

**Exploring the importance of LGBT+ movements for gender
identity and understanding of self among individuals identifying
as transgender or third gender**

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ABSTRACT

Background: The current conditions for LGBT+ individuals worldwide are problematic. Discrimination, harassment, and lack of fundamental rights for LGBT+ people is a global issue. In most countries, including Norway, a legal third gender option is still non-existing, resulting in numerous difficulties for those that do not find a place within the male or female gender category. Human Rights Council reports show that positive changes are happening worldwide, but that the current conditions for LGBT+ people are still challenging in many countries (UN, 2015).

Research objectives: The research objectives are to explore how individuals identifying as transgender or third gender perceive gender identity in general, and how they experience their own gender identity. I will also assess how the study participants regard the role of their involvement in local Norwegian LGBT+ organizations and the communities within the organizations, and how they have affected the study participant's view of themselves as well as their experience of recognition and affirmation. Finally, I will look into the participant's experiences in - and views on - the global LGBT+ community.

Methods: This study is a qualitative study based on an interpretive approach to science, and with a phenomenological research design. There are seven participants within this study that identify as transgender or third gender, and each participant is a member of FRI or Skeiv Ungdom (Queer Youth). The data collection method has been in-depth individual interviews.

Findings: This thesis gives an insight into the study participant's understanding of gender and gender identity. The findings show that the "coming-out" process is a process with several challenges. Age has been a crucial factor in shaping the study participants' personal journeys. The findings suggest that LGBT+ organizations function as affirming communities and creating affirming language and safe spaces for their members. Furthermore, the findings showed that the study participants did not get the healthcare that they needed, particularly concerning the process of gender affirmation and encounter with The Norwegian Treatment Institution for Transgender Individuals (NBTS, Rikshospitalet). My findings suggest that global media channels can function as a place to find relevant information and online LGBT+ communities. The global LGBT+ representation is considered to have both positive and negative implications.

Keywords: Gender, gender identity, LGBT+ organizations, recognition, affirmation, transgender, third gender

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Individuals identifying as transgender or third gender are challenging the gender binary and the social norms of gender. Challenging the binary often comes with a cost, and many transgender and third gender individuals are experiencing discrimination and lack of fundamental human rights because of their gender identity (UN, 2015). Human Rights Council reports show that positive changes are happening worldwide, but that the current conditions for LGBT+ people are still challenging in many countries (UN, 2015). LGBT+ movements are at the same time working towards significant social changes ensuring more understanding and acceptance for LGBT+ people worldwide.

This study focuses on the personal experiences and reflections of gender identity from individuals that identify as third gender or transgender, and on the importance of LGBT+ movements for the study participants. LGBT is a term that is used to refer to people that identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender as a group. The added “+” is to indicate that all people breaking with gender norms in some ways are also included in this grouping (Fri, 2017a). In my study I will look into the importance that local and global LGBT+ movements might have for the individual participants regarding their understanding of self, developing affirmation, and finding recognition.

1.1 DEFINITION AND USE OF TERMS

There are many terms in the LGBT+ field, and this section focuses on defining some key terms that will be frequently used in this study.

The definitions found in Miller’s book “Teaching, Affirming, and Recognizing Trans and Gender Creative Youth” (2019) will be used to define most of the terms, in particular, the chapter “Glossary of terms: Defining a common queer language.” As there might be different understandings of terms, this was found to be a reliable source that is up to date with current queer language. Other sources used to define these terms are Simpson & Herdt (2015) and OED Online (2017).

- *Gender*: has had, as a term and word, different meanings in diverse contexts and cultures during history. In the recent years the term gender has mostly been referring to the complex social organization of sexual differences, according to Stimpson and Herdt (Simpson & Herdt, 2015, p. 2). “In brief, gender does not mean sex, but the

social and sexual relationships between the sexes and the place assigned to members of each sex within these relationships” (Simpson & Herdt, 2015, p. 6).

- *Assigned Gender*: This term is used when one wants to explain the gender that one is assumed or anticipated to embody, based on assigned sex at birth (Miller, 2019 p. 299-309).
- *Transgender*: is an umbrella term for individuals that are breaking with the traditional gender norms. A transgender person may identify with the opposite biological gender. (Miller, 2019). This term includes individuals that identify as neither male or female or both, or move somewhere between the two genders (OED Online, 2017a).
- *Third gender*: is a category for those individuals that identify with indeterminate gender or who have both masculine and feminine characteristics. This is a category for those individuals that do not identify themselves as male or female, but rather as neither, or both, or as a combination of male and female genders (OED Online, 2017b).
- *Cisgender or Cissexual*: This is the category for those individuals that, conforms to gender-based expectations of society. Cisgender individuals identify with a gender identity that is aligned with their birth sex. Cisgender individuals have a self-perception and gender expression that is considered to match behaviors and roles that the society has claimed as appropriate for their birth sex (Miller, 2019 p. 299-309).
- *Passing*: This term is a common verbal expression in the transgender community. It is used to explain a transgender person that looks like their actual gender and not like their assigned gender at birth. A person that is "passing" as a gender is recognized as the gender he or she self-identify with. This can be a woman that is perceived as a woman by those around, and it can be impossible to see that this woman was assigned the male gender at birth (Miller, 2019, p. 299-309).

1.2 TRANSGENDER AND THIRD GENDER RIGHTS IN NORWAY AND GLOBALLY

Research has shown that transgender and third gender individuals are still experiencing discrimination, lack of understanding, and acceptance in Norway. Political and social changes are proceeding at a slow rate (Van Der Ros, 2016). Nevertheless, the conditions for LGBT+ persons in Norway have seen a positive development over the last thirty years. From the legal perspective, essential laws regarding LGBT+ rights have been implemented in Norway. The

anti-discrimination law ensures rights against discrimination regarding employment and housing. It also criminalizes hate crimes against LGBT+ individuals (Straffeloven §77). In 2016 a new law was implemented in Norway: “Law about changing legal gender” (Lov om endring av juridisk kjønn). This law ensures a more straightforward process of changing gender legally. As an example, one does not need to make operational changes in order to change gender in legal documents such as one’s passport (Lovdata, 2016). However, it is currently not legal to categorize oneself in the third gender category in identification documents such as passports and driver’s licenses. The Norwegian Treatment Institution for Transgender Individuals (NBTS, Rikshospitalet) is the only treatment institution for transgender individuals in Norway. There has been much criticism directed towards this institution, and the fact that there is only one institution covering the needs of the entire Norwegian population. Professionals such as Benestad, Thesen, Aars, Olsen, and Bjørkman (2017) have criticized the Norwegian health system for betraying trans persons in Norway based on a lack of knowledge and expertise in the field. The criticism directed toward the treatment institution regards the time it takes to get the help one is looking for, a lack of knowledge among the institution’s staff, and a lack of understanding of the situation that the patients are experiencing.

Globally, third gender and transgender rights vary a great deal. Seven countries (Nepal, Australia, Germany, Bangladesh, India, New Zealand & Pakistan) have recognized the third gender category, making it possible for individuals identifying as third gender to change their identification documents (Pasquesoone, 2014).

Unfortunately, numerous people experience discrimination, harassment, violence and extreme poverty, simply because of their gender identity. In the second General Assembly report from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2015, the current report on global discriminatory laws, practices, and acts of violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity, are presented (UN, 2015). The report addresses the status of gender recognition. It states that getting legal recognition for the desired gender is still a general issue for transgender people, and the result is that these individuals are facing several challenges regarding fundamental rights such as employment, state benefits, traveling, and housing (UN, 2015). It also states the following:

70. Regulations in States that recognize changes in gender often impose abusive requirements as a precondition of recognition – for example, by requiring that applicants be unmarried and undergo forced sterilization, forced gender reassignment

and other medical procedures, in violation of international human rights standards.
(UN, 2015 p. 18)

Positive developments that have occurred since the first report was made (2011) are presented. Various anti-discrimination measures have been made in several countries such as Fiji, Malta Chile, Cuba, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, and Australia (UN, 2015).

Other initiatives include the development of a new judicial protocol to guide the adjudication of cases involving human rights violations on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity (...) National plans of action were developed to tackle discrimination against LGBT persons in Brazil, Canada (Quebec), France, Norway, South Africa, and the United Kingdom, and, in Uruguay, a plan to combat the social exclusion of transgender persons has been made. (UN, 2015 p. 19)

1.3 LGBT + ORGANIZATIONS IN NORWAY

Currently, there are two leading LGBT+ organizations in Norway: SkU (Skeiv Ungdom - Queer Youth) and FRI (The Association for Gender and Sexual Diversity). There are other existing LGBT+ organizations in Norway, however, this study has chosen to focus on these two, and each participant in this study is a member in one of them. SkU is FRI's youth organization. It has existed for 30 years, and it defines itself as a politically- and religiously independent organization.

SkU (Skeiv Ungdom) states, through their webpage, fundamental goals within the organization to work for the freedom of every individual to be able to be themselves regardless of their gender identity, gender expression or sexuality. The purpose paragraph further states that the organization wants a world based on equality, where no one gets societal privileges based on their gender or sexuality. SkU describes themselves as a social-political organization and a safe place where young people can be themselves, feel represented in sex education, to have safe meeting places and be part of a social network (Skeiv Ungdom 2020a). The international work within the organization is mainly in collaboration with other countries' organizations where they share experiences between the organizations. They arrange a yearly international summer camp for trans- and intersex youth, as a way to participate in IGLYO (an umbrella organization for diverse youth organizations). There is also some cooperation with a Russian LHBT organization called Maximus (Skeiv Ungdom 2020b).

The fundamental goals of FRI; a society in which everyone can openly express their identity, love, sexuality, and gender expression based on equality and consent without the risk of being discriminated against and/or harassed. They are also focusing on creating a safe space and arranging a variety of activities for their members where they are able to meet like-minded individuals and learn more about LGBT+ issues, as stated on the organization's website (FRI, 2020b). FRI has an international department that works closely with organizations in other countries. They are also working in Norway to raise awareness of international LGBT+ questions and they are members of several international umbrella organizations.

According to FRI, their movement works towards equality and against discrimination towards people breaking with the current norms for gender and sexuality in Norway, and the rest of the world. There is also much concern about LGBT+ issues globally. Recently they have been campaigning against the current conditions for LGBT+ people in Russia (FRI, 2020a).

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT

As shown in previous sections of my introduction, current conditions for individuals breaking the binary of gender are difficult. Discrimination, harassment, lack of fundamental rights, and social exclusion is something many LGBT+ individuals have to face in their everyday lives. In most countries, including Norway, a legal third gender option is still non-existing, resulting in numerous difficulties for those that do not find a place within the male or female gender category. It is, without a doubt, challenging to find oneself outside of the social norms within one's culture. Those challenging the binary of gender need support, affirmation, and recognition. In my study, I want to look into the lives of individuals breaking the binary gender to better understand the challenges that confront them, how they are finding support, affirmation, and community. I want to explore the importance of LGBT+ organizations in Norway and learn how the LGBT+ community works across national borders. I do not seek to find "one truth" about this topic, but rather to explore and share the participants' thoughts and experiences on the subject.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main objective of this research is to explore the problem of gender identity, recognition and community among individuals that identify as transgender or third gender, with particular focus on the importance of LGBT+ movements for their (wellbeing and) understanding of self. The study will include the following sub-objectives:

1. To explore how individuals identifying as transgender or third gender understand the concept of gender identity in general, and how they perceive and experience their own gender identity.
2. To assess how the study participants regard the role of their personal involvement in the local/ Norwegian LGBT+ organizations, and their experiences of community, recognition, and affirmation within the organization.
3. To assess how the study participants, perceive and are influenced by the current conditions for LGBT+ individuals globally by looking into their experiences with global media channels, LGBT+ visibility in global popular culture, and international LGBT+ movements.

1.6 STRUCTURE OF THESIS

I have organized the study into eight chapters. The first chapter is an introduction of the study, and in the second chapter the theoretical framework that was used to guide the analysis of the empirical data will be presented. The third chapter will include a review of literature within the research field that was found relevant for this particular study. In the fourth chapter, the research methodology will be described. Chapters five to seven present and analyze the empirical findings of this research. The empirical chapters are organized around the following topics: gender identity and the gender confirmation process, LGBT+ communities and affirmation, and global LGBT+ communities. Finally, in chapter eight, I offer a conclusion of the findings and thoughts for further research within this field.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.0 INTRODUCTION

In the following chapter I will present the theoretical framework utilized in this study. I will introduce the ground-breaking perspectives of Judith Butler concerning gender, bodies, regulations, and her concept recognition. Secondly, Michel P. Dentato's viewpoints on the coming out process from the book *Social Work Practice with the LGBTQ Community* will be presented (Dentato, 2017). Finally, I will discuss the concepts of affirming community and affirming language introduced by Heidi M. Levitt & Maria R. Ippolito in the study *Being Transgender: The Experience of Transgender Identity Development*. At the end of the chapter, I will present the application of the theoretical framework in the thesis.

2.1. GENDER AS A SOCIAL NORM; BODY AND REGULATIONS

Judith Butler is one of the most acknowledged scholars within the field of queer theory. A key component of Butler's theory on gender performativity is her radical thoughts about the distinction between sex and gender. Butler questions the binary ideas of what gender is supposed to be. The most common understanding of gender throughout history has been the belief that human beings can be categorized either as male or female, and that categorization is based on the genitals that one is born with. This categorization results in a lot of expectations about how one is supposed to act, express, and one's abilities.

At the center of common thinking about gender is the idea of natural difference between women and men. A whole industry of pop psychology tells us that women and men are naturally opposites in their thinking, emotions, and capacities. (Connell, 2009 p. 50)

Along with other feminist scholars, Butler argues that the biological intractability of sex does not determine the gender, as gender is not a result of sex but culturally constructed (Butler, 1990 p.6). Butler takes it further, and argues gender is a performance, and that most of us are acting out our gender role from the day we are assigned one. Butler questions how we are supposed to know what our gender actually is, or how we express it, when society has always thought us how to act based on what we are perceived to be. The historical understanding of gender illustrates that there are societal norms and expectations for each individual based on the gender that they are given at birth. These norms are, according to Butler, such a strong force in the society that one might think that one's actions are based on our inner self, but how

can we act purely as ourselves when the expectations and norms existed since before we were born?

The theory of gender performativity presupposes that norms are acting on us before we have a chance to act at all and that when we do act, we recapitulate the norms that act upon us, perhaps in new or unexpected ways, but still in relation to norms that precede us and exceed us. In other words, norms act on us, work upon us, and this kind of 'being worked on' makes its way into our own action. By mistake, we sometimes announce that we are the sovereign ground of our action, but this is only because we fail to account for the ways in which we are in the process of being made. (Butler, 2009 p.11)

Gender regulation is an essential concept in regard to ideas of gender. Gender regulation can be perceived differently based on how we understand the term "regulation." The term can refer to the legal aspects of regulating, which refers to laws that regulate what we as individual human beings are allowed to do, and what we are allowed to be. It can also refer to the institutionalization of the path of making individuals "regular." Naturalized forms of regulation are those that can be found within everything and that are made through discourses. Butler argues that the gendered subject has been produced by the power of regulation (Butler, 2004, p. 40).

A regulation is that which makes regular, but it is also, following Foucault, a mode of discipline and surveillance within late modern forms of power: it does not merely constrict and negate and is, therefore, not merely a juridical form of power. (Butler, 2004 p. 55)

Gender regulations are closely related to the concept of gender norms. Butler argues that gender regulations are working through the norms that can be found within our society. Societal norms dictate social intelligibility. Specific actions and expressions are being recognized with positive affirmation as they follow the norms of gender within our society. Butler argues that the surgical "correction" of gender for intersex children provides one example of the regulation of gender within our society (Butler, 2004). A parallel to this concept of regulation is West & Zimmerman's concept of doing gender: "Doing gender means creating differences between girls and boys and women and men, differences that are not natural, essential, or biological. Once the differences have been constructed, they are used to reinforce the "essentialness" of gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 137).

West and Zimmerman believe that models for how to "do gender" are constructed and that they are challenging to distance oneself from or remove. The existing ideas of what a girl/woman and a boy/man are supposed to be, are reinforced continuously by individuals doing gender "correctly." Doing gender is, according to West and Zimmerman, challenging to avoid, because of its roots in our cultures and because individuals choosing not to follow the rules of doing gender are being called out for their choices as they are challenging the social norms (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Butler's ideas of gender performativity presented earlier in this chapter also resonate with West and Zimmerman's understanding of "doing gender," as Butler believes that gender is performative and that the two-gender category stands without a "real" basis or content. We are born into a society filled with constructed ideas of what our body means, is capable of doing, and how we are supposed to identify. Our bodies are pre-packed with socially constructed expectations and limitations (Connell, 2009). Individuals that choose not to conform to these expectations are challenging the current socially-constructed norms.

2.2 RECOGNITION AND AFFIRMING COMMUNITIES

"to persist in one's own being is only possible on the condition that we are engaged in receiving and offering recognition" (Butler, 2004, p. 31).

The concept of recognition is essential in regard to the topic of gender, especially for those who find themselves outside of the binary, as the lack of social recognition might affect how individuals identifying with the non-binary gender category view themselves and how they choose to express themselves. In Judith Butler's book "Undoing Gender," she raises a discussion about the concept of recognition. Butler's discussion is, for the most part, based on Hegel's thinking's about concept recognition. Butler elaborates upon Hegel's argument that desire is always a desire for recognition (Bueide, 2013, p. 13).

Recognition is neither an act that one performs nor is it literalized as the event in which we each "see" one another and are "seen." It takes place through communication, primarily but not exclusively verbal, in which subjects are transformed by virtue of the communicative practice in which they are engaged. (Butler, 2004 p. 132)

Butler states that recognition is a give-and-take process "that moves selves beyond their incorporative and destructive dispositions towards an understanding of another self whose difference from us is ethically imperative to mark" (Butler, 2004 p.144).

Transgender and third gender individuals are often experiencing a lack of recognition and acceptance in society because of their non-normative gender, and LGBT+ movements can be an arena to find the recognition that they might be longing for.

In the American study *Being Transgender: The Experience of Transgender Identity Development* by Heidi M. Levitt & Maria R. Ippolito, they introduce the concept of affirming communities. Affirming communities are communities that are accepting of one's identity. One example of an affirming community given by Levitt & Ippolito is a community that is transgender- supportive (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014).

In their article, they state that these communities can be lifesaving, as they can offer both safety and support to individuals that are challenging the gender binary. They also state that these affirming communities can promote self-acceptance (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014, p.1737). Levitt & Ippolito argue that affirming language within the affirming communities can bring social support that promotes positive self-esteem and strengthens one's confidence. Affirming language within the LGBT+ communities can be descriptive language and expansion of gender identities, such as third gender categories, to mention one example.

According to Levitt & Ippolito's study, it was found that affirming language about LGBT+ issues has an immense power to shape the gender affirmation process by creating more possibilities. An affirming language can foster acceptance and expand the exploration of self (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014, p.1740).

2.3 STAGES OF AFFIRMATION, ROLE OF EDUCATION AND ONLINE RESOURCES

In Michel P. Dentato's book *Social Work Practice with the LGBTQ Community*, he addresses the process of coming out from a theoretical perspective that is relevant to this study.

According to Dentato, there are several stages within the process. In the first stage, one needs to acknowledge one's gender identity; this means that one also needs to recognize that there are several options outside of the binary understanding of gender. Personal knowledge about gender and identity places a significant role in this part of the affirmation process. To understand one's choices, one also needs to be educated within the field. The book is based on social work methods, philosophy, and practice that is built on social science, medical science, and the human rights approach (Dentato, 2017).

Dentato presents Arlene Istar Lev's six-stage model within his book (Dentato, 2017). The following stages for the coming out process are described: (1) awareness, (2) seeking information, (3) disclosure to significant others, (4) exploration of personal identity and self-labeling, (5) exploration of transition issues, and possibly body modification, and finally (6) integration, acceptance and post-transition. This six-stage model provides an insight into the complicated journey of affirming one's gender. The importance of accessible information and communities where one can find recognition and understanding becomes apparent throughout this model.

Dentato makes a point in his book to differentiate the coming out process between those that come out at an early stage in life, and those coming out at later stages of the lifespan.

According to Dentato, some key elements make it harder for individuals to come-out while they are in their mid-life or after. Factors mentioned are the complications one has to deal with if one is a parent or one is in a relationship with a significant other. It might be challenging for children or a partner to be a part of the affirmation process. One might have to deal with the fact that one has lived a lie and confront the fact that family and friends can experience feelings of betrayal in the coming-out process (Dentato, 2017).

Furthermore, Dentato reminds us that even though many societies today are at a progressive stage where one focuses on social changes, increased visibility, and inclusion for LGBT+ individuals, this was not the case for a considerable part of elder transgender or third gender individuals. The suppression, social discrimination, and marginalization might still be a vivid part of elderly LGBT+ individuals' memories, and issues such as discrimination and suppression are still a massive issue within the LGBT+ community globally. Nevertheless, some have found a way to come out in a manner that they experience as positive, and many individuals have been able to form their systems of support within affirming communities (Dentato, 2017).

The role of social media and other online resources is a subject that Dentato addresses in his book. He considers it to be a notable factor in the coming out process for the LGBT+ community. "Coming out in the digital era provides immensely expanded formats for exploring and construction nonheteronormative and gender-variant identities." (Dentato, 2017, p 108). The possibilities for exploration and access to information have expanded enormously through the internet. One can find like-minded individuals and explore one's sexual orientation and gender identity, without the same risk factors as if one were to do it in "real life." According to Dentato, most young LGBTQ individuals today have their first disclosures of gender identity or sexual orientation through online relationships that they trust

(Dentato, 2017). Dentato's book looks into how social workers should work within the LGBT+ community, and therefore he has made some points about how one should put the information we have about the needs of LGBT+ individuals into practice. Some fundamental elements of his recommendations focus on recognition, individual empowerment, access to accepting, and receptive communities. These elements correlate with the broader theoretical focus of this study (Dentato, 2017).

2.4 APPLICATION OF THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK IN THE THESIS

Throughout this chapter, I will present concepts relevant to the empirical analysis of this study. The theory provides a framework for the interpretation of the empirical material. Concepts such as recognition, understanding of gender identity, gendered bodies, affirming language, and affirming communities will be further discussed within the analytical chapters and individual stories. In chapter five I will focus on the participant's reflections and experiences with gender and gender identity. The findings within the chapter have been analyzed from the perspective of Judith Butler's ideas of gender, West and Zimmerman's understanding of "doing gender," Butler's ideas of gender performativity and gender regulations. Dentato's perspectives on the process of coming out will be an essential tool to understand the participants' journeys. Chapters six and seven look into LGBT + communities, the global information channels and LGBT+ organizations work globally. I have analyzed these chapters using Heidi M. Levitt & Maria R. Ippolito's perspective of affirming communities, affirming language, and Butler's arguments of the importance of recognition as well as the analytical perspective from Dentato.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.0 INTRODUCTION

A review of relevant literature demonstrates that several studies are looking into the individual experiences of people identifying as transgender and the need for an LGBT+ community. There seem to be few studies that look into both the individual experiences of gender identity and how participation in an LGBT+ movement might affect the participants. Some studies look into specific issues that transgender individuals might experience, like the feeling that the two existing gender categories do not fit with one's personal identity. There are also some studies looking into social media as a source for LGBT+ individuals. Recently, there has been more critical research on NBTS, Rikshospitalet, I will present some key elements from studies that I found useful for my study, and afterward, I will identify gaps in the current studies on this topic.

3.1 LITERATURE SEARCH PROCESS

In the literature search process, I have been using different approaches in order to find relevant studies. The primary databases used within the literature search have been the database available through the University of Bergen "ORIA" and Google Scholar and a Norwegian database for gender research called "KILDEN." I have chosen to use these databases because altogether they provide a wide range of literature and research on a broad specter of research topics. In order to find as many relevant results as possible, I have used a systematic search. I have kept a log of search terms and the different combinations used, and relevant literature extracted. In order to broaden the search, I also looked at the sources used within the studies that I found relevant.

3.2 GENDER IDENTITY AND AFFIRMATION PROCESS

I found relevant research on the topic of gender identity and the confirmation process, both for the case of Norway and internationally. With a basis in the two first research questions of this study – regarding the participants, personal perceptions and experiences with gender and gender identity, I consider the following examples of research highly relevant.

Studies such as Levitt & Ippolito (2014), Nagoshi, Brzuzy & Terrell (2012) and Mehr (2016) are all looking into individual stories from people identifying as transgender that have been going through a confirmation process in order to affirm their gender.

The qualitative study *Deconstructing the Complex Perceptions of Gender Roles, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Among Transgender Individuals* by Nagoshi, Brzuzy & Terrell (2012) looks into the stories of eleven participants that are identifying as transgender. The interviews were focused on the participants' perceptions on specific topics such as how they understand and define gender identity, gender roles, and sexual orientation. The authors of the study claim that their findings "challenge societal beliefs that gender roles, gender identity, and sexual orientation function within an exclusively heteronormative system" (Nagoshi, Brzuzy & Terrell, 2012, p.418).

Mehr's (2016) qualitative study about people living in Hawaii who identify as male to female transgender, looks into the personal stories of the participants concerning their gender and sex work in the Hawaiian setting. Mehr, among other things, examines the complexities of "passing" as a female. Mehr's study gives an exceptional view of the "desire to be a full woman" expressed by her participants. She also gives an insight into the struggles and dangers of being a transgender woman in Hawaii (Mehr, 2016, p. 103).

Studies such as Sell (2004) and Roen (2001) are interviewing individuals that identifies as third gender. Both studies look into the challenging and positive aspects of not identifying as either man or woman. Katrina Roen (2001), conducted interviews with eleven individuals that identified as third gender or something in-between male or female in 2001. Her article is presented as a critique toward the western medical constructions of transsexuality, aiming to inspire critical thinking concerning racialized aspects of transgender bodies and gender. Sell's (2004) qualitative study focuses on thirty-nine participant's experiences where they all identified as a third gender. The participants were located in different states across the United States of America. Sell's study finds that most of the participants were aware of being "different" than others from an early age. The finding also shows experiences of pressure to "pass" and conform to gender norms, and it was clear that those individuals with the most ambiguous appearances had to deal with more harassment and hostility than those participants with less of an ambiguous appearance.

Henry Rubin's study (2003) is based on interviews with twenty-two transsexual men in their search for recognition. Rubin states that his participants "searched for a willingness to flout social conventions about gender, embodiment, and nature" (Rubin, 2003, p.3). The study focuses on the life stories of a group of female-to-male transsexuals and also on reflections of identity. The participants shared that they had experienced a lack of recognition as their bodies were labeled female at birth, although most of them indicated they had always been men. As the relationship between the body and the "self" did not match, the participants felt a

strong misrecognition as they could not conform to the beliefs of what a male body should be. According to Rubin, the participants in his study felt that they had to get affirming surgery to have a body that felt authentic to their deepest self and made them feel comfortable enough in their bodies to find the recognition they longed for (Rubin, 2003, p.183)

Although these studies are focused on different settings, and the focus of the studies varies, there are some similarities between them. They illustrate various struggles of breaking the rules of the binary of gender, the pressure to "pass" as either male or female, the personal strength and courage that is vital in order to dare to express one's gender identity, and a longing for recognition.

The study *Ageing Bodies that Matter: Age, Gender and Embodiment in Older Transgender People's Life Stories*, Siverskog (2015), looks into the factor of age for transgender individuals. The qualitative study is based on data from interviews conducted within a larger project on LGBTQ experiences in Sweden. The study argues that age is an essential factor as it seems to add complications including how to act out one's gender, the limitations placed on gender-affirming procedures, and the fear of discrimination based on one's gender expression (Siverskog, 2015).

Drage (2017), Espseth (2017), and Rasmussen (2005) are three separate Norwegian studies that look into ideas on gender as a performance and as a construct, and gender identity, among others. Together they illustrate relevant views on gender within Norwegian society. These individual studies have different research aims. However, they also share significant similarities on the perspective of gender within Norwegian society. From different scientific backgrounds, they all look into the topic of gender and challenge the binary ideas of gender from a societal perspective, among other focus points.

Christine Drage conducted a Norwegian study called *Changing Gender*, in 2017 (*Kjønn i Endring*) that analyzes gender identity and how the transgender-community discusses gender and gender confirmation. This study looks into how Norwegian TV-shows and Norwegian bloggers discuss gender and the confirmation process. NBTS, Rikshospitalet and a patient organization called Harry Benjamin Resource-center and gender diversity was analyzed in order to find out how the two different positions within the transgender-community experience and discussed gender, according to Drage (2017, p.4). Luca Dale Espseth's study *Gender and "Other" Genders (Kjønn og "Andre" Kjønn*, 2017) is a discourse analysis that

looks into three discourses in the Norwegian public debate concerning gender. Espseth investigates the different types of consequences gender discourses can have on individual lives, for example, in terms of how one chooses to diagnose someone as transgender. He argues that the way we talk about gender guides the available options for individuals, legally, socially, and medically. Marit Vaula Rasmussen's study *To do Gender: Performativity and Meaning Creation Among Trans Genders in Norway (Å gjøre kjønn: Performativitet og Meningsskaping Blant Transskjønn og Andre Kjønn i Norge, 2005)* is based on interviews with people that in some way was considered not to conform to the gender binary. The participants shared their reflections on gender in the Norwegian context. Rasmussen explored how gender was made natural and invisible through performative practices. Through her study, she illustrates how performativity allows a detachment of the gendered discourses. (Rasmussen, 2005).

3.3 SOCIAL MEDIA AS A SOURCE

The factor of social media as an essential tool, especially for LGBT+ youth, is discussed within several recent studies. Some studies are exploring social media as a place to find the knowledge that one can use to understand personal feelings better. Several studies are also looking into how social media can be a place to come out without having to deal with the same consequences as when one comes out to friends or family members.

In their study *You Can Form a Part of Yourself Online: The Influence of New Media on Identity Development and Coming Out for LGBTQ Youth, 2014*, Craig & McInroy conclude that social media can provide a positive, safe space through processes of finding one's identity. Craig & McInroy (2014) argue that practitioners working with LGBT + youth need to understand the importance of social media and how it works and use it as a tool.

The study *Tumbling into Queer Utopias and Vortexes Experiences of LGBTQ Social Media Users on Tumblr* by Cavalcante (2019), delves into the world of the microblogging site called "Tumblr." The entire study focuses specifically on "Tumblr" as a social network site for LGBTQ youth. The study concludes that the site provides a space for LGBT+ people online where they can interact, test identities, and find political motivation. However, it also finds that there are elements with this online space that could be harmful because it is a platform that is both fleeting and noncommittal. The noncommittal nature of the platform, where relations can dissolve at any time, might be challenging for people that are in a vulnerable state, such as young LGBT+ individuals.

Lucero's study *Safe Spaces in Online Places: Social Media and LGBTQ* (2017) also researches how LGBTQ youth uses social media platforms to learn, communicate and connect, within a digital space that feels safe. The study concludes that there is a need for further research on the topic of social media and that social media also can be a tool used to reach out to LGBTQ youth.

The study *Queer Identity Online: Informal Learning and Teaching Experiences of LGBTQ Individuals on Social Media* by Fox and Ralston (2016) argue that social media can serve as informal learning environments. Participants within the study reported that they used social media as a source of information. Participants within this study also found friends through social media.

The studies presented with the topic of social media and LGBT+ individuals, taken altogether, illustrate that social media platforms have, at this point, established themselves as an essential platform for LGBT + individuals and in particular LGBT+ youth. The studies presented all find that LGBT+ individuals are creating online communities where they can more easily act as themselves and find like-minded individuals, although some also show limitations and possible harmful sides of these online platforms.

3.4 DISCRIMINATION, AFFIRMATION AND COMMUNITY

Studies show that transgender and third gender individuals do experience challenges such as discrimination and harassment because of their gender identity. Sell (2004) concludes in her study that the cost of not fitting into the norms of society are high, and the consequences can be severe. Several participants within her study shared experiences of harassment and being scrutinized. (Sell, 2001 p. 138).

The American study *Being Transgender: The Experience of Transgender Identity Development* by Heidi M. Levitt & Maria R. Ippolito (2014), is a qualitative study based on grounded theory analysis of interviews with altogether seventeen participants living in the US. The participants identified as transgender and were located in several different states across the country. The study looks into the experiences of being an adult transgender, and presents significant findings concerning affirming communities and affirming language. The participants within the study shared experiences of not getting the recognition that they need because they did not fit into the gender binary. Their participants talked about experiences of isolation and self-hatred. They also mentioned experiences of having to conform to cisgender ideals in order to fit into society and get acceptance (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014, p. 1735). In

Maria Shireen Kala'īākea Mehr's Hawaiian study, Mehr's participants shared experiences of harassment because of their transgender identity (Mehr, 2016, p. 94).

Ceatha, Mayock, Campbell, Noone, & Browne's study (2019), conducted in Ireland, interviewed participants that identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. The qualitative study focused on the power of recognition for LGBT individuals and analyzed how the participants experience their participation in LGBT communities, through the theory of recognition. The study found that LGBT communities available to the participants of the study had a significant role in their life, and that the communities contributed to their well-being and to their sense of belonging. (Ceatha, Mayock, Campbell, Noone, & Browne, 2019). Several studies have also shown the importance of learning an "affirming language" for LGBT+ individuals. Participants in Sell's (2004) study expressed the importance of getting to know LGBT+ language in order to find identification terms that could most accurately describe their identities (Sell, 2004 p. 159). The study by Levitt & Ippolito (2014) also discusses the importance of a language that nurtures the acceptance of oneself (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014, p. 1740). The study specifically investigates the concept of "affirming communities" directed toward LGBT+ groups (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014). The participants of their study emphasized the importance of finding a social group where they could explore their gender identity. Some participants also expressed that finding a transgender community helped them realize that they were not alone in their struggles (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014, p. 1740). Some of Sell's participants also shared their experiences from LGBT+ movements, and one participant referred to the LGBT community as a family (Sell, 2004 p. 138). Lal Zimman looks into the importance of affirming language and strategies for promoting a language that is trans-affirming and gender-inclusive (2017). Zimman argues that trans-affirming language is, for the most part, being used in the everyday activism of trans communities and that it should be transported to contexts beyond academic journals. Affirming language for transgender individuals ask cisgender people to be more conscious of how they use their language. Zimman also argues that a gender-neutral language is particularly important for those individuals that do not fit into the male and female binary of gender (Zimman, 2017).

3.5 NATIONAL TREATMENT SERVICE FOR TRANSSEXUALISM

NBTS, Rikshospitalet has, in recent years, been examined through Norwegian research studies. Vigdis Moen (2019), a sexologist, interviewed six Norwegian trans women from ages twenty-four to sixty in her study *Norwegian Trans Women's Experience of Gender-affirming*

Treatment (Norske Transkvinnens Opplevelse av Kjønnsbekreftende Behandling). The focus of the study is the participants' experiences with NBTS, Rikshospitalet. The findings in Moen's study shows that the examination phase was challenging for each participant. The participants expressed that they felt a lack of power over personal identity as well as challenges with their treatment at NBTS, Rikshospitalet. The experiences of Moen's participants also unveil that there is a lack of knowledge about LGBT+ issues within the healthcare system in Norway, as most of her participants struggled to find doctors or therapists with knowledge about their issues (Moen 2019).

Benestad & Pristed (2015) write in their article *Gender in Motion (Kjønn i Bevegelse)* that they have observed, within their practice as a doctor, sexologist and psychiatrist, clients that have had negative experiences with their therapists within NBTS, Rikshospitalet. According to Benestad & Pristed (2015), clients are sharing experiences of rejection, offensive remarks, distance, and inappropriate reactions from the treating therapist.

Five Norwegian doctors (Benestad, Thesen, Aars, Olsen, and Bjørkman, 2017) criticize the Norwegian health system for betraying trans persons in Norway, based on a lack of knowledge and expertise on the field, in their scientific article published by the Journal of the Norwegian Medical Association. They argue that there is a need for structural changes within the system in order to give each trans person a decent treatment option. The Journal of the Norwegian Medical Association also published the article *Gender Variation, Medical Treatment, and Our Responsibility (Kjønnsvariasjon, Medisinsk Behandling og Vårt Ansvar)* by Wæhre and Schorkopf (2019). The authors argue that there is a lack of knowledge within the health system in Norway and calls out for more research on the field, especially regarding the younger generation, as there is, according to her, little research that looks into these issues for younger individuals. Wæhre and Schorkopf (2019) argue that it is challenging to provide a proper treatment plan for individuals when knowledge about the consequence of treatment is deficient.

Janneke Van Der Ros (2016) wrote in her article *The State and Gender Variance in Norway*, that the Norwegian state is not giving trans persons the treatment that they rightfully deserve. She argues that only a small percentage of those seeking treatment at NBTS, Rikshospitalet is, in fact, being treated. She further argues that the criteria for a diagnosis are too strict and that there is no second option for those applicants that are declined by the system.

Altogether the presented literature directed towards the national treatment services for transsexualism illustrates there are structural issues within the treatment facilities that need to be further researched and discussed. The literature highlights a harsh and seemingly valid

criticism towards the Norwegian healthcare, arguing that the Norwegian state is failing at providing primary health care for LGBT+ individuals.

3.6 THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS STUDY BASED ON PRESENTED LITERATURE

In the literature review, I have presented studies examining topics related to the individual experiences of being transgender or third gender, and the importance of LGBT+ movements and their work. I believe that there is a need for a study that delves further into LGBT+ organizations and their potential of helping their participants to understand themselves better and to find recognition and affirmation. There seems to be little research that focuses specifically on affirming communities and affirming language directed towards LGBT+ individuals, and with this study I aim to fill that gap. Each study presented here asks for more research within their topic, and this study contributes to the existing literature within the LGBT+ research field. My study also contributes to the subjects of social media as a resource for LGBT+ individuals, personal experiences with gender and gender identity, and the coming-out process.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I will present the epistemological foundation, research design, and methods of this study. Furthermore, as this is a qualitative study, I will also discuss the process of recruiting participants, collecting the data, the relationship with the participants and the challenges encountered.

4.1 PRESENTATION OF THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE STUDY

The primary consideration one needs to address when one aims to choose a suitable method for a study is determine what questions one is trying to research. In my study, I aim to explore the importance of LGBT+ movements for gender identity and understanding of self among individuals that are identifying as transgender or third gender, and I explore how those individuals perceive gender identity in general as well as how they experience their own gender identity. The research aim has not been to find "one truth" about this topic, but rather to explore and share the reflections and experiences of the participants. As I am exploring the participants' understanding of their experiences and the meaning of gender to them, a qualitative methodology seems most appropriate for this particular study (Creswell, 2007). A qualitative methodology can be defined as "emergent, inductive, interpretive and naturalistic approach to the study of people, cases, phenomena, social situations and processes in their natural settings in order to reveal in descriptive terms the meanings that people attach to their experiences of the world" (Yilmaz, 2013, p.312).

Furthermore, my study rests on an interpretative epistemology approach, an interpretive social science approach (ISS) that can be traced to the German sociologist Max Weber (Neumann, 2011, p.102). The ISS approach looks into how people interact with each other. It emphasizes meaningful social action, socially constructed meanings, and more (Neumann, 2011, p.102). "The systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds" (Neumann, 2011, p.103).

4.2 PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

A phenomenological approach has guided the research design of this study. The phenomenological research design is a design where the researcher seeks to identify an individual's experience of a specific phenomenon and to find similarities between the participant's experiences of the phenomenon that is being studied (Creswell, 2007 p. 58). The process of identifying the essence of individual experiences to a chosen phenomenon relates

to this research as this study has been looking for several individual's experiences of their gender identity, and the role of LGBT+ movements globally and individually, to understand each participant's lived experiences. It is essential to clarify that every procedure for conducting phenomenological research such as shown in Creswell (2007) is not followed as a structured template within this study, but rather as a guideline and inspiration (Creswell, 2007 p. 60).

The primary data collection method has been in-depth interviews with seven participants, defined as a "one-on-one" conversation between researcher and participant, providing information on the participant's point of view" (Skovdal & Cornish, 2015 p.55). I found the in-depth interview method to be the best option for this study for several reasons. One main reason was that through my study I aimed to share individual experiences and reflections on a sensitive personal topic. If I had chosen to use the focus-group method, it could have been challenging for the participants to share the sensitive information that they were comfortable sharing in a one-to-one conversation. The in-depth interviews were also a natural choice because it made it easier to make a closer connection with each participant during the data collection, as I was able to give my full attention at all times during the interview. "The qualitative paradigm views the relationship between the knower and the known as inextricably connected; therefore, the researcher is supposed to develop a close, empathic relationship with the subjects being studied" (Yilmaz, 2013, p.313).

4.3 PROCESS OF RECRUITMENT

The participants in this study are all individuals that identify as either third gender, non-binary or transgender, and they are all members of either FRI or SkU. I started the process of recruitment with an application to the Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD) in order to ensure that my study was following the required guidelines. The process of recruitment started in August 2017, after NSD accepted my research proposal. I started by contacting FRI and SkU through email, where I described my study and attached my research proposal, the consent form and the letter from NSD. Both organizations responded quite rapidly, and they helped me find relevant participants by sharing the information I had given them with their members. Emails from individuals that were interested in participating in this study came shortly after, and it was possible for me to start planning meetings. I chose only to interview participants in Oslo, as most of the individuals contacting me lived close to Oslo, and both SkU and FRI's head offices are located in Oslo. I did not live in Oslo, but I scheduled to travel there in September 2017 and arranged as many interviews as possible within that trip.

The youngest participant interviewed was twenty-three years old, and the oldest forty years old. The current age-gap between the participants is considered to be an essential element within the findings.

4.4 PROCESS OF DATA COLLECTION

There was quite a lot of communication with the participants through email before the interviews. The consent form was given to participants in advance through email, and they were encouraged to read it before the meeting and to look over it before signing.

The length of the interviews varied. The shortest interview lasted thirty-four minutes, and the lengthiest interview lasted for an hour and thirty-nine minutes. Every interview started with a conversation about what the participants could expect and assuring the participants that they were free to answer questions in whatever way made them comfortable, and also free to choose not to answer uncomfortable questions. The participants were encouraged to add something to the conversation if they had something they wanted to say beyond the questions. Before starting the recorder during the interviews, the participants were asked some key questions such as:

- o Gender Identity
- o Age
- o Gender given at birth / biological gender (not approved of by everyone)
- o Membership in organization
- o Length of membership
- o Role in the organization

During the interviews, an interview guide was used. The interviews were semi-structured as each participant had the opportunity to lead the conversation during the interviews. However, I made sure that each question from the interview guide was answered by the end of every interview, and sometimes comments were added because new recurring elements were found and necessary to explore further. The comments about NBTS, Rikshospitalet are an example of an element that became a part of the interview after I realized that each participant had mentioned it, although I did not have that element in the interview guide (Skovdal & Cornish, 2015).

4.5 RESEARCHER'S ROLE, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

A qualitative research study starts with assumptions, and a world view. The final report is a result of the participants' voices, the reflexivity of myself as a researcher, and my descriptions

and interpretations of the data collection (Creswell, 2007, p.37). As the researcher of this study, I have to be aware of the fact that my beliefs, assumptions, and understanding of the research topic, affects the final result of this report. "Researchers should overtly reveal the biases they bring to the study and discuss how their background such as gender, ethnicity, disciplinary orientation and ideological viewpoint affected the interpretation of the findings" (Yilmaz, 2013, p.321). Going into this study, I was worried that my cis-gender identity would make it difficult for the organization and the possible participants to trust me and my agenda. A cis-gender individual identifies as the assigned gender at birth. In other words, a cis-gender individual such as myself fits into the binaries of gender with a heteronormative identity. I worried that individuals eligible for this study would dislike the fact that I did not have an inside perspective. This ended up not being a challenge for me. Almost everyone I contacted was positive about my study and very helpful and understanding. I did, however, experience some difficulties in communication with one participant because of how specific questions were formulated. During the data collection process, I found that I lacked knowledge in terms of LGBT+ language. This could have become a challenge and lead to distrust with the participants. Fortunately, most of the participants stated that they did not have an issue with my deficient LGBT+ language and helped to improve it. Before starting the "official" interview, I would often have a short conversation about the language and the participant's preferences as I did not want to offend anyone or seem ignorant. I encouraged this because I knew that I sometimes formulated questions in ways that could be misunderstood or disliked, and I wanted the participants to feel comfortable enough to question my formulations during the interviews.

I chose a topic for this research where personal experiences interfere to a minimal degree, as I can only relate to a few aspects of the participant's experiences as I identify as a cisgender. I believe that my lack of personal experiences with the phenomenon that I have studied has made it simpler for me as a researcher to stay open-minded regarding possible changes to my study's direction and to eliminate my personal biases from the study (Creswell, 2009). However, as a researcher, I must be aware of my values, assumptions, and expectations. Gender identity is a concept that I have a great interest in and that I also have my own understanding of. Regarding experiences of identifying as a third gender or transgender, I have no personal experience, but I still have assumptions and expectations based on previous studies and mainstream media, and this has shaped this study to some extent. As a researcher, you want to make sure that the participants should not be further marginalized as a result of their participation (Creswell, 2014, p.10). Going into this project, I believed that it was

essential for me to ensure the subjects' comfort, understanding, and trust during the interviews. I was very much concerned with making the conversations natural, and I therefore sometimes shared more than necessary during the first interviews. However, I improved my role within the interviews after recognizing the issue from listening to the first recordings. A qualitative researcher tries to meet the participants in a "natural" setting, and not in a contrived situation (Creswell, 2007, p.37). I would let the participants choose the place for us to meet. Two of the interviews were conducted at restaurants chosen by the participants. The participants assured me that they did not have an issue with being interviewed about sensitive topics in a restaurant. However, I found it to be challenging as the topics are sensitive, and because of many distractions.

4.6 PROCESS OF DATA ANALYSIS

Braun and Clarke describe qualitative approaches as diverse, complex, and nuanced, and they argue that the thematic analysis should be seen as a foundational method for the analysis within qualitative research (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.78). The analysis within this study fits into Braun and Clarke's description of thematic analysis as it has no precise arrangement or a specific systematic approach. The analysis started with the transcription of each interview. During the process of transcribing every interview, I would note key elements and find recurring themes. The document with key elements from each interview became the start of my thematic overview. The coding has been done manually by me. I was first getting familiarized with the data, finding the similarities, recurring themes, and unique elements. I noted every theme within the data collection and numbered the themes based on their relevance and occurrence, this gave me an overview of how many participants had mentioned each of them and made it possible for me to structure the empirical chapters. The process of getting the necessary overview of what the data collection consisted of was based on listening repetitively to the recordings from the interviews and reading through the transcriptions multiple times.

4.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The ethical aspect of any study is essential, and it should be integrated into all parts of the project to ensure that the study is reliable and trustworthy. The topic of this study is sensitive, and it has, therefore, been important to ensure complete anonymity for the participants. Sensitivity and respect from the researcher were also essential as participants have shared their vulnerabilities and struggles in the interviews. When working with the collected data, it

was critical to keep the participants in mind and ensure that their shared information was handled and represented respectfully.

Ethics is a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others. Being ethical limits the choices we can make in the pursuit of truth. Ethics say that while the truth is good, respect for human dignity is better, even if, in the extreme case, the respect of human dignity leaves one ignorant of human nature. (Bulmer, 2001 p. 45)

The technical equipment that has been used in this study is a recorder to record the interviews, and my personal computer to transcribe interviews. I recorded each interview because it was an excellent tool for me as a researcher, but also to ensure that my retellings of the participants' stories are as correct as possible, and in their voice (Bulmer, 2001 p. 51).

4.7.1 PROCEDURES AROUND INFORMED CONSENT AND CONFIDENTIALITY

The participants were given a consent form. The consent form included essential information such as intentions for doing the study, details of the process of participation, use of information that's found, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. As I recorded all of the interviews this was clearly stated in the consent form. Each participant gave their consent to be recorded by signing the part about recording within the consent form that I had given them in advance and which I also brought to the interviews. The participants were informed of my reasoning for doing the recordings, what the recordings would be used for, and who would be hearing the recordings. They were also notified that all of the recordings would be deleted when the project is finalized. This study had a delay in submission, and therefore the participants received a second information letter where they were informed of the delay, and that the data collection would be deleted at a later date as a result of the delay. The participants were informed that they had the right to decline my request to keep their personal data and remove themselves from the study without questions.

4.7.2 ANONYMITY

All of the participants are anonymous in this study. I have focused on keeping my participants' anonymity in mind during the whole research process, such as during recruitment, within my personal files left on my computer, and when transcribing the interviews. The LGBT+ community in Norway is quite small, and maybe some characteristics might be easily recognized by other members of the community, or within the close network of the participant. Ensuring full anonymity for the participants is challenging when sharing information about their role in an organization that they are active members of. I have

therefore chosen not to share specific roles in the study, as I believe it would be too easy for other members of the organization to recognize the individuals if their role is shared, and I want to respect the participants right to privacy (Bulmer, 2001 p. 50).

4.7.3 NORWEGIAN CENTER OF RESEARCH DATA

The project was approved by the Norwegian Center for Research Data firstly in August 2017. The letter stated that this project was accepted as it had been represented in the application form. However, if any future significant changes were made in the project, NSD needed to be given notice of those changes. This was in order to ensure that the project stayed within the requirements by NSD. There were no further comments or requirements given by the NSD. The delay of submission of this study made it necessary to submit a new application to NSD in 2019, reassuring that the study was following the necessary procedures. The study was accepted for the second time in December 2019, but it was necessary to make some changes with how the personal data of the participants were managed.

4.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE RESEARCHER

In any qualitative research, the reader must be assured that the quality of the study is high and that the researcher is trustworthy. The trustworthiness of the researcher relies on how accurate the study displays the collection of data. The “truth” within the study cannot only be the researcher’s “truth, but it should also be the “truth” for the participants and the readers (Yilmaz, 2013, p.278). The trustworthiness also relies on the dependability of the study, how consistent the process of the study has been (Yilmaz, 2013, p.279).

In order to establish my study as credible, I have cross checked my own findings, assured that I had an accurate understanding of the findings by systematization of recurring themes, and I have listened to the recordings several times. I have also attempted to translate the quotes from the participants at the best of my abilities in order to ensure that the quotes are in fact their own words and not mine. I have chosen to have a high percentage of quotes and an introduction of each participant in order to give the reader an accurate description of the story and all the participants. As mentioned in the data collection, I choose to record each interview. I consider this to be essential to the credibility of this study. As the data collection process took place in the fall of 2017, and the submitting of the thesis in the spring of 2020, it was important to listen to the interviews several times to ensure that my interpretations of the data and the findings were accurate, not my personal truth and memory of the stories, and that I stayed within the actual content of the data collection.

The basic criterion to judge the credibility of data is the extent to which they allow the reader to enter the situation or setting under study. In other words, rich and detailed or *thick description* of the setting and participants is a must. (Yilmaz, 2013, p.321)

The interview guide that I used within each interview assured dependability within the collection of data together with the recordings and the transcription of the recordings. I have attempted to give detailed information regarding the research processes. I have also attempted to explain my choices of research design and method in detail.

4.9 LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

As there are seven individual participants with individual stories, I have chosen to insert a short presentation of each participant in order to give readers a better understanding of the individuals. I have chosen to give each participant a fabricated name. These fabricated names do not in any way indicate who the participants are other than gender. As two of my participants identify within the third gender category, I have aimed for gender neutral names (Storm and Frankie). I have also chosen the “ze” pronoun (ze/ hir/ hirs/ ze) to both Storm and Frankie as it is my understanding this is the most commonly used pronoun for third gender individuals.

- *Storm (26 years old)* identifies as a non-binary trans individual. From the start until today, the process of understanding hir’s gender identity has been a challenging process, from trying to be female, and trying to be male, to finding that none of the binary gender categories was right.
- *Kate (33 years old)* identifies as a transgender woman. The process of understanding her gender identity was long and she lived in denial as she grew up in a conservative family. She found it difficult to understand her feelings.
- *Frankie (22 years old)* identifies as non-binary. Ze considers hir gender to be androgynous and in simple terms ze explains hir gender identity as half male and half female.

- *Jane (38 years old)* identifies as a transgender woman. Her given gender at birth was male. She came out as a transwoman in 2015 after over 30 years of denying certain feelings and trying to accept the gender given at birth by living a binary life as a family man.
- *Sofia (40 years old)* identifies as a transgender woman. Her given gender at birth was male. She came out as a transwoman during recent years and until recently has been living as a binary family man. Her lack of knowledge and a language to explain her feelings made it hard to act on those feelings, leading to denial.
- *Rob (23 years old)* identifies as a transgender male. He was given a female gender at birth. He noticed that something was not right at a young age. His parents also noticed that something was wrong because of his depression, loneliness and his panic attacks. After several years he started the process of physical transformation.
- *Julie (32 years old)* identifies as a transgender woman. She was given a male gender at birth. It took many years for her to understand her feelings of being different, and she started her gender conforming process as a grown up.

CHAPTER FIVE:

GENDER IDENTITY AND GENDER CONFIRMATION PROCESS

“Nobody is born one gender or the other. We act and walk and speak and talk in ways that consolidate an impression of being a man or being a woman” (Big Think, 2011, 3:00).

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will discuss the experiences of and reflections on gender identity and the gender confirmation process that the participants in this study have shared during the in-depth interviews. In our society, gender seems to be everywhere. The personal cost of challenging the binary gender roles is, therefore, vast. To give space for people identifying as transgender or third gender, changes are required not only at the individual level, but also at societal level. The culture and the legal system that one is a part of, is not unquestionably willing to take part in the necessary change, and that leads to a conflict that can be challenging and exhausting for the individual. This chapter seeks to convey the complexity and the challenges that arise when individuals choose to express their non-normative gender despite pre-defined rules and norms in a society based on assigned gender at birth.

In order to give insight into the participants' stories and challenges in this chapter, I will focus specifically on personal cost and societal adaptation. The goal is to convey both challenges and possibilities for the journey ahead.

5.1 UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER AND GENDER IDENTITY

The participants in this study represent individuals that have different ways of understanding and defining their gender identity. Each participant's understanding of gender and gender identity as well as their reflections are affected by their personal experiences with their gender process. Four participants identified as trans-women, one as a trans-male, and two participants identified as non-binary. Several participants have struggled to find a term or description that reflects who they are, especially the participants that do not find themselves fitting into the male or female category. It seems that the society more readily accepts participants identifying as either female or male, and that have chosen to make necessary changes in order to "pass" as an "ordinary" female or male despite being born with genitalia that differs from their gender identity.

The participants were interviewed about their viewpoints on gender and gender identity because it was relevant to hear their perspective as they are individuals that find it challenging to accept the socially constructed idea of gender. Storm and Julie had similar responses that indicate the complexity of gender and gender identity.

Gender is complex; it is in everything. It is different based on culture. It is in our language – Storm.

I think that gender is very complicated. It is individual, it varies for every person, and it varies between countries – Julie.

Their understanding of gender resonates with social constructivist theories which see gender as socially constructed and, therefore, also a reflection of the culture one is a part of, performed through language and personal expression. Frankie and Sofia both focused on the role of knowledge, that the knowledge one has about gender identities reflects on how one might choose to identify one's gender. Lack of knowledge leads to a lack of options and perhaps an understanding of gender that is more binary and heteronormative.

The term gender identity is quite new to me. It is only a couple of years ago since I became aware of the fact that there are different gender identities. As a child, I saw gender from a binary perspective. I thought that there are boys and there are girls and nothing in-between – Sofia.

I think that how people understand gender identity is based on what information they have available. For example, when I describe my gender identity, my approach is kind of binary because I haven't had any knowledge about non-binary gender identities. My shortest explanation is that I am half a man and half a woman – Frankie.

When I asked Kate about her thoughts on gender, she explained it from a perspective of the oppression of women within Norwegian society;

Our society is very much based on gender—a society where women are oppressed. A man and everything masculine are considered to be better than the feminine. Gender

*Identity is about being oneself, but it also displays some problems in our culture –
Kate.*

Each participant had their unique thoughts about the binary understanding of gender. Most of them had an evaluative idea of what gender is and how it can be understood. Rob had found a place within the male gender but did not understand why everyone is supposed to fit into either the male or the female gender.

I think that gender is very open, that it is what people say that it is. I don't feel any affiliation with the idea of an either-or category. Even though I might say that I have found myself a place on one side, I do not understand why everyone has to. Furthermore, if someone tells me that they do not fit into either of the two categories, then, of course, that's ok. It is something that you should decide for yourself. – Rob.

As each participant had gone through the journey of being assigned a gender at birth that they do not identify with, they shared what it felt like to experience limitations and discriminations that they had to deal with as male or as female. The participants assigned a male gender at birth all agreed that their status in society was higher as a man, and that discrimination against women is an ongoing issue in our society. Rob and Jane had personal experiences concerning their workplaces, where they both stated that it was clear to them that it was an advantage to be male.

I feel that I have had more opportunities as a man in every aspect. For instance, both in male-dominated and female-dominated workplaces, male applicants are more wanted than females. I feel like it is an advantage to be male. –Rob.

I have seen tendencies like, for instance, in the workplace, it is preferred that I, as a woman, am not supposed to correct my male colleagues the same way that I did before (...). I feel like I have less credibility in the workplace as a woman, and I am very good at my job. – Jane.

On the other hand, several participants also mentioned limitations within genders, that men are more limited in their gender expression than women. Kate and Julie had experiences with

these limitations. Julie had several hurtful episodes of not being accepted because of her feminine traits when her legal gender was male.

I was never hurt by people referring to me as a girl or a woman while I was identifying as a male. However, I have found it hurtful when I have been discriminated against because of being a boy, like not being allowed to do the same things that girls do. – Julie.

It is not accepted for a man to show feminine traits, or to wear feminine clothes. However, it is more acceptable for a woman to show masculinity. – Kate.

Kate and Julie's experiences of not being permitted to express themselves and do the things that they wanted to do, illustrate Butler's ideas of gender as a performance as Kate and Julie are expected to act in a specific way to fulfill the criteria of their assigned gender. The people around them are regulating their wish to dress female or do something that is considered to be female because they are not performing their gender "properly."

5.2 THE GENDER CONFIRMATION PROCESS

The process of gender confirmation in Norwegian culture and within Norwegian laws, regulations, and social structures has shown to be a complicated process for the participants in this study. For each participant, this was still an ongoing process at the time of our interview. The process from having an assigned gender at birth that one later does not identify with, to later being recognized as the gender one does identify as, is for each individual a long journey and for some individuals not possible as the Norwegian law only recognizes the two binary genders male and female.

The individual processes of understanding one's gender identity and maybe choosing to make bodily changes in order to have an appearance that is more aligned with one's gender differ a lot between the participants. One can find some similarities between the individual stories, but every journey is unique, and everyone has had to figure out each step ahead on their own.

At an early age, each participant carried a feeling of being different and something not being right. Precisely how this feeling came across, how it felt, at what exact time and when it became clear to them where the feeling originated, was individual. Everyone described the feeling as impossible to ignore, and the cost of suppressing it as enormous. Most of the

participants experienced some degree of mental health issues from their experiences of suppressing feelings and not being able to express themselves.

As mentioned earlier, Julie described several uncomfortable incidents where she had been criticized for her feminine traits during the time leading up to her gender confirmation process. It was especially challenging in romantic relationships to find acceptance for having feminine traits while being a male on paper. Other participants have also mentioned their romantic relationships during their transition. Some partners chose to end their relationship because of the transition, while others chose to stay, but according to several participants, it has been very challenging to find acceptance in a partner during the transition.

Kate, Julie, and Jane had experiences with their spouses that led them to stay in their assigned gender after deciding to “come out” to their spouses. This was because of their spouse’s reaction to their disclosure. They both tried for a long time to reject their own feelings of wanting to be a woman.

My girlfriend at that time was on and off about supporting me. The pressure from my family and my girlfriend was so intense that I told them that I was not transgendered after all - Kate.

When I was a grown-up, I admitted to myself that I am a transwoman and that I could not continue to live my life the way I did at the time. I then told my girlfriend, and she did not take it well. She threatened that she would not let me see my child ever again. So, instead of taking action, I continued to deny my feelings and stayed in the relationship. – Jane.

I tried to tell my girlfriend at the time that I felt like a girl, but she had a very negative reaction to me saying that I was bisexual. She tried to deflect and said things like, "I also feel like a man sometimes, at least like the man in this relationship." It is not easy to tell people. -Julie.

Sofia had some support from her spouse, and at the time of the interview, they were still together, hoping that they would be able to stay married. When she was asked if her wife had handled the situation well, Sofia replied the following:

No! She thinks that this is very difficult. So, we have some challenges, but we think that we will be able to work through it, keeping our lives and our marriage in decent shape. But it is a long and hard process. She is very clear about the fact that she is not a lesbian and that she is not attracted to women. But I am not heteronormative. I don't fall in love with a genital; I fall in love with a personality. So, it is a bit hard for me to understand that part, but I guess that's how it is for some people. - Sofia.

Each participant had a different experience in regard to the way others reacted to their confirmation process. Some shared that they did not have contact with certain people as a result of their confirmation process. Others shared that they had received a great deal of support from family and friends throughout the whole process. The younger participants of this study seem to have found more understanding within family and friends, as opposed to the older participants. Some of the participants found the coming out process to be a lot easier than they expected it to be. Frankie found it almost too easy.

When I think about it today, in retrospect, I don't understand myself, because for some reason I was so nervous to tell my mom that I was a trans person. Maybe I just thought about it too much, thinking that I should hope for the best but be prepared for the worst. It was a bit funny that I was freaking out about being trans, while my mom wasn't even a little bit surprised. I was thinking: "Now I've been stressing around for what feels like an eternity, can't you at least be a little surprised?" - Frankie.

The age of coming out appeared to make a big difference. The older participants seemed to have a harder time coming out than the younger participants. The situation for some of the older participants was more complicated also because they were married and had children. Spouses tended to have a hard time dealing with massive changes, and the participants had several challenges involving the children. In regard to the personal process, it is clear that the circumstances the individual finds themselves in, what their resources are, their age, and their family situation, determine in many ways how their process will be.

In terms of limitations, it has been a huge disadvantage for me, not having enough knowledge about gender and options. At this point, I am sort of too old to do anything about it. The situation is very locked. -Sofia.

Most study participants agreed that it is, in fact, more comfortable to come out in Norwegian society today, due to two particular factors: more knowledge about gender identity, and transgender experiences throughout the society.

I am utterly confident that it is easier today. I grew up without the internet, for example. When I went to high school was when the internet first became available to me. I did not have access to the information that is available to younger people today, and neither did my family, friends, school or the media. Young people today have so much information available, and that makes it possible for them to find people they can relate to, and therefore understand themselves better. I didn't understand anything because I didn't have any references or any sources of information as a child. I knew that I wanted to be a girl, but I didn't have any language to describe it. – Sofia.

There was not a lot of information about these topics when I was a child in the eighties, so I didn't know anything about what it was. I was more of a shy person then, than what I am now, and I didn't talk about this to anyone. I cried myself to sleep every night as a child because I hadn't been born into a girl's body. -Jane.

5.2.1 EXPERIENCES WITH NBTS, RIKSHOSPITALET

During the interviews, I found one substantial similarity between each journey, which was the participants' experiences with NBTS, Rikshospitalet. I had initially not planned to include the topic of conditions at Rikshospitalet, but as it became clear that this was a massive part of the participants' gender confirmation process, I decided that this was an important issue to address.

Every participant had a challenging experience with NBTS, Rikshospitalet. The participants had negative experiences with the waiting time for actual treatment, lack of understanding from the individuals that they interacted with at the hospital, as well as deficient treatment.

Jane and Kate had similar journeys concerning delays at NBTS, Rikshospitalet. They both experienced the process of being understood and seen as someone in need of help regarding the transition process was a long and challenging ordeal.

Rikshospitalet is treating us in a way that makes us sick and out of work, because having to wait in limbo-land feels horrible. It's the same every time I am there. They sit there with their questions, and it's always a new person. They ask the same questions every time. – Jane.

When it became clear to my psychiatrist that my depression was related to being transgendered, I was referred to Rikshospitalet. I had a new round with a psychologist there to ensure that I was transgendered. It took about a year before they came to the same conclusion as my psychiatrist. I started on hormones that I got a hold of by myself since it took such a long time at the treatment center, and I knew what I wanted. They try to make you question your feelings and think that you might not be transgendered after all. I think that the process can be very intense. Eventually, I got a prescription for the hormones that I had already been taking a while. - Kate.

Jane and Frankie mentioned the high cost of having to take matters into their own hands. Each participant has paid some medical expenses themselves with help from family and friends.

I am not receiving any public healthcare in regard to gender-related issues. So, everything is out of my pocket, and that's not always easy when testosterone cost between 250-500 NOK a month and you already have other medical expenses related to other issues. You should get most of your medical cost covered if you try to get help through the department at Rikshospitalet. The problem is just that they are very binary and gender-typical in their approach. They have been criticized for years. For good reasons. - Frankie.

I did not get any help from Rikshospitalet. I had to pay for my treatment. My financial situation was in a bad state, and I was trying to get the money to pay for lasers, hormones, and doctor appointments, as well as almost not being able to pay rent. I took up a lot of credit during this period, and I ended up in a bad environment. – Jane.

I was trying to get treatment through Rikshospitalet two times to get approved for medical treatment. I ended up “cheating” and went to a private clinic instead. After I had already started the treatment, it kind of seemed like Rikshospitalet suddenly were more in a hurry to get me treated. – Rob.

The feeling that it was easier to get help from the treatment institution after one had already started the process was not only something that Rob mentioned. Jane had a similar experience and had a feeling that NBTS, Rikshospitalet somehow preferred not to pay for all the medical expenses.

Rikshospitalet still does not recognize me as transgender, because that implies that they have to pay for my costs. I don't think that they want to pay. I know that there is some financial hold-up; it is so obvious that this is about the economic situation. – Jane.

5.3 EVERYDAY CHALLENGES

The process of gender affirmation and finding a gender identity has brought with it some everyday challenges to my study participants. Some individuals have a harder time fitting into the societal rules and norms because of their gender than others. As indicated above, it seems simpler for people to be accepting of other's identities if they conform to another gender rather than breaking from the binary altogether. In the introduction to this chapter, I mentioned that I wanted to look at the individual cost of expressing their gender identity and the ability of the culture and legal system to make space for individuals that are challenging the binary. This part of the chapter illustrates some key elements that display how Norwegian culture and legal system fails to make room for everyone, and how the participants continually are reminded that they do not fit into the norms of our society.

I think that society, no matter where you live in the world, should get more knowledge and be more understanding. Because I think that knowledge will help, if people have more knowledge about LGBT+ individuals, the negative attitudes will go away, or they will be more tolerant and more respectful. – Storm.

Some challenging everyday issues that the participants shared during the interviews were lack of options in clothing, or not being able to call your bank and ask them to block your credit card after losing the card simply because your voice does not sound like a male or a female. Julie mentioned some of the issues that she has had with phone calls:

Phone calls were unpleasant for a while. They assumed it wasn't me that they were talking to since I sounded like a man but had a female name. I felt pressured to change

my voice. I searched for tips though the internet. After working a lot with my voice, it stopped. – Julie

Several participants mentioned issues with finding clothes that suited them both in style and in size. Storm mentioned that ze found it challenging to find clothes that would fit.

It is difficult to find clothes in large sizes. I have a lot of trouble finding clothes that fit me in size and cut. (...) I often buy expensive clothes that are on sale. Then at least I find clothes that fit me (...) All clothes should really be unisex, after all we have different bodybuilding. – Storm

5.3.1 SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Most of the participants found themselves outside of work or school for a period, either because of depression, because of operations, or simply because it would be challenging just to apply for a job that often through application forms required that you identified as either male or female. Social exclusion, such as this, was challenging for several participants. Storm and Frankie both experienced challenges with job applications or student courses simply because the applications forced them to choose either a female or male gender.

I think that it would be really nice if there could be one social gender and one legal gender. Because when I am applying for jobs, it's often required that you specify your gender in order to submit your resume. It does not matter what gender you are, but you still have to say that you are either a man or a woman. So, many times I just don't apply at all. - Storm.

Well, often, when you are signing up for courses or different associations, for example, at universities, it is acquired that you choose a gender, and the only options are man or woman. When you ask why they often answer that it is because of statistics without realizing that the statistics will be incorrect when individuals are forced to lie because of lack of options. –Frankie.

Another form of social or societal exclusion is the lack of options in social settings given to those that find themselves challenging the binary. One example that all the study participants

mentioned was the toilet and locker-room situation. Several mentioned that they no longer went to the gym or to take a swim simply because of a lack of options.

And then there are public toilets. There are so many places where they choose to have gendered toilets when it is not necessary at all. It varies a lot if I choose to use the female or male toilet, or the handicap toilet if it is separate from the female and male toilet. And I love to swim, but I have not been to a swimming pool in God knows how many years. And I avoid the gym. – Frankie

Well, so there is the perpetual debate about which toilet to use. I have experienced that a bit too. I have friends in the LGBT+ community who believe that the genitalia that you are equipped with should decide which toilet to use. I do not always agree with them. I sometimes use women's toilets, but I think it is almost a little scary. It feels so incredibly wrong when you get there, you have a breast prosthesis on, and you have a wig on, and you go in high heel shoes. You look like a woman, but with a bit, angular facial features, but nothing more than that, and you are supposed to use that men's toilet. It feels bizarre. And, when one has a relatively strong female identity, it is almost a little scary to go to the men's restroom.

When we are at the swimming pool with the kids, I act as a man there because it gives much less friction. Of course, I also understand that looking like a man and claiming to be in the women's locker room does not work. – Sofia.

It would take a lot for me to go to the gym or to a swimming pool because I'm afraid of discrimination. – Julie.

Both Storm and Julie mentioned episodes where they had not been allowed to enter a toilet. Julie mentioned that everything felt safer for her as soon as she started to “pass” as a woman. Storm shared an uncomfortable personal experience of not being allowed to enter the chosen toilet.

I was banned from a toilet once at a place where I thought that there are so many people going to this toilet every day, so it should be fine. But I was not allowed to enter the men's toilet. I even had my foot inside the door, and suddenly a person came up to me and said: "No, you should not go in here; this is the men's toilet." At that

time, I had a beard and makeup and long hair. I waited until everyone was gone and spent a long time deciding if I should try another bathroom or just go home. Eventually, I went to the handicap toilet. - Storm.

5.3.2 SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER

Each Norwegian citizen is given a social security number at birth. These numbers are based on your assigned gender at birth and are of great importance in our society. We use it everywhere to identify ourselves. The participants that went through a gender confirmation process found it challenging to deal with this number in a long in-between period within the gender confirmation process. The participants that did not identify with a binary gender found this number to be extremely frustrating as the number states an apparent binary gender that they do not identify with. For those participants that had changed their social security number from male to female or female to male, it could be challenges such as having to change essential documents so that they corresponded with their gender identity. Rob shared that it was challenging for him to have to contact people that he knew before transitioning to ask if he could get important documents to match his gender:

Attempting to collect every important document with the correct social number is challenging. As an example, I have to get my high school diploma with the correct name and security number. It is challenging being forced to meet people from my past that might think that I look familiar but don't understand who I am, because my gender is different from before when they knew me. – Rob.

Storm shared another perspective on the matter of social security number:

For many, it is crucial to have the correct gender in the social security number and passport when they are about to travel abroad, among others, but since I cannot get the right gender in my security number at this point, I feel like I am happy with the one that I got because it's the one that I am used to. – Storm.

Other challenging issues that the participants shared during the interviews were lack of options in clothing, and not being able to call your bank and ask them to block your credit card after losing the card simply because your voice does not sound male or a female. Julie mentioned some of the issues that she has had with phone calls:

Phone calls were unpleasant for a while. They assumed it wasn't me that they were talking to since I sounded like a man but had a female name. I felt pressured to change my voice. I searched for tips though the internet. After working a lot with my voice, it stopped. – Julie

Rob shared that some essential changes are currently happening in Norwegian society. He mentioned the change of law that was passed in January 2017, allowing individuals to apply for a new social security number without having to go through NBTS, Rikshospitalet (Lovdata, 2016).

The change of law that ensures that one does not have to go through a lot of operations and such in order to change their social security number - it's a huge deal. Many people have a much easier life now because of it. This is something that could have taken up to 4-5 years through the Rikshospitalet. Many have not been aboard for maybe ten years or so simply because they don't want to travel with a passport that has the wrong gender in it. – Rob.

5.3.3 MEDICAL CARE

There was one crucial element several participants mentioned during the interviews that also indicate challenges within the Norwegian legal system that are important to address. Each citizen in Norway is entitled to medical care, and the Norwegian health programs are considered to ensure a high level of medical care to all Norwegian citizens. Several participants mentioned that this medical care lacks insight into the needs of non-binary and transgender individuals. The medical care system is also very much based on gender, and therefore it becomes an issue when one has gone through a confirmation process, or one simply has changed one's legal gender and made no bodily changes. Julie mentioned some criticism of the matter.

In my experience, things are not adapted to transgender people. Biological gender and legal gender, there is no distinction between those in the legal system. There should be more adjustments, so you are able to get the healthcare that you need. If you are a man legally, you will lose your rights to mammography and gynecological examinations, while others will get it without needing it. It might be possible to get

these things, but it is challenging to figure out how to get them since the system isn't adapted to transgender people. It can also cause unpleasant situations when you are being examined in, for example, the genital area, and you do not have the genitals that the doctor expects you to have due to your legal gender. There should be some information about it available for the doctors in advance of the examination. – Julie.

Storm also mentioned similar issues of not being able to get the medicine that the doctor gave a prescription for, because the pharmacist said that the medicine was for a different gender.

When I was going to get some drugs at the pharmacy about two years ago, I was told by the pharmacist, "No, you are not allowed to have these drugs because they are for men and you are a woman." It was unfair and discriminating. I should be able to get the medicine that my doctor prescribes for me, and it was in my name! – Storm.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, most of the participants have had high expenses concerning their medical care. In many of those cases, it is merely because of a lack of system in place for transgender and non- binary individuals within the health care programs.

5.4 DISCUSSION

Understanding of gender and gender identity: Within the theoretical framework and literature review, I have presented terms and concepts that have provided the basis of my analysis when looking into the participants' understanding of gender and gender identity. In the second chapter, I presented theories on gender as a social norm, body, and regulation which speak about the ways that gendered bodies are full of sociality constructed expectations and limitations from the perspective of Butler, Connell, and West & Zimmerman. My findings illustrate that the participants within this study have reflected a lot on their gender and gender identity in a manner that corresponds with social constructivist perspectives on gender. They have a high level of knowledge and awareness of how they express and perform their gender, as well as how others perceive them. They are often finding themselves constrained by gender regulations, expectations, and norms of gender, particularly those participants that do not identify as either male or female. The participants describe gender as complex, omnipresent, based on culture and something that each individual should define for themselves. Each participant has a unique way of describing his/her/ze gender and gender identity.

The findings concerning the participant's understanding of gender and gender identity are similar to the findings in Nagoshi & Terrell's (2012) research that interviewed eleven participants identifying as transgender. Their participants were faced with similar questions on gender and gender expression. Their reflections on gender roles, expression, masculinity, and femininity resembles the reflections of the participants within my study, such as this reflection from one of their participants:

I think it's more fluid [compared to the binary of gender identity]. Because I think people switch back-and-forth. Even your 'man' and your 'female' or 'woman,' they flow and if you look at adolescent children, they flow between, you know . . . they're not very rigid about this is this, and that is that, they just kind of flow between both of those worlds. (Nagoshi, Brzuzy & Terrell, 2012, p.415).

Their study also mentioned power relations between the male and female gender, which has similarities to the responses of the participants in my study, their experiences of having expressed both male and female gender identity at some point in their lives. "Two participants noted how a transgender individual's decision to express the female gender identity meant a loss of social power and privilege" (Nagoshi, Brzuzy & Terrell, 2012, p.414). Each participant within my study agreed that it is easier to be a male than a female in the Norwegian society, that female identity is suppressed, and that women are not allowed to express confidence in the same way as men do. However, they also mentioned that gender expression permitted as a male was much more limiting than as female. It was also clear that those participants that did not "pass" as a binary type of gender experienced more challenges than those individuals that passed as either male or female, where good examples can be applying for a job or finding clothes that fit their personality. Participants identifying as either male or female, also shared that they would get comments on their gender expression if they did not attempt to be a very masculine or feminine version of their gender.

As argued by Butler, the societal norms of gender, is an incredibly strong force within the society.

In other words, norms act on us, work upon us, and this kind of 'being worked on' makes its way into our own action. By mistake, we sometimes announce that we are the sovereign ground of our action, but this is only because we fail to account for the ways in which we are in the process of being made. (Butler, 2006 p.11)

The pressure of "passing" that participants within this study felt, illustrate this point well. The pressure to "pass" as either male or female was also found within Sell (2004) and Levitt & Ippolito's (2014) studies of participants that identified as third gender (Sell) and transgender

(Levitt & Ippolito). According to Sell (2004), it was those participants with the most ambiguous gender expression that experienced the highest amount of harassment and difficulties in their everyday life. Levitt & Ippolito (2014) found that some of their participants felt so pressured to conform as cisgender, that they started to believe that their gender was dysfunctional. Maria Mehr's participants that identified as transgender presented different arguments when it came to the pressure of passing. The participants within my study referred to the term "passing" as a negative form of regulation of people's gender expressions, while Mehr's participants viewed it more as the goal and endpoint of their journey. "For the ladies working the streets of Honolulu, being "fish" and passing, no matter their personal definition, then symbolized the ultimate success. It was proof that you were woman enough, but it was also a social convenience" (Mehr, 2016, p.92).

Process of gender confirmation: Dentato (2017) presents in his book a version of Arlene Istar Lev's six-stage model, which is used as a tool for the analysis of the participant's gender confirmation process. Awareness (1) is a crucial first step within the process, and the participants in my study have had different experiences with their personal awareness. However, one significant similarity has been their experience of feeling different from an early age. This resembles the experiences of the participants in Sell's study, where 90 % found themselves aware of being different at an early age. This analysis also relates to the argument that is made in Siverskog's study (2015), that age is an essential factor of the coming-out process. My analysis shows that the older participants had a harder time understanding the feeling of being different and weren't able to find information about gender until they were older. This takes us to the second stage: seeking information. This seems to have been a natural step for the participants within this study. However, age is an essential factor concerning how available the information has been. Most participants in my study agreed that accessible information about LGBT + issues is essential for individuals that are in the "coming out" process. The participants agreed that the "coming-out" process is more comfortable for younger LGBT+ individuals because relevant information has become far more accessible over the past decades. The third stage in the six-stage model is disclosure to significant others. According to Dentato, most young individuals identifying as transgender or third gender, have their first disclosures of gender identity through online relationships that they trust (Dentato, 2017). This was not found to be the case with the participants of this study. One of the elder participants shared that the first time she disclosed her transgender identity, was to a friend online. The remaining six participants shared their identity issues face

to face, and with the person they felt closest to, such as their mother, friend, wife, or romantic partner. Several participants had severe challenges with their partners, wife, their ex-girlfriends, parents, and their children, as a result of coming out. A lack of understanding from the people they were closest to, also made the coming-out process longer for several participants. The factor of being married and having kids also made the coming-out process more complicated. However, several participants expressed that they had positive experiences with "coming out" to their family and friends. The final stages of the sig-stage model; (4) exploration of personal identity and self-labeling, (5) exploration of transition issues, and possibly body modification and finally (6) integration, acceptance and post-transition were, according to the participants within this study, a different and individual journey. Some participants wanted to make bodily changes through gender-confirming surgery, and other participants did not find gender-confirming surgery to be necessary. Those participants that did not identify as male or female found the process of finding their personal identity and self-labeling more challenging. Overall, the coming-out process has been a long and still ongoing journey for the participants. It was also found that most of the participants experienced mental health issues as a result of their suppression of feelings. The participants in Levitt & Ippolito's study (2014) had similar experiences. They shared that they had periods of self-hatred and used a lot of their energy on trying to pretend, hide, and ignore their feelings. The experiences that the participants in my study have had with the process of affirming their gender shows that there have been significant changes within our culture and our legal system. It seems that people, in general, are more accepting of individuals identifying as another gender than their assigned gender at birth; however, it is also clear that there are still many challenges for LGBT+ individuals related to their coming-out process.

Experiences with NBTS, Rikshospitalet: An across the board issue in the participants' process of affirming their gender, was their negative experiences with NBTS, Rikshospitalet. The findings show that each participant who in some way had been involved with this treatment institution experienced negative encounters. As mentioned in CH. 3 The institution has been under scrutiny. Several scientific articles and commentaries that have addressed the practice at the NBTS, Rikshospitalet include those by Janneke Van Der Ros (2016), Wæhre and Schorkopf (2019), and Benestad, Thesen, Aars, Olsen, and Bjørkman (2017). The authors of these articles and commentaries all explore the current system and argue that there is a need for structural changes within the system in order to ensure a decent treatment option for trans individuals in Norway. Benestad and Pristed (2015), in their article "Gender in motion"

(Kjønn i bevegelse), point to negative experiences with NBTS, Rikshospitalet. They share that their clients have experienced rejection, offensive remarks, distance, and inappropriate reactions from the treating therapist at the institution. This is, to some degree, similar to the experiences of my study participants; they all felt a distance and a lack of understanding from the side of the therapist. However, the participants did not mention inappropriate reactions or offensive remarks from their therapist. The findings within Vigdis Moen's study (2019) are more comparable to the findings of my study. Moen's participants describe their experiences with the institution as psychologically challenging and extremely time-consuming with few results. My study participants also expressed feelings of not being understood and therefore seeking alternative solutions at private institutions. Each participant mentioned medical cost as a personal burden. These medical expenses were primarily due to the lack of a health care system that recognizes their bodies as different from a body that is gendered in a manner that adheres to prevailing norms. Several participants took matters in their own hands as a result of their negative experiences with the institutions, leading to high medical expenses from surgeries done at private institutions.

Everyday challenges: The findings within this section shows that individuals that are breaking the binary of gender, still have a lot of day-to-day challenges because of their gender identity. Things that a cisgender person might take for granted can become problematic for nonconforming individuals. Most participants found themselves out of work and school for extended periods. Stating one's gender is often requested when one applies for a job, and this makes it difficult for third-gender individuals to apply for a job. These findings contrast with the findings of both Sell (2004) and Levitt & Ippolito's (2014) studies, as their participants shared that they choose to put their energy towards work and school during challenging times and found it to be a healthy distraction. My participants expressed challenges such as using public toilets, signing up for courses, going to the gym or the swimming pool, their social security-number, answering the phone, and much more. Findings within Sell's study (2004) show similarities to this as the participants in her study also shared negative experiences with using public restrooms. Some participants of Nagoshi & Terrell's study on transgender individuals (2012) also commented that it is problematic to go to the gym when your gender is fluid or unclear to others. Most of the participants within my study commented that changes are happening in Norwegian society, legally and socially. The participants are looking for more knowledge and recognition in society and, of course, fundamental rights within the health care system; they are not getting the health care that they need and rightfully deserve.

CHAPTER SIX: LGBT+ COMMUNITIES

6.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the importance of LGBT+ communities, such as FRI and SkU, for individuals that find themselves confronting the norms and binaries of society. As mentioned in the previous chapter, these individuals often find it challenging to get support and understanding from friends, family, and health institutions. LGBT+ communities can be important places for people to find support, knowledge, understanding, and recognition. Butler's concept of recognition is essential when exploring the importance that these organizations have for their participants. Experiencing and giving recognition is essential to persist in one's identity (Butler, 2004, p. 31). The LGBT+ organizations claim that they are working towards more legal rights, as well as more understanding from society, to ensure a better everyday life for those challenging the binary in different ways.

THE SUMMER CAMP

One of the findings that came across in most of the interviews was that the LGBT+ organizations that they participated in had been essential places for them to find self-acceptance. Frankie shared a personal story concerning this topic that demonstrates the importance these organizations may have for individuals that are challenging the binary. Frankie's story illustrates that an LGBT+ community can be a vital free space where one does not have to fear the consequences of challenging the norm of the society, but where one can express one's identity freely. Frankie's story also illustrates how much of a difference it makes to be able to have a free space in an affirming community outside of normal society where one might feel an expectation to fulfill the criteria of the binary norms. I want to start the chapter with this story because it is relevant to all aspects of the chapter. SkU has a tradition of hosting something that they call "gender diversity camp," and this is the camp that Frankie is telling about:

When you sign up for camp, there is a sign-up sheet where you get to fill in your legal name, the name you prefer on the name tag, and below you fill in the pronouns that you prefer because they will write them under your name on the name-tag. It surprised me how much of a difference it made. I did not have to deal with the uncertainty of having to consider what pronouns to use on other people because it was entirely accepted that you asked, or that you stared at their name tags. It was just a very

different life. Furthermore, everyone identified as genderqueer in some way or another at the camp, and that is accepted. So, some people that would usually have a "binder" choose not to use it a breakfast just because they were tired and hungry and wanted to get their breakfast and deal with the binder later. You could relax in a completely different way. At the camp, we had a private area at the beach, and I actually got to take a swim! I went for a swim in the ocean for the first time in a long time. I think it must have been something between seven and nine years ago since the last time I swam in the ocean. And just that experience, oh! I can actually take a swim here! I don't have to worry about what I look like. I am wearing my swimming trunks and not caring about the fact that my body fat is located on my body in a feminine way. I am just totally relaxed at that point, and I just swam, and it was so fantastic! At the camp, they had showers that were gender-neutral with several booths. One could reserve a time there, but if no one had reserved, it was free for everyone to use. Long before I found out that I was trans, I hated those showers. It was the first time that I had been so relaxed in a shared shower, and I wasn't even alone there. Because there wasn't any gender pressure, it wasn't any normative pressure. It didn't matter what kind of body I had. It is when you go to such a place that you realize how tense you are in your everyday life. It's the most relaxed I have been in quite a long time with my body image. – Frankie.

Frankie mentions the effect of affirming language, affirming communities, about finding recognition, and being able to ignore the gendered bodies. Several participants have shared personal stories from the same camp that Frankie talks about, and it is apparent that this camp has been of great importance to many of the participants.

The first Skeiv Ungdom (SkU) camp that I went to ended up being a bit of a make-it-or-break-it moment for me personally. That's where I found out about a health station in my area for LGBT+ youth. Someone working there gave me information so that I could start my process through private practice. I had no idea how one could get help concerning transitioning outside of NBTS, Rikshospitalet before that. I got to know four of my closest friends at my first camp with Skeiv Ungdom (SkU). You are free there. You can choose one name on Monday, and on Tuesday you don't like that name anymore, so you find something else. You can just test it out, and if you want to

change your pronoun, you are free to do that as well. It's very free, non-judging. A real vacation from the whole world. - Rob.

6.1 AFFIRMING COMMUNITIES WITHIN THE ORGANIZATIONS

One essential element coming through in the interviews were the participant's experiences with FRI and SkU. Several participants have had some administrative role in the organizations, while other participants have involvements merely through their membership. The interviews aimed towards getting an understanding of what kind of community the organizations had created. What could one, as a member, expect to get out of that community? The interviews made it clear that the community of the organizations felt positive and safe for the participants. Most of the participants mentioned common arenas created by the organizations. These arenas were places where one could find friendship and gain knowledge about gender and legal rights. The gender diversity camp is one example of such an arena. The participants also mentioned joint spaces such as social cafes, group sessions, and conferences.

Julie mentioned that such arenas were places where it was possible to feel comfortable, and where social interactions were effortless. Julie's understanding is similar to Frankie's experience at the camp. She also mentioned the importance of being able to join these organizations without feeling like one has to come out publicly.

You can be yourself, and show up as you are, no makeup required. Things are accepted. It is a process to get to the point that you dare to stand out from the rest of society. Some show up to these kinds of arrangements even if they are not open about their identity publicly. This is very important - that one can attend these arrangements without feeling pressured to be open publicly. - Julie.

Most of the participants had found a new personal network within these organizations. Kate mentioned that she had found a lot of new friends when she moved to a new town after coming out, and explained how she found those friends in the following way:

In the beginning, I got in touch with many people through "FRI." I went to some of their events and got to meet other transgender individuals there. I also got new friendships through work and friends of friends and such. - Kate.

Jane had a different experience than the other participants. She mentioned that she was hoping to hear about other member's journeys with transitioning in terms of the practical steps forward. She found that people did not want to share information about where they got their hormones or surgeries.

I have friends at FRI now (...) I felt like I just could not get in at first, and no one would tell me where they had gone for help or hormones. I actually felt that it was tough at first because I felt like no one bothered to try to get to know me. I was new to the whole environment. – Jane

6.2 AFFIRMING LANGUAGE AND A PLACE FOR KNOWLEDGE

One of the things that most people mentioned as a positive experience within FRI and SkU was how they dealt with pronouns. According to participants, there is a round of pronouns at the start of each meeting or social gathering. The round of pronouns seems to be based on the same ideas as a round of names that most people probably are familiar with in settings where people unknown to each other meet. During the round of pronouns, participants are free to call themselves, and use whatever pronoun they would like. Both Rob and Frankie spoke about this in relation to the gender diversity camp, and Julie mentioned it regarding the meetings that she has attended.

I did get some network through FRI. Something that I found extraordinary about FRI and Skeiv Ungdom (SkU) was the fact that they have a name and pronoun round. My mind began to think more about that once I was introduced to it. Every time I joined it, I was sort of baffled about the fact that I could choose a pronoun. The first time I was a little confused and replied that since people usually call me a "he" that is fine. The second time, I replied that the pronoun wasn't so important to me. The third time I replied that I preferred that they used "She." No one had ever asked me about my pronouns before that, so it was kind of a process trying to figure it out. – Julie.

This round of pronouns is an excellent example of affirming language because it gives people the power over their own gender identity, and it recognizes that one should not assume anyone's preferences in regard to their gender identity. Sofia shared that she had learned to respect other people's experiences and personal journeys through other members of the organization. Overall during the interviews, it was clear that respect and tolerance for other

individuals' understandings, interpretations, and feelings regarding gender and other LGBT+ issues were at a high level.

Yes, I have learned a lot from my friends in FTPN (Association for Transgender People in Norway) and FRI. They have contributed to the fact that I now have a rich understanding of gender identity. Many people talk about their coming-out process and how it has been. I feel like my process has been straightforward, apart from my wife, I haven't really met any resistance. So, I didn't feel like I benefited from hearing about those rough journeys, but they may have helped me to be humble about my own experience when meeting other people. And I have respect for the fact that others may have different opinions or feelings about it. – Sofia.

Rob also mentioned something similar to Sofia about learning more concerning LGBT+ issues that were not necessarily a problem for him, but that it gave him essential information so that he could have a better understanding of what other LGBT+ individuals go through.

I had come a long way in my own process before I joined Skeiv Ungdom (SkU), but I have learnt a lot about different gender identities and general norms. They have a lot of lectures on different topics. I feel like I have become a bit of a "police officer" against political incorrectness - Rob.

The comments from Sofia and Julie show some insight into how the LGBT+ organizations can be a place to learn about oneself and others. One can also find information about LGBT+ issues and essential rights. Each participant mentioned that they had learned some things at meetings or other arrangements that either made them more aware of issues that other LGBT+ individuals are dealing with, or necessary knowledge that made it easier to understand oneself. Kate, Julie, Storm, and Frankie all mentioned that they had learned specific terms within the organization that made a difference in their understanding of their identity.

I was actually introduced to the term "trans" at a meeting with Skeiv Ungdom (SkU), I started to reflect on things after a talk at a summer camp. -Storm.

Julie and Frankie mentioned that SkU and FRI were places where they had found information that was challenging to find elsewhere.

I was early in the process when I started joining FRI and Skeiv Ungdom (SkU), I was perceived as a cis-person in the beginning since I had not done anything with my appearance at that time. I feel like I learned about many different terms and stuff from FRI and Skeiv Ungdom (SkU). – Julie.

I seeked information about gender on various websites, but I felt like the information was difficult to find, and I did not really know where to look for it. At Skeiv Ungdom (SkU), I got some pamphlets with relevant information. – Frankie.

All participants stated that FRI and SkU, in one way or another have contributed to their understanding of LGBT+ issues and of themselves in terms of language. The participants have learned essential terms and information about themselves and other LGBT+ persons through their membership. They have gained an understanding and respect for each other, further ensuring that the organization is a place where individuals can find recognition and affirmation.

6.3 LGBT+ AND POLITICS

Although the overall response concerning the participation in FRI and SkU were positive, some negative experiences were also shared. FRI and SkU are organizations with a clear political profile, especially concerning LGBT+ politics. It was mentioned by a few participants that this made it a challenge to be a member when one did not agree with the political view of the majority in the organization. The previous chapter on gender identity gave an insight into challenges within the Norwegian legal system that the participants are facing, making it clear that political changes are necessary to ensure better conditions for individuals within the LGBT+ community. The political parties in Norway are often divided into a left side that is considered to be more liberal and a right side that is considered to be more conservative. There are four Norwegian parties that want to make a third gender legal. One party from the center right (Venstre), one party that considers itself as in-between the two sides (Miljøpartiet de Grønne) and two parties on the left side (Sosialistisk Venstreparti and Rødt).

Jane shared some critical thoughts related to excluding factors she had noticed within the organization, with the primary issue being seemingly unanimous opinions about LGBT+ politics within the organization and its members.

Jane mentioned that it could be challenging to have different political opinions than the majority. She described herself as right-wing politically, and in her opinion, that was not a popular political position within FRI.

Another thing is that I'm very right-wing politically, and that is not popular in these organizations. If you're not voting SV (the Socialist Left Party), then you do not care about our rights. That makes me feel like I don't belong here. These organizations are very political, and that makes it difficult, and I think that it excludes a lot of people. – Jane.

Rob also mentioned that politics can be hard within the organization because trans politics are very personal, and it can be hard to agree with someone that supports political parties that do not have good politics concerning transgender individuals. Rob argued that the organization tries to avoid the position where political views exclude individuals from social arrangements.

The organization is supposed to be neutral, but queer politics does come up a lot. One tries to balance it, but I don't think that most people say out loud that they are voting for parties that do not have good trans politics, unless you are ready to defend that and get some angry looks. It is not well-received. The organizers will try to intervene because there is supposed to be room for everyone, but it is difficult since it is so very personal. – Rob.

Although Rob agrees with Jane on the fact that it could be problematic to have a different political view than the majority of members in FRI and SkU, he also mentioned an important point as to why it might be challenging for members to make room for other political views. LGBT+ rights are crucial to most members of the organizations. Storm and Frankie are examples of members that are fighting for the right to legally identify as a gender that is neither male nor female. Other political issues might feel unimportant in comparison, to individuals such as Frankie and Storm, and therefore it might be difficult to find understanding for other viewpoints within the organization. Activism and working towards a better society for LGBT+ individuals is essential within FRI and SkU, and the organizations do have a clear political standing on these issues that one supports by merely being a paying member of the organization. Therefore, it would be impossible for such an organization to accept any political viewpoints with regards to these core issues.

Sofia points out reasons why the political work and activism within the organizations is such a vital part of the work done by the organizations—clarifying that the political role of the organization is significant and has led to an explanation of LGBT+ rights within Norwegian society that is crucial for those that are affected by it.

Changes happen way too slowly, of course! But we are on the right track. I would say that. And that's a lot thanks to all the work done by FRI and FTPN and the Human Rights Alliance. All these organizations that are working day in and day out. They are pushing for changes that ensure a better future. I think if we hadn't had these organizations, we probably wouldn't have been where we are today. After all, they have worked together and have ensured a change of legal gender, and hopefully in the near future, the possibility of a third-gender alternative for those who do not feel at home in "man" or "woman." And the discrimination laws that are now so much better. – Sofia.

6.4 DISCUSSION

Affirming communities within the organizations: When Levitt & Ippolito explain their concept of affirming communities, they state that these communities can be lifesaving, as they can offer both safety and support to individuals that are challenging the gender binary. They also state that these affirming communities can promote self-acceptance (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014, p.1737). Levitt & Ippolito base their statement on data from 16 (out of 17) participants that shared their experiences in finding supporting social groups. “(..) it was upon finding their first affirming social group that many interviewees ($n = 9$) found the courage to explore their own gender. These groups provided safe spaces for participants to experiment with different gender presentation (...)” (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014, p.1740). This is similar to the experiences that the participants in my study have had with the organizations FRI and SkU, such as Frankie's liberating experience of being able to shower and swim at a beach without worry for the first time. Another participant in Levitt & Ippolito's study mentioned that his ability to make friends with people within his LGBT group, helped him to navigate and fight discrimination that he experienced in other social settings with confidence because he knew that he had people that loved him regardless of his gender (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014, p.1741). This resonates with what some of my study participants shared, such as Julie that mentioned that FRI was a place where many people came early in their gender confirmation processes

because they could be themselves at FRI while they worked on gaining the courage to "come out" to friends and family.

The findings of my research show similarities to other studies, such as the study of LGBT individuals conducted in Ireland by Ceatha and colleagues (2019). They found that the LGBT communities available for their participants contributed to their well-being and having a sense of belonging. One participant in their study shared the following:

“I’m part of this community and feel included and involved in it . . . because there’s lots of different types of like-minded people there . . . It’s a thing that the community really celebrates diversity in that sense . . . I just feel that I am accepted—it’s wonderful; it’s so validating.” (Ceatha et al. 2019, p.8)

Six out of seven participants within my study mentioned that their membership with their LGBT+ organization had been a place where they have found recognition and affirmation for their identity. The organization has provided a free space where one can be oneself.

Affirming language and a place for knowledge: Levitt & Ippolito (2014) argue that affirming language has the power to foster acceptance as the experience of gaining knowledge about other transgender stories and learning essential LGBT+ terms and concepts expand opportunities for self-exploration (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014, p.1740). The fact that these organizations are a place where one can find valuable knowledge to understand oneself and other people is also found in my study. Most participants in my study shared that they learned a lot about LGBT+ terms, narratives, and rights from their organization. In Craig & McInroy’s study (2014) that looks into transgender representation in offline and online media, they argue that language and terminology are prevalent issues that should be encountered more in offline media since some LGBT individuals do not have accessibility to online media (Craig & McInroy, 2014, p.615).

One participant in Levitt & Ippolito's study shared that “learning about the diversity of transgender experience, his experience of gender was validated, and he had found an identity that fit” (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014, p.1740). Sell's study (2004) shows similar findings as her participants expressed that the affirming language had contributed to their understanding of their own identity. The most significant finding in terms of affirming language within FRI and SkU was the round of pronouns. Most of the participants mentioned that the round of pronouns was essential for their understanding of self. Julie stated that she learned that she

had the right to decide her own pronoun because of FRI. I believe that this illustrates an excellent example of the importance and effect of an affirming language. Lal Zimman discusses affirming language and promotion of language that is trans-affirming and gender-inclusive not only in LGBT+ communities but also beyond and within our culture and language, Zimman argues that trans-affirming language currently is mainly used in the trans communities (Zimman, 2017). Based on the findings within every single study mentioned in regard to affirming language, Zimman's argument can be considered as both relevant and important.

LGBT+ politics: The issue of politics within LGBT+ organizations is an interesting topic that emerged during the interviewing process, although it was not something that I explicitly asked about. The conflict of how to balance politics within an organization such as an LGBT+ organization is complicated. The organizations FRI and SkU, seem to aim for their spaces to be open for all regardless of political viewpoints. However, the personal experiences shared by participants in my study demonstrate that it might be challenging to be a part of the organization if one has a different political standpoint than that is shared by the majority of the members. To be an organization that is open for all but also an organization that has a clear political profile working to ensure LGBT+ rights within the Norwegian legal system creates difficulties in creating balance. The issues they are facing regarding this balance becomes clear through Jane's story and is also reinforced by Rob. I have not found other studies that look into this particular issue within LGBT+ communities. The study conducted in Ireland by Ceatha et al. (2019) mentions organization politics vaguely, but there is no discussion about the possible issues of having a clear political standing within an LGBT+ organization. There is an interesting tension to find oneself in a community where one's gender identity is being recognized and celebrated. At the same time, one's political opinions are unwelcome and can lead to a feeling of exclusion from the community. The community members must be recognized and accepted for their views, although the majority have another perspective on the matter.

CHAPTER SEVEN: LGBT+ CONDITIONS, COMMUNITY, AND VISIBILITY GLOBALLY

7.0 GLOBAL COMMUNITY

The previous chapters have focused on the participant's experiences, mainly as Norwegian citizens, and within the Norwegian culture and legal system. This chapter looks further into the experiences that the participants have had with a global LGBT+ community by looking into different elements of the LGBT+ cross-national community. It is necessary to clarify my usage of terms. In my study I have employed the term global LGBT+ community in a broad and slightly "fuzzy" way; encompassing every LGBT+ individual in the world that is connected through their mutual disconnection from the binary of gender, including vocal celebrities and people who are persecuted because of their gender identity, performance or expression. The global LGBT+ community is an essential element in this study, and this chapter seeks to give an insight into the participants relations to a global LGBT+ community understood from my broad definition of the term. Furthermore, it looks into how the participants feel that aspects of the cross-national LGBT+ community have had an impact throughout their gender affirmation process. I will look into this by focusing on cross-national information channels, LGBT+ representation and visibility, and current conditions for the LGBT+ community across the globe.

7.1 CROSS-NATIONAL LGBT+ INFORMATION CHANNELS

Several participants mentioned that they used the cross-national (social) media channels to gain knowledge and to find information about LGBT+ issues. Some also traveled to other countries to get their gender-conforming surgery. Social media channels such as YouTube, Tumblr, Instagram, personal blogs, and others were brought up as sources of information. Kate, Frankie, and Jane mentioned that they found information through searching on the internet.

After my therapist mentioned that I might be transgender, I started to google. I found a lot of useful information and a lot of weird information by researching on the internet.

– Kate

You do pick things up online, to put it that way. -Jane.

Frankie mentioned that some information was available on Wikipedia and Tumblr. Tumblr is a microblogging and social networking website.

I went to Wikipedia, I explored some forums and looked a bit elsewhere. I don't exactly feel that Tumblr was as vast at the time, which has now somehow become one of the most well-known places to find that kind of information. - Frankie.

Rob mentioned that Instagram could be a place to find friendship and support.

I know some young people now who have secret groups on Instagram or follow each other. People know each other through Instagram. It's much easier to find things online. – Rob.

7.2 LGBT+ VISIBILITY GLOBALLY

The recent years LGBT+ issues have gained more visibility through global media channels, particularly within the western popular culture. Several well-known individuals have chosen to be open about their transgender identity, and there has been a change in how transgender characters are portrayed through TV-shows and movies. However, the participants all agreed that some recent media representation have had a rather negative effect on the LGBT+ community. It seems that the visibility of transgender individuals within Norwegian society was considered to have a more positive effect on the LGBT+ community in Norway, compared to the LGBT+ representation in the global media channels.

The participants were explicitly asked about their viewpoints on Caitlyn Jenner¹ as a globally known trans person, as she is a well-known figure a lot of people outside of the LGBT+ community are aware of. Almost every participant answered that Caitlyn Jenner had a negative impact on the LGBT+ community, mainly because of her conservative viewpoints politically, and lack of understanding for other individuals within the LGBT+ community.

¹ Caitlyn Jenner (born 1949) identifies as a transgender woman. She is a retired Olympic gold medal-winning decathlete and American TV-personality.

However, Laverne Cox² was mentioned by several participants as a constructive representative, primarily because her talents earned her fame, and not her gender. Sofia mentioned that celebrities that belong in the LGBT+ community did not necessarily have a positive impact on the community as the celebrities mainly had a personal wish for exposure and not a focus on being a spokesperson for the LGBT+ community.

No, they are not very good spokespeople for trans people. They just aren't. Because it's often just about exposure, and as I said previously, it's not necessarily the way to go. But at the same time, they help put transgender people on the map in some way. After all, they help to make us known. After all, we can't sweep it under a chair. So, it's by no means solely negative. But I think one has to be a little careful about how one looks at it. One has to admit that they are just celebrities, and in the same way as other celebrities, they are pretty much just looking for attention. Laverne Cox should have some cred for the fact that she is actually a bit of a down-to-earth actress. - Sofia.

Julie mentioned that it was challenging with transgender celebrities that conveyed negative attitudes towards other individuals within the LGBT+ community.

It varies a bit depending on who the person is. I don't have a very positive relationship with Caitlyn Jenner since she says a lot of stupid stuff. There's many sides of her that I'm a bit skeptical about. She utters a lot that seems very transphobic and homophobic (...) I have nothing left for those people that disapprove of other people within their community; it's a bit of a double standard (...) Laverne Cox is one with whom I have a better impression of. I think she is a positive known trans person. She is positive, supportive, and non-discriminatory. -Julie.

Julie and Rob agree that Caitlyn Jenner has problematic views and produces a lot of negative statements about the LGBT+ community, which makes her a unfavorable spokesperson for the community. Rob also mentioned an intriguing viewpoint in regard to what type of information celebrities chooses to share.

² Laverne Cox (born 1972) identifies as a transgender woman. She is an Emmy-nominated actress, film producer and equal rights advocate.

There are two sides of it, when it comes to celebrities representing the LGBT + environment. Caitlyn Jenner, for example: A lot of people think she's very cool, but she does a lot of things that many in the community aren't very fond of. So, it will always be a bit like that. Also, it is a bit scary how much information anyone can receive without seeking it out in any way. One example is when celebrities share details about gender conforming operations and scars. I know there are many who are afraid that some scars will be marks that everyone understands why one has. Then suddenly, it is no longer a secret that one has taken a specific type of surgery. As soon as you take the shirt off, people know it. There is a lot of feminizing surgery for trans women, it does not produce huge scars, but with a little knowledge it becomes easy to recognize that a person has had an operation. Some talk very openly about this in interviews, and it can suddenly get a little scary. When is it too much? What do people really need to know about? – Rob.

The critical questioning of what type of information it is necessary to share is noteworthy. Looking from the outside, one might think transparency is key in order for people outside of the LGBT+ community to gain an insight into the gender confirmation process. However, is it necessary for others to have full insight into every aspect, such as gender-conforming surgeries if some transgender individuals feel more insecure because of it?

Furthermore, Rob also shares some positive reflections on having several spokespersons for the LGBT+ community.

The fact that celebrities in general or well-known people choose to speak out is positive. Especially impressive are people like Laverne Cox or Jannet Mock³ who have not appeared in the media, but who have become popular and then said “by the way, I am trans.” That it wasn't part of the whole reason why they became known, it's also nice to see that someone like Laverne Cox can be a known trans person without having to walk around with hundreds of security guards to be safe. She somehow survives. Only that, I think, means a lot to many. It may sound strange, but it is something you are terrified of. -Rob.

³ Jannet Mock (Born 1983) identifies as a transgender woman. She is a New York Times bestselling author, an American TV-host, director and transgender rights activist.

Rob's opinions on the matter give an insight into the level of discrimination that the individuals within the LGBT+ community are facing. To a cisgender individual, it might seem absurd that Laverne Cox can be considered a good representation simply because she is able to be herself without fearing for her life.

Several participants brought up some TV-shows with characters that were trans persons. "Transparent" is such a show which tells the story of Mort who comes out as Maura to her three adult children and ex-wife. To put it in short, the storyline circles around this significant change within the family and the process that they are all going through. The participants all agreed that these TV-characters represented the LGBT+ community in a better way. Some also pointed out that there have been massive changes in how characters that identify as transgender are portrayed on TV-shows and movies. Instead of being characters that the viewers are supposed to find funny, the characters are now closer to reality. The characters are humanized and shown with the same complexity as any other people. Some TV-shows, such as "Transparent," are also showing the complexity of the processes that trans people and their families experience.

I think that a series like "Transparent" is more important rather than celebrities. The series shows all these complicated things that happen in a family when someone suddenly comes out. None of the actors are trans, but the director has a queer background. I think it's a much more valuable contribution. I have seen "Transparent" with my wife, and she finds it an excellent series, but she does see a little of me in the main character. But it has been a little interesting, and we have had many pleasant conversations about it. I would recommend it to anyone. -Sofia.

Julie mentions further that it is essential that transgender individuals get the opportunity to play the transgender characters, and that it is problematic to have a male cisgender to play a character that is identifying as a transwoman.

Laverne Cox does an excellent job in the roles she plays as a trans person as well. After all, it is also vital that trans people get roles in acting. Too often, they use men to play trans women and women to play trans men, and I think that it is a shame. In fact, it would have been better if they used cis women to play trans women because they

have at least the right gender identity. However, the best thing is that transgender people are given those roles. -Julie.

7.3 LGBT+ CONDITIONS ACROSS THE GLOBE

While discussion about famous LGBT+ celebrities was lively and simple for the participants to delve into, it appeared to be more of a challenge to discuss LGBT+ conditions across the globe. However, there was a consensus between the participants that global conditions do matter. Most participants stated that they pay attention to what is happening outside of Norway. Kate and Rob stated that they had heard of stories from other countries that made them feel fortunate to live in Norway and that conditions in other countries were scary and brutal.

So, it's absolutely horrible! I think I am lucky because I am living in Norway. If I had been living in Chechnya, I would probably have been sent to a camp or something. There are very many countries that I cannot travel to. It means that when you hear about these and similar stories, it becomes more personal – Kate.

Some exchange people came in here at Skeiv Ungdom (SkU); some from here traveled to Russia. Then you got to hear completely different stories. I think it's really scary. I can live here and do what I want and walk down the street quite safely, might get some comments and glances, but I'll survive it if that is the worst it gets. In other places, you are killed or arrested the moment you go out your own door. I think it's terrifying. -Rob.

Jane mentioned that she felt fortunate to live in Norway, mainly because of the possibilities that the stable economy of the country provides.

After all, we are fortunate in Norway, where our economy is so strong that we can afford to go to other countries and take surgical procedures. For it could probably be more difficult in other countries to simply afford it. Because that's a thing, people do. It is not selling drugs but selling their bodies. – Jane.

However, Jane also pointed out that although Norwegian citizens have some rights on paper, it might not actually be available to everyone in practice.

We may have some paper rights in this country. But it doesn't work like that. After all, we don't even get help through the health care system. I have read that many US citizens who work and have life insurance, they get reimbursed for their insurance coverage. -Jane.

Storm, on the other hand, mentioned that ze found it difficult to feel anything when ze heard of terrible stories that other people would get very moved by. Storm states that ze have found a coping-mechanism that makes it easier to block out the negative and focus on working towards a better future.

I do not know of conditions in so many other places. You hear about stories and things that happen. I feel very numb when I hear such stories. When I see that people around me start to cry or their eyes are filled with tears, I just think: "but life goes on". That's what I'm thinking. It goes on, but it's sad. I react to that, of course, but I think I have generally managed to build such a mechanism that the negative gains my motivation. A mechanism that makes me want to work towards better conditions for all! – Storm

Norway is considered to be a country that ensures human rights for all, and because of this, it is common to assume that Norway has come further than other countries in regard to ensuring LGBT+ rights. Several participants explained that this was not the case. That there are a lot of countries across the globe that are further along in terms of ensuring LGBT+ rights than Norway at this point. Sofia mentioned that there are several countries that have managed to recognize the need for LGBT+ individuals despite the fact that they have a lower recognition for fundamental human rights.

There are many countries we look up to, and some countries in the world have a third gender alternative available already, where Norway is actually a bit behind. Not every country is necessarily ahead in terms of human rights, but they have managed to recognize it in a way despite of that. – Sofia.

Jane has similar viewpoints to Sofia and points out Iraq as a country that used to have better LGBT+ rights than Norway.

No, I'm happy on their behalf. There are many countries that are worse off than Norway. I read in a Norwegian magazine about a woman who was a refugee from Iraq; she had treatment under Saddam. Yes, under Saddam, then they were treated as transgender people. Got hormones and everything they needed, but when she came as a refugee to Denmark, she did not get treatment. She was seven years without hormones. Seven-years going around waiting for treatment options at the "Rikshospitalet" in Denmark. Same thing there as here. So, we can say what we want about Saddam, but he provided rights for transgender people. In some way, one can say that today's transgender people in Scandinavia are worse off than transgender people in Iraq under Saddam. Maybe it was more class-related in Iraq- I don't know. - Jane.

Although it might be true that treatment has been more available for transgender individuals living under the Saddam regime, the discrimination rate for LGBT+ individuals within Iraq today is very high.⁴

Jane also pointed out that she is happy with changes that are happening in Norway in terms of LGBT+ rights, and that the decisions that have been made will be put into practice soon.

I am happy about the rights and decisions made here. It is, in a sense, the first step. Also, they need to be available in practice and not just on paper. -Jane.

When the participants were asked about the global conditions for LGBT+ individuals, they all spoke about their personal experiences with traveling abroad. This was something that everyone had put some thought into as they were aware of the fact that they could not travel anywhere in the world and expect to be safe.

Conditions in other countries affect me in the way that if I want to go abroad, then I must learn if I can travel to a place, and if it is dangerous for me to travel there. I just

⁴ The LGBT+ community in Iraq / Kurdistan Region faces extreme danger from the government, the society, armed groups and others, which makes security the biggest concern every LGBT+ individual in the country and even activists working on these issues have. (IRAQUEER, 2020)

sort of check things out a lot. When I explore, I often find things that I was unaware of. There are some things, some countries I would not be allowed to enter, while some countries are not safe to travel to, but I am allowed. I'm actually allowed to travel to Russia, but I can't show any signs of homosexuality or being a trans person. Then I must somehow hide that side of me. I would probably use more makeup and try to look more like a woman than I usually do. -Julie.

Rob also mentioned Russia as a country that he would have liked to travel in, but that he does not see himself traveling there because he does not believe that it would be safe.

I am thrilled that I live in Norway, if not, then I probably would not have lived. At least that's the case in some countries. After all, some places are excluded if you want to experience the world. Some countries are on the list of countries you just can't go to like, for example, Russia. It is a fascinating country to go to, but I had never dared to travel there. There are such things that one has to think about a little more. -Rob.

Sofia agrees that one cannot travel abroad without evaluating the safety within the country, particularly if one wants to travel as a transgender woman. She also pointed out that some countries might be safe even if the leaders of the countries are openly transphobic.

Yes, pay attention to it. I might be more attuned to trans-policy than I am to other foreign policy. After all, many of us are very aware of it concerning the fact that you talk about traveling in one's preferred gender expression. If you are assigned a male gender at birth and have a female identity, then you might want to travel as a woman, and there are some places where it is more complicated than others. And there are many who are very afraid to travel to the United States now just because Trump evicted trans people from the military. It's not like it is dangerous to go to the United States! But at the same time, there exists hate against transgender people in the US, so in some places, it is probably more difficult than others. -Sofia.

As Frankie identifies as non-binary it is more of a challenge for hir to travel safely abroad. Frankie shared that there are several places ze would have liked to travel, that ze would not

dare to travel to. Ze also mentioned that it is not only hir gender that is problematic, but also hir sexuality as there is a lot of homophobia and transphobia in other countries.

When a third gender becomes legal in countries other than Norway, I love it because it affects me and others. If I ever go to that country, then at least I know that my gender is actually legally recognized there (...). There are places in the world where I am not very tempted to go just because I am queer. So, not only in terms of gender but also in terms of sexuality. For example, Russia. There it is, after all, homophobia and transphobia. All the phobias there have increased. And violence and discrimination has increased since the Propaganda Act came into force. I honestly do not dare to go to Russia myself as a tourist because I do not know if I could pass as a cis-gendered person. I mean, my mother realized that I was at least sexually queer for a good while before I realized it. I'm not good at passing. Neither straight nor cis, and then having to go to a place like Russia or other places where people who break norms can quickly end up in trouble. It really affects how I think when I try to figure out places I want to go to or consider traveling to. For example, if I want to go to a festival or something like that and I find that there is a lot of discrimination there, do I dare to travel then? – Frankie.

The Propaganda Act that Frankie refers to is a Federal law that Russian president Vladimir Putin signed in June 2013, and it has had an enormous impact on LGBT+ individuals in Russia. It is supposedly an attempt to protect minors from LGBT+ propaganda. The law makes it illegal to give children any information about homosexuality (hrw.org, 2020). Jane agrees with Rob, Frankie and Julie that countries such as Russia are unwanted as travel destinations at this point.

After all, I am concerned about how it is on a global scale. Both because I care about others, but it is also interesting when I travel. How is it in other countries. For example, Eastern Europe and Russia are destinations that are not as high on my list anymore. There are certainly many places in the world where I have to be much more careful now and take precautions. This summer, I was traveling in Western Europe, and there was no problem there. Amsterdam, Paris, and Barcelona are not the worst places to travel for anyone, really. – Jane.

Storm agreed that one could find the options of traveling limiting, but ze made a point of not letting anything be in the way of what ze wanted to do.

After all, I have been traveling several times, regardless of what has been in the passport. I don't think it stops me from traveling (...). I have not thought anything personal about how it is in other countries since I have always been who I am, and I should not let anything like that stop me. -Storm.

7.4 FRI AND SKEIV UNGDOM'S GLOBAL WORK

I asked the participants if they had any knowledge about the international work that was being done within the organization that they are a part of, and most of the participants struggled to answer. Russia was mentioned by most participants as a country that FRI and SkU had on their agenda. Franke stated that hir did not know that much about the international work that SkU does.

Honestly, I don't know that much about it. There may be some work that Skeiv Ungdom (SkU), actually does that I do not know about, but I can at least say with confidence that they are far from ignorant. At the summer camp, we had a visit from the woman from Russia who has published the anonymous letters from queer people under 18 years in Russia. That, in itself, is crucial work. And just to actually get her to Norway, and to talk to us about this here at Skeiv Ungdom's (SkU) biggest camp (...). Also, I do not think it is so unusual that they have some cooperation at times with Skeiv Verden. I'm not going to say anything with 100 percent certainty. So yes, they could maybe have done more, but I think they are doing quite a bit already. – Frankie.

Storm on the other hand, had more insight into the international work and mentioned IGLYO - The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer & Intersex Youth, and Student Organization as an important organization that SkU collaborated with.

Skeiv Ungdom (SkU), has a collaboration with the organization IGLYO. They have had collaborative projects with Russia. Skeiv Ungdom (SkU) collaborates with other organizations in Finland, Slovenia, Ireland. So, they work internationally. There has been an exchange program for Kenya. I think it would have been cool if you could create Skeiv Ungdom in another country. So that you can work across national

borders, it could have been a lot of fun. They have worked a bit with Sweden, a kind of Skeiv Ungdom (SkU) Sweden. -Storm.

Kate mentioned that FRI had an important role in making sure that happenings in Chechnya were visible in media channels.

FRI has been active both in the media and had actions against Russia, for example, regarding the happenings in Chechnya. They have been very outspoken, and they have done a lot of lobbying against the politics there. They have been present in the media and also supported organizations abroad who need support – Kate.

Rob mentioned that FRI probably had more resources to focus on international projects as they are a larger organization than SkU is.

I know that Skeiv Ungdom (SkU) has some international campaigns and marks different days of the year when there is something. For example, the Trans-Memorial Day. Then there is often more focus on other places in the world since there are more people dying outside Norway. Then they inform you about it. I don't know if they have any specific projects now. I expect that FRI has more focus on international matters since they are a much larger organization than Skeiv Ungdom (SkU)." – Rob.

7.5 DISCUSSION

Global community: This chapter has been attempting to give an insight into how the participants relate to the global LGBT+ community at an international level and to what degree the individuals feel like the global community has had an impact on their lives. The findings in my study show that the global LGBT+ community is of importance to the individual participants within this study. However, it is also clear that the LGBT+ community within the LGBT+ organizations that the participants are members of have a more substantial effect concerning affirmation and recognition.

The participants in this study have found affirmation and recognition mainly through their local LGBT+ community. It cannot be stated based on the findings within this study, that a global LGBT+ community has had an essential role for the participants in finding an affirming community, recognition, and self-acceptance. However, the findings show that the

global LGBT+ community within cross-national media channels, global visibility, social networks, and international collaborations in some ways plays a role in the participants' lives.

Cross-national Media Channels: The global media channels are in many ways where the global community for LGBT+ individuals is most apparent, and it is clear from the findings of my study that it plays a role in terms of sharing and finding essential information. Dentato addresses the role of social media in his book (2017) and argues that social media is a space where LGBT+ individuals are able to explore gender and identity and access essential information without the same risk factors as in real life (Dentato, 2017, p 108). Several participants expressed that they had been using global media channels to find information and gain knowledge about LGBT + issues. Findings in similar studies have found that social media has an essential role for the LGBT+ community, particularly LGBT+ youth, such as the one by Levitt & Ippolito (2014) where the participants shared that their initial exposure to LGBT+ terms was through TV and other media channels. Levitt & Ippolito stated that talk shows and media had been mentioned frequently by their participants as an initial exposure to the concept of transgender (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014, p. 1740). None of the participants in my study shared that TV was the initial exposure, but YouTube was mentioned as a place that was used to gain knowledge.

Lucero's study (2017) that sampled participants in an online survey found social media as an essential platform for the LGBT+ community. The participants in Lucero's study shared that it was easier to express themselves through social media channels:

“I am not so good at expressing myself with people face-to-face, and I believe I can express myself a bit more clearly online” That being said, online conversations have been a much more positive experience than face-to-face conversations. Another participant explains, *“when I see people face to face, I sometimes do not have the opportunity to feel safe and enjoy being myself because I get bullied.”*

(Lucero, 2017, p.123)

Cavalcante's study (2019) of observing 27 participants in approximately a year in order to examine LGBTQ youth's use of media channels, experiences of belonging, and identity, have similar findings to my study. Cavalcante argues the following in the conclusion of the study:

Young people need a space to interact and a public laboratory to test their identities and become politically motivated. Tumblr offers this space, giving users a glimpse of the queer utopic, the promise of something better, which is largely absent from their everyday lives as well as other digital media platforms. (Cavalcante, 2019, p.1732)

Cavalcante argues further that online platforms such as Tumblr can have negative consequences for vulnerable LGBT+ youth:

However, there are serious drawbacks to queer collectivity on Tumblr: the fleeting and noncommittal nature of the interactions afforded, the limits of inhabiting an information environment that mutes dissenting viewpoints, the potential for interfacing with Tumblr's dark and possibly harmful underbelly, and the vulnerability of queer users on commercialized platforms that prioritize profit over people.

Cavalcante, 2019, p.1732)

The findings within Cavalcante's study have some similarities to Rob's critique of oversharing elements such as gender-conforming surgeries in media channels. However, it was not found that global media channels had negative consequences for participants in my study.

LGBT+ visibility globally: Several studies have been looking into LGBT+ visibility in television and similar media platforms. The participants in Craig & McInroy's study (2014) argued that there were not many transgender representatives that were experienced as a positive representation for the LGBT+ community. "Many participants felt that there were few positive representations of transgender people, and their responses indicated that the transgender representation available within offline media remains very limited, problematic and stereotypical" (Craig & McInroy, 2014, p.610). My study participants also argued that any representation of the LGBT+ community is not necessarily a good representation. Most of the participants in my study referred to Caitlyn Jenner as a negative representation. Most participants found it challenging to deal with famous LGBT+ individuals that addressed people within the LGBT+ community in a negative way.

LGBT + visibility at a global level has been evolving in recent years. Stories from my participants illustrated some changes that have happened recently, regarding how LGBT+ individuals are being portrayed in media. According to my participants, the LGBT+ individuals are finding characters that are more accurate and based on real-life, than it had been previously.

The participants in Craig & McInroy's study (2014) had a similar response in regard to positive representation:

The more positive representations emphasized by participants also tended to be more fully integrated into storylines and less tokenistic. These more authentic portrayals often normalized transgender identity, depicting characters as complex individuals instead of disproportionately focusing on their transgender identification. Participants

emphasized the quality of representation, rather than quantity as a crucial consideration. (Craig & McInroy, 2014, p.612)

The participants in my study found TV-shows such as "Transparent" to be an essential contribution for the people to understand the lives of LGBT+ individuals better, and celebrity representation such as Laverne Cox was considered to be a positive representation as she was not only known as a transgender woman but first and foremost as a successful actress.

LGBT+ conditions globally: LGBT+ conditions vary to a great degree when you look at it globally. When comparing LGBT+ conditions in Norway to other countries, Norway can be considered to have both more and fewer rights depending on which country you compare it with. The participants in this study made this point clear through their reflections on LGBT+ conditions globally. Initially, I found it surprising that the participants struggled to some degree to reflect on global conditions. However, it became clear to me through this study that the LGBT+ conditions in Norway are far from great at this point. The participants struggle within their day-to-day life, and perhaps these personal issues make it too challenging to worry about the struggles of other LGBT+ individuals at a global level.

However, the participants shared essential viewpoints on the topic. Several participants mentioned that other countries had better conditions for LGBT+ individuals than Norway and that some LGBT+ rights in Norway were so-called "on paper rights" and not implemented in practice and available for all. This finding is very similar to Janneke Van Der Ros's (2016) arguments about how there is only a small percentage of those in contact with NBTS, Rikshospitalet that are getting help. Several participants mentioned that they felt fortunate to live in Norway when they were confronted with news about countries that were treating LGBT+ individuals in terrible ways, such as Russia which was mentioned as a country one could not travel to while being true to oneself and that the situation there was horrifying and brutal. It was also mentioned that travelling was an issue for the participants, as there were several countries they stated that they would not dare to travel to. Most participants explained how they made sure before traveling somewhere that it would be safe when traveling, and that they sometimes chose not to travel as a result of not being sure that they would be safe. Several participants stated that they did pay attention to the global conditions for LGBT+ individuals. One can argue that knowledge of conditions globally affects the participants' feelings of acceptance and recognition. The fear of travel illustrates that the participants do not feel safe, recognized, and accepted in a global perspective.

FRI and Skeiv Ungdom's global work: The participants had limited information to share concerning what kind of work their organizations were doing internationally. The organization IGLYO was mentioned as a collaboration organization. Some participants mentioned that there had been exchanges abroad and that they had heard about conditions in other countries through lectures at arrangements such as the Gender Diversity Summer Camp. It is clear that some work is being done, but perhaps it is challenging to work with these issues at a global level as the acceptance, laws, and regulations within each country differ. One might argue from the findings of this study that the national LGBT+ organization has greater importance for LGBT+ individuals than the cross-national organizations, as it might be challenging to work from a global perspective with LGBT+ issues. The international work can still be considered to be of great importance if one looks from a perspective that is beyond individual experiences of affirmation and recognition.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

I created this research project because I wanted to look into the experiences and reflections of transgender and third gender individuals in terms of gender, gender identity, and LGBT+ communities locally and globally. I interviewed the study participants about their thoughts and experiences with their gender identity, their gender-conforming process, and their everyday challenges as individuals that are breaking the gender binary. Furthermore, I asked the participants about their membership in the Norwegian LGBT+ organizations FRI and SkU and their views on the global LGBT+ community.

The key element of my study's findings is how and where each participant found knowledge about LGBT+ issues, understanding of their gender, recognition and affirmation. Each participant in this study has a lot of knowledge on gender and gender identity. Their reflections demonstrates that each participants' understanding of gender is based on their experiences and theoretical knowledge about the concept. Furthermore, I found that each participant had found affirmation and recognition within their LGBT+ organization, which was either FRI or SkU. It became apparent through the findings of this study that FRI and SkU have played a significant role in the lives of each participant. The organizations have managed to create an affirming community for their members that offer support, knowledge, and recognition. According to Levitt & Ippolito (2014), these kinds of affirming communities that support individuals that are lacking recognition elsewhere in the society can be lifesaving (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014).

"To persist in one's own being is only possible on the condition that we are engaged in receiving and offering recognition" (Butler, 2004, p. 31).

As Judith Butler states, it is essential to receive recognition in order to embody one's identity. LGBT+ individuals need to be recognized as who they are, and the organization's FRI and SkU have had an essential role in the participant's experiences of recognition. Furthermore, FRI and SkU have been a place to find more knowledge, and their practices, such as the round of pronouns, have made their members reflect and take control of their personal preferences. These findings show that FRI and SkU are prompting an affirming language, which is considered by Levitt & Ippolito (2014) to foster acceptance and expand exploration of self (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014, p.1740). It is essential to address that although these organizations

were found to be of great importance to each participant, the findings have also shown how the political element of the organizations could create issues for some members.

I was also looking into whether or not the participants felt like they were a part of a global LGBT+ community and to what extent they found this to be important in their gender confirmation process, and their search for recognition and affirmation. Based on the findings within this study, I cannot claim that the participants had an active part in a global LGBT+ community and that the participants gained affirmation and recognition from their experiences with this community. However, the findings showed that the participants paid attention to LGBT+ conditions globally and that global media channels such as social media, television, and pop-culture were of some importance to them. Most of the participants mentioned that they could not travel to certain countries because of discrimination, homophobia, and transphobia. Furthermore, the participants stated that they felt lucky to live in a country where they could feel safe. Social media seems to be a place where the participants have found information about LGBT+ issues, and some participants have found like-minded people through social media channels. The participants considered the representation of the LGBT + community in global media channels, such as TV-shows, movies, and talk-shows, to have both positive and negative effects on the community. The participants shared that representation through TV-shows and movies have developed positively. Caitlyn Jenner was for most of the participants an example of bad representations as her political views go against the rights for many LGBT + individuals and also because she comes from a very privileged position.

One significant finding within chapter five was the current conditions for LGBT+ individuals in Norway. The participant had everyday challenges and a lack of medical care options as a result of their gender identity. The experiences that the participants within this study have had with the Norwegian treatment-institution for transgender individuals at Rikshospitalet, are contributing to the argument made in several scientific articles that the institution is failing to give transgender individuals the treatment that they rightfully deserve. It is also clear through the findings that the health care system in Norway needs to ensure that their practice changes to make space for bodies that do not fit into the gender binary.

Recommendations for further research:

This study has been looking into lived experiences for transgender and third gender individuals. The findings within this study on affirming community and affirming language should be further researched. I believe that the work of organizations such as FRI and SkU deserves to be recognized. It seems that these organizations can create a safe place for their members that ensures affirmation, recognition, and support for individuals that are at risk for developing severe mental health issues as a result of breaking norms of gender in their culture.

Furthermore, I believe that individuals' experiences with NBTS, Rikshospitalet should be further researched as it has been criticized by each participant in my study, and by several Norwegian doctors, sexologists and others. It seems that there is a need for re-evaluating their practice in order to ensure that transgender individuals in Norway get the treatment they rightfully deserve by Norwegian law.

The importance of social media and global media channels for the LGBT+ community has been addressed by several recent studies. However, I believe it is necessary to continue the research as the social networks are growing by the minute. It seems that these media channels can offer community, support, and knowledge, but according to Cavalcante (2019), they could also cause harm for vulnerable users.

Lastly, I would recommend further research on the LGBT+ community in order to gain more understanding, generate new questions, and find tools to ensure fundamental rights for LGBT+ individuals.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Interview guide for in-depth interviews

INTERVJU GUIDE FOR DELTAKERE I STUDIEN

Intervjuet skal helst styres av deltaker i stor grad og være en samtale mellom deltaker og intervjuer. Spørsmålene i guiden er hovedsakelig ment som et hjelpemiddel dersom det er nødvendig for å få flyt i samtalen.

- 1) Hva er dine refleksjoner rundt kjønnsidentitet generelt?
Hjelpespørsmål:
 - a) Hvordan kan kjønnsidentitet begrense oss? (alle kjønn inkludert)
 - b) Hvordan kan kjønnsidentitet gi oss muligheter?
- 2) Hva er din kjønnsidentitet?
- 3) Kan du fortelle om din personlige kjønnsidentitets prosess?
Hjelpespørsmål:
 - a) Når oppdaget du at din kjønnsidentiteten var utenom det vanlige?
 - b) Hvordan håndterte du det?
 - c) Åpenhet i nærmiljøet?
 - d) Mulige utfordringer?
- 4) Hvordan opplever du at din personlige kjønnsidentitet har påvirker deg?
- 5) Hvilke LGBT+ organisasjon er du medlem i?
- 6) Hvorfor og når ble du medlem i organisasjonen?
- 7) Hvor aktiv er du i organisasjonen?
- 8) Hvilke rolle har den globale LGBT+ bevegelsen for deg?
- 9) I hvor stor grad engasjerer du deg for den globale LGBT+ bevegelsen?
- 10) Kan du fortelle mer om din rolle i organisasjonen?
- 11) Hvor viktig har bekreftelse i LGBT+ miljø vært for deg?
- 12) Har du fått nye vennskap knyttet til organisasjonen?

- 13) Hvordan kom du i kjennskap med sentrale begreper og definisjoner rettet mot kjønn og identitet?
- 14) Hvordan opplever du endringer i det norske samfunnet som relatert til LGBT+ problemstillinger?
- a) Lovendringer
 - b) Holdninger
 - c) Populærkultur
- 15) Hvordan opplever du at populær-kulturen kan påvirke holdninger i samfunnet i forhold til LGBT+ problemstillinger?
- a) Caitlyn Jenner
 - b) Laverne Cox

Forespørsel om deltakelse i forskningsprosjektet

” Exploring the importance of LGBT+ movements for gender identity and understanding of self among individuals identifying as transgender or third gender ”

Bakgrunn og formål

Studiens formål er å undersøke kjønnsidentitet og viktigheten av LGBT+ organisasjoner/ bevegelser på et globalt nivå og på et individ nivå for mennesker som identifiserer seg som transekjønnnet eller tredje kjønnnet. Studiet er en masteroppgave til masterprogrammet: Global Development Theory and Practice, HEMIL-senteret, Psykologisk fakultet UIB (spesialisering i kjønn i global utvikling).

Studien er rettet mot personer som identifiserer seg som transkjønnet eller tredjekjønnnet. Deltakerne må også være medlemmer av en LGBT+ organisasjon. Det er ønskelig med deltakere i alle aldre over 18 år.

Hva innebærer deltakelse i studien?

Deltakere vil bli intervjuet i en en-til-en samtale med meg, Sarah Olausen. I studiet vil den relevante informasjonen gitt via intervju bli anonymiserte og presentert for å vise til mulige funn.

Det er ønskelig at intervjuene blir tatt opp på en opptaker slik at intervjuet kan bli transkribert og bli gjenfortalt med deltakernes egne ordvalg. Dersom du ikke er komfortable med opptak må det beregnes ekstra tid til intervjuene for å sikre utfyllende notater.

Spørsmålene i intervjuet vil omhandle dine personlige opplevelser og refleksjoner rundt kjønnsidentitet og medlemskap i LGBT+ organisasjoner. Intervjuet skal være en samtale mellom deg som deltaker og meg som student/forsker, der du kun svarer på spørsmål som du er komfortable med å svare på.

Hva skjer med informasjonen om deg?

Alle personopplysninger vil bli behandlet konfidensielt og lagret på en passord beskyttet pc. Det er meg som student samt min veileder ved UIB som vil ha tilgang til det innsamlede datamaterialet. Alle opptak vil bli slettet når studien er fullført. Det vil ikke bli samlet informasjon om deltakere utenom intervjuene. Alle opplysningene blir anonymiserte slik at det ikke skal være mulig for andre å kjenne igjen identiteten.

Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes juni 2019.

Frivillig deltakelse

Det er frivillig å delta i studien, og du kan når som helst trekke ditt samtykke uten å oppgi noen grunn. Dersom du trekker deg, vil alle opplysninger om deg bli anonymisert og eventuelle opptak vil slettes umiddelbart.

Dersom du ønsker å delta eller har spørsmål til studien, ta kontakt med student Sarah Olausen telefonnummer: +47 48 23 95 27 epost: sarah.olausen@gmail.com eller veileder Haldis Haukanes på telefonnummer: +47 55 58 92 59 epost: haldis.haukanes@uib.no

Studien er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, NSD - Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS.

Samtykke til deltakelse i studien

Jeg har mottatt informasjon om studien, og er villig til å delta Jeg

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

Jeg samtykker til at intervjuet jeg deltar i blir tatt opp for å transkriberes, og deretter slettes.

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

Jeg samtykker **ikke** til at intervjuet jeg deltar i blir tatt opp.

Appendix 3: Letter of acceptance from Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD)



Haldis Haukanes
Christiesgt. 13
5015 BERGEN

Vår dato: 09.08.2017

Vår ref: 54936 / 3 / LAR

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

Tilbakemelding på melding om behandling av personopplysninger

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 28.06.2017.

Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

54936	<i>Exploring the importance of LGBT+ movements for gender identity and understanding of self among individuals identifying as transgender or third gender</i>
Behandlingsansvarlig	Universitetet i Bergen, ved institusjonens øverste leder
Daglig ansvarlig	Haldis Haukanes
Student	Sarah Olausen

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet, og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger vil være regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsforskriften. Personvernombudet tilrår at prosjektet gjennomføres.

Personvernombudets tilråding forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, ombudets kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget [skjema](#). Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en [offentlig database](#).

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 01.06.2019, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Dersom noe er uklart ta gjerne kontakt over telefon.

Vennlig hilsen

Dokumentet er elektronisk produsert og godkjent ved NSDs rutiner for elektronisk godkjenning.

Appendix 4: Second letter of information to participants of the study

INFORMASJONSSKRIV

Kjære deltaker på min masteroppgave “Exploring the importance of LGBT+ movements for gender identity and understanding of self among individuals identifying as transgender or third gender”

Jeg ønsker med dette å opplyse deg som deltaker om at prosjektet har blitt utsatt fra våren 2019 til våren 2020 på grunnlag av at jeg er i en permisjon frem til februar 2020.

Min opprinnelige avtale med deg som deltaker var at alle data om deg skulle være slettet innen juni 2019, men for å få fullført oppgaven min trenger jeg opplysningene jeg har hentet fra deg til juni 2020. Det vil si at jeg fortsatt har lydopptak fra vårt intervju på en kryptert passordbeskyttet disk slik at jeg kan kontrollere underveis at jeg fortsatt har en korrekt beskrivelse av det som har blitt sagt under intervju. Personopplysninger og opptak vil slettes som avtalt, men altså et år senere enn planlagt. Opplysningene behandles etter de samme kravene som du har signert på når du takket ja til delta i studiet.

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke personopplysninger som er registrert om deg,
- å få rettet personopplysninger om deg,
- få slettet personopplysninger om deg,
- få utlevert en kopi av dine personopplysninger (dataportabilitet), og
- å sende klage til personvernombudet eller Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger.

Dersom du ønsker å trekke deg fra studiet og ikke ønsker at jeg skal holde på dine opplysninger videre, så kan du sende en mail til meg: sarah.olausen@gmail.com. Jeg vil slette all informasjon umiddelbart og ikke dele noe av det du har delt med meg i oppgaven hvis du velger å trekke deg. Dette er helt opp til deg.

Jeg fortsetter oppgaven som planlagt dersom jeg ikke hører noe annet fra deg, og du vil høre fra meg igjen når oppgaven er ferdig våren 2020. Jeg beklager utsettelsen. Ta gjerne kontakt dersom noe er uklart.

Vennlig hilsen Sarah Olausen Askvik

Appendix 5: Second letter of acceptance from Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD)

NSD Personvern

20.12.2019 07:35

Det innsendte meldeskjemaet med referansekode 672123 er nå vurdert av NSD.

Følgende vurdering er gitt:

BAKGRUNN

Behandlingen av personopplysninger ble opprinnelig meldt inn til NSD 28.06.2017 (NSD sin ref: 54936) og vurdert under personopplysningsloven som var gjeldende på det tidspunktet.

13.11.2019 meldte prosjektleder inn en endring av prosjektet. Endringen gjelder en utvidelse av prosjektperioden.

Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen/hele prosjektet vil være i samsvar med den gjeldende personvernlovgivningen, så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet 20.12.2019 med vedlegg, samt i meldingsdialogen mellom innmelder og NSD. Behandlingen kan fortsette.

MELD VESENTLIGE ENDRINGER

Dersom det skjer vesentlige endringer i behandlingen av personopplysninger, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til NSD ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. Før du melder inn en endring, oppfordrer vi deg til å lese om hvilke type endringer det er nødvendig å melde: nsd.no/personvernombud/meld_prosjekt/meld_endringer.html

Du må vente på svar fra NSD før endringen gjennomføres.

TYPE OPPLYSNINGER OG VARIGHET

Prosjektet vil behandle særlige kategorier av personopplysninger om politisk oppfatning, fagforeningsmedlemskap, helseforhold og seksuelle forhold eller orientering, samt alminnelige kategorier av personopplysninger frem til 31.05.2020.

LOVLIG GRUNNLAG

Det ble innhentet samtykke til behandlingen av personopplysninger under gammelt lovverk. Utvalget informeres om utsettelsen, og minnes på at det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet og at de når som helst kan trekke seg fra behandlingen. Det blir videre gitt supplerende informasjon om deltakernes rettigheter.

Vår vurdering er dermed at prosjektet er basert på samtykke i samsvar med kravene i art. 4 nr. 11 og art. 7, ved at det er en frivillig, spesifikk, informert og utvetydig bekreftelse, som kan dokumenteres, og som den registrerte kan trekke tilbake.

Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen vil dermed være den registrertes uttrykkelige samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a, jf. art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav a, jf. personopplysningsloven § 10, jf. § 9 (2).

PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER

NSD vurderer at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningen om:

- lovlighet, rettferdighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a), ved at de registrerte får tilfredsstillende informasjon om og samtykker til behandlingen
- formålsbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelig angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke viderebehandles til nye uforenlige formål
- dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet
- lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lengre enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet

DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER

Så lenge de registrerte kan identifiseres i datamaterialet vil de ha følgende rettigheter: åpenhet (art. 12), informasjon (art. 13), innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18), underretning (art. 19), dataportabilitet (art. 20).

NSD vurderer at informasjonen som ble gitt ved oppstart av prosjektet sammen med den supplerende informasjonen de registrerte vil motta oppfyller lovens krav til form og innhold, jf. art. 12.1 og art. 13

Vi minner om at hvis en registrert tar kontakt om sine rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned.

FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER

NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1 f) og sikkerhet (art. 32).

For å forsikre dere om at kravene oppfylles, må dere følge interne retningslinjer og eventuelt rådføre dere med behandlingsansvarlig institusjon.

OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET

NSD vil følge opp ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet.

Lykke til med prosjektet!

Kontaktperson hos NSD: Lise A. Haveraaen
Tlf. Personvertjenester: 55 58 21 17 (tast 1)