Officially Categorized Queers: 
Strategies, Risks and Unintentional Effects When 
Navigating the Swedish Asylum Apparatus

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the experiences and strategies of queer migrants seeking asylum in Sweden due to sexuality and/or gender identity. By conducting ethnographic fieldwork and biographical interviews within the RFSL Newcomers support network, the thesis analyses how queer migrants navigate the Swedish asylum apparatus. Building on recent research in queer migration studies, it explores how power relations related to class, gender and race affect queer migrants’ strategies. Applying Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network theory, the thesis furthermore analyses the queer migrants in an actor network together with RFSL Newcomers and the asylum apparatus as independent actors. This thesis additionally aims to contribute to the sociological debate on categorization and construction of identity using Ian Hacking’s concept of the looping effect. Lack of social capital, of not having the right networks, gendered possibilities of visibility and speaking about sexuality can establish obstacles for queer migrants in the credibility assessment and the success of the asylum claim. The asymmetric power relation forces queer migrants into conflicting strategies. Forced visibility and hyper hiding are strategies that are specifically produced in relation to the asylum apparatus creating gendered risk and precarious living conditions. This thesis concludes that queer migrants and the RFSL Newcomers network, in their asylum activism both challenge the asylum apparatus and Western narratives of LGBTQ identity. Nevertheless, RFSL and the queer migrants become complicit in the production of official essentialistic LGBTQ identities when navigating the asylum apparatus. By exploring the Swedish context of LGBTQ asylum and categorization of LGBTQ identity in the asylum process, this thesis contributes to the somewhat undertheorized field of queer migration in Swedish academia.

Keywords: Queer migration, asylum, LGBTQ, categorization, ANT, looping effect, intersectionality.

Popular science abstract

The thesis investigates experiences and strategies of gay, lesbian and transsexual people who apply for asylum in Sweden. Through ethnographical fieldwork at the support network RFSL Newcomers, and conducting interviews with LGBTQ asylum seekers, the thesis analyses the Newcomers’ experiences and strategies. Using an intersectional perspective, it investigates how gender, nationality, race and class affect the strategies. The findings indicate that gender and the individual’s financial situation and social network are important when trying to get asylum. For those who do not have the right networks, or do not speak English, it becomes harder to navigate the system. For LGBTQ people, the asylum investigation is challenging because of the need to prove both LGBTQ identity and fear of persecution. Speaking about sexuality and sexual abuse can be especially demanding for lesbian refugees. Analysing the relations between the LGBTQ asylum seekers, RFSL Newcomers and the asylum system, this thesis argues that these inequalities shape the strategies of the asylum seeker. LGBTQ asylum seekers are pushed into being open about their homosexuality in certain Western ways, including participation in media. Hiding and forced openness are strategies created in relation to the asylum system which puts lesbian and gay asylum seekers in dangerous situations. This thesis concludes that RFSL Newcomers and its members in their asylum activism challenges Western ideas of what it means to be an LGBTQ person. Nevertheless, they need to adapt to the system, and therefore also become part of the creating of official essentialist LGBTQ identities.
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1. Introduction

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) states that globally there are almost 60 million forcibly displaced persons (Edwards, 2015). At the end of 2014, 19.5 million of these people were referred to as refugees (UNHCR, 2014). Queer migrants and queer refugees do not always come from circumstances of war, but from persecution from family, state regimes and communities. UNHCR states that lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ) asylum seekers who are fleeing because of persecution face a complex range of threats and challenges at all stages of displacement. The challenges include violence, persecution, threats and discrimination, both in their home country and in the asylum country. Discrimination and prejudice are part of the daily difficulties that meet asylum seekers when accessing humanitarian services and articulating their right to protection (UN: Free & Equal, 2014). In Sweden, the Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Rights (RFSL) supports this group through local support networks called RFSL Newcomers. These groups are located in fifteen Swedish cities where queer migrants can meet others and gain support in their asylum claims. RFSL has completed many reports on the legal situation for queer migrants in Sweden, stating that the process has large problems with legal uncertainty and the discrepancy between legal intentions and praxis (Gröndahl, 2012). RFSL has put forward harsh critique, comparing the asylum process with a lottery (TT, 2015). Building on recent scholarship in queer migration studies, as well as ethnographical fieldwork and biographical interviews, the thesis will focus on queer migrants’ strategies in the asylum system. Biographical and ethnographical research has a feminist tradition that puts the voices and experiences of unheard people in focus (Merrill & West, 2009). Following this focus, the thesis starts with an introduction of the queer migrants in the LGBTQ support network RFSL Newcomers.

1.1. Entering the RFSL Newcomers group

In the beginning of February 2016, I partook at a RFSL Newcomers meeting for the first time at RFSL’s location in central Stockholm. In the meeting room people were sitting on sofas and chairs in a large circle. The walls were filled with articles and pictures of gay and lesbian life in Sweden and on the floor in the middle there were some plants and flowers. The room felt welcoming, people were friendly and said hello whenever a new person entered the room. I looked around and counted to approximately twenty-five present members.
One of the coordinators opened the meeting and asked everyone to help themselves to coffee, tea and fruit. The coordinator told the group that RFSL Newcomers recently received the QX Gaygala prize for their work with lesbian, gay and transsexual asylum seekers. When the coordinator told that the gala was broadcasted in Swedish television, a spontaneous applause arose. At the meeting this evening, the president of the RFSL was invited to give a lecture, but before the lecture took place, I was asked to introduce myself. I introduced myself as a master student in sociology and a volunteer. I explained my project, and said that I would come to the meetings and invited them to take part in interviews.

The president of RFSL gave a long presentation of the history of the struggle for LGBTQ rights in Sweden. During the presentation, many questions came from the audience. Many of the members had questions concerning strategies to change laws around LGBTQ-demands, and it became clear to me that many of the Newcomers were well experienced activists who had been working within the global LGBTQ movement before entering this group. Towards the end of the presentation, one of the members raised a question about marriage. She wondered if it was possible to get married in Sweden if you are transsexual. The president seemed puzzled: “Of course, both men and women can marry whomever they want” she said. “The marriage law is gender neutral here now.” When the lecture was over, a young girl came up to me and gave me her address. She wanted to be interviewed.

The time was almost eight, and the meeting had been going on for more than two and a half hours. People lingered in the cafeteria area and talked about this and that. I prepared myself to leave when a young member came up to me and asked if I worked for RFSL. I answered that I was a volunteer, and the member asked me if I could help with translating a text. It was a letter from the police. I started to read and realized that it was a police report on an aggravated rape and battery. I noticed that it had taken place in a suburb where I have been living for many years. I explained to the member that the letter stated that the investigation had been closed. The member asked me why and told me what had happened that night. The member had been dressed in drag when unknown men pushed the member into a car and conducted a rape. The member became tearful and before leaving me, said: “I still get sad when I think about it. Thank you for translating, but I don’t understand why they closed down the investigation and my report.”
My first encounter with the RFSL Newcomers group ended, and I was overwhelmed by all the different impressions and how well I had been received. The group was heterogenic and diverse when it came to the members’ origin, experiences, education, vulnerability as well as knowledge about the Swedish system. I wondered how I ever would be able to write about and do justice to their struggle, experiences and strategies within the asylum system.

1.2. Purpose and research questions
Sociology has a long history of studying and constructing categories. Scholars are often concerned with normality, and deviance to normality has long been the core of sociology (Foucault 1972; Butler 1990; Hacking 1986; 1995; 1999). Scholars, social scientists as well as social movement activists struggle to find the right classifications and categories, which can be drawn upon to predict and understand people and structures. Scientists are many times in search of mechanisms and principles in society from which they can construct interventions to refine, help and improve societies. Social movements use categorization and naming of norms as a strategy when pointing out oppression and asymmetric power relations in societies (Crenshaw, 1991). LGBTQ activists have used the strategy of naming to highlight the specific vulnerability for LGBTQ people who face persecution and become refugees. It has been hard work for LGBTQ asylum seekers and human rights activists to have gender and sexuality accepted as a ground for asylum in Europe (Jansen, 2013). Queer migrants are now sanctioned as asylum seekers. However, this comes with a cost: queer migrants have to prove being members of the LGBTQ group. Queer migration scholars have pointed out that this proving has to take place even if there are no universal transhistorical categories of gender and sexual identities (Luibhéid, 2014).

Eithne Luibhéid (2014) draws upon Judith Butler’s (1990) work on Gender Trouble when she defines the purpose of queer migration research as to trouble both sexual categories and the international asylum system. She describes this as the researcher’s intention, but points out that the real work is chiefly done by the queer migrants themselves. Queer migrants need both to conform, and oppose, the sanctioned categories and narratives produced in the Western asylum system. Similarly, earlier research done in the field argues that both immigrant and state officials, NGOs and migrants are active in the production of categories and identities, and also in the policing of them (Shakhsari, 2014; Murray, 2014a). The complexity arises when we understand that these identities and categories are both productive and violent (Lewis, 2014).
In Sweden, queer migration is an understudied phenomenon, with scarce research undertaken in fields such as sociology, migration and sexuality studies. This research gap is particularly large when it comes to queer asylum seekers and their experiences of the asylum system. This thesis will therefore draw upon previous research, primarily from Europe and North America, regarding experiences of queer and lesbian asylum seekers in order to describe and understand the experiences of a group of Newcomers in Stockholm.

Fundamentally, the thesis aims to explore how power relations related to class, gender and race affect queer migrants’ strategies. Furthermore, the thesis aims to contribute to the sociological debate on categories and construction of identity by making use of Ian Hacking’s (1995) concept the looping effect, developed to investigate unintentional effects of categorizing. When analysing the categorization and the queer migrants’ strategies, the focus will be to examine how these strategies and the categorization are formed in relation to the asylum apparatus (Murray, 2016). Inspired by Bruno Latour’s (2005) Actor network theory (ANT) the thesis will theorize the asylum apparatus as an independent actant within a network with queer migrants and RFSL. As previous research has found, these actors take an essential part in the categorization of queer subjects and the policing of it (Luibhéid, 2014). However, in this thesis, ANT will be used to examine how the asylum apparatus shapes and affects the strategies of RFSL and the queer migrants.

The research questions aim to examine how queer migrants relate to and navigate the asylum apparatus. Focusing on three actors – migrants, a civil society organization and the asylum system – the study will explore which mechanisms are organizing and pushing the categorization that are at the core of the asylum process. To do this, three research questions are posed.

Research questions:

1. How do the queer migrants at RFSL Newcomers relate to and navigate the Swedish asylum apparatus?
2. How do power relations related to class, race and gender affect queer migrants’ strategies in the asylum apparatus?
3. How may we conceptualize the effects that the asylum apparatus has on queer Newcomers, RFSL and the categorization of migrated queer subjects?
1.3. **Definitions and terminology**
Critical queer migration scholars criticize the distinctions between refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented migrants. This is because most queer migrants shift their legal status many times during their migration process. Making distinctions between queer migrants with legal status and those without can be seen as a technique to normalize and justify the exploitation and surveillance of queer migrants (Murray, 2014a). Therefore, the term queer migrants will here be used when speaking generally about the group of queer migrated subjects in Sweden. Members or Newcomers are the terms used at the RFSL Newcomers network and these names will also be used to provide variation for the reader. The terms asylum seekers and refugees will also be used when specifically writing about asylum claims.

There are different practices of including different letters when referring to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer subjects. RFSL Newcomers uses the LGBTQI which includes intersex people, the Migration agency use LGBTQ and in this thesis the use will be according to the Migration agency’s use, since this thesis focuses on categories in the asylum system. When referring to gender, the use of pronoun that the person uses for themselves will be used. This text also includes the non-gender binary pronoun *they* (LGBT resource centre, 2016). The term *cis gender* is used when only indicating persons whose gender identification agrees with the sex they were assigned to at birth (Oxford dictionaries, 2016). During the work with the thesis, I have struggled with terminology regarding “home country” and “country of origin”. Due to the lack of a more fluid terminology, these terms are used, knowing that national belonging is a social construction and that home and belonging can, and should be interpreted in much broader terms.

1.4. **Outline of the study**
To add context to the thesis and to the informants’ histories, the thesis starts with providing an extended background where the asylum system and legislation will be presented. Previous research will subsequently be presented to situate this study in a broader field. The theoretical framework is divided into three parts: first construction of identity, secondly ANT and the asylum apparatus as an actant and lastly, intersectionality. The method chapter will expand on the methodological decisions and considerations before entering into the part of the results and analysis. The thesis ends with a discussion and a recommendation for future research.
2. Background: The asylum process

This chapter starts with an overview of the international refugee system, the emergence of LGBTQ asylum and the Swedish asylum process. After reviewing the practical process of seeking asylum, this chapter ends with an investigation into the decision-making and the credibility assessment that takes place at the Swedish Migration agency.

2.1. Emergence of LGBTQ asylum

The Geneva Convention (1951) is the most important document that regulates the right to asylum for refugees. A refugee is, according to article 1 in the Geneva 1951 Refugee Convention, a person who:

…owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country (Geneva Convention article 1, 1951:14).

This definition has since then been the definition of what constitutes a refugee. There is still no universal definition of what “persecution” is. However, the UNHCR has, based on the article 33 of the 1951 Convention, stated that: threat to life or freedom on account of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group should be included in the notion of persecution (Bexelius, 2001). When the Geneva Convention was designed, it was designed according to a male norm (Bexelius, 2001). According to the Geneva Convention, the migrants need to be outside their home country to seek asylum. The requisite to be outside of one’s country is one of many stipulations that have had gendered consequences for migrants and asylum seekers. Due to the many times restricted mobility for women, fewer female migrants can access their rights as refugees (Andersson, 2007). During the last thirty years, there has been a rising international awareness of these gendered consequences. In 1985, the convention countries were recommended to expand the notion of “social group” to also specifically include women, a change that was implemented by Sweden first in 1996 (Bexelius, 2001).

The first recognition of sexual orientations as a ground for persecution is found in the Dutch Council of state in 1981 (Jansen, 2013). Since then, other European countries have followed and have included both gender and sexual orientation as a ground for asylum. Jansen (2013)
has noted that the advance of LGBTQ asylum culminated in 2004 when the EU Qualification Directive, under article 10, included LGBT asylum seekers with the text: “a particular social group might include a group based on a common characteristic of sexual orientation“ (Council Directive, 2004/83/EC). In the year of 1995, homosexuals were considered as a group in need of protection in Sweden. However, at that time, queer migrants were discussed under the category others in need of protection and not as refugees (Andersson, 2007). On the 31st of March 2006, the new legislation that includes gender and sexual orientation as a specific ground for refugee status came into effect (Socialförsäkringsutskottet, 2005).

2.2. The Swedish asylum process
Asylum seekers must request asylum at the border. If a person already stays or lives in Sweden (students, migrant workers, visitors etc.), asylum can be requested at Migration agencies in the bigger cities. Information on how to state LGBTQ reasons in a LGBTQ asylum claim is available to queer asylum seekers at the LGBTQ support group’s website (RFSL: FAQ, 2016). The Migration agency decides if the person is eligible for asylum in Sweden or not (Migration agency, 2016). If the Swedish Migration agency decides to take on the asylum claim, a public counsel that will represent the migrant during the asylum process is provided as a legal aid to the asylum seeker (Migration agency, 2016).

2.2.1. The Dublin Convention
The Dublin convention defines the “first country principle” which means that all refugees have to seek asylum in the first country they enter in EU or Schengen. When entering the Schengen area, all asylum seekers and migrants without visa, older than fourteen years, must register fingerprints in the European database Eurodac. In a Dublin case, if the refugee has been registered in another country in EU on their way to Sweden, they will be sent back to that country for their asylum application process. The Swedish Migration agency sends an enquiry to the Migration agency in the country in question, and if the country will not accept this asylum case then the application can, after all, is made in Sweden (Migration agency, 2016). If the asylum seeker does not launch an application in the first country of entry, a new application can be made in the second country of entrance after 18 months. This convention presumes a common European standard concerning LGBTQ asylum cases, which does not exist (Spijkerboer, 2013).
2.2.2. Accommodation and livelihood
For those who cannot organize their own living situation, the Migration agency offers accommodation during the asylum process. In 2015 and 2016 there has been a shortage of accommodation and therefore the Migration agencies have transferred refugees to NGOs and charities for housing. The accommodation system leaves no possibility to choose where to stay, and the asylum seeker must be prepared to move to a city or small town where there is possible accommodation. The refugee may need to move several times during the asylum process. The Migration agency has rejected the idea of opening a specific accommodation for LGBTQ asylum seekers, even though there have been many reports on homo-and transfobic assaults and sexual abuse at the Migration agencies’ accommodations (Frimodig, 2016).

During the asylum process, a small amount of money is granted to the asylum seeker. The daily allowance for an asylum seeker outside an accommodation where food is not included is 71 Swedish kronor (approximately 7.5 euro). The daily allowance should, apart from food, cover transportation, clothes, medical care, medicine, dental care, toiletries, and activities (Migration agency, 2016). When applying for asylum, the applicants leave their identification papers or passport at the Migration agency. The asylum seeker is then given a so-called LMA card stating the migrant’s right to reside and work in Sweden. Asylum seekers can apply for work during the wait for an answer to their asylum application. There are, at this moment, no Swedish courses made available for asylum seekers and adult asylum seekers only have the right to emergency health care.

2.2.3. Appeal, new circumstances and deportation
In case of rejection of the asylum claim, the public counsel will represent the asylum seeker and appeal at the Migration Court and the Migration Court of Appeal. It is very difficult to get a granted leave to make an appeal at the Migration Court of Appeal and there is only one LGBTQ case in Sweden that has been granted a leave to appeal (RFSL: The asylum process, 2016). If the asylum application has been rejected in all instances, the procedure is considered completed. Asylum seekers can be taken into detention centres if the Migration agency believes that there is a risk that the person would stay away from deportation (Migration agency, 2016). The practice of detaining asylum seekers in centres has increased in recent years (Jansson, 2015).
There are exceptions in the law that can hinder a deportation. When a deportation is ordered to be executed, the asylum seeker can apply for enforcement hindrances. This possibility can be used if the asylum seeker has a life threatening condition or, if the asylum seeker is forced to live apart from immediate family for a long time, or if the country where to deport does not accept the return of the asylum seeker (Migration agency, 2016). Such hindrances to enforcement can lead to temporary or permanent residency. The exception furthermore gives the opportunity for the applicant to request a new trial in case there are new circumstances or evidence in the case. The right to a new trial is only practiced when the new circumstances affect the need for protection (FARR, 2016). When the asylum seeker writes an application for hindrances of enforcement, the Migration agency first examines if the expulsion should be stopped directly or not. Secondly, they investigate if the new circumstances should be investigated. If there exists new circumstances, the asylum investigation starts again from the beginning.

2.3. Decision-making and asylum investigation at the Migration agency
The most important part of the asylum process takes place in the individual asylum investigation where a personal assessment is carried out. To be able to seek asylum in Sweden, the queer migrant needs to demonstrate that he/she/they belongs to the social group LGBTQ and is a victim of persecution, or that he/she/they may be at risk of persecution in case of return to the country of nationality (Migration agency, 2016). The praxis is that the home countries are responsible for providing protection for their own citizens. Therefore, the knowledge the Migration agency has regarding the LGBTQ situation of the country in question is crucial to these cases. During the interviews, the applicants need to explain and prove why their government cannot protect them.

2.3.1. Fear of persecution in relation to LGBTQ identity
In the case of LGBTQ refugees, a well-founded fear of persecution is related to sexual orientation, gender or gender identity. When queer migrants apply for asylum, the Migration agency performs an individual assessment of the right to asylum, where both the applicant’s identity and fear of persecution are investigated (Migration agency, 2016). In the investigation, the applicants are asked to be as specific as they can about their identity, sexual orientation and how this is connected to the fear of persecution. The assessment is forward looking and should take in consideration the risk for persecution in case of the person’s return to the country of citizenship (Migration agency RCI 03/2011). Therefore, questions about openness and if the applicant has lived openly as a homosexual are asked. Furthermore, the
investigation examines how others would react to this openness in case of a return, and if their reactions would reach up to the requirements of persecution (Migration agency RCI 03/2011). The Migration agency defines both discrimination and harassment from the state authorities or from family or private groups in the queer migrant’s home country as persecution. The risk of being denied the right to education or health care are also offences that could be considered as persecution owing to the person being an LGBTQ person (Migration agency, 2011). The principal of free evidence assessment stresses that the queer migrant is responsible for coming up with all the proof and evidence available to strengthen the verbal testimony.

2.3.2. Credibility assessment in relation to LGBTQ identity
The credibility assessment in the asylum claims is crucial for the outcome. In a report on LGBTQ refugees from Uganda that examines verdicts from the Migration court it is noted that the Migration courts base their rejections on credibility assessments (Peterson, 2013). LGBTQ refugees are according to the report often denied asylum, because they are not considered trustworthy by the Migration agency. In the case of Uganda, the Migration courts recognized the precarious situation of LGBTQ persons. However, this circumstance has sometimes been used against the asylum seekers in the credibility assessments. In these cases the Court has questioned whether the person could have lived openly as homosexual in Uganda, since it is criminalized (Petersson, 2013). The reporter who analysed the court’s statements, found no major differences between rejected and accepted cases. This suggests that there is arbitrariness in the asylum process (Petersson, 2013).

In the special report “Norm critical examination of the asylum procedure” (Wolf-Wats, Törner & Borg, 2010) that the Migration agency ordered from an independent consultancy agency, the arbitrariness of the system is confirmed. The researchers Wolf-Wats et al. (2010) argue that the asylum procedure and investigation includes vague definitions and contradictory guidelines. Their study found that the outcome for the individual asylum seeker depends on which immigration official is handling the case. The study states that, although sexual identity should not be questioned during the investigation, this is still practiced. Furthermore, they found that the mistrust directed toward sexual identity is often based on stereotypical and heteronormative ideas about sexual identity and expression.
3. Situating the study: Previous research on Queer migration

This chapter summarizes the research conducted, and the research gap in Sweden, which frames this thesis’ emergence. Secondly, some international and European research on LGBTQ migration is presented, on which the results will be drawn upon in later analysis.

3.1. Swedish LGBTQ migration studies

In Sweden, the field of queer migration is not well represented in research. Most knowledge production has taken place in students’ theses and within civil organisations such as RFSL. However, among students, queer migration is a more studied theme, which is why I will include some of these important findings (Andersson, 2007; Gröndahl, 2012).

Hanna Wikström has together with Rebecca Thorburn Stern (2015) written an extensive report on credibility assessment in asylum cases at the Swedish Migration agency related to faith and sexuality. In their research, they state that ideas of what is seen as genuine or "authentic" in the applicant’s sexual orientation become central for the assessment. The credibility assessment is central to the investigation. The immigration officials base their decisions on their understanding of the asylum seekers’ stories. The officials are also producers of their own story, based on what they perceive as genuine and trustworthy in the applicant’s story. Both applicants and officials thereby become co-producers of the asylum claim. The decision makers are accordingly producing one story out of the story that the asylum seeker has presented in the investigation. Wikström and Thorburn Stern (2015) have found that the way the story is presented in terms of details, and if it is perceived as coherent and seems logical, becomes decisive for the decision. This indicates that the narration of the asylum case becomes decisive rather than the content of the story (Wikström & Thorburn Stern, 2015).

3.1.1. Lesbian migration in Sweden

Dina Avrahami’s (2007) research during 2000-2004 was conducted at a time when there was no research on lesbian migration in Sweden. Her work must be understood as pioneering. In her qualitative and narrative research in the field of lesbian– and IMER–studies (International Migration and Ethnical Relationships) she finds a complex interaction between gender, sexuality and migration, where the informants’ experiences of marginalisation were understood as similar, regardless of original nationality (Avrahami, 2007). Avrahami has a constructivist view of sexuality and means that this marginalisation is the context in which
lesbian women form their consciousness and understand what being a lesbian means. The coming out process is described as essential for her informants, and it is through this process that lesbian women, as Avrahami puts it, “learns to be a lesbian” (Avrahami, 2007 my translation). Through conscious actions they change their subject position and stop being marginalised subjects and become instead proud actors. Avrahami (2007) postulates migration as a possibility for becoming a lesbian, where socioeconomic change may enable new ways of living or thinking. Reneé Andersson (2007) also writes about lesbian refugees in her master thesis in political science, and her work examines how norms on sexual politics are constructed in political policies and legislation. Andersson finds, as Avrahami suggests, that lesbian identity is more invisible than gay identity in official policies on migration. By examining pre legislative work and policies, she demonstrates a high degree of invisibility of lesbian identity in government publications. Andersson (2007) also notes that a separation exists between public and private persecution in the Swedish migration policies, which have gendered effects when presenting evidence. The separation produces gender difficulties for lesbian migrants. The refugee claim is determined after what is referred to as an ”objective criteria” and women must prove a well-founded fear of persecution with objective evidence such as news articles, an arrest warrant etc. Andersson’s findings suggest that lesbian refugees meet more difficult obstacles to obtain asylum status than male gay asylum seekers.

3.1.2. Arbitrariness and openness in the Swedish asylum process
The legal council considers that the level of openness in the home country determines the risk of persecution in case of expulsion (Andersson, 2007). Not having “come out” as a lesbian is interpreted as not being at risk for persecution, a statement that could be understood as a direct requirement for openness (Andersson, 2007). Aino Gröndahl (2012) has confirmed the important role of openness when examining verdicts by the Migration court. Her work in the department of law, demonstrates that when LGBTQ asylum seekers have not been open with their sexuality in their home country, in order to avoid violence and abuse, they are seen as at less risk of being persecuted. Not being able to live openly as gay or lesbian paradoxically leads to a higher possibility of rejection of the asylum claim (Gröndahl, 2012). Gröndahl (2012) furthermore describes how conflicting statements in the preparatory legislative work leads to the untenable argument that less visibility leads to less violence. Additionally, Gröndahl assesses that inconsistent assessments and the numerous occasions when immigration officials have given conflicting decisions, have led to contradictory and arbitrary information. In certain cases, being open is not decisive for the decision, whilst in other cases
openness of homosexuality was crucial to the decision. The role of criminalization is likewise a reason for discrepancy and inconsistency within the practice of the immigration agencies. In some cases, criminalization of homosexuality in the home country has been grounds for asylum while in other cases; the applicant is asked to seek protection from the authorities in the same country despite their criminalization of the asylum seekers.

Recently, researchers have shown an increased interest in the assessment of asylum applications at the Migration agency (Stern & Wikström, 2016 forthcoming). So far however, there has been little discussion about the experiences of the queer migrants and how they navigate the asylum system. The lack of ethnographical research on queer migration in Sweden has been part of the decision of this thesis’ research design.

3.2. Queer migration studies
Queer migration studies is a field where studies of sexuality, migration, gender, sociology and critical race theory intersect. It is an interdisciplinary field and its objects of study vary between state policies, undocumented queers, asylum seekers, organisations and organising around queer migration, partner immigration and many more. The field is highly dominated by North American researchers with a focus on gay and male queer refugees.

In Europe the research field of LGBTQ migration is growing. Spijkerboer (2013) discusses the emergence of the LGBTQ asylum in Europe, and has demonstrated that there are still large gaps in research on female lesbian refugees and trans refugees. Many scholars have demonstrated that the credibility assessment system creates enormous barriers for queer migrants when seeking protection through asylum based on sexual orientation or gender (Spijkerboer, 2013; Lewis, 2014; Murray, 2014a; Luibhéid, 2008). Rachel Lewis and Nancy Napels, editors of the special issue of the journal Sexualities with a focus on Queer Migration, Asylum and Displacement (2014), argue that there is a need for research that connects asylum, queer migration and factors that lead to precarity.

3.2.1. Homonormativity, homonationalism and migration to liberation narrative
Murray (2014a; 2016) describes the idea of the false LGBTQ applicant as an active and essential mechanism of the nation state. Being produced, as a fake or deserving migrant is part of the nation states gatekeeping process (Murray, 2014a). Murray (2016) has in his extensive research among LGBTQ refugees and support networks in Canada, noted that the discussions concerning authentic claims serve two purposes: both to ensure LGBTQ refugees
their right to stay and also to ensure exclusion of those not entitled to stay. The concept of homonormativity described by Lisa Duggan (2004) is essential to queer migration studies and describes LGBTQ activism that does not contest essentialist and hetero-normative narratives and assumptions, but rather de-politicizes the gay community and upholds liberal consumerism. Melissa Autumn White (2014) demonstrates one example of homonormativity in her research of North American support networks for queer migrants. She displays how normative assumptions of homosexuality became ruling in campaigns supporting queer migrants. The homonormativity is linked to Western white middle class consumerist ideas of gay authentic lives. White links her concept to Jasbir Puars (2007) concept homonationalism. Puar (2007) has used the concept of homonationalism to describe mechanisms within the nation state to separate deserving and undeserving migrants. National campaigns for LGBTQ migration and discourse around queer migrants many times function as a mechanism to include a few migrants then exclude many (Puar, 2007). Puar (2007) and White (2014) demonstrate that campaigns and support for LGBTQ asylum not necessarily contest general migration policies.

The concept of Migration to Liberation Narrative is another important concept developed by David Murray (2014a). Murray noticed that migrants are forced to understand themselves as victims of oppression who need to be liberated by the west. The Migration to Liberation Narrative pushes a narrative where the West is depicted as liberation for queer people and “the rest” is portrayed as perpetrators. This narrative, depicting oppressed queer migrants coming to the West and meeting freedom is a narrative that has become hegemonic in Canadian media. Murray (2014a) describes how the migration to liberation narrative has become common in politics around asylum in general and especially in LGBTQ asylum. The narrative both produces some LGBTQ identities as invisible and others, who conform to the narrative, as a visible. The narrative has also become an important political part of Canadian self-image as a democratic and morally strong country (Murray, 2016).

3.2.2. Western narratives of openness and both gendered and classed visibility
Sima Shakhsari (2014) is in her work demonstrating the paradox of human rights in queer migration. The queer migrants in her fieldwork are simultaneously being deprived of their human rights while staying under the UNHCR apparatus of human rights (Shakhsari, 2014). In her fieldwork with Iranian refugees in Turkey, she documents how queer asylum is marked with precarious living condition and are denied basic human rights such as: the right to work,
and the right to health care and mobility during their wait for asylum assessment at the UNHCR. The notion of queer asylum as a “golden case way” to asylum has produced suspiciousness around the asylum seekers as “authentic” gay, lesbian or trans. Shakhsari (2014) demonstrates how racialized, gendered and economic assumptions on identity become informal guidelines on who to trust and support among the asylum seekers. These normative assumptions lead to less access to support for those who do not fit the normative narratives of gender and sexuality. Shakhsari also notes that not only the police, and UNHCR but also the asylum seekers themselves take place in the policing of “authentic” identity. An example she gives, is a working class gay man who was excluded from support because of the suspicion of him being “a fake case”. This suspicion has its roots in him not conforming to a middle class gay narrative.

The research on the hegemonic Western racialized and gendered narratives of LGBTQ refugees has been broadly discussed within the field of queer migration studies. Queer migration scholars have found that decision makers, and immigration officials, rely on normative ideas of openness during the credibility assessment process (Murray, 2016; Lewis 2014; Shakhsari, 2014). The officials are determining whether the asylum seeker has an LGBTQ identity or not, and this becomes part of the decision regarding the claim (Murray, 2014a; Jordan & Morrissey, 2013). Due to the need to proof of LGBT identity, many queer migrants are forced to a visibility marked by Western conditions. This forced visibility is closely connected to revers covering, a concept highlighted by Sarilee Kahn (2014), which describe how migrants are forced to be open about personal details they previously have been forced to keep as secrets. Khan (2014) demonstrates how this reverse covering becomes necessary in order to do successful asylum claims.

Amy Shuman and Carol Bohmer (2014) also theorize visibility but in the terms of hypervisibility, invisibility and the unheard in the field of queer migration. They use the term cultural silence to describe what can and what cannot be seen or heard in the investigation. The silence is connected to the power relation between the immigrant official conducting the interview and the migrant who is interrogated. Shuman and Bohmer (2014) exemplify their argumentation with situations where the immigrant official has certain expectations on an LGBTQ narrative, which makes other narratives unheard. Cultural silence is also used to analyse how experiences of sexual violence are hard for lesbian migrants to talk about with unknown represents from the authorities. Shuman and Bohmer (2014) moreover argue that
people’s lives are depending on the understanding and managing of this cultural silence. Investigations made by immigration officials can trigger, disclose or clear away cultural silence, with the consequence of life or death for the asylum seeker.

Lewis (2010; 2013; 2014) has correspondingly investigated lesbian visibility in queer asylum in her extensive examination on lesbian refugee asylum seekers in the United Kingdom. She keeps reminding us that lesbian refugee asylum seekers are less studied and less advocated for in LGBTQ organisations, even though lesbian asylum seekers have been in the UK asylum system since the 1990s. Male gay and bisexual asylum seekers have both in North American and Europe outnumbered female LGBTQ refugees. There are no available statistics over lesbian asylum seekers in Europe, but Shannon Minter (2000) has found that only one out of eight LGBTQ refugees in USA were female. Lesbian refugees are furthermore disproportionately less likely to be granted refugee status, compared to gay men (Lewis, 2010). The need to both be read as genuine queer and trustworthy in their fear of persecution and lack of protection, in combination with a constraint on consistent and coherent statements, cause inherent difficulties for lesbian and female bisexual asylum seekers (Jordan & Morrissey, 2013; Bennett &Thomas, 2013).

By interrogating the UK system of credibility assessment in the asylum process, Lewis (2013; 2014) demonstrates how lesbians of colour are being produced as deportable subjects. Lesbian migrants are in the UK at higher risk of being deported and live with a constant fear of expulsion. She discusses the fact that women and lesbians meet higher barriers to gain asylum, partly due to poverty and also to less access of social capital. Lewis demonstrates how racialized lesbians in detention centres become deprived of resources needed to make a trustworthy claim. She discusses how queer migrants involved in anti deportation activism challenge the state violence of deportation.

Indeed queer migrants resistance movement such as these demonstrate how the institution of asylum, an institution initially created to safeguard human rights, has become a tool for further entrenching the coercive, racist powers of the neoliberal state (Lewis, 2014: 971).

Lewis (2014) has furthermore noticed, that to gain trustworthiness in the UK asylum system, male queer asylum seekers have felt the need to go so far in proving their sexuality as to record pornographic videos of them having sex with a same sex partner. This practice has
specific negative and gendered consequences for lesbian asylum seekers. The situation for lesbian asylum seekers is already what Bennett and Thomas (2013) calls "hypersexualized". Lesbian asylum seekers are witnessing a high degree of sexualized and humiliating questions in the process of credibility assessment. Under the pretext of establishing proof of lesbians “true identity” the opportunity opens up for immigration officials to interrogate women on sexual details such as questions about sex positions, favourite toys and/or what kind of noise they make when having sex in the shower (Lewis, 2014; Bennett & Thomas, 2013).

3.3 Implications for this study
As demonstrated in this chapter, there are relatively few studies in the area of queer migration in Sweden. This thesis aims to use findings from international research and investigate the relevance in the Swedish context. Shuman and Bohmer’s (2014) concepts of hyper visibility and invisibility will be developed in this thesis’ analysis. Theorizing cultural silence in relation to the Swedish asylum apparatus will be used to highlight specific gendered, classed and racialized challenges in the asylum investigation. The notion of reverse covering (Kahn, 2014) will also take an essential part in the intersectional analysis regarding queer migrants experiences of the Swedish asylum process. Much of the current literature on queer migration pays particular attention to the credibility assessment in the asylum process. Therefore this examination will concentrate on the strategies of the queer migrants and the categorization that takes place in the asylum process.

The reasons for queer migrants to leave their country vary. UNHCR guidelines for queer asylum state that queer migrants does not always relate to LGBTQ identity (UNHCR Guidelines, 2012). As Lewis (2014) and Murray (2016) demonstrates, for queer migrants to be understood as deserving migrants, they must conform to a Western openness and coming out narrative, LGBTQ identity and a migration to liberation narrative. Similarly, White (2014) has found that homonationalism and homonormativity is part of forced strategies that both civil society and queer migrants conform to. This thesis aims to use the concepts discussed above to study how queer migrants and the civil society (represented by RFSL) in the Swedish context relate to these themes when navigating the asylum apparatus. In addition, this study will use the findings from earlier studies to focus on the categorization that takes part in this process.
4. Theoretical framework

The aspiration for this thesis is to study strategies and navigation in relation to the asylum system of queer asylum seekers. To contribute to the discussion on categorization and to expand the field of queer migration in Sweden, one of the aims for the thesis is to study strategies in relation to categorization. Therefore the sociological debate on categorization will be discussed. By using Hacking’s (1995) ideas of the looping effect on naming and categorizing, this thesis further aims to contribute to the debate on essentialism and categorization. Secondly, the model of intersectionality will be briefly outlined since it serves as an important analytical approach and operational methodology in this thesis. Inspired by the work of Latour (1999) the asylum apparatus will be discussed and theorized in the light of Actor-network theory.

4.1. Categorization and the troubling power of naming

The concept of social constructivism has been liberating for many social movements. When saying that the world is constructed, it also implies that it can be reconstructed and changed (Berger & Luckman, 1967). This is true for feminists, queer activists and scholars using the construction of gender and heterosexuality to unveil so-called biological differences of men and women (West & Zimmerman, 1987). The Western gay movement has, like the women’s liberation and civil rights movement, used the power of self-naming and self-ascription (Tong, 2014). Conceptualizing and naming is well practised among feminist scholars. Cynthia Enloe (2014) calls it “the power of naming”; before you give it a name it does not exist. She uses the example of systematic wartime rape, a term that feminists have pushed through to get on the table of peace negotiation. Naming has been a strategy amongst feminists when talking about incest and violence against women. Important categories of violence experienced by women have, after the conceptualizing, become political (Enloe, 2014). In Western gay-liberation and feminist movements, the concept of “coming out” and the naming of homosexuality have been crucial strategies (Avrahami, 2007). Queer, postmodern and intersectional feminists and scholars have later on challenged these strategies for being Western and essentialist strategies, which limit and police possible identities and actions for queer subjects (Butler, 1990; Luibhéid, 2008; Murray, 2016). In the following section, I will discuss categorization and its relation to reflexivity and interaction using Hacking’s elaboration of the Looping effect.
4.1.1. The looping effect in categorization.
In the article The Looping Effects of Human Kinds (1995), Hacking develops ideas concerning the social construction of humans in relation to reflexivity. He addresses the way we classify people and how it is part of the construction of what people are. Hacking (1986) names this process “making up people”. The term human *kind* is used to refer to the kinds of humans that are studied in social sciences. He uses the example of homosexuality stating that same sex relations have been known in all societies, but the idea of the homosexual person is a construction from the late nineteen-century, when homosexual subjects became interesting for science (Hacking, 1995). Research on human kinds are often made with good intentions: the expert wants to examine teenage pregnancy and child abuse to prevent it, but what interests Hacking is the unexpected and unintentional effects that comes out of these classifications: the looping effect. The looping effect happens when a classification or a new named identity becomes the ground for self-understanding and self-identity. The people of the category interact with the knowledge produced about the category. When using the knowledge they develop the category, which changes. New knowledge is needed to describe the category again and the looping has come into effect. Hacking has a hermeneutic interpretive approach rather than a causal understanding of humans, and says that the difference between human and natural kinds is that the human kinds are only understandable in their social context. In his distinction, human kinds are laden with value, in contrast to natural kinds (Hacking, 1995). The looping effect happens when naming and classifying leads to a new self-understanding:

To create new ways of classifying people is also to change how we can think of ourselves, to change our sense of self-worth, even how we remember our past. This in turn generates a looping effect, because people of this kind change, and so there is new causal knowledge to be gained and perhaps, old causal knowledge to be jettisoned (Hacking 1995: 369).

This looping effect happens whenever a new classification is introduced and keeps on looping as long as the kind exists. Hacking uses the example of women refugees as a construction. Female refugees are real in the sense that women who have to flee exist, but the point of talking about woman refugees, as a socially constructed category, is not to say that they, the individuals, are constructed and do not exist, but rather that it is the social construction of the category women refugee that is important. It is not only the female refugee who changes; more important is that the interventions and ideas around the category change as well. Ideas of what kind of accommodation is best for “women refugees” appear.
The law defining who can seek asylum as a woman refugee might also change. The woman refugee becomes both a kind of person and a legal entity (Hacking, 1999). Women refugees learn how to be a woman refugee because they are interactive kinds. Interactions happen between the kind and the people who may fit into the category, but interaction also happens between activists, lawyers, social workers and many more who are part of the process. As said before, what is known about these kinds, change with the looping effect. Women refugees and LGBTQ refugees interact with the knowledge available, and change their self-understanding accordingly. The classification of a woman refugee, or in this case LGBTQ, can therefore become false over time, since the kinds have changed (Hacking, 1999).

By using Hackings’ model of understanding categorization in relation to refugees this thesis will focus on the interaction between queer migrants, RFSL and the demand for official categories in the asylum process. RFSL furthermore takes part in the producing of knowledge around LGBTQ asylum. The queer migrants access to and interaction with this knowledge will stand in focus of the analysis. While the migration process is strongly connected to gendered, racialized and classed resources the thesis will subsequently examine how the access to knowledge and resources mark the strategies and challenges for queer migrants in the Swedish asylum system. The intersectional approach will be outlined in the next part of this chapter.

4.2. Intersections of race, gender, class and sexuality
Both the Western gay liberation and feminist movements have gained critique because of the narrow white and Western categories that have been produced during the struggles of the social movements. The refusal of universal categories is a key understanding in intersectionality: a concept where race, gender, class, nationality, sexuality are seen as intersected and interplayed. With an intersectional approach one does not view analytical categories, such as woman, black or lesbian one at a time, but view them as always intertwined and interplayed. The concept of intersectionality is used to examine specific places of oppression where race, gender and class intersect. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) was one of the first to use the concept and wrote about black women’s experiences. Her intervention was to include the social dimensions of race, colonialism, gender and class in the understanding of black women’s social positions. Intersectionality is, by Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Crenshaw and Leslie McCall (2013) described, both as a theoretical approach and operational method for social science (Cho et al., 2013). Thoughts of sameness and differences function
as an “analytic of sensibility” when social positions are studied. Intersectionality as a concept does not work by including all possible social categories in the analysis; it is more a way of understanding research on categories as complex and intertwined. The categories are according to Cho et al not always distinct from each other, but they permeate each other in a process. Social categories are, as Cho et al puts it, “fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by dynamics of power” (Cho et al., 2013:795). According to Nira Yuval-Davis (2006) social categories should be understood as intersected and interplayed rather than additional, this since one person cannot suffer from three oppressions at the same time. The oppression is occupied and constructed together as one oppression, not three different. Still, each social division or identity cannot be reduced to another social division but has its own ontological base (Yuval- Davis, 2006).

4.2.1. Critical realism and intersectionality
Critical realist scholars have criticized the focus on discourse and deconstruction of categorization. Their critique assess that postmodern feminists have over-focused the importance of language and the uncertainty of categories (Archer, 2000). This focus has, according to critical realist feminists, disembodied the human, taken away her agency and left her only as textualism (Clegg, 2006; Archer 2000). Shari Stone-Mediatore (2002) argues that postmodern scholars in their urge to react to essentialism have dismissed important processes of identification. Identification that is useful for people in gay and social movements.

Linda Martín Alcoff (2006) is another scholar who uses the deep ontology of critical realism to defend identity as a useful concept. The critical realist approach disagrees with postmodern thinkers such as Butler (1990), who argue that categories such as woman and lesbian only have meaning in a system of language. Instead, scholars who use critical realism, try to solve the conflict between “reality and construction” by arguing that categories such as woman and lesbian, are shaped and policed by discourse, but that they also exist “in the reality” outside discourse. By making use of the discussions of the deep ontology in Critical Realism, they view identity as both socially constructed and substantially true. This approach rejects the neo-conservative consumerist attitude to identity and the stipulation that the individual creates her own happiness. It also rejects the postmodern position that the individual successfully can remodel historically shaped identities such as gender, class and race through individual refusal or performativity (Alcoff et al., 2006).
In a critical realist view, people are seen as agents with great ability to act in their surroundings. Critical realist perspectives do not see people as predetermined by nature. The realist ontology allows humans to be something they still are not, which gives them an emancipatory potential (Sayer, 2000). In the thesis the queer migrants’ agency will be analysed in relation to intersectionality and in relation to the agency possessed by the actant described in the next section; the asylum apparatus.

4.3. The asylum apparatus
In this thesis, three actors are studied; the queer migrants, RFSL and the asylum apparatus. The term apparatus and the theorizing of the asylum system will here be discussed. Luibhéid describes the Western asylum system as “a major apparatus of power” where queer migrants both navigate and challenge the system (Luibhéid, 2014). When theorizing not only asylum processes but also migration in relation to the European Union, Gregory Feldman (2012) uses the term: the migration apparatus. Feldman describes that the way migrants are looked upon change in the process of policy making. From being individuals, they become produced as what Feldman calls “static policy objects” (Feldman, 2012). The practice of border-control, the use of biometric security measures and the practice of circular migration are all part of the material infrastructure of the migration apparatus. When Feldman interrogates the migration apparatus, he demonstrates the discrepancy between the techniques used to separate the “desirable” migrants from the “undesirable” migrants, and the human rights discourse within the European Union (Feldman, 2012).

Murray (2016) has developed Feldman’s term when constructing the term refugee apparatus. With the term refugee apparatus he theorises queer migration in Canada (Murray, 2016). He understands the refugee apparatus in contrast to Feldman (2012) as a nationalistic device of controlling both the population and economic management and he demonstrates how the LGBTQ categorization has become part of this controlling device (Murray, 2016). The refugee apparatus is a network that holds together the control of the population with economic growth. It is part of a larger migration apparatus that focuses on naming, controlling and removing specific groups of migrants. Both these apparatuses are stable in their focus, but changeable and adaptable to new laws or migration patterns. They are not only part of controlling the flow of migration but also the perceptions and thoughts of immigrants in a society. Murray (2016) writes of this double activity:
Despite the image of bureaucratic stability and rhetoric of policy development through governance, migration and refugee apparatuses act and react to changes in international law and transnational migration patterns and laws developed in relation to these changing patterns. However, these apparatuses and their attendant laws and policies are equally, if not more, active and reactive to changing public moralities or perceptions of immigration and/or particular classes of immigrants, resulting in a process of constant adaptation, or what Foucault calls normalization (Murray, 2016: 9).

Murray analyses how LGBTQ refugees and immigration officials learn and negotiate the logic of the apparatus. Even though LGBTQ refugees only have existed in policies for twenty-five years in Canada, the apparatus has adapted the new categorization and Murray demonstrates through his queer feminist and anthropological study how the refugee apparatus limits and polices the entrance to migration and LGBTQ identity. Discourses of sexuality and gender have become a central part of how the refugee apparatus takes part in power domination in society.

Inspired by Murray’s use of the term refugee apparatus, this thesis will use the term asylum apparatus when analysing the Swedish asylum system. The asylum apparatus is in this thesis to be understood as part of the migration apparatus and is larger than the Swedish asylum system. When using the term asylum apparatus, the authorities working with asylum will be separated from civil organisations supporting asylum seekers. In this thesis the asylum apparatus is defined as all the authorities that take part and exercise power through official authority over the asylum seeker in the asylum process in Sweden. This includes the Migration agency, the detention centres, the police, courts and lawyers working within the asylum/deportation process. I will use this concept when analysing how queer migrants relate to, and navigate the asylum apparatus. This thesis will furthermore analyse the relationship between queer migrants, RFSL and the asylum apparatus in an actor-network, which will be described in the next section.

4.3.1. The asylum apparatus as an actant

Latour’s (1999) Actor-Network Theory (ANT) theorizes agency with a focus on power relations between different agents in a network. Agency is the individual’s own possibility to act independently within a structure. ANT sees both humans and non-human as possessors of agency. Elements or objects are seen, equally, as actors that affect the network and the actors in it. When analysing social relations, Latour (1996) asks us to use the same analytical
framework when we study an object, or a group of humans. The term actant is used instead of agent to clarify that not only humans hold agency:

An actor in ANT is a semiotic definition – an actant – that is something that acts or to which activity is granted by another...an actant can literally be anything provided it is granted to be the source of action (Latour 1996: 373).

ANT is a material semiotic method with a focus on power relations. The actors may be different in terms of power, but they all hold agency. In the interactions between the actants, the actants affect each other. Different groups or clusters of actors are all part of the producing of meaning which is both material and semiotic. To study a social order or an organization from this perspective means studying the different heterogeneous actors that take part of a network (Latour, 2005). The connections between the actants are in focus. Therefore, the solution or answer to our question is found in the connections between the actants, and not in any specific agent. Objects are part of social networks and hold agency in these networks. Non-human actants are often stable actants that other agents need to navigate around. When there are more than two actors involved in an interaction they form an actor-network. An actor-network is also an actant with agency and if we look closer, most actants are made up by many actor-networks. The actors that are part of a network, that is to be analysed, are identified through the way they interact with other actors (Latour, 2005). To be part of an actor network the actors and actants need to recognize each other as part of the same network. The interactions between the actors in the networks create stability in the network. If the actors stop their interactions, the actor–network may fall apart. Therefore an actant-network is always in some meaning unstable.

To illustrate the relation between actors in an actor network, I will use the example of weapon and humans. Neither of them holds the solution to deadly street violence. Instead of studying weapons separately and humans separately, the relation between weapons such as handguns and humans should be studied. The connection between humans and weapons and how they are used together in a network should, according to ANT, be the focus of an analysis. In this example, the weapon is not a human but an object wherefore the word actant is used rather than agent. Inspired by Latour’s actor network theory, this thesis will study the agency and the interactions between the actants and actors in an actor-network displayed in the figure on the next page.
According to ANT, these three actors are seen as possessors of agency and are accordingly part of changing each other. ANT, furthermore theorizes the uncertainty of social groups. Latour (1999) has an understanding that social groups should not be the focus of study; instead the making and unmaking of a social group should rather be the centre of sociological analysis (Latour, 2005). ANT could therefore also be understood as a theoretical approach that problematize constructions of social groups and avoids essentialism. ANT is not interested in finding the essence. ANT does not help us find “the truth”. It rather helps us to focus on the connections between actants in a network. The focus on categorization and the making of social groups is a central focus in this thesis and the ANT, with its constructivist approaches is applicable even for this effort.

The connections between the actants are important for the thesis, since the aim is to investigate how the actants relate to each other, not to question the existence of queer migrants but rather investigate how the asylum apparatus is part of organizing and categorizing queer migrants as LGBTQ subjects. ANT rejects both a positivist and a postmodern perception of truth. Truth may exist, but is contextual and changes over time. Therefore, ANT never focuses on finding the truth or the essence, but rather the mechanism between the agents in the network.

The agent navigates all social levels at the same time and Latour does not make a difference between macro, micro or global or local. This is applicable for asylum seekers who have to address and navigate all levels of the asylum apparatus when migrating from one place to another. With Latour’s (2005) understanding of agency, all three actors examined in this thesis, hold agency. Hacking (1999) talks of interactive kinds that change due to descriptions available in categorization. In ANT all actants affect each other. The actants, the asylum apparatus, RFSL and the queer migrants practice agency to change or impact the other actants.
in the network (Latour, 2005). Hence, the power relations between them are highly asymmetric. Recollecting Murray’s (2016) findings of the refugee apparatus as an agent in discourse, the power implications become evident. By using Latour’s Actor network theory I will theorize the asylum apparatus as an independent actant within a network with queer migrants and RFSL. Therefore, the thesis will use ANT to study how the asylum apparatus as an actant takes part in the categorization. Furthermore, ANT will be used to examine how the asylum apparatus as an actant shape and affect the strategies of the other agents in the network.

4.4. Theoretical implications for this study
This thesis’ focus is on queer migrants’ strategies within the asylum apparatus. It also wishes to show how the asylum apparatus as an actant and the RFSL Newcomers network take part in forming their strategies and the categorization of queer subjects. For this purpose, two important themes have been discussed; first, there are a number of agents that hold agency and are performing and policing borders, identities and categories. Theorizing the asylum apparatus as an independent actor that holds agency highlights the violent power structures that the queer migrants must navigate through. Secondly, categories can be seen as useful and productive for the gay movements, but categories can also become essentialistic and need to be problematized by the same movement. The inherent structure of the asylum apparatus is forced to rely upon the categorization, and the actors within the actor-network rely on the knowledge available. Therefore, Hacking’s notion of the production of categories and the looping effect can be useful when understanding the categorization of LGBTQ asylum seekers.

Both critical realist feminists and intersectional feminists have asserted what is problematic with sexual categories or identities, and also what is problematic when not using categories at all (Alcoff et al; 2006; Crenshaw, 1991). Hacking is asserting the power of constructivism but he is not saying that there is no reality behind the category. Using a critical realist stance to discuss the conflict between what is constructed and what can be understood as real, this thesis takes the theoretical stance that categorization and the looping effect is happening at the same time as real people exist, challenge and adapt to these categories. Adaptation is part of succeeding in the asylum system. As has been demonstrated in earlier research (Lewis, 2013; 2014), this success is gendered, classed and racialized; therefore intersectionality will be an important tool for the analysis.
5. Method

This chapter contains a brief presentation of the thesis’ methodological point of departure and use of method. Secondly, it is explained how the fieldwork with interviews and participant observation has been carried out. Subsequently, this chapter provides a discussion on validity, reflexivity and this thesis’ ethical position. Finally, the work with coding and analysing the material will be discussed.

5.1. Ethnographical field work and qualitative material

The choice of working with qualitative data was guided by the research question focusing on experiences and strategies amongst queer migrants. In qualitative research, the researcher is confronted with a context in a more thorough way than in quantitative research. Scholars using qualitative methods have argued that having close contact with the object of study can correct preconceived assumptions and thus create a higher validity, although validity is a discussed notion which will be further developed later on in this chapter (Flyvbjerg, 2003).

Further, this thesis aims to study how queer migrants relate to and navigate the asylum apparatus, focusing on the queer migrants’ strategies and on the effect the asylum apparatus has on queer Newcomers, RFSL and the categorization of migrated queer subjects. The aim is further to study how strategies and challenges are linked to ideas of class, gender and race. To meet these objectives, a combination of fieldwork has been chosen with both interviews and participant observation. These two methods both capture pronounced and unconscious experiences and thoughts. To answer the research question on how queer migrants relate and navigate the asylum system, in depth interviews with queer migrants and participant observation at RFSL have also been completed. The structure, the asylum apparatus, in which these experiences take place will also be analysed and described. Therefore, an extended background on the asylum system built on official documents, policies and previous research was needed. David Silverman (2010) advocates for an open mind when entering the field. The researchers should study the context, the material and the concrete cases openly and unconditionally without being governed by a too heavy theoretical superstructure. When entering this field, I had a heavy luggage of theory from previous research and strong ideas of what was going to be found. I felt a bit locked and took Silverman’s (2010) advice and decided to stop reading theory when starting the work with the interviews.
5.1.1. Biographical interviews
Biographical analysis has in the new millennium gained new interest in social sciences. Robert Miller (2000) has argued that a biographical perspective advances sociological conceptualization in social science. When constructing a biography, the individual has to take into account the past, present and future and place herself within social structures and a historical context. Miller (2000) further describes how this process creates and requires an embeddedness of the informant. When talking about social structures during biographical interviews, the informant resides in social networks of family, work, friends etc. both in her current position and in her origin. The biography is located in time and context, which becomes especially important when analysing experiences of migration.

Many scholars bring up the importance of biographical interviews and biographical analysis in studies of migration. Barbara Merrill and Linden West (2009) highlight the tradition and usefulness of biographical data in feminist research. Biographical interviews are part of a broader practice of creating a balance and more equal relationships between researcher and the researched (Merrill & West, 2009). Many feminist scholars use the biographical methods to focus on, and give voices to, those who are not heard in society. This kind of focus emphasises the interview structure of a two-way conversation with open questions rather than with an over structured interview guide.

5.1.2. Selection and contact with informants
This study relies on the possibility to gain contact with queer Newcomers who would trust my intentions with the study, therefore access to the field was one of my earliest concerns. A meeting with one of the national coordinators of RFSL Newcomers and the president of the organisation RFSL was organised. The aim of the thesis was explained, along with the request to conduct interviews and observation with their approval. Before entering the Newcomers group and volunteer group as a researcher, I attended two information meetings for new volunteers.

The first presentation at the RFSL Newcomers member meeting generated three informants, who were interested in participating in interviews. The interviews took place at RFSL in a small meeting room with total privacy. Due to questions on confidentiality, it has been important that no other Newcomers or employees should have information about which members that participated in the interviews. During the fieldwork in the Newcomers group, I
noticed that many students, journalists and artists asked for stories concerning the queer migrants’ backgrounds and experiences, which made me wary in the contact. Discussions where newcomers commented on how tiring it was to always “tell their story” were overheard. Additionally, an aim was to avoid performing an interview too much alike the one that the Migration agency performs with too many questions about sexual identity and persecution. However, it was still necessary to ask about the informants’ experiences of identifying sexual identity and the decision to migrate.

Most of the members asked, said that they were happy to participate in an interview, but three times members rejected partaking. One of these members answered the question with the words: “You know I’m so tired of all these interviews”. The informants were all in different stages of the asylum process, and it was decided early on that the interviewees would include members that still had not gone through the individual investigation at the Migration agency. Using the guidelines from Merrill and West (2009), the interviews were structured as broad conversations with three basic themes; 1, growing up and relating to a sexual identity, 2, the decision to migrate and 3, the experience of the Swedish asylum system including RFSL and the Newcomers group.

5.1.3. Participant observations
Besides the interviews, an ethnographical fieldwork with participant observation at RFSL Newcomers network has been carried out. The RFSL Newcomers network is a volunteer based network at RFSL. Two national coordinators are responsible for the administration of the network and together with the volunteers they organize the day-to-day contact with newcomers and the arranging of activities. RFSL Newcomers network has around 120 members in the Stockholm group. They have the legal status of asylum seekers, undocumented or newly arrived. Every Newcomer’s member is offered a volunteer as a contact person who can have the direct contact with the individual. The individual support includes contact with authorities, finding clothes, translating letters, help to find housing and accommodation, expand the social network and much more. Furthermore, the Newcomers network provides a weekly schedule of activities with Swedish lessons, legal aid, psychological support, food support and social activities. The weekly RFSL Newcomers member meeting has been the place where most of the participant observation has been conducted.
To be able to answer the research question how both RFSL and queer migrants take part in the categorization of queer subjects, participant observation has also been conducted in the RFSL Newcomers volunteer group with a meeting every other week. It was decided early in the process that I would carry out some minor volunteer tasks aside from my observation even if this would interfere with the possibility to remain distant and objective. Participant observation is crucial to feminist research, which is built on the foundation that research should not exploit but empower the research participants (Merrill & West, 2009). This strategy was part of my focus, which is why I tried to find ways of contributing while attending the support networks. The choice was also motivated with the importance of gaining trustworthiness and access to the field.

During the fieldwork of four months participation at the RFSL Newcomers support network, I have attended twelve Newcomers meetings, six social activities and ten volunteer meetings. Together these meetings make up approximately fifty hours of participant observation. During the weekly Newcomers meetings minor task such as answering the doorbell, translating from English to Spanish or Swedish for non-English speaking participants and organising the chairs before and after the meeting and welcoming new members have been carried out. But mostly I have tried to take a background position taking notes on the meeting regarding the topic of the meeting and the participation of the group members. After the meeting, field notes have been written down. The field notes consist of summaries of the discussions at the events and my own thoughts and feelings about the meeting have also been noted. All transcripts from interviews and observations make up a material of 123 pages of text.

5.2. Validity, reflexivity and reliability

Validity and reliability are concepts that have roots in positivist quantitative research. Qualitative research, on the other hand, seeks to understand phenomena in a very context-specific setting. Nahid Golafshani (2003) describe the difference in purpose between quantitative and qualitative research by stating that the first has its purpose in explaining, while the latter means to generate understanding. In quantitative research it becomes central when ensuring reliability that the absence of systematically made errors is done. When it comes to qualitative research, reliability could be framed as the credibility and the trustworthiness of the research. As Flyvbjerg (2003) has mentioned, one way of doing this is through participant observation. Instead of striving for distance, participant observation
forces the researcher to continually reflect on the subject of study in the field (Flyvbjerg, 2003). For this fieldwork, it has been important for me to be present at the Newcomers group at least twice a week during the work with the thesis. Even when the material was gathered and the interviews were transcribed, it was therefore still important to be present in the network.

Triangulation of methods is another strategy to improve validity and reliability (Golafshani, 2003). By using participant observation, interviews and the study of documents, the aim has been to ensure that the research questions correlate with the methods and the findings.

What also might have affected the validity is the process of selecting the interviewees and my position as a white academic researcher. The fact that most of the interviews were made in English, has from the beginning affected the result. These circumstances mean that the voices of migrants who do not speak English, Spanish or Swedish have not been heard to the same extent. Thus predominantly excluding persons without higher education or not belonging to a middle class. On the other hand, three interviews were done in Spanish, which was the mother tongue of the interviewees. Two of the interviewees had English as one of their official languages, which make up half of the interviews. Otherwise, the language that was used during the interview was neither theirs nor my most comfortable language. There is a possibility that cultural silence (Shuman & Bohmer, 2014) can have been produced and affected the interviews. Cultural silence could mean that the informant has not been able to speak about certain subjects with me, due to the uneven power relation, shame, or because of my gender.

Charlotte Aull Davies (2008) has elaborated on the researcher’s role, and the importance of reflexivity in qualitative research. Davis (2008) states, inspired by critical realism, that sociological research always is a political act. Selecting the research topic is part of the individual’s background and interests. The researcher’s self will impact the knowledge production, and therefore awareness around reflexivity becomes of importance. Davies’ (2008) view of the self is that it is always under construction. The self of the researcher changes during the fieldwork, and the altering of the self allows the researcher to access the self of others.

Scholars influenced by critical realism reject the idea that the researcher can apply a method without having knowledge of the object of study. Instead, they propose that the researcher
must devote herself to a subject of which she has great knowledge (Sayer, 2000; Davies, 2008). Being part of a queer movement and working with migrants, can partly be seen as knowledge of the field. However, as a Swedish lesbian researcher, I can make no claim to be part of this group. I realise that my limited position as a white Swedish student with no experience of migration brings up both political and epistemological implications. Davies (2008) points out the impotence of attentiveness towards these power relations:

… these are commonly linked to social divisions such as class, gender, ethnicity, race, age or professional status, and will most certainly affect the interview interaction” (Davies, 2008:108).

In reflecting over the validity of this study, considerations and efforts have been made to deal with this power relation, and thus create a relationship based on awareness of these circumstances. The lack of research, my curiosity and political conviction, have all been part of the decisions that nevertheless made me go through with this project. The power relation between the informants and me will be further developed in the next section where this thesis’ ethical considerations will be outlined. But first, a last remark on the reliability and validity is needed. The theoretical approach with many concepts from earlier research may have made this thesis theory heavy. Findings and results should therefore be interpreted as theory driven results, and not as universal truths (Sayer, 2000). It is in this situation important to stress that any research will be coloured by its theoretical approach, and the result would have been different if done with other theoretical lenses.

5.3. Ethical considerations
Dóra Bjarnason (2009) has developed important ethical reflections on research conducted with people in vulnerable situations. Ethics, politics and epistemology are interconnected; special care should be taken into consideration regarding specific vulnerable groups (Bjarnason, 2009). In this thesis queer migrants are considered as a vulnerable group, and queer migration is considered as a field that is highly politicized which therefore needs extra careful ethical considerations. Bjarnason (2009) makes a distinction between an absolute and a relative approach to ethical dilemmas in qualitative research. The absolute involves protection for the participant, prevention of fraud, protection of privacy and informed consent. In the relative approach, the researcher has absolute freedom to study what they believe will increase the value of the research. However, the researcher must belong to the field of study. There is no clear distinction between the two postures. Feminist research is not only about knowledge production, but also aims to give a voice to social groups. Feminist
researchers often emphasize the importance of trust in the relationships, and standpoint epistemology where the researcher only should research a group they belong to. Belonging to the field would in this case mean being defined as queer or and having experience of migration.

Most ethical dilemmas in research concern injury, consent, fraud and privacy. For this thesis the question of all these concerns have been important. When it comes to personal injury the interviews have been the most crucial point. The relationship between the researcher and the researched is a relatively closed and fragile relationship. Mistakes can lead to loss of access, which also speaks for attentiveness. But as Bjarnason (2009) notes, an overly cautious relationship can limit the researcher’s access to deep knowledge. In the work with the interviews, this has been an always-present dilemma. Deciding when to push on in conversations, adding questions on traumatic experiences or when to stop and take a break have been difficult considerations. Interviewing and working with qualitative material is closely connected to intuitive work (Merrill & West, 2009). I have dealt with these issues by trying to create a trustful relationship where the informant would feel comfortable to ask for a break if necessary. In the beginning, talking about the importance of confidentiality, the informants have been asked to choose a name for themselves, which later on has been used when referring to the informant in the text. The decision that the informant should choose a name was guided by an intention of giving back power to the informants and not labelling their story from outside.

To further strengthen the informant’s position and also the credibility and validity of the thesis, respondent validation, where the informants have been able to revise part of the description of them, has been practiced in the analysing phase (Merrill & West, 2009). Nine out of ten informants have taken part in respondent validation where they have revised and made comments or changes to their presentation. With this said, it is understood that the relationship between me, being a volunteer for the RFSL Newcomers network and a white Swedish student, and the informant is highly asymmetric. The asymmetric power relation may have affected the informants to participate in the interview, answering questions even though it can have caused them injury and reopened trauma (Bjarnason, 2009; Merrill & West, 2009). On the other hand, some members at RFSL Newcomers have denied participating when the question was asked, and six out of ten informants volunteered without a personal request, which indicates autonomy.
5.4. Making sense of biographical material
Merrill and West (2009) state that making sense of biography material in research can be confusing and time consuming. Hence a thorough coding and sorting brings theoretical coherence, and a rich material that is very rewarding (Merrill & West, 2009). Coding can be understood as a process of sorting the material and it can be beneficial with an early analysis to provide feedback for further data collection (Miller, 2000). Merrill and West employ a model of analysing biographical material, which they name the humanistic and subjective approach to analysis (Merrill & West, 2009). The humanistic approach refers to a feminist tradition where the subject of the work, the interviewee and her/his/their voice is placed in the centre of the research (Merrill & West, 2009). This stance emphasises the researcher’s reflexivity and human beings as active agents and creators of the social world:

We believe that social science should take seriously its humanistic foundations, derived from the idea of human beings as active creators of their world as well as being created by them. We would emphasise the capacity of human beings to reflexively understand, including in the research setting- a potentially transitional space for collaborative learning- how they may be structured or positioned by discourse. This is an element in building what we have termed critical realism: listening attentively to diverse voices but also being sensitive to how people can be storied, including by researchers. We need to address the interplay of language and subjectivity, immediacy and memory, self and other, if we wish to build really reflexive research (Merrill & West, 2009:130).

During the work with the material the ambition have been to create a transitional space where space for openness gave new suggestions and learning. The sociological practise of coding and sorting material through making typologies and categories could sometimes feel violent and contradictory to the advice given by Merrill and West. However, there is in a sorting process no way to avoid all categorization from outside. Since the thesis is about identity and constructing categories, the aim has been to not story the interviewee too much, or to use categories they do not use themselves. When asking about their identity, the question has been framed without a category “when did you start thinking about your sexuality?” or “when did you find out…?” And when, or if, a person uses an identity or term for themselves, I adapt to that and ask questions such as: “Did you know anyone else that was gay?”. During the process of writing this thesis it become evident how hard it is to avoid labelling and using categories and I had to bite my tongue not to use a category that the person himself/herself/themselves did not use. A few times I slipped and during the work with transcribing the interviews I could hear myself doing assumptions of the other person’s sexuality or gender identity without asking first.
5.4.1. Transcribing and coding the material
In all processing of qualitative material the coding and theorizing starts immediately (Berner, 1989). Merrill and West (2009) strongly recommend starting the analysing process as soon as possible. The work of conscious reflection started at the interview, and notes were made directly of specific quotes or themes that came up. During the transcription, another part of the intuitive coding took place. When seven interviews were completed and five of these were made into transcripts, the coding started. Based on earlier research and theory, a coding schedule was produced and used when going through the material. With the transcripts on paper, the coding started through highlighting sentences and key words with a pen. In the end of every section the interview was summarised in a short biographical version.

After coding the first four transcripts according to the schedule, I decided to change strategy. The material seemed much richer and I felt uneasy squeezing in the informant’s biographical data into my theoretical typology. When finishing all the interviews and transcriptions, I returned to the material with an ambition to put the queer migrants stories at the centre of the analysis rather than a theoretical typology. In the data I looked for the queer migrants’ strategies, how they and RFSL navigate the asylum apparatus and also how their strategies are permeated by intersectional power structures. The material was in the initial process coded in a simplified intersectional coding where class, gender, race and religion were accounted for. Noticing how the access to asylum more than anything else was marked by classed and gendered relations made me even more attentive to the informants´ educational background, their parent’s social positions, birthplace, if growing up in a big city or a small town. Access to Internet, the interviewee’s gender, experience of travelling, religion, and social network are other factors I have been attentive towards.

5.4.2. The emergence of analytical themes
Many of the final codes emerged right out of the material using a grounded theory inspired process. Following key words in the text as well as theoretical concepts from earlier research the material was re-coded in the soft ware program NVivo for handling qualitative material. After the final coding I ended up with a large range of codes that had lost the connection to the research question and which in the end never were used.

The final code scheme corresponds with the research question and was organised in four themes: 1: Background and earlier strategies. 2:Strategies marked by intersectional power
structures. 3: Strategies produced in the asylum apparatus. 4: Looping effects and the creation of identities. These themes have functioned as a tool for structuring and organising the analysis, which will be presented in the next chapter.

![Code scheme and final themes.](image)

### 6. Analysis

This chapter will be divided into four themes. First the informants are presented. The context in which they have become queer migrants is important for the analysis, which is why this chapter starts with a theme summarizing the informants’ earlier strategies and backgrounds. After that, the analysis is structured around the three research questions with the sections: 1, Strategies marked by intersectional power structures; 2, Strategies produced in the asylum apparatus and; 3, the creation of official identities and the looping of LGBTQ categories.

#### 6.1. Backgrounds and earlier strategies

During the work with this thesis, I spent time getting to know the Newcomers network and its members. Queer migrants are a heterogenic group and it is not possible to describe all the different experiences that people have when arriving to Sweden. To add context to the informants’ experiences, this theme starts with a presentation of the informants and with a brief summary of their individual situations based on what came up in the interviews.
Secondly, some of the experiences and strategies highlighted by the migrants when talking about their relation to the LGBTQ community and growing up as a queer subject are discussed.

*Lola*

*Lola* was born as a boy in a wealthy family in South America. She discovered early that she was transsexual. *Lola’s* father found out that *Lola* was transsexual when her body changed due to her taking hormones, and she was thrown out of her home. At the age of 18, she managed to gather money enough for a transitional operation and changed her sex. Her country of origin does not accept her gender. Before arriving to Sweden as a queer migrant, *Lola* had gone through a seven year long legal dispute to convince the authority to change the gender of her identification. The court did not accept her case; she said that they changed her name “as a favour” but stated that they would never change her gender. She was, as she says, “a woman trapped in an identity of a man”. Being an asylum seeker in Sweden at the age of 47 and getting the LMA card meant for her that she for the first time could use an identification document with her right gender.

*Fatima*

*Fatima* grew up in a big African city. Her family is part of a middle class Muslim clan, and she went to boarding school. At school she met her girlfriend and they started dating. After boarding school she was living with a relative who helped her with accessing college education. *Fatima’s* male cousin caught *Fatima* and her girlfriend. The cousin raped *Fatima* and threatened her to tell everyone that she was a lesbian if she ever told someone about the rape. *Fatima* became pregnant and was thrown out of the house. After a few years, the cousin who raped her wanted to marry her and take care of her child. Once again he threatened to tell everyone that she was a lesbian if she said no to his demand. When *Fatima* understood that she needed help, she asked a relative from Sweden who was on holiday to visit her family:

*Fatima –* I reached a point in my life where I needed help. First of all even if I wasn’t lesbian I can’t marry someone who have raped me. I can’t marry someone who won’t let me go out with my kid alone. Apart from that it’s just inhuman... I’m a lesbian I can’t stand... I can’t see myself a minute kissing a boy. How can I spend a whole life with that person (...).
Fatima applied for asylum together with the relative who lived in Sweden, but had to leave her child behind. When she came to Sweden her relative had organised a meeting with the lawyer at RFSL Newcomers.

Rose
Rose grew up in a big Asian city. She comes from a middle class religious family. She understood that she was lesbian at an early age, and had friends that she fell in love with when she was young. Her friend and sister knew and told her parents, who started to control and physically and psychologically abuse her. Education became Rose’s possibility to escape from family control and an early marriage. After many years, Rose managed to persuade her parents that she could come to Sweden. Well here, she faced a psychological collapse, and when her study visa expired she applied for asylum.

Mike
Mike grew up in an African big city in a working class home. His parents and family are Christian and very religious. Mike knew from the beginning that he could not talk to them about his attraction to men. When he was young, his parents caught him with another boy and he got badly beaten by his father who also threatened to “waste” him if he ever saw this again. Mike lived on and got caught again after finishing school.

Mike – And after one year, when I finished secondary they caught us again. But it was not my family now the neighbours. This one shocked me and I was afraid. And when they caught us they shouted, and people gathered and coming and I tried to leave there and I got lost. So since then I have never seen my mother nor my father again.

Before coming to Sweden Mike lived in another European country where he tried to live with a woman. It was not until much later when he lived in Sweden, that he separated from the woman. In his first asylum application, Mike says he was afraid to tell them he was gay and his claim was rejected. When he one day met some gay men on a train, he got the courage to ask them about the gay community, and they directed him to RFSL. Mike came to the Newcomers group and with their help, as he says, he “gained the courage” to reopen the asylum claim as a LGBTQ asylum seeker.

Jose-Carlo
Jose-Carlo grew up in a small family with parents who worked in the military in a South American city. His first boyfriend was his best friend from childhood. When they were kids Jose-Carlo did not understand his feelings for him, but they had a romantic relationship and
exchanged rings at early age. The boyfriend’s brother, a man closely connected to a religious sect, found out and they were separated with force and violence. It took Jose-Carlo until his 20s to start experiencing gay life again. When Jose-Carlo was visiting Sweden as a tourist, he got a letter from his mother saying that he had to stay away from his country, otherwise he would be killed. The boyfriend from his childhood had gone missing and his brother blamed Jose-Carlo for it and had spread the rumour that Jose-Carlo was going to pay for this with his life. The only solution Jose-Carlo could find was to stay in Sweden and apply for asylum. A friend recommended him to contact RFSL.

Olof
Olof grew up in a small village in an Asian country. His parents worked for the state. He was the only child and very loved. Olof started to understand that he was gay very early and had affairs with boys in the Quran school where his father sent him. One day he and his boyfriend were caught and a mob of people threatened their lives. Olof’s boyfriend was murdered by the mob and Olof managed to escape to another city. A fatwa was put on his head and he was banned from the village. After this, Olof paid some smugglers to take him to Europe and he ended up in Sweden. When we met, he had recently been rejected by the Migration agency. The Migration agency believed the story was correct, but they stated that it had happened to another person, not to Olof. Olof still had hope when we met and was doing an appeal of his asylum case. He had a good job with a working contract, which kept him busy during his wait for an answer to his appeal. He said he was not losing hope but wanted to see what was next.

Osama
Osama grew up in a middle class family in an African city. He met his first boyfriend when he was 15. He had access to the local gay community through the Internet. Osama said that he had had many bad experiences connected to sexual life in his home country. At one time, a lover blackmailed him and threatened to tell his family about his sexuality if he did not pay him money. Osama’s father caught him watching videos with gay men on the Internet, and stopped talking to him. He became a non-person in his family who ignored him. When Osama finished school he worked a few years abroad, but when the boss at his work found out that he was gay, he lost his job and had to move back. Back in the family the situation escalated and Osama’s mother helped him to gain a visa to Europe where some relatives of the family lived. The mother asked Osama to forget about his home country and never come
back. In Sweden he was rejected as an asylum seeker because of the Dublin convention and when we met he had no papers and lived under very precarious circumstances.

Carlos
When I met with Carlos he had been living in Sweden for four years, most of the time undocumented. He said that it all started when he started accepting that he was gay and had a lover. Carlos grew up on the countryside in a Catholic family in South America. He was afraid to accept his sexuality, and instead he got together with a woman and started a family. When his wife caught him having an affair with a man she told it to Carlos’ and his lover’s family. Carlos’ lover, who worked on a farm belonging to Carlos’ aunt, got thrown out of his house by his homophobic father, and in despair he killed himself. The father blamed Carlos and his family, and started to terrorise and threaten them. The situation escalated and when I met Carlos he told me that his aunt, two brothers and father had been murdered by this family.

Helge and Peter
Helge and Peter are a couple since nine years. Four of these years they have spent in Sweden applying for asylum. They met when studying at the university in a big town in an Asian city. Helge and Peter realised there were few possibilities for gay people to meet, and they founded an Internet based organisation with forums, chat and political activism for LGBTQ rights. When their project became known in media they got harassed and felt unsafe. The decision to migrate came after an event when they were attacked on the street and a group of people tried to kidnap them. In Sweden they have spent four years processing their asylum application and working as activists for LGBTQ migrants rights.

6.1.2 Educating and organizing LGBTQ identity
The RFSL Newcomers members that I have met during the activities and meetings at RFSL are overall a very resourceful group when it comes to contacts, education and experiences of activism. Three of the earlier strategies that the informants specially highlight are hiding, fighting and education. In this section education and organising LGBTQ identity will be discussed as an strategy that have had effect on the Newcomers when fleeing to Sweden.

Many of the members are used to navigate systems of power. The strategies that the Newcomers have used to leave their country and migrate are highly correlated with resources and privilege. For those who have large networks and contacts outside their country, the
process of migrating has been easier. The more privileged positions, the more knowledge and preparation were possible to arrange before migrating. What may be noted in the interviews with the newcomers is that all of them have experiences of struggling within a heteronormative system. The struggle with heteronormative values and religion in the family and society is part of being a queer subject. Struggling with the system and developing strategies to overcome it, has been a part of the informant’s daily life before migration. Lola started her struggle to get her family to accept her gender already in childhood. At the age of 18, she managed to fool the doctors at the clinic that her family had consented to the transitional operation she needed. Her whole life bears witness of a struggle with a system that has tried to limit her right to exist as a working professional transsexual woman. Helge and Peter who sought asylum together as a couple are also witnesses of a long struggle with normative values in the families as well as a homophobic system. A fight that started long before arriving in Sweden:

Helge— for four years we have been looking for a clue to what we can do, to solve our situation because when we got the negative decision. First we had a hope we thought well, from our situation everything was very clear we will not go back living in our country. Because from the moment we left we had problem not only with society and individuals that are homophobic but with the system. And the story that happened here in Sweden that’s like kind of it’s the second time it happened to me. First the fight with the system in our country.

The quote from the interview with Helge and Peter demonstrates how they are used to struggling with a system before entering the relation with the asylum apparatus. Well here, they describe the situation as the second time they needed to pick up a battle with a homophobic state. The migration to liberation narrative is both present, and challenged, by the way the queer migrants describe their previous experiences. When Helge makes the comment on the Swedish asylum system as a system that produce homophobia, he challenges the idea of the West as a gay heaven with promise of liberation to queer migrants such as himself.

The strategy to survive or migrate through education is present among any of the people I have met in the Newcomers group. For Rose, education was a strategy to learn about LGBTQ rights. Furthermore, for her, education was the only way out of an early marriage and leaving her birth country. Rose lived a controlled life in relation to her family and religion.

Rose—(...) I was just talking to myself, I don’t want to get married and if it’s going to happen after two to three years?! Ok I’m going to continue my study because I’m a
good girl. (…) I told my parents I’m going to travel abroad and started applying. I did not ask them, this is a key. Because all the people say – I asked my parents but they said no. Really? Of course they are going to tell me no. The same, but I took action I didn’t ask them. Of course I was afraid what’s going to happen! Well if I show them I’m strong and took action they will allow me and so on. I used to put scarf I couldn’t go out maybe maximum no later than 10 pm after they called me hundred times (….)

*Rose*’s strategy involved higher education when deciding how to handle the fact that she was a lesbian, not wanting to live the life her parents had sought out for her. She had the possibility, as she says, to be a good girl, to study hard and persuade her parents that she could go on to higher education. This strategy became formed in relation to the knowledge she gained through Internet, books and teachers at her international university. In her understanding, her access to Western education became a key for her possibility to migrate. Even if *Rose* comes from a privileged background with access to education, her position as a woman in a religious home made it difficult for her. *Rose* described how the process from deciding that she had to leave her country and the possibility to do so, took years of preparation. *Rose* explained how she educated herself with books on LGBTQ rights and self-assurance to be able to tell her parents that she wanted to study abroad. When preparing for her migration, she spent hours every day talking to her parents about education, building up a trustful relationship so that they would let her travel in the first place.

### 6.1.3. Hiding LGBTQ identity

Another experience all the informants share, is the practice of hiding. Hiding has been a strategy among all the informants on different levels; hiding from family, from the state and from communities. The necessity of hiding one’s identity and sexual orientation has, for some, been in practice from the age of ten to twelve years, when they first came to discover their sexuality. Many queer migrants speak of hiding as a survival strategy, and it is a practise that is highly gendered, classed and racialized. Some have also lived in heterosexual relationships, trying to prove to their families that they were not gay, even though they felt it was wrong for them. Some informants report being forced into heterosexual relationships. The possibility of openness is contextual and differs from societies, cities or countryside, level of religious surrounding and the access to education and resources. *Fatima* describes hiding as a survival strategy, which comprises both the public and the private part of life. When I ask about the situation for her where she grew up, she answers me like this:

*Fatima* – it was so homophobic you can’t live and be who you are. So it’s living by hiding, it’s not hiding from the family only it’s hiding from society. It’s punished by law, being bisexual, gay or a lesbian, it’s punished by the law. So you have to hide and not live freely so it’s really hard.
After the process of migrating, the strategy of hiding takes new forms. For some of the informants, hiding their sexual orientation has continued to be a strategy in the new country. It is hard to go from a practice of strict hiding to the extreme openness demanded in the asylum process (Khan, 2014). The process of going from being forced to hide into being forced to be open is analysed by Khan (2014) as the practice of reverse covering. Reverse covering happens when the migrants have to disclose their sexuality in front of an authority, something, which in their previous context was associated with the risk of persecution. For many of the informants, the act of speaking openly about their sexuality with the authority is a huge challenge. And for some, talking about sexuality becomes an insurmountable obstacle. In the interview with Mike it become clear how talking about sexuality can be demanding. When Mike first came to Europe, he said that he tried to live with a woman to hide himself. When he came to Sweden this relation had failed, as he says he was never “comfortable with it”, and also that he “couldn’t even manage to cope to maybe be with the girl”. For Mike the hiding of his sexual desire did not end when he came to Sweden. Mike says that in his first asylum application, he did not state that he was gay because of fear. It was not until he met gay people in the city whom he started to talk to, that he started to openly identify himself as gay.

6.1.4. Reflection on backgrounds
It will never be possible to portray all the experiences and situations that the queer migrants at RFSL have. Some of the members are highly educated professionals who speak many languages. On the other hand, many of the members do not speak English, are not used to travelling and have very little knowledge of the Swedish society. As Murray (2016) points out, none of the informants started their lives thinking about themselves as migrants or asylum seekers. It is a description that has been imposed on them when they crossed borders to seek for a better life (Murray, 2016). The voices that are heard in this thesis are also filtered through gender and access to resources. It is important to also keep in mind that there are voices that are not heard here. Voices belonging to queer subjects who do not possess the resources that would have made it possible to migrate. Access to education, experiences of LGBTQ activism or being forced to hide one’s sexuality earlier in life, are experiences that keep on effecting the migrants’ strategies and possibilities in the new countries. In this theme, the complex context in which these queer migrants come from is established. The informants to the thesis are people with distinctive backgrounds, using different strategies before arriving to Sweden and becoming queer migrants.
6.2. Strategies marked by intersectional power structures

In this theme, analysis of the queer migrants’ strategies from an intersectional perspective will be made. This section relates to the research question “How do power relations related to class, race and gender affect queer migrants’ strategies in the asylum apparatus?” The analysis is divided into three parts. First, an analysis of the asylum process in relation to gendered, racialized and classed possibilities is presented. Secondly, an intersectional approach is used when analysing the possibility of visibility. Finally, the access to knowledge and resources are examined in relation to gender, class and nationality.

6.2.1. The asylum procedure as a classed, racialized and gendered process

All the informants had been in some kind of asylum process where they had to prove both persecution and LGBTQ identity. The credibility assessment and the asylum investigation is a process where the proving of rights to asylum lies solely on the asylum seeker. The credibility and authenticity of the queer migrant is filtered through what Murray (2016) describes as a Western middle class narrative that is centred on “the coming out story”. Since the credibility assessment used at the Migration agency produces the unsuccessful asylum claims as frauds, queer migrants are forced to conform to what immigration officials expect of a LGBTQ subject’s identity. The notion that there are migrants within the asylum process, who use the LGBTQ status as an “easy way” of getting asylum, has made the credibility process even tougher.

Being credible as a queer migrant is something that all queer migrants have to adapt to. Many of the informants in this thesis report a high level of suspiciousness from the immigration officials that they have met. Furthermore, as Shakhsari (2014) demonstrates, racialized, gendered and economic positions affect the possibility to be seen as a trustworthy LGBTQ asylum seeker. This normative LGBTQ identity is linked to a consumerist identity, where taking part of gay club life is essential. Being part of RFSL Newcomers provides a possibility to access a LGBTQ community without a Western, white and consumerist connotation. The network provides membership, a meeting space and activism, which is affordable for asylum seekers. Still, access to the Newcomers network is easier for queer migrants who speak English and live in cities than for those living in the countryside.

Internationally, lesbian asylum seekers are often produced as invisible in the asylum system (Lewis, 2010; Lewis 2013; Shuman & Bohmer, 2014). This invisibility renders lesbian
asylum seekers to be less successful with their asylum claims. This gendered reality was also found in this thesis’ fieldwork. While participating in the RFSL Newcomers network, it became evident that lesbians meet higher barriers to become asylum seekers. At the RFSL Newcomers meeting, cis female members were always in minority. During the meetings and the activities at the RFSL Newcomers support network, cis women were less visible and heard. The field notes show that the attendance of perceived gender cis women was only around 16% (these figures are approximate since it was hard to correctly estimate the number of attendants due to the fact that the meetings were open and people came and went at different times during the activities). The fact that lesbian asylum seekers constitute such a small number of the members, points towards the fact that lesbian refugees meet higher barriers to access asylum seeker status. Leaving the country where they were persecuted is also more challenging for female migrants. Lewis (2014) discusses the fact that lesbians meet higher barriers to gain asylum, than gay men, partly due to poverty and less access to social capital. These gendered and classed implications of the asylum apparatus will be further developed in the next section.

6.2.2. Gendered, classed and racialized visibility
Lesbian asylum seekers have historically been denied asylum due to the idea that lesbian sexuality is easier to hide and live with in secret than male homosexual sexuality (Shuman & Bohmer, 2014; Andersson 2007). Lewis (2014) argues that this idea of invisibility as a possibility for lesbians is, driven by a Western heteronormative assumption, about it being easier for women to be “voluntarily discreet”. The Swedish Migration agency has previously received critique because of its decisions stating that queer migrants who do not live openly do not face persecution (Gröndahl, 2012). This policy has led lesbian migrants to be pushed back into hiding (Andersson, 2007). The Migration agency changed this practice in 2011, stating that the new policy should be forward looking (RCI 03/2011). The new policy takes into consideration whether the queer migrant wishes to live openly in his/her/their country of birth or not. If the migrant was not open, they should still not be forced into hiding again. Thus, being successful with a claim based on sexual identity still demands a high degree of openness in Sweden.

Experience of sexual violence is also a gendered aspect, which makes speaking about persecution and sexual identity more challenging for female asylum seekers. Women are more likely to suffer violence in the private sphere than in the public sphere, and are as a
result of this, more “invisible” in the asylum apparatus (Andersson, 2007). Lesbians are, due to this violence, also more likely to be closeted (Lewis, 2014). Of the informants at the Newcomers network, it was harder to gain contact with lesbian asylum seekers. One of the reasons why it was harder for me to talk to female informants is possibly because their experiences included more sexual violence, a topic that is hard to talk about in an interview situation. Lewis’ (2013; 2014) research on lesbian asylum seekers in the UK would support the probability that female queer migrants to a larger degree have broader experiences of sexual violence and rape than males. *Fatima* is one of the female migrants who have had this experience. I came in contact with her when another member from the group made a recommendation and introduced me to her. For *Fatima*, the asylum investigation and talking about her experiences was demanding. It was notable that taking part in our interview was also stressful for her. *Fatima* described in both words and emotions that it was painful for her to talk about the details in her history. When I asked *Fatima* if the lawyer gave her any specific advice of what to say during the asylum investigation, she replied like this:

> Fatima – no she never said what to say. She told me... she said don’t hide the details. Because it’s a part of my life where I hate the details. Even when I talked to her I didn’t want to give her details, but she told me that when you have the interview try hard to give the details, because if you are going to talk shallow they will take it shallow. Give the details so that they will know how hard it was.

*Fatima* explains how the lawyer who advised her at RFSL had stressed the importance of showing emotions. Displaying emotions, as we can see from this example, is an important part of the proof of credibility and trustworthiness in the asylum investigation. As Wikström and Thorburn Stern (2015) have demonstrated, the applicant’s emotions are important for the credibility assessment in the investigation. The emotions are also interrogated and expectations of which visible emotions should be displayed, are used as proof of trustworthiness in the decision (Wikström & Thorburn Stern, 2015.) From *Fatima*’s quote, it is possible to think that both the lawyer and *Fatima* are aware of the importance of showing emotions during the interview. *Fatima* described how hard it was to talk about her experiences, and how she felt exhausted afterwards, but that she had to keep on practising giving all the details so that her asylum claim could go through.

*Rose* is one of the informants who directly talked about the cultural aspects of silence and visibility. When we talked, she referred to the asylum investigation at the Migration agency and explained that she got the feeling they wanted her to tell something she could not:
Rose—there is something I can’t forget, the investigator was young and female. She kept repeating a question. Up to now I don’t know what she wanted to hear. Because I was super honest with her, giving all the details to her without her asking, from I was young up to now. She kept repeating: ‘but how did you feel when you were 13?’ I told her. ‘No but how did you feel?’ I talked, I talked, I talked. ‘But when you felt that you liked that girl what did you feel?’ And at the end, she became frustrated and at the end I told her –I wonder what you expect from me to answer because I tell you everything? And then I realized that maybe she want… she wants me to talk about how I feel in terms of sexual deep or what. And I told her—if you are waiting for me to tell you about sexually how I felt and these sexual fantasies, sorry at that age at that country and with that education… we have zero education about sex and we are not allowed to even feel what we feel. And then she was like ‘aha’. Ok. So maybe she was waiting for me to tell something deeply. I don’t know, or that I slept with a girl.

Joanna– did you get the feeling that she believed you or was she questioning you? Your story?

Rose– she questioned me five or six times. Even if we moved in the story she said ‘no you are not giving me what I want. No, still you did not answer my question’. Really? How did I not answer your question? Because I didn’t give you your expectation? Your answer? I mean specifically, if someone is really honest and is telling everything. It shouldn’t be like that. They should know that we are always frightened in terms of thinking out of the box or thinking of our needs.

In the interview Rose talked about getting a feeling that the immigration official at her investigation wanted something special from her that she was not able to give. Rose said that she attempted to answer the questions, but after repeated questioning she realized that the immigration official wanted her to tell something specific. Rose explained how she identified that she might not have been able to meet the immigration official’s expectations on how to express sexuality. Shuman and Bohmer’s (2014) term cultural silence becomes meaningful when analysing Rose’s experiences. Rose’s experiences demonstrate how the managing of cultural silence might be crucial in LGBTQ asylum claims. The relation between cultural shame and proving LGBTQ status becomes clear. What the asylum seeker is able to disclose, is connected to shame and humiliation rooted in culturally imposed rules (Shuman & Bohmer, 2014). Yet, the possibility of speaking about sexuality is marked not only by gender, but also by culture and class.

Mike’s said that in his first investigation at the Migration agency, he did not speak of his sexuality. Mike spoke of a direct fear of other people knowing what he “is”. At the time of our interview, he was in his second asylum application, now stating LGBTQ reasons. In our interview, he avoided words surrounding sexuality and referred to himself or other LGBTQ persons as “so and so” instead of using terms like gay, homosexual or queer. Mike explained how he could not tell his lawyer, even when she asked him directly if he was gay:
Mike – I could not say I’m gay (...). She asked me are you so and so.

Joanna- are you so and so?

Mike – yes. Are you? She asked me with the language we use in our country (...). I just know it was like a fear you know? This fear, now she was going to know who I am. And when she left me; I felt like if I was relieved!

At the end of our interview, I returned to the subject of openness and asked Mike if the Migration agency could have done or said something to make it easier for him. He answered that it is a process within himself. Mike stated that he was worried that the Migration agency would not accept his second application, and wonder why he did not tell them in the first place. Mike’s experiences point at how challenging the process of reverse covering can be. To be successful in an asylum claim, it becomes necessary to achieve this reverse covering (Kahn, 2014). For those who do not meet the challenge of speaking openly about their sexuality, gaining asylum becomes even harder.

Hiding and openness are debated concepts (Murray, 2016). Not conforming to Western ideals of openness does not necessarily mean that the person is “hiding” their “true” sexuality. Many queer migrants have other experiences of queerness and sexual identity than the Western, white consumerist gay narrative and thereby challenge the presumed Western way of being lesbian, gay or transsexual. The informants’ experiences of “Western” openness and talking about LGBTQ identity are also highly correlated with access to resources and privilege. Queer migrants from small towns, or without a LGBTQ network, describe difficulties when talking about their sexual identity. Olof, who did not have a large experience of a LGBTQ network before coming to Sweden, described the investigation at the Migration agency like this:

Olof – they asked specifically about times and the things again and again and again, and its really sometimes they go really deep so its hard to answer. Especially in our country, everybody is silent about it and its not easy, and I had never talked about it like this before. But now I’m in RFSL so… I made lots of friends and saw lots of people so I’m getting used to talk about my feelings and about my rights. But in my country, everybody is just silent so it’s hard to talk and I was not used to it. They were asking many questions but it was hard for me to answer them.

When I met Olof he had been to three interviews at the Migration agency and had been coming to the Newcomers group for almost a year. To the immigration official, being open in a trustworthy way, means taking part in gay consumerist narratives, such as attending gay parties, pride festivals etc. (Lewis, 2014). For queer migrants such as Olof, attending RFSL Newcomers provides a space to take part in gay life without access to economical resources.
The interview situation in the asylum investigation is experienced as very stressful by most of the informants. The asylum investigation takes place in a highly asymmetric situation, where the immigrant official holds the power over the asylum seeker’s right to stay. The asylum process had for some of the informants just started, whereas other informants had a long experience over several years of applying or appealing the Migration agencies’ decisions. During the asylum investigation, the asylum seeker and her/his/their lawyer and a translator are present. Most of the questioning takes place during a meeting of two to three hours. But, in some cases, it takes more time and more than one meeting. Lawyers at RFSL have been pointing out the importance of creating a safe space at these meetings. Experiences with homophobic translators, which have been reported during this fieldwork, is a concern in relation to the possibility and ability to speak freely. One lawyer at an asylum education reported that immigrant officials often have a Western, narrowed view of LGBTQ identity. One of the volunteers at the course asked what that meant in reality. The lawyer gave an example of how, especially racialized lesbian asylum seekers, can fail to be recognised as lesbians if they do not conform to stereotypical ideas of Western lesbian butch appearance such as having short hair and wearing a flannel shirt.

6.2.3. Classed and gendered access to knowledge and resources
The asylum system is built on the Swedish immigration law. It is not easy to grasp for people outside the legal system. During my participation in the Newcomers network, a number of educational possibilities about the asylum system were offered. The legal service that was offered every Friday afternoon was one of the most visited activities. For those who speak English, it is always easier to navigate the asylum system and access information on LGBTQ asylum. In many of the conversations and interviews, it was told to me that the legal service, and having a good lawyer is a key to the success of an asylum claim. The access to language, the Internet, education, social and economic resources will affect the asylum process. For some of the informants, choosing Sweden has been a choice based on knowledge and research. For others, it was the only way to escape persecution. The possibility to migrate is from the beginning a possibility marked by gender, class and race.

The countries of origin play a big part for the knowledge available to the informants. Countries that have a long history of producing not only LGBTQ refugees but also other refugees have citizens with greater knowledge about the European asylum system.
Carlos had made a long journey to gain access to the LGBTQ network and knowledge within the RFSL Newcomers network. Within his ethnical group and exiled countrymen, there does not exist a large knowledge about the asylum system:

Carlos—when you come here, you ask people how to do things. I brought proof of my brother and my aunt. I brought pictures and all, of my brother with his head cut off and all. I had proof. I asked how it was here in Sweden, if one could ask for asylum. But people when I asked around said don’t go and ask for asylum because you’re only going to be thrown out! They will grab you and put you in prison and then you are deported. Therefore I have stayed here hidden for two years.

Carlos explains how other Spanish-speaking migrants advised him to stay away from the Migration agency. Only when he met a co-worker who also was in the process of asylum, did he get the advice to contact a lawyer and to launch an asylum claim. The lawyer he contacted had little knowledge about LGBTQ asylum. Carlos says that he was explicitly advised by the lawyer to not tell the Migration agency that he was gay, and to keep silent about his sexuality. A large amount of information and rumours exist about how to gain asylum. For the queer migrants it requires work, time and effort to understand which advice to listen to, and also language skills, education and contacts. The legal service provided by the RFSL Newcomers network is one effort to try to even out this knowledge gap and provide the Newcomer members with legal knowledge that they can build their strategies and decisions on. However, this access to knowledge is also concentrated to the larger cities. For the queer migrants who are placed in smaller cities, it is harder to access information in time before the investigation at the Migration agency starts. Many of the cases that the lawyers at RFSL take on, are cases where the asylum seeker’s asylum application already has been rejected.

Many migrants, lawyers and activists involved in queer migration, assert the need to have a competent guideline from the very beginning of the process. It is important that all the actors who take part in the process are familiar to LGBTQ asylum cases (RFSL Newcomers, 2016). This includes the immigrant official, the translator and the lawyer. When I meet with Osama for our interview, he has just visited the lawyer for advice. I asked him how it went with the lawyer:
Osama– something good, something not good. The good for me is that the new law\(^1\) not will affect me because I have Dublin and I applied in Sweden the first time in April 2015(...). And you must stay here 18 months and next year, inshallah 2017 I can apply and the new law won’t affect me.

Second point: I told him what happened if I find someone who could make a contract of job? And I start to work and pay taxes? He told me they wouldn’t accept me at all. Why? Because first, you are illegal, you have Dublin identity you go back to Spain. Second, contract of work if you find, they drive you back to your country, and if you go back you can’t come back here to Sweden, because you have stayed here illegal and they won’t accept your visa for tourism (...).

About if I marry some, also is very hard. If I get someone to marry, you are still illegal here. I must go back to my country and wait there. You cannot go and apply for marriage, your partner must go for you and tell that he has a boyfriend. But if you go alone and you want to make an application with someone, they get you and send you to Märsta (the detention centre) because you stay here illegal. That is Dublin.

From Osama we understand, that he is trying to manage a large range of information about ways to legal migration in Sweden. The new laws on asylum and for a residence permit are concerns and stress that the queer migrants at RFSL have in common. For Osama, who has a Dublin case and needs to stay undocumented for 18 months in order to seek asylum in Sweden again, other legal entrances to migration are considered. The possibilities to gain a residence permit through partnership or work are other possibilities that he investigates. In Osama’s case both these alternatives are hard to access and are affiliated with the risk of deportation.

6.3. Strategies produced in the asylum apparatus
Under this theme, the strategies that have been produced in relation to the asylum apparatus are analysed. As demonstrated in earlier themes, many strategies are formed by racialized, gendered and classed norms and possibilities. Positions formed by gender, class and race were not formed at first in the asylum apparatus, but existed as inequalities long before. In this theme, the strategies that have been developed in relation to the asylum apparatus in Sweden are highlighted and analysed. These strategies are separated in three subthemes: forced openness, hyper hiding, and strategies that lead to precarity.

6.3.1. Forced openness and the creation of new risks
As established in the previous chapter, access to a consumerist gay life is important for the credibility assessment and the success of he asylum claim (Lewis, 2014). Social status, class,

\(^1\) The 15 of November 2015 the government presented laws aiming to decrease the numbers of refugees to Sweden. Including temporary residence permits. During the spring of 2016 RFSL Newcomers attended a campaign against the new law.
not having the right networks, not being able to talk well and knowing English, are all things that can create obstacles for queer migrants. RFSL Newcomers network and their members struggle with these obstacles, and try to overcome them by all possible means. Some of these strategies are: forced openness and the creation of new risks.

Many discussions regarding the purpose of the network taken place at the Newcomers network volunteer meetings. Should RFSL Newcomers only support queer refugees with food, legal support, information and social activities? Does the network and the volunteers only give these people meaningless support, prolonging an expulsion that will take place anyhow? One of the main objectives for the RFSL Newcomers has been to support queer migrants in obtaining asylum. The network is asylum oriented and, just as the Newcomers, RFSL navigates the asylum apparatus and tries in all possible legal ways to support their members. One of RFSL’s main strategies has been to support the queer asylum seekers who have received a negative decision, in gaining new circumstances in order to be able to reopen their cases again. New circumstances can be new threats or new proof that strengthens the queer migrant’s first testimony. Media plays a crucial part in this work. Participating in media, talking about their sexuality is used as proof of being a LGBTQ person. At the same time this creates an enhanced vulnerability and risk in case of an expulsion.

Shakhsari (2014) and Lewis (2014) amongst other queer migration scholars, speak of forced visibility among queer migrants. Being successful with a claim based on sexual identity demands a high degree of openness (Bennett & Thomas, 2013). The more queer migrants fear being open, the less likely they are to gain asylum (Shuman & Bohmer, 2014). The forced visibility is, as we shall see in this theme, very present at the RFSL Newcomers network and have gendered, classed and racialized consequences. Both male and female queer migrants are sometimes forced into an openness that puts them at an even higher risk than before applying for asylum. This contradiction, of forced openness, was found in many of the interviews. When I asked Fatima if she had any other possibilities if the asylum did not go through, she responded like this:

Fatima – I don’t know, one thing I know is that I can’t go home. I have come out already. I have been in the newspaper. So at least something I know is that I can never go back home. Luckily enough, my aunty (living in Sweden) doesn’t get it because that newspaper doesn’t go to where she lives. They took my picture but not my name, but it’s the same thing.
Joanna – what did you think then? Why did you do that?

Fatima – I don’t know... Leila (one of the coordinators) told me ‘you came here seeking for safety. If you’re here and are hiding, it doesn’t make sense. You have to show them you’re here and you’re living freely, that you came out. It’s going to help you in your case’. That’s what she told me. And I was given a hope. I was ok; I came here to live out, to be out anyway, to live my life. So why should I be hiding anymore? And I did it (…).

Joanna – did you do another article like that?

Fatima – no! No, no I don’t want to. I don’t want to, I just want my case to be done. I think that was enough

Fatima says that she made a strategic choice when disclosing her sexuality in media. With the advice from the Newcomers network, she decided to participate in an article talking about her asylum claim and her sexuality. Fatima says, that she did not want to participate from the beginning, but that one day she decided to take the risk and do it. Knowing that this decision could help her case, but also that it could risk the custody of her child and ostracism from her family. In this quote, it is also visible, how aware Fatima and RFSL are about the importance of performing a “coming out” story. This type of forced visibility produced within the asylum apparatus, sometimes puts queer migrants in even higher danger than they were in before deciding to flee. To be able to be successful in an LGBTQ asylum claim, the queer migrants need to put themselves at risk of losing both family and life.

Taking part of gay life and LGBTQ activism also functions as another strategy to prove membership in the LGBTQ category. If the claim does not go through, the remaining strategy is to produce new circumstances. Helge and Peter’s first strategy after appealing to the court was to keep on working for LGBTQ rights in their home country. They told how they launched a campaign on gay rights, which later on was shut down by their government. Through this strategy, they also say they gained new threats from authorities in their home country. When their asylum application was turned down and they faced expulsion, they used the media as a last strategy to stop the expulsion.

Helge – for us contacting journalist was an act of desperation. (…). I don’t want to be exposed as an asylum seeker. To me it’s something I prefer to hide because it’s not a pleasant part of my life and I think that’s part of my private life… Of course, when we were in the detention and we had all the risks that they would execute an expulsion, we had no choice.

Helge and Peter had at this time, through their activism, put themselves in an even more dangerous position. With this article they outed themselves, not only in Sweden as asylum
seekers, but also to their home country that they live in Sweden as gays. After this article, they were faced with more ostracism from their families, who responded that they put shame on their families. In this quote, Helge states that it was an act of desperation. The desperation is a product of the asylum apparatus and leads to ostracism from families, hypervisibility and danger of greater persecution. The asylum apparatus that is founded to protect persons from persecution, in this case, actually produces even greater threats and persecution.

6.3.2. Hyper hiding
The hiding practiced by the undocumented queer migrants in fear of expulsion, is another type of hiding that the informants have to conform to in relation to the migration apparatus and it’s authorities in Sweden. Hiding occurs when no other possibilities are available. Not being granted asylum but still fearing for life and security, forces people into hiding as a strategy. Hiding becomes a strategy to avoid deportation. This theme emerged early in the material, hiding not only due to sexual orientation, but also due to legal status. Many queer migrants pass through different stages of legal status. Hiding is furthermore, often part of the actual way of entering Sweden, due to few legal entrances to the European Union. Different legal stages enable different access to openness. Some queer migrants enter Sweden as tourists, students or workers. A second stage is then being in Sweden as an asylum seeker. If the claim is denied, an undocumented part of the process takes place, and then another period of asylum seeking can take place again.

When Carlos was denied asylum in Sweden, he did not want to continue living in hiding. He commented that hiding had been a strategy for him in his first community, in his relationship and among family, from the state and now also the Swedish society:

Carlos – then I could not do anything. When they gave me this, I did not know what to do. I told my mom, that the migration told me to leave. And I said ok, then I have to leave. I don’t want to be here anymore. Because I’m hiding in my country, and when I am here I’m hiding too. Because they said at the migration if I did not leave they would hand over my case to the police. And if the police takes me? I do not want to be like this, I do not want to be hidden. Nowhere. But in my own country I have to hide because otherwise they kill me and here I have to hide from the police.

Carlos said that he became tired of constantly hiding, and therefore decided to return to his home country, where the situation escalated. He consequently decided to flee again. Because of the rejection of his asylum application, he stayed on in Sweden undocumented. Living by hiding is still one of his core survival strategies. When we went for an activity with the Newcomers, Carlos called me. We were going to visit a museum for a storytelling workshop,
and before deciding whether to come or not, he wondered if he could remain anonymous at the workshop and if he would need to show ID to enter the museum. This is only one of the precautions he needs to take when navigating the asylum apparatus. Carlos has not been participating in the LGBTQ community, visiting bars and clubs etc., in fear of getting caught by the police. Even when Carlos is working, he hides his own identity. Working in restaurants and washing dishes entails meeting a lot of people from his own origin to whom he cannot disclose his true identity and sexuality.

Carlos – most of the time here I have been hidden. I could… I could have gotten a job by now, but not me. Sometimes they ask me: ‘what’s your name?’ And I can’t answer. Not even my name. And what is worse, I have worked with people from my country. And they ask where are you from? I say I’m from another country. I lie. I am not from my country. This is all because of my problem (...).

Carlos describes a situation, which I in this thesis term hyper hiding. Hiding from persecution in his country, led to fleeing from his country. Being denied asylum in Sweden forces him to hide from authorities in order to avoid deportation. To avoid being reported or harassed by fellow citizens, he hides his sexual identity, his country of origin, his name and his legal status.

Osama, who has been rejected asylum due to the Dublin convention, was also forced into hiding. Osama has a slightly different strategy and is more engaged in the gay scene. What they both have in common is the fear that fellow countrymen will understand that they are gay. Osama’s and Carlos’ worries can be understood as a precaution to avoid harassment, but are also strategies to avoid expulsion. For migrants who live in Sweden undocumented, it is important not to let other people know their legal situation in order to not be further exploited or reported to the police. Within the asylum apparatus, the queer migrants are forced into various strategies of hiding in order to be successful claimants. It is notable, that the informants are conscious about their legal situation, and that they, at any given moment, might have to go into hiding to avoid deportation. Hiding is also a forced strategy in the sense that the migrants would not need to fear being open around fellow countrymen if they knew that they could stay in Sweden. The forced hiding produces queer migrants as precarious population, a notion that will be further developed in the next section.

6.3.3. Strategies that lead to precarity
Death, psychiatric illness and thoughts of suicide have all been themes during the interviews. The queer migrants at RFSL Newcomers share experiences and strategies of coping with
ostracism, precarious living conditions, desperation and the endless wait for the decision from the authorities. At the accommodation centres that the Migration agency provides, homophobic harassment takes place which forces many queer migrants to seek and pay for their own housing. *Helge* and *Peter* have reported that harassment and discrimination at the Migration accommodation, coupled with a situation where they had to focus on their asylum claim (which demands openness), made them leave and seek housing in another city. The access to housing, food and transportation is one of the most frequent needs that the RFSL Newcomers’ members ask for from the network. Finding housing and financial support is hence one of the duties that most occupy the volunteers active in the network. *Jose-Carlo* is only one of many who experience homelessness during their asylum process. He described how not having a secure place to stay had been one of the hardest parts of the asylum process:

*Jose-Carlo*— I was born on September 18. And on the September 18 I did not know where to go. It was my birthday. At this time I felt a hard defeat. I started to cry, it was the first time I cried during this process. Because I could not return to my home and on my own birthday I had to stay out at the metrostop, thinking about where to sleep. Because I didn’t have any place to go. It was the most difficult time, the first difficult thing during this time (...).

For the queer migrants that currently are in the asylum process, the daily amount of 7,5 Euro that is available, is not enough to cover the expenses of housing and food. To cover the local transportation card in Stockholm, which costs approximately 80 Euro, more than a third of the given monthly amount is needed. For most migrants in the asylum process the possibility of working is open, but to find a job for a non-Swedish speaking asylum seeker is difficult. Experiences of exploitation at work are common. For the undocumented queer migrants, this exploitation is even worse:

*Osama*— now the situation is very, very hard. No money, no job, no home to stay. I move from house to house after two three months. The food I take only in the church or little money from RFSL. The SL card only one girl in the association No one is Illegal, she pay for me the SL card. My situation is very very difficult very very hard. I don’t know Dublin was like that but it’s true (...).

Some day I work, some day I don’t because it’s black jobs. When I work at the restaurant cleaning dishes I get maybe 300 kronor (30 euro) a day. Some day I work and I sell tickets at the football arena for that I get only 150 kronor (15 euros) for a day. Life is going like that.

The transportation card (SL-card) is crucial, especially for the undocumented migrants because the police make their immigration control in the transportation system when a person does not have a valid ticket (Lundberg & Hydén, 2004). RFSL Newcomers have from time to
time gained money from campaigns so that they are able to support the undocumented queer migrants with funds for public transport. *Osama* also gets some support from another organization supporting queer migrants; No one is Illegal (IMÄI, 2016). The asylum apparatus not only produces precarious living conditions, it also forces queer migrants into strategies that lead to precarity. Risk of prostitution and exploitation at work was present in the interviews and in conversations with queer migrants at RFSL Newcomers. One of the members joked about prostitution as an alternative when they did not have money enough to pay for the transportation card. Even though it was a joke, the comment demonstrates a presence of strategies that lead to precarity. In this section, it has been argued that the asylum apparatus produces LGBTQ migrants as precarious population when exposing them to exploitation, injury, forced openness and hyper hiding.

6.4. The creation of official identities and the looping of LGBTQ categories
This theme will analyse how the asylum apparatus, RFSL and the queer migrants are all part of producing LGBTQ identities and categories within the asylum apparatus. This relates to the third research question “How may we conceptualize the effects that the asylum apparatus has on queer Newcomers, RFSL and the categorization of migrated queer subjects?” The theme starts with a discussion on the production of LGBTQ identities within the actor-network that is analysed in this thesis. Subsequently, the analysis is separated into three sections, first the adaption and production of categorization by the Newcomers network at RFSL, and secondly, amongst the individual queer migrants, and lastly, the adaption and pushing of official LGBT identities by the asylum apparatus is portrayed.

Luibhéid (2014), Shakhsari (2014) and Murray (2016) have all documented that state officials, NGOs and queer migrants all take part in the categorization of queer identity. Using Hacking’s model of the looping effect, we can add that theorists, scholars, and students such as myself take part of the categorization apparatus, which also holds agency. In this section it will be demonstrated how categorization made by all the actants in the migration process has unintentional negative effects. When something is categorized, it is named, and thereby it is implicitly decided what enters and what does not enter the category. The theoretical framework of the thesis takes the stand that the category of LGBTQ asylum seekers is a construction. LGBTQ are furthermore categories fraught with contextual, historical and political cultural baggage inserted in the asylum apparatus (Murray, 2016).
The informants in this thesis obtain knowledge about being a trustworthy LGBTQ person and an asylum seeker from RFSL in order to navigate the asylum apparatus and its demands for official categories. Murray (2016) has shown that to be a successful claimant, queer migrants must quickly learn the hegemonic narration of refugees and LGBTQ. Hacking’s (1995) notion of the looping affect in categorization, refers to this narration. The queer migrants have to use a specific narration as a strategy to be successful. When the category LGBTQ asylum seeker is constructed, the ideas around the category start to change, and thereby also the persons of the category (Hacking, 1999). The classification “woman refugee” that Hacking refers to is not inevitable; it is constructed, placed in time and context. Hacking’s (1999) point is, that the women in the category start to think and feel differently about themselves once they have been categorized. LGBTQ asylum seekers follow the same pattern, and queer migrants need to adapt to the category and the ideas around it in order to survive. LGBTQ are relatively new categories in Swedish asylum law, which the asylum apparatus, the queer migrants and RFSL have learned to relate to.

6.4.1. Adaption and categorization at the RFSL Newcomers network
RFSL takes a great part in producing knowledge and narrations around queer migration. One example is the campaign “I am free now” which portrays queer asylum seekers and their struggle to “become free” (Jag är fri.nu, 2016). One of the most important resources that the network provides for its members is legal advice and a social platform where the members can take part in gay life and get a membership for it. One of the most common questions I got as a volunteer when attending the weekly Newcomers meeting was: “When do we get the membership certificate?” The machine that made the membership cards was broken during the time I attended the Newcomers group, which created a not so small amount of nerves amongst the members. Attending the Newcomers meeting in order to get the certificate seemed important for many. The stress surrounding the membership certification speaks for the high demand for official membership within the asylum apparatus. The queer migrants have to learn identities and narrations, which they practice before taking part of the asylum investigation. At the introduction for the new volunteers, a paper was handed out with common questions about what the volunteers in the network needed to know before entering the group. From the fact sheet:

Sometimes LGBT people who are asylum seekers, newly arrived or undocumented do not have access to the knowledge of LGBT issues in the same way as in Sweden (...). It is good that contact persons also can be a link to education when it comes to LGBT issues. (RFSL Newcomers fact sheet: General needs)
Among important information was the statement that volunteers also need to inform and teach the newcomers about LGBTQ identity. Trans educations are especially highlighted as something the volunteers need to speak to the queer migrants about. The fact sheet also mentioned that there exists a lack of knowledge in the Swedish society as well, and that the volunteer has an opportunity to learn from the newcomers, not only the other way around. However, when talking about the LGBTQ knowledge that RFSL volunteers should provide the newcomers with, RFSL take part in an essentialist and Western categorization of sexual identity. Due to difficulties to gain trustworthiness in the asylum system, the RFSL Newcomers network tries to strengthen the possibilities for queer migrants. RFSL Newcomers network provides the members with a possibility to gain membership and a certification stating that they are part of a LGBTQ community. This practice, with a certified LGBTQ membership, is a part of the producing of essentialist ideas of what trustworthy LGBTQ individuals are. With the Newcomers members card as a certification, RFSL produces artefacts that become an important source for proof of LGBTQ status. Being a trustworthy LGBTQ asylum seeker today means having a membership certificate from RFSL Newcomers.

6.4.2. Adaption by the queer migrants
As demonstrated earlier in the thesis, queer migrants are forced to conform to Western narratives of LGBTQ identity when doing a LGBTQ asylum application. Conforming in this context means being “out”, taking part in gay activism and conforming to consumerist gay identity. When talking about forced openness, it has been stressed how the informants, even when they have not wanted to be publicly open, have felt the need to participate in media. The terminology with the letters LGBTQ are also part of the narration and practised among many queer migrants who use them when speaking about their own identity. Rose applied for asylum after her study visa expired. When producing proof for the immigration official responsible for her case she used all contacts possible to strengthen her case:

Rose – before I left the meeting she gave me her email and said ‘if you have anything’. And I said ok I’m going to send you my pictures with my ex and I’m going to send screenshots of my Facebook. Because she asked me if you are in your country would you live openly? And I was of course no! And then she was like if you live here? And I said yes. And then she asked if people knew about me in school (in Sweden) and I said yes, I don’t care. And that’s maybe how she can believe (…) Last week I emailed her, because I participated in a photo project (…) something about LGBT. I told her I’m going to participate and my picture is going to be in Paris, so what does she want more than that? Of course I’m afraid my parents will see it but now I don’t care.
Rose had produced her own evidence of being lesbian through screen shots on social media and through participation in a LGBTQ campaign. Being open in school, showing rainbow colours in social media and supporting gay activism, are all things that Rose used to demonstrate to the decision maker that she belongs to the LGBTQ group. Her membership at Newcomers network and her participation also became her proof. After our interview, she also asked me for a letter stating that she had been a part of my research. I had been very clear that the participation in this study would not affect the asylum case due to the requirements of confidentiality. Still, I did complete the letter she asked for. In Rose’s case I thereby also became involved in the production of proving LGBTQ status.

During the interview with Helge and Peter, we looked at the many documents they had gathered during their process. They had a large document binder with them during the interview. The binder was full of all the applications they had made, and all the decisions from the Migration agency. It was hard to follow all the steps and turns of their asylum process. We started to write a time line with all the turns and changes. Helge had during his many years in the asylum system practised various ways to adapt to the legal situation, and the navigation had almost become a profession. Helge described how he used all possible legal ways within the system to prove that he and his partner had the right to protection and asylum. To reopen a case when a final decision has been made, new evidence or information is needed. In one of Helge and Peter’s applications for hindrances of enforcement, they stated that the Migration agency had to reopen their case because they had not been able to speak about their sexual identity due to inner homophobia.

Helge– because I wrote that I didn’t disclose these facts because of my sexual orientation and my inner homophobia (…). That they had to reopen the case and take part of my sexual orientation.

Internalized homophobia is a concept well documented in queer migration studies, and is also connected to the concept of cultural silence. Helge has adapted this language when speaking about his sexual orientation and inner homophobia. The possibilities to reopen a case because the sexual orientation was not part of the first application, is a common strategy. The way Helge used the terminology indicates an interaction between knowledge production about queer asylum, and the LGBTQ asylum seekers. Using Hacking’s model of the looping effect in categorization, it is possible to argue that the queer newcomers, here exampled by Helge and Rose, start to change their perceptions of themselves. When Hacking (1995; 1999) theorizes what happens in this process of knowledge production, he highlights the
interactions between the categorization and the categorized. His research describes how people understand and construct themselves with the descriptions available. There is a dynamic relation between research on, and construction of, people. This type of interaction is found in the case of LGBTQ asylum. New construction and production of identity are created in the actor network between the queer asylum seeker, the asylum apparatus and RFSL.

6.4.3. Adaption by the asylum apparatus

Murray (2016) describes how the Canadian refugee apparatus performs, acts and takes part in the changes in legislation and in migration patterns. In the Swedish context, the asylum apparatus, through policies and decisions, which can be understood as actants, change, not only individuals’ lives through decisions, but also public opinion on how trustworthy LGBTQ persons are. The asylum apparatus is, as an actant, active in changing public moralities and the perceptions of queer migrants. In this section the adaptation by the asylum apparatus is analysed. The asylum apparatus is here portrayed and analysed through documents, but predominantly from the experiences of the informants of this thesis. Queer migrants are since 2006 a sanctioned social group eligible for asylum in Sweden. This thesis demonstrates how queer migrants have to conform to the category LGBTQ and prove their membership to this “social group” even if there exists no universal trans historical categories of sexual identities (Luibhéid, 2014). As demonstrated in this chapter, both RFSL and queer migrants, take part in the production of LGBTQ categories and identities. Sweden has since 2006 included sexual orientation and gender as ground for asylum. During the ten-year period since the new legislation came into effect, the asylum apparatus has developed and adapted to the new rules. The Migration agency has specific information for LGBTQ asylum seekers on their webpage. At the Migration agency this information is stated:

Threats or violence of a serious nature from your family, the state, or other persons can be grounds for asylum. If legislation, general rules or public opinion entails you being subjected to serious offences due to your sexual orientation – for example fines, severe assaults against your life and health, through being denied education or withheld the right to choose a profession or the right to health care – you can be entitled to asylum. The risk of such offences that can be regarded as persecution owing to you being gay, lesbian, bisexual, or a transgender person can lead to refugee status (Migration agency: Information for gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender persons 2011).

The information at the Migration agency goes hand in hand with UNHCRs information on LGBTQ refugees’ right to protection. The migration agency has adapted their information about LGBTQ asylum in coherence with UNHCR. The adaption has also led to collaboration between RFSL and the Migration agency. The Migration agency hands out information to the
LGBTQ asylum seekers about the existence of support groups such as RFSL Newcomers. When *Rose* had her first interview at the Migration agency, she received a paper about LGBTQ rights that mentioned RFSL, but she never understood the meaning of the letters RFSL:

*Rose* – …they gave us a paper they wrote and inside there was about RFSL. They did not mention it by one sentence. And for me, a person that was new in the city, I had a lot of things going on inside me. I don’t care if it’s RFSL or LGBT if I don’t have a person to talk to (…). I did not know what does RFSL really means.

*Rose*, who at the time of the investigation lived in a small town far from Stockholm, had at one time been at a local LGBTQ meeting. She described how it was, just sitting in a room, discussing politics. When she saw the paper that had the letters RFSL on it, she concluded from her experience that it was nothing for her. Of all the informants, she is the only one that had received information about RFSL through the Migration agency. *Rose* was questioning how the collaboration worked between the Migration agency and RFSL, and why she had not received more information about the support network and the resources that they provide. The Migration agency has received a lot of critique, among others from RFSL, comparing the asylum process for LGBTQ asylum seekers to a lottery.

To deal with the critique, the Migration agency ordered an investigation; a critical study on normative assumptions in the asylum process (Wolf-Wats et al., 2010). The investigation is based on interviews with representatives from the Migration agency, human rights activists and studies of documents. The investigation points at vague definitions and contradictory guidelines. The investigators furthermore consider that these shortcomings reflect a heteronormativity and stereotypical attitudes towards gender and sexuality. The Migration agency has since this critique trained twenty-one LGBTQ experts (Makar, 2013). The LGBTQ trained experts at the Migration agency have been trained with special competence and should advise other immigration officials when handling a LGBTQ asylum application. None of the informants of this study had met any of these experts, but *Helge* and *Peter* had seen the tracks of their work.

An LGBTQ expert had been involved in their case and left a stamp in one of the agency’s decisions. The note stated that a LGBTQ certified official had been consulted in their case. *Peter* and *Helge* described how they had trouble believing that this was serious when the annotation occurred on their decision. *Helge* and *Peter* told, that they were staying in a
detention centre at this time, and had just received an order for deportation. They had filled in a new claim to reopen their case due to new circumstances. Helge said in the interview that the time was six in the morning, and the deportation was about to take place. When a new application is completed, the deportation has to wait until a new decision is made (Migration agency, 2016). Helge and Peter told their experiences in the interview, and showed me their documents. The Migration agency staff had made a handwritten translation of their request, and sent it away to have it decided upon. The decision came quickly, denying the right to reopen the case and thereby allowing the deportation to take place. In our interview, Helge and Peter showed the decision marked with the stamp and notation from the LGBTQ experts.

Helge – yes this is the decision and here they write that the LGBT responsible have read this application. But look here it is 8.45 (in the morning) and I know that they don’t work at this time. And they used it (the LGBT stamp) many times and I know that they use it against LGBT people.

Helge and Peter had an uneasy feeling, knowing that the Migration agency used the LGBTQ expert to facilitate an expulsion of them. After many experiences within the asylum system, Helge had a somewhat disillusioned perspective on their chance for a fair investigation. During their four years in Sweden, he had taken part of many LGBTQ asylum cases when talking to the lesbian and gay people he met at both the migration camps and at detention centres. In our interview, Helge kept coming back to the feeling that the Migration agency bends the law to protect their own decisions.

Helge and Peter expressed that they had encountered arbitrary decisions and experiences during their process. The deportation, that was to take place after the experts were consulted, was cancelled when they were at the airport. They were told that it had to do with the weather conditions, but they told me that the weather was fine that day. Later on, their case was reopened after all. Peter and Helge mention other experiences where they felt that the immigration officials were not honest to them. Helge especially recalls one time when they were separated into different departments in the detention centre. This is the account Helge reproduces in our interview: Peter was severely ill due to his hunger strike, and Helge says that the immigrant officials wanted Helge to convince Peter to start eating again. When he refused, Helge had to change room. Peter’s passport was old, and Helge was going to be sent away earlier. The staff at the detention centre explained that Peter and Helge, because of this, could not stay in the same department. Helge got the explanation that someone else needed the room, and that the detention centre was short of space. When Peter and Helge were
separated, Peter’s health became worse, and he was sent to the hospital. Later on, when Helge tried to take care of Peter’s personal belongings, he found out that Peter’s room was empty and that there was no shortage of space. During their Kafkaesque struggle with, and navigation within the system, they have gained knowledge, and also a feeling that there exists unpredictability in the asylum system:

Helge –For people from Africa, they say yes, we believe that you come from Uganda or Zambia where there is a direct persecution of gays. But, we don’t believe that you are gay. Or if you are gay enough. (...) This is an obvious way in which they bend the law, but in the smaller scale they use a lot of different things. ‘Yes we believe you and we have reports that they don’t give health care (in your country), but it is not in every hospital’. What should I do? I need to go to every hospital in the country to gather proof? Ahhh. All these circumstances made me into a very political person. Because of this I think about political stuff, migration stuff.

The experience of the asylum process and the many meetings and applications has turned Helge and Peter into LGBTQ asylum activists. Helge has developed a cynical relation to the migration apparatus.

The Migration agency has adapted to the language and the letters LGBTQ. In the Migration agency’s information on their webpage, they use the letters LGBTQ. Q stands for queer persons, which means that queers can be seen as belonging to a social group with the right to asylum. Still, there exists a difference in regard to RFSL who officially include intersex persons by using LGBTQI. The adaptation to LGBTQ asylum has resulted in including the fluid term queer, at least on paper, and new folders describing LGBTQ rights in Sweden and specifically educated investigators.

7. Concluding discussion

In this section I will further discuss the thesis’ result in relation to chosen theory and previous research. However, this discussion will start with restating the results of the analysis. Secondly, the interactions between the actors in the actor network will be discussed. Finally, some recommendations and further research suggestions will be addressed.

7.1. Summarizing the findings
The thesis started with a glimpse of the first time I entered the support group RFSL Newcomers. This was in the beginning of February 2016. When writing this summary, four months have passed which I have spent getting to know the support network, the queer
migrants and the challenges and struggles they face. The analysis of this thesis also starts with a presentation of Lola, Rose, Fatima, Jose-Carlo, Osama, Mike, Olof, Carlos, Helge and Peter, their backgrounds and current situations. I want to remind the reader that their process is longer than four months, but still it is not their whole life. Becoming a queer migrant will be a small section of their lives and their identities, which will lose importance after the finalising of the asylum process. Other identities and challenges will be part of their lives, hopefully in Sweden. As Olof, said in our conversation. “I want to live and everybody are fighting a battle in their life and I am too. I want to see what’s next”. This “next” reminds us that this struggle and these identities are contextual and temporal with a coming next.

The present study was designed to examine how power relations related to class, gender and race affect queer migrants’ strategies. Furthermore, the thesis aims to contribute to the sociological debate on categories and construction of identity. The research questions were constructed to focus on three actors – migrants, RFSL and the asylum apparatus. This to explore which mechanisms are organising and pushing the categorization that is at the core of the asylum process. In the analysis, it has been established in which ways the asylum process is challenging for the queer migrants. Gendered aspects of migration form Rose and Fatima’s strategies and their possibilities to be heard in their asylum process. The production of cultural silence, and the importance of resources in terms of class and social capital are revealed when analysing how Mike had not been able to state that he was a queer migrant and access his right to LGBTQ asylum, and when Carlos had been unwisely advised by both lawyers and countrymen. After this section, it has been shown how some of the strategies used by queer migrants and the support network, are produced specifically in relation to the asylum apparatus.

The challenging process of gaining asylum, which demands a high degree of openness, pushed Fatima into participating in media, which created a high risk of persecution for her. The informants’ testimonies demonstrate the politics of visibility merged into the asylum apparatus. Hyper hiding is another strategy that has been found as something produced in relation to the asylum apparatus. The pervasive feeling of always hiding sexual identity, national identity or legal status that the informants report, existed before arriving to Sweden but was also created in the asylum apparatus and is both a response to, and a strategy to challenge, the coercive violence from the nation state.

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In the third section of the analysis, it has been demonstrated how new categorization is produced and policed in a co-production by the queer migrants, RFSL and the asylum apparatus. Thus, RFSL and the queer migrants challenge and struggle with the asylum apparatus. The RFSL Newcomers network provides a platform for the queer migrants in Stockholm to empower themselves in the struggle together with others. The LGBTQ activism performed by the members in the network takes place with the intention of changing the asylum apparatus to a more inclusive system. On the other hand, the network and the newcomers become complicit in the creation of essentialist categories when navigating the asylum apparatus.

7.2. Navigating dynamics of power in the asylum apparatus

Numerous migration scholars (Lewis, 2014; Luibhéid, 2008; Spijkerboer, 2013) have demonstrated that LGBTQ migrants face specific challenges in the asylum process. These challenges are due to the complex task of proving membership of the social group (LGBTQ), and demonstrate a well-founded fear of persecution. Furthermore, the well-founded fear must also be proven linked to the LGBTQ identity. Gröndahl (2012) has demonstrated a discrepancy in the credibility assessment and the law. The contradictions and arbitrary judgments within the Migration agency’s decisions leads to legal uncertainty for the individual asylum seeker (Wolf-Wats et al., 2010). The Swedish situation, described in this thesis, is consistent with international research on queer migration. The thesis has focused on the strategies used by the queer migrants to meet these challenges. In the analysis, it has been argued that the queer Newcomers at RFSL Newcomers relate to, and navigate the Swedish asylum apparatus with distinctive strategies, some that put them in even greater risk of persecution. The queer migrants in this investigation use a range of different strategies including hiding, openness, creating risks and avoiding risks. The asymmetric power relations force queer migrants into conflicting strategies. Privileged visibility (Shuman & Hesford, 2014), hiding and forced visibility (Lewis, 2014) are produced inside the Swedish political asylum process. Visible are those who participate in activism or media to strengthen their asylum case, and those who meet the expectations of what it is to be a queer migrant (Shuman & Bohmer, 2014). Invisible are those who are forced into what I termed hyper hiding; a strategy when queer migrants need to hide their sexuality to family and fellow countrymen, and additionally hide from the authorities to avoid deportation.
The thesis has tried to trouble the narrative of queer migrants as victims in need of a liberation found in the West. However, when focusing on the creation of risk and precarious living conditions, the thesis risks to further victimize queer subjects. Likewise, when analysing gender, sexual identity, race and class in relation to possibilities and strategies in the asylum apparatus, this work also risks re-inscribing these categories and social positions. The categorization and the victimization the thesis has set out to criticize, becomes an unintentional effect even in this study. It is therefore important to keep in mind that the mechanisms of gendered, racialized and classed exclusion described in the thesis should not be understood as individual social positions, but as mechanisms produced globally and reinforced in the asylum apparatus.

When discussing the relation between queer migrants’ strategies and social positions, this thesis argues that power relations related to class, gender and race affect queer migrants’ strategies. The access to economic and social capital is essential when taking part of a presumed Western gay life, which has been proven important for the credibility assessment and the success of the asylum claim (Wolf-Wats et al., 2010; Murray, 2016). Lack of social status and social capital, not having the right networks, not being eloquent or not knowing English are found to possibly establish obstacles for queer migrants in Sweden. The asylum apparatus with its gendered and classed possibilities for asylum, therefore, unintentionally, upholds existing gendered, classed and racialized inequality. This inequality furthermore produces racialized lesbian asylum seekers as less likely to gain asylum.

7.3. Navigating official demands of identity
The thesis has demonstrated that the queer migrants, RFSL and the asylum apparatus all take part in the categorization of migrated queer subjects. All these actors and actants hold agency, and affect and influence each other. Next, the actor networks co-creation of LGBTQ identity and categorization of queer migrants subjects will be discussed. This categorization becomes part of the separation between deserving and undeserving migrants in an underlying migration to liberation discourse. The thesis has, in accordance with Luibhéid (2014), demonstrated how the conflict of essentialism is built into the asylum system. The mechanism of categorization pushes both the need for defining categories, and people’s need to adaption to the categories. The asylum apparatus has to produce essentialist categories and identities, and the queer migrants have to try to fit into them. Following Hacking’s model of
the looping effect, it is notable how interactions happen between the idea of what a LGBTQ asylum seeker is, and the queer migrants who try to fit into the category.

The actants in this thesis may hold different forms of power resources but they all hold agency. In the interactions between the actants and agents, they change and influence each other. Hacking (1999) talks of interactive kinds that change due to the descriptions available. In the analysis, it has been demonstrated how queer migrants change, adapt to and challenge official demands for LGBTQ identity. The interaction between the knowledge production of queer migration and LGBTQ migrated queer subjects, is a strategy used to succeed in the asylum investigation. RFSL Newcomers support network has, through years of working with LGBTQ asylum, gained knowledge on how to support queer migrants in their asylum claims. They support queer migrants to be successful in their claim by preparing the migrants to talk about their vulnerability and LGBT identity, and also to adapt to certain ways of performing LGBTQ identity, which sometimes includes conforming to Western narratives of openness.

Adaption and interaction has to take place in order to succeed in the system. The question as to which extent the interactions form and change the self-understanding of the queer migrated subjects has been posed in the thesis. Even if it is a hard question to answer it is vital to stress the importance of interrogating the interaction between the migrants, the asylum apparatus and civil organisations such as RFSL. RFSL, with activists, lawyers and lobbyists, take an essential part in the interaction. In the thesis, it has been demonstrated how RFSL takes part in producing “certified LGBTQ identity” for queer migrants when producing documents and membership cards for the credibility assessment. Murray (2016) has noted how the productions of artefacts such as letters from support groups contribute to the production of homonationalism. The certified identity that RFSL provide with their membership and letters, could similarly to Murray’s analysis, be argued to uphold homonormative categories that are part of the nation state narrative of homonationalism. Both RFSL and the Migration agency have produced documents, experts and artefacts with delimited essentialist understandings on queer identity, with the intention to include LGBTQ asylum seekers. Nevertheless, these categories become part of the nation state exclusion mechanism. Due to the global refugee apparatus with a gendered, racialized and classed mobility, queer migrants and RFSL are forced into a situation where they become complicit in what Luibhéid (2014) describes as “the production of official identities”.
When navigating the asylum system, queer migrants conform to the demanded official categories and a normative narration in order to be understood by the immigration officials. On the other hand, with a critical realist view, considering people as agents not predetermined by nature, the possibility of changing identity within the asylum apparatus can be seen as an act of empowerment (Sayer, 2000). The fact that the informants’ identities and self-understanding are adapted and changed during the asylum process can also be seen as an essential and conscious act, where queer migrants, as Avrahi (2007) suggests, stop being marginalized subjects and instead become proud actors. During the ethnographical fieldwork for this thesis, I have participated in frequent demonstrations, campaigns and actions where the queer migrants of RFSL Newcomers have taken an active and leading part of the movement. During these occasions, their individual struggles become part of a larger movement, challenging a power system of population control and norms of sexuality. For some of the informants, this process could be described as empowering and as a transitional process going from hiding into proud activism. For them, the emancipatory potential within RFSL Newcomers network allows them to be something they have not been before. Whilst for others, being organized in RFSL Newcomers is only a continuation of an on-going struggle with a heteronormative society, with the new identity as queer migrants.

Thus, the intersectional perspective highlights how the LGBTQ categories, as well as gender, race and class, are categories that permeate each other in a dynamic of power (Cho et al., 2013). These social categories are changing and fluid. The categories are being created by dynamics of power, not only by agency from the queer migrants, but also from official demands for categories (Luibhéid, 2014). However, in the asylum apparatus, LGBTQ identity is not seen as fluid. The identity is investigated and ruled in the asylum investigation. The Q in the letters LGBTQ that the Migration agency has incorporated in their policy is contradictory. The Q should, rather than being a simplistic adaption of the LGBTQ discourse, be a reminder to the Migration agency of the fluid character of sexuality. Queer is never a fixed identity or category that can be measured or assessed in an investigation.

Using ANT, this thesis has focused on the interactions between the actors/actants, and demonstrated how all actors/actants influence each other. It has been highlighted how the asylum apparatus as an actant affects, and changes, how RFSL and the queer migrants can understand themselves and their strategies inside the system. RFSL has a specific aim to change the asylum apparatus through campaigns, education and cooperation with the
Migration agency. However, the present study raises the possibility that the interaction with the asylum apparatus might alter RFSL to become a more homonormative agent who takes part in the nation state homonationalism.

The findings of this study suggest that the asylum apparatus produces gendered, classed and racialized strategies and exposure forcing migrants into adapting to Western official LGBTQ identities. At the same time, the asylum apparatus produces non-credible queer migrants to what Lewis (2013) calls deportable subjects. The queer migrants that not are accepted in the asylum apparatus, or read as trustworthy LGBTQ subjects, are deported. Accordingly, this study finds that some queer migrants are involuntarily entrapped to both hyper visibility and hyper hiding. Instead of liberating, the Swedish asylum apparatus in many cases forces people into precarious living conditions, hyper hiding and exploitation. Swedish homonationalism, with a tale of being a liberating national state who protects lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer refugees from other homophobic and violent states, is hereby challenged. What is portrayed as giving LGBTQ people rights is in reality for many a process where they are deprived of basic human rights.

7.4. **Recommendations and further research**

Overall, the thesis highlights the need for secure living conditions for queer migrants, and secure individual examination of the asylum claim. The investigation indicates a need to further examine the process of asylum for queer migrants in relation to intersectionality. It could be meaningful for the Migration agency to direct attention to the production of cultural silence in the asylum process. Furthermore, attentiveness towards gendered risk and the challenging process of revers covering during the asylum investigation, would be of great significance. For the civil societies’ part, it would be of importance to stress that asylum policies produced through the nation-state will never be the solution to the violence that faces LGBTQ migrants (White, 2014). Consequently, a real intersectional, critical, queer agenda needs to advocate for the removal of all borders. This thesis has highlighted various questions in need of further investigation. Ethnographical studies that examine the actual asylum investigation would be especially vital for further research.
8. References


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