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Singing survival in community:
A qualitative study of care, resilience and futurity in two
queer community choirs in Berlin and Malmö

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Abstract

This thesis examines how survival is articulated and practiced within two queer community choirs in Malmö and Berlin. Situated within a European context marked by increasing anti-gender politics and queer precarity, the study conceptualizes queer survival as a collective and political practice grounded in care, resilience and futurity. Drawing on queer theory and queer political sociology, it explores how community choirs function as spaces in which marginalized subjects sustain and reimagine life under conditions of vulnerability.

The study employs a qualitative mixed-methods approach, combining eight semi-structured interviews with autoethnographic observation. Through thematic analysis, the research investigates how participants experience belonging, healing and collective imagination within queer communal singing spaces.

The findings demonstrate that queer community choirs operate as infrastructures of care that foster recognition, safety and relational support beyond heteronormative social structures. Collective singing enabled participants to experience visibility, emotional connection and resilience, while also creating spaces in which alternative forms of resistance, belonging and queer futurity could be rehearsed. At the same time, the study highlights how grief, vulnerability and inequalities remain embedded within queer communal life.

The thesis therefore argues that queer community choirs are not merely cultural or recreational spaces, but politically significant sites of everyday survival and collective world-making.

Keywords: Political Science, Sociology, Gender Studies, Queer Worldmaking, Survival, Care

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Problem

I scream and shout	And in that space
from the depth of my mind	we share a calm place
I scream and shout	a place to be
all the shit I have to fight	so strong and free

- *Jag roper* by Sara Parkman (translated from Swedish to English by Malmö choir conductor)

After attending the fundraising concert of a friend who is part of a queer community choir in Malmö, I was intrigued. While the choir singers were not hitting every note perfectly, the joy emanating audibly and visibly from their collective effort was palpable. By the end of their performance, we were stood up, clapping and singing along with them. Togetherness was created within the span of three songs and a lot of smiles. My thesis was born out of this, out of the joy of collective togetherness, of creating communal belonging through the raising of queer voices in harmony and melody.

Such spaces in which non-normative existence can emerge and thrive are increasingly pressured, as structural violence on queer life has increased due to recent political developments in Europe and on a global scale. The latest ILGA Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of LGBTQI+ People in Europe and Central Asia makes this clear: restrictions towards queer life in the form of laws, education and hate speech are on the rise (2025). „LGBTI people have become the testing ground for laws that erode democracy itself“ (Chaber/ILGA 2025), accumulating the safety concerns around life conditions for queer people.

Queer existence has historically been deeply shaped by systematic violence, marginalization and discrimination, especially for trans and gender non-conforming people of color. The experiences resulting from these burdens, marked through shame, erasure and institutional abandonment, dominate in media representations, public discourse and academic inquiry. Feminist scholarship has rightfully centered the deconstruction of such harms in order to understand their social, political and historical dimensions. However, as oppressive forces intensify, answering questions around queer belonging, collectivity and futurity become increasingly urgent, as these questions are key to conceptualizing alternative strategies for *queer survival*, care and healing. As Audre Lorde writes in her poem *A litany of Survival*, to be „seeking a now that can breed/ futures“ (1978) is essential to disrupt and expand beyond hegemonic power relations.

The following study approaches the concept of *queer survival* through the lenses of belonging, persisting and imagining in spaces beyond dominant models of relationality. Most prevalent models of space, relation and community are rooted in heteronormative, capitalist and white supremacist systems and often rely on state support and institutionalization. Queer communities have had to historically adapt to being excluded from such spaces and society at large, with alternative practices of collectivity emerging in response. Feminist scholarship needs to develop and continuously expand the ideas of care and relationality as political practices that are vital and contested sites of struggle. This study delineates ways in which people understand survival to be supported within queer collective spaces, specifically queer community choirs in the urban contexts of Berlin, Germany and Malmö, Sweden. Through exploring the role community care plays, how resilience is practiced and which futures are enacted, I aim to critically analyze political practices in non-normative collective settings, showing survival to be conceptualized under increasingly politically repressive circumstances.

1.2 Research Questions & Aims

From this inquiry, the following research question will guide the study:

How is survival articulated and practiced within queer community choirs in Malmö and Berlin?

The following three sub-questions will allow a deeper examination:

1. Which forms of caring relations and structures of community emerge within the choir practice?
2. How do choir members experience healing and understand resilience amid ongoing harm?
3. What futures and alternative imaginaries are rehearsed and voiced in the choir context?

This study has an explorative character, aiming at situating the realities of queer community choirs within two different national and urban contexts.

While the overarching research question aims to understand how survival continues to shape places of queer existence comparatively, each of the sub-questions indicate the ground from which survival is built upon and understood to consist of within this study. Inquiring about the meaning of care, resilience and futurity within queer community choirs is understood here as looking at contemporary ways to mitigate insecurity and risk, going beyond dominant notions of survival and complicating collective threat responses.

1.3 Background

In order to adequately understand the background of the thesis, I will briefly explain the terminology used, present the city contexts of Berlin and Malmö in relation to queer life and provide an overview of the two chosen choirs. Finally I will signpost my approach to this thesis.

1.3.1 Terminology

This study will utilize the word „queer“ most frequently and broadly, to refer to people, places and behaviors which are considered non-normative, non-conforming or socially deviant from cis-heteronormative society. „Queer“ carries a lot of contestation (Berlant et al. 1994), having been a derogatory term of abuse which was reclaimed by US grassroots activists in the 1980s (Jeppensen 2016) and is now often used as an umbrella-term, encompassing all types of identities and lives (Beale 2017). Other denominators exist, such as LGBT and LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, +) or SOGIESC (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, Sex Characteristics) (IOM 2021), varying widely between contexts and being used fluidly in research. „Queer“ was selected for its possibility to complicate and politicize notions of gender and sexuality (Butler 1993), as research collaborator Eli explains: „I think you can be, like, gay and not political, but, like, queer, you are political. It's, like, part of it. [...] it is bigger than just your identity“.

1.3.2 City Context

In order to examine different collectivities' approaches to the notion of survival, Berlin and Malmö were chosen as sites of research. This comparative lens allows for a deeper understanding of survival mechanisms and expands the research into the international sphere of European queer social movements.

Malmö and Berlin create very different contexts for queer life, being based within different nation-states, cultural contexts and historical entanglements. These differences in conditions and environment must therefore be considered carefully.

Berlin is known, nationally and internationally as the „rainbow capital“ (Ewing 2023: 113) of queer culture. As Germany’s capital city, Berlin has a long and well-documented queer history reaching back to early 20th century sexological research and emancipation movements which were violently interrupted by the persecution of queer people under National Socialism (Beachy 2014). Be it through archipelagos of underground queer club culture (Andersson 2022), the landscapes of remembering in LGBTQ+ museums and memorials (Lange & Kalandides 2025) or the vibrance and ambivalence within queer diasporic and of color communities (Mole 2018; Altay 2024; Preser 2017), Berlin is made up of manifold queer spaces which influence the city today.

Malmö is Sweden’s third-largest city and thereby much smaller, ranking third on the countries ‘same sex index’ (Wimark & Östh 2014). As a town with working class history, where Swedish social democracy established itself, it has deep ties to workers’ rights movements and social organization. The city often performs as queer-friendly, e.g. hosting events such as World Pride together with Copenhagen in 2021 (Malmö Stad 2021), and is widely perceived as open and welcoming to queer life (Dima & Dumitriu 2023). Locally, this may differ, as designated queer spaces are relatively sparse and the idea of queer-inclusive spaces is much further spread within the city landscape. While less well known and venerated, a recent publication charts Malmö’s queer history, culture and activism from the late 19th century until now (Chowdhury & Brunnström 2021), showing how queer life in Malmö has been continuously shaped through shifting configurations of political engagement.

1.3.3 Choir Context

To understand the conditions under which community is enacted, the following section will briefly illuminate the background of the two choirs included in this study. All background information is given with the awareness of anonymization in mind. Both choirs are community choirs by and for queer people, sharing the idea of community-making. Still, they differ in contextual aspects that are relevant to understand how their practice is situated.

The Berlin choir is embedded in a more formal organizational structure, functioning with clearer institutional boundaries for joining and maintains a more stable membership size that is connected to a membership fee. It is a long-established choir with a substantial history, oriented towards classical and modern choral music, structured through conventional choral sections, such as soprano, alto, tenor and bass. Within the choral scene, it is quite connected, attending international queer choir festivals and collaborating regularly with other ensembles. Its everyday language is German.

The Malmö choir operates more loosely through communication on social media and online organization formats. Joining the choir is free and every rehearsal is open to new members, resulting in more fluctuating numbers of participants, circling around a core of 25-30. Being a more recently established collective, the choir tends to perform less frequently, especially in formal festival contexts and sings more often for its own community at events such as fundraisers. Rooted in pop and folk genres, the partition of voices is flexible and categories such as higher and lower or harmony and melody are used. Its everyday language is English.

1.3.4 Signposting

Expanding the preceding background section on terminology, city and choir context, a thematic literature review will provide a comprehensive overview of existing scholarship. It encompasses queer theorizing in Political Science, LGBTQ+ movements in Europe and finally a wider overview on literature regarding queer choral movements and community choirs.

Thereafter, the theory chapter will go into detail on the framework of *queer survival*, illuminating theoretical concepts of care and community, resilience and healing, as well as imagination and futurity. Operationalizing the theoretical concepts in the methodology section, the research design will be explained. Clarifying sampling strategies, data collection, analysis and limitations, further subchapters will explore reflexivity, positionality and ethical considerations.

Subsequently, the analysis chapter will present the main findings of the research, followed by a comprehensive discussion of results in conversation with theory and a reflection on the study's limits. After identifying implications for future research, a conclusion will summarize and finalize the thesis.

2. Literature Review

To provide an overview of the foundation which this study builds upon, I will conduct a three-fold thematic literature review focusing on English-language scholarship. It first addresses queer Political Science and Political Sociology, then turns to scholarship on LGBTQ+ movements in Europe and finally reviews the emerging field of queer and LGBTQ+ choral movements. Together, these strands establish the basis for examining queer community choirs as sites where power and belonging are negotiated through the lens of survival in everyday life.

2.1 Queering Political Science

I position this study within political sociology, as its integral theme aligns: examining power within socio-political relations (Weber 1922; Guzzini & Klausen 2025). From this perspective, queer people are not peripheral to political analysis but are situated within state and societal regimes of domination and inequality that shape the possibilities of everyday life. Queer community formation, survival and resistance to oppressive power are situated not only as social phenomena, but as political practices through which power is lived and transformed (Foucault 1976). Thus, „the study of LGBTIQ people and their experiences *is* centrally about power and politics“ (Ayoub 2022: 156). Survival then becomes analytically central in the understanding of power, rather than marginal or niche as it is often purported. In understanding the personal as political, this study takes this claim seriously by examining how power is exercised and contested throughout everyday practices of survival, including those in queer cultural and community spaces as choirs.

For a long time, Political Science maintained a ‚curious silence‘ on LGBTQ+ politics (Cook 1999), although the wider canon of queer Political Science has expanded since the early 2000s. Much of the literature still focuses on queer people as objects of governance, within laws, institutions, public opinion or policy outcomes (Bosia et al. 2020; Haider-Markel 2021; Flores et al. 2024). Scholarship engaging queer people as subjects remains comparatively limited, analyzing them as political actors in their own right with political beliefs, voting behavior or as organizers of social movements that reflect their lived experiences (Cravens 2020; Page & Douglas 2020; Egan 2025). The utilization of queer-feminist political theoretical perspectives as an analytical lens within Political Science remains a marginal practice (Tadlock et al. 2017). Smith and Lee contended back in 2014 how „political science is consciously marginalising issues of gender and sexuality and hardly doing justice to the political analysis of social relations that queer theorists have been successfully doing for quite some time“ (50). Such exclusionary practices are still pertinent today, leaving the account of power relations, especially regarding the construction and control of sexuality, gender and the body, incomplete. The glacial pace at which a queer rethinking of concepts as Power, The State or Political Action enters the established political science corpus, limits the extent to which the politics of queer life can be understood.

Against this background, this thesis joins calls for a broader queering of political science. Queer theory can sharpen political analysis through „productive tensions“ (Thiel 2019: 132), questioning how norms produce and organize power, and established boundaries. Identifying how sexuality and gender structure institutions, social relations and political bodies (Currah 2011), categories such as state, citizenship and political action are questioned. Regarding multi-causal and complex political phenomena, expanding the

scholarly viewpoint to include queer theory may be a necessary step to expansive knowledge-making (Thiel 2019).

This study positions itself as part of this expansion, treating queer community choirs as sites of social movement where power relations and survival of oppressive regimes are negotiated and enacted. Rather than treating queer political life as a specialized sub-topic, „the queering of political science is long overdue“ (Smith & Lee 2014: 59).

2.2 LGBTQ+ Movement and Europe

Building on this political framework, this section situates LGBTQ+ movement spaces within wider European socio-political transformations. Across Europe, queer movements have developed through complex interactions between state, NGOs and grassroots movements, local and transnational organizing, visibility politics and struggles against exclusion.

Foundational work by Ayoub and Paternotte extensively researched the relationship between Europe and LGBTQ+ rights, activism and movements, showing how deeply entangled they are (Ayoub & Paternotte 2012, 2014a, 2014b, 2016, 2020). They attest of a conflicted relationship (Ayoub & Paternotte 2020), elucidating how on the one hand, LGBTQ+ rights have become a „powerful symbol of Europe“ (Ayoub & Paternotte 2014: 3) within its inward and outward identity of liberal democracy; on the other hand they generate new forms of exclusions and political contestations.

A central theme in this literature is the transnational infrastructure of queer networks. Organizations such as the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), and collaborative efforts influence the structure of queer activism (Ayoub & Paternotte 2012), enabling the diffusion of norms and strategically allocating resources across Europe to support activist claims. Simultaneously,

scholars have shown that such networks are shaped by vulnerabilities, such as shifting political opportunities and instabilities (Gonsalves & Velasco 2022) or increased political hostility and crisis (Redert 2024). This renders critical solidarities (Binnie 2014) and heightened intersectional awareness (Ayoub 2018) as key tools of sustainable queer activism.

Related scholarship has traced the shift towards institutionalization of LGBTQ+ politics and its ambivalences. Advocacy, professionalization and NGO-ization have produced funding, legal reform and tangible policy change. At the same time, these processes have tended to depoliticize grassroots activism and enshrine more rigid and vertical organizational structures (Paternotte 2015; Ayoub 2016; Redert 2024). Parallel, this fight for and alignment of queer minority rights with the European project has elevated sexuality and gender equality as a hallmark of a ‚modern and liberal‘ Europe and the European Union (Ayoub & Paternotte 2014; Slootmaeckers 2020). This has also reinforced discussions of „Western exceptionalism“ (Rahman 2014) and the uneven distribution of rights across and within Europe. In turn, this has provoked backlash, including anti-gender mobilization and far-right campaigns targeting queer rights as part of broader struggles over nation, morality and belonging (Kuhar & Paternotte 2017; Kováts 2017). Mirroring strategies of queer movements through transnational mobilization and policy contestations of equality at multiple levels (Mariani 2025), this entails intensified political struggle and the construction of queerness as a fault line within society. This literature is useful to the present study by demonstrating how queer lives and with it, community spaces, are never detached from wider political formations. They are shaped by European discourses of inclusion and equality but also by local divisions around migration, austerity and social stratification (Ayoub 2016; Ayoub & Paternotte 2019; Thiel 2022).

Critiquing the image of a ‚rainbow Europe‘, debates on homonormativity (Duggan 2002) and homonationalism (Puar 2007) have revealed the divisions within queer community structures. The former describes the political ascent of certain queer subjects whose lives align with dominant norms, such as white, cisgender, middle-class, and the latter describes the state incorporation of queer rights into nationalist projects while excluding racialized, migrant and muslim populations. Studies from the German (Hunklinger & Ajanović 2022, Teschlade et al. 2023) and Swedish (Liinason 2020; Kehl 2024) contexts confirm that these fractures are reproduced within queer community formations themselves. While supporting queer rights within and outside of their jurisdiction, some EU-institutions and mainly Western-European countries reinforce existing power hierarchies, normalizing some queer subjects while marginalizing others (Haritaworm et al. 2008; Colbani & Habed 2014).

Taken together, the literature shows that queer activism and community formation intersect with questions of European identity, governance and nation-building. Yet the dominant scholarly focus on legal change, policy and NGO advocacy has left the everyday spaces of queer political life under-explored.

2.3 Queer/ LGBTQ+ Choral Movements

As a part of queer social movements, community choirs constitute a specific place. As cultural spaces, they enact queer existence through shared social, cultural and political practices. At the same time, the literature makes clear they are not exempt from reproducing exclusions and hierarchies. This section returns to queer choral movements as both extensions of LGBTQ+ activism and as distinct sites of community formation.

The historical origins of queer choral arrangements are usually traced to the United States, where women's/lesbian/feminist choruses emerged in the 1970s as part of a cultural boom within the women's music movement (Balén 2017: 96). Other explicitly queer choral organizations followed during the height of gay and lesbian organizing after the Stonewall-Riots, such as 'The San Francisco Gay Men's chorus' in 1978, inspiring the beginning of the LGBTQ+ choral movement (Schattenkirk 2021; Southerland 2023). This embeds queer choirs firmly within social justice histories, alongside choral traditions in Union Workers' Resistance and Black Civil Rights struggles (Balén 2017). In this tradition, queer choirs have been finding their way into the urban centers of Europe since the early 1980s, having since developed into diverse projects with a multitude of styles, repertoires and performance practices (Hilder 2023a).

Queer choirs can be defined as part of the wider definition of „affinity choruses“ (Sutherland 2023: 64), describing ensembles organized around a shared socio-political or cultural identity, affirming participants and connecting to social justice causes. In Balén's formulation, queer choral musicking involves „singing in the company of those who recognize each other more fully - inevitably imperfectly, but definitely more clearly in some important ways - than the rest of the culture is generally willing or able to do“ (2017: 4). Creating music, is understood as an „embedded social practice“ (Balén 2017: 9) rather than simply an artistic one. Singing together can thus be understood as a form of embodied, collective meaning-making that challenges systematic silencing, invisibility and dehumanization by creating counterstories which keep „humanizing identities that are still systematically denied full humanity“ (Balén 2017: 35). Queer community singing can then be included into the sphere of social movements, reframing public discourse by disrupting pejorative stereotypes through public visibility, participant and audience artistic expression and contributions to movement culture (Southerland 2023: 76).

While the existing literature on queer/LGBTQ+ community choirs is growing, it is uneven in emphasis. Balén's previously quoted monograph is foundational, engaging with a wide array of topics around queer choir singing, from identity and protest history to changing conventions and institutions (2017). They portrait communal singing as a healing and empowering form of narrative change or as a ways of building counterstories to oppressive social sanctions (Balén 2017).

Subsequent scholarship on queer choirs has analyzed issues of intersectional identity (Taylor & Herring 2014; McKiernan & McNickle 2023; Birch et al. 2024), power (Strachan 2006), participation (Cates 2020) and queer community choirs potential for change in a global setting with LGBTQ+ rights in flux (De Quadros 2019). Furthermore, case studies from different national settings have documented U.S.-socio-historical development (Hilliard 2008), the positive impact of community singing on the well-being of participants in the UK (Birch et al. 2024) and Estonia (Davidjants & Raju 2025) and relations with church in New Zealand (Bird 2018). Hilder's research on European queer choirs analyzes them as sites of collective identity formation (2022, 2024), as places of mourning and memory (2023b) and maps their role as political actors throughout Europe (2023a). A wide range of approaches is used, from (auto)ethnography (Miyake 2013) and sociological analysis (Atinello 2006; Latimer 2008) to historical mapping (Reynolds 2013; Lee 2013).

The overarching body of work largely approaches choirs in an affirmative light, foregrounding their transformative capacity to foster belonging, engage in socio-political change and community affirmation. A smaller but important body of work focuses on the limits of celebratory narratives, drawing closer attention to tensions, marginalization and ambivalence within queer choral spaces.

MacLachlan (2020) argues that LGBTQ+ choirs often pursue social integration

more than liberation, drawing on discussions of community, homonormativity, disidentification and assimilationist social movements. Southerland asks „Are LGBTQIA+ choruses racist, transphobic, and classist?“ (2023: 78), criticizing the reproduction of broader systemic oppression and promoting changes which reduce participation barriers. Drudge and Nekola focus on the challenges of aspiring towards radical inclusivity and highlight the risks of implementing exclusions within affinity choirs (2024). Hilder similarly shows how queer choirs operate in an increasingly uneven European context, shaped by nationalism and different access to belonging, requiring critical reflection within queer choral contexts (2023a).

Recent work on trans* experiences within choir contexts further deepens this conversation by focusing on relational sensitivity (Patch 2022; Bartolome & Bullington 2022), issues of fluidity, changing voice (Patch 2024; Carlson 2025), embodied politics (Patch & König 2018) and gender euphoria (Challacombe 2025).

Drawing on this scholarship, queer community choirs are shown as spaces of both possibility and constraint: they can foster belonging, build agency and increase wellbeing of marginalized individuals, yet also reproduce the exclusions, normativities and uneven power relations embedded in societal structures.

2.4 Research Gap

All in all, the reviewed literature shows how queer and LGBTQ+ politics are not marginal additions to political science but remain central in the analysis of power, identity and movements formation both in political science and contemporary Europe. It also shows how queer choirs can be meaningful sites of collective expression, affirmation and wellbeing. Yet two gaps remain.

First, much of the scholarship on queer politics in Europe foregrounds institutions, legal change and NGO activism, focusing on the macro-politics of queer governmentality. This leaves the micro-politics of queer life, such as everyday practices and cultural community, under-explored.

Second, whereas queer choral scholarship richly documents belonging, identity and factors of inclusion, a conceptual language is still underdeveloped and a specific lens as to *queer survival* is yet to be applied.

This thesis addresses these gaps by examining queer community choirs in Malmö and Berlin as politically significant spaces of everyday survival. It asks how choir members articulate and practice survival through care relations, resilience amid harm and imagined futures. In order to queer political science contexts, this study takes seriously the political significance of cultural and relational forms of queer life. Its comparative design further makes it possible to explore how local conditions shape these practices differently across two European urban contexts. In doing so, the thesis develops a queer political sociology of everyday life that understands queer community choirs not as mere by-products of policies, but as sites where structures of survival are actively created and negotiated.

3. Theoretical Framework and Concepts

The literature review has clearly elucidated how a queering of political science contexts is essential, including the critique of state as well as heteronormative assumptions within policy and institutions. It has also elaborated on the current state of LGBTQ+ rights within Europe, highlighting how uneven protections, backlash regarding gender diversity and differentiated vulnerabilities across countries heavily restrict queer peoples' lives. With queer, and specifically trans people of color's lives that are being structured by precarity, being exposed to state and societal violence and are having limited access to resources, survival becomes a political concept.

In this thesis I use the idea of *queer survival* extensively and develop it as the theoretical basis for analysis. Choirs are understood as sites where survival is practiced through sustaining bodies, affect, voice and community under ambivalent conditions. In order to understand the relational, collective and utopian formulations of interdependence within the context of queer community choirs, I will build a theoretical framework of *queer survival*, moving along three of Cheilan's dimensions: community & care, resilience & healing grief and imagination & futurity (2026). I have decided to omit one of her categories which concentrates on resources through a queer ecology lens, as it is not efficiently tied to the research population. Its inclusion would surpass the scope of the thesis.

While Cheilan's work functions as a foundational framework, each of the dimensions will be explained and enriched with a range of further theorists, informing and explaining the concepts while being moored in an interdisciplinary gender studies corpus. Such a diversity of thought is necessary in order to develop an applicability and deep understanding of the dimensions. Even though distinguished into three categories, each of the dimensions overlap and intertwine, which becomes visible within the work of theorists,

who may be referenced in several subchapters. Each dimension will simultaneously function as a comparative analytical grid for the reading of my autoethnographic and interview data, analyzing their content as a radical ontology of queer life under pressure.

3.1 Queer Survival

Starting from the conceptual grounding of life within crises, it is important to define *queer survival* in depth. Cheilan asserts that „queer lives are, almost by definition, precarious and under threat, surviving has always been a central issue to queer communities“ (2026: 3). This is visible today, when growing conditions of violence position queer life at the margins and actively denigrate queer people to a marginalized position within state and society or negate their existence in the world. Butler stresses that „survival can be determined by those we do not know and over whom there is no final control“ (2004: 23), rendering life precarious. Queer people therefore practice survival on an everyday basis, through existing and enduring hostile conditions of queerphobia, repression, far-right backlash and structural hindrances which limit their ability to live. Precarity is not an abstract universal but a lived reality for a lot of queer people, further intensified by social norms and institutional arrangements that enshrine determinants such as race, class, ability and gender, defining who can live and how (Cheilan 2026: 7).

Survival often comes into play when majority society is threatened or in danger through catastrophes or emergencies, examples being effects of the climate crisis, wars or pandemics. Normative ideals of survival mostly reproduce existing systems of oppression, centering a ‚survival of the fittest‘-model and positioning Social Darwinism as the main structure of capitalist societies

(Claeys 2000). For queer people and other minorities, inclusion in these structures is not a given, as survival depends on the existence of „norms of recognition that produce and sustain our viability as human“ (Butler 2004: 33). Even if basic humanity is granted, survival is conditional on the „protection of public and private spaces, on legal sanctions that protect us from violence, on safeguards of various institutional kinds against unwanted aggression“ (Butler 2004: 33). In the face of this dependence, it is necessary to examine *queer survival* while decentering dominant imaginaries of heteropatriarchal ideologies, turning towards the ongoing and multifaceted fights by minoritized people. The „queer art of surviving“ (Cheilan 2026: 2) defines survival not just as persistence to sustain life within existing hegemonic world orders. Instead by challenging competition and individualism, foregrounding care, and allowing vulnerability and imagination to build, it emerges as an active practice of countering and world-making. *Queer survival* resists „normative trajectories in unexpected ways“ (Cheilan 2026: 9), some of which will be outlined in the following sections.

3.2 Care & Community

As the first tenet in her conceptualization, Cheilan identifies care as a primary practice of *queer survival*. Defining relationships and community as strong determinants to future human viability, she illustrates how care can be redefined through a queer lens as a relational, collective and non-hierarchical practice that resists mainstream hegemonic narratives of survival (2026). By providing counter-paths to the dominant centering of the nuclear family, strict binary gender roles and patriarchal hierarchies, queer alternatives commit to „doing relationships and communities differently, especially within precarious conditions of existence, thus unsettling heteronormative understandings of social organisation“ (Cheilan 2026: 4). Care through a queer lens can be

constructed as a form of mutual support, opening up space for collaborative experimentation without a neoliberal contract or biologically essentialized moral obligations. Instead, survival relies on community built on friendships, chosen families and mutual aid dynamics, grounding relationality in reciprocal kinship, interdependent autonomy and shared vulnerability. Cheilan's vision of collaborative ethics, centering „horizontal networks of relationships and mutuality“ (2026: 5), finds resonance in Muñoz' insistence on „the essential need for an understanding of queerness as collectivity“ (2009: 11). As Cheilan emphasizes communal care as an embodied critique of exploitative systems and blueprint for resilient futures, Muñoz extends this by posing collective relationality as a precursor to queer world making. Thus, *queer survival* depends on an understanding of interdependence and entanglement with others.

Queer people have had to live within communal settings for a long time, relying deeply on survival strategies that are rooted in relationality. Cheilan's queer re-definition of care builds on earlier feminist scholarship, such as Tronto & Fisher's foundational deconstruction of care as a privatized feminine moral virtue (1990).

When 19th century white middle-class men entered the capitalist marketplace, excluding their wives from paid labor, the „cult of domesticity“ (Tronto & Fisher 1990: 38) connected care to gendered emotional sensibilities with a private moral duty. Challenging this separation, the authors insist that caring permeates all life. All activities inhabit a sense of care in order for those enacting them to sustain themselves. Care is something fundamental to being human, as „survival establishes the fundamental context of caring“ (Tronto & Fisher 1990: 39). Care continues to be an inherent part of political power dimensions, structured by gendered, racialized and classed divisions of labor which produce to different degrees the invisibilization and devaluation of care. Crosscutting dichotomous notions between rights and duties, love and labor,

public and private, narrow, individual and feminized definitions of care are expanded to broad, political and collective care models.

Feminist redefinitions which detach care from biological motherhood and heteronormative nuclear family are key to understanding the ways in which queer care is constituted. Care as a socio-political practice which sustains bodies, relationships and environments opens up the possibility of imagining alternative configurations that emphasize vulnerability, interdependence and accountability. Care as a practice intrinsic to human sociality includes socio-political contradictions, unequal labor divisions and material distributions. While „conflict will always be part of caring“ (Tronto & Fisher 1990: 56), Piepzna-Samarasinha takes up this tension by asking how to shift care from an individual chore into „collective responsibility that’s maybe even deeply joyful“ (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018: 17). Within its complexities, care can be summarized as a contextual, negotiated responsibility to maintain the world, embedded in specific social arrangements. This world „includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web“ (Tronto & Fisher 1990: 40). Butler extends this to queer „webs of relationship“ (2004: 26), functioning as modes of association that cross the boundaries of community, family and friendship. Redefining relational connection, they constitute a „breakdown‘ of traditional kinship that displaces the presumption that biological and sexual relations structure kinship centrally“ (Butler 2004: 26).

An example of radical redefinitions of care are U.S.-based disability justice activist Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha’s „care webs“ (2018: 17), a radical community response to systemic failure and to insufficient care networks through state sources. Resisting the model of profit and charitable gratitude, care webs institute solidarity instead, shifting collective social understandings of care to be places of mutuality, community and political organizing. Such shifts in definitions are radical and rewrite what care means.

These approaches, rooted in queer theory and disability justice, showcase how communities who cannot rely on or trust state or other institutionalized structures, build and create radical forms of care which are collectively controlled, supportive and complicated. This includes resisting the romantization and idealization of community as a perfect utopia. While community holds the power to change care enactment, Piepzna-Samarasinha states that „community‘ is not a magic unicorn, a one-stop shop that always helps us do the laundry and be held in need“ (2018: 18). Community is not accessible to everyone, painstakingly built, made up of complex people, can be inadequate and overloaded with expectations around fulfilling care needs. What it can do is build alternative pathways towards care that bring mutual aid, reciprocity and collective interdependence to the foreground, acknowledging care as a dynamic, political and imperfect process through which communities continually rework the conditions of their own survival.

Emerging from these varied theorists is not a singular definition of care, but a shared insistence that *queer survival* demands a reworking of relationality itself against all forms of domination.

3.3 Resilience, Grief & Healing

As these outlined practices of care enable queer life to be sustained, they make resilience and healing possible. Being a collective and relational practice, care produces the foundational conditions needed for endurance. In the second pillar of Cheilan’s framework of *queer survival*, resilience is positioned as intersecting with queer grief and healing work (2026), extending care to an affective practice that allows queer communities to live, adapt and transform during ongoing conditions of harm.

In order to navigate arduous life conditions, queer communities develop

emotional and embodied strategies which move beyond the norm of adequacy regarding survival in a heteropatriarchal culture. This includes a „messiness of queer survival“ (Cheilan 2026: 6) among harmful circumstances which require contradictory, uncertain, dynamic and transformative forms of perseverance. Cheilan questions resilience discourse for its neoliberal identification, defined through images of self-reliant toughness, disciplined recovery and the triumphant notion of ‚bouncing back‘ after hardship, recognizing its limitations (2026). They argue loss and grief co-exist with joy and aliveness in the process of queer resilience, not fitting into a linear arc of healing, but rather existing as a continuous part of life. Lived examples of this concurrence are the loss of trans life through murder or suicide and the legacies of grief and mourning of the HIV/AIDS pandemic existing side by side with celebrations such as Pride marches, cultural productions like TV series or books that empower queer storylines. Because there is no end point of healing among conditions that continue to cause structural and anticipatory loss and grief, Cheilan implies similarly how resilience requires „moving beyond the binary of life and death, of trauma and healing, of hope and despair, and existing dynamically within the intricacies of both“ (2026: 6). In the European context, the continual reality of harm is represented through campaigns of anti-gender movements, withdrawal of funding for queer spaces and increasing attacks on individuals and LGBTQ+ NGOs (Chaber/ILGA 2025; Kuhar & Paternotte 2017; Kováts 2017). „Queer resilience incorporates this continuous grieving as a part of healing - if it cannot come to an end, it can become a mode of existence“ (Cheilan 2026: 6), while negotiating new possibilities for living and creating life.

The notion of grief within this framework underscores how deeply relational and politically vulnerable queer lives are. Butler reflects on the embodiment of grief in *Undoing Gender*, adding to the individual loss of queer life, the impossibility of mourning it in a world where it is not consistently awarded full

humanity and remains socially unrecognized. Living queer is to be exposed and dependent on others in desire, recognition and risk, as non-normative sexuality and gender are „*modes of being dispossessed*“ (Butler 2004: 19). Grief is understood as a result of happenings outside of one’s control, causing us to be consistently „beside ourselves“ (Butler 2004: 20), at risk of losing fundamental understandings of self. In that is revealed, how deeply the self is composed through ties to others, exposing „the constitutive sociality of the self“ (Butler 2004: 19). The unraveling of grief functions as an illustration of the interconnected reality of lives. The experience of grief following social vulnerability as a shared condition, unites and shapes the constitution of political community, as queer people „all have some notion of what it is to have lost somebody“ (Butler 1990: 18). Queer grief makes explicit how *queer survival* is always collective even if it is experienced individually.

In line with collective notions of healing, resilience and care, grief then moves beyond individual, private and solitary experiences, to form a basis of community whose complex togetherness is a consequence of differential exposure to harm. The process of grieving encompasses fear, powerlessness and passive resignation to the reality of loss. At the same time, Butler clarifies how grief makes us return to shared human vulnerability, invoking „collective responsibility for the physical lives of one another“ (2004: 23). Experiences of adversity can therefore be a political resource, bringing forth community that acknowledges shared vulnerability and precarity, and whose subjectivity is formed through such limitations.

Within the concept of resilience as an ongoing process of negotiation, the notion of growing through harm emerges as a distinct practice. Situated within transformative justice frameworks and abolitionist care, Arani & Winget recognize the potential of building resilience as a political project that is at

once individual and collective, shifting between the liberation of the self and the liberation of all. In this context they define queer healing as a „collective practice that mitigates the impacts of intergenerational harm and violence while creating conditions for a world that is more survivable“ (Arani & Winget 2022: 3). Rooted in approaches by communities living and theorizing from the intersections of queer subject positions, they ask: „What do we need to heal to get in right relationship with our bodyminds, people, environments, and movement spaces?“ (Arani & Winget 2022: 4). Instead of state-based forms of support and institutionalized forms of healing towards cure, communal relationality and support are centered. Healing is engaged as a "fluid, nonlinear, and amorphous process that is both deeply personal and necessarily communal and collective“ (Arani & Winget 2022: 3). It asks of communities to be in relationship with integrity and accountability, in order to encounter, prevent, disrupt, reimagine and heal harm. While such regenerative resilience can develop in a multitude of ways, such as therapy sessions, meetings, podcasts, research teams and artistic practice, the importance of collectivity and collaboration is invariably highlighted (Arani & Winget 2022).

Finally, the question raised is not whether grief can be overcome so that one can return to a stable self. The theorists inquire towards resilience, asking how sustaining relationships, movement spaces, and practices of healing can emerge from the recognition that we are already, from the beginning, bound up in lives that are not our own.

3.4 Imagination & Futurity

In the entanglements of collective *queer survival*, care structures are built to move through and stay with harm, grief and healing. From this perseverance,

queer practices of imagination have a history of performing alternative futures in which queerness could exist, creating queer futurity (Cheilan 2026). Contradicting a world that defines „who can live and how“ (Cheilan 2026: 7), queer imagination creates „concrete utopias“ (Muñoz 2009: 31), destabilizing spatial and temporal rigidity. The denial of queer existence within an inescapable present makes a queer futurity vital, breaking open a different temporality which reaches out to impossible utopias within and despite the threatening exclusions of the present. As Berlant puts it: „the urgency is to reinvent, from the scene of survival, new idioms of the political, and of belonging itself, which requires debating what the baselines of survival should be in the near future, which is, now, the future we are making“ (2011: 262).

Such debate requires an openness to uncertainty and possibility, reconfiguring political practice and the making of a present that orients itself towards utopian imaginaries. Resisting the „stultifying temporal logic of a broken-down present“ (Muñoz 2009: 12), queer communities use the available resources and structures to build alternative embodied realities within reality. Instead of waiting for an ideal future, improvised spheres of the counter public, such as ballroom culture, safe houses, queer art festivals, night life and community choirs, define the aesthetic and political realization of queer utopianism (Muñoz 2009). Aesthetic, material, embodied, relational and affective forms of engagement in the liminal spaces of society are equal political performances of queerness and essential to understand the ways queer life survives oppressive power and norms.

Dissecting ‚cruel fantasies‘ of the good life rooted in capitalist and heteronormative promises, Berlant sees potential in such alternative optimisms, relational spaces and practices that „imagine a potentialized present that does not reproduce all of the conventional collateral damage“ (Berlant 2011: 263).

As minorities for whom collateral damage means an endangering and threatening present, creating and activating different ways of being-together works towards „doing for and towards the future“ (Muñoz 2009: 19). Queer imagination and the capacity to commit to its future possibilities under dire circumstances is essential to survive, by opening up concrete spaces and practices; i.e. „finding forms of existence“ (Cheilan 2026: 7) within the interstices of cis/heteronormative societies.

In summary, Cheilan synthesizes relational care, resilience amid healing grief and imaginations of futurity into a conceptualization of *queer survival* as prefigurative world-making. In a reality of polycrises, which exacerbate structural hostilities upon queer life, the adjoining theorists reveal queerness to be a possibility which „holds together the acceptance of ineluctable loss, the celebration of failure, and the ongoing active opening of future possibilities“ (Cheilan 2026: 8). Rethinking what survival can mean, includes rethinking what life means, showing that „lives spent fighting to survive can also be good lives“ (Cheilan 2026: 7). Survival as in lived, material practices which build counterpublics (Muñoz 2009, Balén 2017), allowing the coexistence of grief and joy, create effervescent existence that heteropatriarchal norms of existence are not prepared for.

This thesis follows the conviction that „art and beauty still have a role to play when life is lived on the perpetual cusp of disaster“ (Cheilan 2026: 4) by examining queer community choirs. These singing collectives offer concrete sites to trace how care networks may form, resilience may be embodied and utopian futures rehearsed. The following methodology operationalizes the theoretical framework in order to research how *queer survival* is unevenly voiced. It examines the practices across different urban contexts that respond to and reshape the reality of political conditions.

4. Methodology

This chapter will explain my approach towards research design and methods, highlighting why I chose a qualitative mixed-methods approach, how I approach data collection, sampling and participation, as well as data processing and analysis. Additionally, I will reflect on my biases and positionality within the context of the case studies and elucidate ethical considerations, describing how both have been integrated into the research process.

4.1 Research Design

This thesis uses a qualitative mixed-methods research design grounded in constructivist and interpretivist research paradigms, utilizing methodology through feminist embodiment and queer situated knowledge (Haraway 1988, Browne & Nash 2010). Diverging from positivist ideas of neutral methods as mere technical tools, I understand my research design as a normative political and epistemological framework in which methodologies shape how knowledge is produced and which perspectives are taken seriously. The research design understands choirs as more than musical groups, as social spaces of queer life in which practices of community and survival may be explored and which are situated in broader queer social movement.

As an exploratory study using qualitative methods, this thesis combines autoethnographic elements with semi-structured interviews to create in-depth insights into the experience of collective spaces and their contribution to political life. By engaging with choir members and my embodied experience of their collectivity, this research aims to value queer perspectives as analytically and politically instructive. Overall, the design is multi-sited and critically informed, making visible „the powerful ways in which social norms and political structures can be challenged through song“ (Hilder 2023a: 21).

4.2 Reflexivity and Positionality

My own sociopolitical positioning constitutes a key consideration as it influences access, relational dynamics and the narratives produced. As a queer researcher and choir member, I am not external to the communities I study, making my identity important in approaching, relating and interpreting people's experiences. I therefore approach my methods from a position of inherently questioning normativities, „a political positioning that infuses the research process with ethical considerations“ (Browne & Nash 2010: 12). This stance asks that I approach this project with the understanding that „re-search is a humble and humbling activity“ (sic!) (Tuhiwai-Smith 1999: 5), therefore seeking to incorporate the needs of the communities I researched with rather than just the logics of academic output alone. Echoing indigenous scholar Eve Tuck's critique of „damage-centered research“ (2009), I resist the tendency to reduce queer life to monolithic sites of trauma. Rather, the thesis pays attention to the creative and collective practices which enact care and support without losing sight of its complexities. Especially with communities which are historically marginalized, carrying out research on survival requires respect, dialogue and reciprocity in order to value the ethical, political and relational dimensions of knowledge production.

As a researcher, I was and am implicated, affected and transformed by the process, engaging in continuous self-reflexivity throughout the research and critically questioning how my involvement and expectations affected the interviews, interaction dynamics and interpretation of data. At several points, I struggled with differentiating my role as a person embedded within these queer communities from that of the researcher. Subsequently, I decided not to attempt a rigid separation. As a queer student researcher, my positionality both enables access to communities and individuals, as I was perceived as more familiar or trustworthy by participants. At the same time, I recognize the heterogeneous

privileges along the lines of race, class, ability and gender expression intersecting with my identity as a queer academic. These aspects need to be taken into consideration in the context of queer community choirs and my position as a researcher who builds trust with participants. As my whiteness is overwhelmingly reflected back within the participant sample, it is important to consider how perspectives by queer People of Color are excluded from this research. As Hilder notes, those of us with greater access to institutional resources and platforms bear a particular responsibility of care towards others (2023a: 19). I recognize that my positionality in combination with structural factors may reproduce longstanding hierarchies within the LGBTQ+ community, shaped by gender, class, ability, and race, and that collaborative, dialogic, and participatory methods may not be sufficient to fully undo them.

I resonate with the argument that there is scholarly and ethical value in studying issues related to one's own identity, as long as that closeness is met with critical self-reflexivity and an ethical framework that prioritizes the well-being of the communities involved (Ayoub & Rose 2016; Browner & Nash 2010). In sum, reflexivity and positionality are recognized as constitutive dimensions of the research design, shaping questions of access, representation, and the politics of knowledge itself.

4.3 Data Collection

I contacted each choir through their chairpeople, which led to short meetings where I explained my thesis project and methods, asking whether there would be an interest to collaborate. In both cases it was suggested that I join a choir rehearsal or send an Email to introduce myself to the members. During this short presentation I also explained that I would conduct interviews, asking the members to collaborate as interviewees. Several were willing to participate,

with four members of each choir being interviewed thereafter, resulting in eight interviews total. Joining each of the choirs during two rehearsals, I conducted autoethnographic observation for the duration of these. The data collection took three months in total, being conducted from February until April 2026.

4.3.1 Interviews

Being allowed access to choir members' lived experiences, perceptions and interpretive frameworks in their own words (Galletta 2013, Kvale & Brinkmann 2018), semi-structured interviews were chosen as a primary method of data collection. As a conversational method of data collection, it is invaluable in collaborative research, as „knowledge is constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee“ (Kvale & Brinkmann 2018: 2).

Six out of eight interviews were conducted in person; due to scheduling constraints, two were held via encrypted video call with LU Zoom. After initial email or text message contact and arrangement of the meeting, I sent the ethical consent form and a comprehensive interview guide to the collaborators in advance (see appendix). Asking them to read both documents carefully and write to me any concerns or questions, I planned adequate time for participants to reflect on basic themes, timespan and depth of the interview and inform themselves about the ethical framework. Together with a short briefing and signing the printed version of the ethical consent form at the beginning of each interview, this ensured informed consent as a ongoing process, in which the interviewee has agency on how much information they want to give (Kvale & Brinkmann 2018: 32). The in-person interviews took place in public or semi-public settings such as libraries, cafés and university group rooms. Conversations were conducted in English, Swedish and German, ranged between 45mins and up to two hours and were recorded with a voice recorder. They followed an interview handbook with opening, middle and concluding segment (Galletta 2013) (see appendix), which provided systematic guidance

through questions clearly linked to the purpose of the research. At the same time, a semi-structured approach was centered, enabling flexibility and versatility through encouraging elaborations onto themes we found particularly significant and allowing the interviewee room to build their narrative (Galletta 2013: 72). In order to increase validity and participant agency, I did a ‚member check‘ after each interview (Tracy 2020), sending participants their respective transcript and inviting them to contact me should they wish to exclude, clarify or change any part of their statements.

4.3.2 Autoethnography

Autoethnographic elements constitute a core component of the data collection, enabling me to integrate my researching position and embodied experience into the study. As Anderson writes, „it entails self-conscious introspection guided by a desire to better understand both self and others through examining one's actions and perceptions in reference to and dialogue with those of others” (2006: 382). Joining four choir rehearsals, two for each city's choir, I conducted autoethnographic observation during these. This meant that I centered self-observation during the rehearsals and during participation in some of the singing and social activities. In order to guarantee a ‚thick description‘ (Geertz 2008), I maintained a continuous documentation, producing a large amount of written and recorded notes. I strove to be attentive to what I perceived, felt and witnessed, tracking patterns of interaction, moments of tension, as well as affective and spatial dimensions. Using these observations, I wrote extended stream-of-consciousness style scripts that reconstructed the entire sequence of the rehearsal experience, from entering the space to leaving it. In these scripts I systematically censored names, places or details which might convolute anonymity or confidentiality.

Drawing on Geertz (2008) and Hine (2015), my objective was not to generate a generalized or objective account of queer community choirs, but to use

autoethnography to produce a situated and contextually rich description of the ways choir spaces are shaped, notwithstanding the specificities of my engagement with the setting. This stands in the tradition of evocative autoethnography, „writing in the first person with vivid recounts of conversations, interactions and memories“ (Crowley 2012: 10). By including the researchers' standpoint as an analytical dimension, autoethnography adds located knowledge to the material deriving validity from its situatedness, rather than claims of neutrality. This approach is intimately rooted in feminist epistemologies, understanding how „the researcher cannot be separated from the research“ (Crowley 2012: 16), and that research cannot be made separate from existing power relations. I am in line with Hine when she recognizes how the researcher is always already embedded in the social field and thus participates in shaping what becomes visible, sayable and analytically relevant (2015). As a queer researcher who also sings in a queer community choir, autoethnography is especially pertinent, as I am „taking part for real“ (Hine 2015: 99), participating and being invested in the choir life through dual positioning. At the same time, this proximity necessitates rigorous reflexivity regarding the ways in which my expectations, identifications, and affective investments shape both what I perceive and what remains obscured. In the analytical phase, I therefore read the autoethnographic scripts in dialogue with the interview transcripts. The material is thus treated as one situated vantage point among others, illuminating and complicating the narratives shared in interviews through visceral experience, thus enriching the overall interpretive depth of the study.

4.3.3 Sampling Strategy

Malmö and Berlin were selected as cities of interest because they differ in scale and in their historical and social conditions for queer life. In addition, my

personal connection to both cities made them more accessible for this study. The choirs themselves were chosen according to availability in their respective cities. I contacted a variety of choirs for collaboration and engaged with those who signaled their interest. Some declined collaboration due to privacy concerns or scheduling conflicts, which resulted in my final sample of two choirs. The same concept applied to my interaction with choir members. While research collaborators did vary in age (21- 63), time of choir membership (4 months - 25 years) and social positioning (migration history, gender, sexuality, class), I did not exert influence onto the sample composition. While I may not have been able to form a statistically representative sample of each choir, I did manage to honor a wide range of experiences of care, belonging and survival within each choir, while centering ethical research practice.

4.3.4 Limitations

Despite the effort to develop this research design, several limitations emerged which impact the circumference and structure of the gathered data and subsequent analysis. As the participants self-selected themselves for interviews, the sample represents those in the choir who feel comfortable speaking with me about their experiences and who could align their values and interests with the project. This inevitably skews the representation towards those who already tend to articulate the connection between community involvement and their queer identity while those who are less confident, less visible or not comfortable with talking to me remain underrepresented. Although engaging a diverse group across age, membership time and gender identity, certain axes of belonging, particularly race, ethnicity and non-European migration history, were less visible within the participant sample. The relative racial homogeneity among interview collaborators mirrors wider patterns of segregation and exclusivity within queer choir spaces (MacLachlan 2020; Hilder 2023a) and

diminishes the extent onto which findings may speak to racially marginalized and migrated queer choir members. Some voices did not get heard and show how the examined spaces and the process of research are deeply shaped by accessibility and social positioning.

4.6 Research Collaborators

The following table lists the eight research collaborators who participated. They assigned themselves pseudonyms and pronouns which they felt comfortable with being used in the thesis, and I additionally asked their age and membership time as demographic data.

Name	City	Membership time	Age	Pronouns
Eli	Malmö	4 months	27	She/Her
Lilly	Malmö	3.5 years	63	She/Her
Jessica	Malmö	4 months	21	She/They
Esther	Malmö	4 months	35	She/Her
Philipp	Berlin	10.5 years	54	He*/Him
Dianne	Berlin	2 years	34	She/Her
Anna	Berlin	1 year	58	She/Her
Konstantin	Berlin	24 years	60	He/Him

4.7 Ethical Considerations

This research involves sensitive themes of identity, belonging, and survival within queer community spaces. Ethical compliance and care are therefore central.

Several steps were taken before, during and after the research process in order to configure the research to high ethical standards. Participation was entirely voluntary and informed consent was understood as an ongoing, negotiable process. This transferred through reminders at the beginning and during the interview, so that research collaborators may stop the interview at any time, decline to answer questions or change the topic without justification. To guarantee full consent, interview transcripts were sent to each participant, giving them the opportunity to exclude, add or edit their answers. I also emphasized that participants' perspectives were seen as essential to the research and encouraged them to introduce their own themes and topics, positioning the interview as a conversational, co-produced encounter rather than a rigidly structured procedure.

Using strict anonymization and pseudonyms regarding the choirs and more general context, participants' privacy was protected throughout the autoethnographic and interview process and transcriptions. Research collaborators were also reminded to keep sensitive details private during the interview if they wished.

Given that the nature of the thesis topic may include themes of grief, exclusion and harm, I remained attentive to participants' emotional responses during interviews, reminding them to take breaks or time to think and that they could choose not to answer. But as the research focused explicitly on queer community choirs, non-normative identities were visible, making complete de-identification on behalf of researcher or participants neither possible nor desirable (Myers et al. 2020). The research centers respect, agency and

confidentiality instead, trying to avoid extractive or voyeuristic research practices that have historically marked research on marginalized communities (Tracy 2020).

In line with my reciprocal understanding of knowledge production within relational and collective practices, I understand my responsibility towards the queer choir communities involved, as interest in further contact has also been expressed. I will share a brief, accessible summary of the main findings with the choirs and the full thesis, if requested. Where feasible I will also propose an informal feedback conversation with interested choir members. Such practices are intended both as forms of accountability and as recognition that the knowledge generated in this project is co-created with participants rather than simply extracted from them.

4.8 Data Analysis

Following the collection of data, I applied a thematic analysis to identify, extrapolate and interpret the patterns and themes within the data (Naeem et al. 2023). As a qualitative method, thematic analysis acts as a „flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, amount of data“ (Braun & Clarke 2017: 78). It is useful to examine different research participants’ perspective, highlight the divergences and to generate unexpected insights (Nowell et al. 2017). To ensure trustworthiness during the analysis, I used the approach by Nowell et al., dividing the analysis into six phases: 1) Familiarizing with the data 2) Generating initial codes 3) Searching for themes 4) Reviewing themes 5) Defining and naming themes and 6) Producing the report (2017).

The first step was done during transcription, as interviews were converted to text using the Sunnet Scribe software, and translation, when necessary, was conducted using DeepL. The transcripts were then manually reviewed for

accuracy, spelling mistakes and nuances of emotional expressions, while confidential details were excluded or anonymized. Together with the autoethnographic scripts, all interview transcripts were analyzed using the qualitative coding software atlas.ti. Step two was done using abductive coding, as a coding handbook was devised (see appendix), which included three main themes as code groups (care, resilience, futures) based on the studies' theoretical foundations. In the third step, as I coded the data, sub-themes within each of the code groups emerged, as well as few additional themes which were listed under the added code group ,Other'. The work of step four and five can be found in the codebook through theme descriptions with citation examples. Regarding coding guidelines, the smallest coding unit was a sentence and the largest was a paragraph. Text not relevant to the topic, including interviewer questions, was not coded, but relevant text could be multi-coded using subcategories and categories. Drawing on the developed themes, the next chapter outlines the findings of the analysis.

5. Analysis

The following chapter focuses on the analysis of the gathered data. I will approach the qualitative thematic analysis systematically, beginning by elaborating on what the data says, describing findings from interviews and autoethnography. In the discussion, these findings will be put into conversation with theoretical literature to interpret what the data means in relation to established concepts. I will finalize the chapter by reflecting on limitations within the research, and implications for future research.

5.1 Findings

The total amount of data amounted to 204 pages of transcripts being coded, among these 184 pages of interview transcripts and 20 pages of autoethnographic scripts. As the following table clearly shows, there was a difference in the distribution of themes, with *Care* standing out as the most frequently cited category, followed by *Resilience*, *Future* and *Other* categories. A wide variation of the amount of codes can be explained through different lengths of interviews and autoethnographic scripts, as well as different foci which came up within the conversations and observations.

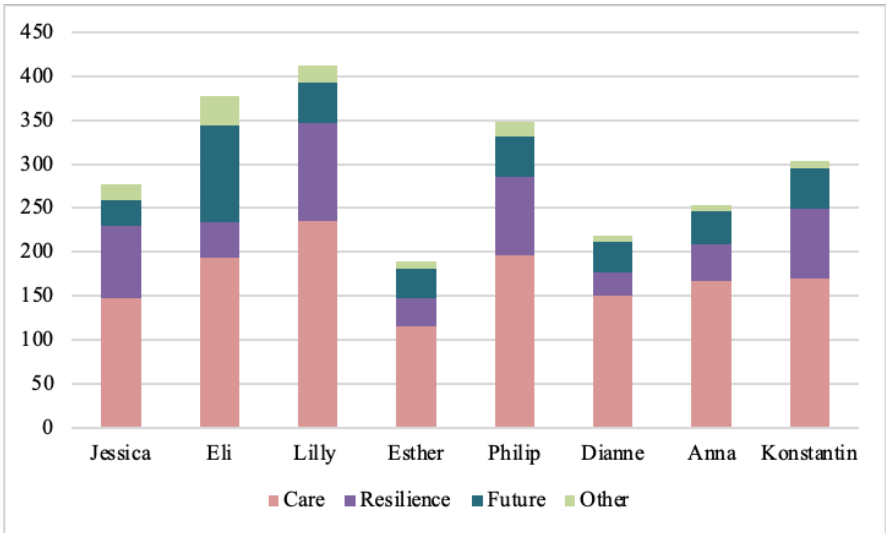


Table 1: Distribution of themes between interview participants

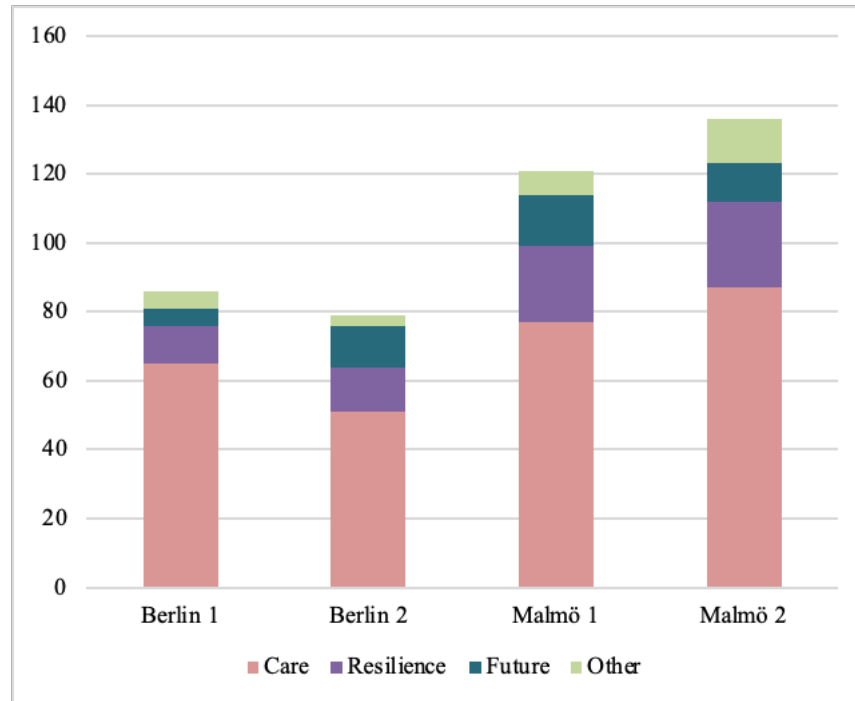


Table 2: Distribution of themes between autoethnographies

Within the data, several sub-themes within care, resilience and future categories were identified that had a high citation rate among research collaborators and in autoethnography. While being used as sub-codes, they will be described in detail in the following findings section. Each chapter focuses on recurring themes from the data, which overlap and inform each other. As the *Care* theme was by far the most frequently mentioned, the themes within this topic are more extensive compared to *Resilience* and *Future*. The code *Other* was used solely for three codings. Two of them (*Embodiment*, *Beyond Choir*) were practical codings which aided in sorting the other themes and will not be described in detail. The third code *Urban environment* was used to aid the comparative city analysis found in the discussion chapter.

5.1.1 Care

Community, Visibility & Recognition

While combatting experiences of loneliness, exclusion or invisibility, feeling connected to a queer community space was an important aspect in the everyday life of many research collaborators. Part of this was feeling seen, as some struggled with being perceived as not „queer enough“ (Jessica, Eli) or „too hetero“ (Lilly) within heteronormative and other queer spaces. Some participants felt that their participation in the rehearsal and social practices affirmed the connection to their queer identity. But also being seen outwardly during performances was essential, as Anna described it as „both beautiful and important to have a place where you can make yourself visible“. Philipp explains how as a trans person he* felt recognized being perceived during concerts, visibly expressing his masculinity: „I belong here, and I'm trans, and yeah, I'm not a woman who sings tenor - and that's just how it is“. In autoethnography I also mention how the feeling of togetherness added to my sense of belonging, feeling joyfully recognized as part of this queer community, even if just for a short period of time. Several research collaborators mentioned that they miss people during rehearsal who were absent (Esther, Konstantin), regardless of the intensity of their interpersonal connection. Esther pointedly described this notion of being seen and feeling connected: „And just, like, knowing that this is a space where I get recognition that I'm not alone, that we are all different, but we're also, like, from the same minority here“.

Safety and Liberation

Beyond being visible, almost all participants mentioned how the communal space of a self-defined queer choir made members feel „normal“, not having to justify themselves, prove anything or explain their sexuality or gender identity.

As Lilly put it: „The queer choir have been my point of where I can be me. Where I can breathe“ (sic!). Eli posited „here we are the norm“, describing the importance of not feeling different or like an outsider. Philipp claimed that it just became easier in spaces around „people that are like you“, being able to relax and have the capacity to question and critically reflect yourself without a double entendre.

To a certain degree this was also described as feeling safe in community, including not having to think about an additional dimension of heteronormative perspectives lingering during conversations (Philipp), having to be careful about exposing one's sexual preferences (Esther) or being questioned about one's sexuality (Jessica, Eli). Several research collaborators mentioned being scrutinized by people on the necessity of a queer choir, citing alleged increased LGBTQ+ rights and freedoms (Konstantin, Philipp). But all participants affirmed, how being a part of queer community choir was a positive, joyful and fun experience that felt liberating. Konstantin concluded his feelings of safety in the choir with the following metaphor: „And that means it's also a little island where you can just be yourself, and you don't have to explain everything you do, what you think, or how you do it“.

Connection & Kinship

The choir represented a space that evoked at the least a feeling of deep connection and at most an association with home and family. Non-biological kinship was mentioned several times, in order to describe the general atmosphere and group dynamics (Jessica, Eli, Esther). Family associations were made to refer to connections and friendships that formed for long-term choir members (Philipp, Konstantin, Lilly) and also the way in which people showed up for each other in situations of hardship (Anna, Esther).

The complexity of building relationships was innately connected to the idea of the community choir; its ups and downs thereby being understood as part of the

communal process (Dianne, Philipp, Anna, Esther, Konstantin, Lilly). Anna established how singing together naturally built an emotional bond between people and referred to her connection to the choir: „I think it’s about having found a place in the world that exists independent of romantic relationships and individual people, where things can change, or people go their separate ways, or die, or whatever. So it’s also a place of community that’s constantly evolving“.

Philipp highlighted the key role kinship plays within queer choirs, noting: „It’s just that sense of community. You share so much in life, and there are a lot of people who don’t have any family - or just a little - right now. I’ve celebrated Christmas and Easter with friends before, just from the choir. And I think queer people especially need that kind of community because they tend to lack family. And maybe they lack friends too, depending on where they come from“.

Such elaborated forms of connection thereby extended beyond the choir, from shared outings at bars, concerts or meet-ups to spending holidays together. The choir represented „a little village community“ (Konstantin), attracting and creating structures of deep connection that members accessed to varying degrees. Konstantin and Philipp gave intimate insights into the quality of such connection, describing forms of pre-performance contiguity, where collective showering, changing, living and rushing off to sing together blurred normative bodily, gendered and relational boundaries through mundane practices of trust and closeness.

For some, a big part of kinship included multigenerational exchange. Eli and Dianne highlighted how the choir was a place to encounter queer notions of growing older and connecting to perspectives that were structured beyond nuclear family ideals. As Philipp put it: „I want to join my team, where it’s more common for people to have different family situations than just the typical mom-dad-two-kids setup“. During autobiography I observed similar

notions of „feeling in touch with a vein of lived history that I really need to hear“ when sharing stories with older lesbian participants, acknowledging, similarly to Philipp, the potential of intergenerational queer kinship and learning from varied experiences of queerness.

Support & Interdependence

The strong interdependence inherent in a choir setting emerged as a central part of the choir experience, beyond the evident musical reliance on each other during singing. Participants repeatedly described the choir as a space where people actively supported each other, responsibilities were shared and the group's existence depended on collective investment.

This showed through emphasis on co-creation and self-organization of the choir (Esther, Konstantin). In the Berlin choir this was reflected in its organizational history of being founded and managed by singers (Konstantin), leading to a division of tasks between members. While a voluntary board committee shouldered most of the work, individual members with financial or digital skills took over tasks as needed (Dianne, Konstantin). Even though it was founded by its conductor, the Malmö choir showed interdependent structures in other arenas such as rehearsal logistics, logo design, attendance lists for funders and Fika breaks (Jessica, Esther, Autoethnography). As Jessica posited: „We work together or there is nothing“, highlighting the dependence on shared labor and ongoing coordination within the choir collective.

As effort put into joint choir creation was central, social interdependence was a key aspect too. Lilly explained that „We don't want to be a group who are singing, we [...] want to be, that every voice is needed“ (sic!), emphasizing that the choir was not merely a group of individuals making music together, but a network in which every person mattered. Instances of tangible support toward one another appeared in multitudinous ways, from sharing advice during

rehearsal (Jessica, Autoethnography), checking in on sick or grieving choir members (Anna) or organizing housing (Dianne). More examples included helping each other through mental health struggles and difficult life stages (Eli, Esther, Philipp) or pitching a drag performance idea to the choir and receiving support for it (Lilly). In autoethnography, this perception of interdependence was reflected, as I noticed that I felt „grown together“ with the choirs and was apprehensive about detaching when I left rehearsals.

Ideally this network of support worked flexibly as Anna described: „Not everyone has to give something, and not everyone wants to, but you can where it's an option“. Still, the ‚stickiness‘ of interdependence also came with stipulations. Philipp noted how „everyone is, in some way, a little bit - let me put it positively - unique, but has also experienced discrimination, which means we're all dependent on one another“. He* added that this could bring people closer together while also making it „very, very hard to let go“ (Philipp). Several members recounted how emotionally and socially involved people could become within the choir, heightening the stakes once there were issues, conflicts or changes (Anna, Lilly, Konstantin, Philipp). At the same time, this shows the essential role queer choirs played in individuals lives on a city-wide scale, nationally and internationally, as the interconnected community of choirs was mentioned several times as working „like a net that supports“ (Anna).

Access & Ex-/Inclusivity

A very prominent theme throughout the data analysis was the shaping of the choir contexts by a range of social, bodily, linguistic and organizational factors, determining who participated and felt welcome. While both choirs were described as inclusive queer spaces, the material showed that access to care was structured variedly and was negotiated through everyday practices in face of exclusions.

The Malmö choir was described repetitively as having a low threshold for participation. Eli characterized it as „very, like, low effort, low pressure, kind of just like people coming together, singing just for the fun of it“ (sic!), and Esther mentioned that a lack of auditions removed „massive pressure“. In an informal atmosphere with little expectations, free Fika and no extensive preparation requirements (Eli, Jessica) contributed to a sense of social and material openness.

By contrast, the Berlin choir was portrayed with a more structured access process. Members described how joining involved auditioning, three try-out rehearsals and a vote by the musical section on social compatibility (Dianne, Konstantin, Philipp). Furthermore it was outlined how the framework of an association required paid membership of choir singers, creating a more pronounced threshold.

Simultaneously, in both choirs exclusion was mentioned beyond formal access points, hinging on socio-political factors that made access uneven across both choirs, although they were mixed-gender, mixed-age and welcome any background.

Lilly accounted for age-based social exclusion in her example of a conversation: “- Oh my god, you’re here? Why are you here? - Because I’m queer as you. - No, you can’t be because you are old”. While Esther mentioned the Malmö rehearsal space being wheelchair accessible, Philipp and Lilly spoke about the limits of ability impacting participation, mentioning knee surgery and hearing issues. This pointed to potential issues with aging and demands of standing for longer periods of time during practice and performances. Additional to physical ability, mental health concerns were brought up by Esther and Eli, adding that social anxiety, phobias and overstimulation could limit accessibility. This was reflected in my own experience during rehearsals of the Malmö choir where I felt overwhelmed by „loudness and fifty people minimum, all in a small room“ (Autoethnography).

Dianne and Konstantin spoke of the increasing multilingualism and members' efforts towards understanding each other as a part of the Berlin choir's diversity. Meanwhile Esther pointed out how linguistic openness may be difficult to enjoy for someone who does not speak English in the Malmö choir. Beyond such subtle class barriers, Eli reflected on how choir participation felt tied to a „middle class kind of“ access to the arts and education, describing her own background gave her confidence regarding behavior and familiarity in the space.

At the same time, inclusion was actively created within both choirs, with newcomers being welcomed warmly and members actively highlighting how a diversity of queer lifestyles was important to them (Anna, Esther). The inclusion of using „queer“ instead of more limited terms such as „gay-lesbian“ was also mentioned (Konstantin, Anna). Lilly described flexible voice distribution as a step towards inclusion: „You can sing with that voice that you have“. Accommodating voice changes due to transition or progression of age, Eli also deemed this as deeply inclusive, while Philip mentioned how his transition and switching from Alto to Tenor was received smoothly and without great hurdles. Dianna pointed out how reading music transcended language boundaries and how she liked to sing classical „music that is accessible“ also to those listening to it. Several Berlin members mentioned the joy and potential in collaborating with a trans choir as part of an effort to continually include and stay in touch with queer community expansions and society at large (Konstantin, Anna, Esther, Philipp).

5.1.2 Resilience

Adversity & Precarity

The need for resilience came up in a multitude of ways, with most participants locating it in the structural and everyday adversities that shaped queer life.

Describing growing anti-queer sentiment, participants included conditional love and homophobia in families (Jessica), misgendering in workplaces, growing feelings of hatred (Eli, Esther) and lack of safety in public spaces as threats that made them feel like „me being me is not okay“ (Jessica). Several research collaborators linked this explicitly to wider political shifts, including rising fascism and right-wing party support in Sweden and Germany (Esther, Philipp), as part of the „general shift to the right around the world“ (Philipp). Such changes were perceived as eroding hard-won rights and increasing the precarity of many marginalized communities. Konstantin observed: „After all, we’re still living in a world where heterosexuality is the norm“, with queer people being „at risk of being threatened“ amidst a rollback of freedoms.

Such adversity was also described as existential and personal, including a pervasive sense of isolation, as „the queer experience in very, very, very commonly defined by being alone. Surrounded by lots of people who aren’t queer“ (Philipp). Lilly highlighted how „it can be life and death for that person“ coming from another place and feeling utterly alone, not having anyone to connect to. Participants also spoke of biphobic stereotyping in both queer and hetero contexts („you have two stigmas“ Lilly), and navigating within a heteronormative world as cumulative forms of harm that contributed to always feeling like an outcast. Unrelated crises, such as the Covid-19-pandemic or experiences of losing a partner further increased fragility (Lilly, Philipp). In this context, Lilly mentioned how „it’s not easy out there“, emphasizing how resilience was a response to structural vulnerability.

Participants additionally reflected on normative expectations of queerness itself as a source of pressure and adversity. They felt compelled to embody certain „accepted“ versions of queerness relating to age, gender expression, clothing and community codes (Lilly, Jessica, Eli). Dominant representations of queer life in culture and media were said to be „centered around darkness and how everything is so sad and depressing“ (Eli), mentioning how „in movies we’re

always dying“ (Eli). This resulted in feelings of being permanently outcast (Philipp), repressing queerness (Jessica), leading „separate lives between queer and hetero“ (Lilly) or joking fatalistically „I’m only here because you are going to sing at my funeral“ (Lilly).

Healing & Growth

Against this adverse backdrop, research collaborators described the choir as a central space of recuperation, a lifeline where feelings could be processed and strength gathered.

Music was described as a way of expression that went beyond words, working through „pain and suffering“ during songs that had a lot to do with oneself (Philipp) and letting go while singing out tension and frustration (Jessica, Eli). When referring to memorial singing, Anna noted how it offered an embodied way of coping „where words often don’t get you very far“.

Healing was closely tied to being in a queer affirming environment (Esther) which brought stability, the choir symbolizing a „constant in life“ (Anna) for several participants. Konstantin stressed that a strong, caring community could „support even those who are struggling, for a while at least, because they feel so well cared for“. As an infrastructure of togetherness, the choir was „important for providing a sense of community for those who might not have much support in their personal lives“ (Anna), gaining access to care and emotional connection.

The queer choir also emerged as a place of personal growth and reflection, through personal musical development (Lilly, Konstantin, Anna, Philipp), newfound confidence in leaving their comfort zone (Eli) or reconnecting with „a part of myself that kind of was very dormant“ (Jessica). Philipp reflected how questions such as „Who am I, really, when I’m not actually being discriminated against? What role do I play?“, had a chance to form. Within autoethnography and interviewee accounts, attending choir rehearsals and

feeling part of community was revealed to build higher confidence and self-assurance.

Such strengthening effects were understood as fundamentally collective, as Konstantin emphasized how „there’s such a power there, because so many people are a part of it“. Eli described the dynamic of recharging in the choir to „go out again and feel much stronger“, with Konstantin determining: „that’s exactly what matters: that we want to have a strong community and treat each other well“.

Joy & Pride

The strength of community also served as an important springboard to reframe queerness towards joyful anecdotes. Rejecting the notion of queerness as „a sad thing“, Eli explicitly found affirmation and importance in celebrating joyfulness within queer community. Examples included the experiences of ecstatic and explosive joy during performing together (Lilly, Philipp), some describing concerts as „unforgettable lifetime experiences“ (Anna) they would have never imagined possible. Philipp described instances of „gender euphoria“ within the choir and Esther underlined how „joy is really what brings me there“. During autoethnography, I noted how the choirs' embodied joy during singing and pride after rehearsals and concerts spilled over onto me, moving me deeply. The pride of successfully mastering songs (Jessica, Lilly, Esther, Philipp), fruitful collaborations and successful choir weekends (Konstantin) were articulated as „absolutely essential“ even within a tight work schedule (Anna). Several participants mentioned how much of a priority choir was as it contributed to their well-being and zest for life (Konstantin, Philipp). These mentions showed how the combination of queer community and musical experimentation was „a recipe for excitement“ (Esther) that went beyond coping with harm, instead increasing resilience through positive affect.

Resistance in Resilience

Joy within community was also imbibed in the collective withstanding of precarious conditions, Eli stating: „I do believe in, like, joy as resistance“. Insisting that „we have to keep the fight going as well, but we can't do that if everyone is, like, super depressed all the time“, Eli linked political endurance to emotional capability. Along with Jessica, she also challenged an increasing depoliticization of resilience through individualization, which „destroys people“, highlighting how structural hurdles should be addressed through collective forms of resistance.

Choirs were mentioned as potential places of resistance, Jessica outlining how „singing and coming together through song and music is a big way to kind of build connection and [...] even to riot against the government“. Practices often incorporated materially embedded forms of political engagement, such as queer solidarity fundraising efforts during concerts for countries where LGBTQ+ rights were in danger or humanitarian aid was needed (Konstantin, Eli). Visibility and collective strength was demonstrated in places with a strong right-wing presence (Konstantin, Anna, Dianne) and political topics around nationalism, environmental destruction and representation of queer artists were brought into the choir repertoire (Dianne, Esther, Eli, Lilly). The Berlin choir sung at inaugurations of memorials to queer emancipation (Konstantin) and maintained local, international and inter-community networks, which Philipp described as „certainly no bad network for other things too when push comes to shove“, situating it within broader struggles of marginalized communities. Highlighting the increasing pressures on queer life, Philipp elaborated in great detail how choir members had formulated collective escape plans to another country in case of a German far-right accession to power.

Several participants also framed being queer as inherently political (Jessica,

Eli) and embodying this openly within choir as a form of political participation (Anna) that „bursts stereotypes about queer people“, for example by performing classical music (Konstantin). Lilly highlighted the intricacy of queerness and political engagement, saying „it’s not easy to be political if you in the rainbow family, because the political of the rainbow family. But we can be so much more“ (sic!).

Intra-community Issues

What became clear in the data was that queer community choirs were permeable social spaces, in which external and internal dynamics and pressures intersected. The findings showed how ongoing work was needed to maintain resilience across structural and interpersonal tensions.

Research collaborators described how the distributions of responsibility and labor could burden people unequally between board, conductor and members, which at times could lead to stress or feelings of loneliness within certain responsibilities. As a founding member, Konstantin described the choir as his „first child“ and underscored how emotional and practical intensity could take a toll, especially when carrying the choir through difficult periods.

In the Berlin choir space, differing expectations and levels of commitment to the social and musical space showed up (Dianne, Konstantin), complicating organizational procedures due to emotional attachment and dependency, making things turn messy more quickly (Anna, Philipp). Such emotional density was also mentioned to interact with experiences of discrimination which could be projected or carried forward, creating added friction (Lilly). In the Malmö choir, short membership times also complicated the choirs longevity (Eli) leading to a division of a core group and „satellites around us“ (Lilly).

Several participants highlighted how queer community stereotypes reflected negatively within the choir, e.g. age (Lilly, Konstantin), with Lilly also

describing exclusions through hierarchical categorizations due to appearance or lifestyle. Philipp mentioned growing pains during gender transition and feeling slightly left out of his section. Dynamics of clique building heightened the hurdles to newcomers (Lilly).

Such tensions were especially pertinent during moments of crisis. Both choirs experienced periods in which their existence seemed uncertain due to leadership illness and membership decline (Lilly) or conflict around conductor and board relations (Philipp, Konstantin). Describing how the choir was on the verge of falling apart, with people „crying during rehearsals“ and fearing a „hostile takeover“ by the choir director (Konstantin), showed how existential disruptions of a foundational community space may become.

Simultaneously, such crises revived the „incredibly wonderful sense of community“ (Konstantin) among its members in the aftermath, generating what Dianne describes as an „immune system“. Along with Anna, she highlighted resilience as the capacity to work through conflict reasonably, though „it’s not like that’s a fun process“. Claiming „Community is really just other people who are annoying. It’s hard work“ (sic!) (Dianne), she described collectivity as demanding, bureaucratic and emotionally taxing labor, which allowed the choir to persist. People who believed being responsible for each other beyond established boundaries, figured things out (Lilly) and saw crises as „just another hump in the road“ (Dianne), were key to sustaining the meaningful context of queer community choirs.

5.1.3 Futurity

Improvisation

Spontaneous adaptations and improvisations were mentioned as important parts of rehearsals and general choir sociality. This spanned learning how to sing and

getting to know each other (Jessica, Eli), navigating language barriers (Dianne), mutual support in figuring out difficult passages (Autoethnography) and finding collective solutions when materials were missing (Autoethnography). Concert preparations involved flexible cross-community integration, negotiating between „different styles of music, different styles of learning“ (Dianne), singing in enriching new combinations (Anna) and having a queer experimental ethos in guiding the choir (Konstantin). It was notable how quick learning and adaptation were a part of the choir process, the Berlin choir curiously exploring collaborations that moved beyond classical voice distributions (Philipp, Anna, Konstantin), the Malmö choir embracing funky dance warm-ups and onstage drag ideas (Lilly). As a board member, Konstantin highlighted how important it was for him to try out new things and autoethnography showed how the musical process was filled with productive confusion, moments of fluidity and jolly chaos that were observed as an „exploration and openness towards each other“.

Counterspaces

As a space beyond the heteronormative public, the choir was identified as a regularly sought out place of queer existence (Jessica, Anna). Likening it to a village „that’s always there“ within the city, Konstantin highlighted how life in the choir moved along regular encounters as well as with life’s milestones. Eli contrasted this queer enclave with the harsh reality of the „real world“ upon exit. Noting how heteronormative dominance was vast, she exclaimed on spaces for straight people: „They are everywhere. Everywhere!“. Several research collaborators from Malmö noted the scarcity of safe counterspaces that were outspokenly queer, especially in small cities in Sweden (Esther, Jessica, Lilly). Citing exclusively queer counterspaces, such as bookshops and bars, Jessica credited them with creating safety without question. As several people mentioned the feeling of collective ownership within the choir, Lilly

asserting „Yeah, this is my space“, the choirs were seen as counterspaces who's' existence greatly impacted choir members lives (Eli, Anna).

Concrete Utopias

When asked to describe the queer choir, participants used terms like family, home, community, microcosm, safe space and island, shaping an image of a concrete utopian imaginary.

The perception of being a part of something bigger than oneself or ones identity was highlighted (Eli, Konstantin). Jessica emphasized the benefits of actively learning to work together towards something bigger and Konstantin noted how the choir moved beyond individuals towards „a value that transcends them“. Hinting at a similar idea, Eli portrayed the choirs as queer community bubbles where norms were reshaped, acting as replenishing spaces to gather new strength within a different reality. Jessica validified this, saying: „No one here gives a fuck. Everyone sees everyone as queer. And we all love each other“. While imagining her ideal future, Esther dreamed „that one day we would just not need a queer choir. Like, everyone would be queer and we could just, we would not have to label ourselves in that way“. At the same time, she framed endorphin-releasing activities, such as singing, as community self-care. The choir provided „somewhere to be“ for shared queer experiences, creating a place „where queer community happens“ (Anna). Music took an important role, opening up an „extra space“ of life, where full expression was viable (Philipp). During autoethnography, I found myself within „cocoons of collective ambition“ that were imbued with collective „curiosity and wonder“.

Collective Visions

Participants were keen on sharing dreams and aspirations for their choirs' future, connecting present and futures to community building and understanding the choir as a political and interpersonal project (Dianne).

Several participants emphasized continuity and a stable development of the choir, as Eli expressed a desire for the choir to continue existing in a way that preserves its current scale, allowing for meaningful personal connections. Dianne also wished for the functioning infrastructure of the choir to continue. Lilly raised the question of increased collective responsibility for connective structures and Eli also acknowledged the members roles in shaping her choirs' future.

A number of visions also revolved around long-term belonging and care. Philipp and Konstantin humorously mentioned a „choir-nursing home“ where long-standing relationships between choir members could translate into shared housing support. Expanding the understanding of the choir to a lifelong community, the idea of multiple choirs came up, accommodating changing abilities to avoid future exclusions based on age or physical limitations. Intergenerational exchange between an aging queer generation and a younger one emerged as a key collective vision, positioning the choir as a space where „generations really come together“ (Philip). A few people emphasized the importance of continual rejuvenation within the choir to encourage continual learning processes around topics such as gender diversity and current developments within the queer community (Konstantin, Anna, Philipp).

Other aspirations included visibility and outreach, several research collaborators describing an ambition to move beyond the „queer bubble“ (Philipp) by engaging with wider audiences. As she highlighted the Berlin choir's aim of fostering „understanding between heterosexual and queer people“, Anna invoked bridge building as a goal while she also maintained how collaborative projects should be grounded in queer collectivity. Political engagement was articulated as an arena of expansion, as Konstantin mentioned a potential for more active stances on issues as refugee rights and right-wing extremism, and accentuated the possibility for music as a medium of social

change. Relatedly, some participants expressed a desire to establish more queer choirs and spaces overall to fill a perceived scarcity (Esther, Jessica).

Queer Horizons

In the data, queer horizons were envisioned as imagined possibilities and developments that broadened spaces and connections beyond the choir itself.

Eli emphasized the potential in choir spaces to mobilize people towards engaging in different spaces. Incentivizing people to become more active, she suggested that the community-based environment of the queer choir could act as a departure point for „more and broader queer organizing“ (Eli). Expansion towards other practices of collaboration and networking was reflected frequently (Dianne). Anna underlined that „networking and collaboration“ with other choirs and across different demographics meant a lot to her and Konstantin emphasized how it was generative of queer cultural production. Such efforts included aspirations towards big stage projects within a collaborative queer choir context (Anna) and an ongoing engagement with other choirs for continual renewal and diverse membership (Philipp). Konstantin maintained „I want to keep expanding my horizon“, showing how queer horizons also included personal learning.

Interconnectedness emerged as key, as participants described overlapping networks of queer sociality, that spanned choirs, festivals, political groups, social spaces such as meditation groups, book clubs, bars and cafés. Anna recalled how she kept meeting people at a national queer choir festival, whom she sung with „30, 35 years ago in another city“, and Lilly explained how frequently people switch and move between queer choirs, illustrating how they link to a wider constellation of queer spaces.

5.1.4 Other

Urban Environment

An additional recurring theme within the data was the relationship of choir experiences to life in the urban environments of Malmö and Berlin.

In Berlin, the contrast between choir life and urban reality was particularly pronounced, as the choir acted as a counterpoint to the scale and pace of large, anonymous city life (Konstantin). Emphasizing the choir as „a gathering place, a microcosm that exists within this big city“, he highlighted its small, village-like community, providing him with a form of „home“ (Heimat) that he could rely on and return to. Similarly, Anna described choir as a place which centered her and brought regularity into a hectic city life, evoking „a sense of home [...] in queer community“. The choirs held a special role for people who had newly arrived to a city, giving access to community, with Anna reminiscing how „it’s always helped me settle in - whether in new cities or new places“. Dianne, Philipp and Jessica referenced similar perspectives on relocation and Esther relayed her experience of moving from Berlin to Malmö. Contrasting a period of loneliness to an active search for community which proved successful, she exclaimed: „I have it. I have that community that I’ve been looking for“.

Most participants described their respective cities as environments where their queerness could be expressed, Dianne even described Berlin as „gay paradise“. The limitations of such belonging are hinted at when Esther reflected on her privilege, how being „white, Swedish speaking and cis-presenting“ made it easier for her to feel connected. Anna pointed to the diverse citizenry of Berlin and was happy how increasingly, this diversity was being reflected within her choir. Nevertheless, choir was described as a distinct space, with Lilly characterizing it as a safe space within the city’s queer landscape. Jessica highlighted how her participation in the choir increased her sense of confidence

and belonging within Malmö's urban environment, making her „more open to just going outside and exploring the city“.

Overall, the findings indicate that the queer choirs functioned as multifaceted social spaces in which care, resilience and futurity were continuously produced through everyday practices, community infrastructure and wider collective imaginaries. Although the themes within care, resilience and futurity were analytically separated, the coding process revealed significant overlaps between them. Several themes frequently co-occurred which suggests that experiences of *queer survival* emerged relationally through interconnected practices. These code co-occurrences will be further explored in the following discussion chapter.

5.2 Discussion

After the findings described how themes of survival expressed themselves within the two choirs, the discussion links back to the inquiry of this research. I begin by answering the main research question, asking how survival is articulated and practiced within queer community choirs in Berlin and Malmö. The findings showed distinctly how *queer survival* was enacted through several aspects of relational care, embodied resilience and collective imagination while being subject to local conditions and internal tensions. In relating these themes to the aligned theoretical framework, five sections will discuss patterns within the findings and answer the thesis subquestions.

5.2.1 Comparative Queer Survival

This section answers the main research question: „How is survival articulated

and practiced within queer community choirs in Malmö and Berlin?“ The findings were analyzed through the lens of *queer survival* as theorized by Cheilan (2026), articulating it as a collective practice of sustaining livable queer worlds under uneven conditions of precarity. While both choirs functioned as infrastructures of *queer survival*, the data from each city emphasized different dimensions of this survival work.

The structural logic of *queer survival* was shared across both queer community choirs. Rather than reproducing dominant narratives of „survival of the fittest“ (Cheilan 2026: 3), the choirs were articulated as relational infrastructures in which survival was lived out collectively, politically, and contextually to sustain queer life. In either choir, the practice of *queer survival* was fundamentally interpersonal and continuously produced within choir life through the collective negotiation of precariousness via interlocking practices of care, resilience, and futurity. As counterspaces, both queer choirs functioned as important sites of embodied musical coping, entangling „political, intimate and aesthetical answers“ (Cheilan 2026: 4) in confronting unequal social conditions. The choirs demonstrated through artistic expression and collective creativity, how *queer survival* is not reducible to the „bare minimum of acceptable living conditions“ (Cheilan 2026: 4), but involves sustaining beauty and imagination under difficult conditions. Yet they remained simultaneously fragile structures, as their access and internal dynamics were influenced by exclusion and unequal access to resources. A joint conclusion on *queer survival* showed that queer communities must still construct their own living conditions within „a world that does not want us“ (Cheilan 2026: 4).

Still, Malmö and Berlin exhibited differences in their survival infrastructures that can be traced to their respective urban contexts and particular conditions of queer livability.

The Malmö queer choir could be analyzed as a comparatively informal and intimate space of *queer survival*, where affective forms of sociality created a refuge from varied challenges. As a smaller city, Malmö was described as rather scarce of queer countercultural spaces, where the choir stood out as a fairly new enclave of safe community. The limited queer environment led the choir to be assigned the role of a social anchor, providing a stable and collectively constructed infrastructure. As a space, it was shaped by a low-threshold of organizational and emotional accessibility, where *queer survival* encapsulated encountering loneliness and isolation through emotional safety and recognition. In consequence, community constructions were intimate and flexible, providing relief from social scrutiny and normative pressures. Creating the possibility to exist among other queer people was credited with establishing joyous resistance, that was analyzed as emotionally restorative and connective. Challenges revolved around instability and fluctuating commitment levels, as well as structural barriers.

Within a larger queer metropolis, the more established Berlin choir was one of many queer cultural structures and connected to wider ecosystems of queer choirs and organizations. Beyond being a place of queer gathering, *queer survival* was expressed through organizing durable community structures that required planned commitment and collective labor. The choir was framed through rather formal organizational configurations and clearer membership boundaries that consolidated longer-term interdependence and kinship. This supported lifelong visions of queer belonging that enabled multigenerational exchange and continuity of the collective, even through navigations of crises. *Queer survival* was portrayed as the collective capacity to persist through inevitable conflict, sustaining and expanding the collective infrastructure into networks of collaborative queer cultural space.

The same dimensions of *queer survival* thereby materialize differently, depending on the urban context. While the Malmö queer choir was situated within a smaller queer environment, its structures were looser and frequently emphasized local community cohesion that prioritized openness and accessibility. In contrast, the queer choir in Berlin was embedded in a larger queer metropolis with an established and institutionalized queer urban landscape, leading to a stronger organizational continuity and more networked and politically expansive forms of *queer survival*.

Queer survival in the Malmö choir is thereby presented as more immediate and affective while in the Berlin choir it is more procedural and forward-oriented. This suggests that the same dimensions of *queer survival* identified by Cheilan materialized differently according to local urban conditions and scales of queer institutionalization (2026).

5.2.2 Mutually Constitutive & Interconnected Dimensions

While analyzed separately, the findings indicate that the dimensions of relational care, embodied resilience and imaginative futurity were interconnected and built upon each other. This reflected Cheilan's conceptualization of *queer survival* as a dynamic process in which these three dimensions continuously wrap around another in the ongoing work of sustaining queer existence (2026). Her spiral model argues that with survival at the core, practices of healing resilience and care enable imagining otherwise, opening up possibilities for future *queer survival* (Cheilan 2026: 8). This theoretical framework was validated empirically through the number of co-occurrences within the analysis, showing frequent overlaps between the dimensions sub-themes. Within both the Resilience and Futurity dimension, themes were linked back to practices of Care. *Healing/Growth* was often coded together with relational themes of *Recognition*, *Connection*, *Support* and *Safety/Liberation*, and *Collective Visions* co-occured with mentions of

Inclusivity, Connection, Effort/Commitment and Recognition. Within the choirs, *queer survival* was thereby experienced through recursive and overlapping practices that constituted each other.

5.2.3 Building Relational Infrastructure

In this study, it became visible how *queer survival* in the two choirs was fundamentally collective and infrastructural. As the previous section made clear, the dimensions of survival were interconnected, with care themes linking to resilience and political imaginaries. The following section shows that the choirs' practices of care produced collective belonging, shaping *queer survival* into a relational infrastructure and answering the first subquestion: „Which forms of caring relations and structures of community emerge within the choir practice?“

All depictions of care were mutually constitutive with collectivity, forming an essential aspect of the queer choirs' social environment. This reflected Tronto & Fishers' feminist redefinition of care as comprehensive and integrated, understanding caring efforts as an inherently social activity that speaks to collective survival (1990: 37). Enacting Muñoz understanding of „queerness as collectivity“ (2009: 11), collective choir care practices moved away from neoliberal social organization, framed through isolated individuals or biologically essentialized obligations, instead highlighting communalism and collaboration (Cheilan 2026: 4). Care was inherent to the choir structure, as visibility and recognition were fostered through choir attendance, resulting in inward and outward, personal and group affirmation of queer identity. Butler described recognition „as a site of power by which the human is differentially produced“ (2004: 2). Applied to collective care, queer subjects were therefore produced and supported in their queer belonging and wider existence and persistence.

Another dimension of belonging, developed through the liberating experience of queerness being normalized, is the wariness of scrutiny, justification and everyday constructions of marginality being replaced by the relief of safety. In this context, the choirs relational bonds mirrored Butler's „webs of relationship“ (2004: 26), becoming a site where relationality expanded to include non-biological family ties, intergenerational kinship bonds and communal connections. Through these relations that played a key role in peoples lives, the choirs were organizationally and emotionally interdependent, functioning as networks of mutual support to its members. Such reciprocal understandings of support resist common structures of for-profit care and mirror Piepzna-Samarasinha „care webs“ (2018: 17), highlighting spaces of mutual care and community.

Collective interdependence created life-giving support but also came with obligations, heightening the stakes through „social interactions that contain the potential for conflict“ (Tronto & Fisher 1990: 39). Piepzna-Samarasinha's complication of community was reflected in the findings, as community demanded disproportionate labor and was defined by uneven access to resources (2018). While the choirs took active steps towards inclusivity, care still remained unevenly accessible, reflecting exclusionary structures along language, class, dis/ability, age and membership procedures in wider society.

Building on Butlers' assertion that interdependence is „the mode of our being in the hands of others, a mode of being with and for others without which we cannot be“ (2004: 33-34), the choirs demonstrate how survival depended on a relational infrastructure, enabling care logics beyond normative structures. At the same time, this infrastructure was fragile, its social body reflecting exclusions, and had to be actively maintained through contestations. As political practices of care recognized and responded to shared but unevenly distributed adversity, the next section will elaborate on how *queer survival* was

negotiated through ongoing coexistence of vulnerability and flourishing, to sustain queer life in the long term.

5.2.4 Navigating the Co-existence of Harm & Joy

The findings, especially in the dimension of resilience, clearly showed how joy and struggle co-existed within the choirs, complicating *queer survival*. In line with Cheilan's notion of resilience as an „ongoing work of grief in the midst of joy" (2026: 6), the choirs built empowering mechanisms of resilience against broader oppression and internal crises. This section thereby addresses the second sub-question: „How do choir members experience healing and understand resilience amid ongoing harm?“

The understanding of resilience itself was defined variedly within the findings. Some defined it as personal perseverance or growth in the face of loss, coinciding more with conventional ideas of self-reliance (Cheilan 2026: 6). At the same time this definition was also questioned as a tool of capitalist individualization and attributed with decreasing communal responsibility. Alternative definitions explained the collective quality of resistance within choir spaces as a key factor, providing space for healing through grief and ongoing difficulty while building resistance.

Adverse life conditions of queer people, which Butler alludes to their „modes of being dispossessed“ (2004: 19), were omnipresent. From personal relationships over professional contexts to political climate, the reality of a heteronormative society in which queer existence was largely rendered socially vulnerable is ubiquitous. These experiences can be interpreted through Butler's lens, positioning exposure to harm as a shared condition of community (2004: 19) that could become a political resource. In this sense, the queer choirs provided a network of support to encounter such struggles together, the choir sphere enabling trust and reliability through its continual stability.

Within this sphere of shared vulnerability, empowering and joyful processes took place. People cited growth and development of themselves, through self-reflection, shared musical prowess or reconnection to queerness, writing an alternative narrative to social precarity. Reports of increased strength and self-assurance, alongside confidence and collective power, showed how the communal space of the choir enabled resistant modes of queerness to form. These can be interpreted as part of a healing process that puts people into a better relationship with themselves, others and their environment (Arani & Winget 2022: 4). Echoing Arani & Winget's understanding of healing as „deeply personal and necessarily communal and collective“ (2022: 4), it was attributed to relational and embodied practices of joyful expression, such as singing, dancing and socializing. The association of choir with nourishing experiences and pride-filled memories, underlines how queer collectivity creates conditions for resilience in which coping with harm exists side by side with empowering notions of queerness (Cheilan 2026: 6). Changes towards a positive redefinition of queer life were portrayed as a form of resistance, building endurance and affirmative self-preservation, effectively expanding Cheilan's notion of resilience (2026: 6). Resistance was made a key element, practiced through non-apologetic queer existence, connective strategies against societal pressures and active solidarity with other marginalized groups.

The choirs did not eliminate structural violence, exclusions or grief, and neither were they separate bubbles of purely celebratory queer community. Instead, they created temporary and recurring conditions under which participants could move through difficulty or encounter hardship together and create empowering narratives of queer joy. To do so, they developed internal immune systems to maintain their constitution which required negotiation and commitment to survive integral crises. They then could be deemed spaces of ‚asynchronic‘ queer resilience (Cheilan 2026: 6) which held contradictions together and

moved through adversity while creating joy. This could be deemed a specifically queer mode of survival, creatively holding the tensions of both fragility and thriving, side by side.

5.2.5 Producing Horizons of Possibility

During the negotiation of resilient practices, the two choirs emerged as spaces where queer world-making took place. Producing imperfect but livable environments for queer existence in the present, *queer survival* in this context could be understood as a temporally layered generation of alternative futures. The following section will thereby answer the third sub-question: „What futures and alternative imaginaries are rehearsed and voiced in the choir context?“

Beyond providing avenues through which queer people may seek protection, recognition or recovery from harm, the choirs could be described as „utopian rehearsal rooms“ (Muñoz 2009: 111). Through their relational infrastructure, they provided space to navigate adversity and build asynchronic joyful resilience, providing the base for alternative imaginaries.

As queer counterspaces within a „potentialized present“ (Berlant 2011: 263), the choirs enacted alternative embodied realities within a reality, in which the „conventional collateral damage“ (ibid.) of heteronormative society was temporarily suspended. The two queer choirs could be read as making „alternative futures while existing within the interstices of cis/heteronormative societies“ (Cheilan 2026: 7). As containers of community, where safety and collective ownership were highlighted, the choirs were spaces in which members and audiences temporarily reorganized social norms, reinventing „new idioms of the political and belonging itself“ (Berlant 2011: 262). Ideations on the choir as a permeable counterspace remained ambivalent, with tensions existing between the preservation of existing structures and transformation through their continuous renewal.

Instead of utopian abstractions, the choirs could be interpreted as „concrete utopias“ (Muñoz 2009: 31), as they were small scale lived implementations of alternative worlds in the present.

As choir members highlighted the wider purpose of queer musical expression together with ambitions towards political change, artistic practice merged with socio-political creativity, underlining the „inseparability between aesthetical and political performance“ (Muñoz 2009 in Cheilan 2026: 7). Rooms of artistic presence were real spaces of transformation, Muñoz describing how „these stages are our actual utopian rehearsal rooms, where we work on a self that does not conform to the mandates of cultural logics“ (2009: 111). Improvisation was a common notion in these spaces, emphasizing openness and adaptation and reflecting the need to build something imperfect „here and now, instead of waiting for an ideal scenario that will never come into existence“ (Cheilan 2026: 7). Acting as creative counterspaces of collective transformation, the two choirs could be interpreted to prefigure queer futures by investing and performing them (Cheilan 2026: 7). This positions futures within the space as temporally layered, weaving past experiences and current practices into future-oriented visions, speaking to Muñoz’ non-rigid understanding of time by „asking and looking beyond the here and now“ (2019: 28). Simultaneously, the findings on wider collective visions illustrated how communal choir qualities were embedded in shared trajectories of the future. The choirs’ futures were imagined with a deep sense of responsibility towards the choir infrastructure, each other, the choirs' impact on queer community and societal politics more widely. Collaboration and networking towards queer horizons emerged as key components to sustaining a vivid choir life into the future.

Berlant shows a measured optimism for such „lateral politics“ (2011: 262) speaking to the previously mentioned visions of agentive, improvised, solidary and horizontal political practices. In contrast to traditional, state-centered,

vertical political engagement, queer collective social spaces imagined, rehearsed and enacted alternative futures, constructing the idea of survival as a baseline of generating localized futures towards communal survival.

Queer survival was constructed through the generative material and affective social worlds of the choirs, where queer existence became more livable within an unequal world. Through actively rehearsing different ways of relating to each other, concrete utopian futures were introduced in the present.

5.2.6 Queer Survival as Political Practice

Situated within a wider European context, the findings of this thesis suggest that the *queer survival* mechanisms within two community choirs in Berlin and Malmö constitute a political practice that reorganizes norms of belonging, recognition, relationality and futurity through everyday cultural and affective labor. Rather than understanding politics exclusively through formal institutions, party systems or state-centered activism, this research demonstrates how queer politics emerge through collective infrastructures of care, embodied practices, artistic expression and the ongoing production of livable social worlds. The examined queer choirs function as political actors that negotiate the conditions under which queer life becomes possible.

The findings resonated with Warner's (1991) understanding of queer politics as social practices, connecting to widespread aspects of life, and operating through queer counterpublics and world-making practices (Warner 2002). The two choirs could be interpreted as examples of counterpublic infrastructures, in which heteronormative assumptions were temporarily suspended and alternative social relations were rehearsed collectively. Through singing, organizing, caring and imagining together, participants created social environments that challenged dominant understandings of collective belonging. These practices were then political because they intervened in how social life

was organized and who was depicted as recognizable, valued and supported within it.

Most importantly, this thesis showed how *queer survival* remains necessary within the comparatively ‚progressive‘ European countries of Sweden and Germany. While both countries are often positioned within narratives of European queer exceptionalism and liberal inclusion, the findings reveal that formal equality does not resolve everyday precarity. Participants continued to describe experiences of marginalization, insecurity, exhaustion and social vulnerability within broader heteronormative society. The studied queer choirs thereby emerge as self-organized infrastructures through which members collectively produced care, resilience and alternative imaginaries beyond the limits of institutional recognition. This underlines the limitations of liberal inclusion politics, as visibility, representation and legal rights alone do not automatically assure livable queer futures.

At the same time, the findings complicate idealized understandings of queer community. The choirs may have enacted utopian sociality, but they were not spaces outside of power relations, remaining shaped by exclusions related to class, race, language, age, dis/ability and access to cultural resources. These dynamics reflect critiques within queer scholarship on homonormativity (Duggan 2002) and selective belonging in European queer spaces (Hilder 2023a). The political significance of the two choirs therefore lies not in transcending hegemonial power altogether but to continue negotiating these tensions. *Queer survival* appeared as uneven, incomplete and fragile, requiring a continuous reflexivity and active engagement with intersectional inequalities. Thus, this thesis contributes to queer political sociology by illustrating how power is negotiated not just through institutional politics, but also through everyday infrastructures of collective survival. The studied queer community

choirs can be understood as political sites in which recognition, social organization and queer futurity are negotiated. Extending Cheilan's conceptualization of *queer survival* (2026), this study empirically shows how care, resilience and futurity become enmeshed within collective cultural practice to produce queer livability under uneven conditions of precarity.

5.3 Limitations & Implications for Future Research

This study has contributed important transdisciplinary insights into the fields of queer studies and political sociology, highlighting survival as a key lens to look at queer socio-cultural practices. While producing important knowledge on the necessity and fragility of queer choirs as community spaces, some limitations within the research require reflection. They circle around scope and comparative scale, as well as the participant composition and whiteness.

Regarding scope, the qualitative analysis focused on two queer choirs in two cities, making an in-depth exploration possible. Consequentially, this also means that there are limits to the level of generalization which can be concluded from the study. In both Berlin and Malmö, several queer choirs with different organizational, political and demographic compositions exist. Due to the temporal and methodological constraints of the thesis project, analytical depth was prioritized over breadth. This opens the possibilities for further studies to focus on longitudinal and larger-scale comparative studies, using survival as a lens to research localized queer musical and community practices. Including more European cities in this research would also be fruitful to expand knowledge on how *queer survival* infrastructures are shaped by varying queer histories, urban conditions and political climates.

Additionally, this is a cross-sectional study, providing an impression of a certain time and space within specific political conditions. As survival

infrastructures are dynamic and evolving, practices may shift over time and future studies are needed to map and link these to broader transformations.

A key limitation, which was previously mentioned in the data collection, pertains to the demographic composition of the participant and choir sample. As the research collaborators and the choirs spaces themselves were read as majority white, the findings are then articulations of experiences associated with white queer sociality. This raises questions around whose survival is centered, normalized and sustained within queer choir spaces, impacting the accessibility of survival infrastructure. Additionally, race is almost completely absent within the interviews, raising the question as to why race is not mentioned. The absence of explicit discussion, while other markers of marginalization were brought up, points to whiteness as an unmarked norm through which survival is refracted. This can lead to issues of racialization, ethnicity and different vulnerabilities to risk being under-articulated in queer community spaces. In turn, this creates a clear demarcation for future studies, that could examine how queer PoC (People of Color) navigate access to, participation in and experiences of queer community spaces. While touched upon in this thesis, further research can focus even stronger on how experiences of survival are shaped by intersecting forms of marginalization.

6. Conclusion

This thesis has examined how survival is articulated, enacted and negotiated within queer community choirs in Malmö and Berlin. Situated within a European and Global context marked by rising anti-gender politics, structural precarity and renewed hostility toward queer lives, this study has argued that *queer survival* could be understood as a fundamentally collective and political infrastructure. The choirs showed how survival cannot only be defined as endurance under oppressive conditions, but also as a collective and political practice of world-making.

Through a qualitative mixed-methods approach combining interviews and autoethnographic observation, the research explored how care, resilience and futurity were constituted within queer communal singing practices. The findings demonstrate that the two queer community choirs functioned as important spaces of belonging where participants actively negotiated what it meant to survive, heal and imagine otherwise.

Ultimately, this thesis has argued that these queer community choirs should be understood as politically significant spaces of collective survival. Beyond artistic or recreational spaces, they built relational infrastructures through which queer people sustained one another, negotiated vulnerability and enacted alternative possibilities for living together. In a time when queer existence remains contested and vulnerable, these choirs demonstrated how important it is to attend to the everyday practices by which marginalized communities create livable conditions. *Queer survival*, as demonstrated throughout this study, can not only be a question of enduring hostile conditions, but of collectively producing forms of care, resilience and futurity that make other worlds imaginable.

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8. Appendix

8.1 Autoethnography Guiding Questions

Questions:

- What is the general atmosphere?
 - How do people interact?
 - What are conversations like?
 - Which feelings does meeting people and between singing chatting evoke?
 - How does the choir instructor lead the group?
 - How is choir practice organized?
- What aspects of sociality can I identify?
 - How do I feel within the group?
 - How do people treat me as a newbie?
 - What makes me feel welcome/ not welcome?
 - Do people practice care/does it just happen?
- Senses & location
 - What can I feel, hear, see in the place?
 - Which aspects show up for me?
 - What stays with me after?
 - How do I perceive the place?
 - How does singing make me feel?
 - Can I identify hurdles or resistance?

8.2 Interview Guidebook

Opening script: 2 mins

Thesis: Explores idea of queer survival, care, healing and futurity

Context: Doing data collection in two queer community choirs in Malmö and Berlin.

Methods: Based on interviews and autoethnography (observation of myself in social context)

Duration: Thank you for participating. The interview will take approx. 60 mins.

Recording: Session recorded with voice recorder. Please answer my questions honestly.

Reminder Participant rights:

This interview needs your consent which we have signed. You have the right to skip questions or not answer without justification at any time. Especially as we might cover sensitive topics. I will anonymize as much as possible from the interview, beginning with your name:

Could you pick a pseudonym for yourself that I could use in my thesis?

Could you tell me how long you've been a part of this choir?

And do you hold another role than participant (organizer, conductor)?

Warm-up questions (5-7 mins)

- Could you tell me a bit about yourself and how you came to this choir? Have you been in other choirs or queer spaces before?
- How would you describe this choir to someone who has never heard of a queer community choir?
- What does a typical rehearsal look and feel like for you? What parts do you look forward to? Are there parts that feel more stressful or difficult?

Theme A: Care, community, interdependence (15–20 min)

- Do you think about this choir as a community? How do you think people care for each other?
- How do people relate to each other? Ex.: friendships, relationships, loose connections, chosen family, acquaintances?
- Can you describe a moment when you felt especially connected with the choir? Was there a moment when you felt cared for or supported in the choir? => What exactly happened? Who was involved? How did it affect you?

- Are there ways in which choir members take care of each other beyond singing? Ex.: Practical help, emotional support, political solidarity, everyday check-ins?
- Can you imagine some hurdles to joining or feeling included & taken care of in the choir?
 - Who do you think is well taken care of in this choir, and who maybe less so?
 - Do some people fall through the cracks?
 - What barriers exist, e.g. through language, ethnicity, class, disability, gender identity, mental health?
- Have there been difficult moments in the choir?
 - Maybe moments where people were overburdened, disappointed, or harmed?
 - How were these situations handled?
 - Did anything change afterwards?

Theme B: Survival, harm, resilience, healing 15–20 min

1. What does it mean for you live everyday life in Malmö/Berlin/the world as a queer person?
 - What does being part of this choir mean for your ability to get through everyday life?
 - => If you imagine your life without the choir, what would be different?
 - Does it feel like a resource to you? In what way?
2. Can you recall a time when you or someone else came to rehearsal or a concert while going through something difficult?
 - Probes: What was happening at the time? How did the choir or people in the choir respond? Did singing together or being at choir change anything for you in that situation?
3. Have experiences of loss, grief, or ongoing harm (e.g. around transphobia, racism, HIV/AIDS, violence, political backlash) shown up in the choir space?
 - Have they appeared in conversations, songs, dedications, announcements?
4. Do you experience the choir as a healing space? If so, in what ways; if not, why not?
 - Are there specific moments when you felt more able to be yourself there?
 - Where do you feel are the limits of what this choir can hold or heal?
5. How would you describe resilience in this choir?
 - Can you think of a concrete example?
6. ONLY IF MENTIONED BEFORE: Have there been moments when the choir felt unsafe or too difficult to be in?

- Probes: What made it feel that way? Did the group or choir leader respond? What would have needed to happen to make it more survivable?

Theme C – Imagination, futurity, politics (15–20 min)

1. When you think about the songs we sing together, what kinds of stories or worlds do they create?

- Do any songs feel especially queer, political, or comforting to you?
- Are there any songs that feel out of place or uncomfortable to you?

2. Does being in this choir help you imagine or believe in a different kind of reality for queer life?

- Are there particular moments that give you that feeling? Can you think of concrete examples of how it is different from other places or situations? What made it feel different?, How did bodies, voices, gestures, interactions change?

3. Do you see this choir as political? If yes, in what ways; if no, why not?

- Probes: Visibility, repertoire, fundraising, collaborations, stance on current politics? How does being in Malmö/Berlin shape this?

4. If you imagine this choir in five or ten years, what would you hope it has become?

- Changes in membership, access, repertoire, politics, care practices? What would an ideal future for this choir look like?

Comparative / contextual prompts (10 mins)

1. How does the wider city context (Malmö/Berlin) affect the way this choir operates and feels?

- E.g. Funding, safety, far-right presence, queer infrastructure, venues, migration, language?

2. Do you feel differences between this choir and other queer spaces you know (bars, parties, NGOs, online spaces, activist groups)?

- What is distinctive about doing politics or survival through singing, compared to other spaces?

3. ONLY IF RELEVANT: If participants have lived elsewhere or in another national context:

- How does being in this queer choir here compare to other places you've lived or sung in?

Closing questions (5–10 min)

1. Is there anything important about your experience in this choir, or about queer survival and care here, that we haven't talked about yet?
2. Is there something you would want people outside the choir to understand about what this space makes possible, and what it doesn't?
3. How was it for you to talk about these topics today?
(Check-out, wellbeing, possibility to follow up or withdraw material.)

Let the participant know:

They can contact you later if they remember something they want to add or if they want to withdraw parts of the interview (within the limits you state in your consent form).

Ask if they need a moment to check in with themselves before leaving (especially if heavy topics came up).

Probes

- Can you tell me more about that?
- How did that feel?
- Can you give a concrete example?
- What happened just before/just after?
- Who was there and how did they react?

8.3 Interview Guide for Participants

Dear choir member,

Thank you for your interest in taking part in this interview.

This document briefly explains what the interview will be about and how it will work.

1. What is this interview about?

I am writing a Master's thesis about queer community choirs in Malmö and Berlin.

I am interested in how choir members experience:

- Being together in the choir
- Support and care within the choir
- Dealing with difficulties and finding strength
- Hopes and ideas for the future in and around the choir

Your perspective and experience are central to this project.

2. What will the interview be like?

- Duration: about 60 minutes
- Setting: a quiet public place we agree on together, or online (if needed)
- Format: an open conversation guided by some themes - not a test and not a strict questionnaire
- Language: we will speak in English mostly, but you can use your own words and take your time

You can skip any question, take breaks, or stop the interview at any time without giving a reason.

3. Main themes we will talk about

We will move freely between these themes, depending on what feels important to you:

1. You and the choir

How you came to the choir and what being part of it looks like for you.

2. Community and care

How you experience relationships, support and togetherness in the choir.

3. Difficulties, survival and wellbeing

How the choir relates to challenges in your life and to feeling okay (or not).

4. Songs, politics and futures

How you experience the music you sing, and what kinds of meanings or futures it opens up for you.

5. City and context

How being in Malmö or Berlin shapes your experience of the choir as a queer space.

There will also be time at the end for anything else you feel is important and that we did not cover.

4. Sensitive topics and your well-being

Some themes may touch on difficult experiences (for example, discrimination, exclusion, grief, or mental health). You are always free to:

- Skip any question
- Answer only in general terms
- Take a break or stop the interview

If you want, we can agree beforehand on topics you do not want to talk about. Please let me know in writing or in talking before the interview.

5. Confidentiality and data handling (see ethics form for more)

- I will use a pseudonym chosen by you to reference our interview in my thesis.
- The interview will be audio-recorded so I can remember accurately what you said.
- Let me know if you want the transcription of the interview to check.

You can change your mind later and withdraw your participation or ask for parts to be removed.

6. Your role in this research

I see you as someone with important knowledge about your choir and queer life in this city.

You are welcome to:

- Correct me if I misunderstand something
- Ask me questions about the project
- Bring in topics that you feel are important, even if I don't ask about them directly

If you have any questions, concerns, or accessibility needs before the interview (for example about time, place, language or emotional support), please contact me via our established communication channel.

8.5 Interview Consent Form

Research project title: Queer survival in community choirs

Research investigator: Benedicte Jarlman

Research Participants name:

The interview will take minimum *60 minutes*. We don't anticipate that there are any risks associated with your participation, but you have the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any time.

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the above research project. Ethical procedures for academic research undertaken from Swedish institutions require that research collaborators explicitly agree to being interviewed and how the information contained in their interview will be used. This consent form is necessary for us to ensure that you understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation.

Would you therefore read the accompanying information sheet and then sign this form to certify that you approve the following:

- The interview will be recorded and a transcript will be produced
- You will be sent the transcript and given the opportunity to correct any factual errors
- The transcript of the interview will be analyzed by Benedicte Jarlman as research investigator
- Access to the interview transcript will be limited to Benedicte Jarlman and her academic supervisor as part of the research process
- Any summary interview content, or direct quotations from the interview, that are made available through academic publication or other academic outlets will be anonymized so that you cannot be identified, and care will be taken to ensure that other information in the interview that could identify yourself is not revealed
- The actual recording will be kept until the finalization of the thesis and destroyed in June 2026
- Any variation of the conditions above will only occur with your further explicit approval

By signing this form I agree that:

1. I am voluntarily taking part in this project. I understand that I don't have to take part, and I can stop the interview at any time;
2. The transcribed interview or extracts from it may be used as described above;
3. I have read the Information sheet;
4. I don't expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation;
5. I can request a copy of the transcript of my interview and may make edits I feel necessary to ensure the effectiveness of any agreement made about confidentiality;
6. I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future.

Printed Name

Participants Signature

Date

Researchers Signature

Date

Contact Information

If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please contact:

Benedicte Jarlman

E-mail: b.jarlman@posteo.de

8.6 Codebook

A central part of thematic analysis is the establishment and development of categories and schemes used to code existing textual material. In this study the coding categories were developed deductively from the theoretical foundation to create a coding system including the three main categories of care, resilience and future. Subcategories were then inductively derived from the text material, serving to identify the different ways theoretical themes are understood. This appendix explains each code category and gives detailed definitions and examples of all coding categories.

Main Category	Sub Category	Definition	Example
Care	Care	Describing care but does not fit into other codes	„Yeah, I don't know if there's any moment, but I have felt very cared for.“ (Dianne)
	Community	Alluding to or describing community contexts on different levels, centering shared belonging and collective wellbeing	„That, of course, is the essence of a choir: that sense of community during a performance, getting through the pre-show jitters together, having parties afterward once you've pulled it off, and talking about how the concert went.“ (Philipp)
	Connection	Describing the fostering of relational bonds, feeling connected to other people, structures, spaces.	„We're reminded to look at each other, to listen to each other, we are really in this connected space. We're supposed to speak to each other, using our singing voices. I catch the eye of a few people and often we smile and that makes me feel warm and like I belong here.“ (Autoethnography)

Kinship	Mentioning non-normative notions of family or kin, deeper relational ties beyond conventional social definition	„So for me, it’s like a second family, exactly. As a queer person without kids, single, you already have your issues with your own family.“ (Philipp)
Interdependence	Emphasis on reciprocal forms of organization or care, highlighting mutuality in interactions	„I mean it is and so I think that's a really good thing that that's like we work together or there's nothing. There’s a consequence to us not working together so yeah.“ (Jessica)
Recognition	Expression of affirmation through feeling seen, acknowledged, recognized as self	„And just, like, knowing that, yeah, this is a space where I get recognition that I'm not alone, that we are all different, but we're also, like, from the same minority here.“ (Esther)
Safety/ Liberation	References to emotional comfortability, safety to be oneself, trust and feelings of autonomy and freedom	„Uh, and the queer choir have been my point of (deep breath) where I can be me. Where I can breathe.“ (Lilly)
Support	Mentions of personal, broader structures that assist in emotional, practical ways	„But I also believe that our community is so strong that it can support even those who are struggling, for a while, at least, because they feel so well cared for.“ (Konstantin)
Inclusivity	Indications of inclusion, showing acceptance, making belonging available	„And the second thing about the queer choir is that, um, our instructor has always had that, um, come and join. Regardless who you are.“ (Lilly)

	Exclusivity	Indications of exclusion, hurdles in acceptance, making belonging unavailable	„Like, for me, I grew up and I started singing in a choir and whatever. But, like ... I feel like that's very, like, middle class kind of a ... I don't know, being, like, taught to sing, yeah, and have access to all this kind of like, access to the arts.“ (Eli)
	Accessibility	Describing easy ways to access choir spaces through behaviors, structure, environments	„So I thought it would be really fun to go to a space that already had a big focus on just being comfortable and not being professional and already knowing how to read music and stuff.“ (Jessica)
	Effort/ Committment	Explaining different levels of investment to the choir	„So for the first concert, I practiced a whole lot using practice files and managed to learn 13 new songs in no time.“ (Anna)
Resilience	Resilience	Describing resilience but does not fit into other codes	„And I feel like the space, if we do, like, all show up for each other week after week and you do this together. And then maybe, like, build connections outside of that as well. Like, that is the resilience of it.“ (Eli)
	Adversity	References to experiences of hardship and difficulty that produce threat, instability, loss	„And of course, as queer people, we're also at risk of being threatened, right? I mean, there's been a bit of a rollback lately, and so on.“ (Konstantin)
	Healing & Growth	Alluding to processes of emotional repair, development through choir participation	„I mean, discrimination naturally reinforces certain patterns of behavior, and a queer choir like this offers a chance to take a closer look at that. And to do things differently.“ (Philipp)

	Joy	Emphasis on happiness and affirmation towards queer identity & choir	„And it feels like this big group of queer adults who are all entering on a Tuesday evening from different days are just able to let go, to shake off some things, to learn to rely on each other and just have a bit of fun.“ (Autoethnography)
	Pride	Expressions of affirmation and celebration towards queer identity & choir	„But it’s also a lot of fun, and when I see that an idea works, or how we’ve implemented it, or how we’ve established the guidelines—so to speak—for how things should run in our choir, and it works, and people feel they’re in good hands, and at the same time we’re making challenging, beautiful music, then... That really makes me happy. And I’m proud of it, too, I have to say.“ (Konstantin)
	Resistance	Descriptions of political dimension of choir, notions of dissent and active engagement against adversity	„I said that if we go to Thuringia and convince even one person not to vote for the AfD through our performance, we’ve already done something good“ (Konstantin)
	Cis-Heteronormativity	Mentions of heterosexuality as the default and cis-gender as the norm	„Somehow it’s different then, you know, the Kanu association. There we are the only ones. I’ve never encountered another queer couple.“ (Anna)
	Intra-community Issues	Expressions of challenges, struggles, difficulty within queer community/ choir	„And then most of the time they look, "Oh my god, you're here?" "Why are you here?" Because I'm queer as you. And they, "No, you can't be because you are old." It's, there's something very peculiar happens. And not, not happen once. It happened twice. A lot. (Lilly)
Future	Future	Depictions of futures that do not fit into other categories	„Yeah my head voice is coming. And I can begin to sing with more power in it, but it takes some more years.“ (Lilly)

	Improvisation	Indications of spontaneity, experimental approaches and actions	„They were just like, "Oh, you should sing soprano instead." Okay. Uh, but now I sing alto again. I keep moving around.“ (Dianne)
	Counterspaces	Expressions that position the choir as an alternative public space that resist dominant sociality	„But just knowing that I'm part of this community, um, and I do have, like, somewhere to be, somewhere to go, somewhere also where there are people that, like, share the same experience of, like, coexisting in this world as a queer person.“ (Esther)
	Collective Visions	Depictions of shared dreams, possibilities and ideas for queer choirs and community	„Well, realistically speaking, my hope for the choir is that we keep doing what we're doing, that new members keep joining, and that we don't become a group that just grows old together and eventually calls it quits, so to speak. That we actually become diverse, and the generations really come together.“ (Philipp)
	Concrete Utopias	Envisioning new forms of queer relation, lived & practiced utopia	„Uh, so I feel like being in this kind of, like, bubbles ... is really important. Like, surround yourself with that and kind of like reshaping the norms, even if it's just like in small, small, small parts. It's like, „Okay, but here we are the norm.““ (Eli)
	Queer Horizons	Notions of expanded queer existence, collaborations or expression beyond the choir	„So in our speeches we are not as political as this lesbian choir. They are very feminist which I find great. And I thought: „Hey, that is good.“ Maybe one just has to name it sometimes. So not just going somewhere to create openness.“ (Konstantin)
Other	Embodiment	Mentions of bodily experience, physical sensations and emotions	„I get eye contact with someone that I don't know, and a lot of times both of us are just, like, smiling and it becomes... So I, I actually get chills when I talk about it 'cause I get so touched by it.“ (Esther)

	Beyond choir	Mentions of contexts extending beyond the choir	„Yeah, cause you know when you're just out and about at a regular bar, let's say, and maybe you are looking for a friend or even looking for a potential love interest and you're queer, it can be kind of hard to tell.“ (Jessica)
	Urban Environment	Depictions of urban life and city experiences	„So, kind of a place to go, a sort of microcosm that exists within this big city, but which is just really special to me, and, I think, to many others as well, simply because it's a place to go.“ (Konstantin)