We are here, but are we queer?

A bricolage of the experiences of LGBTQ refugees in Linköping, Sweden

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Abstract

In recent years, the field of queer asylum studies has slowly been expanding in different contexts across the world, with numerous methodologies and various topics of focus. In Sweden, the academic work in this area has mainly focused on legal perspectives. Providing a different perspective, this thesis examines the situation and experiences of LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees in Linköping, Sweden through a community-based collage project. It examines how collages can be used as a method for research and a tool for community building within this context, and explores the experiences of LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees in Linköping, Sweden, using individual and group collages.

Using the concept of bricolage, the thesis ties together various artworks with short narratives and analytical interpretations. Together, they form a fragmented, in itself collage-like insight into this community. Through these fragments, the thesis reflects on the themes of migration, belonging, survival, and identity. Additionally, it explores questions of home, family, refugeeness, mess, homonormativity and representation. I argue that commonly used narratives of migration often do not fit this group, as they face highly complex forms of oppression based on their intersecting identities.

Furthermore, the thesis examines the use of collage as a method by looking into the ways collage can negotiate methodological issues like accessibility and researcher accountability, how it can function as a tool for community building, and how it can be used to allow a community researcher to negotiate their positionality in an easier way. I argue that the use of collage has many benefits and that the use of the collage method in this thesis has enriched the research.

Keywords: Queer asylum; LGBTQ migrants; LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees; queer migration; collage; bricolage; intersectionality; identity
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Chapter 1: Introduction

May 2018. East Pride, Norrköping. It is warm, and I am tired. I am not sure how I am still functioning, but the adrenaline is keeping me on foot. Flashbacks to a year ago, Norrköping Pride 2017. The first time I am participating in a pride parade. I am walking as part of the Newcomers Östergötland group, together with around ten people. We carry several banners that we made during our weekly Newcomers café prior to the pride. The biggest, and for us the most important, banner reads ‘Stop deporting LGBTQ people’1. Other, smaller banners read ‘Keep calm and be yourself’, ‘Love is love’ and ‘Love wins’. We walk, trying to spread messages of love, but also of urgency. We are feeling hopeful, but desperate. Ready to fight, but defeated. Wishful, but scared. But most of all, we feel strong, because we are doing it together.

In this thesis, I explore the experiences of LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees in Linköping, Sweden. In the past few years, many migrants have come to Sweden to apply for asylum, with a recent peak in 2015 with over 160,000 applications (Migrationsverket 2018a). A fraction of the total amount of asylum seekers are LGBTQ migrants. Although the exact size of this group is unknown, RFSL Newcomers, a project set up by RFSL, the Swedish Federation for LGBTQ rights, had around 600 members in 2016 (RFSL 2017). Positioned at the intersection of being LGBTQ and being a migrant, this group faces specific challenges. RFSL Newcomers was started to assist LGBTQ asylum seekers and newcomers in Sweden with activities, support and guidance (RFSL 2015b).

About half a year after I moved to Linköping, Sweden to study, I found RFSL Newcomers, a project set up by RFSL. It is a network aimed at asylum seekers, refugees, undocumented immigrants and newly arrived LGBTQ people in Sweden. Although all migrants are welcome, forced migrants are the main target group, and the main purpose of the network is to support these migrants throughout and after their asylum procedure. The network has around 600 members all around Sweden, and about 50 volunteers (RFSL 2017). In Linköping, where this study is based, the project mainly entails counselling and a weekly café evening. Overall, a group of around 30 people attends the café evenings, and 20 of those attend at least once a month. On the average evening, there are around 6-13 visitors. I started attending the café evenings in December 2016. Slowly, my role grew from a regular attendee.

1 Translated from Swedish: ‘sluta utvisa hbtq-personer’. For an overview of all translated words and phrases and their original Swedish, see Appendix 2.
to a volunteer. It was a somewhat ‘natural’ process where I grew into the role, so it is difficult
to give an exact moment at which I became a volunteer. However, since September 2017 I
became more involved and took on more responsibility within the project. Since then, I have
attended almost weekly and taken care of the practical arrangements such as picking up bread
from the bakery, doing grocery shopping, preparing food and drinks and letting people in, as
well as sometimes assisting during workshops. I also was a volunteer coordinator during
Pride in Linköping, where a lot of the volunteers were part of our Newcomers group.

During my time as a volunteer for the Newcomers project, I have observed some of the
specific issues and challenges that this group faces when going through the asylum procedure
when building up a life in Sweden. They need to find their way in a new country and a new
environment. Various intersecting identities shape their lives significantly. As immigrants,
and especially as asylum seekers and refugees, they may face xenophobia. As people of
colour, they may face racism. As LGBTQ people, they may face homophobia or transphobia.
At the same time, they are not a homogenous group, and other intersecting subject positions
can lead to some facing more oppression and marginalisation than others. In this thesis, I
explore the intersection of being LGBTQ and being an asylum seeker or refugee in Sweden
though the use of a collage method, building on work previously done within this community
(Enquist 2017), as well as previous academic work (Fobear 2016a, 2017; Dill et al. 2016). In
addition to this method, I use my own experiences as a volunteer, connecting the two by
using the concept of bricolage (Lévi-Strauss 1968), by which I mean that I, in part, have used
things that were ‘at hand’ through my position as a volunteer: in this case, mainly my own
reflections and experiences, as well as two previously made collages.

With this thesis, I intend to contribute to the knowledge on the intersection of being LGBTQ
and being an asylum seeker or refugee in the Swedish context. I additionally intend to
contribute to the recent development of using experimental and arts-based research methods
in studies with LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees. The thesis is largely explorative, as
community-based studies have not been carried out with this group within the Swedish
context. Therefore, I focus not necessarily on a specific topic, but rather limit my scope by
basing the analysis in seven collages and the themes that come forward from these collages.
The study contributes to the field of knowledge around LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees
in Sweden, that until now mainly has had a legal focus. It can improve the understanding of
the complex and intersecting oppressions that LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees may face.
Additionally, the thesis also could benefit the LGBTQ migrant community in Sweden. Because the situations of LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees are so complex, it is important to get some insight into the lived experiences of this group. An increased understanding could help those people that work to assist LGBTQ asylum seekers during their procedure and afterwards. It could also inform the Swedish Migration Agency, as it could show them the complexities of what it means to be LGBTQ asylum seeker. It could also help LGBTQ support groups to be more inclusive, if they are more aware of what specific aspects should be paid attention to. As a starting point for this thesis project, I give an overview of previous research in the next section.

**Previous research**

Queer migration scholar Eithne Luibhéid (2008) has previously noted that “most scholarship, policymaking, service provision, activism, and cultural work remain organised about the premise that migrants are heterosexuals (or on their way to becoming so) and queers are citizens (even though second-class ones).” The intersection of being LGBTQ, or queer, and being a migrant, remains largely understudied, and specifically, the area of queer asylum highlights specific issues of power, privilege and oppression, as it features a specific process between nation states and migrants (Luibhéid 2008). Still, especially in the last decade, various scholars have shown an interest in studying queer asylum and LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees. In this section, I give an overview of these studies. First, I focus on studies done within various contexts outside of Sweden, followed by an overview of studies within the Swedish context.

**Queer asylum**

The asylum process is highly complex, involving not only asylum applicants and workers at the migration institutions, but also, amongst others, lawyers, interpreters, and community groups (Miller 2005). In the last decade, the field of queer asylum has been expanded on an international level, with a variety of studies with different focus areas. Most of these studies are qualitative in nature, which may be because this group is difficult to reach, and because it is a somewhat vulnerable population. Queer asylum seekers often have experienced long-term persecution and abuse, often starting in childhood (Shidlo & Ahola 2013; Alessi, Kahn
Because LGBTQ asylum seekers have often faced oppression based on their multiple intersecting identities, their traumas are often highly complex, and the asylum process can retraumatise them, as they are often required to demonstrate previous instances of persecution, as well as why they are at risk for further persecution in they were to return to their country of origin (Reading & Rubin 2011; Shuman & Bohmer 2014; Kahn & Alessi 2017; Jordan 2009). Furthermore, they must demonstrate that they are ‘credible’ refugees in asylum systems that produce many as deportable subjects, which for LGBTQ people often means that they must make their sexual orientation or gender identity credible (Lewis 2013, 2014; White 2014; Murray 2016b, 2016a; Akin 2017). Because of this, the asylum process can affect the narratives and identities LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees use to describe themselves (Berg & Millbank 2009; Lee & Brotman 2011; Murray 2016b; Akin 2017; Dhoest 2018). The asylum process itself is not the only aspect that can cause issues for this group: other issues that have been identified are difficulties when meeting health care staff or workers at other kinds of institutions, fears of revealing an LGBTQ identity, housing (Chávez 2011), social isolation (Nerses, Kleinplatz & Moser 2015; Logie et al. 2016), and discrimination in the country they apply for asylum in based on, for example, sexual orientation, immigrant status, ethnicity and/or race (Reading & Rubin 2011).

Despite the complex traumas that this group often carries along and the complicated issues they may face in the country they claim asylum in, LGBTQ asylum seekers also show great resilience, in which support networks, often organised by community organisations, often play a big role (Logie et al. 2016; Alessi 2016; Jordan 2009). Because of the benefits of these community support networks, several authors have taken a community-based approach to doing research with LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees, especially within the Canadian context. Coming from a background in social work, Edward Ou Jin Lee and Shari Brotman have published several articles on their work with the Speak Out! Project, a qualitative, community-based project spanning two years, in which they explore the intersectional experiences of LGBTQ refugees in Toronto and Montreal and highlight issues like identity, refugeeeness, gender, sexuality, and belonging (Lee & Brotman 2011; Brotman & Lee 2011; Lee & Brotman 2013). Anthropologist David Murray carried out a two-year ethnography study in Toronto, attending and volunteering at support groups for LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees, as well as interviewing asylum seekers, support group organisers, lawyers, and staff at the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) of Canada. In his research, Murray
explores the notion of the ‘authentic’ refugee, norms in the refugee determination process, and questions of migration, home, community, identity and becoming (Murray 2011, 2014a, 2014b, 2016b). These various studies are community-based and qualitative, with interviews as the main method of data collection. Katherine Fobear explores similar themes in her PhD thesis (Fobear 2016a), based on her volunteering at a Vancouver-based LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugee support group called Rainbow Refugee, as well as additional fieldwork in the form of interviews with IRB workers, oral histories with LGBTQ refugees, and participatory photography with some of these oral history participants. Fobear (2016a, p. 60) also discusses her involvement in various art projects while volunteering at Rainbow Refugee, such as a theatre performance, a mural painting and an art show. It was her engagement in the mural painting, on which she published another paper (Fobear 2017), that in particular caught my attention when starting this thesis. This mural was part of the Painted Stories project, a community art project that engaged 15 LGBTQ refugees in several workshops, leading to the creation of a mural, called “We are all human: Migration is difficult – don’t make it more difficult” and accompanied by a documentary called “Seeking Protection is Not a Crime” (Fobear 2016a, p. 60). Fobear’s (2016a, 2017) description of the process of making the mural and activists’ responses to the mural inspired me to explore arts-based research within my own context, in a community of LGBTQ migrants in Linköping, Sweden. Another example of a similar arts-based research project with LGBTQ migrants is the Queer Crossings project in South Africa (Dill et al. 2016; Oliveira, Meyers & Vearey 2016), which used body mapping and poetry. Finally, Lewis (2013) has studied how art and media can be used as methods for activism and a means of resisting deportation for LGBTQ migrants. There are, however, arts-based methods that remain unexplored with this group, and collage, the method I use for this thesis, is one of them. As mentioned above, the current study was carried out in Linköping, Sweden, and therefore, I give an overview of research about LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees in the Swedish context in the next section.

LGBTQ refugees and asylum seekers in Sweden

Like Lee and Brotman (2011, 2013; Brotman & Lee 2011), Murray (2011, 2014a, 2014b, 2016b), and Fobear (2014, 2015, 2016b, 2016a, 2017) I am basing my study in my involvement in a support group for LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees. However, the context is quite different. Aside from being based in a different country, the Linköping context is also quite different from the Canadian contexts that the mentioned studies are
based in. Linköping, Sweden’s fifth largest city with around 155,000 inhabitants (Linköpings kommun 2017), is a much smaller city than Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver (2.7 million, 1.7 million and 630,000 inhabitants, respectively) (Statistics Canada 2017). Within the Swedish context, there have been some studies about queer asylum, although the focus has mainly been on the legal procedures in the asylum process itself. I first discuss the legal studies, following by a short discussion of two qualitative studies that have been done on this topic.

Focusing on legal frameworks, Hojem (2009) reviews the legal basis for people to seek asylum based on the ground of sexual orientation, as well as the actual asylum procedure, in Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, and notes a lack of information about the particular needs of LGBTQ asylum applicants. In an overview of the current situation of queer asylum seekers in the EU, Jansen and Spijkerboer (2011, p. 22) note that in Sweden, the criminalisation of same-sex relationships is not enough grounds for asylum, unless that criminalisation is actually enforced. Jansen and Spijkerboer (2011, p. 29) also note that in Sweden, applicants are often asked or expected to seek state protection, in some cases even if LGBTQ people are criminalised in the country of origin, something also found by Gröndahl (2012). Grandin & Sörberg (2011) provide an insight into country of origin information that is used in the Swedish asylum process, with a specific focus on LGBTQ people. They note that according to RFSL, there is a disparity between official reports and ‘informal’ knowledge, in the sense that the focus is generally only on legal situations, but not on nongovernmental actors or asylum seekers’ own families, leading to a disparity in the judgement of persecution risk (Grandin & Sörberg 2011, p. 6). Thorburn Stern and Wikström (2016) identify that credibility is a central concept in the asylum investigation. The credibility assessment also arises in a report by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2017), in which it is noted that asylum officers tend to ask about, amongst others, the applicant’s family life experiences, and knowledge of LGBTQ organisations or meeting place to establish whether an asylum seekers’ story is indeed credible. In a report by Newcomers Youth (2017), which features a survey of the situation of LGBTQ children and youth in the asylum process, this credibility assessment is noted to be one of the biggest problems in LGBTQ asylum cases, in the sense that the public counsels in the study identify it as the biggest reason for denying an asylum claim.

These studies all focus on the asylum process and are based on reviews of legal frameworks and documents or interviews with case workers or lawyers. While these studies point at
important issues in the asylum process, it is important to also focus on the asylum seekers themselves, as their lives consist of more than only this process, even if it is shaped by it (Murray 2016b). There are two studies that focus on the specific experiences LGBTQ migrants in Sweden. Haansbæk (2002) discusses, based on life history interviews with 21 gay and lesbian immigrants, experiences of sexuality, religion, coming out, family, social networks, discrimination and health. Exploring similar topics, Avrahami (2007) carried out a study with 21 lesbian migrants in Sweden about gender and sexual orientation, coming out, stigma, family, social networks, migration, and establishment in Sweden. Both studies have a mixed sample of migrants that came to Sweden as asylum seekers, and migrants that came in other ways, such as by partner migration.

This overview of previous research shows that the majority of Swedish studies about LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees focus on legal aspects, rather than the lived experiences of the group. Furthermore, the use of arts-based research, as has been done by authors in other contexts (Dill et al. 2016; Fobear 2016a, 2017; Lewis 2013), has not yet been explored within the Swedish context. The method of body mapping, which was also used in the Queer Crossings project in South Africa (Oliveira, Meyers & Vearey 2016), has been used with LGBTQ migrants in Sweden, in a cooperation between the Swedish Museum of Ethnography, RFSL Newcomers and the Unstraight Museum (Riksutställningar 2017). On a smaller scale, an exhibition, based on various community workshops, was put together at RFSL Newcomers Linköping to be displayed in the local county museum in 2017 (Bogaers 2017), which I discuss further in chapter 2. Although in both instances art was used to work with LGBTQ migrants, using art as an informant for research with this group has not yet been done in Sweden. With this thesis, I intend to lay the first bricks of a bridge between art with LGBTQ refugees as a community project and academic arts-based research within the Swedish context, and specifically, in the city of Linköping.
Research questions

Based on the literature review, in which I found that there is a lack of community-based research on and with LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees in Sweden, as well as an international interest in exploring arts-based research methods with this group, I use the following research questions for this thesis:

- How can collage be used within a community context of LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees in Linköping, Sweden, both as a method for research and as tool for community building, and what are the advantages and disadvantages of this method?
- What can be learned about the experiences of LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees in Linköping, Sweden, by using individual and group collages?

Theoretical framework

On a theoretical level, I have mainly been influenced by concepts and theories used within queer migration studies. Queer migration studies is a field that relates to sexuality and migration and the intersections between these two areas (Luibhéid 2008). Within the field of queer migration studies, an important focus is on the study of identity categories, especially relating to gender and sexuality, and how these are generated and transformed by regimes of power (Murray 2016b, p. 5). The field of queer migration studies is guided by both intersectional and queer theory (Luibhéid 2008), two theoretical frameworks that I also use in this thesis. In this section, I give a short overview of these two theoretical fields and how I use them as theoretical backgrounds.

Intersectionality

The first theoretical concept that I am using for my thesis is the concept of intersectionality. Queer migration scholar Eithne Luibhéid (2008, p. 170) defines the use of intersectionality within queer migration studies as a way of “understanding sexuality as constructed within multiple, intersecting relations of power, including race, ethnicity, gender, class, citizenship status, and geopolitical location.” This means that sexuality is seen to have an impact on all migrants – not only those that might be describe as ‘queer’. Intersectionality has a longer
history, and it has been used in a variety of fields, especially fields that in some way are occupied with the study of power relations (Lykke 2010). The term was introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 and has its roots in activism by black women in the United States of America (Crenshaw 1989; Collins 2009). Using the metaphor of a traffic intersection, Crenshaw (1989) argued that oppression can come from different directions, or different subject positions, and that people in multiply marginalised positions can therefore experience oppression from any of these different positions, or a combination of them. Crenshaw (1989) also used intersectionality to challenge claims of a general female identity, which were usually made by white women, arguing that for black women, these experiences often did not align. Therefore, it was argued, white women’s experiences should not be seen as universal, and rather, the diversity within groups should be acknowledged (Mohanty 1988; Crenshaw 1989).

Since its introduction, the concept of intersectionality has travelled across a wide variety of academic fields, both disciplinary areas, such as history, sociology, and philosophy, as well as interdisciplinary areas, such as gender studies, ethnic studies, and queer studies (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall 2013). According to Cho, Crenshaw and McCall (2013), intersectionality is best framed as an analytical tool, something also noted by Lykke (2010), who argues that intersectionality should be seen as a nodal point, leading to open-ended investigations, rather than as a closed system. Although there has been criticism towards the concept of intersectionality from various directions, the concept is still used both in academia and outside of it (Lykke 2010; Cho, Crenshaw & McCall 2013; Spade 2013), and is used to describe the position of people facing multiple oppressions, not only relating to gender and race, but also, for example, including class, age, sexuality, ethnicity, or education status (Lykke 2010, p. 50).

A way to use intersectionality as an analytical tool is by “asking the other question”, a phrase coined by Mari Matsuda (1991, p. 1189). This method involves looking beyond the most ‘obvious’ form of oppression. Despite the focus on subject positions and directions of oppression, the intent of intersectionality is not to make identities static or to categorise people across specific axes. Rather, it is used to acknowledge that people may face oppression and privilege from various directions and that these may or may not interact, but also that these structures can change. I am using intersectionality as a guiding concept throughout this thesis, even if I do not always make it explicit. My focus is the intersection of being LGBTQ and being an asylum seeker and refugee, but I also consider other aspects that
may affect this group. In addition to intersectionality, I am also using queer theory, which I discuss next.

Queer theory

Another main guiding theoretical framework that I am using for this thesis is queer theory. Within the field of queer migration studies, the concept of queer is used “to acknowledge that all identity categories are burdened by legacies that must be interrogated, do not map neatly across time and space, and become transformed through circulation within specific, unequally situated local, regional, nation, and transnational circuits” (Luibheid 2008, p. 170). This means that it is used to challenge and interrogate standing norms. The concept of queer has its roots in LGBTQ activism in the USA in the 1990s. Specifically, the activist group Queer Nation, founded in 1990, reclaimed the term, that was previously used as a slur, to celebrate difference from the norm (Hall 2003), or, as they put it themselves in a pamphlet published in 1990, “it’s a way of telling ourselves we don’t have to be witty and charming people who keep our lives discreet and marginalised in the straight world (Queer Nation 1990, p. 5).” The term is used to resist the norm and to position oneself as opposite the normative subject position. According to Halperin (1997, p. 62), “queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate.” From its activist origins, the term queer travelled to other spaces, including academia (Hall 2003). In the book Fear of a Queer Planet, Michael Warner (Warner 1993, p. xxvi) writes that “For both academics and activists, “queer” gets a critical edge by defining itself against the normal rather than the heterosexual, and normal includes normal business in the academy.” The word queer has come to be used in a variety of ways: it can be used as an adjective, a noun, as well as a verb (Hall 2003). I mainly use it as an adjective, to avoid categorising people and acknowledge the complexities of their existence (Hall 2003), as well as when describing theoretical concepts that come from the field of queer theory. In some cases, I also use it as a verb, ‘to queer’ or ‘queering’, to signify a way of challenging norms and systems of fixed classifications (Hall 2003, p. 14). Finally, I use the concept of queer following its use in the field of queer migration studies, where it is used to challenge norms and to expand and complicate notions of ‘refugee’, ‘asylum’ ‘integration’ and ‘assimilation’ (Manalansan 2006).
Terminology

The topics that this thesis covers are complicated, and the variation of terminology used around them reflects this complexity. I therefore want to discuss what specific terminology I am (not) using, based on the context I find myself in and the theoretical frameworks I base my thesis in. Language matters, and using specific words over others is always, in itself, an act of power. Therefore, I discuss two ‘sets’ of terminology here: migrant/refugee/asylum seeker and LGBTQ/queer/SOGI.

Within the field of queer migration studies, which I mentioned above, scholars are critical of the traditional distinction “among legal immigrants, undocumented immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, or short-term visitors” (Luibhéid 2008, p. 173). According to Luibhéid (2008) terms like these are created by nation-states to enforce neo-colonial power dynamics, in the sense that they create a hierarchy between those people that are allowed to enter a country and those that are not, and therefore distinctions between ‘worthy’ and ‘unworthy’ migrants (Miller 2005; Murray 2016b). Luibhéid (Luibhéid 2005, 2008) therefore argues for the use of the more general term ‘migrant’ to encompass these different categories, especially as these categories are not static – queer migrants may shift between them over time. In contrast, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR 2016) argues against the blurring of the concepts ‘migrant’ and refugee’, as this may take away attention from the specific legal protections that refugees need, and undermine public support for refugees. They therefore make a distinction between refugees, people whose application for asylum is recognised and who are therefore granted a refugee status, together with certain rights and protections, and migrants, who they argue choose to move to improve their lives, and who can return to their countries of origin safely. I agree with Luibhéid’s (2005, 2008) points in that I think it is important to challenge these categories, and I think that the distinction that UNHCR (2016) makes are not always that clear or easy to distinguish. However, the participants in my study were either in the asylum process or were granted protection by the Swedish state because of an asylum application, which is why I used ‘asylum seekers and refugees’ in my discussion of this group, acknowledging that these terms are the outcomes of hierarchical structures among migrants.

In addition to terms related to migration, I also want to discuss terms related to sexuality. A common initialism used to describe groups marginalised on sexual orientation or gender identity is LGBT, which stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. The exact set of
letters in the initialism vary: most commonly, the letters Q (queer), I (intersex) and A (asexual) are sometimes added, as well as a + (plus) sign to signify other categories not included in the set of letters. The UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), for example, uses LGBTI, as facing persecution based on being intersex can also be a reason for asylum (UNHCR 2012). However, I decided not to use LGBTI, as there, as far as I know (but this does not mean it is impossible), were no intersex people in my sample, and only adding a letter for ‘inclusion’ when people are not actually represented is also harmful. I have chosen to mainly use the term LGBTQ (Q standing for queer), as this is currently the favoured terminology within the Swedish context (Swedish: hbtq) (RFSL 2015a). However, I acknowledge that the use of LGBTQ or similar terms is not undisputed. Especially when it comes to studies of migration or transnational relations, privileging this set of westernised terms over other terminology is problematic. To acknowledge this, some authors use alternative terms, such as SOGI (sexual orientation, gender identity) (e.g. Murray 2016), which is a more general description and does not put specific labels on people’s identities. I, however, follow the terminology of RFSL Newcomers, which calls itself a network for newly arrived LGBTQ people. By including the Q in the signifier, I also acknowledge that not all people necessarily identify with the LGBT categories. In addition to LGBTQ, I also sometimes use just the word ‘queer’ as a signifier, by which I attempt to resist the normative and Western identity markers that the use of LGBT may imply (Warner 1993; Luibhéid 2005, 2008).

**Methods and methodology**

In this section, I discuss my data collection methods for this thesis, and how I have made sense of the data by using the concept of *bricolage*. My main data collection moments were three workshops that I organised during the weekly meetings at RFSL Newcomers Linköping. During these, five collages were made. I supplemented these with two previously made collages. In my analysis, I identified themes within and between the collages, and interpreted these using insights from my work as a volunteer and activist, as well as various theoretical concepts.
Methods: collage and participant observation

Collages can be defined as “visual artworks that are created by selecting magazine images, textured papers, or ephemera; cutting or altering these elements; and arranging and attaching them to a support such as paper or cardboard” (Chilton & Scotti 2014, p. 163). My choice to use collage making as a research method was informed by different reasons: my interest in exploring nonconventional research methods, my discomfort with carrying out longer, in-depth interviews with this group because of their vulnerability, and the fact that this method had been used within the group before. In this section, I elaborate on these reasons and discuss the choice for collages, the use of which has its roots in arts-based research methods.

Like Cole and Knowles (2008, p. 57), I got interested in arts-based research methods because of a feeling of dissatisfaction with traditional research methods. I therefore became interested in exploring alternative methods. Arts-based research can be defined as “a set of methodological tools used by qualitative researchers across the disciplines during all phases of social research, including data collection, analysis, interpretation and representation,” that specifically draw on various types of art, such as performance, writing, music, film, dance or visual art (Leavy 2009, p. 2). Hansson (2013), drawing on Haraway (1997), argues that science is about using specific narratives and practices to tell stories about ‘objectivity’, and that therefore in that sense, academic research is also a form of art. It is an interpretation of science as a performance to seem as objective as possible. I find this interpretation of positivist standpoints about academic research quite interesting, but most of the time, academia and art are considered two incompatible areas of work (Hansson 2013, Eisner 2008). In an attempt to challenge this thought, arts-based research uses artistic methods in academic work, with the intention to create “new understandings of process, spirit, purpose, subjectivities, emotion, responsiveness, and the ethical dimensions of inquiry” (Cole & Knowles 2008, p. 59). I use the method of collage in my thesis as an alternative to more traditional qualitative methods to explore the benefits of arts-based methods. The use of collage, specifically, brings together fragments from different contexts, making a collage “reflect the juxtaposition of individual ideas, realms of thoughts, texts, images, and other creative works, and the conversation that develops between them” (Vaughan 2005, p. 41). In this way, the fact that knowledge is always partial, situated, and contextual, is acknowledged and embraced (Harding 1996; Haraway 1988a; Leavy 2009).

When I started this thesis, I wanted to make sure that I was not the only party benefiting from the project. Research asks time and input of participants, and especially when working with
marginalised groups, it is problematic to simply ‘extract’ information and then leave the research participants in the same situation as before. It was for this reason that I felt uncomfortable with using interviews, a research method that I had used before in a different context. I felt that the use of this method would not be beneficial enough to the participants, and I was worried that I was not equipped to carry out interviews with them because of their vulnerable position. Furthermore, as I was already a volunteer at RFSL Newcomers and I therefore was in a dual relationship with participants (Martin & Meezan 2009), I was also worried that participants might share too much with me, because they felt pressured in some way. For me, using collage as a method was, to some extent, a remedy to these worries. Collages allow people to share only those things that they feel comfortable with, as they themselves have the agency of selecting what they want to contribute. Arts-based projects also leave behind a more tangible product besides only the research outcomes, which can be used to share people’s stories with a wider audience. With collages, this can for example be done by displaying them in an exhibition, something that was done at RFSL Newcomers previously, and which I discuss more in chapter 2, and which I have previously written about in a blog post (Bogaers 2017). Creating a space for producing art can also be liberating in a capitalist society that mainly focuses on productivity, as it takes time, as well as a sense of freedom about one’s time, to make art (hooks 1995). It can therefore be empowering to resist this structure, and to provide a space for people to make art about themselves, in a setting where they feel comfortable, like in a community context.

For the data collection, I organised three workshops during the RFSL Newcomers café evenings in Linköping, with the purpose of creating both individual and group collages. The collages, together with data collected through participant observation during the workshops and my time as a volunteer, are the main body of material for this thesis. First, during two sessions with a week in between, I organised two workshops with the intention of participants making individual collages about their identity. This workshop followed a workshop developed by Nero F Enquist (2017). In the workshop, participants were asked to make small, individual collages (A4 size) about their private and their public identity, one on each side of the paper. For the ‘public identity’ side, the focus was on identity at work or at school, to make it more concrete. The workshops took around 2 hours each. Although the intention for the individual collages was, as mentioned, to have participants make a collage on two sides, this did not really work in the end – it was difficult to keep participants interested in the workshop long enough to do it, and for some, the instructions about the different sides were
too complex. I decided to rather than trying to follow the original plan, just see what the participants would come up with, as I did not feel pressuring them would be beneficial in any way. When using arts-based methods, it is not always easy to plan or envision what the outcomes will be, and it is rather important to be flexible when using these kind of methods (McNiff 2008). As McNiff (2008, p. 40) puts it, “in the creative process, the most meaningful insights often come by surprise, unexpectedly.” I therefore did not want to give participants any feeling of limitation in the work they were doing. In addition to these two workshops, I also organised a workshop in which participants were asked to make a group collage with the prompt ‘What is pride?’.

During all three workshops, one other volunteer and the project coordinator of RFSL Newcomers Linköping were present, although they were not present constantly, as sometimes they had to leave to arrange practical things or give consultations. The project coordinator helped me to explain the exercise during the gathering that we hold every café evening. In this gathering, we give information about the activities of the day, as well as about future activities. We also discuss the rules of the gatherings and give other information if applicable. During this gathering, I introduced my study and the workshop to the attendees and invited them to join the workshop. The project coordinator helped me with explaining things in a simple way, as they are both a native speaker and have more experience with this. I also think that them helping me with the introduction signified to attendees that they approved of the workshop and of my work, which could have helped with making people willing to join.

For the workshops, I gathered a variety of Swedish magazines. At RFSL, there are many LGBTQ-themed magazines, the majority being QX, a monthly magazine about and by LGBTQ people (QX 2016). In previous collage workshops that were done in 2016, we (the volunteers and project manager) mainly provided QX magazines as source material and we realised that it would be better to have a bigger variety, and to not only have LGBTQ-themed magazines. Although for some people, being LGBTQ is an important part of their identity, it is certainly not all there is to a person, and supplying people only with LGBTQ-related magazines could limit them in finding images or words to relate to. Therefore, for the workshops that I hosted, I made sure to bring different types of magazines. All magazines were obtained for free, which means that some held a lot of advertisements. Many of them, aside from the QX magazines, were produced and distributed locally. All magazines that were provided were in Swedish, which could mean that at least the text is not as accessible for participants not speaking Swedish well. However, this turned out not to be a problem, as
all participants had at least a basic level of Swedish. In the analysis, I mainly use the English translations of the Swedish phrases used in the collages, unless the Swedish term is relevant in the analysis. An overview of these translations can be found in Appendix 2. An additional problem with only using Swedish magazines is that of representation: as I was working with people of colour, asking them to depict themselves using majority-white source material is problematic. Although I was aware of this issue, I did not have the possibility to obtain magazines featuring more people of colour, as this would most likely end up being quite expensive. Therefore, I worked with the magazines that we had access to. I come back to the topic of representation of people of colour in chapter 3.

In addition to the materials produced during the workshops I hosted, I also used two additional collages: a collage based on another workshop by Enquist (2017), for which participants were asked to write down positive and negative aspects of their country of origin and Sweden, and a collage with the prompt ‘what is Newcomers?’ Both collages were made while I was volunteering, and I was involved in the making of one of them. I decided to use these in part because I got inspired by the concept of bricolage, which Lévi-Strauss (1968, p. 21) has suggested is built by “using the remains and debris of events”. I therefore added these two additional collages, to give a more complex insight into the community and to cover a somewhat larger timeframe. In addition to these two collages, I also used data generated through participant observation: my own experiences and reflections from my time as a volunteer at RFSL Newcomers, mainly in the form of narratives throughout the thesis, as well as field notes that I made during the collage workshops. In the next section, I discuss more how I use the concept of bricolage in this thesis.

Methodology: bricolage

For the structure of this thesis, I have used the notion of bricolage as a guiding concept. A bricolage is commonly defined as a construction made from those materials that are readily available. The term bricolage, and the related term bricoleur, in their academic and philosophical use is often attributed to the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1968). The originally French terms were introduced into the English language context when the translator of Lévi-Strauss’ work did not translate these specific terms, but instead let them in their original French. Nowadays, bricolage and the accompanying term bricoleur (the person making a bricolage) are used in different academic fields (Denzin & Lincoln 2011).
Introducing the concept of bricolage and the bricoleur into academia, Lévi-Strauss (1968) distinguishes between two modes of acquiring knowledge, the one of the engineer, and the one of the ‘bricoleur’. According to Lévi-Strauss (1968, p. 19), an important difference between the two is that the “engineer is always trying to make his way out of and go beyond the constraints imposed by a particular state of civilisation while the “bricoleur” by inclination or necessity always remains within them.” In this definition, the bricoleur does not intend to find objective truths, but rather stays within their own context. Donna Haraway (1988a) argues that knowledge is always situated, and that “feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object.” Rather than trying to transcend the situatedness of knowledge, like Lévi-Strauss’s (1968) engineer seems to be doing, the bricoleur accepts that these constraints are inherent to the production of knowledge, and aligns their work within these constraints, rather than trying to overcome them. It is within this line of thought that I frame the findings in my thesis.

Rather than looking for isolated facts and outcomes, I have written about the study and my own involvement with the community that the study was done with in a highly reflexive way. Like Haraway (1988a), I do not believe that knowledge production is ever objective, something that I had a hard time negotiating while I was writing my bachelor’s thesis – a process in which I was required to act as an ‘objective researcher’, rather than an embodied subject. It may have been in part the discomfort that I experienced within the social sciences that led me into the field of gender and feminist studies, where the researcher’s position and their reflexivity is an important part of most studies and reports on studies. The researcher-as-bricoleur is furthermore often interested in social transformation and working in an intersectional way (Kincheloe, McLaren & Steinberg 2011, p. 168), which fits the study at hand, as I started out with the interest of benefiting the community.

In Lévi-Strauss’s (1968, p. 17) conception of the bricoleur, the bricoleur performs a variety of tasks while making do with “whatever is at hand” in terms of materials. Lévi-Strauss’s conception of the bricoleur has travelled within academia, and has for example been picked within a more general discourse around qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln 2011). Denzin and Lincoln’s (2011, p. 4) conception of the qualitative-researcher-as-bricoleur is one in which the researcher makes use of a variety of tools, using those strategies, methods, or empirical materials that are available in the context that the researcher is working in. Seeing my thesis as a bricolage has allowed me to make use of the experiences during the past 1.5 years in my work as a volunteer, without bringing harm or danger to the individuals I work
with. In my analysis, I focus on themes that come forward from the various collages and link these together with theoretical concepts. In addition, I discuss some of my personal experiences as a volunteer, both in a narrative form at the beginning of various parts of the analysis, and in the analysis, itself. The final product is a collection of stories, observations and art, tied together within different themes and aspects of the asylum process and the lives of LGBTQ asylum seekers. Lincoln and Denzin (2011) compare the academic bricolage to a quilt. Made from many small pieces, together forming a bigger piece, but where these individual pieces are still noticeable and recognisable, the quilt is an accurate metaphor for what this thesis has come to be.

A bricolage not only challenges the idea of objective knowledge, it also allows one to refuse a linear, solid narrative (Collie 2011, p. 21). In the asylum process, applicants are often expected to tell their personal histories in a linear, coherent interview (Lee & Brotman 2011; Murray 2016b). To challenge this, I do not follow a chronological order in my thesis. Instead, I make a thematic analysis based on the collages, and I supplement them with some short narratives from being a volunteer, activist, and researcher within this community. Some of the fragments that I use came into existence before I started this thesis project in January 2018. To give some insight into the timeline, I give approximate dates for the narratives. It was not always that easy to remember exactly when a certain moment took place, and for some, I had to look at my personal calendar to find this – which shows that it is difficult to accurately remember such things concretely, even when it comes to one’s own life. However, LGBTQ asylum seekers are often expected to provide such detailed narratives during asylum interviews, and a lack of detail or struggling to remember certain details can be a reason to question their credibility (Lee & Brotman 2011; Murray 2016b). Stories, however, are often not narrated linearly, especially without practice, and especially when the story is something as complex as a life history, or a thesis about a very diverse group of people.

Using both collage and bricolage, two concepts with great similarities, has allowed this thesis to come into being. However, it took me a long time to figure out how to structure both my research and the thesis itself. At the start of the process, I wanted to stay somewhat distant while I was doing research, as I felt that that would be more appropriate – I was worried about my dual position as a researcher and volunteer. However, I was flexible throughout the research process and let myself be guided by insights that I picked up along the way. In the end, this thesis became more personal than I had initially planned, as I realised I was too
entangled in the community to be able to distance myself from my role as a volunteer while carrying out my research. I go more into how I negotiated these two roles in the next section.

### Research ethics

The idea to write this thesis started after I had been involved with RFSL Newcomers Linköping as a volunteer. I started attending the café evenings in December 2016, and my role slowly evolved from a participant to a volunteer. I started taking full volunteering responsibility around September 2017. When I started this thesis in January 2018, I found myself struggling with negotiating my position as a volunteer and my position as a researcher within this community. In this section, I discuss how I negotiated these positions, as well as what additional ethical considerations I took with me along the way.

I want to start this section by reflecting on my own positionality in relation to the study and the community in which the study was carried out. I was part of the RFSL Newcomers project before I started the thesis, which meant that I already had contact with the participants and I already had access to the community. I originally started attending Newcomers because I myself migrated to Sweden and consider myself to be part of the LGBTQ community. In that sense, I had some kind of insider position (LaSala 2009). However, my reason for moving was quite different than for most of the other attendees, as I moved to Sweden to study, and in many ways, my subject position differs from the participants in the study, which makes me what LaSala (2009) describes as the Outsider Insider researcher. However, as people’s subject positions are always intersecting in different ways, a researcher can never fully be an ‘insider’ (Dunbar, Rodriguez & Parker 2003). Still, respondents may be more inclined to participate if a study is carried out by someone they can to some extent identify with (LaSala 2009). However, this insider position also has risks: researchers may not notice things they are familiar with and they might project their own feelings upon respondents (LaSala 2009). I have tried not to fall into these traps, but it is difficult to guarantee such a thing, as I am part of the community myself, and therefore, my own experiences within it are entangled with those of the participants.

In addition to being aware of my own positionality as a researcher and a volunteer in relation to the participants, there were additional ethical considerations. There are two types of requirements that a researcher deals with: requirements from academia, which entail that knowledge should be developed and methods should be improved, and requirements about
the protection of individuals, which entail that research participants should be protected from harm and that their privacy should not be jeopardised (Vetenskapsrådet 2002). These requirements may conflict and should therefore be weighed against one another. Therefore, ethical considerations are important in any study. As a guideline for negotiating these considerations, I used the principles of research ethics in humanities and social research as proposed by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet 2002), as well as feminist insights.

In any study, it is important that participants are informed about the purpose of the study (Vetenskapsrådet 2002). To do this, I wrote an information sheet in both English and Swedish, where I tried to explain the study in a way that was easily understandable, while still covering all the essential information (see Appendix 1). For the Swedish version, I had two Swedish native speakers look at it, one of which was the project coordinator of RFSL Newcomers Linköping, who then also gave me tips of different ways to explain certain concepts/sentences to make sure that participants understood the information they were given. I also made clear that participation was voluntary and that nobody was required to participate (Vetenskapsrådet 2002). I also made sure I obtained consent from the participants, which I chose to do orally, rather than written, as I felt that asking for written consent might make it feel too fixed and might hinder participants from withdrawing if they at any point felt uncomfortable. Furthermore, some LGBTQ migrants may not be comfortable with signing their name somewhere, especially if they are undocumented.

Confidentiality is another important ethical aspect of doing research, especially when working with vulnerable and/or marginalised groups (Vetenskapsrådet 2002). Many of the people I was working with are still waiting for a decision on their asylum case, and if it is denied, being recognisable in any way in a public document could be dangerous. Even within Sweden, they may be at risk for racism, as well as homo- and transphobia, and as a community member it is important to me to do as much as I can to make sure they are as safe as possible (Martin & Meezan 2009; Fobear 2014). I therefore have not used people’s names. As the member group of RFSL Newcomers Linköping is very small, even small pieces of information could make participants easily identifiable. I therefore also limit the descriptive characteristics that I use, both to protect people’s privacy and not to out anybody unintentionally, as well not to impose any identity categories on the participants, as I do not want to reinforce normative descriptors without participants agreeing to this (Kirsch 1999). It is for this reason that I, for example, do not mention countries of origin, ages, or other
identifying characteristics. I do use the pronouns that participants use to describe themselves (he/she/they). Aside from protecting participants’ identities, the information that I received during workshops was not shared with anybody else that was not present at the time. It was especially regarding confidentiality that I was at times struggling with my positioning as both a volunteer and a researcher. To negotiate this, I have used some of my own reflections outside of workshops in the analysis, but without focusing on any individual people. Otherwise, I have used the data that was collected during the workshops.

A final point that needs to be acknowledged is that of representation (Kirsch 1999). In reporting on data gathered, a researcher is inevitably making selections about what to represent, and therefore, at the same time, silencing or making invisible certain aspects, which can reinforce hierarchies and power structures (Kirsch 1999). In acknowledging the situatedness and fragmentation of the knowledge produced in this thesis, I hope to account for this issue to some extent. An additional point is related to the methods: because I have based the analysis on visual products created in the community space, I also should acknowledge that my interpretation may not necessarily always be accurate, or representative of what the participants intended. I have therefore tried not to necessarily focus on pinpointing exact readings into specific images, but rather identified common themes, both within and between the collages.

Before I move into the analysis, it is important to provide some background. Therefore, in the next chapter, I discuss shortly the legal frameworks surrounding LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees in Sweden, as well as some additional background information on RFSL Newcomers Linköping.
Chapter 2: Background

To provide a background to the analysis, I here discuss the legal framework that provides a ground for LGBTQ people to claim asylum, both on an international and a Swedish level. I also shortly discuss the different steps in the Swedish asylum system. I then continue with an overview of the development of RFSL Newcomers in Linköping and the developments prior to this thesis project.

Legal framework

In 2017, being LGBTQ was criminalised in 72 states (Carroll & Mendos 2017). This criminalisation can lead to LGBTQ people fleeing their countries of origin and claiming asylum elsewhere. On various levels, there are laws in place to both protect LGBTQ people in their origin, and, if this fails, to protect rights for those that seek asylum elsewhere.

International legal framework

The right to seek asylum has its basis in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as written up in 1948, and specifically, in article 14, which states that “everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution” (United Nations 1948). Building on this declaration, in 1951, a Refugee Convention established the exact implications of this right (United Nations 1951). The convention defines who is a refugee and outlines refugees’ rights and the legal obligations of nation-states to protect them. A refugee is defined as a person “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his [sic] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country” (United Nations 1951, p. 152). In 1967, a Protocol was adopted, removing geographic and temporal limits that had been part of the 1951 Convention, and thereby giving the Convention universal coverage (United Nations 1967; UNHCR 2010). Together, the convention and its protocol are the only global legal instruments covering the main aspects of the lives of refugees (UNHCR 2011).

For people seeking asylum based on sexual orientation or gender identity, there are some additional important documents. The claim to asylum on these grounds are most commonly
based on the “membership of a particular social group” (UNHCR 2012, p. 11) A crucial document is therefore the 2002 guidelines on international protection, in which membership of a particular social group within the context of the refugee convention is examined (UNHCR 2002). In this document, a “particular social group” is defined as “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” (UNHCR 2002, p. 3). The implications of this for people seeking asylum based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity are worked out more in guidelines on international protection no. 9, a document that focuses on the specific issues for this group (UNHCR 2012). Two other important documents that focus on LGBTQ people are the Yogyakarta Principles and its addition that was published ten years later (International Commission of Jurists 2007, 2017). The Yogyakarta Principles are an application of international human rights law to issues affecting the lives of LGBTQ people. Specifically, principle 23 states that “Everyone has the right to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution, including persecution related to sexual orientation or gender identity. A State may not remove, expel or extradite a person to any State where that person may face a well-founded fear of torture, persecution, or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity” (International Commission of Jurists 2007). Following this principle, certain obligations for states are established, such as accepting a well-grounded fear based on sexual orientation or gender identity as a ground for asylum and ensuring that there is no discrimination against people claiming asylum on these grounds. In the Yogyakarta Principles plus ten, thirteen additional obligations are lined out, including protection from violence, not asking people to conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity, and accepting an asylum seeker’s self-identification (International Commission of Jurists 2017, p. 22). These international human rights frameworks all affect the Swedish context in which this study takes place.

In addition to working within globally accepted human rights frameworks, Sweden, being a member of the European Union (EU), is also obliged to follow laws and regulations that are made within this framework. In the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the right to asylum, based on the 1951 Convention, is said to be ‘guaranteed’ (United Nations 1951; European Union 2012, p. 399), although to what extent this is actually the case for LGBTQ people varies between member states (Jansen & Spijkerboer 2011). In addition to this Charter, there are various additional laws that govern the rights of asylum seekers in EU member states, but I do not think that it is essential to cover these here. Jansen and
Spijkerboer (2011) provide an extensive overview of the legal framework and realities for LGBTQ asylum seekers in the EU.

**Swedish legal framework**

In the Swedish Aliens Act of 2005, a refugee is defined as “an alien who is outside the country of the alien’s nationality, because he or she feels a well-founded fear of persecution on grounds of race, nationality, religious or political belief, or on grounds of gender, sexual orientation or other membership of a particular social group, and is unable, or because of his or her fear is unwilling, to avail himself or herself to the protection of that country” (Justitiedepartementet L7 2005). This law specifically mentions gender and sexual orientation as grounds for ‘membership of a particular social group’. The Aliens Act of 2005 provides the main legal framework for Swedish migration regulations, including those for asylum seekers and refugees.

The asylum process in Sweden consists of several steps. The asylum procedure starts when a person or family applies for asylum in Sweden. To do so, one needs to be in Sweden or at the Swedish border (Migrationsverket 2017b). In the application, one needs to give information about who they are, about why they left their country of origin and how they came to Sweden. When someone applies for asylum, they receive information about the asylum process, their right to housing, medical care and schooling for those that are underage (Migrationsverket 2017b). It is also possible to apply for financial support. Then, the Migration Agency prepares for the investigation by going through the asylum seeker’s documents and deciding how much of the application should be investigated, assigning a public counsel if deemed necessary, and contacting the asylum seeker if more information is needed (Migrationsverket 2017b). Once this is done, a waiting period starts, which can vary from person to person. After the waiting period, the asylum seeker is invited for an interview, where they need to explain their reasons for seeking asylum and what they think could happen upon returning to their country of origin. In other words, in this interview, asylum seekers need to make clear why they have a “well-grounded fear of persecution” and on what grounds, which, as mentioned, for LGBTQ asylum seekers generally is that of a “membership of a particular social group” (UNHCR 2012). If the application is refused, it is possible to appeal to the Swedish Migration Court (Migrationsverket 2017d). Overall, the asylum process is lengthy. Of all first-time asylum decisions made in the first five months of 2018,
the average handling time was 522 days, or one year and 22 weeks (Migrationsverket 2018b). This does not account for possible appeals, which can lengthen the process even further.

In Sweden, it is not tracked on what basis people seek asylum. This makes it hard to estimate how many LGBTQ asylum seekers or refugees there are in Sweden. Furthermore, not all queer migrants claim asylum based on their sexual orientation or gender: some may apply for asylum based on other grounds, making it even harder to make an estimate (Justitiedepartementet 2004; Lee & Brotman 2011; RFSL 2016; Brunell 2017). Therefore, even if there were statistics on the number claiming asylum based on gender identity or sexual orientation, the actual numbers would likely be higher. At RFSL Newcomers Linköping, there are people who apply for asylum based on gender identity or sexual orientation, as well as people who apply on other grounds. In the next section, I give a more extensive description of the work of RFSL Newcomers Linköping, in which this thesis is grounded.

RFSL Newcomers Linköping

RFSL, the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Rights, was founded in 1950. The organisation works on a local, national and international level to improve rights for LGBTQ people. They have over 7000 members across Sweden and 37 local branches (RFSL 2017). RFSL works with various kinds of projects, such as advocacy, support for LGBTQ people and education. Part of RFSL is Newcomers, a network for refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented and newly arrived LGBTQ people (RFSL 2017). On a national level, Newcomers strives to influence political and legal decisions to do with asylum seeking LGBTQ people, while on a local level, it is meant to provide a place to get support and to meet other people. In 2016, the Newcomers network had 604 members, 17 locations and 50 volunteers nationwide (RFSL 2017).

One of the local branches of RFSL is based in Linköping, a city in the county of Östergötland, around 200 kilometres from Sweden’s capital, Stockholm. Linköping is Sweden’s 8th largest city, with the municipality having around 155,000 inhabitants in 2016 (Linköpings kommun 2017). RFSL Linköping has existed since 1975 and currently works with a variety of projects with and about LGBTQ people, such as Linköpings Regnbågsvecka (Linköping Pride, or Rainbow Week), counselling with a focus on sexual health, and RFSL Newcomers. It also provides a space for a variety of social events with different target
groups, such as LGBTQ people under 30, lesbians, newcomers, as well as a general café for all LGBTQ people.

As mentioned previously, the research for this thesis was done mainly during café evenings that are part of RFSL Newcomers Linköping. The project was started in Linköping in 2015 and is currently run by one employee, with support from the board of RFSL Linköping and volunteers. Right now, we have two weekly café evenings aimed at Newcomers: one general one, for all ages, and one within the framework of Newcomers Youth, for people aged between 15 and 25. The latter was only started in 2018, and the work for this thesis was only done within the general one, with people of all ages. This café takes place every Tuesday and lasts for three hours, and is run by the employee with the support of one or two volunteers. Right now, I am the volunteer that is there most often, and one board member also joins most evenings. The café evenings are mainly intended to provide a space for people to meet and mingle, and there is also a chance for drop-in consultation with the project coordinator for issues related to, for example, the asylum procedure, health, or housing. Sometimes, we plan activities such as workshops or information sessions during the evenings. Of the 50 people our project coordinator is in contact with, there are around 30 people in total that come to the café evenings, of which around 20 people attend at least once a month. On the average evening, we have around 6-13 visitors. People who attend do not only live in Linköping, but in various places around Östergötland, as well as just outside of the county. One of our main goals with the project is to provide a space for LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees where they can be the norm.

Although Linköping is a fairly large city within the Swedish context, compared to many cities outside of Sweden, it is relatively small. I previously compared the size of Linköping to the size of large Canadian cities, where similar community-based studies have taken place. The size of the city also affects the size of the community. For example, Murray (2016b, p. 11) describes gatherings for LGBTQ asylum seekers in Toronto, where at some point just under 200 people were attending. This is quite a difference from the around 20-30 people that come to our cafés on a regular basis, and the usual gathering size of around a maximum of 15 people. At the same time, having a relatively small group makes it easier for people to really get to know each other and build up bonds with others attending. However, the amount of people involved in the project is limited, which sometimes makes it difficult to organise everything the way we would like. Other, bigger cities, often have more volunteers and resources to organise activities. Right now, Newcomers Linköping is largely based on the
work of three people, with the support, but limited direct involvement, of the board of RFSL Linköping.

Since autumn 2012, RFSL Linköping has been working with various projects related to honour-related violence and oppression (Enquist 2017). In autumn 2015, findings from the project ‘LGBT and Honour in practice’ showed a need for ways to discuss issues of honour, sexuality and identity with migrant youth. To explore ways to do this, the project ‘LGBTQ and honour with newly-arrived people’ was started, which resulted in the publication ‘Talking about honour’, a guidebook with various workshops aimed at bringing up these issues with the target group through creative methods (Enquist 2017). The methods were developed and tested at RFSL Newcomers Linköping during the autumn of 2016. In February 2017, we put together an exhibition to show the results of the project, which was exhibited at Östergötlands museum in Linköping (Bogaers 2017). The methods used in the project included individual collages about identity, a group collage about family, bracelets about norms, maps where people could mark places where they felt safe, as well as places where they felt unsafe, and finally, an exercise where people compare their life before coming to Sweden to their life now by using a map of Sweden. The uses of these various methods and the exhibition at the local museum showed me the power of arts-related methods in bringing up difficult and sensitive issues. Inspired by this project, I decided to look into using arts-based research methods for this thesis, and I came to, as discussed in the previous chapter, to using collages as my main method of data collection.

This chapter was meant to give some background information to the discussions in the analysis, giving an overview of the legal frameworks for LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees in Sweden and discussing RFSL Newcomers Linköping and previous projects it has carried out. In the next chapter, I analyse three group collages that were made during meetings at RFSL Newcomers Linköping.
Chapter 3: Group collages

April 2018. The first individual collage workshop. Several participants have trouble getting started. They seem lost, or stuck. They do not really know what kind of pictures to find, and one person asks me what to do if they cannot find anything. Another person spends a lot of time browsing through various magazines, but only ends up cutting out one picture. I try to help them by asking what kind of pictures they are looking for, but they say they do not know. Some people never end up producing a collage, and despite me trying to just get them started, they give up. Others barely seem to think about what they are cutting out, putting together a collage in very little time. I decide to not put too much pressure on those that are struggling and to accept it if they end up not producing anything.

Art and academic knowledge have for a long time been seen as separate domains, that were not easy to unite with one another (Eisner 2008). Academia, especially within the positivist paradigm, was considered to be a domain of rationality, whereas art was linked to irrational and emotional modes of being (Eisner 2008), despite the art world also being structured by patriarchal and oppressive systems (Pollock 1987; hooks 1995). However, within various academic fields, such as feminist and postcolonial studies, the idea of positivism and objective academic knowledge have been challenged (Haraway 1988a; Harding 1996; Spivak 2010). Similarly, many scholars have worked on ways to unite academia with art, which can also be seen as a way of problematising positivist ideas about science and academic knowledge (Eisner 2008; Vaughan 2005), or as ‘queering’ dominant practices (Hansson 2013). Similarly, Susan Finley (2008, p. 73) argues that “to claim art and aesthetic ways of knowing as research is an act of rebellion against the monolithic ‘truth’ that science is supposed to entail.” Therefore, I use collages as a way of exploring alternative knowledge methods and challenge traditional methods and ideas of positivist knowledge.

In this chapter, I analyse three group collages that were produced at RFSL Newcomers Linköping between February 2017 and March 2018. The first one is a map of Sweden showing participants’ input about positive and negative aspects of their countries of origin and Sweden. The second one is a collage following the prompt ‘What is Newcomers?’ The third one is a collage with the prompt ‘What is pride?’. I combine the analysis of the collages with reflections on the collage making process, as well as reflections about my volunteering experiences. Each section starts out with a short description of the collage, and of the
situation it was created in, which is described above the image of the collage. The analysis of each collage follows after the image.

Map of Sweden

February 2017, RFSL Linköping. Together with four other people, I am preparing for an exhibition at Östergötlands Museum in Linköping. The exhibition shows the results of a project that was carried out at RFSL Newcomers in the autumn of 2016, and includes various collages, maps, flags and bracelets. On the evening before, we are putting together the last contributions – we are decorating the banner that was used in a pride parade (‘Newcomers – We are proud, we are queer, refugees are welcome here’), we are sorting through the various items that we have to make sure they do not include any names, and we print out a list of the different countries that our members come from. I am working on a word collage. The sounds of scissors and paper being cut fill the air, as well as the somewhat frequent cries of pain from one of the volunteers who keeps burning themselves with the glue gun. We are drinking coffee and eating snacks. Despite working with quite serious topics, there is a feeling of positivity and excitement.

My participation in putting together the exhibition in February 2017, as described above, was my first serious involvement with RFSL Newcomers as more than just a visitor. Specifically, I made a word collage featuring the map of Sweden, and positive and negative aspects about participants’ countries of origin and Sweden. The map was based on an exercise in which participants wrote these aspects on individual, smaller maps. Around 8 people from various cultural and language backgrounds took part in the workshop. Based on the exercise, the project coordinator drew a bigger map, while I cut out words of various magazines to bring together what people had written. In this way, the results were anonymised, and people’s individual exercises were not shown to the public, but the things they wrote down were still depicted. In Brockelman’s (2001, p. 2) words, we used the collage to “represent the intersection of multiple discourses.” While I was carrying out research for my thesis, I decided it would be a good idea to revisit this map of Sweden and to see what it might be able to tell. As it was made as a summarising collage, it is not possible to draw either individual nor generalising conclusions, but instead, it is a way to explore themes and topics that are important to this group. The map, as shown below, gives an exploratory insight into the complex experiences of LGBT asylum seekers and refugees. The map is divided in ‘then’ and
‘now’, depicting people’s countries of origin and Sweden, and positive and negative aspects related to both. In this section, I analyse two themes that come forward in this map: the complexities of migration, and the concept of ‘home’.

![Collage map of Sweden](image)

**Figure 1: Collage map of Sweden**

**Complexities of migration**

To start off the analysis of this map, I want to look at the general differences between ‘then’ (country of origin) and ‘now’ (Sweden). For ‘now’, more positive points have been noted down than for ‘then’, suggesting that there have been improvements to the participants’ lives
in some ways. Several authors have noted that around the topic of queer migration, a common narrative is one of movement from repression to freedom, or, as Murray (2016b, p. 19) puts it, a “queer migration to liberation nation” narrative (Luibhéid 2005; Murray 2014a, 2016b). This narrative follows a dichotomous structure, in which the nation of origin of asylum seekers is described as bad, unfree, and oppressive, and the nation where the queer person gets asylum is described as a country of freedom, where the person experiences liberation from all oppression (Murray 2014a, 2016b). To some extent, the map reflects this narrative, as ‘now’ is described with words like ‘safety’, ‘love’, ‘health’ and ‘freedom’, whereas ‘then’ is described with terms like ‘crisis’, ‘unjust’, ‘no rights’ and ‘hopeless’. However, the map also challenges this narrative. It names negative aspects of Sweden, such as ‘missing family and friends’, ‘sorrow’ and feeling ‘lonely’. In a similar sense, it shows positive aspects of the country of origin: ‘family’, ‘memories’ and ‘friend’. These various aspects show how complex the lives of migrants are, and why it is impossible to classify their journeys as one from oppression to freedom. Even if things are gained by migration, other things are always left behind.

This ‘migration to liberation’ narrative, then, is not accurate, but this does not mean that members of this group have not suffered. Several words point to negative experiences and trauma, especially in life ‘then’, where words like ‘crisis’, ‘scared’, ‘unjust’, ‘fear’ and ‘stress’ highlight the difficulties that made people eventually flee their countries of origin. Previous studies about LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees show that they may face abuse from many different directions, such as from family members, community members, the police and governments, and it can often start in childhood and continue until the person decides to flee (Reading & Rubin 2011; Shidlo & Ahola 2013; Alessi, Kahn & Chatterji 2016b). The migration itself is often also not without issues: for many LGBTQ migrants, the course of migration is highly complex and lengthy, and migrants often face violence and exploitation on the way (Jordan 2009).

Once LGBTQ migrants arrive in Sweden and claim asylum, they are likely to carry these traumatic experiences with them. In the collage, the words ‘sorrow’ and ‘lonely’ are pointed out as negative aspects of Sweden. Sorrow, a word often used in relation to loss, highlights the complexities of migration: despite having a good reason to flee, there are always things that are left behind on the way. For LGBTQ people, who, as mentioned, have often experienced abuse from various directions, this feeling of loss can be highly complex, and perhaps paradoxical. A feeling of loss can also relate to networks that migrants have been
able to establish with queer people in the countries of origin, often in secret (Jordan 2009).

Furthermore, not all participants fled their countries of origin based on being LGBTQ, so ‘sorrow’ can also imply loss of family and friends, especially for participants who come from countries with war. The words ‘missing family and friends’, that are also listed as a negative aspect of Sweden, point in a similar direction. The word ‘lonely’ points to the isolation that LGBTQ asylum seekers may face in Sweden. Because of their intersecting marginalised identities as migrants and as LGBTQ, they may experience such isolation in different spaces. In a previous study about gay and lesbian migrants in Sweden, participants reported finding it more difficult to be openly gay with other migrants than with Swedish people (Haansbæk 2002). At the same time, many of the participants in that study had experienced discrimination based on not being white or on being a migrant (Haansbæk 2002). This means that LGBTQ migrants may often experience discrimination from different directions, even once they have arrived in Sweden, making it difficult to deal with previous traumas caused by oppression and persecution in their countries of origin (Reading & Rubin 2011). This, then, can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness (Reading & Rubin 2011).

Finally, in addition to the experiences that LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees may have once they have come to Sweden, the asylum process itself can also play a role in their experience of trauma. In order to make a case of asylum, applicants must prove that they have a “well-grounded fear of persecution” (United Nations 1951). The burden of proof here is on the applicant, and they must therefore provide their reasons for seeking asylum and provide eventual evidence (Migrationsverket 2017b). LGBTQ asylum applicants should also show how their identity is connected to the persecution they have faced or may face upon return (Migrationsverket 2015a). This process of having to recount one’s persecution history may bring up psychological difficulties, and can lead to possible retraumatisation (Reading & Rubin 2011; Kahn & Alessi 2017). Because of the often long-term traumatic experiences, these issues are likely to play a role in the lives of LGBTQ migrants even when their claim for asylum is approved (Haansbæk 2002; Jordan 2009; Kahn & Alessi 2017).

Because of the discussed complexities that LGBTQ migrants face, prior, during, and after their migration, their stories cannot easily be summarised in a simple narrative of migration from oppression to liberation. Rather, these experiences, both positive and negative, shape migrants and will continue to affect them even after their asylum process – that is, if their claim for asylum is approved of in the first place. It is important to acknowledge that issues, especially when it comes to mental health, do not suddenly disappear after migration. In the
next section, I go more into the notion of ‘home’ and what this means for LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees in Sweden.

**Home in Sweden?**

Once an LGBTQ migrant has arrived in Sweden and applied for asylum, they enter, as discussed previously, a lengthy process in which their right to asylum is judged. Especially during this time, it can be difficult for an applicant to establish a life in Sweden. Refugees are often depicted as being ‘without home’ or ‘in between’ (Bhabha 1994; Murray 2016b, p. 136). Depending on one’s situation and position in the asylum process, this can be an accurate description, as many asylum applicants spend a lot of time waiting: on the journey to Sweden, but also while waiting for an asylum decision. As mentioned previously, the average handling time of first-time asylum decisions was 522 days in the first five months of 2018 (Migrationsverket 2018b), and eventual appeals to a decision can make the process even longer.

The map collage holds one clear reference to the asylum process: ‘right to asylum threatened’, which is listed as a negative aspect of Sweden. This could have relation to, for example, the rise of anti-immigration rhetoric in Swedish politics, especially with the increased popularity of the anti-immigration party Sweden Democrats. Another concrete development that likely underlies this statement is a change in immigration law that came into power on the 20th of July 2016 (Justitiedepartementet L7 2016), as this map was created not long after that, in autumn 2016. The law change limits the possibilities for asylum seekers that came to Sweden after the 25th of November 2015 to gain residence permits. Instead of permanent residency permits, which were given out prior to this law change, asylum applicants are only issued residency permits of 3 years, if they receive refugee status, or 13 months, if they are eligible for subsidiary protection but not refugee status. When these temporary permits expire, holders need to reapply, and their permits will only be extended if their grounds for protection are still considered to exist. This law change makes the lives of those that are granted asylum less certain, as they cannot be sure that they will be allowed to stay.

The long waiting times in the asylum process and this law change from 2016 together affect this status of ‘in-betweenness’ that asylum seekers are in in Sweden, as even after having received a positive asylum decision, they cannot be certain that they will be allowed to stay in
the country. The way to receive a permanent residency permit is by being able to support oneself, making it important to find a job while having a temporary residency permit (Migrationsverket 2018d). This is not an easy task: the unemployment rates amongst immigrants in Sweden are higher than those amongst those born in Sweden (Statistiska Centralbyråns 2014). For queer asylum applicants, the possible prospect of having to return could also affect their willingness to come out as LGBTQ, which can affect whether they will be granted asylum in the first place. This is an inherent risk within the asylum process, as not all that apply are granted asylum, and being out as LGBTQ and then being sent back can endanger people’s safety greatly. The temporary law of 2016 only adds to this risk. Some activists, researchers and politicians have argued that LGBTQ people are specifically affected by this temporary law (e.g. Linde & Höj Larsen 2016; Mehho 2016; Tillberg 2016), although because it is so recent, there is no research on its specific effects for LGBTQ people.

Despite much being unknown about the effects of the temporary asylum law of 2016, it could affect, amongst others, the conception that participants have of ‘home’. Murray (2016b, p. 149) argues that for LGBT refugees, home may not necessarily be defined based on material space, but rather on people, thoughts and memories connected to a sense of safety, security, belonging and inclusion. In this sense, both ‘then’ and ‘now’ can be described as showing feelings of ‘home’: ‘then’ because there are friends and family there, as well as a lot of memories, ‘now’ because there is a sense of freedom and safety. Within anthropology, the concept of home for migrants has become to be understood as a fluid process that is related to relations, people, environments, and sometimes movement itself, rather than one fixed place (Rapport & Dawson 1998; Sirriyeh 2010). In this interpretation, the concept of home is ever-changing, fluid, related to one’s experiences and relationships, as well as one’s location. Complicating the concept of home in this way engages with the intersectional and complex experiences that migrants, and especially forced migrants, go through. Although Sweden is where people are currently positioned, there are things that may make it difficult to feel at home: as discussed above, in the collage, some things that are mentioned are ‘missing friends and family’, ‘lonely’ and ‘sorrow’, as well as having ‘nothing to do’ and ‘boring’. These kind of negative feelings, as well as traumas that LGBTQ migrants often carry with them, can make it difficult to feel ‘at home’ in Sweden. The ‘nothing to do’, as well as the word ‘boring’ also points to more practical aspects of establishment in Sweden, such as finding work or education. Although minors have a right to education, adult migrants can only start attending Swedish lessons once they have received a residence permit. Some asylum seekers
have the right to work, but without a certain level in Swedish, it can be difficult to find something, making people more vulnerable for exploitation.

The map analysed in this section represents the works of eight different people, all with different backgrounds and different stories. They have some things in common: they have migrated to Sweden, and they in some way have non-normative sexualities or gender identities. The map challenges discourses of migration ‘from oppression to liberation’ and instead highlights the complexities of this migration. The lives of LGBTQ asylum seekers are not easily put into some general narrative, but at the same time, it is a group that faces persecution, which often continues to affect them during and after the asylum process. However, despite difficulties that this group faces, there is often also a lot of resilience and positivity. In the next section, I discuss some more positive aspects based on the second collage.

‘What is Newcomers?’ collage

September 2017, Linköping’s Rainbow Week. It is time for the pride parade, and together with one other person, I am coordinating around 15 volunteers that are going to be positioned along the route of the parade. Many of our pride volunteers are part of the Newcomers group. We instruct them what to do in case they see anything suspicious or threatening. We have a close contact with the police. On the same day, there is a large gathering of the Nordic Resistance Movement, a neo-Nazi group, in Gothenburg. It feels paradoxical, but in some way, we are glad that they are gathering, as it seems less likely that there will be any followers around Linköping to give us any trouble. In the past months, many pride parades all over Sweden have been targeted by far-right and neo-Nazi groups. Later, I hear that someone attempted to throw hot water on the parade. Perhaps we were not so safe after all.

As discussed in chapter 2, RFSL Newcomers Linköping was started in 2015 with the purpose of providing a safe space and support group for LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees. Some years later, in 2018, we have many regular visitors, and even more individuals that are in contact with the project coordinator. To depict what Newcomers means to some of the visitors, this collage was made by two participants in December 2017 under supervision of the project coordinator. Although I was not present while it was made, I talked about the collage with one of the participants involved in the process, who contributed most of the text.
in the collage. In this section, I analyse the text and images in this collage. The collage gives insights about themes surrounding family, resilience and survival, refugeeness and the accessibility of the collage method.

Figure 2: Group collage 1: ‘What is Newcomers?’

Family

Several words and phrases in the collage point to a feeling of community: ‘smile we are family’, ‘unity is vital’ and ‘girls like us’. The word family is especially interesting here, as it was also used in the map as discussed above (figure 5). There, it was mentioned twice: as a positive aspect of ‘then’ (‘family’), and as a negative aspect of life ‘now’ (‘missing friends and family’). However, it is likely that they do not have the same implications, as in this collage, it says ‘we are family’ in relation to Newcomers. I therefore want to explore the concept of ‘chosen family’ in relation to this phrase (Weston 1991; Hull & Ortyl 2018).
As mentioned, family came up in the previous collage as well (Figure 1). I discussed there that many LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees face persecution from different directions, often including from their own family (Haansbæk 2002; Reading & Rubin 2011; Shidlo & Ahola 2013; Alessi, Kahn & Chatterji 2016b). Alternatively, they may not be out as LGBTQ to their families, and therefore not be able to fully be themselves (Haansbæk 2002; Shidlo & Ahola 2013). These are not problems specific to LGBTQ migrants: many LGBTQ people have strained relationships with their parents or other family members (Weston 1991; Hull & Ortyl 2018). Many LGBTQ people therefore use the idea of ‘chosen family’ as a way to negotiate the loss and trauma of a family that is not accepting who they are (Weston 1991; Hull & Ortyl 2018). A family should be a source of support, and when a biological family is lacking, a chosen family or supportive community can take over. In this collage, the words ‘we are family’ point to this concept: although not a biological family, the community at RFSL Newcomers can provide a feeling of belonging and safety when one cannot get those feelings with one’s biological family. These kinds of communities can be very important for the mental health of LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees (Alessi 2016). Lee and Brotman (2011, p. 259) argue that “an integral aspect to how sexual minority refugees survive and thrive may be the degree to which they establish support networks within affirming communities.” Furthermore, Lee and Brotman (2011, p. 261) argue that especially LGBTQ refugee-specific groups are powerful, as they can break social isolation, build community and foster self-affirmation.

These points are reflected in something expressed by the project coordinator for RFSL Newcomers Linköping: that an important aspect of Newcomers is that it is meant to provide a safe space where visitors can be themselves to an otherwise marginalised group, and to provide a space where “they can be the norm” (Åkerö 2016). The phrase ‘unity is vital’ also points to solidarity, to standing together. Sara Ahmed (2017, p. 240) argues that “in queer, feminist, and antiracist work, self-care is about the creation of community, fragile communities […], assembled out of the experiences of being shattered. We reassemble ourselves through the ordinary, everyday, and often painstaking work of looking after ourselves, looking after each other.” Outside of the space of Newcomers, attendees may experience oppression or trauma, but within this space, they can stand together and find people that they, despite having different backgrounds and experiences, can relate to because of similar positions.

2 Italics in original.
The idea of chosen family, specifically, can be a way to deal with the loss of or estrangement from a biological family. Providing safe spaces can be a way of allowing LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees to build strength and resilience in a context where they feel safe and feel like they belong. It can be a great aid in their establishment in a new country and can be beneficial to their mental health. In the next section, I discuss the concept of resilience further.

Resilience and survival: messages of hope

Several sentences in this collage speak of love and happiness: ‘love is free’, ‘love is love’, ‘happiness is key so be proud of who you are’ and ‘smile we are family’. These messages are all positive, and to me, express a feeling of hope. In this section, I go into these phrases further, and how we can read them as a way of showing resilience and survival.

Firstly, I want to focus on the two phrases ‘love is free’ and ‘love is love’. Love is a frequently returning theme in many of the projects discussed in this thesis, and it is represented in different ways: in words or depicted by hearts. In this collage, both are used.

‘Love is love’ is a common phrase within LGBTQ activism, and the phrase was also used on one of the banners that the Newcomers group carried during Norrköping Pride 2017. When I talked to the person who wrote these sentences on the collage, he told me “What I’d share is that I think people need to love each other, one another, because we’re coming from different countries, so, but the aim is love.” This line reflects the feeling of community that I discussed above and highlights the importance of love for this participant. In the talk I had with him, I brought up love several more times. In relation to the phrase ‘love is free’, he told me: “That’s what [Newcomers] is, defining different people, different people, different colour, doesn’t matter, it’s all about love. That’s why in this picture I put in ‘love is free’.” Like ‘love is love’, the phrase ‘love is free’ has been used in different contexts related to the LGBTQ community. For example, UN’s global campaign against homophobia and transphobia is called Free & Equal (United Nations Human Rights Office 2017). The same participant also told me “Love is free, no-one should choose who you should love.” This reflects persecution of sexual orientation, in which others decide who one is allowed to fall in love with or be attracted to. However, the focus on spreading a message of love here, gives a feeling of positivity and hope.
Two other phrases on the collage are ‘happiness is key so be proud of who you are’ and ‘smile we are family’. Again, smile and happiness are very positive terms. Although there are also some phrases on the collage that are less positive, when I was discussing the collage with the participant I cited previously, he only focused on these positive messages: he read all of them out loud to me, some several times, and he did not do this with any of the negative ones. Reflecting on this, I was reminded of something that Katherine Fobear (2017, p. 58) argued about the Painted Stories project, in which a mural was created by a group of queer refugees: when the project was shown to the public, she received the comment from an activist that although they liked the painting, they wished it was “more political”. In an interview about the project, she expressed that “survival is political. […] To be safe and loved is political. To laugh even though you are facing so much oppression is political (Plaut 2015).” The fact that the participant that I talked to only focused on these messages of positivity, then, can be seen as a form of resilience in itself. Fobear (in Plaut 2015) also refers to Audre Lorde, who engaged with the topic of survival in various texts, one of which is a poem called A Litany for Survival (Lorde 1995):

“and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid
So it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive”

I have chosen to cite the ending of this poem here, as it reflects an argument that Lorde also brings up in ‘The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action’ (Lorde 2007): people facing oppression will face fear, judgement, and pain, but they will have to do so either way, whether they speak up or not, and therefore, it is better to break this silence. A way of breaking this silence can be activism: for example, participating in a pride parade. This is not possible for all participants, however, as not everyone is out, and some may face threats from other communities if they are seen in an LGBTQ-related context. Therefore, this silence can also be broken in less public ways, like writing about one’s experiences, as well as by sharing positive messages, since, as Fobear (in Plaut 2015) argued, showing happiness when in a
multiple marginalised position can also be a political statement, and a form of resilience. In this regard, the positive messages in the collage reflect this idea of ‘breaking the silence’, of standing up for oneself, and to show that one is, indeed, surviving.

In addition to individual issues that participants may have, RFSL Newcomers Linköping has also had some moments when we felt, as a community, somewhat unsafe. In the introduction narrative that I started the analysis of this collage with, I described the mixed feelings that I and the other organisers felt during the pride parade in Linköping, which took place at the same time as a large gathering of the Nordic Resistance Front. During Pride, the LGBTQ community as a whole is more visible, which can at the same time make us more vulnerable to attacks, especially during parades, and at the time of the parade in Linköping, there had already been several instances of Nazi groups attacking or otherwise disturbing Pride parades (e.g. Franchell 2017; Jamshidi 2017; Voss 2017). At Linköping’s Rainbow Week in 2017, RFSL Newcomers specifically also received attention from the Sweden Democrats, a political party that has expressed itself to be against immigration on many occasions (Sverigedemokraterna Linköping 2017). Specifically, they questioned the fact that RFSL was financially supported by Linköping’s municipality for the organisation of this Rainbow Week, when part of the program of that week was RFSL Newcomers, in which undocumented migrants are part of the target group. Although we did not face any specific issues following this, the Sweden Democrats’ attention on our work still made us aware of the vulnerable position that we might be in, as this attention could potentially lead to more negative attention and possibly even threats. Even if so far nothing has happened, we are always aware of possible safety issues, especially those that oversee the group, that is, the project coordinator and volunteers. Therefore, resilience is not only important for individuals, but also for us as a community. Drawing on Lorde, Sara Ahmed (2017, p. 237) argues that “when you are not supposed to live, as you are, where you are, with whom you are with, then survival is a radical action.” Furthermore, Ahmed (2017, p. 236) argues that within feminism, survival becomes a shared feminist project. Within the context of RFSL Newcomers, I would argue that similarly, survival becomes a shared queer project, in which we support those people who, in some people’s eyes, “were never meant to survive” (Lorde 1995). Sara Ahmed (2010, p. 120) writes in The Promise of Happiness: “I think the struggle for a bearable life is the struggle for queers to have space to breathe. […] With breath comes imagination. With breath comes possibility. If queer politics is about freedom, it might
simply mean the freedom to breathe.” Focusing on positive messages of happiness and love can be a part of this project of survival, and of finding freedom to breathe.

All in all, messages of love and happiness reflect a feeling of hope and positivity, and can show ways of being resilient, and strategies of survival. At the same time, these kinds of strategies would not be necessary if there were no difficulties. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge these difficulties and to consider the negative experiences of participants as well. In this collage, some of these negative experiences are reflected. Therefore, I discuss them in the next section.

Refugeeness

Despite the many positive messages on the collage, there are also a few sentences in the collage that reflect less positive things: ‘they are affected by the housing shortage’, ‘can a lottery ticket help people on the run?’ and ‘the terror had the opposite effect’. Aside from on the map of Sweden (Figure 1), for which participants were specifically asked to come up with negative aspects of their countries of origin and of Sweden, these kinds of more serious statements do not come forward in any of the other collages. They reflect some of the more difficult aspects that this group faces. Although messages of hope, as discussed above, can be a strategy for survival, it is important to also acknowledge the challenges.

Firstly, I want to discuss the sentence ‘can a lottery ticket help people on the run?’ This sentence comes from an advertisement from the Swedish Postcode Lottery, in which they display that they support various support non-profit organisations, including some that support refugees, such as UNHCR and the Red Cross. The intended meaning is therefore to show that they contribute to good causes, and that people can buy a ticket and, in that way, support the Lottery’s contributions. By taking it out of context and putting it in a collage, however, its meaning can be read in a somewhat different way. The words ‘lottery ticket’ here reflect a discourse that has been used within queer asylum activism in Sweden, including by RFSLs national chairperson in 2015 and a previous employee of the Swedish Migration Agency in 2017 (TT 2015; Ahldén & Thorén 2017): that the asylum process can be a lottery for LGBTQ people. Within the legal framework that exists for asylum based on being LGBTQ, this should not be possible, but it is possible that there are problems despite legal frameworks if these are not adequately followed. Because it is not tracked based on what people claim asylum, it is hard to find statistics on the outcomes for those that claim asylum
based on them being LGBTQ, although some exploratory studies have pointed towards there being inadequacies during the asylum procedure for LGBT people in Sweden (Jansen & Spijkerboer 2011; Gröndahl 2012; Lukac 2017).

The sentence discussed above also has the words ‘on the run’, or in Swedish ‘på flykt’, which reflects the word ‘flyktning’, or refugee (‘flykt’ translates to flight or escape). The mention of ‘on the run’ in this collage is the only time in the studied material that this word is specifically used, although it is also reflected in the map of Sweden, where ‘asylum rights threatened’ was one of the negative aspects of Sweden, as discussed above. That it is brought up here, in a collage with the prompt ‘What is Newcomers’ reflects that those participants involved in making it acknowledge, at least to some extent, their identity as a refugee or ‘refugeeness’ (Lacroix 2004). Lacroix (2004, p. 155) describes refugeeess as a process of becoming, that often starts with political events or a crisis in the refugee’s country of origin. For LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees, the exact reasons that make someone decide to flee can differ, but often, it is a process that builds up over time, in the sense that they are often confronted with discrimination and stigmatisation from a young age (Jordan 2009; Alessi, Kahn & Chatterji 2016b). Refugeeess as a process of becoming is furthermore affected by the asylum process itself, as people are caught in a system that is supposed to determine who is and who is not a ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ refugee (Lee & Brotman 2011; Migrationsverket 2011; Murray 2016b). Because of this, the asylum process can affect people’s perception of themselves as refugees.

Lee and Brotman (2011) argue that in addition to the asylum claim determination process itself, there are two key areas that may contribute to LGBTQ refugees’ conceptualisation of refugeeess: housing and employment. Problems with housing are reflected in the sentence “they are affected by the housing shortage”. When somebody claims asylum in Sweden, they are assigned housing if they do not have means to arrange something for themselves. Normally, this means sharing a room with at least one other person, or, in the case of temporary housing, with several others (Migrationsverket 2013). Because of homophobia and transphobia within migrant communities, this may not be a safe option for LGBTQ asylum seekers (Haansbæk 2002; Carlsson 2016; Madon 2016). LGBTQ asylum seekers can qualify for housing reserved for vulnerable people if they face threats to their safety, but the places are limited (Migrationsverket 2018c). Safe housing can therefore become an issue for LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees, especially since many cities in Sweden are facing housing shortages (Boverket 2018).
The second key area that Lee and Brotman (2011) name as contributing to LGBTQ refugees’ conceptualisation of refugeeness is that of employment. Those who apply for asylum in Sweden have the right to work if they meet certain conditions, such as having valid ID and having a valid asylum case (Migrationsverket 2017a). However, as mentioned previously, without speaking Swedish it is not easy to find a job, and without a residency permit one does not qualify for language sources such as SFI (Swedish for Immigrants) (Migrationsverket 2017c). Therefore, this can also affect participants’ conception of refugeeness and their establishment in Sweden.

Despite showing resilience and positivity, LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees face difficulties in Sweden, some of which are reflected in this collage. These difficulties may contribute to participants’ conception of themselves as refugees. Experiences that lead up to people’s decision to migrate, experiences during the asylum procedure, as well as problems related to housing or employment that can specifically affect the way participants experience refugeeness.

In addition to the themes that this collage brings forward, I also want to discuss the ways that collage can be an accessible research method in relation to it. Although I was not personally involved in the making of this collage, I talked about it with one of the participants involved, and I used some of the things that he told me in my reflections about the accessibility of collage, which is why I discuss it in this part of the thesis.

**Accessibility of collage**

One reason for choosing collages as a research method was because I felt it could be an accessible research method. Specifically, I was facing the issue of language barriers when starting the thesis. As an immigrant in Sweden, I have been studying the language for the past two years, and although I am by now somewhat fluent in it, I do not have the language skills of a native speaker. I speak English at an advanced level, which helped me communicate with some of the participants. However, several participants had no or very limited knowledge of English, so Swedish was the better option. For some, however, the knowledge of Swedish was also still very limited. This double language barrier, both on my and on their end, made it difficult to communicate verbally in some cases. To bridge these language barriers, I chose to ask participants to make collages instead.
An advantage of using collages, as well as other visual arts-based methods, is that they can be helpful to capture things that are hard to put into words (Weber 2008). In my study, this aspect was helpful in different ways: both in the sense that for some participants, it may have been easier to show certain things in images than to talk about them, as well as in the sense that it allowed me to do the exercise with participants that had quite low levels of Swedish. Although these participants had some basic communication skills, allowing me to explain the workshop and the study, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to have in-depth conversations about their experiences. Collages, specifically, have also been described as being an inclusive method, which can be used with a range of participants, including those often left out of studies due to age, disability, or language differences (Chilton & Scotti 2014). Collage methods can therefore be useful in intersectional research, where the group of participants is quite varied, like in the current study.

A downside of using collages is that it is difficult to interpret without any additional communication. When analysing collages, some kind of “translation process” between images and words needs to take place (Leavy 2009, p. 234), which is complex without any verbal input or explanation from participants. I talked to one of the participants, who I have previously cited above, about the ‘What is Newcomers’ collage, using the collage as a starting point for a short interview (Leavy 2009). It was helpful to get his explanations about the images he chose and the sentences that he wrote on the collage. For example, he told me that he had chosen to write in both English and Swedish to “spread the information”, and that he wrote “smile, we are family” because RFSL, to him, was “all about family”, and that when he comes there, he would forget about other problems he was experiencing. Although his explanations were useful and gave additional insights to the collage, for reasons I discussed previously, I decided not to carry out additional interviews with the other participants.

In addition to making the process of data collection for the thesis more accessible, I also wanted to make the thesis as a whole more accessible, by presenting some of its results in a collage in addition to the written thesis (Weber 2008). This collage features images of the created collages, pride flags that were used during Norrköping Pride in 2017 and my personal additions, such as poetry that I wrote while writing the thesis and woven book pages (Appendix 3). Cole & Knowles (2008, p. 61) note that a part of arts-based research “involves commitment to a particular artform,” which is usually reflected in several elements of the research process and the representation of the research. It therefore felt fitting to present the
thesis not only in a lengthy, academic text, and as I was working with collage as the method of data collection, it seemed fitting to also represent the thesis in this way.

Despite the challenges that using the collage method may bring with itself, especially when it comes to using it on its own, I feel that it was a successful experience overall, as it allowed me to work with participants that would have been difficult to include in the sample if I had used research based on spoken or written language.

The collage analysed in this section, based on the prompt ‘What is Newcomers?’ gives some insights into the notion of family and community, as well as resilience and survival through the messages of love and happiness. Although the collage displays a lot of positivity, there are also some negative aspects that come forward in it, that are related to participants’ position as refugees. It is important to acknowledge both these positive and negative aspects, as they together highlight the complex situations of the participants. As I noted above, however, aside from the until now discussed two collages, the others mainly highlight positive aspects. One collage that has an, overall, quite positive vibe, is the collage discussed in the next section, based on the prompt ‘what is pride?’.

Pride group collage

May 2018, RFSL Newcomers. I have planned the final collage workshop for tonight. Inspired by the previous workshops, I have decided to do a group collage about Pride. It is two weeks before Norrköping Pride, so this is a good way to get people excited about it. I prepare the workshop by putting out the materials. It is warm outside, and for some time I am worried that nobody will show up. About half an hour after opening, the room is filled with people. It is busier than it has been in months. Soon, several people are working on the collage. Our space is filled with conversation, jokes, and laughter. I feel relaxed during the workshop, even if I am not always happy with the things people want to put on the paper. It does not really matter what ends up on it, I care more about the process. We are creating something together, and we are having fun while doing it.

When I was hosting the individual collage workshops, I observed one of the participants starting a collage and gluing one picture on a piece of paper, and then abandoning it. This piece of paper was then picked up by another participant, who added his own pictures and writing to it. Seeing this made me think of community – people helping each other when
stuck, and in this case, finishing each other’s collages when they did not know how to continue. This inspired me to do a group collage, in which people make a bigger collage together. As a prompt, I decided to have ‘What is Pride?’, partly in the hopes of encouraging some people to join us at East Pride in Norrköping a few weeks later. In total, six people contributed to the collage: four newcomers, one volunteer and myself. Whereas with the individual collages, I tried to be as little involved as possible with the actual making of the collages, I decided to participate in the making of this one, as I figured it would stimulate the rest of the people involved in the process as well. This also meant that I played a role in what did or did not end up on the collage, which I reflect on more in this section.

Figure 3: Group collage 2: 'What is pride?'

Queer mess

The first thing that I noticed while looking at this collage was that I felt it looks a lot more ‘messy’ than the individual collages. During the individual collage workshops, as discussed in the next chapter, participants often only started gluing down their images once they had
found enough that they had liked, and they often spent time on fitting the images together in a way that they liked. With this group collage, the process was quite different: people glued images on the paper as they found them, and slowly working to fill up the empty spaces. This makes this collage, I felt, more ‘messy’ than the individual collages. In this section, I want to unpack this idea of ‘mess’ in relation to this collage, and what it can mean for queer communities and research.

Mess is often seen as a negative thing. In *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler (2004, p. 175) notes that “It seems that feminism is in a mess, unable to stabilise the terms that facilitate a meaningful agenda.” In equating mess with the inability to facilitate a meaningful agenda, Butler portrays mess as unproductive and useless. Not all scholars think that mess is necessarily a bad thing, however. In *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research*, John Law (2004, p. 2) argues that “the world is complex and messy”, and that academia should adapt its methods to account for this messiness. He concludes that “it is important to appreciate that allegory, non-coherence, and the indefinite are not necessarily signs of methodological failure” (Law 2004, p. 154). George Marcus (1998, p. 189) writes about how ‘messy texts’ can be used to deal with the complexities of reality, arguing that “messy texts are messy because they insist on their own open-endedness, incompleteness, and uncertainty about how to draw a text/analysis to a close.”

The world is a messy place, and so is being a queer subject in the world. Within queer scholarship, several authors argue that mess is inherent to queerness. For example, Manalansan (2014, p. 97) argues that the concepts of ‘mess’ and ‘messy’ should be seen as “constitutive of queerness”, drawing on Michael Warner (1993, p. xxvi), who argues that queer theory is “a way to mess up the desexualised spaces of the academy.” ‘Messing up’, or ‘queering’, normative concepts and ideas is inherent to queer scholarship, and similarly, argues Manalansan.(2014, p. 97), ‘mess’ as a concept can be used to recognise and re-centre “underrecognised practices, stances, and situations that deviate from, resist, or run counter to the workings of normality”, while simultaneously acknowledging the mundane and ordinariness of queer experience (p. 98). In a similar vein, Love (2016, p. 345) writes about queer scholars that “When it comes to being messy, we are.”

What can these insights about mess, then, tell us about this collage, that I judged to be ‘messy’? For me, messy was not necessarily a negative way to describe it, but rather, it was an observation that arose when I compared this collage with the individual collages, and when I reflected on the processes of making the different collages. When working on
something together in a group, such as with this collage, structure can still exist, if a plan is made beforehand. However, in simply finding things that looked interesting and gluing them wherever they saw fit, or writing whatever, wherever they wanted, participants could still make their individual choices without having to conform to the rest of the group. Creating a ‘messy’ collage can be a way to show nonconformity in a world in which normative structures highly affect the lives of marginalised people, and in which art should be aesthetically pleasing and worthy of being bought (hooks 1995). It allows for a freedom of expression that structured work may not always provide. Mess can also be a way to free oneself from norms about functionality, value or practicality (Manalansan 2014, p. 98). At the same time, the collage does communicate a message, even if it is, so to say, a muddy, confusing one. Some of the text is directly aimed at the viewer: “You have to do what makes you to feel happy in your life” and “Be yourself like a dick”. Although whether these lines, to use Butler’s (2004, p. 175) previously mentioned words, “facilitate a meaningful agenda”, is debatable, they do demonstrate that even in a messy context, messages can be spread to a reader or viewer. Mess, then, is not necessarily unproductive or not meaningful.

Mess, like queerness, defies the normative frameworks in which everything should be neat and in order, structured. Collage is a messy method, as it works with fragments, with snippets, with scraps, and brings these together in one big messy collage of intersecting, intertextual, interacting concepts, identities and ideas. These fragments remain in dialogue with one another, with the collage as a whole, and with those who view the piece. Embracing the messiness of the collage method can allow one to embrace this defiance of the norms, to go against the normative ideas around art and identity, and to explore these concepts with a feeling of freedom. In the next section, I explore the idea of defying, as well as conforming to, norms through the themes of love and sex.

**Love and sex: conforming to and defying homonormativity**

When looking at this collage, I was struck by the numerous emphases on sexual themes, as well as on the concept of love. When I started the workshops, one of the first things one of the participants said to me was “I am going to draw dicks.” In the introducing narrative about this collage, I wrote that I was not always happy with what participants wanted to put onto the paper. This was one of these moments, and I decided to step in here. In reflecting on this moment, I found myself wondering why I had decided to stop the participant from drawing a
penis, and why I felt that the depicting of it would cross a line. In this section, I explore these thoughts further in relation to the numerous mentions of sex, as well as love, on the collage.

I did not really have any expectations prior to starting the workshop, as this was dependent on the people that would join it and their interactions. However, when the first thing one of the participants said was that he would draw dicks on the collage, I found myself a bit worried. Although we are open about sex during the cafés, as part of the work consists of benefiting to attendees’ sexual health (for example by providing information, as well as free condoms), I felt that the actual depiction of genitalia on the collage could be seen as inappropriate by some, or even confrontational. As I was not sure what would happen to the collage – some of the collages have been displayed in the meeting space – I decided to draw the line there.

When browsing through some magazines, I found the image of a pillow with ‘penis’ on it, and I gave it to the participant, and told him that he could put that on the collage instead of drawing a penis. Our interaction here was in a joking way, and I am not sure that we could indeed have drawn a penis even if I had not stopped him – perhaps it was a joke from the beginning. The same participant, however, did write “be yourself like a dick” on the collage. This, along with several other references to genitalia and sex, such as “don’t drink and fuck” and “my pussy grabs back only girls”, and condoms being glued to the collage, show an engagement with sex and sexuality. It did not surprise me to see these topics being featured, as we, as mentioned above, try to normalise sex within the community, in order to encourage people to not feel ashamed about it, and to engage with it in a safe way.

In addition to the various references to sex and genitalia, there are also several references to love: the phrases ‘We believe in love’ and ‘Love in the air’ and various hearts. The theme of love also comes back in the Newcomers collage (Figure 2), where, as discussed previously, love came forward as a very important concept, both in the collage and in the conversation I had with a participant who contributed to the collage. The depiction of hearts also come back in several of the individual collages, which are discussed in the next chapter. The focus on sex, however, only comes forward in this work.

Rosqvist & Andersson (2016) argue that between 1969 and 1986, a development in the Swedish gay community took place, where slowly, a hierarchy was created where love was positioned as more acceptable than sex. Whereas sex, in the beginning of the period they analyse, was described as fun, good, and as a creative force, over time, the focus on love became more important, and sex was seen as only appropriate when had in a loving, monogamous relationship. This is an example of homonormativity: behaviour within the
LGBTQ community being structured along the lines of the heterosexual norm in order to be more acceptable or appropriate (Duggan 2002). In the collage, the different mentions of love reflect this discourse of love as an essential concept of the queer community, or at the very least, as a mechanism used to make the community seem more acceptable given the cis-heteronormativity in society. This is not to say that talking about love is a negative thing, but it should not be the only thing that is focused on, as not all issues that queer people face have to do with love. The openness about sex in this collage, to some extent, defies this hierarchy of love over sex. There are straightforward, and somewhat profane references to sex and genitals. Sexuality has for a long time been a taboo in Western societies, and has been treated as negative or dubious, especially outside the context of a monogamous relationship (Rubin 1984). By explicitly bringing up sexual terms, participants can be understood to defy this hierarchy of sexual behaviour and reclaim their sexuality.

Although the focus on sex can be seen as a reclaiming of sexuality, this idea should be unpacked a bit further, as this behaviour can have its roots, in part, in the asylum process. Akin (2017, p. 119) notes that LGBTQ asylum seekers often feel the need to perform “a Western style of loud and proud sexual identity,” which can be seen as a strategy to fit into the new society, and to be seen as a credible LGBTQ person. This ‘rainbow splash’ (Akin 2017, p. 119) strategy can take several forms, including an emphasis on sexual activity. Akin (2017, p. 125) describes this as a risky strategy, as it reduces sexual orientation to sexual acts, and it risks not being taken seriously by immigration authorities. In the Swedish context, this is a likely risk as well, as asylum applicants are supposed to demonstrate that they belong to a certain group and are persecuted based on that. The focus is therefore on identity, rather than behaviour (Migrationsverket 2015b). Because of this, it can be a strategy to emphasise the aspect of ‘love’, as that may be seen as more tied to an asylum applicant’s identity.

Love and sex are both complex constructs, that are often entangled with one another. By bringing both themes into the collage, participants can be understood to both conform to and defy certain homonormative discourses. It can also be read as a strategy or a performance of identity. In the next section, I go more into the concept of performing identity and the representation of different identities.
Representation

While I was working on this collage together with four Newcomers, I was joined by another volunteer. He commented that he felt that the collage was not representative enough, as it mainly had rainbow flags and references to being gay, and did not incorporate other identities, such as being trans, bisexual, or lesbian. I agreed with him, and together, we made some additions to the collage that brought in some variation: references to being transgender (e.g. I added several trans flags, the other volunteer added MTF/FTM\(^3\)), to being queer in various ways (e.g. the word queer, the Swedish gender-neutral pronoun ‘hen’, the genderqueer flag\(^4\)). Because of these additions, the collage includes more different identities, which we felt was important, as it was likely that the collage would be displayed somewhere in our meeting space, and we did not want some people to feel excluded. Without the additions by me and the other volunteer, the collage would mainly have had a representation for gay identities – the word ‘gay’ is specifically used several times, and although the rainbow flag is meant to represent the whole LGBTQ community, combined with this fact, it was read by me and the other volunteer as not being representative enough. I want to unpack some of the phrases in the collage and what implications they may have.

One of the lines in the collage reads ‘Am so gay that I not walk straight’, using ‘straight’ in a double meaning: walking straight, as in walking in a straight line, as well as straight signifying heterosexuality. Although it is a wordplay, it also reinforces a binary thinking of heterosexuality being positioned against homosexuality (Lorber 1998; Elizabeth 2013), which ignores the complexity and variation of sexualities. It neglects the interpretation of sexuality as a spectrum, including those identities that do not align with one of these two binary categorisations, such as bisexuality or pansexuality. Another line in the collage reads ‘Let’s make Sweden gay again’. This is a reference to, or a wordplay on, the line “Make America great again”, a slogan used by Donald Trump, the current president of the USA, in his presidential campaign. Below, I discuss the resignification of this sentence, but here, I want to highlight the word of the use ‘gay’. Gay is usually meant to signify a male sexuality, and because of this, I and the other volunteer felt it was somewhat excluding to only use that in

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\(^3\) The trans flag has five stripes, from top to bottom: Blue, pink, white, pink, blue. The terms MTF and FTM are used to mean, respectively, Male to Female, which is used to describe trans women, and Female to Male, used to describe trans men. Nowadays, these terms are seen to be somewhat outdated within the trans community. For a discussion of this, see for example the video by Kat Blaque (2017). Some terms are not considered to be appropriate when used to describe others, but can still be taken on by individuals to describe themselves, and I would argue that MTF/FTM are such terms. As a trans man, the volunteer therefore can decide for himself whether he is comfortable with these terms, and it was his choice to add them to the collage.

\(^4\) The genderqueer flag has three stripes, from top to bottom: purple, white, green.
the collage. Although the participants who used the term may identify as gay, we wanted to make sure that this was not the only identity being portrayed. In an attempt to be more inclusive, as mentioned, we looked for references to other sexualities and gender identity, but somehow, we failed to include references to, for example, bisexuality, despite both of us identifying as bisexual. Since we were basing our contributions on the things we found in the source material, we were dependent on what was being represented in it. The lack of representation of bisexuality in the source material shows how bisexuality is often erased within the LGBTQ community (Yoshino 2000).

The phrase ‘Let’s make Sweden gay again’ sparked some discussion between the participant who wrote it and another participant, who asked “Did you just write a Trump reference?” She seemed a little disturbed by the fact that a “Trump reference” had made it onto the collage. However, after a while she said “I guess it can be seen as a parody of Trump”, after which she seemed okay with it. Following this statement, she wrote “My pussy grabs back only girls”, in reference to something that Trump is thought to have said on a tape about grabbing women ‘by the pussy’ (Jacobs 2017). In protest, the slogan ‘this pussy grabs back’ was used within feminist activism (Puglise 2016). In writing ‘My pussy grabs back only girls’, this participant both made use of this protest slogan and of the idea of making a parody of Trump. This is an example of resignification, which Butler (1993, p. 257) has described as a “question of subversion, of working the weakness in the norm”\(^5\). By changing the phrasing of the line, but keeping the reference, the participant shifted a sexist phrase to be something positive for her: namely expressing that she is sexually attracted to women. Aside from this phrase, she did not contribute to the collage, although she was present during the entire workshop. Somehow, the idea of resignifying this line sparked her interest.

The ways in which participants signify different identities or sexualities in this collage can in some phrases be seen as reinforcing the gender binary. In other phrases, a resignification of negative expressions has taken place. Furthermore, the goal of representing various identities that I and the other volunteer took on was not easy. Trying to be inclusive and representative of different identities is an ambitious project, especially when relying mainly on specific source material, which in this case was Swedish LGBTQ-themed magazines. Still, I think that it is important to signify inclusion, especially with projects that will be displayed once they are finished. Even if the things added by participants were not always unproblematic, the

\(^5\) Italics in original.
collage enabled a small group of newcomers to have a common goal. In the next section, I discuss how the process of making a collage together contributed to a feeling of community.

Building community with collages

Collages can be used within activist contexts, as a way to address issues of inequality, and provoke action and change (Vaughan 2005; Finley 2008). They can be used to communicate messages in a way that is different from spoken or written language. As I mentioned above, collages can also be a way to build a feeling of community among participants. In this section, I go more into this building of community through collages.

In the introduction narrative to this section, I wrote “Our space is filled with conversation, jokes and laughter,” in my narration about the collage workshop about pride. Furthermore, I wrote “It does not really matter what ends up on it, I care more about the process. We are creating something together, and we are having fun while doing it.” Although these are only my personal reflections, and I cannot speak for the feelings of the participants in the workshop, I left the workshop with a very positive feeling. As written, the atmosphere was good, the participants were talking, making jokes to one another, and laughing while making the collage. It allowed them to engage in social interactions with each other, while also working on a common project. Dill, Vearey, Oliveira & Castillo (2016) describe how they used a poetry project as a method to build a network and a sense of community among a group of LGB (lesbian, gay, bisexual) migrants. Although the participants already knew each other prior to the workshop, making the collage together still facilitated a space for the strengthening of these prior relationships.

Collages can also have some additional advantages that can strengthen group relations. Making a collage together could also be a way to bridge language barriers, although in the group workshop that I did, this was not really the case, as the participants all spoke English. However, because collages can be made by mainly using images, this is still a potential advantage. During many Newcomers café evenings, the group splits up into smaller groups, in part based on what languages attendees speak. To bring these different groups together, we sometimes play games that do not require as much language use, such as Jenga or card games.

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6 Jenga is a game where you remove wooden blocks from a tower and stack them back on top of it, with the purpose of not making the tower fall down.
games. Collages could also be used as a similar way of engaging attendees that do not have languages in common.

An additional advantage of the collage workshop was that it also provided a safe space for expression, as they were not open to the public and were held in a LGBTQ newcomers-specific context (Fobear 2017). The only people that were not part of the newcomer group were the project coordinator, a board member and myself. Fobear (2017) describes the exclusion of non-refugees in the community art project that she carried out to be a “necessary and revolutionary act”. By creating such a space, I hoped to protect participants’ anonymity and safety, and give them the agency to afterwards make the choice whether they want to identify themselves as the maker of the collage.

Finally, collages can also be used as a way to build a community by sharing the projects with a wider audience (Leavy 2009; Fobear 2015). Within this community, this was done in the form of an exhibition in 2017 at a local museum, which I have discussed in chapter 2. In the future, the products that were created during this thesis process can hopefully be exhibited in a similar way. We did display the collages within our own meeting space at RFSL. This was a way to, as the project leader put it, “give them a feeling of empowerment.” The concept of empowerment is somewhat vague, and it is hard to say in what way it could have influenced participants. However, several attendees of the cafés commented on the display of collages, and some participants in the study looked at the displayed collages as an inspiration. One way that art projects can be a form of empowerment is by the way they create a collective memory within a group (hooks 1995; Finley 2008). By displaying the collages in our meeting space, the creators were able to share their products with the rest of the group, either anonymously or not. Additionally, putting up the collages was a way to encourage others to express themselves in similar ways in the future.

As discussed, the collage method can be used to benefit a community in different ways. It can be used to provide a space for social interaction, to bridge language barriers, and to provide a safe space for expression. It can also be used as a way of building a collective memory within a group and to inspire other participants in terms of creativity. Finally, it can allow participants to communicate information with a wider audience.
Group collages: research outcomes

The three collages discussed in this chapter give some insight into the complex processes within this community, and the experiences of participants. In relation to the first collage, the map of Sweden (Figure 1), I discussed the complexities of migration for LGBTQ migrants and how this may affect their feeling of ‘home’, challenging the idea of an ‘oppression to liberation’ narrative that is often used when describing the migration trajectories of LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees. In relation to the second collage, with the prompt ‘What is Newcomers?’ (Figure 2), I argued that for many LGBTQ migrants, a community can act as a chosen family. I also argued that the participants demonstrated resilience and a form of survival through sharing positive messages. I also argued that different experiences prior to, during and after migration, can lead to participants conceptualising their identities as refugees in a certain way. In addition to these themes, I also argued that collages can be used as an accessible method that allows a researcher to access participants that may have been more difficult to access with other methods. In relation to the third collage, with the prompt ‘What is pride?’ (Figure 3), I argued that although this collage may be seen as messy, this mess can be seen as having a relation to queerness, and that it can also have positive aspects. I also argued that through the use of references to love and sex, participants both conformed to and defied homonormative discourses. Finally, I reflected on representation in the collage, and argued how the collage method can be used as a way to build or strengthen a feeling of community.
Chapter 4: Individual collages

April 2018, RFSL Newcomers. I introduce the collage workshops to the attendees for the first time. Once I get started with the workshop, one participant seems especially excited about the collages, and he points to a collage that is already hanging in the space and that was produced several months ago. In my introduction, I mentioned wanting to talk about the collages for a bit, and he says that he wants to talk about the one he created previously – he makes it seem that he made it by himself, although I later hear that several people were involved. We sit down to talk, although I feel quite unprepared. He tells me about the collage, about his life in Sweden and about pride. I am quite impressed by his excitement. Later, I hear from the project coordinator that his application for asylum got denied, and that he was therefore likely to be quite desperate to participate. Still, the participant does seem to enjoy making the collages, and he asks me about them for several weeks after I have hosted the workshops.

In this chapter, I discuss four collages with the theme ‘identity’, that were produced in two workshops that took place during RFSL Newcomers Linköping café evenings. Originally, the plan was to have participants make a collage with two sides: one depicting people’s private identity, and the other depicting the identity they were showing in public spaces, like in school or at work. However, this turned out to be a bit too complicated, and I decided to just ask people to make a collage about their identity in general. By giving broad instructions, it was also interesting to see what people would come up with and how they would interpret what they were being asked to do. However, I did clarify in some cases what the task was, as the concept of identity was unclear for several people. I told them that it is ‘everything that describes who you are’. I did not otherwise provide them with specific instructions of what they should focus on, as I wanted to see what people would come up with themselves. The four collages that were created in the end are quite varied – some more busy, others a bit more structured.

Individual collages

The chapter has a slightly different structure that the previous one. I start the analysis by describing and discussing each collage individually, reflecting on aspects that reflect previously discussed themes or other things that caught my attention during the workshop.
After the individual discussions, I continue with an analysis of some themes that come forward in several collages. Specifically, I explore the themes of identity-making and identification, and performing queerness. I also reflect on the benefits of the collage method in relation to academia, and researcher accountability. Finally, I discuss challenges that I experienced while using this method.

**Figure 4: Individual collage 1**

This collage is colourful and has a variety of images. The person who made this collage seemed to find it quite easy to do it – he worked fast and cut out many pictures. He did not really ask for any input or help from me and handed me the collage once he was finished. He also did not really engage much with other participants during the workshop. The collage has
many different images. Some of them could be seen to reflect themes discuss previously: a big heart, representing love, and a variety of rainbow flags, both in direct form and as represented in (bow)ties, pointing to an identification with this flag and its significance for the LGBTQ community. The only text on the collage is the word ‘everyone!’, which could be read in different ways: the word, together with the red heart, come from the same advertisement, which says ‘Agria’ loves everyone’. By putting these two elements on the collage together, they could therefore be saying ‘love everyone!’ . Alternatively, if the heart and the word ‘everyone’ are considered separate elements, the word could also signify something discussed in chapter 4: a feeling of community or unity. Other images show dolls, feathers, flowers and fern leaves.

Figure 5: Individual collage 2

This collage was originally started by one person, who struggled a lot with finding pictures. I tried to help him by asking him what he was interested in and what kind of pictures he was trying to find (he told me he liked cars, music, and animals), but in the end, he only managed to add one picture to the paper: the person with the guitar. However, once he had gone home, another person took up the paper and started adding pictures and writing to it. I found this process quite interesting, and it eventually inspired me to also do a group collage, as I

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7 Agria is a company that sells insurance for pets
discussed in chapter 3 (the collage about pride, see Figure 3). As the person who finished the collage was working on it, I talked to him about what he was doing and the pictures he was putting on it. He said that the focus of his collage was that all people are smiling, as “smiling is key”. He worked fast and seemed comfortable with making the collage, which could be because he had done it several times before. He told me that he liked making them and said that collages can bring forth a message easier than just writing text. This reflects something that bell hooks (1995, p. 8) has previously expressed: that “art constitutes one of the rare locations where acts of transcendence can take place and have a wide-ranging transformative impact”. Images can speak in ways that text not necessarily does. Still, this person did use text in his collage as well, which is something that is quite limited in the rest of the individual collages. Together, text and images, as united in a collage, can be used to strengthen a message that is being communicated.

This participant was also one of the participants that worked on the ‘What is Newcomers’ collage (Figure 2). The emphasis on smiling in this individual collage is somewhat reflected in that collage, where the words ‘smile we are family’ are written. In addition to the smiling people and the text ‘smile is key’ on this individual collage, the collage has the text ‘I got to say “Well then, see you”.’ This line comes from an interview about a lesbian woman who was in the US military, who tells that when she was called to fight in the army in 2001, she could not properly say goodbye to her partner because she could not show that she was lesbian. She says, then, ‘I got to say “Well then, see you”.’ If the meaning of the line is read in this sense, then, it could signify not being able to say goodbye to a loved one, or at least not in the way that would have been preferable. As discussed in chapter 3, family and friends can be a complicated topic for LGBTQ migrants leading to conflicting feelings. This quote could signify this. However, the quote taken out of context could also be read to mean something along the lines of ‘if you do not like me, then I will say bye to you’. In this meaning, it could be saying something about self-acceptance and getting rid of harmful people or influences.
In chapter 3, I discussed the idea of mess in relation to queerness and the group collage (Figure 3). The process of this collage was quite different: the participant chose his images carefully, fitting them with each other as good as possible – they are all square or rectangular. Interestingly, one image breaks this pattern: the bowtie, in the colours of the rainbow flag, was added on top of an image of a coastal urban area. This can be seen as a form of ‘queering’: placing a rainbow-patterned image on another image, and also adding an additional rainbow-themed image to the collage, in addition to several others, which makes it likely that this participant is aware of the rainbow flag and its meaning for the LGBT community. This collage also has a reference to SD, the Sweden Democrats, which I discuss in more detail below. Although I did not get the chance to ask this participant about it, I believe that he was not familiar with its meaning. The collage also has several pictures of people: some smiling, some looking more serious, some waving rainbow flags.
Like individual collage 3, this collage was made during the second workshop. It took a while for this participant to get started, and at first, he was mainly observing the other participants and browsing through magazines. He remarked, at some point, that he could not find anything. However, once he got started, he worked quite fast and finished his collage quickly. The collage is not particularly full, but this has allowed for a certain layout with a bigger picture in the centre and smaller images surrounding it.

Like the bowtie put on another image in collage 3 (Figure 6), two pictures are overlapping: the picture of a heart in the rainbow flag colours overlaps the image of Las Vegas. As these two collages were made in the same session, the participants may have influenced each other, as they both ‘queered’ an image by putting a rainbow flag on it, and in both cases, this is somewhat out of pattern with the rest of the collage. I do not know which participant did it first, but it shows that although the collages are individual projects, they cannot be seen as separate entities. As Vaughan (2005, p. 41) puts it, “the products of a collage practice are multiple, provisional, and interdependent,” which this similarity between the two collages is an example of.
Identity-making and identification

The prompt of these individual collages was identity, and I asked participants to make a collage about their identity. As I mentioned above, I explained ‘identity’ to participants as ‘everything that describes who you are.’ This is a simplified explanation of a complex and contested construct (Hall 2000). I explained the concept as simplified as I could, both to bridge language barriers, and because I wanted to see what participants would come up with. I did not come up with this prompt with any intention to essentialise identity categories based on people’s work. Rather, I wanted to get some insight into the process of identity-making and identification of the participants (Lawler 2014), which I reflect on here.

The collages show fragments of what participants think about themselves and what they find important. Identities are never singular, but rather multiply constructed and fractured (Hall 2000, p. 17), and a collage method can be ideal for exploring and acknowledging this construction, as collages are in themselves built up out of fragments. Lawler (2014, p. 7) argues that identity should be seen as more than frequently used identity categories such as gender, race, class, and sexuality, that is, categories that are often considered to be of importance in intersectional theory. According to Lawler (2014, p. 7), “they cannot in any way account of the complexity as it is lived”, since identities cross categories, available identity categories may not describe people’s understanding accurately, and people’s feelings about themselves may not be the way other people identify them.

The collages that were produced are outcomes of process of identity-making and of identification: participants chose themselves what they felt would be an accurate depiction of themselves. That does not mean that they are complete: some identifications are not easy to express in images if someone is not used to the practice, participants may not have been comfortable with expressing certain aspects of themselves, or they may not have known how to express them. Some aspects of the collages do somewhat clearly point to certain commonly used identity categories, such as the use of rainbow flags, which I go into further in the next section. In a different manner, some images depict hobbies and interests: the fourth collage (Figure 7) has several images reflecting this, such as a computer, a ball and a person on a bike. Another participant, who in the end did not produce any collage, told me that he liked cars, music and animals when I asked him what he was looking for. These instances show that interpretations of what identity, or a prompt of ‘describe who you are’, can vary and that identification is full of complexities. Certain identity markers, especially if people are oppressed based on them, can affect them more generally, but aspects such as
one’s interests also shape who people are, and enable development though bringing them in contact with others, for example. In that sense, finding interests and people that have those interests in common can also establish someone’s network when they find themselves in a new context, which is the case for this group of migrants. It is therefore important to not neglect these aspects of expression. Within RFSL Newcomers, we also try to engage with the interests of visitors so that we can, where possible, give them an opportunity meet others interested and through there build up stronger networks.

The four collages depict various fragments of ‘who participants are’, and perhaps, simply imagery they find aesthetically pleasing. The collages depict both the complexity of identity, but also the, at times, somewhat mundane aspects of it: identity is not only made of abstract categories, but instead, it can also be what kind of hobbies someone has or what kind of music someone likes. Several collages also portray queerness in some way, which I discuss in the next section.

**Performing queerness**

Although I, as mentioned above, do not want to pinpoint specific identities by means of the collages, a significant theme that comes forward is references to the rainbow flag: collage 1 and 3 (Figure 4 and 6) both have various rainbow flags, as well as items of clothing with the colours of the flag, and collage 4 (Figure 7) has a heart in the colours of the rainbow flag. As discussed previously, the rainbow flag is a frequently used symbol in the LGBTQ community. I want to discuss the implications of the use of this theme here.

The engagement with the rainbow flag in the different collages can be seen to demonstrate a process of performing this specific aspect of identity. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler (2006, p. 185) argues that certain acts, gestures, and enactments are performative, “in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.” Although Butler (2006) engages with this in the sense of a material performance of the body, the outcome of the collages can be read in a similar way. The use of rainbow imagery demonstrates some kind of queer/LGBTQ identity, or at least an identification with the symbol and what it stands for. Butler (2006) argues that performativity is often related to the repetition of existing norms, and the specific image of the rainbow, which is abundant in the space in which RFSL Newcomers Linköping meets, is therefore a logical choice to depict this identification.
Furthermore, because of their position in the asylum system, participants need to demonstrate to the Swedish Migration Agency that they have a right to asylum based on their belonging to a ‘particular group’ based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. Because of this process, people might engage with this aspect of their identity to a higher extent than they would normally do (Akin 2017).

As I discussed in chapter 3, LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees may not always be able to engage with their queerness, as it could affect their safety. Heller (2009) describes a process of covering and reverse-covering that LGBTQ asylum seekers go through: in their countries of origin, they have had to cover their identity; in the asylum system, they have to reverse-cover to be granted asylum; and finally, if the asylum claim fails and they need to return to their country of origin, they once more need to cover their identity as LGBTQ. However, this cycle of covering and reverse-covering can also take place when LGBTQ asylum seekers move between different contexts within Sweden. At RFSL, it is safe to be open about one’s queer identity, but in certain other contexts, it may not be. These safe spaces, then, both provide a place for a freedom of expression, but also a space to practice this openness that they will need to prove their claim for asylum.

Although it can be helpful, and perhaps necessary, for LGBTQ migrants to engage with images that reflect certain identity categories, it can also be useful to transcend these categories to create alliances in what Yuval-Davis (2010) calls ‘transversal politics’, where the focus is on common values, rather than necessarily common identifications. An example of this took place during East Pride 2018, in the neighbouring city Norrköping, where we took part with the RFSL Newcomers group together with the general RFSL section, as well as a group for young migrants in the Östergötland region. One of the participants from that group carried a sign saying “Human rights apply to EVERYONE”, which to me demonstrates this building of alliances that Yuval-Davis (2010) describes.

By engaging with rainbow flag imagery in the collages, participants performed queerness. This can be a positive thing for LGBTQ newcomers, as they may not be able to safely express their queerness in other contexts. However, it can also be useful to build alliances across different identities. In a similar vein, it can be useful to build bridges across different practices or disciplines. Therefore, I discuss how the collage method was a way to negotiate and unite my position as a volunteer and researcher.
Negotiating my position as a volunteer and researcher

What was especially important for me when starting this thesis was to make sure that I was not taking advantage of the community members or of my position as a volunteer. I felt, at times, a bit torn between my position as a community member/volunteer and my position as a researcher. It was therefore important to explore how the collage method could be used as a way of bringing community knowledge into academia, while still protecting the group.

One aspect of the researcher-as-bricoleur is that they “attempt to remove knowledge production and its benefits from the control of elite groups” (Kincheloe, McLaren & Steinberg 2011, p. 169). For me, in this specific context, this meant trying to give agency to participants in the making of collages. Participants could themselves decide what kind of themes and images they wanted to engage with. Meezan and Martin (2009) argue that in interviews, participants may feel pressured to answer, especially when there is a dual relationship between researcher and participant in some way, that is, if they have a relationship outside of the research. As a community volunteer-turned-researcher, I was in such a dual relationship with the participants in my study, and for me, the collages provided a way to mitigate the ethical issues of a dual relationship. While I did give participants a prompt or a theme for the collage, they otherwise got to choose themselves what they would highlight and what kinds of materials to use. The relatively longer process of data selection by participants, in the sense of them searching for, selecting, cutting out and finally gluing images or text onto a piece of paper allows them to take the time to carefully select what they want to portray. In many cases, this filtering by participants may not be helpful to the research process, but as I was focusing on participants' self-expression, I found that this was an advantage of the collage method. In addition, the collage method allowed me to display the results of what they created directly in my thesis, bringing their input into the academic context.

As I was working on this project, I was simultaneously preparing to leave Sweden for at least a year, and possibly forever. It felt like a strange paradox sometimes – and a very privileged position. The people I was working with could not decide where they would go, they were dependent on what the asylum system would decide for them. This also made me uncomfortable with the thought of carrying out extensive interviews, as I did not want to be the kind of researcher that comes, collects their data and leaves straight away. I did not like asking people to confide in me with personal stories and then leave shortly after that. However, as I would leave the project shortly after finishing my thesis, I decided to try to
design a study that was not too intrusive, and that would in some way hopefully give something back to the participants.

I consider the protection of the community to be very important, and I did not want to have a negative impact on the community by taking my academic work into that space. This could be seen as a flaw, as I, in some way, prioritised my position as a community member over my position as a researcher (Taylor 2011). However, other researchers that have carried out similar community-based studies with LGBT asylum seekers and refugees have either, like Lee and Brotman (2011) spent a long time (6-8 months) to build up rapport or, like Fobear (2017), have also been volunteers within the community. Therefore, I believe that it can also be an academic strength: by already being a volunteer within the community, I had already established some form of rapport with both the project coordinator and the community members (Taylor 2011). Furthermore, addressing the needs of marginalised groups and individuals is described as a characteristic of the researcher-as-bricoleur (Kincheloe, McLaren & Steinberg 2011, p. 169), and therefore this position in relation to my participants fits well with the way I have constructed the thesis.

Although it is not possible to really make a distinction between my position as a volunteer and my position as a researcher, at times, I felt that the two conflicted. Therefore, it was useful to find ways to unite these two positions and to negotiate my position in the community with my position in academia. The collage method helped me in those negotiations. The collage method also helped me in reflecting on my accountability as a researcher, which I discuss in the next section.

**Accountability/researcher position**

Using collages as a method helped me to constantly reflect on my accountability as a researcher, as I was an active participant in the data collection process. I felt more embodied during the workshops, as both I and the participants were working with objects in the space, such as magazines, scissors and glue sticks (Weber 2008). For me, this helped to keep me grounded in my relation to the participant, and to bridge a distance that I have experienced before when carrying out interviews. After the workshops had taken place, I kept reflecting about my position in the research process because we displayed the collages in our meeting space. In this section, I discuss some of these reflections about the collage process and my accountability as a researcher.
I mentioned previously that most of the collages were displayed in our meeting space as an inspiration for the group. With one specific collage, the display of the collages led to an enhanced reflection. During one of the workshops, a participant was cutting out a picture of Sweden, which included a Swedish flag and ‘SD’ in the corner (see Figure 6). SD stands for Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna), which, as mentioned previously, is a nationalist political party that is known for its anti-immigration-attitudes and of which members have also been shown to be homo- and transphobic (Sjöberg 2016, p. 181; Nilsson 2015). As we were in the space of RFSL Newcomers, during a café evening, I assumed that this person did not cut out the picture because of their interest in or agreement with SD’s standpoints, but rather because they liked the photo itself. When it happened, I was not sure what to do. My academic side, still influenced by my background in social sciences and ideas of ‘objective research’, was telling me to let him put the picture on his collage and to not interfere. My volunteer side, however, was highly uncomfortable with SD getting a place on a collage and therefore within our space, as their views are against everything that we are working for. In the end, my academic side won, and I decided not to interfere and to let the person put the image on their collage, despite having engaged with the idea that ‘objective knowledge’ does not exist, and that the researcher always affects the data collection.

Once the collage was finished, and I put it up in our meeting space, I felt uncomfortable with the choice I ended up making when I thought about it afterwards, but in the moment, it seemed to be the right one. When I put up the collages in our meeting space, the project coordinator made a remark about the presence of the SD logo. I explained why I had made the choice not to interfere and discussed my discomfort with them, and although it did not lead to any further issues, it made me highly aware of how important it is to reflect on one’s accountability as a researcher. If I had stepped in and explained to the participant what SD means, the image would probably not have ended up on the collage. This experience contributed to my decision to be more involved in the process of making the group collage (Figure 3).

During the individual collages, I tried to be involved as little as possible, aside from giving the instructions. I did sometimes browse through some magazines, just to seem like I was doing something, as I did not want to make the participants uncomfortable by just sitting there and ‘observing’ them. Where people were struggling with the task, I tried to encourage people by asking what type of images they were looking for, but I did not actually help with looking for pictures, which is something that I probably would have done had I not been there.
in the position as ‘researcher’. Reflecting on this choice afterwards made me question why I felt I could not be more involved, but as I mentioned before, I was probably still carrying the baggage of studying social sciences with me, in which I was pressured to be as objective as possible. After the two individual collages I realised that this was the case, and therefore, I decided to become a bit more involved during the group collage workshop. In my data collection, I felt that both the process and the results were equally important to the study, and my fear of influencing the participants for the individual collages partly impaired the stimulation of this process between workshop leader/researcher and participant.

All in all, the research process for this thesis was one of extensive reflection, which was appropriate because of the research topic, and the use of a collage method helped me in this reflective process and to make sure I was held accountable for the choices I made throughout the process. Overall, the collage method was highly beneficial to me in several ways, as discussed until now. However, there were also some challenged that came with it. I discuss these in the next section.

Collage for everybody?

One of the main challenges that I ran into while hosting the workshops was participants not being able to make a collage. During all three workshops that I hosted, there were people that seemed interested in taking part, but that did not produce anything in the end. I was asked by three different people questions along the lines of “what to do if I cannot find anything?”. I want to share some reflections here about what may have been the reasons that some participants did not end up making a collage, despite showing interest at first.

I decided not to pressure anybody during the workshops. Although I tried to help them when they asked for help, mainly by asking stimulating questions about what kind of images they were searching for, I did not help them with finding any pictures. Perhaps I could have pushed participants more than I did, but I also did not want to influence what they would put on their collages too much, especially when it came to the individual ones. The consequence of this was that several potential participants did not manage to produce a collage, despite their initial interest. In part, my inexperience with the method likely plays a part in this, as I was not sure how to best stimulate participants without influencing the final product too much.
Aside from my inexperience with the method, especially as a research method, the collage method itself can also have been an influence in this regard. Artistic methods do not work for everyone, and therefore it might not necessarily be the best research method to reach all people. However, various authors have argued that the use of collage specifically works well with people with little artistic experience and that it generally does not stimulate people’s concerns about artistic ability (Leitch 2008; Chilton & Scotti 2014). Artistic ability indeed did not seem to be a concern for most of my participants, as the only comment I received about ‘not being good at this’ (this being the collage making) was from the other volunteer. I also did say to some participants that it did not have to look ‘professional’, that it was just an assignment to help them express themselves. However, as said, some participants still struggled with the assignment. There are several possible explanations for this.

I think that in part, my inexperience with the method plays a part in this, as I was not sure how to best stimulate participants without influencing them too much, the choice of method itself can also have been a challenge in this regard. One reason could be that people found it difficult to decide what images to represent themselves with. Alternatively, participants might have felt intimidated by being asked to make a collage because they lacked experience with it. Those participants that had done similar tasks before indeed seemed more comfortable than those who had no experience with making collages within this context. A third reason could be that participants simply were not comfortable with sharing information about themselves. After all, I was someone that they would see again after they had made the collage, and they were also not making them by themselves – there were a lot of people around, even if they were also LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees. Finally, a reason that participants had trouble with the assignment could be that they did not feel comfortable with the source material they were provided with. As I used magazines that could be gathered for free as the main resource, they were all Swedish magazines. It is possible that participants were unfamiliar with certain representations in the magazines, or simply did not recognise themselves in them, and therefore did not feel inspired to use any of the images for their collages.

Individual collages: research outcomes

In this chapter, I have discussed the process and outcomes of two workshops that I hosted with the theme of ‘identity’. I noticed that some themes that I previously discussed in chapter
3 were also reflected in some of the individual collages. Additionally, I discussed the topic of identity-making and identification, and argued that the collages show fragments of identity, which can be both complex identities, such as sexuality or gender, but also less complex identity, such as hobbies. I also argued that several of the participants performed queerness in their collages through the repeated use of the rainbow flag. I also reflected on the role of the collage method in the research process. I argued that the collage method made it easier for me to negotiate my different positions as a volunteer and researcher and to keep reflecting on my researcher accountability. Finally, I explored possible reasons for participants not producing a collage, despite showing an interest to participate in the workshops. The collage method may not be for everyone, but that despite this, the collages provided valuable insights and outcomes.
Chapter 5: Conclusions

East Pride, Norrköping 2018. The week leading up to this warm and sunny Saturday has been spent by making our own banners and signs, coming up with slogans, cutting fabric and cardboard, and getting paint on our hands and our clothes. The Newcomers group that we are walking with is not that large: many group members are afraid to be seen by friends that they are not out to. One of the people walking with us has similar worries, and I skip part of the parade route with him to make sure he is not seen. When we are about to join the group again, he takes the rainbow flag that I had put away out of my bag and he walks with it for the rest of the parade. I wish he could keep the flag, although I know that having it could endanger him. For the rest of the route, I hold the big Newcomers banner, and he holds my flag. We keep on going.

As I have discussed before, the point of a bricolage is not to give all-encompassing, generalisable research results, something that I, acknowledging Haraway’s (1988) theory of situated knowledges, do not believe is possible. Instead, this thesis gives some insights into fragments of what affects this group of LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees in Linköping, Sweden. I use the word fragments, as I have used before, to also reflect the method of collage that I have used, a method that plays with fragments and makes them into something new. This thesis, too, takes fragments of the experiences of this community, fragments that were brought to the surface by the collages. Although the knowledge it produces is incomplete, situated, and fragmented, it is still possible to get some answers to the research questions that I posed at the beginning of the thesis.

Firstly, I asked how collages can be used within this community of LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees in Linköping as a method for research and as a tool for community building, and what the advantages and disadvantages of this method are. In my discussion of the different collages, I highlighted several aspects that provide some answers to this question. In terms of using it as a research method, the collages allowed me to be more embodied in the research process, the collage allowed me to be more embodied in the research process, which meant that I reflected more thoroughly on the decisions I made and the steps I took during the workshops that I hosted and when writing the thesis. This was because I was more physically embodied during the workshops, and because the collages were displayed in our meeting space, making sure that I reflected on my accountability as a researcher. The collage method also is an accessible method, especially as it can be used to bridge language barriers and, in
that way, allow people to participate that may not have been able to participate otherwise. I also made a collage representing the thesis, allowing the contents of the thesis to be more accessible to a wider audience.

Although I had good experiences with the collage method overall, I also found that it may not work for everyone. Especially since I only provided participants with Swedish source material, some may not have felt themselves represented by it, which could have affect their willingness to produce a collage. Alternatively, some participants may have not been comfortable with the method itself, for example because of their lack of experience with making collages, or because they were unfamiliar with expressing themselves in images. Despite the challenges that I ran into when using the collage method, I would argue that it is a highly valuable method in the academic contexts. In future research, the use of this method in combination with other research methods could give deeper, more complex insights exploring a variety of perspectives.

In addition to the academic benefits of the collage method, I also found that it can benefit the community in different ways. It can be used to bridge language barriers, both between volunteers and participants, and amongst participants. Even when there are not particularly strong language barriers, collages can be used to express things that may be difficult to put into words. This makes collages an inclusive method, that makes it easier to work with a variety of participants. Especially with group collages, the method can also provide a space for social interaction and free expression. By displaying collages once they are finished, the method can also be used as a way of building a collective memory within a group (hooks 1995) and to inspire other participants in terms of creativity. Finally, the method can be used to allow participants to communicate information with a wider audience, for example by displaying the results in an exhibition. Through this thesis, I have demonstrated the strengths of this method and how it can be used as a research method and as a tool for community building, showing that collages are a strong, inclusive method providing interesting perspectives that may not come to the surface with other research methods.

The second question I posed was what we can learn about the experiences of LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees in Linköping through collages. In my analysis, I found that the migration trajectories of this group do not fit in with the narrative of a migration from oppression to liberation, but that rather, this process is much more complex. For example, participants expressed positive feelings about their countries of origin, while at the same time expressing certain negative feelings about Sweden. Furthermore, many participants have
faced trauma, which will continue to affect their lives in Sweden. Because the situation is highly complex for participants, and they may face issues in Sweden, it can be difficult to feel at home, especially when the right to get asylum is being threatened. Long waiting times may also affect this, as it leaves migrants in uncertainty for a long time. The asylum process, as well as certain issues, especially housing and employment, can also affect how participants conceive of themselves as refugees.

Despite facing issues, as just discussed, participants also expressed resilience by sharing messages of love and happiness, such as ‘love is free’ and ‘happiness is key so be proud of who you are’. These positive messages express survival and resilience against xenophobia, racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia. Drawing on Sara Ahmed (2017), I argued that survival is a shared queer project, in which a community is built to support people that, in some people’s eyes, “were never meant to survive” (Lorde 1995). A community, then, can provide a resource for strength and positivity. At times, a community can also act as a form of family, something that was also expressed in one of the collages (Figure 2): ‘smile we are family’. I argued that when a biological family is lacking, other people can act as a chosen family, a family bond formed not by blood, but by empathy and a caring for one another.

The participants also could be seen to both conform to and to defy certain norms. I argued that the focus on love can be understood as conforming to certain homonormative discourses. Other aspects can be seen as defying the norms, however, such as the messiness of the collage about pride, and the focus on sex and sexuality in that same collage (Figure 3). A focus on specific themes can both be a way of expression aspects of participants’ lives and identities that they are not able to express in other environments, but it can also be signifying strategic choices that are necessary to navigate the asylum process. Identities are complex and made up of many, intersecting identity categories, but they can also be shaped by hobbies, or things people like. All these things together shape each unique, individual person. It is therefore important to not define LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees as only that – they are so much more – and to not only look at the legal procedures that they are involved in.

Acknowledging the complexities of identities could also be beneficial to the asylum process, as this would allow for asylum seekers to not have to perform their identities, but rather be who they are, and for that to be enough.

This thesis is only a starting point of looking deeper into the actual experiences of LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees in Sweden, and it is important to go beyond the findings in this thesis, as they only build on the experiences of participants within a small community in a
relatively small city in Sweden. It would therefore be good for more research to be done, especially related to topics such as identity, community and integration. Within the Swedish context, there is a lack of qualitative studies, which could enhance the understanding of this group and the specific issues they may face. In terms of legal research, it would be helpful to have in-depth research that specifically focuses on Sweden, as the current research mainly gives overviews of several countries, and therefore lacking the depth that could give insights into the realities of the asylum procedure, beyond the legal frameworks.

This thesis could be followed up in different ways. For example, a similar study could be done with white Swedish LGBTQ people to see if they express certain concepts in a different way, especially when it comes to their conceptions of identity and community. Another way of following up this study could be by using collages to generate topics for conversation, in the form of, for example, an interview, or an oral history. However, it would be important that researchers who carry out such a project are familiar with the group they are working with, and are trained in sensitive interviewing, as asking people to share their stories could lead to extra traumatisation. Finally, this study is grounded in a small community and can therefore not be seen as representative of other contexts. Future studies could therefore carry out similar projects on a larger scale, or with a more diverse group of participants. The current study only reached LGBTQ migrants that have a support network and a community, because of their involvement in RFSL Newcomers. However, queer migrants that do not have this support network could be at risk for mental health issues and abuse, as they may lack a space to be open about who they are. It could therefore be beneficial to study specifically that group, however, it is likely that it is much more difficult to access them, as they may not be willing to be involved in a study related to being LGBTQ in the first place.

In terms of the community of RFSL Newcomers Linköping, this thesis has shown the benefits of using creative methods and has provided a space for members to express themselves. A possible follow-up to this thesis could be another exhibition, like the one that was organised in 2017, to display the works the participants made. An alternative way to follow up this thesis could be by using collages as a method for integration, for example by hosting workshops in which established Swedes and newcomers make collages together. RFSL Newcomers provides a safe and separatist space for members to build strength and resilience and to feel free. However, it would also be good to encourage members, if they are ready for it, to attend other events that are hosted at RFSL Linköping, as this could benefit their integration. Collage workshops, which many members are already familiar with, could
mediate this process and make it easier for the Newcomers to become established in different contexts.

As I attempted to write a concluding paragraph, I found myself struggling with putting it into words that felt right, that made sense. I have a lot of positive feelings about this thesis and about RFSL Newcomers Linköping, but the end of this thesis also means that my time there has come to an end. As mentioned earlier in the thesis, I have struggled with the privilege that I have in deciding to leave, in going where I want to go. At the same time, I will continue to feel a connection to this community, that was my home for 1.5 years. Rather than writing a concluding paragraph, I want to end this thesis with a poem that reflects my feelings.
Preparing to leave

at least for now
the cold and darkness of Sweden
which despite its flaws
has given so much warmth and happiness and love and hope

RFSL Linköping

One and a half year, many hours spent
Newcomers, freedom, growth, community, love
Leaving physically, but leaving a little piece of my heart behind
Remembering fondly the feelings of hope and positivity,
But also remembering the difficulties, tough times, the strength

Though I will be elsewhere
I want to stay involved
with this community, building bridges, continuing the fight.

Rioting within, across, through borders.

Together we are stronger.
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Appendix 1: Information sheet collage workshops

Collage about identity – RFSL Newcomers

Today we are going to make collages about identity. Everyone will get a piece of paper, and on each side, you will make a collage about yourself. On the one side, you make a collage about the identity that you show to others, for example when you at school or at work. On the other side, you make a collage about ‘your true self’, the identity that you feel that you really are, even if you do not always show it to others. You can choose yourself how personal you want to be.

We will use magazines as our main source material. You can cut out pictures or words. You can also draw or write on your collage.

I (Sacha) am a volunteer at RFSL Newcomers. I am also a master’s student in gender studies at Linköping University. I am currently writing my master’s thesis (final research project) about LGBTQ refugees and identity. If it feels okay, I would like to talk to you about your collage afterwards in a short interview (talk/conversation). I will use these interviews and the collages as a basis for my thesis.

Everything you say will be treated confidentially (I will not share the information with anyone else) and if I use any quotes (things you have said) in my thesis, it will be anonymous (so that you will not be recognised). The questions I ask will be based on the collage you made, and you can always choose not to answer.

I would like to record the interview so I can remember what you tell me, but I will delete the recording when I am done with the thesis. Again, I will also not share these recordings or anything said in it with others.

Hopefully the thesis can help with the understanding of the identity of LGBTQ refugees. You should be aware that participating in this will not in any way affect your individual asylum case.

The thesis will be published online when it is finished.

Sacha Bogaers
## Appendix 2: Translations of Swedish words and phrases used in collages

### List of translations from Swedish to English

If used several times, this table refers to the first use of the translated word/phrase

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Chapter / section</th>
<th>Page number</th>
<th>English (used in thesis)</th>
<th>Original Swedish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 / Introduction</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Stop deporting LGBTQ people</td>
<td>Sluta utvisa hbtq-personer</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 / RFSL Newcomers</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>LGBT and Honour in practice</td>
<td>HBT och Heder i praktiken</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>LGBTQ and honour with newly-arrived people</td>
<td>Hbtq och heder med nyanlända</td>
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<td>Talking about honour</td>
<td>Att samtala om heder</td>
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<td>36</td>
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<td></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>now</td>
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<td>safety</td>
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<td>health</td>
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<td>freedom</td>
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<td>crisis</td>
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<td>unjust</td>
<td>orättvis</td>
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<td></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>no rights</td>
<td>inga rättigheter</td>
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<td></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>hopeless</td>
<td>hopplöst</td>
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<td></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>missing family and friends</td>
<td>saknar familj och vänner</td>
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<td>family</td>
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<td>memories</td>
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<td>friend</td>
<td>kompis</td>
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<td>rädd</td>
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<td>3 / Home in Sweden?</td>
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<td>stress</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>right to asylum threatened</td>
<td>asylrätten hotad</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
<td>memories</td>
<td>minnen</td>
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<td></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>nothing to do</td>
<td>inget att göra</td>
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<td></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>boring</td>
<td>tråkigt</td>
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<td>3 / Family</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>girls like us</td>
<td>tjejer som oss</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 / Resilience and survival: messages of hope</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>love is free</td>
<td>kärlek är fri</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 / Refugeeness</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>they are affected by the housing shortage</td>
<td>de drabbas av bostadsbristen</td>
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<td></td>
<td>46</td>
<td>can a lottery ticket help people on the run?</td>
<td>kan en lott hjälpa människor på flykt?</td>
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<tr>
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<td>the terror had the opposite effect</td>
<td>terrorn fick motsatt effekt</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 / Love and sex:</td>
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<td>we believe in love</td>
<td>vi tror på kärlek</td>
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<td></td>
<td>conforming to and defyng homonormativity</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>love in the air</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 / Individual collages</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>everyone!</td>
<td>alla!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>I got to say “Well then, see you”</td>
<td>Jag fick säga tja då, vi ses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 / Performing queerness</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>Human rights apply to EVERYONE</td>
<td>Mänskliga rättigheter gäller ALLA</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3: Image of own collage based on thesis process
We are here, but are we queer? A bricolage of the experiences of LGBTQ refugees in Linköping, Sweden

Sacha Bogaers

Abstract

In recent years, the field of queer asylum studies has slowly been expanding in different contexts across the world, with numerous methodologies and various topics of focus. In Sweden, the academic work in this area has mainly focused on legal perspectives. Providing a different perspective, this thesis examines the situation and experiences of LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees in Linköping, Sweden through a community-based collage project. It examines how collages can be used as a method for research and a tool for community building within this context, and explores the experiences of LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees in Linköping, Sweden, using individual and group collages.

Using the concept of bricolage, the thesis ties together various artworks with short narratives and analytical interpretations. Together, they form a fragmented, in itself collage-like insight into this community. Through these fragments, the thesis reflects on the themes of migration, belonging, survival, and identity. Additionally, it explores questions of home, family, refugeeeness, mess, homonormativity and representation. I argue that commonly used narratives of migration often do not fit this group, as they face highly complex forms of oppression based on their intersecting identities.

Furthermore, the thesis examines the use of collage as a method by looking into the ways collage can negotiate methodological issues like accessibility and researcher accountability, how it can function as a tool for community building, and how it can be used to allow a community researcher to negotiate their positionality in an easier way. I argue that the use of collage has many benefits and that the use of the collage method in this thesis has enriched the research.

Keywords

Queer asylum; LGBTQ migrants; LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees; queer migration; collage; bricolage; intersectionality; identity