



**LUND**  
UNIVERSITY

Lund University  
Department of Sociology

**Can You Prove Your Inner Emotional Process?  
Exploring Caseworkers' Perspective on Assessing SOGIE Asylum**

Author: Alexandra Andersson  
Master's thesis: WPMM42  
30 credits Spring semester 2024  
Supervisor: Dalia Abdelhady  
Word count: 20,025

## Abstract

This thesis explores the role of the Swedish Migration Agency (SMA) caseworkers in sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE) asylum assessments. Through seven semi-structured interviews with the SMA caseworkers, this thesis investigates their understanding, experience, and interpretation of the SOGIE asylum assessment and their role. This research queries how bureaucratic structures influence the caseworkers' role. Concepts of identity, identification, and power are discussed in the analysis by employing a queer theory and social constructivist framework. The findings and analysis shed light on the bureaucratic violence ingrained in the SMA's essentialist understanding of SOGIE asylum seekers, simplifying identity and ignoring diversity. To distinguish between 'true' queer refugees and unreliable asylum seekers, caseworkers adopt a sceptical and interrogative stance during the assessment. In this setting, asylum caseworkers function as executors of state policy and struggle internally to balance their compassion and bureaucratic efficiency, resulting in emotional detachment. The thesis finally suggests that the SMA SOGIE asylum system may be inappropriate due to lack of training, unclear guidelines, and inadequate time and staffing – crucial for fair and just assessments.

**Keywords:** SOGIE, asylum, caseworker, Sweden, migration agency, queer theory

Author: Alexandra Andersson

Title: Can You Prove Your Inner Emotional Process? Exploring Caseworkers' Perspective on Assessing SOGIE Asylum

Master's thesis: WPMM42

30 credits Spring 2024

Supervisor: Dalia Abdelhady

Department of Sociology

## Popular Science Summary

This master's thesis is on the topic of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE) asylum – also referred to as SOGIE, queer, or LGBTQI asylum. To examine the subject, I study the Swedish Migration Agency (SMA) caseworkers who are responsible for assessing SOGIE asylum. In their daily work, they carry out interviews with asylum seekers to assess whether they are in need of protection or not. I conducted seven online interviews with asylum caseworkers, asking them about their work and what it is like working as a state employee. I ask how they interpret guidelines, understand their role, and how bureaucratic structures influence the assessment. The research aims and questions were developed by engaging in previous research about SOGIE asylum and asylum management. The theoretical framework covers concepts from queer theory and social constructivism. For example, I engage with theories regarding power and identity. The findings and analysis consist of three sections. Firstly, I discuss how SOGIE are essentialised by the SMA. Essentialising is a process that simplifies identity into simple and fixed characteristics, ignoring the diverse human experience. Second, I analyse how the caseworkers understand and navigate their role in the context of SOGIE asylum. Lastly, I examine the internal criticism that the caseworkers express and how it indicates possible conflicts and challenges within the SMA. The result of the thesis points to the fact that the processing of SOGIE asylum lacks sufficient training, time, staffing, and guidelines for it to be carried out as fairly as possible.

## Acknowledgements

To the individuals who participated in my research, thank you for your time, openness, and insights. This thesis would not have been possible without you.

To my supervisor, Dalia. Thank you for all your advice and support and for pushing me further in my academic endeavours!

To my friends and family. Your optimism and compassion have inspired and uplifted me time and time again. Thank you!

## Abbreviations

EU: European Union

DSSH: Difference, Stigma, Shame, Harm

LGBTQI: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex

RFSL: The Swedish Federation for LGBTQI Rights

SOGIE: Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression

SMA: The Swedish Migration Agency

UN: United Nation

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

# Table of Contents

- Abstract..... 2**
- Popular Science Summary..... 3**
- Acknowledgements..... 4**
- Abbreviations..... 5**
- Introduction ..... 8**
  - Research Issue and Aim..... 9*
  - Research Questions..... 10*
  - Delimitations..... 10*
  - Disposition..... 11*
- Literature Review ..... 12**
  - Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression Asylum..... 12*
    - Factors Influencing SOGIE Asylum Assessment ..... 12
    - Implications of Categorisation..... 14
    - SOGIE Asylum in the Swedish Context ..... 15
  - Street-Level Asylum Workers ..... 16*
  - Conclusion ..... 19*
- The Swedish Context..... 20**
  - An Overview of the Swedish Migration Agency..... 20*
  - Seeking Asylum Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression in Sweden..... 22*
  - Guidelines in the Swedish Asylum Process..... 23*
- Theoretical Framework ..... 24**
  - Queer Sociology and Asylum: Reviewing Identity and Power ..... 25*
  - Identity Construction ..... 27*
  - Questioning Essentialist Ideas of Identity ..... 28*
  - Performativity and Recognisability ..... 29*
  - Conclusion ..... 30*
- Methodology and Data..... 30**
  - Research Design ..... 30*
  - Sampling Process..... 31*
  - Data Collection..... 31*
  - Data Analysis..... 33*
  - Limitations ..... 33*

<i>Researcher Positionality</i> .....	34
<i>Ethical Considerations</i> .....	36
<b>Findings and Analysis .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<i>Essentialising Sexuality and Gender</i> .....	37
To be considered Reliable: Constructing the True Queer Refugee.....	37
The Truthful Narrative .....	39
Stereotyping .....	43
Grasping at Straws .....	45
<i>The Executors of State Policy</i> .....	47
Understanding the Role in the Context of Queer Asylum .....	47
Navigating the Role .....	49
<i>Internal Criticism</i> .....	52
Issues with Implementation .....	53
Punching Upwards .....	54
Unsatisfying Knowledge Within.....	56
Room for Improvement.....	57
<b>Discussion and Conclusion .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<i>Future Research</i> .....	61
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>62</b>
Figure 1: Flowchart of Swedish asylum procedures .....	21
Figure 2: The DSSH Model – Examples of Questions .....	24

## Introduction

The distinctive feature of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (hereafter, SOGIE) asylum assessment is that SOGIE cannot be reliably proven. Apart from the most apparent method of demonstrating SOGIE – a person’s self-identification as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, or intersex (hereafter, LGBTQI) – SOGIE may also be determined by sexual behaviour or inner emotions. The latter is assessed under the Swedish asylum system as the Refugee Convention protects LGBTQI persons from persecution based on their *identity* rather than their *actions* (Middelkoop, 2013, p. 157). The Swedish Migration Agency’s (hereafter, SMA) caseworkers have a unique position as agents between politics, bureaucracy, and asylum seekers. Tasked with assessing asylum claims and separating reliable SOGIE claims from unreliable ones, caseworkers enter a multifaceted epistemological debate on human sexuality, gender, and identity. The role of the SMA’s caseworkers raises questions about the intersection of power and identity (and identification) and whether it is appropriate for them, on behalf of the state, to arbitrate specific understandings of sexuality and gender that norms and biases may influence. Swedish authorities and civil servants have a reputation for neutrality but are also responsible for carrying out the government’s inherently political policies. In an interview with Swedish Television, Anna Lindblad – deputy head of law at the SMA – acknowledged the agency’s need to improve its work with SOGIE asylum cases (Christiansen & Tidevall, 2023). This highlights the need to understand the asylum process from the inside and examine how the SMA caseworkers interpret the SOGIE asylum assessment and their role in it.

The landscape of asylum protection is currently undergoing a paradigm shift in both Sweden and the European Union (hereafter, EU) against the backdrop of changing migration policies. Countries that previously had extended asylum protection are now more focused on limiting the number of refugees they allow (LaViolette, 2013, p. 207). The Tidö Agreement, presented in the fall of 2022, demonstrates this trend in Sweden, emphasising reduced asylum-related migration and integration of migrants into stringent Swedish norms (Regeringskansliet, 2023). Similarly, the New Pact for Migration and Asylum, approved in December 2023, introduces the concept of a ‘safe third country’, enabling member nations to make decisions about foreign countries’ safety. Employed as a bordering practice, the concept further inhibits displaced persons from being acknowledged as refugees under the Refugee Convention



(Osso, 2023). This idea is ambiguous, especially for SOGIE refugees, who are more likely to experience violence and prejudice due to their intersecting identities.

## Research Issue and Aim

It is crucial to recognise the entirety of the asylum process to enhance its effectiveness. Previous research reveals that SOGIE asylum seekers are not always treated equitably throughout the process (Gröndahl, 2020; 2023). These individuals may be subjected to privacy violations during assessments and feel compelled to conform their narratives to align with expectations of their SOGIE identity (Akin, 2017). Additionally, governing documents utilised in the asylum review process of SOGIE cases may contain ambiguous language (Gröndahl, 2023; Johannesson, 2023). However, a lack of research delves into the caseworkers' role in depth – examining their work, perceptions, and interpretations of asylum processes on SOGIE grounds. Through the lens of queer theory, I highlight the social constructivist nature of SOGIE credibility assessments in the Swedish asylum system. I do so through interviews with the SMA caseworkers, discussing their experience and role as civil servants.

Welfare studies can benefit from this work on two fronts. First, a better investigation of SOGIE asylum cases is necessary to improve welfare access for SOGIE refugees and asylum seekers in Sweden. Second, the fair and efficient conduct of the assessment is greatly dependent on the SMA staff, who handle these cases on a day-to-day basis and have decision-making authority. Ensuring population well-being is a top priority for the government and the SMA. As civil servants, they carry out and enforce Swedish laws and policies, as well as the directives of the SMA. Fairness in the asylum assessment process for SOGIE asylum seekers is crucial. Concerning the literature review, I contend that gathering perspectives from the entities that execute – and occasionally neglect to execute – legal stances and directives from the SMA, the government, the EU, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (hereafter, UNHCR) is essential. Studies exploring caseworkers' experiences in this setting are rare in Sweden.

## Research Questions

My thesis centres on SOGIE asylum cases, focusing on Sweden. Despite caseworkers in Sweden being bound to a legal position document, disparate outcomes are observed in otherwise similar cases (Gröndahl, 2020; 2023). Thus, my research focuses on the SMA caseworkers' experience processing SOGIE asylum applications beyond the legal positioning and other official frameworks. To understand what insights can be gained from the SMA caseworkers' experiences in assessing SOGIE asylum, I ask the following:

- What is the role of caseworkers in the assessment of SOGIE asylum?
  - a. How do caseworkers perceive their role?
  - b. How do bureaucratic structures impact caseworkers' roles?

## Delimitations

In this study, I analyse qualitative data from seven semi-structured interviews with caseworkers at the SMA. Although in this study, I sometimes refer to laws and legal positions regarding migration and asylum, it is not my intention to analyse these in detail. 'Queer' and 'LGBTQI' are used interchangeably throughout the thesis, encompassing non-hetero and non-cis individuals. With the literature review as a background, I argue that studies examining asylum processing of SOGIE identity in Sweden are lacking. Within the area, there are different angles to investigate. Although I consider it relevant and crucial to research SOGIE asylum seekers and refugees' experiences of the system or to examine legal documents, there is a gap in the literature regarding the caseworker's position. Caseworkers are often mentioned in the literature that examines asylum seekers or laws. Still, these lack the personal experiences and in-depth understandings that the caseworker has of the asylum process and the role of a civil servant. Caseworkers play a vital role as intermediaries between policymakers and asylum seekers. They must navigate the demands and expectations placed upon them by their superiors and the public (Borrelli & Lindberg, 2018). Therefore, in this master's thesis, I examine the processing of SOGIE asylum cases. Specifically, I investigate how caseworkers interpret the SMA guidelines for assessing SOGIE cases.

## Disposition

The initial segment of the thesis introduces the subject of SOGIE asylum and the Swedish asylum system. In the research issue and aim, I explain the purpose of the thesis in more detail. The literature review is divided into two. In the first part, I feature previous literature on queer migration and asylum, with a focus on the asylum assessment and various guidelines and requirements that guide it. The second part focuses on asylum caseworkers. Numerous studies have explored the topic of SOGIE asylum; however, most focus on the perspective of the asylum seekers. Merging this emphasis with the literature on caseworkers is vital. By doing so, we can better understand the system and how it affects asylum seekers and caseworkers. The literature review is a crucial component in developing this thesis. It plays a significant role in the progress of ideas and theories, providing a thorough understanding of the existing research in the field.

In the context section, I overview the Swedish asylum context. I explain the SMA's mission and goals, what it entails to apply for asylum due to fear of persecution based on SOGIE and the role of the caseworkers in assessing asylum. After that, the theoretical framework is followed, focusing on power and identity. I justify how queer theory extends beyond issues of sexuality and gender and features other identity categories such as race, ethnicity, class, and nationality and their impact on the assessment of SOGIE asylum. In the method section, I describe the research design in-depth, including data gathering, management, and ethical considerations.

Next, I present the findings and analysis, which combines them interchangeably. The first part concerns how the SMA instructs caseworkers to handle SOGIE asylum cases and conveys who can be considered a reliable subject. In the second part, I focus on the caseworker's role in SOGIE asylum cases and how the interviewees understand and navigate their role as civil servants. I highlight the internal criticism that the interview participants voice, such as problems with implementation, authority and government criticism, as well as insufficient knowledge, and their suggestions for improvement. In the conclusion, I summarise the study's main findings and how they answer the research questions. Finally, I discuss unanswered questions and potential future research and measures in assessing SOGIE asylum in Sweden and Europe.

## Literature Review

### Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression Asylum

Since the 2010s, the issue of SOGIE asylum has received much attention from researchers in the field of sexuality, gender, migration, and asylum. One of the first books to address the intersection of asylum, sexuality, and gender studies is *Fleeing Homophobia* (Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2011). Since then, several books have discussed SOGIE asylum in Europe (see, for example, Danisi, Dustin, Ferreira, & Held, 2021; Güler, Shevtsova, & Venturi, 2019; Mole, 2021), revealing a lack of harmony between the EU member states regarding the handling of SOGIE asylum cases. Some asylum processes within the EU do not follow international human rights law, including international refugee law (Gröndahl, 2023, p. 8; Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2011, p. 7).

### Factors Influencing SOGIE Asylum Assessment

The asylum review process is not neutral but shaped by bureaucracy, institutionalism, norms, and values (Hertoghs & Schinkel, 2018; Prearo, 2020). The studies reflect the existence of stereotypical images of LGBTQI people and how they should behave or appear. Caseworkers may be unfamiliar with how SOGIE can manifest or have a diverse impact in the asylum seekers' origin society (Avgeri, 2023). There are laws and guidelines at national and international levels to guide decision-makers, administrators, caseworkers, and judges on how to manoeuvre asylum cases based on SOGIE. To qualify for SOGIE asylum, the asylum seeker must demonstrate a well-founded fear of persecution based on grounds of the Refugee Convention (Hedlund & Wimark, 2019). Additionally, their country of origin must be unable or unwilling to protect them (Dustin & Ferreira, 2021). Consequently, SOGIE asylum seekers witness pressure to prove to caseworkers that they are part of a particularly vulnerable social group (Akin, 2017; Juss, 2015; Lewis, 2019; Lunau & Andreassen, 2023).

The credibility assessment reduces what it entails to be LGBTQI and redefines their legitimacy to stories of suffering and trauma (Giametta, 2017; Zisakou, 2023). Asylum agencies expect the process of discovering one's SOGIE identity to involve – but also privileges – negative emotions such as guilt and shame before the person comes to acceptance

of their SOGIE (Giametta, 2017; Middelkoop, 2013, pp. 160-161; Spijkerboer, 2013, p. 225). Scholars are calling this a “requirement of shame”, and unless SOGIE asylum seekers have gone through a process of denial, guilt, and insecurity, their identity as part of the LGBTQI is questioned (Dawson & Gerber, 2017; Åberg, 2023). The notion that before accepting their SOGIE, a ‘typical’ queer individual should have an internal battle or contradictory emotions of shame and self-loathing is culturally blind and linear (Middelkoop, 2013, p. 161; Millbank & Berg, 2009; Spijkerboer, 2013, p. 224).

In reality, caseworkers are assessing the ‘performative believability’ of an asylum seeker – meaning, how well the asylum seeker can convey their narrative as truthful and trustworthy (Hertoghs & Schinkel, 2018). Asylum seekers in Norway, for example, apply a ‘rainbow splash’ in their stories to appear more ‘genuine’ or truthful in front of the migration agency (Akin, 2017). ‘Rainbow splash’ describes applying more ‘colour’ to make a SOGIE narrative appear more loud, proud, and essentially Western. The splash is used to either embrace a previously denied lifestyle to the asylum seeker in their origin country or to fit in more effectively in their host country (Akin, 2017). At the same time, asylum seekers are accused of fabricating their stories and using SOGIE as an ‘easy’ route to international protection (Ferreira, 2022).

Since the 1990s, feminist and queer scholars have criticised essentialism for its latent harm and limitations (Danisi, Dustin, Ferreira, & Held, 2021, p. 76; Luibhéid, 2008; Zisakou, 2023). The central criticism concerns essentialism’s deterministic stance, which fails to address social and cultural factors that shape the individual’s identity, including their SOGIE. The essential form of socio-sexual identity that asylum seekers are expected to fit into is based on a Euro-American sexual identity formation (Murray, 2011). The sexual identity, which Murray (2011) describes as a normative model, consists of four categories – lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. The issue of sexual identity can be particularly challenging for asylum seekers who may not come from societies that adhere to the normative model of sexual identity (Murray, 2011). Despite this, these individuals are often expected to conform to the prevailing societal model of sexuality through their narratives, feelings, and thoughts. This can create significant difficulties for asylum seekers as they navigate a new and unfamiliar society while trying to reconcile their personal experiences and beliefs with those of their host country.

## Implications of Categorisation

Nonetheless, it is not clear-cut to define and characterise SOGIE asylum seekers as a ‘vulnerable social group’. Positioning asylum seekers in the vulnerable category might convey the impression to caseworkers that they are helpless and lack empowerment. The phrase ‘vulnerable’ might imply biases and assumptions that do not accurately capture the variety and power of queer individuals (García Rodríguez, 2023). The Western idea of sexual orientation and its relationship to gender expression can be particularly divisive with non-Western understandings of SOGIE. According to Western perspectives, which are endorsed by UNHCR and EU standards, sexual activity is not a significant characteristic of a sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is more of an identity issue associated with masculinity and femininity. This is not necessarily true outside of the West. According to Middelkoop (2013, pp. 155-156), the impact of sexual orientation on one’s identity varies outside of the West, where homosexuality may be viewed as incompatible with religion. In such circumstances, homosexuality, just like smoking and drinking, is considered a kind of religious disobedience. Owing to misconceptions about religious nations – such as the idea that all its citizens find queerness intolerable – caseworkers sometimes assume religious SOGIE asylum seekers experience further pain and shame (Middelkoop, 2013, pp. 165-166).

Furthermore, frameworks and regulations (and thus also caseworkers) fail to respect the fluidity that SOGIE entail (Dustin & Ferreira, 2021; Klesse, 2021, p. 118; Singer, 2021, p. 240). Consequently, bisexual asylum seekers are misunderstood and increasingly denied in comparison to other SOGIE asylum seekers (Klesse, 2021, pp. 114, 118). Caseworkers sometimes expect bisexual asylum seekers to conceal their identity as heterosexual to avoid fears of persecution in their origin country (García Rodríguez, 2023). Additionally, lesbians or bisexuals with children or past relationships with men are questioned or not believed in credibility assessments (Spijkerboer, 2013, p. 224). Expectations of gender are another issue in SOGIE asylum. Gender-conforming asylum seekers (such as femme lesbians and masculine gay men) are met with disbelief more than gender-nonconforming individuals (such as masc lesbians and feminine gay men) (Lee & Brotman, 2011). The literature on caseworkers’ experiences assessing trans and intersex persons is remarkably scarce (Bach, 2013). Transgender persons seeking refuge seldom face reliability issues, most likely because transgender is viewed as a medical condition by migration authorities rather than an internal identity (Spijkerboer, 2013, p. 222).

Causing these tendencies, some scholars describe a ‘culture of disbelief’ in asylum systems (see, for example, Jubany, 2011; Selim, Korkman, Pirjatanniemi, & Antfolk, 2023). When tasked with separating the reliable from the unreliable, caseworkers meet asylum seekers with scepticism. Research indicates that civil servants have little or none of the so-called truth bias; the tendency for the average person to assume that others are speaking the truth more than they do (de Bruïne, Vredeveltdt, & van Koppen, 2023; Masip, 2017; Selim, Korkman, Pirjatanniemi, & Antfolk, 2023). Since it is difficult to document or prove a ‘well-founded fear’ of persecution, as well as SOGIE, caseworkers resort to Western stereotypes and notions of what it means to be LGBTQI to assess SOGIE asylum seekers (Dhoest, 2019).

Media surveillance has been used to identify SOGIE asylum seekers as ‘genuine’ or ‘fraudulent’ in, for example, Denmark and the United Kingdom (Danisi, Dustin, Ferreira, & Held, 2021, p. 148; Gray & Mcdowall, 2013; Lunau & Andreassen, 2023). Lunau and Andreassen (2023) found that cis-gendered gay men are favoured in the Danish system as caseworkers make use of phone surveillance to assess, for example, porn consumption. Meanwhile, individuals of other SOGIEs have fewer chances to demonstrate their identity. For instance, several lesbian asylum seekers in the United Kingdom have felt pressured to share pornographic material between themselves and someone of the same sex (Dustin & Held, 2021, p. 200; Lewis, 2019, pp. 226-227). Asylum seekers resort to these methods due to the pressure from migration officials to *prove* their SOGIE (Juss, 2015). There are also notions that SOGIE asylum seekers should be well-read on the laws of their country of origin, interested in queer culture, and participate actively in the ‘gay scene’ – which is stereotypical (Middelkoop, 2013, pp. 164-165; Spijkerboer, 2013, p. 225). Such notions do not allow space for queer people, for example, to think that love and sex life should be kept private, and thus also their SOGIE – as one interviewee of Middelkoop’s (2013) research said “religion is one side, and personal feelings are the other side” (p. 165).

### SOGIE Asylum in the Swedish Context

A significant part of the literature relating to migration control and SOGIE asylum cases in Sweden is focused on the experiences of SOGIE asylum seekers. In Sweden, SOGIE asylum seekers have testified about caseworkers asking questions about same-sex sexual experiences, the use of dating apps in the origin country, and if they visited gay clubs. Asylum seekers have

also been requested to contribute pictures or videos of partners (Hedlund & Wimark, 2019; Lukac, 2017, pp. 15-22). Due to the phrasing of legal documents and frameworks, migration officers (such as judges and caseworkers) tend to focus on assessing the credibility of the SOGIE asylum seeker's *story* rather than their *identity* (Johannesson, 2023). Since their work concentrates heavily on credibility and reliability assessments of the story, it is difficult for caseworkers to empathise with SOGIE asylum seekers (García Rodríguez, 2023). Sometimes, there are complications with the translation from interpreters during processing, which may skew the asylum seeker's narrative (Lukac, 2017, p. 22).

How many SOGIE asylum cases are being processed in Sweden is unclear. While there is some documentation of decisions, they are not adequately accounted for and available to the public. Between 2020 and 2023, lack of credibility and reliability accounted for 75.5 per cent of SOGIE asylum rejections<sup>1</sup> (Gröndahl, 2023, p. 13). RFSL (the Swedish Federation for LGBTQI Rights) and Gröndahl collaborated to produce a report analysing the SMA and the migration courts' examination of SOGIE asylum cases. In the report, Gröndahl (2020, p. 119) highlights that identical cases were handled and interpreted differently. According to Danisi et al. (2021, pp. 445-446) and Gröndahl (2020), ambiguous legislation and guidelines cause inconsistency in asylum processes. For example, there is a risk that the system works in one way, while the street-level practices are distinctly different (Lewis, 2019, p. 227).

## Street-Level Asylum Workers

Literature across different fields discusses the role of migration caseworkers and administrators as “street-level bureaucrats”. The concept, popularised by public policy researcher Michael Lipsky (1969), describes public service employees who work with people at the street level. Their mission is to implement various policies on behalf of the government or state. The street-level bureaucrat concept covers many professional occupations, including migration office workers. Navigating the intricacies of policies, rules, and laws while simultaneously managing interpersonal relationships can be overwhelming. Caseworkers are tasked with interfacing with the ‘authority’, which is often vague and detached, yet demands a humanistic approach to interactions (Lipsky, 2010, pp. 71-73).

---

<sup>1</sup> Out of 1,360 analysed verdicts and decisions, 1,305 were rejections. 985 out of 1,305 rejections were based on credibility and reliability.



Caseworkers endure pressure and stress due to the difficult judgments they must make, which can cause “moral discomfort” (Weiss & Gren, 2021). When caseworkers must make difficult decisions in a short amount of time, this strain is increased, especially in the case of asylum seekers who have experienced violence and conflict (Borrelli & Lindberg, 2018).

Caseworkers and decision-makers develop specific ‘coping mechanisms’, such as responsibility transferring and compartmentalising, to address challenges such as heavy workloads and ambiguous policies or guidelines (Dallara & Lacchei, 2021; Ekstedt, 2023; Lipsky, 2010, pp. xiv, 226). As the policy and regulations include exclusionary language and logic, caseworkers can apply them without taking responsibility themselves (Kalir, 2019).

Furthermore, as decision-makers make the final decision after caseworkers have conducted the asylum interview, caseworkers tend to feel less responsibility (Ekstedt, 2023). Their position confuses and forces them to balance between the state and the state’s client, but it also allows them to take a ‘neutral’ position without much responsibility. As executors of state policy, some caseworkers believe they are and act neutral and objectively due to their position. This “trained indifference” makes caseworkers oblivious to the power and discretion they hold over asylum seekers (du Gay, 2000; Ekstedt, 2023).

In an ideal bureaucratic organisation, everything is expected to be done logically and quantifiably, but dealing with individuals with whom one has sympathy seems to make this difficult. One coping strategy caseworkers use is to turn away from their feelings and empathy to concentrate only on the organisation’s primary objectives. However, this decision has apparent consequences, one of which is a disregard for the needs and sufferings of the asylum seekers. Other caseworkers try to align their values with their work, although it does not always comply with the regulations (Borrelli & Lindberg, 2018; Weiss & Gren, 2021). While caseworkers try to show compassion and care toward refugees and asylum seekers, they generally can only aid rather than reduce or completely resolve issues for asylum seekers (Weiss, 2020, pp. 205-206). This is not an attempt to voice disagreement with or challenge the authority’s policies. Adjusting work procedures to reflect personal ideals arises from individual objectives, such as making work duties easier or more pleasurable while adhering to the authority’s framework (Borrelli & Lindberg, 2018).

The concept of exit-voice-loyalty may help to understand the many approaches that emerge to address problems that develop in caseworkers’ duties. Caseworkers either speak out to

management or colleagues about their worries or quit their positions due to ethical difficulties. Some caseworkers do not face ethical conundrums to the same degree since they have a solid devotion to the authorities (Ekstedt, 2023; Golden, 1992; Hirschman, 1970). Due to their loyalty to the state, some caseworkers interpret the regulations as inherently logical (Lindberg, 2020, p. 94). Thus, there is a belief that the state does what is best for welfare, and some are considered forced refugees while others are seen as undeserving welfare beneficiaries (Borrelli, 2022).

Previous literature underscores the interdependent relationship between discretion and conflicting policies (Schultz, 2020). These findings suggest that civil servants play a critical role in executing policies, and their challenges must be considered to ensure successful policy implementation. The number of rejections by asylum officials is high, primarily due to the ambiguity inherent in the laws and frameworks they must abide by. As a result, asylum seekers are being denied based on insufficient evidence (Lipsky, 2010, p. 226), indicating a need for greater clarity and specificity in the decision-making process. Street-level bureaucracy challenges include balancing policy execution and autonomy, dealing with the bureaucratic system, and handling policy ambiguity (Heyer, 2022; Kalir, 2019; Lipsky, 2010). In their daily work, civil servants must balance the responsibilities of their role and their values (Borrelli & Lindberg, 2018). As representatives of the state, they have guidelines that they must follow, but there is also some room for their judgment or discretion (Borrelli, Hedlund, Johannesson, & Lindberg, 2023, p. 7). Discretion is not problematic in itself; it can mean, for example, that the caseworker has more flexibility to adapt work strategies to accommodate asylum seekers better. However, it can also lead to unfair and unequal treatment (Borrelli, 2022; Borrelli, Hedlund, Johannesson, & Lindberg, 2023; Pedersen, Stritch, & Thuesen, 2018).

The literature reveals that asylum caseworkers are dedicated to the state's policies and rarely move outside the frameworks, although they have much discretion in their work (Ataç, 2019; Bhatia, 2020). In the UK, for example, employees at the Home Office refused to relocate particularly vulnerable asylum seekers, even though they were more prone to hate crimes (Bhatia, 2020). In the long run, this kind of treatment has negative consequences for asylum seekers. Since 2015, Swedish migration policy has become stricter – for example, fewer asylum seekers receive permanent residence permits, and the requirements for family reunification are higher (Lindberg, 2020, pp. 85-86).

Some authors (for example, Closas Casasampera, 2021; Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; Tazzioli, 2020, p. 3) argue that policymakers and governing documents construct asylum seekers as undeserving or undesirable. However, caseworkers also create and uphold distinctions between worthy and unworthy asylum seekers. These perceptions may manifest as binary categories, such as deserving versus undeserving or genuine versus fraudulent, facilitating the work within the asylum process (Ataç, 2019; Bhatia, 2020). According to Borrelli (2022) and Hertoghs and Schinkel (2018), caseworkers assume asylum seekers are initially suspicious or possible fraudsters. The asylum seeker is only considered 'authentic' once they have told their narrative and undergone a caseworker's scrutiny. However, the classification of the 'authentic' is not straightforward. Caseworkers determine whether an asylum seeker needs protection based on the narrative they provide. For example, caseworkers may empathise with someone fleeing persecution, but if an asylum seeker struggles financially, they might be seen as reliant and unreliable (Hertoghs & Schinkel, 2018; Joormann, 2020, pp. 32-33).

In SOGIE asylum cases, it is crucial to gather country of origin information, its legislation regarding SOGIE, and social norms and beliefs that exist among the public (Danisi et al., 2021, pp. 234-235; Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2011, p. 72). However, caseworkers and decision-makers testify that such information needs to be more complete or easier to obtain. There are also concerns that there are no guidelines on training collaborators within SOGIE asylum at the EU level (Danisi et al., 2021, p. 201). Prior studies demonstrate the potential benefits of further skill development for migration authority staff members managing SOGIE asylum cases (LaViolette, 2013). However, the lack of research that methodically investigates caseworkers' perspectives in this context makes it challenging to determine which training may benefit most (Hedlund & Wimark, 2019).

## Conclusion

The literature review underlines the challenges that caseworkers encounter and the problems that arise in the SOGIE asylum process. The first part emphasises general problems with reliability assessments and how essentialist ideas and Western-centric preconceived notions colour the investigation, ultimately giving caseworkers a strict image of how SOGIE asylum seekers express themselves and experience their SOGIE. In the long run, it leads to asylum

seekers distorting their narrative to comply with their expectations. The second part illustrates how caseworkers are enmeshed in institutional structures, forced to navigate between the bureaucracy's demands for efficiency and their moral compass. Caseworkers use different strategies to address this challenge, such as adapting work procedures, voicing disagreement, or transferring responsibility. The literature review lays the foundation for the thesis examining power and identity in a bureaucratic setting and justifies the focus of SOGIE asylum and asylum caseworkers. Considering the ideas and notions that influence the SOGIE asylum process, it is central to gain further insight into the experience of the caseworkers and how they maintain or oppose these. By focusing on their perspective, this study can highlight practical insights into assessment improvements.

## The Swedish Context

### An Overview of the Swedish Migration Agency

The SMA is a Swedish authority that operates on behalf of the Parliament and the government and oversees migration issues. The Aliens and Citizenship Act, regulations, and international conventions govern the authority's activities. In addition, every year, the authority receives a regulatory letter from the current government that contains goals, assignments, and an annual budget. The authority's area of responsibility includes processing applications for asylum, various types of residence permits, and citizenship, and management of return migration as well as reception systems for asylum seekers and unaccompanied children (Migrationsverket, n.d.). The SMA follows the United Nations (hereafter, UN) Declaration on Human Rights and the Refugee Convention. It assumes that everyone's application must be examined legally and based on a joint process. Anyone who is a refugee according to the UN Convention or in alternative need of protection according to EU rules must be granted residence status in Sweden (Migrationsverket, 2023). The asylum system follows the EU Qualification Directive, where Article 10(2) reads:

When assessing if an applicant has a well-founded fear of being persecuted it is immaterial whether the applicant actually possesses the racial, religious, national, social or political characteristic which attracts the persecution, provided that such a

characteristic is attributed to the applicant by the actor of persecution (European Union: Council of the European Union, 2011).

Suppose an individual is refused a residence permit. In that case, they have the right to appeal their decision to the Migration Court, and in some cases to the highest instance for migration matters, the Migration Court of Appeal (Migrationsverket, n.d.). Figure 1 illustrates the asylum procedures in Sweden.

In the regulation letter for the 2024 budget year, the government informs that “the Migration Agency must make priorities so that the number of people who return will increase”, both voluntarily and under compulsion. The other goals are increasing the use of detention and offering places at return centres for those with enforceable decisions, greater efficiency in processing, the digital infrastructure and ID work, prioritising permit revocation cases, promoting highly skilled labour immigration, better integration following ‘Swedish values’ (such as equal rights between the sexes), combating female genital mutilation, and finally, working against incorrect payments from the welfare system (Regeringsbeslut II:1, 2023).

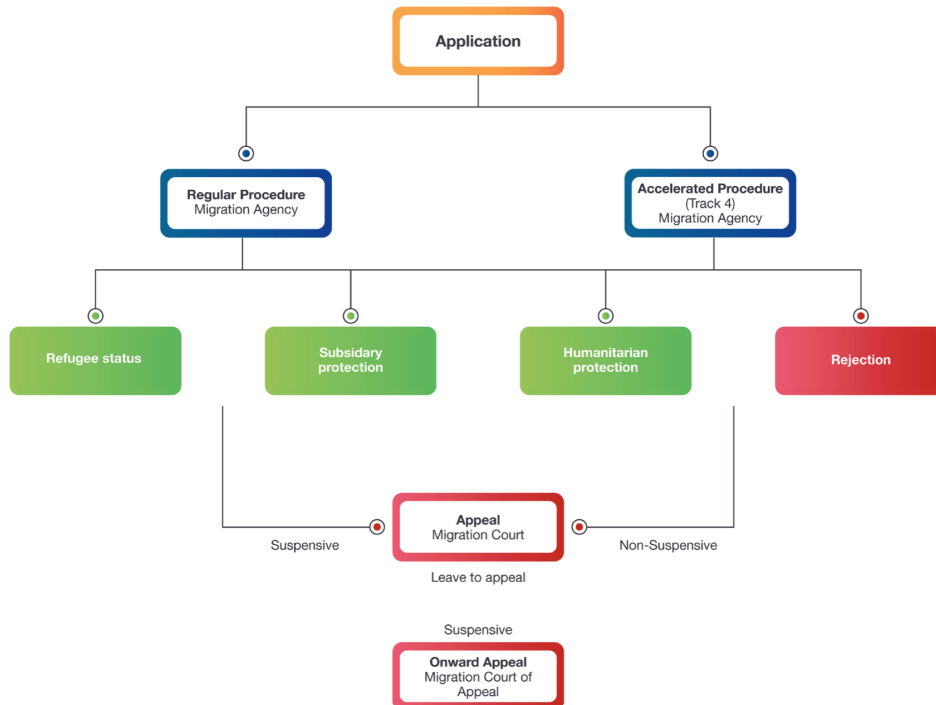


Figure 1: Flowchart of Swedish asylum procedures (Moniz, Talwar, & Vindrola-Padros, 2023)

## Seeking Asylum Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression in Sweden

The asylum process begins with a short application interview at an application unit where the asylum seeker introduces who they are and why they are seeking protection and submits identity documents. Caseworkers at the asylum review unit must then go through the application and prepare protocols for an asylum investigation, which they can review with a decision-maker, who has more experience, to ensure that the investigation is carried out correctly. They also assess whether a public counsel, a state-provided legal assistant, should be attributed to the individual. The public counsel's purpose is to inform asylum seekers about their rights and the rules that apply to the Swedish asylum process.

The investigation for SOGIE asylum usually takes two to three hours, and sometimes a verbal supplementation (maximum of three hours) occurs. In addition to the caseworker and the asylum seeker, a translator and a public counsel may be present. The asylum seeker has the burden of proof, i.e. they are responsible for explaining their reasons for protection and submitting other evidence (Migrationsverket, 2024). After the investigation, the caseworker writes a protocol that the asylum seeker and the counsel can review and approve. Finally, the council submits a statement to the SMA, arguing why the asylum seeker should be granted a residence permit (Asylrättscentrum, n.d.). Lastly, the caseworker presents the investigation to a decision-maker, and they jointly make the final decision – granted or denied (Migrationsverket, 2024).

The Swedish law was changed to include fear of persecution based on sexual orientation or gender identity as a ground for asylum in 2006 after pressure from RFSL and other organisations (UNHCR | Nordic and Baltic Countries, n.d.). Previous regulations included SOGIE asylum seekers as “otherwise in need of protection”, but since 2006, this group has received protection as refugees (Prop. 2005/06:6, 2005). Before 2006, it was common for migration authorities to assume that SOGIE asylum seekers could avoid persecution by hiding their SOGIE, so-called discretion requirements (Gröndahl, 2023, p. 10). Today, the requirement is prohibited according to the Aliens Act (2005:716, 2005). The Act's preparatory work (Prop. 2005/06:6, 2005, p. 27) clarified that an individual should not be forced to renounce a fundamental characteristic such as SOGIE. According to the SMA, they have

equipped its staff with relevant training regarding LGBTQI issues, and up until 2020, LGBTQI specialists participated in the decision-making process (Gröndahl, 2020, p. 21).

## Guidelines in the Swedish Asylum Process

All caseworkers at the SMA must follow legal positions when processing asylum seekers. Legal positions (hereafter, position) are guidelines that inform all the SMA employees on how the constitution should be interpreted. The position RS/015/2021 applies to investigating and examining individuals who invoke protection grounds due to SOGIE. The purpose of positions is to support the investigation and assessment of individuals who invoke protection grounds on *actual* or *attributed* SOGIE. Attributed SOGIE means that the asylum seeker is perceived and attributed as belonging to the social group LGBTQI by actors of persecution (RS/015/2021, 2021).

The position informs that an assessment preferably (i.e. not necessarily) follows five overarching steps. First, an evaluation of whether the asylum seeker can make their belonging to a group at risk of persecution because of their SOGIE probable. In the assessment, the caseworker should start by deciding whether the asylum seeker probably belongs to a “particular social group” rather than determining their SOGIE. Homosexuals, bisexuals, and transgender individuals are included in the social group according to the Aliens Act, as they risk persecution in societies where they are considered different or deviant from the prevailing norm of how men and women should behave. Secondly, the caseworker must evaluate the conditions of LGBTQI individuals in their origin country. The caseworker should determine if LGBTQI individuals are vulnerable to persecution and whether the authorities in that country can provide adequate protection. Next, the caseworker assesses whether the asylum seeker is likely to have been persecuted or subjected to protection-based treatment in the past and if they have a well-founded fear of persecution upon return to the origin country. Finally, the origin country’s protection or internal refuge options must be reviewed. If the authorities offer sufficient protection, the asylum application might be rejected (RS/015/2021, 2021).

No precise questionnaire informs the caseworker how the assessment should be carried out. However, the SMA emphasises that the assessment must consider the individual’s situation and that they might feel vulnerable talking about SOGIE to an authority figure. To guide the

evaluation, the position informs that caseworker may look at asylum seekers’ self-description, childhood, family life, future, the society they are from, or steps taken to “correct” their gender identity (RS/015/2021, 2021, p. 8). The model DSSH – difference, stigma, shame, and harm – is not explicitly mentioned in the position; however, the SMA refers to UNHCR’s handbook and guidelines and deems that the asylum seeker’s reliability and credibility can be assessed by examining feelings and experiences of difference, stigma, and shame (RS/015/2021, 2021). The purpose of introducing the model was to avoid the past discretion requirement and focus on sexual activity. Figure 2 exemplifies commonly asked questions based on the DSSH model.

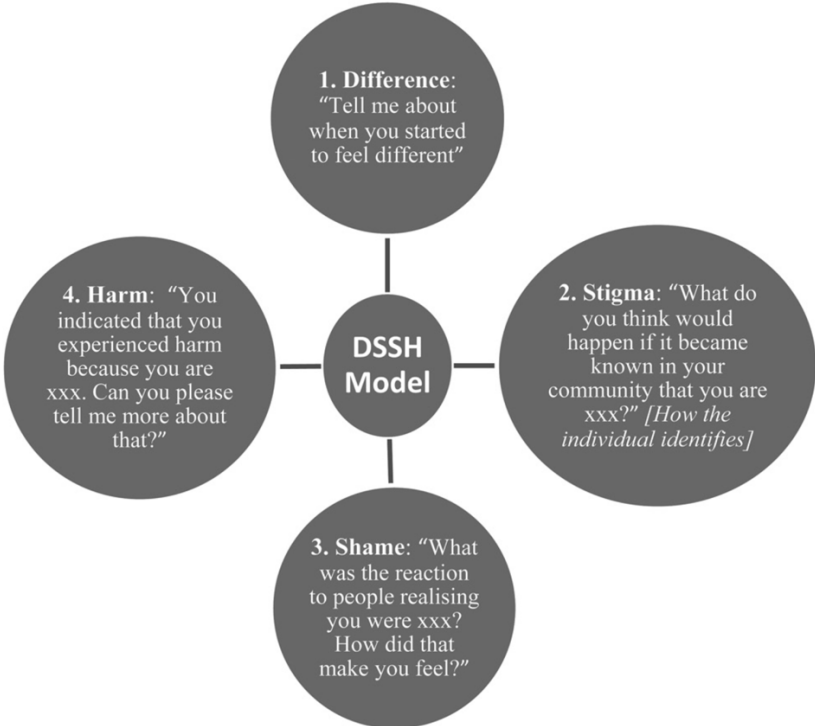


Figure 2: The DSSH Model - Examples of Questions (Dawson & Gerber, 2017)

### Theoretical Framework

Drawing on queer theory and social constructivist concepts, the theoretical framework gives insights into power dynamics, sexuality, gender, and identity negotiations. It allows me to analyse the caseworkers’ interpretations of the guidelines and process and reveal power dynamics inherent in the SMA and caseworker role. By examining power and identity, the framework shines a light on intersections and interactions between individual caseworkers’



experiences within the SMA, societal norms regarding identity and SOGIE asylum, and bureaucratic practices of the agency.

## Queer Sociology and Asylum: Reviewing Identity and Power

Queer migration and asylum scholars explore how asymmetric power structures affect mobility based on individuals' SOGIE (Luibhéid, 2008). They underscore how policies and technologies influenced by colonial history and neoliberalism facilitate mobility for some while at the same time hindering others (Jordan, 2009; Luibhéid, 2008; Rao, 2020, p. 143). Queer theorists do not deny the existence and significance of binary categories. Instead, they advocate for a critical examination of these categories and their reflection on both past and present societal norms. They recognise that categories and concepts are constructed, fluid, and subject to change (Moussawi & Vidal-Ortiz, 2020).

Moussawi and Vidal-Ortiz (2020) propose a framework, queer sociology, that extends beyond the realms of queer theory and discussions surrounding sexuality and gender. This approach challenges the views of power, identity, and societal norms within sociology. 'Queer' should be viewed as a verb that encompasses more than sexuality and gender as traditionally defined in queer theory (Moussawi & Vidal-Ortiz, 2020; Rao, 2020, p. 9). Instead, they advocate for a focus on race and racialisation while decentring whiteness asserting that factors such as race, class, and gender collectively influence an individual's identity and interactions, within society (Moussawi & Vidal-Ortiz, 2020) – nevertheless in the Swedish asylum apparatus.

Identity and society do not function as two separate entities (Seidman, 2016, p. 244), but are instead, as Jeffrey Weeks (1986) describes, "a product of negotiation, struggle, and human agency" (p. 26). Central to this understanding of power, knowledge, as well as queer theory, lay the work of Michel Foucault. Power is neither an organisation nor a structure; it is not something an individual or a group *has*. Power arises from social interactions at any given time (Foucault, 1978, p. 93). Foucault's theory of 'power/knowledge' and 'truth game' lends credence to the idea that neutrality cannot be entirely achievable. No individual can be wholly impartial if everyone is enmeshed in a web of power, as every individual is subject to the dynamics of power that mould and govern them (Johnson, 2016). The production of 'truth' is inherent in the production of knowledge. Every society constructs discourses of truth that in a

sense serve as public policies to determine other discourses from false and true (Foucault, 1984, pp. 72-73): ““Truth” is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extends it. A “regime” of truth” (Foucault, 1984, p. 74). The asylum application procedure itself may turn into a place where disciplinary power is used to define and regulate the identity of the ‘true’ queer refugee. The asylum seekers become disciplined subjects; of the state, medicine, and the empire, as the ‘deserving’ or ‘true’ refugee, the queer, and the racialised Other (Green, 2010).

As executors of state policy, caseworkers are positioned amidst this power structure and could either reject or be shaped by the disciplinary mechanisms ingrained in asylum procedures. Caseworkers find themselves in the middle of the bureaucracy, where they exercise power as an extension of the Swedish welfare state but are simultaneously powerless. In their position, exercising power over asylum seekers and migrants, they at the same time have little power to influence the bureaucracy and the institution. Hannah Arendt (Arendt, 1969) describes the bureaucracy as:

[...] the form of government in which everybody is deprived of political freedom, of the power to act; for the rule by Nobody is not no-rule, and where all are equally powerless we have a tyranny without a tyrant (p. 33).

The bureaucracy has violent consequences, not least for refugees and asylum seekers. The violence that bureaucracy results in is not necessarily physical but can be expressed through denying rights to freedom (Abdelhady, Gren, & Joormann, 2020, p. 13). The bureaucracy trains caseworkers and other asylum officials to deny such rights. They are taught to be sceptical (because some asylum seekers lie) and objective (where their judgment does not fit). The process of seeking asylum thus means being forced to be exposed to bureaucratic violence, where you are either registered, settled, and continue to be controlled, or you are deported (Gren, Abdelhady, & Joormann, 2024). However, the boundaries between control and protection –border enforcement and humanitarianism – lack clarity. The global asylum and migration management system, which operates through unequal power dynamics between the global north and west, has inherent ambiguity that makes it unclear whether the goal is to prevent and control displaced people’s movement or to protect refugees (França & Ribeiro, 2024).

## Identity Construction

SOGIE asylum seekers are frequently subjected to various forms of othering as their marginalised identities intersect. The persecution or discrimination that asylum seekers are subjected to based on their SOGIE does not occur in isolation. Additional relations of power, such as race, ethnicity, religion, and class, can affect how they are treated in the asylum system (Luibhéid, 2008; Venturi, 2023). An intersectional perspective (see Crenshaw, 1989) sheds light on the individual SOGIE asylum seeker and their circumstances (Venturi, 2023). During an asylum investigation, they are particularly at risk due to their identity being scrutinised and assessed by SMA and its staff (García Rodríguez & Giametta, 2024).

Othering, as a concept, describes the reductive and marginalising processes of defining social groups as different and beyond the norm. The unity of the ‘natural’ or superior homogeneous group can only be established through constructing the Other (Hall, 1996, pp. 4-5). Othering is essentially a two-sided process; to establish an identity, it must be resisted and formed as distinct from Others (Gunaratnam, 2003, p. 12). The Other is seen as the second, a less ideal version of the superior subjectivity of the heterosexual, Western, cis man (Irigaray & Guynn, 1995). Ideas regarding race and ethnicity emerge because of complicated social connections and take on significantly defined meanings in diverse social settings (Gunaratnam, 2003, p. 13). Hand in hand arises the formatting of lesbian and gay, with distinct character traits. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, sexuality has not only been seen as a sexual behaviour but rather an identity, a sexual nature that each individual has (Seidman, 2016, pp. 245-247). In line, heterosexuality was attributed as normal, and homosexuality as deviant and Other (Fuss, 1989, p. 103) – ideas that were taken up in the state, the law, psychiatry, and the media through dividing, othering techniques (Foucault, 1982; Seidman, 2016, pp. 245-247).

This is inherent in identity politics – an outside identity must be constructed with every attempt to establish an identity. The process extends further – in the context of the SMA, the construction of the reliable SOGIE refugee also means the construction of the unreliable asylum seeker (Seidman, 2016, p. 248). With social resistance against LGBTQI, a situation has arisen where the subject, the asylum seeker, lacks the power and control to define themselves and must instead *prove* their SOGIE to caseworkers and decision-makers (Middelkoop, 2013, p. 168). Asylum caseworkers are positioned to compare the asylum seeker’s narrative with their understanding of SOGIE, which is grounded in the prevailing

social and cultural norms. If the narrative does not align with such preconceptions, it *should* indicate that the asylum seeker is less stereotypical than the caseworker's expectations. Instead, it suggests to caseworkers and decision-makers that the asylum seeker is lying – that they are untrustworthy, unreliable, or inadequate (García Rodríguez & Giametta, 2024; Middelkoop, 2013, p. 167).

While it is necessary to identify specific groups' positions and lack of agency based on gender, sexuality, race, and class, there is also a risk that identities will be manipulated by politics so that they reinforce standing power structures in society (Butler, 2006, pp. xxvii-xxviii). For example, refugees are occasionally considered 'by-products' of war, conflict, and low-income countries (Ong, 2003, p. 80). Such narratives about marginalised groups, such as asylum seekers, can have a reinforcing effect on their intersecting identities. As persons seeking asylum based on SOGIE are expected to be persecuted, expectations about their country of origin, culture, and religion arise as repressive and impermissible of SOGIE (Akin, 2019). These expectations reproduce each other, and only an individual who has endured enough suffering and vulnerability in their country of origin is considered reliable – because the more phobic country, culture, and society, the more different and 'outside' the individual must feel (Akin, 2019; Hertoghs & Schinkel, 2018; Zisakou, 2023).

## Questioning Essentialist Ideas of Identity

Gender and sexual essentialism describe sexuality and gender as a natural and biological instinct in everyone and, therefore, also a force that drives individuals to think, feel, and act accordingly (Seidman, 2016, pp. 243-244). The individual's sexuality and gender, according to essentialism, are governed by biological factors such as hormones and genetics. Thus, the essentialist view claims that individuals are born with a fixed SOGIE, which is static throughout life. Through binary categorisations such as 'gay' and 'straight', or 'woman' and 'man', essentialism overlooks the diversity and fluid nature of human SOGIE (Seidman, 2016, p. 244). Critics of essentialism argue that SOGIE, and the individual's understanding of it, are influenced by factors such as society's norms and power structures (Zisakou, 2023). Dealing with identity issues in politics is complex and woven into power structures. By applying a queer perspective to SOGIE, heteronormativity becomes apparent in regulatory institutions (Jung, 2015). In a heteronormative society, heterosexuality is seen as a natural,

uniform order. As society assumes there is an essential form of heterosexuality, such a homosexual form exists as well (Seidman, 2016, pp. 249-251). The concept of heteronormativity serves as a tool for navigating the complex landscape of the Swedish asylum system, as it sheds light on how standardised ideals of heterosexuality and gender are reproduced in bureaucratic settings (Luibhéid, 2008).

## Performativity and Recognisability

In the literature review, I highlight Hertoghs and Schinkel's (2018) notion of 'performative believability'. The idea is an extension of Judith Butler's (2006, p. 189) performativity or 'performative acts'. With the help of the concept, Butler describes gendered bodies, where the 'act' can be seen as different styles of the flesh, of being, or as the working of 'sex', and the word 'performative' entails a construction of meaning. Butler (2006, p. 190) thus argues that gender is a constant construction through performative acts. Accordingly, there are no true genders or a natural essence – because without the act, gender would not have existed. Through repetitive performative acts, society has constructed ideas and expectations about what the 'real' woman or man means, which results in the ideas being perceived as natural. Gender is thus a social phenomenon – individuals perform their gender identity, but the act is also a public display and thereby informs binary gender norms to others. Acts are performative, as individuals act and display their gender based on society's expectation of their gender (Butler, 2006, pp. 191-193).

Similarly, sexuality and sexual identity are shaped by social norms in society. Butler (2006, p. 40) refers to Foucault and claims that sexuality and power coincide. Thus, no sexuality is neither entirely free nor completely subverted from the influence of society's power structures. As no sexuality exists before, outside, or beyond power, discourse, or norms, there is no normative sexuality. Heterosexuality is not an 'original', as heterosexual norms are identifiable even in non-heterosexual contexts, revealing their constructed nature. The repetition of heterosexual norms as the 'original' is merely "a parody of the *idea* of the natural and the original" – a copy of a copy (Butler, 2006, p. 43). To be recognised as queer, one's queer identity must become intelligible through social and cultural norms. The understanding of a person as queer is thus based on their recognisability and intelligibility, the understandability of its identity within the framework of prevailing Western social and

cultural ideas (Butler, 2006, pp. 22-25). Asylum seekers must not only fit the Western definition of queer through SOGIE recognition but also differ enough culturally to be deemed vulnerable and in need of asylum (Posmykiewicz, 2022).

## Conclusion

The theoretical framework, grounded in social constructivism and queer theory, facilitates further examination of how caseworkers navigate and uphold laws frequently supporting hegemonic norms and systemic prejudices, specifically regarding SOGI and refugeeness. Intersectionality emphasises how several identification variables, including race, class, and SOGIE, concurrently influence SOGIE asylum seekers. This theoretical approach highlights the inherent difficulties that bureaucratic systems – characterised by ambiguity and asymmetrical power relations – present to asylum applicants and caseworkers. The theory surrounding bureaucracy contributes to understanding how caseworkers are both products and technologies of power in the asylum system, nationally and internationally. Analytical ideas, including the Other, identity, and essentialism, may assist this thesis in comprehending the process and observing how the Swedish state and the SMA define and manage SOGIE asylum through caseworkers. The notion of recognisability and intelligibility demonstrates how social and cultural standards significantly influence society's perception of gender and sexuality. It also calls into question the constraints of the status quo and the necessity of more diversity and intersectionality. Together, the framework facilitates the analysis of findings by interpreting power dynamics and their consequences, understanding the construction of identity and how it is assessed, and challenging essentialist ideas.

## Methodology and Data

### Research Design

To fully understand the asylum assessment process and how the Swedish state utilises asylum caseworkers as tools to execute state policy, it is crucial to gain first-hand insight from caseworkers (Jubany, 2011). Phenomenology allows for a more in-depth analysis of the experiences and perspectives surrounding the broader phenomenon of being a civil servant

(Creswell & Poth, 2018, pp. 121-124). A qualitative, social constructivist approach allows me as a researcher to investigate the complexities of the caseworkers' interpretations of guidelines (Creswell & Poth, 2018, pp. 23-25), while recognising that my interpretation of the phenomenon is a construction itself (Charmaz, 2006, p. 187; Subramani, 2019). Through semi-structured online interviews, I investigate caseworkers' interpretations of the asylum assessment and their interactions with guidelines regarding SOGIE asylum. The interview data explores the subjective elements and interpersonal challenges in negotiating the intricate bureaucratic terrain that SOGIE asylum entails, revealing more than just factual information (Creswell & Poth, 2018, pp. 121-124).

## Sampling Process

The SMA employees are bound by professional secrecy. This means they cannot disclose personal information related to specific asylum case processes (Migrationsverket, 2021). I resorted to using convenience sampling techniques to overcome this challenge. I reached out to three individuals who I know work at the SMA through email and asked if they or their colleagues would be willing to participate in my study. One of my contacts provided me with email addresses for asylum units in two large Swedish cities. Another contact provided me with the email addresses of past colleagues. In addition, I emailed asylum researchers and lawyers and gained a few additional caseworkers' email addresses. Eventually, I also published posts on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram, where I found a few additional interviewees.

## Data Collection

I conducted seven one-on-one semi-structured online interviews in Swedish through Zoom between February 5 and 20, 2024. The interviews were between 50 and 70 minutes long. Using pseudonyms, I refer to the interviewees as Agnes, Camilla, Jimmy, Linnea, Lotta, Marcus, and Sara in this thesis. I translated the transcripts from Swedish to English. Inspired by the literature review findings, I prepared a semi-structured interview guide centred around five main questions before the interviews. For each main question, I also had probes and sub-questions that assisted me in gaining deep, nuanced, and detailed answers and data (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 129). The requirement for participation was minimal, mainly because it was

challenging to find potential interviewees (see limitations). Two of the participants in the study are no longer employed by the SMA. Before entering the data collection process, I knew this could influence their responses – both negatively and positively. There was a risk that they did not remember various details of their work. Still, there was a chance that they felt more comfortable openly discussing their interpretations because they were no longer active caseworkers and could raise their thoughts freely.

Some participants expressed before the interview that they were unsure whether their experiences and perceptions would be helpful in my study. Therefore, I needed to create a curious environment during the interview where I expressed my interest in the subject and the knowledge they can provide. By demonstrating a willingness to acknowledge my limitations and asking thoughtful follow-up questions, I sought to underscore the expertise of my interviewees and the value of their lived experiences. I believe that by focusing on the participants' experiences, I could demonstrate that there were no correct or incorrect answers and that I intended to learn from them, not to interrogate or pressure them in any way. To start each interview, I asked about their position and typical day at work to warm up the atmosphere (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, pp. 117-120). I then asked probing questions about their view of the legal position and their role as a civil servant.

Following each interview, I completed field memos describing the interview material and conduct while documenting my initial thoughts and ideas. Moreover, I wrote respondent memos, including my initial reflections on the data, the main takeaways, and what was said during the interview. Later, the respondent memo was sent back to the participant as part of the member-checking process (McKim, 2023). This process is a method I used to ensure validation – not in a positivist sense, but as checking and questioning my understanding of the interview findings (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, pp. 143-144). Sending full transcripts can appear overwhelming to the interviewee, and few choose to read through the material (McKim, 2023). Accordingly, I wrote one page that compiled the main content of each interview. When I emailed the memo to participants, I informed them that it was not compulsory to read it but voluntary. I emphasised that they could add something they forgot to say or came up with after the interview and that I could change information they felt was incorrect. Three participants answered and wanted to adjust some details, two confirmed the memo without changes, and two never reconnected.



## Data Analysis

The data analysis process of coding, categorising, and thematisation was inspired by Anselm Strauss (1987). Although Strauss comes from the grounded theory school and has a foundation in symbolic interactionism (Aldiabat & Le Navenec, 2011), I argue his approach to interpreting qualitative data to be suitable and beneficial. The initial coding procedure enabled me to move away from this thesis's epistemological framework, theory, and earlier literature. As a result, the open approach avoids pushing data into a template of past results or conclusions about the context (Strauss, 1987). The transcendental phenomenology approach further inspired the study (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 126), which proposes evaluating data by extracting statements and quotes from the transcript. With this method, I could draw on prior knowledge as a point of departure while being open to themes and codes that emerged organically from the findings (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 225).

As I transcribed the interviews, I wrote the respondent memos and did the first round of unrestricted, open coding. While going through each transcript, field note, and memo, I highlighted segments relevant to my research questions that appeared similar or contrasting to previous literature. My aim at this stage was not to unfold 'true' meanings and findings, but more so, as Strauss (1987) puts it "to *open up* the inquiry" (pp. 28-29). Early in the process, I organised the segments using codes in Microsoft OneNote. Under a section named Themes in OneNote, I created several pages and subpages that described codes (with examples from the data) that answered parts of my research questions and either built on or contradicted findings from previous research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 226). I created a codebook to organise the codes under three overarching themes (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, pp. 216-217). At this stage, I conducted selective coding in NVivo, which enabled me to visualise the codes and how they connect to the three large themes. I continued coding until the codes no longer pointed towards new information, meaning where I reached saturation in the material (Strauss, 1987). I utilised previous literature and, at the time evolving, theoretical framework to develop nine connecting categories between the 46 codes and three themes.

## Limitations

The SMA is one of Sweden's biggest governmental agencies and has roughly 5,000 employees (Migrationsverket, 2024). Therefore, a sample size of seven individuals is relatively small and is not representative or generalisable of all caseworkers in Sweden, nor do I seek to make generalisations. Instead, the study is only representative of those seven interviewed individuals. The outcomes of the analysis and the study may have been, or may not have been, different if I were to interview seven other caseworkers. Despite engaging in reflexivity and considering my position as a researching student (see Researcher Positionality), certain constraints were inescapable. For instance, my lack of interviewing expertise impacts the thesis (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, pp. 110-111). Proficiency and expertise in this field may have enabled me to dedicate further attention to coding and analysis. It may have additionally permitted me to ask more insightful questions throughout the interview to discover more about the topic.

I encountered difficulty obtaining interview participants from the asylum units and other managers. Either they did not answer my emails or told me that assisting me with interview participants would "take a lot of time away from the organisation". Participants also wanted approval from their managers before participating, although it is not mandatory. One of my participants advised me to, for example, contact the SMA's official email address so that they could decide on whether they or other participants should be allowed to participate or not. The interview participation sample is, therefore, dependent on my network.

Nevertheless, the study aims to acquire an in-depth understanding and knowledge regarding caseworkers' interpretations of the SOGIE asylum process. One of the greatest strengths of interview studies is how they can achieve in-depth knowledge about participants' interpretations and perceptions, which is difficult to reach via quantitative studies. Additionally, by highlighting how new findings contrast, compare, or expand on previous literature, qualitative research instead cultivates *theoretical* generalisations (Luker, 2008, p. 127).

## Researcher Positionality

To ensure transparency and integrity, I describe my research process and logic throughout the thesis (Given, 2012). In the background, delimitations, and disposition, I explain the context

and scope of the thesis. My methodology and data section, including sampling strategy and limitations, serve to justify and explain my approach and process of research. In qualitative research, the researcher usually acts as the main instrument during data collection and analysis (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p. 148). Reflecting upon my role and position as a researcher – the practice of reflexivity – is thus an integral part of my thesis as it unveils limitations or biases in the research (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p. 168; Subramani, 2019; Tracy, 2013, pp. 2-3).

My research focuses on issues of SOGIE and asylum. Inevitably, my gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and socio-economic background will colour my understanding of the discussed subjects and the execution of the research (Subramani, 2019). Being a lesbian woman has not only influenced my interest in queer research, but also how I interpret and experience social structures regarding SOGIE. Additionally, my previous research and engagement in migration studies influence my choice of topic, research question, and research design (Strauss, 1987, pp. 9-10). This essay aims to contribute to research at this intersection, which can provide insight into how caseworkers experience SOGIE asylum assessments in Sweden. Such knowledge is vital to adapting the SOGIE asylum process in the long term so that it is fair and just. At the same time, I want to point out that another purpose of the essay is to achieve a master's degree at Lund University, which serves my academic and professional pursuits. As a native Swede, I have previous knowledge of the political landscape, the government management system, societal norms and the SMA's work areas, which helped me to ask relevant and informed questions during the interviews. Being Swedish-speaking facilitated all parts of the interview process – including contact with participants, the actual interview, and feedback.

The interview content was primarily focused on the participants' interpretations of the legal position and guidelines for processing SOGIE asylum applications, as well as their experience of their role as civil servants. The topic of the participant's sexuality did appear in three of the interviews, however, briefly. During two of the interviews, I mentioned my identity as part of the LGBTQI, as we discussed our shared experiences of insight into queer identity in contrast to the SMA's expectations of SOGIE asylum seekers. I found that this disclosure fostered openness and understanding between us. However, in the other interviews, I chose not to reveal my SO, as I did not believe it was relevant to the interview, and I did not want to limit the conversation or create expectations about what was appropriate to say regarding the topic.

## Ethical Considerations

Informing the participants about the study was an essential ethical consideration that I undertook to protect and respect the participants' self-determination (Halse & Honey, 2005). Therefore, I gave the participant an information sheet and consent form before each interview. The purpose of the sheet was to inform the participants about the study, its goal, and how it will be used (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p. 32). I described how participants may ask me or my supervisor questions, that participation is voluntary, their confidentiality is assured, that their identity will not be traceable in the study, that interview data will be analysed, and that the thesis will be published to the public on Lund University's LUP Student Papers. I obtained informed consent from all participants before recording the interview, either through the written consent form or verbally before the interview.

Most participants stated before the interview that anonymity was central for them to feel safe discussing their experience working at the agency. To ensure their identities' anonymity, I kept their personal contact information and interview recordings confidential. This is especially important as all interviewees work within the same organisation (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p. 33). Describing their age, whereabouts, and length of employment in the study could reveal their identity, particularly to other colleagues, which three participants emphasised during their interview (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p. 33). At the start of each interview, I informed the participants again about the study, anonymity, recording, and the possibility of withdrawing their consent. Additionally, each participant is assigned a pseudonym in the thesis to protect them further. After the transcribing process, I deleted all recordings. I also decided not to ask participants for demographic information.

## Findings and Analysis

I present the findings and analysis in three sections according to the themes that emerged from examining the interview data. Firstly, I examine the essentialising of sexuality and gender at the SMA, the most prominent theme I have found. The essentialisation is noticeable in three different ways – through the construction of the actual 'queer' refugee, stereotyping, and preconceived notions, as well as the questioning of SOGIE asylum seekers. I investigate the caseworkers' role as state policy executors in the second theme. I analyse how they

understand and navigate their role as civil servants and how bureaucratic power dynamics and challenges manifest in their work. The last theme I discuss is internal criticism. Here, I distinguish caseworkers' critiques that are punching upward towards the government and the SMA, as well as issues with implementation and knowledge within the agency. In the last section, I examine the expressed room for improvement by the caseworkers regarding the processing of SOGIE asylum applications and the agency's strategies and structure at large.

## Essentialising Sexuality and Gender

In this section, I analyse the assessment of SOGIE and how the SMA prioritises LGBTQI identification and group affiliation. To identify someone as belonging to the group, they also prioritise that the asylum seeker has undergone a process of self-reflection and self-realisation. If the asylum seeker has not undergone such a process or can articulate their feelings about their SOGIE, their identity and group affiliation are considered unlikely.

### To be considered Reliable: Constructing the True Queer Refugee

SOGIE asylum seekers must be able to talk about their feelings and thoughts about their SOGIE to be considered reliable and make their SOGIE probable to the caseworker. The SMA and the legal position regarding SOGIE inform the caseworker to focus on the asylum seeker's feelings related to their SOGIE rather than sexual activities. My seven interviews with caseworkers propose that the SMA focuses on emotional insight during investigations of SOGIE asylum seekers. There is an expectation among all interviewed caseworkers that the asylum seeker must, during an asylum investigation, express how they came to understand their SOGIE identity in some way. There is a pattern that the realisation should also bring about various negative emotions, such as shame or difference. Participants Lotta and Agnes explicitly mention the DSSH method – different, stigma, shame, harm – as it sometimes guides the investigation of SOGIE asylum cases. Lotta finds that the model may lead caseworkers to incorrect expectations of SOGIE asylum seekers – for example, that everyone would at some point feel shame connected to their orientation or identity.

Multiple interview participants expect that recognising one's SOGIE evokes negative feelings, as asylum seekers often flee from situations or countries where they face persecution due to

their identity or orientation. Based on the theoretical framework, this can be interpreted as the essentialisation of the SOGIE refugee identity. The asylum seeker is expected, due to both their SOGIE identity but also as refugees, to undergo suffering. Butler's (2006) concept of performativity continues to unveil the power dynamics in the process. Emotional and self-perceived narratives of SOGIE asylum seekers cannot be seen as a manifestation of a clear-cut and essential identity but rather as a performative reaction to the pressures and expectations of the authority and society.

When conducting asylum interviews, the SMA instructs caseworkers to prioritise the asylum seeker's narrative and their ability to express emotions and thoughts about their SOGIE. This indicates that emotional vulnerability is one of the most crucial factors in determining the asylum seeker's reliability. One way to understand the occurrence is as a component of identity building from a social constructivist standpoint. Social conventions about queer identification and deviance from heteronormative society shape the identity of the queer asylum seeker (Jung, 2015; Seidman, 2016, pp. 249-251; Zisakou, 2023). In the light of 'performability', the SMA and caseworkers' expectations can be seen as requirements for recognisability and intelligibility (Butler, 2006). When the SOGIE asylum seeker does not meet expectations, their identity is not understandable within the framework of the bureaucracy and society's norms around SOGIE. If the asylum seeker's identity is not understandable or intelligible, they cannot be recognised as queer by the system either (Butler, 2006, pp. 22-25).

However, some caseworkers expressed that assuming such could pose problems since realising one's identity could also involve positive emotions. According to Linnea, the decision-makers in her unit fail to effectively communicate that there are several ways to understand or feel about one's SOGIE. They told her that LGBTQI persons in Sweden experience negative feelings as shame. Thus, SOGIE asylum seekers should experience shame considerably more, as they come from cultures where being queer is "norm-breaking or dangerous."

And so, you start from those assumptions when you assess or ask questions about LGBTQ-related asylum reasons. That is the logic [at the SMA]. [...] This is something that is associated with a life-threatening situation for you, so it must be that you feel a great deal of shame and guilt and fear about your sexuality or your trans identity. Here [at

the SMA], there is no such thing: that it can be a positive experience or that you just do not think too much about it. Or to think, “I am who I am... so what?”

Most participants are aware that there are different ways of thinking and feeling about one’s SOGIE; for example, LGBTQI individuals realise their identity in various ways and at different ages. One participant, Agnes, describes “insight” as “a process – when did you notice that you might not live up to heteronormative expectations?”. She acknowledges that prevailing societal norms are heteronormative; yet she fails to reflect on the SMA and the guidelines heteronormative notions, therefore contributing to re-enforce sexuality and gender essentialism. A few participants attest that the perception of SOGIE asylum seekers at the SMA is simplistic. Reflecting upon the theoretical framework, such perceptions run the danger of sustaining an essentialist understanding of what it means to seek SOGIE asylum. Such an image poses risks of ignoring the versatility of asylum seekers (Dustin & Ferreira, 2021; García Rodríguez, 2023; Klesse, 2021, p. 118; Moussawi & Vidal-Ortiz, 2020; Seidman, 2016, p. 244; Singer, 2021, p. 240), who may experience both good and negative emotions regarding their SOGIE.

### The Truthful Narrative

The assessment determines whether the narrative is credible, reliable, and sufficient. According to all interview participants, reliability is the most critical factor in this evaluation process as it lays the ground for the final probability assessment. Meaning, whether the asylum seeker has made their membership to a particular group – i.e. LGBTQI –probable or not. The caseworker Camilla describes reliability as: “Whether they can narrate in such a way that it appears as self-experienced – that it is not a generic story.” Through a theoretical standpoint, the asylum assessment procedure reflects the SMA’s fundamental belief that there is a true queer identity – similarly to how heteronormative society assumes heterosexuality and cisgender as essential and uniform (Seidman, 2016, pp. 249-251).

SOGIE asylum seekers are not always aware of the expectations that caseworkers at the SMA have of them. The caseworkers I interview tell me that they or the asylum seeker’s public assistant try to inform that the asylum seeker’s self-reflection and feelings are prioritised. In cases where the narrative does not meet these expectations, caseworkers try to “nudge” asylum seekers through follow-up questions to tell them more about feelings, insight, and

what it is like to live as queer in their country of origin. Suppose the asylum seeker fails to satisfy the SMA, caseworker, and decision-makers' expectations for self-reflection and self-realisation. In that situation, caseworkers attempt to "drag out" such reflections, as this is required for granting refugee status.

Agnes discusses the importance of asylum seekers providing insight into their sexual identity rather than simply stating that they have had same-sex partners. Agnes usually needs to ask for more information from asylum seekers beyond their relationships – as the excerpt below extenuates. Asylum seekers must have gone through self-discovery and be able to describe their feelings.

You just told me you have fallen in love with this girl [...]. But you have not actually told us about how you came to an understanding with your sexual orientation. You told me before that you felt very alone when you realised your sexual orientation. Can you tell me more about that?

Both Agnes and Jimmy place significance on this distinction during the reliability assessment. Both say that it happens that people talk about previous relationships, but change the partner's pronoun, to present themselves as queer. Asylum seekers sometimes give them short answers and vague stories indicating they may not be 'truthful'. Jimmy believes there is a difference between being friends and being in love with someone. A gay man seeking asylum might tell him, for example, "I used to like this guy", but Jimmy says, "It is another thing to be in love".

As part of moving away from discretionary requirements, the SMA has emphasised the individual's self-perceived narrative, rather than sexual activity, to assess LGBTQI membership (Gröndahl, 2023, pp. 10-12). Inquiries regarding sexual acts are prohibited in the process by EU regulations, which highlights the importance of asylum seekers sharing their feelings, thoughts, and emotions (Gröndahl, 2020, pp. 139-146). The guidelines reflect the law, which reflects a perception of SOGIE as a "fundamental characteristic" of the individual, something that cannot be changed or hidden (Prop. 2005/06:6, 2005, p. 27). The interview material does, however, seem to indicate that expectations do encompass certain behaviours and activities, such as being in or having been in a non-heterosexual relationship in the past.



In this prerequisite, a kind of confusion arises among some caseworkers, which causes challenges in the asylum interview. Some claim that assessing someone who has never been in a relationship is complicated. Admittedly, none of the caseworkers I spoke to have been involved in such a case, and the SMA informed them that “actions” – such as being in a relationship – should not be paid as much attention as feelings and thoughts. Linnea shares an experience at work where she denied a bisexual woman a residence permit that exemplifies this confusion. The woman discussed her previous relationships with a woman. Yet, because she did not have emotional, deep thoughts and what Linnea perceived as a self-experienced narrative, it was not enough to be considered probable – just as the SMA informed Linnea. Nevertheless, Linnea got into trouble with the management, who said she had not investigated the woman’s statement ‘accurately’.

Together, the nudging, focus on the linear process of self-realisation, and the self-experienced narrative indicate no place for other understandings or experiences of queerness. The true queer has not only gone through a linear path (Middelkoop, 2013, p. 161; Millbank & Berg, 2009; Spijkerboer, 2013, p. 224) from negative emotions to self-awareness but can also express this process in a way that the caseworker understands as self-experienced – which, according to Marcus, is a nuanced, deep, and descriptive narrative. On the other hand, the large emphasis on the self-experienced narrative in comparison to other modes of evidence, contrasts previous literature suggesting that caseworkers assume SOGIE asylum to, for example, have knowledge about the queer scene or share pornographic material (see, for example, (Danisi, Dustin, Ferreira, & Held, 2021, p. 148; Dustin & Held, 2021, p. 200; García Rodríguez, 2023; Gray & Mcdowall, 2013; Lewis, 2019, pp. 226-227; Lunau & Andreassen, 2023; Middelkoop, 2013, pp. 164-165; Spijkerboer, 2013, p. 225).

From a queer perspective, the SMA conveys through guidelines such as the legal position and the DSSH model, an essentialist view of gender and sexuality. According to performativity, SOGIE are not fixed essences but are expressed through repeated actions and representations. Through the performativity lens (Butler, 2006), SOGIE is changeable and contextual – which contrasts the description of SOGIE as a fundamental characteristic as described by the SMA and the preparatory work of the Aliens Act (Prop. 2005/06:6, 2005). By understanding SOGIE as performative acts, expectations of specific behaviours or expressions – or feelings for that matter – appear narrow and problematic. Additionally, the expectations may be seen as intelligibility characteristics that asylum seekers must possess for the SMA and its

caseworkers to recognise them as true. The tension between performativity and essentialism is reflected in the work of the caseworkers at SMA.

One participant specifically mentioned that they do not identify as gay and, thus, do not know how a gay “emotional process” is supposed to unfold. Nevertheless, the quote below suggests they expect SOGIE asylum seekers to be able to navigate and narrate *their* SOGIE. The caseworker goes on to describe their expectations and what they are founded on:

Most of the time, you have had at least one partner [...]. That is when you understand that you are gay or lesbian. Most are also adults, of course, so everyone has lived 20+ years in their home country with this knowledge [their SOGIE]. It is a very long time [...] – again, those experiences are pretty unique – why we see a requirement [...].

Based on the theoretical framework, the expectations may be an indication of an essentialist image of sexuality and refugeeness – which together influence the construction of the true queer refugee. Although the quote is not very long, it builds up an insightful picture of the linear process of reflection and insight that asylum seekers must achieve to be seen as reliable and thus granted asylum (Giametta, 2017; Zisakou, 2023). The idea that only those who have had a romantic relationship can understand their SOGIE is inherently essentialist. It is based on the idea that everyone has an innate and fixed true SOGIE that lies latent and hides within them (Seidman, 2016, pp. 243-244), which is then revealed in a relationship. Several years of brooding are expected when the individual has realised their identity, which does not hold any fluidity or change.

In addition, SOGIE asylum seekers come from situations and countries where they are exposed or fear persecution. Therefore, their narrative involves, is expected, and above all is privileged to be “unique” – to contain signs of some suffering or battles of emotions (Giametta, 2017; Middelkoop, 2013, pp. 160-161, 165-166; Spijkerboer, 2013, p. 225): scholars and the theoretical framework signal how such expectations are culturally blind. Through the lens of performative believability and recognisability (Butler, 2006, p. 43; Hertoghs & Schinkel, 2018), the true queer refugee narrative is thus only a parody of the SMA essentialist idea of the true queer refugee. To be recognised as a refugee, the asylum seeker must perform as the subordinate cultural Other – who has undergone enough suffering; and to be recognised as the queer Other – who felt enough different and outside in their

‘phobic’ country or culture (Akin, 2019; Hertoghs & Schinkel, 2018; Zisakou, 2023). ‘The requirement of shame’ does not accommodate various ways of viewing one’s SOGIE (Dawson & Gerber, 2017; Åberg, 2023) and how it is influenced by societal norms and power structures (Zisakou, 2023).

### Stereotyping

Sometimes, the asylum investigation of SOGIE cases appears to be coloured by preconceived notions about love, sexual orientation, origin, and class. Marcus testifies about discussions at his unit, where colleagues have said that “all Moroccan street children all of a sudden claim to be gay” and “These young guys did not see a future in their home country. They had to figure out a way to get out of there”. He describes how colleagues claim that all North Africans use the same, generic story when applying for asylum on SOGIE grounds and that their “profiles” have too many resemblances, for example:

It could be that all the guys said they had met and fallen in love with another guy on a football pitch. [...] You can point that out if everyone says the same thing. Then, there may be a lack of collective credibility.

Jimmy also talks about how he meets SOGIE asylum seekers from “mainly three African countries” with similar “profiles”. In his context, young African women are met with scepticism due to their socioeconomic background.

It is always those who come from some country far away from here. Then the question is – is it not easier to seek protection elsewhere? [...] One country is dominant, and then you have to ask.... It is not that all the world’s LGBTQ people come from a single country, but something else is going on here. Some signs of human trafficking. This is usually the case if you cannot afford to go to Sweden. [...] It is unclear where the money comes from.

Such notions pointed out by Marcus and Jimmy paint a picture of asylum seekers being fraudulent based solely on their origins and class and accuse them of fabricating their stories as an ‘easy’ route for international protection (Ferreira, 2022). This mirrors Borrelli’s (2022) and Hertoghs and Schinkel’s (2018) suggestions that there is inconsistency in the distinction

between asylum seekers who fit into different categories and those who do not, such as deserving and undeserving. Additionally, it builds on Joormann's (2020, pp. 32-33) finding that asylum seekers from the lower class are often seen as undeserving, illegitimate, and not in need of protection. From an intersectional perspective, this illustrates how impoverished individual's intersecting identities – such as the Moroccan children – collectively influence their position in the asylum system (Moussawi & Vidal-Ortiz, 2020) and are not given proper consideration in their queer identities (Crenshaw, 1989; Venturi, 2023).

According to the SMA's legal position, the need for protection is connected to a question of identity, and not necessarily sexuality – but what does this entail for individuals who view their orientation as a simple attraction? Or for individuals who are not perceived by others to belong to the LGBTQI group? The visibility of one's group affiliation is brought up in one of the interviews. The focus on the insight into one's identity tries to avoid stereotypical notions of who is LGBTQI. However, caseworkers' perception of asylum seekers' group affiliation is still assessed. For example, one caseworker says:

So, you usually notice if the person is trans. People who come from these countries usually cannot afford to have this kind of gender correction or surgery either. So, then it [their situation] is even more vulnerable. So, if you are a lesbian, maybe... It is not like everyone sees you are a lesbian unless you are aware or very clearly dress that way. If you are transgender, it is pretty obvious.

Considering the theoretical framework, the quote uncovers a dependence on visual and stereotypical indicators in the SOGIE asylum assessment, which risks perpetuating preconceived notions about how trans individuals should appear and act concerning society's cis-normative and binary norms. It creates an unsustainable, homogeneous, and essentialist picture of trans persons by assuming that everyone wants to have gender-affirming surgery or treatments – which further engrains the idea of trans identity as something medically achieved (see, for example, Spijkerboer, 2013, p. 222). This comment may be viewed in a larger context as exemplifying the misconception that trans individuals are easily identifiable based on their looks, causing them to be perceived as innately vulnerable. According to García Rodríguez (2023), categorising SOGIE asylum seekers as 'vulnerable' is inadequately nuanced, potentially reinforcing norms that favour cis persons and perpetuate binary gender systems. Furthermore, it ignores the diversity of varied experiences of SOGIE asylum seekers,

reflecting a kind of bureaucratic violence that further marginalises non-conforming asylum seekers.

Considering Butler (2006), certain performative acts of gender are more recognisable and intelligible than others in the asylum system. The quote by Jimmy below illustrates how appearance may play a role in the assessment of SOGIE asylum:

You should not judge someone based on their appearance, and we do not. But like...if I see a girl seeking asylum. She says she is a lesbian... [unintelligible] ...She looks very lesbian. I am not saying it affects me, but like she looks very lesbian.

The statement indicates that the asylum process is based on a strict set of gender norms and expectations, which are based on hetero and cisnormativity. The result is that certain performative acts, or gender expressions, are more privileged than others. It is unspoken what it means to look lesbian, aside from some 'dress'; however, previous research by Lee and Brotman (2011) suggests that individuals who are gender-nonconforming and thus more visible in their expression (as it more clearly violates prevailing norms about SOGIE) have an easier time getting asylum granted. Their gender nonconformity is seen as evidence of their queerness, which further indicates that sexuality and gender are often entwined in the asylum assessment.

### Grasping at Straws

Sara perceives decision-makers in her office as trying to 'grasp at straws' when deciding whether to grant or reject SOGIE asylum applications. She experiences that they occasionally try to find signs that the asylum seeker is lying, such as fidgeting or not meeting the caseworker's gaze during the asylum investigation. Accordingly, they are not making their claims probable. "Some decision-makers thought that if the person does this or behaves this way, it is more credible than a person who behaves differently." Furthermore, she describes the situation and the information from the SMA as ambiguous. While SOGIE asylum seekers should experience feelings of shame and thus find it difficult to disclose their identity, their nervousness should be taken as an indication of unreliability.

Jimmy experiences a similar contradiction to Sara. In this case, his impression is that decision-makers do not always follow the legal position properly. He points out that the asylum seeker's vulnerability sometimes is more visible due to being gender-nonconforming and being attributed a queer group affiliation. The first paragraph of the legal position (RS/015/2021, 2021) states that caseworkers' assessment of asylum seekers must apply to the claimed protection reason of *actual* or *attributed* SOGIE. This is in line with the EU Qualification Directive Article 10(2) (European Union: Council of the European Union, 2011) which states that it is immaterial whether the asylum seeker possesses the characteristics that attract persecution, as long as the persecutor attributes those characteristics to the asylum seeker. Despite this, decision-makers, in his experience, have urged him to focus more on flaws in narratives and *not* assess the attributed group affiliation. In one specific asylum case, Jimmy had to edit the protocol, at the decision maker's command, to shift focus from asylum seekers' gender expression to the reliability of its narrative.

Since asylum seekers are situated in a bureaucratic environment – a migration authority – the power to define themselves is not in their own hands but with caseworkers and decision-makers (Middelkoop, 2013, p. 168). Considering the concept of bureaucratic violence, this may be viewed as one of many mechanisms to control and register displaced people. To be viewed as reliable, credible, and adequate, the asylum seeker must fit within the identity construction, the reliable and true queer refugee. With each establishment of an identity, the Other is also constructed (Seidman, 2016, p. 248). In practice, if one is seen as reliable, the other is unreliable, following the theoretical framework (Gunaratnam, 2003, p. 12). In this context, the Other are those who fail to make their queer asylum identity reliable and have a 'deficient' history which lacks the emotions that the SMA demands.

The caseworkers restate what the SMA asserts in the legal position when discussing sufficiency, credibility, and reliability. For instance, assessing the asylum seekers' credibility entails examining their behaviour. Agnes says, for example, that she looks at whether the asylum seeker usually arrives on time or shows up late to meetings with the SMA. In addition, just like Jimmy, she generally looks at how long the asylum seeker has been in Sweden before applying for asylum. Finally, sufficiency is whether the evidence is sufficient to receive international protection. Lotta exemplifies and says that it can be about whether the asylum seeker risks being reported, murdered, or treated in an inhumane or degrading way if they return to the country of origin.

The caseworkers are indirectly asked to be sceptical during the asylum interview to assess whether the asylum seeker is part of the LGBTQI or not, as previous literature suggests (see, for example, Jubany, 2011; Selim, Korkman, Pirjatanniemi, & Antfolk, 2023). However, the caseworkers have a divided understanding of the nature of the asylum interview. Around half of the interviewed caseworkers prefer to describe the asylum interview as a process that purely assesses reliability. In contrast, the other half considers that the process explicitly questions the asylum seeker's identity as LGBTQI. Camilla says, "After all, we never say whether someone is lying or not", while others perceive the process as just that. Linnea says, "The asylum seeker must make it probable that they are not simply lying", and Jimmy says, "Some lie. It happens quite often. That is how it is".

## The Executors of State Policy

The caseworkers' shared view of the asylum interview also reflects how they understand their role and position in the asylum process. In this part, I examine how the caseworkers understand, navigate, and reflect on their civil servant roles.

### Understanding the Role in the Context of Queer Asylum

The experience of caseworkers in their role as civil servants at SMA underscores the challenges of balancing beliefs with policies. They all recognise the demanding nature of being representatives of the state, acknowledging the responsibility they hold for the lives of others. However, there is a divergence in how caseworkers perceive the state they represent. Some view themselves as representatives of democracy, while others, such as Linnea and Marcus, see themselves as agents of a repressive government. Agnes and Jimmy share similar interpretations that following Swedish laws, established through a democratically elected government, gives legitimacy to their work. Although some caseworkers do not necessarily agree with regulations and policies, they can find themselves in the role because they did not play an active role in choosing them.

The divide in interpretations may point toward a deeper issue of authority and responsibility. From this point of view, some of the caseworkers may renounce power and responsibility

while defending their roles and actions (Dallara & Lacchei, 2021; Lipsky, 2010, pp. xiv, 226). The SMA tells them to act, and the SMA is informed by an elected and democratic government – therefore, their action is correct (Lindberg, 2020, p. 94). These findings relate to what Kalir (2019), Lindberg, and Borrelli (2018) describe in their studies. Here, the state’s policy and the agency’s guidelines are seen as inherently logical; thus, the caseworker does not have to take responsibility for the bureaucratic violence (to deny someone the right to freedom) they are asked to carry out. Some caseworkers I interviewed do not necessarily describe themselves as ‘gatekeepers’ of truth; but they do demonstrate how their position includes the power to question the integrity of SOGIE asylum seekers. They place themselves in the bureaucracy’s power structure and recognise their role in deciding who gets to settle and who gets deported.

Caseworkers express that being a servant entails a balancing act where professionalism is coupled with compassion and empathy towards those seeking asylum. This is similar to how Lipsky (2010, pp. 71-73) describes the balance between the detached authority and humanistic approach. This balance serves as a means for caseworkers to navigate the discipline required by their role. How they describe the importance of their role differently reflects their understanding of the power they wield over asylum seekers. At the same time, they discuss a more emotional dimension of the exercise of power and the moral weight that accompanies the role. It is tough to be a caseworker, and they must make tough decisions— Sara and Jimmy describe it as seeing things you do not want to see, but “that is the way it is.” In the quote below, Linnea expresses a form of hopelessness for the guidelines on SOGIE asylum and questions her position of power as a caseworker at SMA. “[...] In some cases, it feels so fucking impossible to make that assessment, and then it does not matter how unspecific or how specific the guidelines are, I think it feels completely... Like how, what... who am I?”. She says the responsibility to determine who stays or does not “gnawed at her mind”, ultimately leading her to leave the asylum caseworker position – which echoes the exit-voice-loyalty concept (Ekstedt, 2023).

Jimmy does not perceive the guidelines challenging to comprehend but more so to apply or enforce. Jimmy and Lotta point out that there is no “facit” or ‘answer key’ to the asylum assessment—a set of answers corresponding to questions or issues. Therefore, it may be difficult for caseworkers to know if they are making the right decisions. It is not possible to determine if the person is LGBTQI or not, but only if the story is probable, credible, and



reliable. One way to interpret their perception is through the concept of bureaucracy. The SMA has already informed them of what constitutes the “right decision”; however, the challenge may stem from an introspective reflection on assuming the role, distinguishing true from unreliable, and grappling with the disciplinary power’s moral implications. It may also reflect the inherent ambiguity that makes it unclear whether the goal is to prevent and control displaced individuals’ movement or to protect refugees (França & Ribeiro, 2024).

### Navigating the Role

Agnes and Jimmy state that an asylum seeker’s education can influence the language they use to express their sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression. With that knowledge, Agnes can set the “bar” differently during an investigation and adapt the inquiry to the individual.

[...] I can set the bar much higher in terms of reliability if, let us say, it is a man from Iran who is a lawyer. And he knows what he is talking about. Compared to if I have a Somali woman who may have just been a housewife with no education. [...] So, it is something you must bear in mind that it might not be easy for the asylum seeker to actually always articulate themselves and what it is they think and feel depending on their...where they come from and their educational background.

Despite discretionary attempts by caseworkers, such as Agnes and Camilla, to adapt their language to reduce “authority language” or explain the process adequately to asylum seekers, their task remains to separate true queers from unreliable asylum seekers. Despite discretionary power, Weiss (2020, pp. 205-206) concludes that caseworkers often cannot adjust the assessment enough to resolve issues for asylum seekers but rather aid them. Instead, scholars such as Borrelli and Lindberg (2018) argue that Agnes’ and Camilla’s adjustments are made to make the caseworker’s duties more pleasurable or easy to navigate.

Regardless of the grounds on which someone is seeking asylum, caseworkers’ previous training should be applicable. Nevertheless, many of the participants experienced that it is difficult to interview SOGIE asylum seekers because their situation is particularly vulnerable. SOGIE asylum differs from other grounds in the sensitive nature of identity issues. Investigating the probability level of asylum seekers’ self-perceived identity comes with intimate questions about feelings and self-awareness. All interview participants describe how

they find themselves in a challenging and uncomfortable position to ask such questions and, at the least, to try to investigate such a matter as SOGIE. Linnea and Lotta question how they can expect asylum seekers to be able to put their feelings into words, especially when, for many, it is the first time they have done so – not least in front of an official. The expectation is described as “unreasonable”, and they wonder how someone can discuss the insight into their SOGIE so accurately and in detail. Two of the interviewees identify as LGBTQI and suggest that the requirements set for SOGIE asylum are challenging to achieve based on their own experiences of queerness. One of them says for example:

I can think of myself and how I came to an understanding of my own sexuality. In a way that makes.... I can see that it is not so obvious how these processes work or what to think and feel about them.

There are several tools that caseworkers can use when trying to navigate or manage the role of a civil servant. One strategy for caseworkers to deal with their role and the ethical dilemmas that arise is to renounce responsibility and power (Ekstedt, 2023). The caseworker below explains how they can have opinions but emphasises that caseworkers’ ultimate responsibility is to follow the law and adhere to the SMA. Because they are executors of state policy, they perceive their role and actions as justified, which may be due to their devotion to the agency (Ekstedt, 2023; Golden, 1992; Hirschman, 1970). Jimmy says:

You are here because you have been given a mission – the duty to follow the law and apply it. Not like a robot, but you must understand... You are an official; you are not a private person. You can have opinions, but you should preferably follow the law and not try to distort it.

Ultimately, the interviewees suggest that navigating the roles of caseworker and civil servant requires a particular person or combination of traits. According to my participants, it refers to having the ability to understand the person in front of oneself and to be helpful and responsive. Not just anybody can be a caseworker, according to Sara, given the demands and contextuality of the role: “I do not think everyone can handle working in such a situation. You have to be a certain type of person [...]” When I ask her if she can describe this person, she tells me about a ‘strange’ strategy that almost comes naturally with her role, and she describes it as “almost acting but you are not”.

## *Redirecting Responsibility*

During the interviews, I asked the participants how they navigate their role of handling SOGIE asylum seekers and the balance between their values and those of the civil servant. Two specific methods emerged that are not about balance but about separating oneself from one's role – compartmentalising and transferring responsibility. Below, Sara explains compartmentalising in her own words:

I think you must be very good at “compartmentalising” – many people used that word at Miggan [the SMA]. Because it is so important to draw this line and understand, “Here, I stop having any influence”. After that, it is not my responsibility.

Above, caseworker Sara depicts two common strategies for navigating and dealing with the civil servant role: compartmentalising and responsibility transfer. Essentially, compartmentalising, which stems from psychology, entails dividing one's thoughts and emotions into separate compartments. The other caseworkers use a similar strategy to navigate and handle their roles, separating themselves and their personal beliefs from the civil servant role and its responsibilities.

Ataç (2019) and Bhatia (2020) describe how caseworkers are unaware of their position of power or transfer the responsibility to either the authority or employees with more power, such as decision-makers. The detachment between one's person and work functions as a coping mechanism to deal with moral discomforts that appear at the job and arise as a natural consequence of performing bureaucratic violence. Similarly to Sara, Agnes describes how she must separate herself from the role in the quote below:

Here are the regulations, and here are Agnes and my personal values. I have signed a contract that I work for the state, but somewhere.... [...] It is not me who thinks this way—it is the government who thinks this way. You can use it as some kind of mantra when you write the decision.

Based on the concept of bureaucratic violence, Agnes's quote above can be interpreted as a strategy to preserve serenity in her role and to be able to perform the ethically challenging violence that bureaucracy demands – that is, to distinguish ‘true’ from unreliable. Through the mantra, the assessment is dehumanised and reduced to applying the regulations almost

mechanically. Although they have some manoeuvring power and discretion to utilise in their work, they often do not as they are dedicated to the agency and state's policies. This phenomenon echoes how some SMA caseworkers reflect on their role. In a bureaucratic structure, their role is separated from their person, allowing them to think critically about the process and how it is carried out without positioning themselves in it (Kalir, 2019). Sara chooses to describe it as “almost acting”, and Marcus says he puts on a “civil servant coat” – both pointing to a disassociation or detachment (Lipsky, 2010, pp. 71-73) between their influence and opinions. The phenomenon is further illustrated through Camilla's depiction of her responsibilities:

What I am responsible for is the law and the government. They have set laws, and I cannot work outside them. No matter how sorry or how much pity I feel for someone. It can be a difficult balancing act, but also something that gets easier with time. Unfortunately, you kind of become numb.

Reflecting on Camilla's words, it seems to suggest that the caseworker role must be objective to the extent that their values and judgement must diminish – resembling the powerless role of civil servants caught in between bureaucracy and violence. Some caseworkers see neutrality and objectivity as inherent in the role. Since they have been taught how a government official is neutral, objective, and follows the law, this is also perceived as a logical and intrinsic part of their position (Lindberg, 2020, p. 94). Since the guidelines are set by the SMA, which in turn is informed by the government, which is democratically elected, the guidelines are objective in the eyes of some caseworkers – because civil servants are objective (du Gay, 2000; Ekstedt, 2023). These inherent parts of the bureaucratic system are necessary to function and are expressed by closely following guidelines that prioritise logic and order.

## Internal Criticism

In the last part of the analysis, I highlight the caseworkers' criticisms and views regarding improvements to the SOGIE asylum system and guidelines. This part continues to reflect their position as caseworkers at the SMA and as civil servants of Sweden's government.

## Issues with Implementation

The most significant issue with implementing guidelines for processing SOGIE asylum seekers is that the guidelines are unclear. As Linnea describes it below, there is an awareness that it is difficult to identify people at all, especially if it means that the identification is internal: “It is relatively vague, too. How to judge a person’s sexual orientation or, gender identity, or something. That is very... it is probably also in some way intentional [by the SMA] that it should be [vague].” She describes the vagueness of guidelines as a conscious choice – the legal position should not define what is the ‘queer’ experience, but there should be room for different experiences.

The SMA utilises the acronym LGBTQI to describe the particular social group who seek asylum based on SOGIE. As the literature review suggests, the research on trans and intersex people in this context is scarce; thus, I ask the caseworkers if they have received specific knowledge regarding those asylum seekers. All caseworkers answered that there was no such guidance and had been informed that the legal position should encompass *all* identities within the umbrella term. Although the position is supposed to encompass all, Marcus argues that there is a significant focus on gays and lesbians from the SMA’s guidelines. As Lotta put it: “information about trans people was pretty poor”. Lotta expresses that there are problems with the fact that caseworkers at SMA are not trained enough in LGBTQI issues. Lotta experienced that the caseworkers could feel discomfort investigating SOGIE cases and, therefore, need more guidance than in other cases. The discomfort was usually due to a fear of accidentally saying something “stupid” or “non-politically correct”. Therefore, a ‘wrong focus’ could appear during asylum interviews. Lotta had to guide and remind the caseworkers to try to get a free and open story from asylum seekers.

The SMA’s expectations of asylum seekers and evidence were unclear to Sara. She blames this on the absence of a proper onboarding process by the SMA, which left her feeling unprepared, disappointed, and lacking knowledge regarding LGBTQI and other ‘sensitive’ asylum grounds. During their time at SMA, the only one who took part in LGBTQI-specific training that I interviewed was Lotta. The training package from the European Asylum Support Office they received as a decision-maker included balancing the ‘free’ story while also adhering to the DSSH model. They also tell me that it is more often that decision-makers

receive such training, but that they believe it would be more beneficial for the caseworkers – who are the ones who are participating in the investigation.

### Punching Upwards

In one part of the interview, I asked the caseworkers about their role as civil servants and how they balance personal opinions and values with their titles. One caseworker, Linnea, positions her role on a larger scale that exceeds the borders of Sweden. She says:

I am a representative of legislation that I do not support. But it is also [...] ... from some sort of larger, global perspective. It is also – for me – a structure, an organisation that is part of a global system of borders and inequalities and segregation. Globally, where we sit and say, “You can come here; you cannot come here” and decide on what grounds it happens.

This echoes queer asylum scholars’ (Luibhéid, 2008; Jordan, 2009; Rao, 2020, p. 143) understanding of how the asylum system operates through policies influenced by colonialism and neoliberalism. She acknowledges a “global system of borders and inequalities” that speaks to the notion of power/knowledge and webs of power relations (Foucault, 1978, p. 93; Johnson, 2016). Sara similarly expresses: “In the end, it is the individual versus the state, and you [the asylum seeker] are, of course, at a disadvantage. All the asylum seekers who come are at a disadvantage.” Together, these quotes can be interpreted in a broader sense through the concept of bureaucratic violence, recognising the unequal power dynamics between the global north and west (França & Ribeiro, 2024).

As caseworkers – executors of state legislation – they are subjected to power dynamics in the context of the SMA and global and societal norms to carry out exclusionary truth politics (Foucault, 1984, pp. 72-74). Additionally, they are in a position of disciplinary power themselves, functioning as technologies to decide who is a true queer refugee and who is an unreliable asylum seeker (Green, 2010) or granting freedom to only some (Abdelhady, Gren, & Joormann, 2020). In this way, the global system – or systems of power – are sustaining and withholding the regime of truth (Foucault, 1984, p. 74).

The caseworkers who questioned their position and recognised that it includes power over the asylum seeker and those no longer employed also tend to question either the SMA, the current government, or both. Marcus, similar to Linnea, is dissatisfied with Sweden's current government. He thinks it is challenging and "not great fun" to be a civil servant and represent the SMA when there is a "far-right government with roots in Nazism". He says:

The incumbent government has said explicitly that they want to limit asylum seekers' freedom and human rights as far as is legally possible. And just a statement like that makes you want to remove your civil servant coat and get out of there.

Through the exit-voice-loyalty concept (Ekstedt, 2023; Golden, 1992; Hirschman, 1970), Marcus' dissatisfaction can also illustrate how caseworkers struggle between different approaches to handling ethical dilemmas. As the political landscape becomes increasingly restrictive regarding immigration and asylum, Marcus struggles to justify his position because the new landscape expects him to execute the policies. In the long run, this struggle can be seen as a manifestation of complicated power structures that caseworkers find themselves in and how new knowledge and truth regimes are established and constructed over time. Camilla makes a similar comment, saying:

Now, the government wants to make it [seeking asylum] tougher in many aspects, and that is a challenge in itself. We, as individuals and colleagues at the workplace, think one thing, right? But then we must follow what is said.

The criticism acknowledges a broader trend in asylum and migration policy – a paradigm shift influenced by right-leaning politics and restrictive ideology, as seen in Sweden and the EU's New Pact on Asylum and Migration.

According to former caseworker Lotta's interpretation, situations arise at the SMA where the reliability assessment of events overshadows or is mixed up with the probability of group affiliation. The SMA failed to adhere to its legal position, which requires differentiation between reliability assessments of events that occurred and probability assessments of group affiliation.

Although the SMA would judge that the events are not *reliable*, this does not in itself mean that the very belonging to the social group is not *probable* [...]. You must separate them, and there I feel that they [the SMA] may not really follow their legal position at all on that point.

From an intersectional standpoint, combining the reliability and probability assessment runs the danger of ignoring how many aspects of the identity of SOGIE asylum seekers interact and influence persecution. Asylum seekers may face significant pressure from the SMA to provide a self-perceived narrative of self-reflection that includes suffering. Previous research by Akin (2017) has demonstrated that this pressure causes some asylum seekers to modify their narrative to conform to sociocultural biases in the host nation. In such cases, the reliability assessment may be skewed, and asylum seekers lose their fair and just chance of making their group belonging probable.

### Unsatisfying Knowledge Within

As mentioned in the background, LGBTQI specialists were present at every asylum investigation until 2020, but this is not a requirement today. The specialists are independent, usually from RFSL, whose purpose is to assist with expertise on LGBTQI matters during asylum investigations. The topic of these specialists only appears in two out of seven interviews. Firstly, Marcus has no personal experience with specialists during his investigations and believes specialists are brought in “far from often enough”. Only Lotta and I extensively discuss the specialists’ role in the assessment. This might not be the case nationwide, but the lack of discussion regarding specialists emphasises Marcus’ statement. It could indicate that using experts is an exception rather than a norm.

In Lotta’s experience, the specialists at her unit lacked specific and expert knowledge regarding the experience of LGBTQI individuals in certain countries. The participation of specialists before 2020 sometimes felt like a requirement by the SMA, “something that needed to be ticked off”, she says. They could also interject about specific questions that could be asked during the asylum interview. Lotta sensed that the questions, usually short and ‘closed’, occasionally hindered the asylum seeker’s ability to tell their free story. If short questions are asked at the beginning of the interview, it can send signals to the asylum seekers that they are not expected to talk much or in depth.



Interpreters during asylum investigations fulfil an essential function, especially in SOGIE investigations where almost all evidence is based on the asylum seeker's narrative. Linnea and Marcus point out that interpreters, especially during SOGIE investigations, can cause difficulties. For example, they misinterpret the asylum seekers or resist saying or translating certain words. It may be because they think it is shameful to say certain things, are influenced by their values too much, or there is simply a lack of an accurate translation, says Linnea. Marcus also adds that it happens that interpreters lack knowledge about LGBTQI.

### Room for Improvement

The caseworkers' views of the system suggest that the SMA overlooks aspects of SOGIE asylum seekers' experiences and needs, indicating a deficiency in their understanding of SOGIE asylum seekers. The lack of country-specific knowledge regarding SOGIE asylum-seeking situations underlines the importance of a queer asylum theoretical perspective. By integrating such a perspective, the system may become more culturally appropriate and better adapted to the asylum seekers' rights and welfare in the process (Danisi, Dustin, Ferreira, & Held, 2021, p. 469).

The participants disagree on whether the guidelines should be more freely interpreted or specific. Those who believe that they should be more specific, such as Camilla, say that it would have been easier to make decisions and that there would have been a more straightforward framework within which to work. For example, richer country information about the lives of LGBTQI people in particular regions could have been helpful to have a more rigid framework to work within, says Marcus. This goes together with the fact that it appears that the training of caseworkers is not sufficient when it comes to specific LGBTQI knowledge. Instead, the focus is on teaching them about interview methodology – how each person is 'unique' and that each caseworker should ask open-ended questions. Beyond the position, it appears that the interview methodology that most participants lean towards when it comes to the processing of SOGIE asylum seekers is the one most participants lean towards.

At the same time, as suggestions are made on how the process could be adapted to work better, some participants feel hopeless. Similarly to four other caseworkers, Jimmy has read

and taken part in criticism of the asylum process from, for example, RFSL and Gröndahl (2020; 2023). He believes that there are little to no proposals for improvements and that those put forward are unreasonable. “What they came up with just recently was that you should just pause it [the assessment]. But what does that mean? How do you pause, like...? Should we just say, “Hey, come back in 2 years”?!”. Now, unless it were magically possible to create a test to determine sexuality, Jimmy sees that he can only assess probability and reliability. Others argue that there is no way to improve the process other than to change the law – to make it more generous, humane, and inclusive of diverse cultures and LGBTQI. This, again, hints at the need to move from the SMA’s seemingly essentialist image of SOGIE asylum seekers and instead embrace intersectionality.

Lotta proposes that the investigations could be longer in cases where the asylum seeker feel they have more to tell. It also presupposes that the SMA’s investigative techniques are improved, among other things, through training in memory psychology and trauma. By inviting experts in different areas, such as LGBTQI and psychology, to training sessions, the SMA could create a more trusting atmosphere and better conditions for the asylum seeker to speak freely – which Lotta believes is the most critical role of the SMA. Marcus states that there are in-house online training courses, but his experience is that they are very scarce.

Simultaneously, nearly all caseworkers report that the authority is severely understaffed and under time pressure. Every year, the SMA receives a letter from the government with specific instructions. Sara says that caseworkers are required to meet the objectives, similar to other authorities:

I think a lot could have changed if it was not like that. [...] Understaffing leads to taking shortcuts. Solutions arise that are not good in the long term, and that lead to lots of different problems, as you can predict.

Agnes voices similar concerns, saying: “The biggest [...] challenge as a caseworker at the SMA is probably [...] that you have an extremely large number of cases. Not extreme, but... you have a lot of cases to keep a production rolling.” Limitations such as understaffing and time constraints underline structural bureaucratic issues, which result in bureaucratic violence. Sara’s observation of ‘shortcuts’ highlights the objectives’ tendency to prioritise efficiency over accuracy, further emphasised by the necessity of “keeping the production rolling”. Such

tendencies can lead to bureaucratic violence. If SOGIE asylum seekers are assessed recklessly, they are further marginalised, and their rights and freedom are jeopardised. The institutional norms and bureaucratic goals that permeate the SOGIE asylum assessment dehumanise SOGIE asylum seekers and turn them into a caseload. This enables caseworkers to continue compartmentalising their roles and values and shift responsibilities elsewhere. In line with Arendt's (1969) analysis of bureaucracy and violence, the structure of bureaucracy allows this to happen. So, where is the appropriate place to assign responsibility for violence in a tyrannical system absent of a tyrant?

## Discussion and Conclusion

This thesis aims to gain inside knowledge about the assessment of asylum based on SOGIE through caseworkers at the SMA. Three research questions sought to guide this study's analysis, they read:

- What is the role of caseworkers in the assessment of SOGIE asylum?
  - c. How do caseworkers perceive their role?
  - d. How do bureaucratic structures impact caseworkers' roles?

The research, which centres on caseworkers' experiences, reveals insight into bureaucratic challenges and power dynamics in the SOGIE asylum process. The caseworkers perceive that the guidelines for assessing SOGIE asylum place great importance on asylum seekers' narrative, as it is often the only evidence available to assess internal claims for asylum. The narrative is assessed, above all, on its reliability and how well it presents the probability of the asylum seekers group affiliation as queer. The analysis reveals that, to be seen as reliable, asylum seekers must be able to self-reflect on their process of self-realisation of their identity. It appears that the expectations of this narrative are based on stereotypes and essentialist notions of queerness and refugeeness, and asylum seekers are assessed based on their ability to perform believability.

The role of caseworkers in evaluating SOGIE asylum can be interpreted as a form of 'gatekeepers' of truth. Through the SMA's guidelines, they are trained to treat asylum seekers with scepticism, for example, by carefully analysing asylum seekers 'unreliable' behaviours,

such as nervousness or flaws in their narrative. The caseworkers must place bureaucratic requirements and efficiency ahead of their morals and compassion for asylum seekers in their function as state policy executors. The bureaucratic environment permits discretion, such as independently structuring the asylum interview or using less authority language. However, it forces the caseworkers to become detached rather than allowing them to combine their roles and ideals. The way caseworkers navigate their roles may be seen as a result of the bureaucratic violence and disciplinary force used to separate true queer refugees from unreliable asylum seekers.

The problems that the caseworkers describe as occurring during the process – such as wrong focus and preconceived notions – suggest that a large part of the difficulties lie in the *identification* of the individual asylum seeker's SOGIE. Unless caseworkers are trained fundamentally and comprehensively about LGBTQI and queerness, their role in entering a debate about the epistemology of sexuality is questionable. More generally, it is debatable whether it is appropriate for a government agency to determine the probability of an individual's SOGIE. Based on the last part of the analysis – internal criticism – it appears that the guidelines the caseworkers must follow are perceived as ambiguous and unclear. Rather than developing even stricter guidelines, which clearly define what LGBTQI 'means' and risk essentialising SOGIE asylum seekers further, more explicit guidance appears to be more critical.

I contend that caseworkers lack the necessary resources to enter this epistemological domain given the absence of training on these topics at the SMA, as exemplified by Sara's doubt following the insufficient onboarding procedure as a new hire. Additionally, the study reveals indications of a narrow and essentialist understanding of gender, sexuality, and culture at the SMA. Through a process of othering, the essentialist picture of the 'true' queer refugee is formed, set against the unreliable asylum seeker. In the state's 'regime of truth', asylum seekers may be viewed as disciplined subjects, and the migration agency is a component of the power structure that creates and maintains the narrative of the 'true'. This runs the danger of SOGIE asylum seekers' identities not being considered probable (i.e. not believed) since they do not fit the SMA's hetero and cisnormative norms. Examining the individual's narrative is the caseworkers' primary tool in the assessment. However, the narrative's expectations are influenced by norms that asylum seekers must meet to be recognisable. Ultimately, the caseworkers assess the asylum seekers' performative believability rather than

the source of their fear of persecution. The study's caseworkers occasionally maintain they cannot balance their values with the demands of their jobs, which causes them to distance themselves from the position. From an analytical point of view, they express their ideals when they voice their discontent with the asylum system and their awareness of the many situations that SOGIE asylum seekers go through. They must, however, compartmentalise their ideals because of the bureaucratic violence they are obliged to carry out in deciding who gets to stay and who does not. What remains is a sceptic-trained 'objective' civil servant. Furthermore, there is the risk that inadequate time and staffing will lead to an inaccurate assessment of each claim. Under these circumstances, it is unfitting for the government, the SMA, and caseworkers to participate in this discussion. Therefore, how should the asylum system related to SOGIE operate and evaluate if it is improper to determine someone's identity as SOGIE?

## Future Research

Based on my conclusion of the study, I recommend future research to investigate the potential of moving away from identity and identification of the individual in the asylum process and assessment by refocusing on (fear of) persecution. There is a further need to problematise the assessment and how identity categories of Western-centric nature influence it. The mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion steering SOGIE asylum are engrained by bureaucratic power dynamics that systematically invoke violence on asylum seekers. The SMA's essentialist view of SOGIE and the lack of education on intersecting identities (such as religion, gender, sexuality, and race) causes preconceived notions to be reproduced in the asylum system. Research should further investigate the effects of the credibility and reliability assessment on SOGIE asylum seekers. More specifically, how the assessment causes asylum seekers to adjust their narrative to cultural settings, reproducing an essentialist depiction of SOGIE asylum. Without a more intersectional and cultural understanding of queer realities at migration and asylum agencies, beyond the West, hetero and cisnormativity, I conclude that it is impossible to ensure that the SOGIE asylum process is fair and equitable – not only in Sweden but on a global level.

## Bibliography

- 2005:716, Utlänningslag (Justitiedepartementet L7 2005).
- Abdelhady, D., Gren, N., & Joormann, M. (Eds.). (2020). *Refugees and the violence of welfare bureaucracies in Northern Europe*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Akin, D. (2017). Queer asylum seekers: translating sexuality in Norway. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 43(3), pp. 458-474, doi:10.1080/1369183X.2016.1243050.
- Akin, D. (2019). Discursive Construction of Genuine LGBT Refugees. *Lambda Nordica*, 23(3-4), pp. 21-46, doi:https://doi.org/10.34041/ln.v23.549.
- Aldiabat, K., & Le Navenec, C. (2011). Philosophical Roots of Classical Grounded Theory: Its Foundations in Symbolic Interactionism. *The Qualitative Report*, 16(4), pp. 1063-1080, doi:https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2011.1121.
- Arendt, H. (1969). Reflections on Violence. *Journal of International Affairs*, 23(1, Political Conflict: Perspectives on Revolution), pp. 1-35.
- Asylrättscentrum. (n.d.). *Så fungerar asylprocessen*. Retrieved March 26, 2024, from Asylrättscentrum | Swedish Refugee Law Center: <https://sweref.org/asylprocessen-2/>
- Ataç, I. (2019). Deserving Shelter: Conditional Access to Accommodation for Rejected Asylum Seekers in Austria, the Netherlands, and Sweden. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, pp. 1-17, doi:10.1080/15562948.2018.1530401.
- Avgeri, M. (2023). Trans\*it: Transgender and gender nonconforming asylum claimants' narratives in Greece. *Sexualities*, 26(1-2), pp. 125-139, doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/13634607211013278.
- Bach, J. (2013). Assessing transgender asylum claims. *Forced Migration Review*, 42, pp. 34-36.
- Bhatia, M. (2020). The Permission to be Cruel: Street-Level Bureaucrats and Harms Against People Seeking Asylum. *Critical Criminology*, 28, pp. 277-292, doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-020-09515-3.
- Borrelli, L. M. (2022). Should (S)he Stay or Should (S)he Go? – Street-level Suspicion and the Construction of the '(Un)deserving Migrant'. *Geopolitics*, 27(4), pp. 1093-1116, doi:10.1080/14650045.2020.1814257.
- Borrelli, L., & Lindberg, A. (2018). The creativity of coping: Alternative tales of moral dilemmas among migration control officers. *International Journal of Migration and Border Studies*, 4(3), pp. 163-178, doi:10.1504/IJMBS.2018.10013558.
- Borrelli, L., Hedlund, D., Johannesson, L., & Lindberg, A. (2023). *Border Bureaucracies: A Literature Review of Discretion in Migration Control*. Neuchâtel, Switzerland: nccr – on the move, Working Paper #32.
- Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2018). *Doing Interviews* (2nd ed.). (U. Flick, Ed.) London, UK: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Butler, J. (2006). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*. London, UK: SAGE.

- Christiansen, S., & Tidevall, Y. (2023, August 4). *Hbtq-flyktingar nekas asyl – visar för lite känslor*. Retrieved January 29, 2024, from svt Nyheter: <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/homosexuella-faizal-flydde-fran-uganda-nekas-asyl>
- Closas Casasampera, A. (2021). A Foucauldian Reading of the Global Compact for Migration. In J. Diab (Ed.), *Dignity in Movement: Borders, Bodies and Rights*. Bristol, UK: E-International Relations Publishing.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), pp. 139-167.
- Creswell, J., & Poth, C. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (4th ed.). London, UK: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Dallara, C., & Lacchei, A. (2021). Street-level Bureaucrats and Coping Mechanisms. The Unexpected Role of Italian Judges in Asylum Policy Implementation. *South European Society and Politics*, 26(1), pp. 83-108, doi:10.1080/13608746.2021.1956161.
- Danisi, C., Dustin, M., Ferreira, N., & Held, N. (2021). *Queering Asylum in Europe: Legal and Social Experiences of Seeking International Protection on grounds of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*. Springer Cham.
- Dawson, J., & Gerber, P. (2017). Assessing the Refugee Claims of LGBTI People: Is the DSSH Model Useful for Determining Claims by Women for Asylum Based on Sexual Orientation? *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 29(2), pp. 292-322, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1093/ijrl/eex022>.
- de Bruïne, G., Vredeveltdt, A., & van Koppen, P. (2023). Culture and credibility: the assessment of asylum seekers' statements. *Psychology, Crime & Law*.
- Dhoest, A. (2019). Learning to be gay: LGBTQ forced migrant identities and narratives in Belgium. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 45(7), pp. 1075-1089, doi:10.1080/1369183X.2017.1420466.
- du Gay, P. (2000). *In praise of bureaucracy—Weber—Organization—Ethics*. SAGE Publications.
- Dustin, M., & Ferreira, N. (2021). Improving SOGI Asylum Adjudication: Putting Persecution Ahead of Identity. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 40(3), pp. 315-347, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdab005>.
- Dustin, M., & Held, N. (2021). 'They sent me to the mountain': the role space, religion and support groups play for LGBTIQ+ asylum claimants. In R. Mole (Ed.), *Queer Migration and Asylum in Europe* (pp. 184-215). London, UK: UCL Press.
- Ekstedt, J. (2023). Bureaucratic configuration and discretion in asylum case processing: the case of the EUAA in Greece. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 11(22), pp. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-023-00345-0>.
- European Union: Council of the European Union. (2011, December 20). Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees [...].
- Ferreira, N. (2022). Utterly Unbelievable: The Discourse of 'Fake' SOGI Asylum Claims as a Form of Epistemic Injustice. *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 34(3-4), pp. 303-326, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1093/ijrl/eeac041>.

- Foucault, M. (1978). *The History of Sexuality, vol. 1: An Introduction*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (1982). The Subject and Power. *Critical Inquiry*, 8(4), pp. 777-795.
- Foucault, M. (1984). *Foucault Reader*. (P. Rabinow, Ed.) New York, NY: Pantheon Books.
- França, I., & Ribeiro, B. (2024). Multiple Encounters: Queer Migrants and Bureaucratic Violence. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees / Refuge : revue canadienne sur les réfugiés*, 39(2), pp. 1-16, doi:<https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.41175>.
- Fuss, D. (1989). *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference*. New York: Routledge.
- Güler, A., Shevtsova, M., & Venturi, D. (Eds.). (2019). *LGBTI Asylum Seekers and Refugees from a Legal and Political Perspective: Persecution, Asylum and Integration*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- García Rodríguez, D. (2023). Critiquing Trends and Identifying Gaps in the Literature on LGBTQ Refugees and Asylum-Seekers. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 42(4), pp. 518-541, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdad018>.
- García Rodríguez, D., & Giametta, C. (2024). Queer asylum: Between hostility and incredibility. *International Migration*, 62(2), pp. 232-236, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.13221>.
- Giametta, C. (2017). *The Sexual Politics of Asylum: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in the UK Asylum System*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Given, L. (Ed.). (2012). *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (Vols. 1-0). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Golden, M. (1992). Exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect: Bureaucratic responses to presidential control during the Reagan administration. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 21(1), pp. 29-62.
- Gröndahl, A. (2020). *Avslagsmotiveringar i HBTQI-asylärenden. En rättsutredning av Migrationsverkets, migrationsdomstolarnas, och Migrationsöverdomstolens prövning av sexuell, läggning, könsidentitet och könsuttryck*. RFSL 2020.
- Gröndahl, A. (2023). *Avslagsmotiveringar i hbtqi-asylärenden: en uppföljning*. RFSL.
- Green, A. I. (2010). Remembering Foucault: Queer Theory and Disciplinary Power. *Sexualities*, 13(3), pp. 316-337, doi:[10.1177/1363460709364321](https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460709364321).
- Gren, N., Abdelhady, D., & Joormann, M. (2024). Unmasking the Impact of Bureaucratic Violence. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees / Refuge: revue canadienne sur les réfugiés*, 39(2), pp. 1-14, doi:<https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.41163>.
- Gunaratnam, Y. (2003). Researching 'Race' and Ethnicity. In Y. Gunaratnam, *Researching Race and Ethnicity: Methods, Knowledge and Power* (pp. 3-27, doi:<https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857024626> ). London, UK: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Hall, S. (1996). Introduction: who needs 'identity'? In S. Hall, & P. du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (pp. 1-17, doi:<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446221907>). SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Halse, C., & Honey, A. (2005). Unravelling Ethics: Illuminating the Moral Dilemmas of Research Ethics. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 30(4), pp. 2141-2162.



- Hedlund, D., & Wimark, T. (2019). Unaccompanied Children Claiming Asylum on the Basis of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 32(2), pp. 257-277, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fey026>.
- Hertoghs, M., & Schinkel, W. (2018). The state's sexual desires: the performance of sexuality in the Dutch asylum procedure. *Theory and Society*, 47, pp. 691-716, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-018-9330-x>.
- Hirschman, A. (1970). *Exit, voice and loyalty: Responses to decline in firms, organizations and states*. Harvard Press.
- Irigaray, L., & Guynn, N. (1995). The Question of the Other. *Yale French Studies*(87), pp. 7-19, doi:<https://doi.org/10.2307/2930321>.
- Jansen, S., & Spijkerboer, T. (2011). *Fleeing Homophobia: Asylum Claims Related to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Europe*. COC Nederland/Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.
- Johannesson, L. (2023). The Symbolic Life of Courts: How Judicial Language, Actions, and Objects Legitimize Credibility Assessments of Asylum Appeals. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 24(Suppl 4), pp. 791-809, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-022-00989-4>.
- Johnson, H. R. (2016). Foucault, the "facts," and the fiction of neutrality: Neutrality in librarianship and peer review. *Canadian Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 1(1), pp. 24-41.
- Joormann, M. (2020). Social class, economic capital and the Swedish, German and Danish asylum systems. In D. Abdelhady, N. Gren, & M. Joorman (Eds.), *Refugees and the violence of welfare bureaucracies in Northern Europe* (pp. 31-49). Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Jordan, S. R. (2009). Un/convention(al) refugees: contextualizing the accounts of refugees facing homophobic or transphobic persecution. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 26(2), pp. 165-182.
- Jubany, O. (2011). Constructing truths in a culture of disbelief: Understanding asylum screening from within. *International Sociology*, 26(1), pp. 74-94, doi:10.1177/0268580910380978.
- Jung, M. (2015). Logics of citizenship and violence of rights: the queer migrant body and the asylum system. *Birkbeck Law Review*, 3(2), pp. 305-335.
- Juss, S. (2015). Sexual Orientation and the Sexualisation of Refugee Law. *International Journal of Minority and Group Rights*, pp. 128-153.
- Kalir, B. (2019). Repressive Compassion: Deportation Caseworkers Furnishing an Emotional Comfort Zone in Encounters with Illegalized Migrants. 42(1), pp. 68-84. doi:<https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1111/plar.12281>
- Klesse, C. (2021). On the government of bisexual bodies: asylum case law and the biopolitics of bisexual erasure. In R. Mole (Ed.), *Queer Migration and Asylum in Europe* (pp. 109-131). London, UK: UCL Press.
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2015). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3rd ed.). SAGE.
- LaViolette, N. (2013). Overcoming Problems with Sexual Minority Refugee Claims: Is LGBT Cultural Competency Training the Solution? In T. Spijkerboer (Ed.), *Fleeing*

- Homophobia: Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Asylum* (pp. 189-216). Oxon, UK: Routledge.
- Lee, E. O., & Brotman, S. (2011). Identity, Refugeeeness, Belonging: Experiences of Sexual Minority Refugees in Canada. *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue canadienne de sociologie*, 48(3), pp. 241-274, doi:10.1111/j.1755-618X.2011.01265.x.
- Lewis, R. A. (2019). "And Suddenly I Became a Lesbian!" Performing Lesbian Identity in the Political Asylum Process. In B. Haas, & A. Shuman (Eds.), *Technologies of Suspicion and the Ethics of Obligation in Political Asylum* (pp. 225-244). Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.
- Lindberg, A. (2020). Minimum rights policies targeting people seeking protection in Denmark and Sweden. In D. Abdelhady, N. Gren, & M. Joormann (Eds.), *Refugees and the Violence of Welfare Bureaucracies in Northern Europe* (pp. 85-101). Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Lipsky, M. (1969). Toward a Theory of Street-Level Bureaucracy. *Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin: Institute for Research on Poverty. Retrieved from [https://www.canonsociaalwerk.eu/1969\\_lipsky/1969\\_Lipsky\\_Toward%20a%20theory%20of%20street%20level%20bureaucracy.pdf](https://www.canonsociaalwerk.eu/1969_lipsky/1969_Lipsky_Toward%20a%20theory%20of%20street%20level%20bureaucracy.pdf)
- Lipsky, M. (2010). *Street-Level Bureaucracy, 30th Ann. Ed.: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Service*. Russell Sage Foundation.
- Luibhéid, E. (2008). Queer/Migration: An Unruly Body of Scholarship. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 14(2-3), pp. 169-190.
- Luibhéid, E. (2008). Sexuality, Migration, and the Shifting Line between Legal and Illegal Status. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 14(2-3), pp. 289-315.
- Lukac, E. (2017). *LGBT Asylum Seekers in Sweden: Conceptualising Queer Migration Beyond the Concept of "Safe Third Country"*. Oxford Research.
- Luker, K. (2008). *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info-glut*. London, UK: Harvard University Press.
- Masip, J. (2017). Deception detection: State of the art and future prospects. *Psicothema*, 29(2), pp. 149-159, doi:10.7334/psicothema2017.34.
- McKim, C. (2023). Meaningful Member-Checking: A Structured Approach to Member-Checking. *American Journal of Qualitative Research*, 7(2), pp. 41-52, doi:<https://doi.org/10.29333/ajqr/12973>.
- Middelkoop, L. (2013). Normativity and credibility of sexual orientation in asylum decision making. In T. Spijkerboer, *Fleeing Homophobia: Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Asylum* (pp. 155-175). London, UK: Routledge.
- Migrationsverket. (2021, September 10). *För dig som är hbtq-person och söker asyl*. Retrieved January 23, 2024, from Migrationsverket Web site: <https://www.migrationsverket.se/Privatpersoner/Skydd-och-asyl-i-Sverige/For-dig-som-ar-hbtq-person-och-soker-asyl.html>
- Migrationsverket. (2023, December 1). *Asylregler*. Retrieved March 26, 2024, from Migrationsverket: <https://www.migrationsverket.se/Privatpersoner/Skydd-och-asyl-i-Sverige/Att-ansoka-om-asyl/Asylregler.html>

- Migrationsverket. (2024, March 8). *Asyl - från ansökan till beslut*. Retrieved March 26, 2024, from Migrationsverket: <https://www.migrationsverket.se/Privatpersoner/Skydd-och-asyl-i-Sverige/Att-ansoka-om-asyl/Asyl---fran-ansokan-till-beslut.html>
- Migrationsverket. (2024, March 1). *Beslut*. Retrieved March 26, 2024, from Migrationsverket: <https://www.migrationsverket.se/Privatpersoner/Skydd-och-asyl-i-Sverige/For-dig-som-ar-barn-och-har-sokt-asyl/For-dig-som-soker-asyl-utan-foraldrar/Beslut.html>
- Migrationsverket. (2024, January 31). *Vårt uppdrag och arbete*. Retrieved April 4, 2024, from Migrationsverket: <https://www.migrationsverket.se/Om-Migrationsverket/Jobba-hos-oss/Vart-uppdrag-och-arbete.html>
- Migrationsverket. (n.d.). *Migrationsverkets uppdrag*. Retrieved March 26, 2024, from Migrationsverket: <https://www.migrationsverket.se/Om-Migrationsverket/Vart-uppdrag.html>
- Millbank, J., & Berg, L. (2009). Constructing the Personal Narratives of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Asylum Claimants. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 22(1).
- Mole, R. (Ed.). (2021). *Queer Migration and Asylum in Europe*. London, UK: UCL Press.
- Moniz, T., Talwar, S., & Vindrola-Padros, C. (2023). *METHODS USED BY FRANCE, GERMANY, ITALY AND SWEDEN TO STREAMLINE ASYLUM PROCEDURES. RAPID EVIDENCE BRIEF*. University College London, Department of Targeted Intervention. London: Rapid Research Evaluation and Appraisal Lab.
- Moussawi, G., & Vidal-Ortiz, S. (2020). A Queer Sociology: On Power, Race, and Decentering Whiteness. *Sociological Forum*, 35(4), pp. 1272-1289, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/socf.12647>.
- Murray, D. (2011). Becoming queer here: integration and adaptation experiences of sexual minority refugees in toronto. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 28(2), pp. 127-135.
- Ong, A. (2003). *Buddha is hiding : Refugees, citizenship, the new america*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Osso, B. N. (2023). Unpacking the Safe Third Country Concept in the European Union: B/orders, Legal Spaces, and Asylum in the Shadow of Externalization. *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 35(3), pp. 272–303, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1093/ijrl/ead028>.
- Pedersen, M., Stritch, J., & Thuesen, F. (2018). Punishment on the Frontlines of Public Service Delivery: Client Ethnicity and Caseworker Sanctioning Decisions in a Scandinavian Welfare State. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 28(3), pp. 339-354, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muy018>.
- Posmykiewicz, A. (2022). Non-heteronormative Asylum Seekers in Sweden: An Analysis of the Swedish Migration Agency's Policies on Gender and Sexuality-related Asylum Cases. *Education of Economists and Managers*, 63(1), pp. 71-82, doi:10.33119/EEIM.2022.63.5.
- Prearo, M. (2020). The Moral Politics of LGBTI Asylum: How the State Deals with the SOGI Framework. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 34(2), pp. 1454-1476, doi:10.1093/jrs/feaa047.
- Prop. 2005/06:6, Flyktingskap och förföljelse på grund av kön eller sexuell läggning (Regeringens proposition 2005/06:6 2005).

- Rao, R. (2020). *Out of time: The queer politics of postcoloniality*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Regeringsbeslut II:1. (2023). Regleringsbrev för budgetåret 2024 avseende Migrationsverket. Regeringskansliet. (2023, October 18). *Om regeringens prioritering: Migration och integration*. Retrieved April 29, 2024, from Regeringen.se: <https://www.regeringen.se/regeringens-politik/regeringens-prioriteringar/migration-och-integration/om-regeringens-prioritering-migration-och-integration/>
- Robson, C., & McCartan, K. (2016). *Real World Research: A Resource for Users of Social Research Methods in Applied Settings* (4th ed.). Chichester, UK: Wiley.
- RS/015/2021, Rättsligt ställningstagande: Utredning och prövning av den framåtsyftande risken för personer som åberopar skyddsskäl på grund av sexuell läggning, könsöverskridande identitet eller könsuttryck (Migrationsverket February 25, 2021).
- Rubin, H., & Rubin, I. (2005). *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (Vol. 2nd). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Schultz, C. (2020). Ambiguous goals, uneven implementation - how immigration offices shape internal immigration control in Germany. *CMS*, 8(10), doi:<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-019-0164-0>.
- Seidman, S. (2016). Lesbian, Gay, and Queer Theory/Heterosexual Studies. In S. Seidman, *Contested Knowledge: Social Theory Today* (pp. 239-253). Chichester, UK: Wiley Blackwell.
- Selim, H., Korkman, J., Pirjatanniemi, E., & Antfolk, J. (2023). Asylum claims based on sexual orientation: a review of psycho-legal issues in credibility assessments. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 29(10), pp. 1001-1030, doi:10.1080/1068316X.2022.2044038.
- Singer, S. (2021). 'How much of a lesbian are you?' Experiences of LGBT asylum seekers in immigration detention in the UK. In R. Mole (Ed.), *Queer Migration and Asylum in Europe* (pp. 238-260). London, UK: UCL Press.
- Spijkerboer, T. (2013). Sexual identity, normativity and asylum. In T. Spijkerboer (Ed.), *Fleeing Homophobia: Sexual orientation, gender identity and asylum*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Strauss, A. (1987). *Qualitative Data Analysis for Social Scientists*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Subramani, S. (2019). Practising reflexivity: Ethics, methodology and theory construction. *Methodological Innovations*, 12(2), p. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/2059799119863276>.
- Tazzioli, M. (2020). *The Making of Migration: The Biopolitics of Mobility at Europe's Borders*. London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Tracy, S. J. (2013). *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact* (1st ed.). Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- UNHCR | Nordic and Baltic Countries. (n.d.). *A safe space for asylum-seekers fleeing persecution due to their sexual orientation*. Retrieved February 7, 2024, from UNHCR website: <https://www.unhcr.org/neu/list/refugeevoices>
- Weeks, J. (1986). *Sexuality*. New York, NY: Tavistock.
- Weiss, N. (2020). The trauma of waiting: understanding the violence of the benevolent welfare state in Norway. In D. Abdelhady, N. Gren, & M. Joormann (Eds.), *Refugees*

- and the Violence of Welfare Bureaucracies in Northern Europe* (pp. 195-209).  
Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Weiss, N., & Gren, N. (2021). Mission Impossible? The Moral Discomfort among Swedish and Norwegian Welfare Bureaucrats Encountering Refugees. *Nordisk Vårdförskning | Nordic Welfare Research*, 6(3), pp. 192-203, doi:<https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.2464-4161-2021-03-06>.
- Venturi, D. (2023). Beyond the Rainbow? An Intersectional Analysis of the Vulnerabilities faced by LGBTIQ+ Asylum-Seekers. *European Journal of Migration and Law*, 25(4), pp. 474-500, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1163/15718166-12340164>.
- Zisakou, S. (2023). Proving gender and sexuality in the (homo)nationalist Greek asylum system: Credibility, sexual citizenship and the ‘bogus’ sexual other. *Sexualities*, 0(0), p. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/13634607231208043>.
- Åberg, K. (2023). A Requirement of Shame: On the Evolution of the Protection of LGB Refugees. *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 35(1), pp. 37-57, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1093/ijrl/ead008>.