Fa\c{c}ulty for Culture and Society
Department of Global Political Studies

**Queer Migration Perspectives**: Identity construction and experiences of social inclusion and exclusion of LGBTQ refugees in Sweden

*Zoë Korten*

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Supervisor: Nahikari Irastorza
Examiner: Anne Sofie Roald
ABSTRACT
Research within the field of migration studies has becoming increasingly interested in asylum seekers and refugees over that last decade. However, there is a large gap in migration literature regarding LGBTQ migrants and LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees in general. Two LGBTQ refugees in Sweden were interviewed in depth about the relationship between their sexual orientation or gender identity and the concepts of identity construction and social inclusion/exclusion. Their insights reveal the strategies used in navigating the intersections of their identity and the challenges faced with regard to seeking inclusion in various aspects of society. Identity construction for LGBTQ individuals often requires dealing with identity conflict which can result in the integration, compartmentalisation, or rejection of the conflicting identities. In addition, six motives of identity construction were considered for their contributions to the way interviewees evaluated various aspects of their identities. These are self-esteem, meaning, continuity, distinctiveness, efficacy, and belonging. The analysis indicates that the more present these motives are within an aspect of identity, the more interviewees were motivated to maintain or strengthen that aspect even in the face of conflict. Inclusion and exclusion were evaluated based on five key components of accessibility of information, belonging, physical or geographical boundaries, stigmatisation, and social capital. Interviewees typically identified belonging, stigmatisation, and social capital to be the strongest factors in their experiences of inclusion and exclusion in Sweden. Furthermore, this study includes statements from the participants regarding how to address the needs of LGBTQ individuals within the asylum process so that others may face fewer challenges in the future. Although this study only examines the experiences of two LGBTQ refugees, it does provide insight that can be useful for future work involving this population.

Key words: LGBTQ, Queer, Asylum Seekers, Refugees, Newcomers, Intersectionality, Identity, Inclusion, Exclusion, Sweden.
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1. INTRODUCTION
Throughout the world, many individuals, families, and communities find that their home is no longer safe and make the decision to seek refuge elsewhere. Over 65 million people have been forced to leave their homes worldwide due to various reasons including political instability, religious persecution, and armed conflict (UNHCR, 2016). Many of these people remain internally displaced within the borders of their own country, while others cross borders and take dangerous routes seeking safety. Within these groups of asylum seekers are individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) who not only face the same challenges as their peers, but who must also navigate the intersectionality of their sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) in relation to the experience of being an asylum seeker.

According to the most recent edition of State Sponsored Homophobia by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association (also known as the ILGA), 72 countries worldwide have laws which criminalize same-sex relations in some way. There is also evidence that in at least eight of these states the death penalty for same-sex relations exists either formally or informally (Carroll and Mendos, 2017). It has been suggested that as LGBTQ persons in many countries have increasingly been granted social and legal protections, these advancements have been met with an increase in homophobia and transphobia in other countries (Beyrer, 2014). This difference in the safety of LGBTQ individuals based on geographic location is just one example of the ways in which LGBTQ members of society must navigate the world differently than their peers.

Though LGBTQ rights and even granting asylum based on sexual orientation or gender identity are recognized throughout the European Union (EU) and North America, discrimination and prejudice directed towards LGBTQ persons is still prevalent in nearly every country around the world. LGBTQ migrants may not only be persecuted by various religious and political institutions, but they are often persecuted by their own family and community as well (Shidlo and Ahola, 2013). Therefore, LGBTQ migrants may find themselves quite isolated in their destination country as they often migrate alone and are likely to be rejected by their ethnic community or the refugee community which shares their country of origin (Portman and Weyl, 2013).

There is a wide selection of literature in migration studies which discusses gender as an influential factor on migration outcomes. However, most studies do so from a heteronormative and sometimes stereotypical perspective of gender roles and differences, with broad generalizations
made about men and women. What is becoming increasingly recognized through the growing field of queer migration studies is that those who do not fall into heteronormative or cisnormative gender roles and identities encounter unique obstacles during their migration experience. From family structures and social networks to religious and cultural norms, gender and sexual identities can play a role in nearly every aspect of a person’s life. It is important to include the voices of these individuals in migration discourses, research, and policy-making.

1.1 Aim and Research Questions
There is a large gap in migration literature regarding LGBTQ migrants. These individuals participate in all aspects of migration yet are often left out of the discussion. The aim of this paper is to contribute to understandings of LGBTQ migration in terms of identity, inclusion, and exclusion. By adopting a queer perspective through the voices of LGBTQ refugees, the paper will also confront the heteronormativity of migration studies. These perspectives are necessary considerations for the implementation of migration policy that is inclusive and takes into account that many people do not fall into society’s heteronormative constructs.

The main research questions that lead this paper are:

- How does gender identification and sexual orientation impact the inclusion and exclusion of LGBTQ refugees in Sweden?
- How does gender identification and sexual orientation interact with other aspects of identity construction for LGBTQ refugees in Sweden?

1.2 Delimitations and Limitations
Due to the nature of a thesis project, where time and resources are somewhat limited, this project was conducted with several delimitations in place. Geographically, this research was conducted in Sweden with the intention of accepting informations from any Swedish community. However, due to the difficulty in reaching informants the project became focused on those located in a single city in Sweden. In addition, informants were only included if they were an asylum seeker or refugee who identified as LGBTQ. Finally, no one under the age of 18 was recruited because of ethical considerations.
This research has been limited by the inaccessibility of informants due to issues of privacy, safety, and vulnerability. For many reasons, LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees are often cautious about where and with whom they choose to reveal their identities. In accordance with this, many organizations working with these individuals are reluctant to allow outsiders to communicate with members. Finally, informants varied in many ways, such as their identifications as LGBTQ and their countries of origin, therefore this research cannot be considered generalizable to the experiences of others but is rather a small insight into the many perspectives that this population has to offer.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis
The eight chapters of this thesis have been developed with the intention of providing readers with the information necessary to understand how the aims of this project were developed, identified, inquired about, and analysed in a way that is clear and easy to follow. Following this outline of the structure, Chapter 1: Introduction, will be concluded. Chapter 2 will provide definitions to key terms, followed by a discussion on the contextual background relevant for this study in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 consists of a review of the literature through a discussion of the broader field of queer migration studies, the development of asylum legislation related to SOGI, and research perspectives in this field. The theoretical framework of Chapter 5 introduces the overarching themes of intersectionality, inclusion and exclusion, and identity. The methodology for this study including philosophical perspectives, important considerations, analytical methods, and practical aspects of data collection will be outlined Chapter 6. Finally, an analysis of the data collected is presented in Chapter 7 through an application of the theoretical framework to various excerpts from interviews with informants. Chapter 8 concludes the study and discusses the implications for future research.

2. DEFINITIONS
The purpose of this section is to define key terms which may be used throughout this paper and other relevant literature. Within discussions of LGBTQ topics, many of these terms are referred to with the assumption that readers are familiar with their usage. This may be due to the assumption that those seeking knowledge within LGBTQ topics are likely to have previous experience with engaging in discussions of these concepts. One goal of this thesis is to contribute different
perspectives where they appear to be underrepresented or not typically considered, and therefore it is necessary to anticipate that the terms in this section, as well as others that have not been included, may be unfamiliar to readers. Furthermore, many of these terms are not clearly or uniformly defined throughout the literature as their meanings have evolved and adapted to changing social, cultural, and political conditions. They should also not be assumed to be universal, as cultural understandings of the concepts that these terms encompass vary around the world (Lewis, 2016, p.25). They are mainly based in “Western” conceptualizations and are defined here to provide a clear understanding of their usage throughout this paper.

2.1 Sexual Orientation

In 2007 the *Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of International Human Rights Law in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*, hereafter referred to as the Yogyakarta Principles, was published by twenty-nine experts from twenty-five different countries. According to the document, sexual orientation refers to “each person’s capacity for profound emotional, affectional and sexual attraction to, and intimate and sexual relations with, individuals of a different gender or the same gender or more than one gender” (IJC, 2007).

2.2 Gender Identity

Understandings of gender identity are always being negotiated based on time and location as well as changes in political, societal, and cultural influences. For this paper, gender identity will be understood as “each person’s deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms” as outlined by the Yogyakarta Principles (IJC, 2007).

2.3 Queer

The term “queer” has been used as a derogatory categorization to delineate individuals as different, strange, peculiar, and so on, particularly in the case of those with same-sex attractions and/or gender non-conforming characteristics since as early as the 1910s (Kunzel, 2018). Since the end of the twentieth century it has seen a reclamation by the very communities it has been used against.
Defining queer presents a challenge because it has different meanings depending on how and by whom it is being used. According to the GLAAD (2016, p.6), an organization formally known as the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation but which is now referred to solely by its acronym, queer can simplistically be described as a term used by some people “whose sexual orientation is not exclusively heterosexual” as well as a term to describe gender identity or expression. Some prefer to use it as an all-encompassing term for anyone who identifies outside of heterosexual and cisgender constructs, particularly when making reference to the “queer community.” Others use it as an individual self-identification, often because they may not feel as if they fit into categories such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. Queer Theory has also emerged as an academic discipline which seeks to broaden understandings of sex, gender and sexuality (Kunzel, 2018; lisahunter, 2019).

Examples of the ways in which various organizations and institutions define queer are:

- “...an academic term that is inclusive of people who are not heterosexual - includes lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and trans people” (ILGA, 2015).
- “...a way of questioning dominant social ideas about how people should experience sexual, as well as other, relationships, how we should form families, express our gender, and so on” and “For some, being queer is a way of defining their gender identity and/or sexual orientation, while for others it offers an identity where one does not have to define one’s sexual orientation and/or gender” (RFSL, 2015).
- “An umbrella term which embraces a variety of sexual preferences, orientation, and habits of those who are not among the exclusively heterosexual and monogamous majority” (National LGBTQ Task Force, 2019).
- “…an identity, a theory about non-heteronormative sexuality, and a theoretical orientation for how identity is to be understood” (Nagoshi, Nagoshi, and Brzuzy, 2014, p.22).

When used in this paper, queer is considered an umbrella term for those who belong to any sexual minority and therefore fall outside of the categories of either heterosexual or cisgender, or both. This author would also like to acknowledge that while queer has become accepted as a reclaimed
term by many, there are still some who are uncomfortable with its usage within the LGBTQ community (GLAAD, 2016, p.6).

2.4 Transgender, Transsexual, and Trans

The use of these terms can be confusing for some as they have shifted over time in response to advancements in understandings of gender identity. “Transsexual” refers specifically to individuals who have medically (and permanently) transitioned or plan to through the use of hormones, surgeries, and other interventions while “transgender” is used as more of an umbrella term for anyone whose gender identity or expression does not match with their assigned sex including but not limited to: cross-dressing, polygender, genderqueer, androgyne, etc. (ILGA, 2015, p.8; GLAAD, 2016, p.10). Transgender is more commonly used, and the use of transsexual should only occur when it is preferred by the individual it is describing. Individuals may indicate that they are a “transgender male” or “transgender female” specifically.

“Trans” is commonly understood as a shorthand for any transgender identity although it is not often formally defined as its incorporation into common usage is somewhat recent and understandings of its meaning can vary from person to person. When talking with or about anyone who identifies as transgender/trans it is important to only use the pronouns they have indicated as their preference. If pronouns are unknown, use neutral pronouns such as “they” or “them” until the proper pronouns have been confirmed by the transgender individual.

2.5 LGBTQ

Various acronyms are used to represent individuals who fall outside of the cisnormative and heteronormative majority and no official international acronym exists. For this paper, LGBTQ will be used as it stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer. This has been chosen because the inclusion of queer means that most individuals who do not identify with the first four categories are still covered. However, it should also be acknowledged that there are additional identities that are considered non-cisnormative or -heteronormative and which are sometimes placed in the acronym (such as intersex or pansexual) but that will not be used here. For the purposes of this paper, LGBTQ is considered sufficient for encompassing the identities of the interviewees.
2.6 Non-Binary Gender Categories

Many of the categorisations within the queer community are based at least in part on the male/female binary, such as identifications as lesbian, gay, and bisexual, as well as identification by transgender individuals as either male or female (Monro, 2005, p.16). Those who do not identify within the gender binary system, however, may choose to identify themselves with gender non-conforming terms such as gender fluid, genderqueer, non-binary, or agender, to name a few. These terms represent a non-identification with being strictly male or female, or rather an identification as either falling somewhere in between, varying or shifting between them over time, or not identifying with gender at all.

In addition to self-identification outside of the gender binary, gender non-conformity can also be based on how outsiders perceive gender being performed by others. Gender non-conforming individuals can be perceived by others to dress, behave, and possess traits outside of the typical culturally-defined roles assigned to categories of masculine and feminine, which can result in negative responses from others regardless of actual sexual orientation or gender identification (Martin-Storey and August, 2016, p.86). For this paper, gender non-conforming will be used as an umbrella term for those who do not fall within traditional gender categories except where individuals have expressed a preference or self-identification with another term such as the ones listed previously.

It is important to note that gender non-conformity in this context does not include individuals who identify as intersex, which is a classification based on physiological characteristics such as genitals, sex hormones, chromosomes, and so on. Intersex individuals are born with variations in these biological characteristics which combine aspects of both female and male sexual anatomy (Monro, 2005, p.15).

2.7 Heteronormative and Cisnormative

Heteronormativity refers to the structuring of society and cultural norms around the implicit or explicit assumption of heterosexuality as the norm. This is often conveyed through subtle messaging that permeates many aspects of social life such as academia, the labour market, advertising and other forms of media, and so on. Conversely, it also sends the message that anything outside of heterosexuality is abnormal (Blackburn and Smith, 2010, p.625)
Cisnormativity works in the same way in that it assumes an individual’s gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth, positioning transgender identities as abnormal (Collier and Daniel, 2019). For example, statements which claim to apply to all women, often regarding topics such as menstruation or pregnancy, can be inherently exclusive of trans women regardless of the intent behind them.

3. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND
Sweden has a long-held global reputation for strong social democratic political values (Esping-Anderson, 2013, p.93). Characterized by an emphasis on multiculturalism, accessibility to welfare, and egalitarianism among many other things, many reference “Sweden exceptionalism” as a model of successful progressive governance (Dahlstedt and Neergaard, 2019, p.124). However, while many view the Swedish model as static, it has undergone many changes and evolved over the last few decades in response to international influences and the responding political climate. As for asylum policy in particular, it appeared that Sweden would remain committed to leading the way in humanitarian values up until the autumn of 2015, when it was announced that the “exceptional” Nordic country would transition from having the most generous asylum laws in Europe to abruptly restricting admission to the minimum requirement imposed by the European Union (Scarpa and Schierup, 2018, p.200). Whereas Sweden received nearly 163,000 applications for asylum in 2015 (more per capita than any other EU country), just one year later that number had dropped to just under 29,000 and has continued to drop every year since (Swedish Migration Agency, 2019). However, this decrease in asylum applications is also due in part to other factors such as a decrease in the number of people fleeing Syria.

Indeed, even before the “refugee crisis” of 2015 Sweden had made some notable rulings on asylum applications bringing into question whether or not Sweden really has been the haven for refugees that many in the international sphere believe it to be. Between the period of 1959 to 2017 Sweden was found in 60 judgements out of 150 cases brought before the European Court of Human Rights that it had violated at least one article of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR, 2018). The most common of these violations have been the right to a fair trial (Article 6), the prohibition of torture (Article 3), and the right to respect for private and family life (Article 8). Other articles have been found to be violated in three or fewer cases.
Furthermore, some have argued that the instances in which the Court ruled that the Sweden was not in violation of the Convention were based on questionable arguments of application of the Convention. Spijkerboer (2018) highlights a few of these cases including one that occurred in 2012 in which a Yemeni woman and her children were denied asylum after fleeing forced marriages, domestic abuse, fears of honour killings for attempting to leave their marriages, unsuccessful attempts at seeking divorce, and other oppressive circumstances. The European Court of Human Rights supported Sweden’s ruling based on assumptions that while the women were unable to protect themselves, there were other men in the family potentially capable of protecting them (Spijkerboer, 2018). One judge in particular was not in agreement with this ruling, arguing that the authorities were “demanding too much” of the vulnerable women in this case (A.A. and others v Sweden, 2012). A similar ruling occurred in R.W. v. Sweden (2015). Other cases include rulings that threats of female genital mutilation are not included as grounds for asylum, particularly in countries where female genital mutilation has been banned by law despite evidence that it still occurs somewhat frequently (Collins and Akaziebie v. Sweden, 2007; R.W. and others v. Sweden, 2012), as well as the case of a gay man who was expected by the court to “live discreetly and not reveal his sexual orientation” for a period of four months while awaiting a decision on family reunification (M.E. v Sweden, 2014). It is important to recognize that these examples only come from cases that reached the European Court on Human Rights due to applicants having knowledge of and access to resources for appealing decisions made by the Migration Board. It is likely that there are more violations or questionable judgements that have not been appealed and unfortunately, access to these cases is limited.

As for asylum regarding LGBTQ individuals in particular, the Aliens Act introduced in 2005 and implemented in 2006 specifically indicates that “gender, sexual orientation, or other membership of a particular social group” (Sweden: Aliens Act, 2005, p.3) are grounds for asylum, among other reasons, if a person is unable or unwilling to gain protection in their country of origin. This came several years before both the UNHCR Guidance Note on Refugee Claims Relating to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity of 2008 and the EU Qualifications Directive of 2011, which outlined the qualifications for international protection within member states and recognized in writing the validity of sexual and gender identity as categories of persecution. Indeed, Sweden has put forth legislation in favour of LGBTQ rights quite often ahead of most other countries. Same-sex partnerships have been legally recognized since 1995 and in surveys conducted
throughout Europe over the last decade, Sweden produces some of the highest proportions of respondents expressing acceptance of homosexuality, often only falling below the Netherlands (European Social Survey, 2013, p.16; Smith, Son, and Kim, 2014).

4. LITERATURE REVIEW
This chapter will provide a concise overview of the literature regarding this topic in order to demonstrate why it has developed as an important topic of study, how it has been approached by other researchers, and how this project builds on previous studies to contribute to knowledge production in this field. In addition, this will provide the reader with an understanding as to how this area of study has been approached and the research used to develop the main objectives of this project. The review will begin with a brief description of how the area of queer migration studies developed out of other areas of study, followed by a discussion on the field itself. There will then be a discussion on research regarding LGBTQ refugees highlighting the various perspectives taken by researchers in the field.

4.1 Queer Migration Studies
While “gender” has been included as a variable of study in migration research for decades, it is generally used in reference to women as a homogenous group and their position relative to men (Manalansan, 2006, p.224). Migration and gender are often discussed in terms of gender inequality, family reunification, marriage, labour market incorporation and other topics situated within and reinforcing heteronormative constructs with little discussion of participation by LGBTQ individuals (Luibhéid, 2004). That’s not to say that the inclusion of gender in migration studies is not useful, as it has provided important insights into the experiences of migrant women as well as gender as a factor in multiple variables related to migration. However, it wasn’t until the late 1980s and early 1990s that non-heteronormative sexuality began to find its place in academia, and in migration research in particular, as feminism adopted intersectionality from Critical Race Theory and the AIDS pandemic served as a catalyst for the rise in lesbian and gay activism (Manalansan, 2006; Chávez, 2013). The globalisation of the spread of AIDS in particular highlighted the need for a greater understanding of sexuality beyond basic western conceptualizations of gay and lesbian as well as the role of sexuality in global processes such as immigration, tourism, and so on (Manalansan, 2006, p.229).
Through the emergence of lesbian and gay studies, which later transitioned into the more inclusive queer studies, LGBTQ migrants have increasingly become included in migration research and discourse. Chávez (2013, p.6) defines queer migration politics as “activism that seeks to challenge normative, inclusionary perspectives at the intersection of queer rights and justice and immigration rights and justice.” This is easily transferred into queer migration studies where research, which can be argued is also a form of activism, challenges notions of migrant experiences to include non-heteronormative and cisnormative perspectives. Luibhéid (2008, p.169), describes queer migration as “at once a set of grounded processes involving heterogeneous social groups and a series of theoretical and social justice questions that implicate but extend beyond migration and sexuality strictly defined, and that refuse to attach to bodies in any strictly identitarian manner — in order to challenge and reconfigure the dominant frameworks.” Like gender, race, class and so on, sexuality is a dimension of power which interacts with various aspects of the migrant experience (Luibhéid, 2004, p.232). Finally, Murray (2014) takes the perspective that:

Queer migration scholarship critically engages hetero- and homonormative arrangements of borders, bodies, desires and movements which are generally upheld by the bureaucratic institutions of the neo-liberal nation-state and capitalist discourses such as mainstream media and advertising.

Queer migration studies has developed over the last two decades to explore how LGBTQ identities interact with various topics related to migration such as citizenship, borders, human rights, discrimination, diasporic communities, nationalism, asylum and so on. The body of work related to this field is still relatively small but continuously growing as interest in these perspectives has increased with changing political climates and societal attitudes towards the LGBTQ community.

4.2 The Evolution of SOGI Asylum Legislation

Outlining a history of queer asylum policies is somewhat difficult. The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees provided a definition of the term “refugee” which did not explicitly mention sexual orientation or gender identity as one of the five grounds for asylum but rather declared that being persecuted for “membership of a particular social group” could constitute sufficient grounds (UN General Assembly, 1951, p.152). The ambiguity of this
particular phrase left it up to member states to determine whether asylum claims based on sexual orientation or gender identity were covered by the convention. It appears that the Netherlands was the first country in 1981 to establish that persecution based on sexuality could constitute a particular social group entitled to asylum, though there may have been cases prior to this in other countries that were not made available to the public (Gartner, 2015; Hertoghs, and Schinkel, 2018). Other UN member states slowly made similar policy decisions over the course of the next few decades, often due to the outcomes of court cases involving LGBTQ asylum claims. Recognizing the need for a more concise understanding of refugee policy, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) clarified the legal interpretation of “membership of a particular social group” in 2002 as:

A particular social group is a group of persons who share a common characteristic other than their risk of being persecuted, or who are perceived as a group by society. The characteristic will often be one which is innate, unchangeable, or which is otherwise fundamental to identity, conscience or the exercise of one’s human rights. This definition includes characteristics which are historical and therefore cannot be changed, and those which, though it is possible to change them, ought not to be required to be changed because they are so closely linked to the identity of the person or are an expression of fundamental human rights. (UNHCR, 2002, p.3).

While this definition appears as if it would be useful in arguing cases of queer asylum, a closer look at the assertion that certain characteristics will be static and unchanging does not fit well with modern conceptualizations of gender and sexuality as fluid and socially constructed (Miller, 2017). Further clarification in regard to LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees was imperative. In 2008, the UNHCR published the UNHCR Guidance Note on Refugee Claims Relating to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, hereafter referred to as “the Guidance Note”, which addressed the various challenges faced by member states in determining how to assess claims of asylum by LGBTQ individuals. Some topics covered by this document are: definitions of various terms such as “sexual orientation” and “gender identity”, understanding that claimants may lack evidence of their LGBTQ identity, the prevalence of forced marriages or marriages used to conceal an LGBTQ identity, and other topics which can complicate the assessment of an asylum application. In addition, the UNHCR took a stance that LGBTQ individuals are victims of persecution in some
parts of the world, often subjecting them to physical and sexual violence, and that such persecution can constitute grounds for seeking asylum.

Determining both the credibility of applicants as LGBTQ as well as a “well-founded fear of persecution” based on their sexual orientation or gender identity has been another obstacle for receiving countries. The Guidance Note of 2008 specifically states that applicants should be given the benefit of the doubt when it comes to claims of sexual orientation or gender identity, even where they are unable to provide evidence of such or documented activities in their country of origin (UNHCR, 2008). Additionally, authorities are instructed to avoid reliance on LGBTQ stereotypes, inappropriate lines of questioning regarding sexual experiences, and assumptions that relationships (such as heterosexual marriages) are indicators of sexual preference. Despite this, instances of authorities engaging in these exact practices, as well as other controversial methods, have been increasingly documented in the last decade. In many cases, methods used to determine the legitimacy of claimants reduce queer identities to mere physical attraction. One such example is the sexual arousal tests conducted by Czech authorities up until 2010 (Gartner, 2015). Other examples include reports of invasive and outright degrading lines of questioning such as that revealed by a report in the United Kingdom where immigration officials asked such questions as “Did you put your penis into x's backside?”, “What is it about men's backsides that attracts you?”, “When x was penetrating you, did you have an erection?” and “Why did you use a condom?” (Day, 2014; Taylor, and Townsend, 2014). In an in-depth report published by a United Kingdom-based organization called Stonewall, those interviewed about their experiences seeking asylum reported questioning and practices that reflected outdated notions of sexual orientation and gender identity as well as stereotyping and a lack of awareness of within-group diversity (Bachman, 2016, p.25).

According to Berg and Millbank (2009), consistency between accounts of SOGI and related experiences during various stages of the interview process is paramount to the outcomes of cases of LGBTQ asylum seekers. What differentiates this from the importance of consistency for non-LGBTQ claimants is that credibility can be questioned at multiple stages: both as to whether or not certain events actually occurred as well as the legitimacy of belonging the “particular social group” in question. While ethnic or political group membership is often demonstrated in more public ways, sexual orientation and gender identity can be much more difficult to prove. For many, the notion of a public LGBTQ identity is an unfamiliar, Western concept imposed on cultures where there is no framework in place for discussing variations in one’s sexual identity. Because of
this, it can be extremely difficult for an LGBTQ asylum seeker to relinquish their desire to hide their identity in order seek out the protection or support of authorities in their new host country (Shidlo and Ahola, 2013).

As more studies looking into the experiences of LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees have been published, the shortcomings and ethical violations occurring throughout the EU and at various stages of the asylum process have been exposed prompting various responses from policymakers, activists, international organizations, and others interested in the protection of LGBTQ rights. Improvements that come as a result of these publications is precisely why research fields like queer migration studies are important.

4.3 Conducting Research with LGBTQ Asylum Seekers and Refugees
While LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees belong to a growing global refugee community, they can have experiences before, during, and after seeking asylum specifically related to their gender identity or sexual orientation. In their countries of origin, LGBTQ asylum seekers typically report traumatic experiences of violence and abuse, exclusion from public services, and an infringement on their freedom of assembly, speech, or association based on their sexual orientation or gender identity (Beyrer, 2014; Shidlo and Ahola, 2013). Once they reach their country of destination, they can find themselves vulnerable to intrusive inquiries into their sexual histories, harassment by staff and other detainees in detention centres, and mental health deterioration as a result of their new situation (Bachman, 2016). These experiences can have a significant impact on feelings of safety and trust of authorities or peers.

Much of the research on the experiences of this group are conducted through qualitative interviews occurring after they have applied for asylum and either received a decision or have been waiting a significant amount of time for one. These studies typically focus on narrative accounts of trauma and persecution, mental health needs, and individual experiences within the asylum process. While these topics don’t explicitly cover the same research questions as this paper, they are relevant for approaching a holistic understanding of the way LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees navigate the specific challenges of being a part of a sexual minority group. This will also serve to clarify how this paper will build on existing research.

The field of psychology has taken a particular interest in the mental health consequences of the trauma and hardships experienced throughout the lives of LGBTQ refugees, producing a
large portion of the research on this community. According to Shidlo and Ahola (2013, p.9), histories of abuse, harassment, discrimination, and forced marriage, to name a few, contribute to common diagnoses among LGBTQ forced migrants of “recurrent depression, dissociative disorders, panic disorder, generalised anxiety disorder, social anxiety, traumatic brain injury and substance abuse” as well as two types of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These issues are often compounded by a lack of support network, particularly an absence of supportive family members, that individuals can turn to once their queer identity is no longer concealed.

In addition to a lack of recognition and acceptance by family members, the various ethnic, religious, or other communities with which they identify are also often contributors to the adversity faced by queer asylum seekers and refugees. As a result of these experiences of rejection, LGBTQ migrants may be resistant to seeking out inclusion in the LGBTQ community or be unaware that such a social support network even exists. Not only can this leave them feeling isolated, but it may lead adjudicators to further question their authenticity and negatively affect their claims of asylum (Shidlo and Ahola, 2013, p.10). It is this point that is often mentioned in research but rarely placed as the main focus of studies in this field. In recognizing the impact of social support networks, inclusion, and exclusion in migrant experiences, this paper will focus on how LGBTQ refugees experience them in Sweden.

Furthermore, a large portion of the studies that have focused on queer migrants have been conducted in the United States (see: Soloman, 2005; Cheney et al., 2017; Hopkinson et al., 2017) and Canada (see: Gosine, 2008; Lee, and Brotman, 2011; Murray, 2014), with a much smaller proportion coming from countries in Europe such as the Netherlands (Hertoghs and Schinkel, 2018; Jansen, 2019). For Sweden in particular there are very few studies, though interest has been growing in recent years, particularly among students completing thesis projects similar to this one. This project attempts to encourage the inclusion of data from broader perspectives by conducting research in a location that may be considered much different from where research in this field typically comes from.

5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
This section will outline the theoretical perspectives which will guide the examination of data collected for this study. It will begin with a discussion of intersectionality which will serve as an overarching critical lens as opposed to an analytic framework. The concept of identity will then be
presented to provide an understanding of how it will be conceptualised and analysed for this study. Finally, a framework for assessing experiences of inclusion and exclusion will be presented.

5.1 Identity

The greatest challenge within the identity construct is attempting to actually define “identity.” From Augustine and the ancient Greek philosophers, to James, Freud, and the late twentieth century rise in writings on individualism by writers such as Giddens and Beck, conceptualizations of the Self and what it means to “know thyself” have been evolving throughout much of human history (Lemert, 2011). The concept of identity remains highly contested and definitions tend to be dependent on the discipline, institution, or even individual providing their perspective. In addition, there are many perspectives on how to frame conceptualizations of identity formation, such as individual versus group (collective) identity constructions. Providing an exact definition of identity would be a large undertaking, so rather than attempting to do so, this section will instead present characteristics of identity perspectives that will provide the framework for the use of the identity construct in this paper.

One’s personal identity, as a larger aspect of their being, is understood as a cumulative incorporation of many smaller, more specific identities that individuals can hold at any given time, and which are “revisable” depending on geographic location, age, relationships, and other life circumstances (Chafee, 2011, p.105). Identities can also be visible or concealable, which can have implications for inclusion, exclusion, prejudice, etc. (Nagoshi, Nagoshi, and Brzuzy, 2014, p.46). Identity can also be driven by reflexivity. As Chafee (2011, p.101) puts it,

Identity relies on definitions of the self, definitions that we acquire through reflexive exchange with other people, various cultures, and ourselves . . . these views of ourselves come to actually constitute identity when they are filtered back to us through the outside world.

In addition, narrative perspectives of identity emphasize “the stories people construct and tell about themselves to define who they are for themselves and others” McAdams, Josselson, and Lieblich, (2006, p.4). In addition, these narratives are both descriptive and prescriptive; descriptive in the way we present ourselves through our stories and prescriptive in that these presentations are often influenced by how we expect those descriptions to be evaluated by others (Sandvik, 2018).
Identities are not only shaped by who people believe they are, but also by who they believe they should be and who they want to be. In addition, the way we present ourselves reflects the ways we want to be seen by others.

Considering all of these characteristics, identity can be understood as fluid and developing continuously over time. This conceptualization of identity also rejects aspects of social constructivism that focus on performativity in relation to socially imposed identity constructs. An example of this is the understanding that transgender identities are not merely based in the performance of gender through appearance or gendered behaviours, but the embodiment of gender as well (Nagoshi, Nagoshi, and Brzuzy, 2014, p.116). The perspective here is that social constructivism has a large amount of explanatory, or descriptive power, but is not entirely sufficient for explaining the personalization of identity. Another example of this is in concepts of ethnic identity. Ethnic categorizations, such as “Mexican-American”, may be socially constructed terms with culturally significant meanings, but the diversity of individual experiences within these categorizations go beyond the explanatory power of social constructivism. Models of social constructivism within identity literature focus heavily on single categorizations, lacking the necessary component of within-group diversity and therefore, intersectionality (Sherry et al, 2010). My interpretations of social constructionism are further explained Chapter 6, section 2 (Philosophical Perspectives).

Identities not only serve as ways to define ourselves, but can also be motivated by their contributions to self-esteem, meaning, continuity, distinctiveness, efficacy, and belonging (Vignoles et al., 2006). According to multiple studies on identity motives by Vignoles et al. (2006), identities that were perceived as contributing to or providing a greater sense of those six variables were rated as more central to the identity construction of those surveyed. Subsequently, increased feelings of these core motives strengthened identity associations, while threats to them can lead to a distancing from aspects of identity as a protective mechanism. These are considered a powerful basis for how aspects of our identities are constructed and maintained.

Finally, intersectionality and identity are inextricably linked, meaning that individuals or groups cannot be simply reduced to a single identity label, or assumed to be representative of that label as their experience is influenced by the intersections of other aspects of identity (Lewis, 2016, p.19). Identities interact in ways that can be both confirming as well as conflicting. The conflict between religious identity and LGBTQ identities, for example, is culturally relevant considering
the implications for both LGBTQ individuals who have been rejected by religion or themselves chose to reject it, and those who maintain a dual religious and LGBTQ identity. Very few have attempted to place the study of this interaction at the focus, but some examples exist such as Yip (2002), Sherry, et al., (2010), and Halbertal and Koren (2013). As a result of conflict, individuals may utilize one of three strategies: integration of identities so that they can be held concurrently, compartmentalization of separately manageable, but incompatible identities, or the eventual rejection of one of the identities to accommodate the other (Wood and Conley, 2013, p.103). These strategies are determined by a number of forces, including those cited above such as motives and reflexivity.

While this study emphasizes LGBTQ identities as the focal point, it is not assumed that LGBTQ identities are held, navigated, or experienced in the same way. Rather, the analysis of identity will explore how various facets of one’s identity are navigated in relation to LGBTQ identities.

5.2 Inclusion and Exclusion
Throughout the literature, multidisciplinary approaches to conceptualising social inclusion, and subsequently exclusion, vary from considerations of socioeconomic factors, psychosocial behaviours, government policies and procedures, and so on. According to Gingrich and Lightman (2014, p.99), the main aspects of social inclusion and exclusion that feature prominently throughout the literature are that they are context-dependent, structural, relational, multidimensional, and relative. The context in which they are being discussed influences how they are operationalized, contributing to a large amount of variability and inconsistency. Through a review of many different conceptualizations of social inclusion and exclusion, five key components were identified as consistently implicated in the process and subsequent outcomes of inclusion and exclusion: accessibility of information, belonging, physical or geographical boundaries, stigmatisation, and social capital. While none of these components hold full explanatory power on its own, together they form a powerful framework for understanding processes of inclusion and exclusion as well as outcomes. They will be explained here and further analysed in Chapter 7.

Access to information is a broad category, and can include information regarding migration processes, individual rights, navigating new social environments, how to utilize social services,
employment and educational opportunities, and many other forms of information that is useful to newcomers (Caidi and Allard, 2005). In addition, access to information can also refer to a person’s ability to consume the information provided. For example, a lack of literacy or translation services may mean that information that is physically accessible remains unavailable for consumption. Furthermore, the digitalisation of information has been implicated in concerns of a “digital divide” where some are privileged with greater access to information via technology than others (Caidi and Allard, 2005, p.315). Information required to navigate migration processes can take different forms throughout various stages and are tailored to individual differences in need and ability. Furthermore, information can be provided by both the state as well as other migrants, creating even greater variability in what newcomers have access to. Therefore, access to information (or a lack thereof) can contribute inclusion and exclusion in various ways.

*Belonging* is a concept that can be considered just as difficult to conceptualise as inclusion and exclusion. Belonging can be a sentiment or attachment to people and places, or based on constructions of insider/outsider status through policies, behaviours, and even physical barriers that are often fixed within power relations (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Fredericks, 2010). According to a belongingness thesis developed by Baumeister and Leary (1995, p.497), belonging is a fundamental human motivation based on the notion that “human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships.” Through attempts to seek these bonds, newcomers can either find greater inclusion or be subjected to forms of exclusion that challenge feelings of belonging. This motivation is implicated in the pursuit of inclusion by newcomers as well as the impact that subsequent exclusion can have.

In direct relation to belonging, *physical and geographical boundaries* can be used to constitute who is allowed in and who should be kept out. They can also be used to signify difference, or a notion of “us” versus “them.” These boundaries can take the form of large, political boundaries such as borders, socioeconomically structured housing practices, or the organization of public space (Allman, 2013). These structures, whether actual physical barriers or concepts that are reinforced through social and cultural practices, are typically more exclusionary than inclusionary, in that they serve to keep others out of certain places (Allman, 2013, p.2). At the local level, segregation based on socioeconomic factors can perpetuate the marginalization of groups of people or geographical areas, preventing access to mainstream society (Davies, 2005).
Difference in geographical location can have a significant influence on access to employment, inclusive social services, experiences of harassment, and the ability to develop support networks (Spicer, 2008). More extreme forms of housing practices regarding migrants in particular such as detention centres can further limit access to health care, educational opportunities, language support, and many other services vital to the integration process (Davidson and Carr, 2010).

*Stigmatisation* is not only a mechanism used to reinforce forms of inclusion and exclusion, but is within itself a form of inclusion and exclusion. Kurzban & Leary (2001, p.187) conceptualize stigmatized individuals to be “systematically excluded from particular sorts of social interactions because they possess a particular characteristic or are a member of a particular group” such as members of the queer community, various racial and ethnic groups, the mentally ill, physically and mentally disabled individuals, and so on. Many contend that the utilisation of stigma is functional, universal, and culturally produced through the reinforcement of power structures (Allman, 2013, p.6). Migrant communities can face stigmatization based on differences such as cultural practices, appearance, and language abilities which in turn may limit their inclusion in mainstream society.

*Social capital* is a much broader concept that can be both a tool and a by-product of social inclusion. Lin (2001, p.35) defines social capital as “resources embedded in a social structure which are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions.” In other words, when communities, networks, or any other form of social structure are available (via inclusion), they can be utilised to facilitate access to resources that are otherwise not easily attained. New arrivals may seek out communities with similar backgrounds, such as ethnic or religious groups, as a way of creating potential networks for economic or social support. This access to resources or support networks can lead to further inclusion into aspects of mainstream society such as the labour market and social services. In addition, social support networks are considered a strong protective factor against stress disorders such as PTSD (Brewin, Andrews, and Valentine, 2000; Schnurr, Lunney, and Sengupta, 2004). These are important considerations as psychological well-being can both be impacted by as well as play a role in various forms of inclusion and exclusion.

Experiences of inclusion and exclusion will be examined from the perspectives of LGBTQ refugees and analysed through these five components in order to gain a better understanding of how these experiences can be impacted by sexual orientation or gender identity.
6. METHODOLOGY
This chapter will outline the strategies of inquiry used for this research project through explanations of the “skills, assumptions, and practices” employed and how all of these aspects of the project are shaped through the theoretical paradigms held by the researcher (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017, p.21). Simplistically, a methodology is “the principles of our inquiry and how inquiry should proceed.” (Schwandt, 2007, p.190 cited in Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba, 2017, p.117). Presenting these aspects of research are important for providing transparency in how findings are reached so that questions of practices, interpretations, biases, and so on may be answered.

6.1 Research Design
A qualitative approach has been determined to be the most suitable method for achieving the goals of this research project. The interpretation of a qualitative approach based on a definition by Creswell and Poth (2017, p.37) is as follows: the collection of complex data, guided by the theoretical and experiential perspectives of the researcher, stemming from the placement of the researcher in a field setting where people, places and phenomena interact as they would naturally. This is seen as appropriate for this subject due to a number of factors, the most obvious being that obtaining in-depth information about the experiences of an extremely vulnerable and marginalized group requires a more open-ended and personalized line of inquiry than traditional survey methods can offer. Furthermore, access to informants is limited and therefore it is necessary to gather as much information as possible from a small sample as opposed to attempting to gather a larger quantity of shorter responses. Finally, this technique is appropriate where interviewees may be less forthcoming with information and it is therefore necessary for the researcher to encourage them to elaborate on their responses. The field setting is extremely important for ensuring that informants feel comfortable and are likely to build trust in the researcher. The data is then typically analysed through an inductive approach. Though the interviews are guided by the two overarching themes of inclusion/exclusion and identity, no preconceived expectations of how interviewees respond to those themes are established. The final analysis is guided by topics that emerge from the information interviewees choose to share.

The project is considered a phenomenological study. It adheres to the following procedure for phenomenological inquiry: determine the phenomenon of interest, establish philosophical
assumptions (described in the following section), collect data from individuals familiar with the phenomenon, identify significant excerpts of the data through horizontalization, cluster themes together, and finally, present the findings (Creswell, 2007). In this case the phenomena of interest are the concepts of identity and inclusion/exclusion through the perspectives of LGBTQ refugees in Sweden.

6.2 Philosophical Perspectives

Important considerations for the way that my own perspectives as a researcher have influenced this project must be put forth so that readers can make assessments on how this has potentially influenced the study. As the researcher, I not only construct and guide the interview process but also exercise interpretive power as the sole analyst of the data (Denzin, and Lincoln, 2017, p.589).

My research operates within a mix of critical and constructionist perspectives. I draw from the views of critical theorists in my understanding of the world as based on power structures resulting in intersectional hierarchies of privilege and oppression, while also holding constructivist assumptions that experiences and interactions construct the way we interpret meaning, knowledge, and perceived reality (Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba, 2017). I believe that it is important as a researcher to acknowledge my own position within power structures. In addition, I view research as historically situated in that the past is connected to and therefore is crucial in producing the present. I lean more towards critical research aims of empowerment, advocacy, and challenging social structures, as demonstrated by my intention of producing research that gives a voice to a marginalised group. However, many studies that are more grounded in critical theory than mine aim for research outcomes such as calls to action and generating solutions to the problems being addressed. As Creswell and Poth (2018, p.32) put it, critical theory, among other similar interpretive frameworks, values research on which one can “base calls for action on documented struggles.” I consider it incredibly important for research to not just identify and critique societal problems but also propose solutions to those problems, however, this does not characterize the entirety of my desired research outcomes.

My epistemological perspective as influenced by social constructionism is the acknowledgement that the terms and concepts we use to describe ourselves, particularly those embedded in conceptualizations of identity, are constructed through our social interactions and cultural foundations (Jupp, 2006, p.39). I make this important distinction between epistemic and
ontological applications of social constructionism in that I acknowledge the “constructive nature of descriptions, rather than the entities that (according to descriptions) exist beyond them” (Edwards, 1997, p.48). For example, approaching concepts of gender and race as socially constructed challenges essentialist assumptions about their nature. This allows us to consider how conceptualizations of such categories reflect history, societal values, and responses to changes over time. However, my applications of social constructionism reach only as far as conceptualizations of terms. This is due to the importance of recognizing that while gender identity, for example, may be based in socially constructed understandings of what it means to be feminine or masculine, personal identification as a specific gender (or no gender at all) is self-imposed and self-constructed, a perspective that is important for the inclusivity of trans identities (Nagoshi, Nagoshi, and Brzuzy, 2014, p.116).

Social constructionism within phenomenological studies can serve to encourage researchers to go beyond just how informants describe their experiences and delve deeper into why informants describe their experiences a certain way through inquiries into implicated historical and cultural contexts (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p.24). Furthermore, social constructionist researchers consider how their own interpretations of the data are also influenced by historical and cultural contexts specific to them.

6.3 Reflexivity: Role of the Researcher

In addition to outlining my philosophical leanings, it is important to also reflect on how my background, worldview, and personal identifications inform my research as well as interact with it (Runswick-Cole, 2011, p.91). I consider these factors to be of great significance when conducting research. A researcher with a background that is different from mine in various aspects, such as race or ethnicity, cultural upbringing, educational background, or perhaps positioning within Swedish society may obtain different data as well as have different interpretations of the data in a qualitative study. I consider my educational background in psychology, for example, to have influenced my understanding of and the value I place on considerations such as these.

My interest in this subject stems primarily from my own queer identification, as is common among researchers who examine queer perspectives. This can be beneficial in qualitative studies because it places researchers at a slight advantage for building trust with interviewees who may be less trusting of anyone in a position of power due to past experiences. For example, as a member
of the LGBTQ community, I have the ability to connect with interviewees through shared understandings and experiences related to belonging to a sexual minority group. Some refer to this as an “insider researcher position” (Runswick-Cole, 2011, p.92). This connection occurs across various types of identity within research and can be more salient in some than others. On her experience of sharing both a racial and gender identification with interview subjects, Johnson-Bailey (1999, p.669) remarks that this establishes “fewer margins to mitigate” and describes the resulting environment as becoming “electrifying and intimate.” On the other hand, some studies suggest that differences between researchers and informants can also be beneficial, as they could be more forthcoming on information they expect to not be fully understood by the researcher (Christoffersen, 2018, p.417). Finally, the LGBTQ identification of informants intersects with other identities that I may not have in common with them, so merely connecting as a queer person does not automatically negate my positioning within the researcher-subject power dynamic.

Moreover, as a white, cisgender woman I must consider that interviewees, who come from several different ethnic and racial backgrounds, will receive me in different ways based on their own experiences of oppression. In addition, I acknowledge that migrating from the United States through a student visa places me in a privileged position in relation to the individuals recruited for this project. This does, however, also serve to separate me from the Swedish population, which could potentially encourage interviewees to be more honest with their critiques of their experiences in Sweden. Finally, I must recognize that the construction of my own identity in these aspects has occurred in a cultural context that differs from that of the interviewees. Our understandings of queerness and gender, for example, were shaped by these contexts. Recognising my insider/outsider status allows me to critically examine my position as a researcher as well as build trust with informants (Christoffersen, 2018)

6.4 Semi-Structured Interviews
Keeping in line with the phenomenological approach mentioned above, where general themes guide the line of inquiry but the interviewees are encouraged to decide how those themes will be interpreted, a semi-structured guide of interview questions was constructed. The benefit of using a semi-structured interview guide is that it allows for the answers to questions to be open-ended so interviewees can choose to elaborate where they feel is most important. Their answers are less influenced by the questions being too specific or narrow. However, an interview guide can also
serve to keep the interview on track when interviewees trail off or start discussing things that are less relevant for the study. The guide was structured by the two larger themes mentioned previously. Within each theme were nine to ten open-ended lines of inquiry developed to aid in gathering as much data as possible. Examples of questions include: “Are you involved in any groups or social activities in Sweden?” and “What do you consider important aspects of your identity?”. This allowed for interviewees to interpret the questions based on their worldview and offer information that seemed relevant to them. This also avoided asking questions that were too specific, such as “Do you consider being a refugee an important part of your identity?” which could lead them to answer in ways that they wouldn’t have otherwise. Naturally, the order of questions was altered depending on the flow of topics, and some questions were not even asked as they had been answered alongside responses to earlier inquiries.

Despite attempts to avoid influencing responses, it is important to recognize that researchers always play a role in the interview process and despite the best efforts to remain neutral, interviewees may respond to this differently. Denzin, and Lincoln (2017) refer to the “asymmetrical power relation of the interview” as an inevitable dynamic of interview settings, where researchers are inherently in positions of power. This project is no exception. However, attempts were made to mediate this effect through measures such as allowing the informants to choose the location of the interview and keeping the dialogue as conversational as possible.

Informants were provided with options as to where the interview would be held and chose according to what felt most comfortable for them. Privacy was of greatest concern as the topics of discussion were deeply personal and could potentially involve trauma and/or abuse. The first informant elected to be interviewed in his home. This was due to a combination of wanting to be somewhere comfortable, busy schedules, and trust in the researcher as we had previously met one time in a casual setting with mutual friends before this project had come to fruition. The second interview was conducted in a private room that had been reserved at a university. This setting felt most comfortable, as well as convenient, to the interviewee who is himself a student.

Finally, participant observations during the interview played a small, yet important role in the interview process. Observations are particularly important in field settings that consider the effects that outside or third-party influences can have on interview responses. In addition, they provide context for the verbal accounts given by interviewees (Bryman, 2016, p.492). For example, interviews conducted with groups or in public settings may be subject to environmental
conditions, sensory stimulation, changes in comfort level and other interruptions. While this study does not include participant observation outside of the interview in the way an ethnographic study would, observations made by the researcher played a role in adjusting how the interview was conducted. In particular, body language and tone of voice were given special attention to recognise how comfortable the interviewees appeared during discussions of various topics. There will occasionally be comments throughout the analysis where mention of these observations, such as emotional reactions to certain topics, will be included to provide a clearer image of the nature of the data being presented.

6.4.1 Data Recording
Interviews were recorded with permission of the interviewees using two devices, a private computer and a private mobile phone, to ensure that the interview was properly captured. Upon assessment of the recording quality, one recording was deleted and the other was saved for transcription. The recordings were then securely transferred to a service provided by the university where they could be safely stored. Some notes were taken during the interviews, but the interviews were transcribed in their entirety verbatim at a later date. Transcriptions do not contain any personally identifying information. Upon successful completion of this project, all recordings will be permanently deleted.

6.5 Sample Size: Challenges to Recruitment
One particular challenge for this project was establishing contact with potential informants. Organizations all over Sweden known to be working with LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees, as well as organizations working with asylum seekers and refugees more generally, were contacted with inquiries as to the possibility of informing members of this project. Most of these organizations did not respond at all, and those that did either suggested contacting a different organization or claimed they would “forward the message to their members.” None of the individuals involved in this study were recruited as a result of this. Word-of-mouth was the only successful method in recruiting interviewees. Due to this challenge, combined with the time constraints associated with a thesis project, a decision was made to move forward with completing the project despite the particularly small sample of informants. However, it is the view of this researcher that a sufficient amount of data was gathered from these interviews to justify this
decision. With that in mind, it is important to acknowledge that with a study of this nature, the data should be regarded as contributing additional perspectives to knowledge that has already been gathered in this field, and it is not considered to be entirely representative of, or generalizable to, the larger population as a whole.

6.5.1 Sample Profiles

As mentioned above, only two individuals were interviewed for this study. Initially, attempts were made to contact potential interviewees through various organizations they were expected to be involved in. Although this was unsuccessful, information about the study circulated through the researcher’s social circle and contacts were made through mutual acquaintances. This is not considered a “snowball” method, however, as each informant was recruited separately and they did not provide further contacts that led to interviews (Bryman, 2016, p.188). Only individuals over the age of eighteen who identified as LGBTQ and had applied for asylum in Sweden were considered. The two individuals who were interviewed for this project are as follows:

**Interviewee 1**

Pseudonym: Jarek

Preferred Pronouns: He/Him or they/them

Time in Sweden: Approximately four years

Asylum Claim: Persecution based on gender identity as a transgender man

**Interviewee 2**

Pseudonym: Ahmed

Preferred Pronouns: He/Him

Time in Sweden: Five years

Asylum Claim: Religious, political, and sexual orientation persecution as a gay man

In line with recent privacy regulations, any identifying information that may allow others to distinguish the interviewees has been omitted. Some of the excerpts used in the analysis contained
this information, such as the interviewee’s country of origin, in which case the information has been redacted.

6.6 Data Analysis

There are many ways in which researchers approach phenomenological data, with some being based on specific step-by-step procedures and others taking a much looser approach. I have chosen to analyse my data based on the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach. Applications of this approach vary from study to study, but the basic guidelines are typically quite consistent. I have chosen to refer to the method described by Smith and Osborn, (2004, p.66) as a guideline for this project, though I did not follow each of their steps exactly.

The length of the first interview was one hour and forty minutes while the second interview was approximately two hours. Therefore, it took a considerable amount of time to complete the transcriptions. Both interviewees were quite proficient English speakers, despite English not being the native language of either of them. Once I was done transcribing, I could begin working through the IPA process with each interview. The initial step in analysing in-depth interviews is to simply read through the transcriptions in their entirety at least once, but ideally multiple times (Smith and Osborn, 2004; Alase, 2017). I carefully read through the transcription twice, without making comments, to make sure I was familiar with their contents before beginning to pull out specific parts. After doing this, I was able to begin making remarks where I thought useful within the transcription document. According to Smith and Osborn (2004, p.67), “Some of the comments are attempts at summarizing or paraphrasing, some will be associations or connections that come to mind, and others may be preliminary interpretations.” It was at this point that I moved on to the second interview transcription, which is one way that my application of the IPA differs from the process described by Smith and Osborne (2004). I felt that beginning to identify themes in the first interview might influence the way I approach the second interview in that I might initially look for those themes and potentially miss new ones, whether consciously or not.

The next step for each transcriptions was to go back through the documents to start categorizing the themes that emerged from my initial notes. The entire transcript is still regarded at this step without yet deciding which particular excerpts will be selected for analysis. I developed themes of descriptive statements for each original comment individually. The themes identified from the beginning are not necessarily intended to be the final themes discussed in the paper. Smith and Osborn (2004) propose generating clusters of themes that are connected to each other. I created
a list of the original themes that emerged from the data and organized them under the two overarching topics of my study.

From this, I was able to start identifying clusters of themes and categorizing them. These clusters were used to identify “superordinate themes” which are decided upon based on “the richness of the particular passages that highlight the themes and how the theme helps illuminate other aspects of the account” in addition to how prevalent then are in the data (Smith and Osborn, 2004, p.74). Finally, I could begin writing my final analysis of the themes which is the next chapter of this paper. I chose to include both the thematic discussion and the connections of these themes to literature in the same chapter, rather than separating them. This way it is clear to readers where I drew these connections, aided by the inclusion of verbatim extracts which support the analysis.

6.7 Validity and Reliability

A common disadvantage in doing qualitative research is that the positivist notions of the reliability and validity of studies come in to question (Denzin, and Lincoln, 2017, p.881). This is especially true for this study given the small sample size and the diverse nature of the larger population. It is therefore necessary to establish a way of understanding reliability and validity in qualitative research that is more suited to studies of this nature.

In a qualitative study where the research subjects are diverse and experience the topic of study through unique intersectionalities, it is not possible to claim that the results can be reliably reproduced. Furthermore, as a project that aims to encourage change and progress, reproduction is not necessarily desired (Burman and Whelan, 2011, p.219). The nature of this project is based on individual experiences that are influenced by a number of factors: race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, language abilities, past experiences, country of origin, and so on. Even if new informants with nearly identical demographics were found, it could not be expected interviews would produce the same outcomes as those described here. As discussed previously, my own background and participation has likely had some influence on the way interviewees interacted with me as well (Onwuegbuzie, and Leech, 2007). It would be difficult to predict how closely a study with a different researcher and different interviewees would resemble mine. Furthermore, if this study were to be replicated after a reasonable amount of time (such as two to five years) has passed, the desired outcome would be that the results are not consistent, but rather reflect improvements where shortcomings have been identified by informants.
Internal validity, often referred to as credibility or interpretive validity (Onwuegbuzie, and Leech, 2007, p.238) in qualitative research, can be difficult to examine when there is only one researcher providing interpretations and analysis of the findings. To ensure that data was not being misrepresented, I remained in contact with both interviewees after the interview process. They were asked at various points during the process of analysis to clarify statements or to determine if my interpretation of what they said was correct. Through their feedback I was able to recognize where my own perceptions of the phenomena may have influenced my interpretations. In addition, considerations of validity should also take into account whether or not the analysis of the data answers the research questions. I believe that the method I have used for conducting the data analysis and presenting the results is in line with the aims of this project.

External validity is even more difficult. For a number of reasons, it should be assumed that this research is in no way considered generalizable to the overall population of LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees, as generalizability in qualitative research should be reserved for much larger sample sizes (Onwuegbuzie, and Leech, 2007, p.238). Some also refer to this as transferability, which may be more suited to this type of study but should still be approached with caution. The overall themes that were produced from the data collected may have some external validity in that members of this population would be able to describe their own experiences with regard to the themes. However, the descriptions of these experiences would all be particular to the individuals describing them and would not be expected to be presented in exactly the same way.

6.8 Ethical Considerations
Identifying ethical considerations should occur at every stage of the research project (Runswick-Cole, 2011, p.96). Before conducting a study, researchers should evaluate the topic to ensure that it adds value to the field. The method of inquiry should be justified and the needs of the research subjects should be viewed as the most important consideration for the study overall. Informants should be made fully aware as to how the information they share will be handled and presented. This project is believed to add value through offering underrepresented perspectives to the topic of inquiry, and therefore the acquisition of sensitive information, though not ideal, is appropriate. Throughout this project there has been complete transparency with the informants as to the nature of the project and the information that can or cannot be used. Both interviewees gave clear, explicit consent to the collection and use of their data and acknowledged that they were aware of their
rights as informants such as the right to withdraw consent at any time. They were also assured that they would remain completely anonymous and any information collected would be kept confidential and private and would be used solely for this project. The information will not be used for any future projects or shared with anyone else. The informants have the right to request copies of their own data which will be in the form of transcripts due to the requirement that all digital recordings of the interviews will be permanently destroyed upon completion of the project.

Regardless of the good intentions behind these considerations, issues can still arise when working with such a vulnerable population. Interviewees can become emotional when discussing experiences related to this project and it is important to recognize whether or not the topics are being discussed in a safe way, particularly when there is a likelihood that informants may have a history of mental health concerns related to trauma. In an effort to prevent the interview from going too far, informants were repeatedly reminded that it was not necessary, or even desired, to discuss anything that went beyond their comfort level. Finally, the input of the interviewees was highly valued to ensure that the interview process was improved upon if necessary and the final outcome of the paper considered how it may impact the lives of this population. Informants were asked at the end of each interview if they had any feedback regarding the interview process such as the setting, the researcher, or the topics discussed. Both interviewees reported that the experience was positive overall.

6.9 General Data Protection Regulation
Per the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in effect as of May 2018, this research project was registered through Malmö University’s online registry for students and staff handling personal data. The data was stored in a location where adequate protection could be ensured. Informants in this project provided explicit consent to the processing of their personal information and were informed that their consent could be revoked at any time. At the conclusion of this project, all personal data in digital form will be permanently erased within a reasonable timeframe. Text-based data will be kept for a longer period in case the interviewees request access to it or it is needed to confirm the findings of the study in the future.
7. ANALYSIS

7.1 Identity

This section will analyse the interaction of LGBTQ identities with other facets of identity that the interviewees relate to. It was much more difficult to separate aspects of identity than it was to separate the themes within inclusion and exclusion, which is in line with the intersectionality of identity discussed in Chapter 5. Therefore, the themes that were drawn from the interviews will not be featured in separate sections, but rather, there will be one section for each interviewee where there will be some overlap between themes. The analyses converge in that the core themes that will be presented were prominent in both interviews, although the perspectives provided on them differ. These themes are primarily religion, activism/political involvement, connection to country of origin, and the relation to Swedish society. Religion constituted the most salient category overall, as it was implicated in nearly every other aspect of informants identity construction. Considerations for the analysis as identified in Chapter 5 will include the six motives to identity maintenance (self-esteem, meaning, continuity, distinctiveness, efficacy, and belonging), descriptive and prescriptive aspects of identity narratives, strategies to managing conflicting identities (integration, compartmentalisation, and rejection) and identity intersectionality.

7.1.1 Identity: Jarek

As demonstrated by the many millions of people who belong to the ever-increasing diversity of religious identifications around the world, religious identity can be a deep, complex and profound aspect of an individual or collective identity (Halbertal and Koren, 2013). For Jarek, he considered his families religious affiliations as Muslims to be weak overall but felt that it influenced their conservative values. His descriptions of religion in both his family life and his country of origin reflect a distancing from these conservative values, while a clear emphasis is placed on aspects that align with his personal values.

I feel very strong about being [country of origin] . . . for a while we’ve been considered like an island of democracy in central Asia. Like surrounded by Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, I’m sorry, like totalitarian countries.

People weren’t really practicing Muslims... would be like really weird if you see someone practicing, you know, with a beard or like in a burqa.
Here he places his country of origin in opposition to values that can be perceived as negative, such as totalitarianism and being “practicing” Muslims versus Muslims with weak religious identities. His conscious rejection of these potentially negative affiliations with his national identity reflect prescriptive mechanisms used in identity narratives, in that they are a reflection of how he expects those affiliations would be evaluated. In making a prescriptive evaluation, he expects that others will view those values as reflecting poorly on his home country, and therefore make it difficult for him to reconcile his “strong” feelings about his associations with it (Sandvick, 2018). Furthermore, this reflects compartmentalisation that is a common strategy in negotiating conflicting identities (Wood and Conley, 2013). By separating his identification with his country of origin from the Muslim identity he has rejected, it becomes more manageable and possible to maintain in concurrence with his other strong identifications.

Despite this clear rejection of identification as a Muslim, however, Jarek has not abandoned religion altogether as many LGBTQ individuals do. He presents his Protestant Christian identity as being “always strong.” Indeed, he very clearly placed his relationships with Christianity and Islam as complete opposites, saying, “I always felt Christian, I never felt Muslim.” By using “always” and “never” in this way, the two are situated as mutually exclusive and incompatible. They represent a dichotomy of positive versus negative that may serve to affirm the decisions he’s made regarding their acceptance versus rejection, rather than integration or compartmentalisation. In addition, they represent the continuity motive of identity construction in that “feeling Christian” and “not feeling Muslim” are aspects of his identity that have remained unchanged across time. This continuity serves to strengthen group ties and creates “self-verifying feedback” that is important to identity construction (Vignoles et al., 2006). However, Jarek also acknowledges that his experiences with Christianity have not always been positive due to rejection from various churches while trying to convert in his country of origin. It wasn’t until he was embraced by the Church of Sweden that he finally felt what he described as, “taking off one big part of my internalized transphobia . . . it helped me to start feeling like more of a person.” Despite feeling Christian but not having that feeling reinforced by the acceptance of churches in his country of origin, this new acceptance into the Church of Sweden may have incorporated the additional motive of belonging into Jarek’s religious identity, which could explain why he refers to feeling Christian when speaking in the past tense, but makes more absolute statements, such as “I am
Christian”, when speaking in the present tense. As mentioned previously, belonging is fundamental to the human experience and has a profound impact on how we relate to others. Without this sense of belonging to Christianity as a result of being rejected from various churches, Jarek found it difficult to maintain his Christian identity because other identity motives, such as self-esteem and efficacy, were also impacted. In terms of the conflict between his religious identity and his transgender identity, Jarek appears to have managed to maintain these identities long enough over time to integrate them once he was no longer having to choose between them.

Jarek experienced questioning from many of his close friends, who he described as atheists, after being baptised in Sweden. Indeed, there is evidence that prejudice against Christians in particular is quite strong within queer communities, making it difficult for individuals to be open about their religious identity (Sherry et al, 2010, p.113). However, the underlying motivations to maintain his Christian identity, such as belonging and continuity mentioned above, have proven to be much stronger than the desire to avoid negative reactions from his peers. His identification with religion not only intersects with his trans identity, but also with his identity as an activist. He states, “in a broader, let’s say, group of activists it’s not very popular to say that I’m Christian.” This “unpopularity” of being a transgender Christian often extends beyond just his activist colleagues and into the communities he is advocating for, particularly the refugee community: “....they say shit things about me, just because I’m trans and because I converted, the way they threatened me.” Here we see the intersection of three axes of Jarek’s identity, namely his gender identity, religious identity, and his identification with the refugee community.

Jarek mentions multiple times that he strongly identifies with being a refugee despite negative interactions he’s had with members of the refugee community. He describes the pull his refugee identity has on his desire to continue to help those who hurt him by saying, “You’re trying to help other immigrants because basically, like being refugees already is sort of, for me it’s also part of my identity, being refugee. And I try to show solidarity.” He finds it difficult to compartmentalise these conflicting identities because the conflict does not originate internally but is based on external factors. Two strong examples of the dissonance he experiences from outside sources with regard to his refugee identity and his trans identity are:

- I’ve been trying to help a lot of refugees, but they never forget about me being fag.
These two statements occurred at two different points in the interview where Jarek was discussing his work with other refugees. They highlight an inability, yet possible desire, to separate or compartmentalise his refugee and trans identities, challenging the motive of efficacy he has over how his identities are presented. In addition, he utilises the motive of meaning through helping others like him as a way to try to strengthen his refugee identity because it is not strengthened by feelings of belonging or self-esteem. Unlike his Christian identity, being recognized as transgender is not entirely dependent on whether or not he chooses to verbally identify as such. Furthermore, he emphasizes the use of the derogatory word “fag” to indicate not only the perception by other refugees that he is different, but that this difference is negative and he does not belong there. This may seem contrary to the positive effect that the distinctiveness motive can have on identity construction in that this distinctiveness results in lower feelings of belonging to his refugee identity. However, the opposite is true with regard to distinctiveness and the maintenance of his trans identity, as demonstrated by the continuation of the last statement: “…the more they remind, the more proud I feel about that.” His difficulties with reconciling these identities in the context of other refugees, and the variable impact this has on the six motives of maintenance (such as self-esteem, efficacy, and belonging) result in Jarek often feeling “very angry”, which Vignoles et al. (2006, p.308) describe as “responding with hostility toward the source of the [identity] threat” in order to minimize the damage.

Contrary to this, there are certain situations in which he finds it easy and useful to integrate these identities. While the above highlights identity conflict as a result of interactions with members who share his refugee identity, interactions with members of the general population who do not share this identity can be confirming towards the integration of being trans and a refugee. Indeed, Jarek repeatedly describes being a “queer refugee” as more to his benefit than just being “queer” and “a refugee” in the context of the general population:

If I say I am refugee, then already I feel the difference. But if I say, for instance, I’m queer refugee, I’m LGBT refugee, that like gives me, makes me better.
When they hear that I am refugee, Swedish people tend to be more racist . . . But like if I have to say I am refugee I mention that I am queer refugee, that makes things a lot better.

In this regard, Jarek takes prescriptive measures when evaluating how to present his identity to the general Swedish population. He expects that presenting one or the other will be met with negative reactions, while combining them will shield him from those, or even generate the exact opposite: “I was asked a few times, ‘why did you come, is it war in your country?’ No, I’m just LGBTQ. And they were like, ‘oh, we’re happy to have you here!’” He recognises the benefit of presenting a certain way depending on the audience and uses this knowledge to strengthen or protect against threats to the identity motives involved in identity construction. In particular, his self-esteem may be threatened by reactions to his trans identity by other immigrants, but in return is strengthened by his increase in status when recognised by Swedes. He may also be protecting his feelings of belonging to the refugee community by compartmentalising his LGBTQ identity, while using the integration of these identities to enhance feelings of belonging to Swedish society. This variability in how Jarek chooses to hide or emphasize various aspects of his identity reflects the notion of identity as revisable; not because his identity has changed at all, but because the way his identity is presented is context-dependent (Chafee, 2011). Through this we can see how the way he defines himself is influenced by “reflexive exchanges”, identity motives, and the intersection of these categorizations with his transgender identity at the core.

7.1.2 Identity: Ahmed

Once again, it makes sense to begin with religious identification for the analysis of Ahmed’s identity presentation. As mentioned in the introduction to the chapter, religion featured strongly in both interviews. However, this is especially true for Ahmed, where religion was found to be incorporated into every aspect of his identity construction. This is a particularly striking observation considering that he identifies as an atheist. He focuses mainly on Islam, and only mentions another religion (Christianity) when comparing it to Islam. This is largely due to his upbringing in his country of origin, where the vast majority of the population is Muslim, including his immediate family.

In contrast with Jarek, who only addresses conflict with religious institutions rather than religious doctrine, Ahmed identifies a clear irreconcilability between his religious upbringing as a
whole and his identity as a homosexual man: “Islam within itself, if we actually read the core text, it is completely against homosexuality.” This is a statement proving the incompatibility that results in the rejection of his religious identity to accommodate his LGBTQ identity. While Jarek maintained a compartmentalisation for as long as it took to be able to integrate his religious identity, Ahmed found that it was not possible to maintain both identities at the same time. Rejection of a religious identity in favour of an LGBTQ identity is more common than the other way around in studies conducted in the United States and Europe (Wood and Conley, 2014), but such information from other parts of the world is unavailable. Considering that Islam is not only practiced by the majority of the population in his home country but also engrained in the culture, law, and governing bodies, it is quite notable that Ahmed went so far as to reject it as a part of his identity completely. We can attempt to explain this if we consider the effect that such messages of incompatibility had on the motives of identity construction. His self-esteem was likely threatened by negative messages leading him to question his LGBTQ identity, while his sense of belonging to Islam was challenged by what he considers Islam’s complete rejection of homosexuality, and therefore himself. Finally, rejecting Islam could be seen as the only solution to accepting his lack of efficacy over his sexuality as well as the teachings of Islam.

However, this clear rejection of Islam as part of his personal identity has not resulted in a complete detachment from the religion as a whole. Ahmed actively advocates for a form of Islam that includes acceptance of homosexuality, despite not being interested in actually practicing this version of Islam himself. He is motivated to do this based on the interaction between this desired outcome and other facets of his identity. In this way, it can be argued that religion is not a particular aspect of Ahmed’s identity, but that it has been integrated into other aspects of his identity. Belonging and continuity are proposed as the main identity motives influencing this continued relationship with Islam through its integration into other identity constructs that will analysed in this section.

For example, Ahmed maintains ties to his country of origin, and in turn his ethnic identity, despite not having returned since his arrival in Sweden. He runs a Facebook group for LGBTQ individuals in his country of origin that has a substantial number of followers, relatively speaking. His advocacy for a reform of Islam may be connected to hope for changes in his country of origin which could result in a greater sense of belonging there in the future. Indeed, he places his sexual orientation as the only reason that: “Even though I wanted to stay in [country of origin], I couldn’t
really.” His decision to leave his country of origin was not because he felt that he did not belong, but because his safety was in question due to others feeling that his views and his homosexuality did not belong. Reforming Islam in ways that align more with his identity would not necessarily lead him to convert to Islam as a religion but would allow him to be a part of the culture and society associated with Islam in his country of origin.

Interestingly, Ahmed attempts to downplay his ethnic identity in general, especially when it is confronted by others:

- If a [member of his country of origin] tells me ‘you’re not Muslim, you’re not [ethnic identity], you’re a fake.’ I’m like okay, whatever. I don’t care, I just want to express myself.
- ...when it comes to ethnic identity, I am [country of origin ethnic identity]. Cultural identity, I say I am very westernized . . . I do see myself to be more westernised and more secular.
- I would say that I never really cared so much about being [country of origin ethnic identity].

The common defence mechanism of minimizing the threat to identity and self-esteem is a likely explanation of this downplaying. The connection between his country of origin and Islam is apparent not only in the explicit terms of the first statement, but also in the way Ahmed still prioritizes expressing himself, interpreted as expressing his identity as a gay man, over his ethnic identity. This implies something inherently conflicting about his identification with his country of origin. “Westernized” and “secular” may also be interpreted as ways of contrasting his ethnic identity with others, illustrated by how he refers to them together in a later statement where he incorporates them into a Swedish identity: “I’m trying to feel Swedish . . . I do try because I love secularism, I love western, I love LGBT, I love the ability to speak your mind.” Underlying these statements is an attempt to minimize the negative impact of this identity threat through distancing himself from his ethnic identity and moving closer towards identities that are more affirming of his LGBTQ identity, such as a “feeling Swedish.” In turn, this Swedish identity is strengthened by feelings of belonging through Ahmed’s self-description as “Westernised” and the fact that a Swedish identity easily integrates with his LGBTQ identity. This integration can also serve to boost his self-esteem, help him find meaning in his new identity, and give him a sense of efficacy in that he has control over whether or not his ethnic identity threatens his LGBTQ identity.
Compared to his ethnic identity, a Swedish identity is connected to much stronger identity motives and requires less management overall.

However, this downplaying is contradicted in other scenarios that may reveal a value placed on his identification with his country of origin that is less apparent. For example, he defends against implications that being Swedish is superior to being from his country of origin made by immigrants who take offense at not being considered Swedish enough: “Why would you get so offended? . . . it puts ‘Swedishness’ on this high pedestal. That being Swedish is so beautiful and fine and wonderous, and being [redacted] isn’t?” As it stands in opposition to his LGBTQ identity through connections with Islam, it is necessary to distance himself from his identification with his country of origin, but the underlying desire to belong to it remains and occasionally resurfaces. This shows the strength of the belonging motive with regard to his ethnic identity in that knowing that he does belong there despite others challenging this belonging is much stronger than merely desiring to belong to a Swedish identity.

Continuity is identified as a strong motive behind maintaining a connection to Islam mediated by the additional intersection of Ahmed’s political identity. For Ahmed, this is not about identification with a political party in particular, but rather being engaged in political discourse and social movements more generally. This is connected to continuity in that he describes being a “political activist” long before arriving in Sweden, and in particular saying, “I would have to say I’ve always been a feminist.” It’s clear that this identity is very strong in comparison to others in that he discussed his political engagement more than any other topic throughout the interview. One statement that particularly highlights this value is:

I always attend the political speeches, political gatherings, political assembly of all political parties. I’m always there and listening like, so I’m, I would say I’m very politically engaged.

The emphasis on “all” political parties rather than some or one in particular indicates his desire to appear open-minded and not constrained by one set of political views, which is supported by other statements such as, “I’m such a free thinker, I’m very open” and “if it comes to political identity, I don’t find myself a part of the right, or the left, or the centre.” This also reflects a prescriptive strategy in determining how to present his political identity. It’s possible that this stems from wanting to avoid associating too closely with groups that may threaten either his ethnic identity or
his LGBTQ identity. In addition, this gives him a distinctiveness that he clearly values, rather than a distinctiveness that may challenge his safety in the way his LGBTQ identity does.

Ahmed incorporates Islam into his political involvement in a much more explicit and easily recognizable way. Through open dialogues on the internet, speaking at universities, and even publishing a book, he encourages others to be critical of Islam’s homophobia while also being respectful. He views himself as representation that “men do this, not just white people but we too. There are Arab gays” and hopes that in doing so he can “be a figure that [redacted] kids can know about, that this guy is gay, and he’s open about it.” This shows a clear integration of his LGBTQ and political identities beyond just finding harmony between them, but also finding ways in which they can strengthen each other, such as through once again attempting to challenge the underlying cause of the incompatibility between his ethnic identity and LGBTQ identity. In doing so, his political identity gives him a sense of meaning, the motive related to “finding purpose in one’s own existence” (Vignoles et al., 2006, p.311), as he takes on the role of providing representation to others. All six identity motives are present and contribute positively to Ahmed’s political identity construction, which is not true for any other aspect of his identity that he discussed. This explains why this aspect of his identity has become so strong and featured so heavily in the identity discussion of the interview.

The relationship between Ahmed’s refugee identity and his relationship with religion is less implicit and based more on the associations that other refugees have with religion. In addition, while he spoke at length about what being a refugee meant to him, it was difficult to get him to make a connection between that and his LGBTQ identity outside of discussing social situations that were determined to be more relevant for the following section on inclusion and exclusion. For this reason, it will be noted that Ahmed feels very strongly about his identity as a refugee, but the implications of this will not be analysed in this section.

7.2 Inclusion and Exclusion

This section will focus on the themes identified by interviewees when asked to discuss experiences of inclusion and exclusion in Sweden. The main themes identified were isolation and a lack of support upon arrival, exclusion from the larger refugee and immigrant community, inclusion through seeking membership in various groups, and experiences with the native Swedish population. These themes will be further analysed based on their relationship to the five core
themes of accessibility of information, belonging, physical or geographical boundaries, stigmatisation, and social capital as discussed in Chapter 5. Furthermore, in contrast to the identity section, both interviews will be analysed together to provide a more comparative analysis.

7.2.1 Initial Isolation
The interviewees were asked about their social connections in Sweden prior to arrival. Both interviewees described arriving in Sweden with only one or two local contacts with whom they were not very familiar, a situation that is quite common for LGBTQ asylum seekers in particular. While others may arrive with family members or be attempting to join friends and family who have arrived before them, LGBTQ asylum seekers frequently face estrangement from families who may have participated in their persecution as well as a fear of rejection from other asylum seekers, leaving them to fend for themselves (Shidlo and Ahola, 2013). Based on responses to the interview questions, a core theme of struggling with isolation and a desire to connect with others was identified.

According to Jarek, his relationship with his family is “complicated”, and since his transportation to Sweden was arranged through a fellowship by an activist organization, he travelled alone. Upon arrival, his only acquaintance was one activist in particular who had been the main organizer of the solidarity fund that brought him to Sweden. This is identified as an initial deficit in social capital available within Sweden. However, he utilized social networks outside of Sweden to secure financial assistance, demonstrating that social capital does not necessarily refer only to local resources:

I have like a few friends that live in the US and they help me a lot. They would send money for like, to help me cover rent. It wasn’t very regular, but it was like, I could count on them. If I have problems I could, I would text them or call them and they were always there for me . . . the first few months it was them basically. So we would be in touch, if I feel lonely we would talk.

Not only did this network provide financial assistance, but also emotional support in the form of people he “could count on.” Feelings of loneliness can contribute to struggles with feelings of belonging, so in aiding Jarek in combating this loneliness, these foreign friends were able to positively impact the otherwise difficult experience of isolation in a new country. Having these
connections who were able to send money and provide emotional support played a significant role in his first few months, supporting the notion of social capital resources as dynamic and multifaceted. Furthermore, Jarek demonstrates the ways in which someone can attempt to build social capital after arrival. He sought out volunteer opportunities as a way to meet people, particularly those in similar situations:

I was at this building . . . they needed people to take shifts the early mornings . . . Then you meet more people. And like everywhere, first month, they’re tough. I had a couple people who I would see from time to time, but then you start volunteering and you get to know more people and more people.

This is interesting because in addition to being assisted by the group where he was being housed, Jarek joined in to assist others. He used his physical location to his advantage, recognising opportunities to increase his own inclusion as a newcomer. To some, assistance from a group or organization may not constitute inclusion on its own. In this way, Jarek managed to include himself as a way of making more significant interpersonal connections in an attempt to foster feelings of belonging. Through his position he was able to share information to new arrivals based on his own very recent experiences. This also likely served to provide him with greater access to the very resources he was providing, as well as more positive interaction through building connection with others in similar situations and giving purpose to his daily life. Overall, Jarek was quite isolated and alone when he arrived in Sweden but through utilising the components of inclusion that he had some access to, such as an advantageous housing location and social capital outside of Sweden, he found ways to reinforce other components of inclusion such as access to information, belonging, and social capital within Sweden.

Ahmed described his main contact in Sweden as “his mom’s cousin” indicating that it was a relative he could turn to for help if needed, but that they weren’t very close. He initially didn’t seek out assistance from his relative, having a positive outlook on his ability to navigate the asylum process independently. However, he encountered further feelings of isolation due the geographical location of the refugee camp he was sent to:

At first I felt like it’s okay, I’m all by my own, I’m a strong, independent man, I’m turning 20, why would I be scared? But as soon as I arrived and I was put in a refugee camp in
[Swedish town], like in northern Sweden, I had no access to the internet, I had to travel forty minutes by bus to go to the library, and it was this tiny city, tiny village I mean. . . there was no one. So, my interactions in the first year were mostly with the refugees.

As discussed previously, housing practices hold a lot of power with regard to how asylum seekers and refugees experience inclusion and exclusion. Ahmed’s situation clearly demonstrates a housing practice that limits access to resources as well as the interaction with the native population via geographic location. Furthermore, refugee camps can foster the “us” versus “them” dichotomy through clear boundaries between areas that are inhabited by the native or general population and housing that is allocated to refugees. Because of this, Ahmed was unable to develop relationships with the local population that could serve as social capital providing greater access to various resources. In addition, this separation provided extra obstacles, such as distance, to accessing information that was not available within the refugee camp.

The significance of geographical location in accessing mainstream society is further supported by Ahmed explaining later in the interview that he didn’t start learning Swedish until his second year due to his limited contact with people outside of the refugee community. To compound this, his LGBTQ identity contributed to exclusionary practices through stigmatisation by others within the refugee camp, so his ability to access resources through both social networks within the refugee community as well as mainstream society was hindered. While others may be better equipped for such an environment due to the presence of family or other acquaintances, Ahmed did not have a support system in place, leaving him isolated socially and geographically. Overall, his first year in Sweden was markedly exclusionary. Through a disadvantageous geographic location, he had very little access to information and an inability to build social capital or a sense of belonging to Swedish society. Stigmatisation within the refugee camp hindered his development of a sense of belonging there as well.

He eventually applied to be transferred to a camp closer to his cousin, “in case something happens to me, in case I need something,” which he believes made it possible for what he describes as: “I created a new life, I started from zero.” In this way, it can be assumed that Ahmed recognized the very little social capital that he did have access to and the importance of utilising it. Furthermore, the absence of a feeling of belonging within the refugee camp made it easy for him to accept moving somewhere else. This demonstrates that one single connection can have an
impact, in this case by providing the opportunity to live in a location with better access to resources.

The initial experiences of isolation, loneliness, and a lack of social support network described by Jarek and Ahmed echo similar accounts from studies in other countries that receive LGBTQ refugees and highlight the importance of such networks in the first stages of the migration experience. In addition, this lack of natural support can compound the effects of mental health issues that stem from past experiences of trauma and hardship (Shidlo and Ahola, 2013). Many asylum seekers turn to building networks through members of their ethnic or religious communities (Budhiraja, Pathak, and Kaushik, 2017), however those who are LGBTQ may find that they are unwelcome among these communities for the same reasons that they felt unable to remain in their host countries. This will be further elaborated on in the following section.

7.2.2 Refugee and Immigrant Community Exclusion

Both interviewees spoke extensively on their experiences with other refugees and immigrants. Their personal accounts share common themes but are also marked by incidents specifically related to the intersectionality of their own personal characteristics. Jarek’s identity as a trans man as well as his physical presentation as what he describes as “Asian”, “a short guy”, and that he doesn’t “match masculinity” undoubtedly shape his experiences in a way that differs from those of Ahmed, a cisgender man who believes others often perceive him as “just a Middle Eastern, Arab, Muslim.” Despite the differences in their backgrounds, LGBTQ identity, physical appearances and so on, Jarek and Ahmed share strikingly similar sentiments about inclusion and exclusion in the larger refugee and immigrant communities in Sweden.

In particular, both interviewees stated that among other refugees, and often immigrants in general, it is unadvised to make their LGBTQ identity publicly known. Jarek states:

My experience here with immigrants was not easy. I was abused, molested, sexually harassed, excluded . . . I think that most of my queer friends, they have, they are traumatized by their experience. They don’t want to have anything to do with the straight part of the immigrant community, you know? And I understand why . . . I’m worried about their reaction and I’m worried that if I report on them, they will lose papers.
Individuals in this position are faced with making a choice between constantly trying to hide their LGBTQ identity or being open and risking negative reactions. Underlying this decision is both the motivation to feel a sense of belonging (Baumeister and Leary, 1995) and a fear of stigmatisation. However, Jarek’s perspective is particularly interesting because despite his fears of stigmatisation, and the negative experiences he has already had, he is also concerned for the situation of the very people who have harmed him. This indicates that despite his exclusion by other “immigrants”, he has not lost his sense of belonging and may not yet identify as an outsider. This is supported by his claims of maintaining a strong refugee identity as discussed in the identity analysis.

Exclusion from this community can have a pronounced impact on individuals seeking asylum, especially those who may have experienced significant trauma related to their identity in the past. Here we can see that exclusion, or a lack of inclusion, is largely produced by stigmatisation of LGBTQ identities which is not only salient when individuals are open about these identities, but also when they are aware of the need to hide them. The similarities between the refugee community and the countries LGBTQ refugees have fled can potentially serve to reactivate memories of trauma in individuals with enduring mental health challenges (Shidlo and Ahola, 2013, p.11). Ahmed highlights this notion with regards to the refugee camp environment in saying, “when I was in the refugee camp, I never outed myself to anybody because of course not, it would be like outing myself in the Middle East.” Both informants express explicit feelings of exclusion via stigmatisation by their peers. As quoted above, Jarek used the word “excluded” to describe some of the negative treatment he received from immigrants. Ahmed describes exclusion based on identity as well as situations in the refugee camp that resulted in a form of stigmatisation:

I feel very excluded from the immigrant society and the refugee society. I relate to refugees and I feel like I’m a refugee and I’m a part of it, but I’m very much excluded because my sexual identity stands in contrast with the core beliefs of the vast majority of the refugees.

In the refugee camp, it was Ramadan, . . . and I was eating and drinking because I’m not Muslim and there were a lot of people who were like why, why are you eating? It’s Ramadan, why aren’t you fasting? And I’m like, yeah right, I’m going to tell them that I’m gay. So I ended up just eating alone in my room for a month and not wanting to confront their faith.
Perhaps as a mechanism for maintaining hope for inclusion, both Jarek and Ahmed emphasize the role of religion in their exclusion from this community. Regardless of whether or not religion is entirely to blame, placing the majority of the blame on religion can mediate the potential cognitive dissonance that Jarek and Ahmed might have towards their peers. It can be a way to maintain a connection to them and prevent the ultimate loss of a sense of belonging to the community. This is important because this small sense of belonging may be the only component of inclusion they have with regard to the refugee or immigrant communities. Furthermore, it adjusts the focus of their stigmatisation from internal to external by emphasising deficiencies in the worldview of their peers as opposed to their queer identity. Ahmed in particular spoke at length on the role of the “Islam of the Middle East” in his exclusion, which was likely influenced by his upbringing in a traditional Muslim country. He often refers to those who react negatively to him as “Muslims” rather than refugees or immigrants, and describes how his friends who practice other religions are different: “many of them are religious and none of them try to take away my rights, or offend me, or tell me I’m disgusting or anything like that.”

Ahmed and Jarek both continued to work with refugee and immigrant communities despite negative experiences and exclusion from them. They seem to feel a kinship towards these groups that allows them to be critical while simultaneously understanding their perspectives. Rather than emphasizing the pain and emotions associated with this exclusion, both recognize the power of shared understandings of the refugee experience that lead to feeling a greater connection with other refugees than with more inclusive communities.

I say I identify a lot as a refugee like, I’m in university and there are a lot of international students and all of them are English speakers . . . But unlike refugees, they don’t go to Swedish classes, or they earn a very academic atmosphere that is very uplifting and very like, you feel like you have a purpose, you’re going to be someone. But when you come as a refugee you’re traumatized, you come with a lot of baggage . . . I went through the same kind of phase, of being in a refugee place, being treated as a refugee, the whole process so we’ve been through the same thing. Same struggles of trying to tap into the Swedish language, trying to tap into the Swedish society, trying to bike properly.

Ahmed relates to both communities in terms of language, for example, but the difference is that among his fellow students, language contributes to an “uplifting” atmosphere while language in
the refugee community represented a common struggle. This is an example of a way that Ahmed felt a belonging to the refugee community that couldn’t be influenced by his LGBTQ identity, which is likely why he refers to it when emphasising his refugee identity.

In talking about the larger refugee and immigrant communities in Sweden, belonging and stigmatisation are the concepts that feature prominently. The overall consensus that Jarek and Ahmed experience a significant amount of exclusion from these communities is reflected in the evidence that experiences of stigmatisation largely outweigh experiences of belonging. Nonetheless, those indications of belonging that Jarek and Ahmed get a sense of are strong enough to at times reject these notions of exclusion in support of maintaining their strong identification as refugees.

7.2.3 Searching for Inclusion
Apart from ethnic and migrant communities, newcomers can utilize other strong identifications to seek out inclusion in a host society, as these associations are important tools for navigating new environments (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993). It was here that Jarek and Ahmed diverged in their perceptions of inclusion in Sweden, though their responses did reflect a few similarities. For example, Jarek described greater involvement in activist organizations and some LGBTQ spaces while Ahmed emphasized his political engagement and expressed a lack of desire for other strong group associations.

Regarding their experiences with various LGBTQ organizations, both expressed mostly positive sentiments but that the overall environment of such organizations was somewhat lacklustre. Both Jarek and Ahmed found it difficult to connect with those organizations geared towards the general population because in addition to Swedish language barriers, they expressed feelings of not being understood with regard to their experiences of growing up in countries where non-heterosexual identities are oppressed or even criminalized. Jarek described attempting to find a trans community in Sweden:

I looked for the trans groups, but they all spoke Swedish and it was like okay. And . . . people don’t understand. Being born, growing up trans in Sweden is not easy but it’s still like very different from the rest of the world, you know?
Similarly, Ahmed struggled with the differences between LGBTQ experiences in Sweden compared to other parts of the world:

I volunteered in pride and I went through the trains and I felt like very, it was a nice kind of solidarity and I liked it. But the problem is I always look at things from a very globalistic point of view and I see that pride is doing great for gay people in Europe but it backfires in the Middle East . . . I don’t think I feel like I would feel very at home with the gay community in Europe because the gay community within Europe itself does not feel home yet.

Jarek and Ahmed both sought out involvement in the LGBTQ community as a way of building social networks and finding a community where their sense of belonging was reinforced. However, they experienced the reverse effect compared to exclusion by the refugee community in that this time, their experiences as refugees made them feel like outsiders. This stands in conflict with common assumptions that LGBTQ communities naturally replace ethnic communities as support networks for newcomers in host countries. Typically, LGBTQ refugees may lack involvement in these communities due to a resistance to opening up about their identities (Shidlo and Ahola, 2013). However, in this case both informants were not only openly LGBTQ, but they also sought out supportive spaces immediately after arrival. This is particularly problematic because social capital in the form of group involvement and community resources is a powerful factor in the long-term wellbeing of newly arrived migrants (Messih, 2016). Without family, access to an ethnic community, or any acquaintances in Sweden, the LGBTQ community would be assumed as the most likely source of a sense of belonging and a place to build social capital. It was mainly in spaces created specifically for LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees, such as an organization called RFSL Newcomers, that either of them felt they were entirely welcome. Jarek attributed this to the fact that the main organizers of the group were immigrants themselves, while Ahmed felt that it was more about shared experiences:

More in the refugee meetings [compared to general population meetings] because like everybody is a survivor and everybody was so happy to be in a community where we can speak freely about our oppression and what we’ve been through and etc. While in a
Swedish setting, most gay problems tend to sound like ‘first world problems’ for a gay person who comes from a place where they would be hung for it.

This challenging difference of worldview is echoed by Jarek who described how an experience of police brutality that he shared with a trusted acquaintance was not only shared to others within an activist organisation without his permission, but also trivialized by his peers. He recounted, “I was like okay I understand, for you it sounds like almost James Bond story. But for any queer person from my country, this will be reality.” Experiences of stigmatisation like this contributed to feelings of being an outsider or different from others in the group, making it difficult to build feelings of belonging. Furthermore, the resulting lack of trust in members of these groups made it difficult for him to build meaningful relationships that could be utilised as social capital resources.

In addition, a common conflict that was experienced within activist organisations was a lack of welcoming intersectional perspectives and feelings of being unable to speak openly about how their experiences differed from other members. Jarek expressed feeling silenced on multiple occasions when attempting to speak up about issues of racism, homophobia, and transphobia, particularly while involved with organizations that work with migrants. In his words, “you have to know your place.” He received backlash and accusations of mental instability for reacting to both observations and experiences of racial prejudice:

Just because I’m immigrant, just because I’m a person of colour, and I don’t know how to speak Swedish well . . . these activists and anarchists, and left-wing activists, they’re cool as long as you get along with their rules. But you will never gain the voice. And a lot of people of colour speak about that within feminist organizations, within left-wing organizations, you will never hear. You either have to follow the rules or for them you will be some freak . . . they called me mentally unstable.

He also faced threats of being left to fend for himself after questioning the behaviour of organizers for a housing programme he belonged to:

When I raised the issues, ‘okay we have issues of racism.’ I was like, I turned to them because the employee was racializing me. They told me . . . if I don’t shut up then they will pull their support.
This is particularly concerning in that it demonstrates the instability of social capital and that it depends not only on the person utilising it, but also those who have access to the resources. This challenges the assumption that having networks in place automatically provides access to resources. In reality, these networks are just as susceptible to human nature, such as the tendency to include and exclude others. In this scenario in particular, Jarek is experiencing stigmatisation, a revocation of his sense of belonging, and threats to his access to social capital all at once. His exclusion from the activist organisation as well as the potential exclusion from access to housing could have resulted in even greater exclusion from society in general through cutting off his social network, forcing him to relocate to a potentially less advantageous geographical location, and further restricting his access to information. Overall, the greatest sense of belonging occurred in settings where others could relate through multiple shared identities as well as shared experiences. Unfortunately, it is becoming increasingly well documented that asylum seekers and refugees face challenges when dealing with staff at various levels of the asylum process.

In contrast to Ahmed, who describes himself as an atheist, Jarek’s inclusion into a religious community in Sweden has had the most profound effect on his feelings of inclusion. Despite his experiences with religious institutions in his country of origin, Jarek found a welcoming Christian community in the Svenska Kyrkan (Swedish Church). In an official document titled *Strategic Plan for the Church of Sweden’s International Work*, the church states: “We take a firm stand against injustices due to gender, sexual orientation or gender identity.” (Church of Sweden, 2017) Furthermore, the church permits marriages between LGBTQ couples since 2009 and participates in the Stockholm Pride celebrations. In describing being welcomed by the church, Jarek displayed an emotional response that was not elicited by any other accounts of inclusion. He described the experience as:

> I went to Swedish church and it was probably first time that a priest told me, and we talked a lot about me being queer and about faith and what that means to me. And I was welcomed and you know like... that was healing.

Jarek found his strongest sense of belonging, where his acceptance has been unconditional compared to other groups, in the Church of Sweden. His experiences with religious institutions went from highly stigmatised to positive and profoundly affirming. Indeed, for Jarek, the Church
of Sweden represents the effect of all five components of inclusion. He is no longer excluded by not being welcomed within the physical boundaries of the church walls due to stigmatisation of his trans identity. His sense of belonging has led to the ability to build strong interpersonal relationships, and therefore social capital, which in turn lead to greater access of information. As a result of this synchronicity of the five components, he has been able to integrate his LGBTQ and religious identities and promote greater psychological well-being.

7.2.4 Swedish Society
Generally, a desired outcome of the migration process is that migrants will gradually become incorporated into mainstream society. This is facilitated through various forms of societal participation, such as the labour market, and interactions with the general population which can expose new members to language and cultural practices. When it comes to the general population of Sweden, which may consist of immigrants who are now long-term residents but will be referred to by both interviewees as “Swedes” or “Swedish people”, Jarek and Ahmed vary in their perspectives on inclusionary and exclusionary practices.

For Jarek, there is a clear struggle with regard to his sense of belonging. While he relates to the challenges of being a refugee, he also views himself as in a position of privilege in comparison to both other refugees and the situation he came from.

I live in like, I don’t know how to say it, cognitive dissonance . . . When I see how they treat people from like clearly Middle Eastern origin, background, and how they treat me. It’s a bit different. But still like, they’re still racists . . . just more like liberal racism.

Here he’s referring to how he experiences less stigmatisation than other migrants based on his ethnic identity and physical appearance. However, he qualifies this at the end by implying that while he may not receive the same amount of stigmatisation, he still receives some based on the fact that he is still not assumed to be “Swedish” and therefore is unable to feel a complete sense of belonging among Swedes. While he may not face the same levels of stigmatisation as others, the amount he does receive hinders his ability to access and build networks of social capital among the general Swedish population. He may not feel entirely excluded when comparing himself to
“clearly Middle Eastern” immigrants but overall he experiences very little inclusion in this regard from the general Swedish population.

Ahmed confirms these sentiments somewhat, such as the way he described perceptions of him as “just a Middle Eastern, Arab, Muslim” in a previous section. His decision to stop openly identifying as a refugee is because of the associations to certain stigmatisation it gives him, which he perceives as negative: “The reaction when someone finds out I’m a refugee was very, oh, you know, like ‘you’re one of them.’” In this scenario, Ahmed is trying to disconnect from his sense of belonging to the refugee community as a result of such stigmatisation by Swedes, contrary to previous situations where he feels a strong connection. He explains that while he doesn’t feel Swedish yet, “I’m trying to feel Swedish.” This is a likely explanation for his motivation to distance himself rather than defend his refugee identity. As discussed in the identity section of the analysis, Ahmed is very motivated to strengthen his Swedish identity to the point that he may downplay other aspects of his identity that threaten it. Stigmatisation of “Middle Eastern, Arab Muslims” further challenges his identity motives in maintaining his connection to the refugee community and his ethnic identity. He feels that in downplaying his connection to the refugee community he has a greater chance of inclusion in Swedish society.

Where Jarek feels the most sense of welcome and belonging in Sweden is as a queer refugee, which was touched upon in the identity analysis. He describes this as: “First time in my life, they treat me better because I’m trans and it just feels weird! But like, you know, better they treat me this way than the opposite.” While at times he enjoys this ability to shed stigmatisation and gain a sense of belonging, he questions it when faced with reminders of what his reality used to be like through interactions with those who are still living it.

And then when you speak about how life is like, “listen I’ve been there and I live in Sweden now” and then like you share a little bit with them about how life in Sweden is like for trans people, and you just live a life. And I say a couple things and they’re like wow, that sounds like a fairy tale. And then you think retrospectively, and it is.

Ahmed expressed a similar sentiment, labelling it “survivor’s guilt”:

Gays are worshipped here. I need to bring this LGBT thing and take it with me to the Middle East. I always felt this survivor’s guilt.
In this example, we can see that gaining a sense of belonging is not entirely based on Jarek and Ahmed being received positively by others, but how their membership relates to aspects of their identity as well. They may be given “insider” or “outsider” status by a particular group, but their overall perception of whether or not they truly belong comes from within.

8. FINAL DISCUSSION

8.1 Identity

Through the analysis of the identity construction of both Jarek and Ahmed we can see how LGBTQ identification interacts with the other aspects of their identity construction. These interactions result in either the integration, compartmentalisation, or rejection of these identities based on the strength of the six identity motives discussed: self-esteem, meaning, continuity, distinctiveness, efficacy, and belonging. Furthermore, these underlying mechanisms can be more evident through descriptive and prescriptive measures taken by the interviewees in discussing their identity construction.

For Jarek, the interaction between his LGBTQ identity and his religious identity previously resulted in first the rejection of a Muslim identity, then a conflict with his Christian identity that required a compartmentalisation of it. This was quite difficult, but the motive of continuity was strong enough to maintain this compartmentalisation until arriving in Sweden where he further adopted the motive of belonging and resolved the conflict between being transgender and Christian. Without the need to compartmentalise these identities anymore, they became integrated. His Christian identity has now been strengthened to the point that it is not threatened when others question or even criticise him for it. This interaction reflects the findings by Vignoles et al. (2006) that identity motives are strong influencers of identity construction.

The conflict between his refugee identity and LGBTQ identity is not so clearly managed and reflects the “revisability” of identity construction (Chafee, 2011). In the context of other refugees, he attempts to compartmentalise his LGBTQ identity while searching for ways to strengthen motives of meaning and belonging associated with his refugee identity so as not feel the need to reject it due to threats to his self-esteem and efficacy. In the context of the general Swedish population, however, his management of these identities is quite the opposite, as they are fully integrated in order to increase his chances of receiving the best possible response from others,
which may enhance self-esteem. This reflects the prescriptive measures that Jarek takes in determining how to present his identity to others so that he will be received in ways that contribute positively to identity motives and reduce threats to his identity construction.

Ahmed’s identity construction differs greatly from Jarek’s. Though religion plays a strong role, its influence is not based in Ahmed’s participation in religion, but rather the connection between Islam and his other identities. Islam’s connection to his ethnic identity in particular challenges the identity motives of belonging and self-esteem, often resulting in a distancing from his ethnic identification and attempts to strengthen his identification with a Swedish identity. Through building a Swedish identity he asserts his sense of efficacy and finds it positively contributes to his self-esteem and sense of belonging. Furthermore, it easily integrates into his LGBTQ identity rather than requiring compartmentalisation and management, rendering it much less mentally taxing.

He values his political identity which is not only reinforced by the same motives as his Swedish identity of self-esteem and belonging, but also gives him a sense of meaning through his political participation as well as continuity by remaining active in a way he feels he has always done. He develops a sense of efficacy through the competence and control he has over developing his own political ideology in addition to finding a channel for promoting the reform of Islam that would weaken the conflict between religion and his LGBTQ identity. In creating an image of himself as a “free-thinker” who doesn’t belong to any particular political party, he recognizes his distinctiveness from others as a positive attribute. The fact that all six identity motives are strongly represented in his political identity construction provide an explanation for the emphasis he placed on how important this identity is in comparison to the others. Furthermore, his ability to easily integrate his LGBTQ identity as well as the lack of conflict with any other identification means that there are few threats to his political identity overall.

8.2 Inclusion and exclusion

The four main themes discussed in this section of the analysis highlight the ways in which access to information, a sense of belonging, physical or geographic boundaries, stigmatisation, and social capital work in conjunction to determine whether the interviewees perceived themselves as included or excluded in various circumstances and communities.
The first theme of initial isolation in Sweden discusses the importance of access to networks and having social capital established before arrival as well as the ability to build social capital upon arrival. Both interviewees recognised their lack of this component of inclusion in particular and the subsequent effect that it had on other components such as access to information and a sense of belonging. For Ahmed, this was further compounded by the challenge of a housing situation that was both geographically exclusionary and internally exclusionary of his LGBTQ identity. Both interviewees utilised the very limited networks they had access to as a means of building social capital that could improve their situations overall and lead to a greater ability to feel included in their new home.

Within the refugee and immigrant communities, however, social capital was not only lacking upon arrival but also largely inaccessible after arrival. This was due to stigmatisation experienced by both individuals based on their LGBTQ identities. Stigmatisation was the strongest factor in exclusion from these communities and served as a barrier to strengthening other components of inclusion.

In other communities where Jarek and Ahmed felt there was potential for inclusion, they experienced challenges due to a combination of components. Stigmatisation once again played a significant role though in forms that differed from that coming from the refugee community. However, even when stigmatisation was low, building a sense of belonging proved challenging due to differences in worldview and past experiences of oppression that others could not particularly relate to. Despite this, Jarek and Ahmed have found places where they feel a greater sense of inclusion. In particular, Jarek has found inclusion in a religious community where he has been given a strong sense of belonging, an ability to build social capital through strong interpersonal relationships, and in turn, access to information. Consequently, he no longer feels excluded by the physical barriers of the church and does not experience any stigmatisation from the community. He has found harmony between all five components of inclusion.

Finally, the interviewees gave some insight into their experiences with the general Swedish population. Stigmatisation once again featured prominently but was experienced quite differently by Jarek and Ahmed due to their different ethnic backgrounds. While both acknowledge that their LGBTQ identities contribute to a sense of belonging and inclusion in Swedish society, they find it challenging to internalise this belonging due to feelings of guilt towards those who are still experiencing the persecution they faced before arriving in Sweden. Their past experiences remind
them that they are different and that their connection to others who are going through the same experiences is stronger than their connection to the new society they are trying to become a part of.

9. CONCLUSION
Identity, inclusion, and exclusion play a major role in the experience of migrating to another country, particularly when that experience is an attempt to seek freedom and escape persecution. This paper has attempted to demonstrate that those who are LGBTQ and seek asylum not only face similar struggles as other asylum seekers, but that their experiences are further shaped by belonging to an additional marginalised group. The analysis first examined how interviewees navigated the various intersections of their identity with their LGBTQ identity at the centre. This revealed various processes of integrating, compartmentalising, and rejecting certain aspects of their identity over time. This supported the notion of the process of identity construction as fluid, dynamic, and continuously developing over time.

Secondly, the experiences of inclusion and exclusion described by Jarek and Ahmed were examined to reveal how they are situated in various communities in Sweden. The themes identified based on the interviews were: isolation and a lack of support upon arrival, exclusion from the larger refugee and immigrant community, inclusion through seeking membership in various groups, and experiences with the general Swedish population. These were analysed through the concepts of accessibility of information, belonging, physical or geographical boundaries, stigmatisation, and social capital. Overall, the strongest components in Jarek and Ahmed’s accounts of inclusion and exclusion were belonging, stigmatisation, and social capital. A lack of social capital in particular featured prominently as an exclusionary factor in the beginning of their experience. However, further analysis shows the ways they attempted to accumulate additional social capital as they spent more time in Sweden. Physical and geographical factors were relevant in the early stages of living in Sweden as well, but much less present later. The fifth component of access to information was the least salient of all as it was mainly influenced as a by-product of the other components and only appeared to be relevant for one interviewee.

Although this research does not claim to be representatives of the larger population of LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees in the world, or even in Sweden in particular, it does provide insight that can have implications for future work involving this population. Organizations
working with this population in particular can consider the perspectives of Jarek and Ahmed when interacting with this community, training volunteers and staff, and considering how their own conduct may impact the LGBTQ individuals they come in contact with.

Furthermore, researchers in the field of migration studies should recognize that categorizations can imply homogenisation of groups where there is in fact a considerable amount of diversity. Future research should consider this and attempt to include a wider variety of perspectives in an attempt to not only contribute a greater understanding of the variability of human experiences, but also encourage reflection on power structures and the needs of marginalised groups. As there continues to be more queer perspectives in migration studies, research can inform policy and practices that impact the queer community. This project provides support for recognising the need for including these perspectives and the benefit that doing so could have for future studies that may have access to a larger sample size and greater diversity of informants.
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Appendix A: Additional Comments and Suggestions from the Interviewees

Here I would like to include statements from the participants regarding the asylum process and areas for improvement, which is in line with the perspective of this paper that this type of research should give a voice to marginalised groups, challenge social structures, and attempt to generate solutions to problems. I am not able to include everything that was said but have chosen the most important points as indicated by Jarek and Ahmed. This section reflects the last segment of the interviews, which was not intended to be analysed but was provided as a space for the participants to have a role in empowering their community. I will provide some commentary for context, but majority of the space will be given to the participants.

Housing

A major concern for both participants was the housing situation for LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees.

Jarek:

There are safe housings for LGBT people in, somewhere in [redacted] region, but it’s in a very remote area. People who spend there a long time, they get very depressed. That’s actually very important. Like safe housing in urban areas where they can have access to the community . . . But in Sweden they don’t do it because they don’t want to discriminate anyone. And that would be such a... it would be so much better, it would help a lot for people. And not having to share like two persons in the room because this space thing also matters. Because now they are locked in this small village in the middle of nowhere, they see only each other, they have to share rooms and then they, in a long-term way there will be conflict. And this housing would be like really helpful.

Ahmed:

For the gays . . . Having been in that situation, absolutely, they should be isolated but that’s also problematic because it’s like no, let the savages alone but they’re not savages, they’re just ignorant about LGBT. So I would say, create a place for gay people, for LGBT asylum seekers, and at the same time work on the non-LGBT asylum seekers . . . I felt that way, like it ruined my process. I didn’t feel like I came to a place where I’m liberated.
**Educating Newcomers**

Jarek and Ahmed felt that newcomers should be given information about what they can expect and what is to be expected of them in their new home, such as respect of LGBTQ individuals.

Jarek:

When the newcomers come, doesn’t matter which one, just like tell them in general information like this and this and this . . . and also in general to say like homophobia and transphobia is prohibited and it’s illegal and will have consequences. And if you’re LGBT just in general, if you experience this and this and this, you can turn to this hotline or something. So that people get information right away about places they can go. And they should like, it should also be in the languages they speak because many of them don’t speak English.

Ahmed:

You have one of the most developed countries in the world, work on a programme for the asylum seekers. Something that educates them, that tells them that gay people exist, that we respect gay people here . . . It should be more like are you aware that Sweden is a country that is 100% in alignment with the LGBT community and will never change that direction as gay people are a core to our society? That kind of information needs to be given to the non-LGBT asylum seekers. Nothing was given to me, I found myself telling people, like my roommate, telling him that yeah, actually gay people get married here and it’s fine. That there are laws that protect gay people and that also, all about gender, gender studies need to be spoken about in immigrant communities.

**Migration Agency Staff**

Jarek in particular has many negative experiences with some staff members during his asylum process and expressed that staff should be particularly aware of the needs of LGBTQ individuals.

Jarek:

I was shocked how some migrationsverket people who don’t like LGBTQ people. They would put straight [homo/transphobic] people in our room on purpose and it kept happening . . . it would happen during the shifts of certain people.
And also with translators, a lot of times they are homophobic when you ask them and influences the quality of translation. Or maybe LGBTQ people translating. That would be best. That happened at my interview. Because I know English I can understand a little bit of Swedish and my translator I realized called me transvestite. And I got so pissed and she tried to boss me around, and I said like I will get a complaint on you, and it’s because I know my rights. Someone else would not be able to do that and it’s very stressful. It’s your asylum interview.

I would like to thank Jarek and Ahmed for bravely being open to sharing their perspectives allowing me to include them here.
Appendix B: Interview Outline

Name:
Age:
Preferred Pronouns:
Country of origin:
Reason for leaving:
Reason for choosing Sweden:
Time in Sweden:

Identity Section

Brief introduction to interviewee: What do you consider important aspects of your identity?

Expand where necessary:

Are/were you seeking asylum based on your LGBTQ identity specifically?

Have these identities shifted or changed at all since you arrived in Sweden?

How do you see your LGBTQ identity interacting with your other identities?

Are you more open about your LGBTQ identity in some spaces than in others?

Do people react differently to your LGBTQ identity compared to other identities?

What are some ways your LGBTQ identity has impacted your experience as an asylum seeker/refugee in Sweden?
Inclusion/Exclusion/Social Capital

Did you know anyone here when you arrived?

How did you initially interact with others here and how did you meet new people?

Are you involved in any groups or social activities in Malmo? These could be social groups, volunteer work, sports, organizations, etc.

How did you find these groups? Did you seek them out, were they recommended to you, did they find you?

Did you seek out LGBTQ spaces when you arrived?

Do you feel welcome in LGBTQ spaces? Why or why not?

Did you initially feel welcome into these groups when you arrived?

Have you had access to stable housing?

Conclusion

What do you think Sweden or other countries could do to make queer asylum seekers feel more welcome or safe?

Do you have any feedback for me and this interview process?