FACULTY OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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A qualitative study about how trajectories of sexual identity, legal migration procedure and integration among male homosexual asylum seekers are intertwined during the flight

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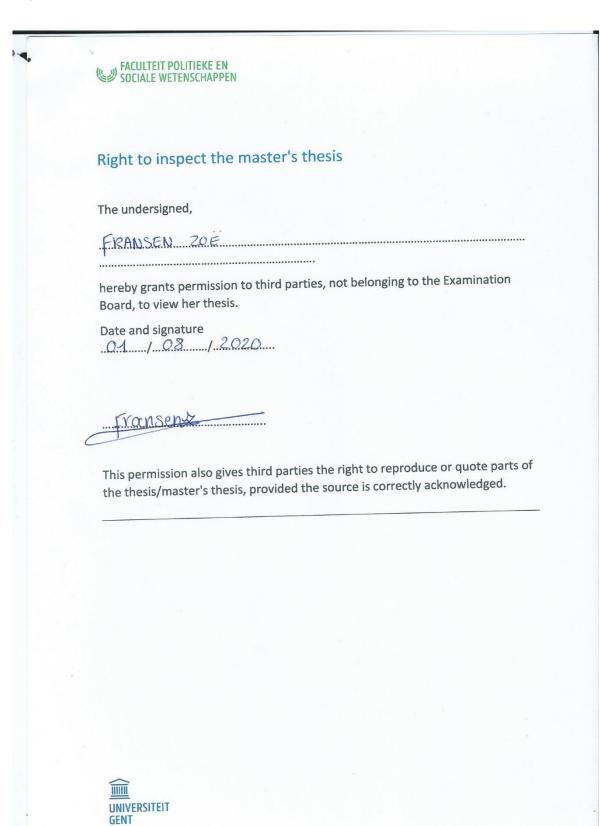Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Bart Van de Putte

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Preamble

In this preamble I will describe how this qualitative research was infected by the measurements that were taken due to the Covid-19-crisis. This preamble was approved in consultation between the student and the promotor.

This research contains a qualitative approach. I had already done ten interviews and two observations before the lockdown. It was planned to continue fieldwork observations during the months of March, April and May 2020. Simultaneously, more in-depth interviews would be conducted, reaching respondents via participation in meetings of Rainbow House.

A first consequence for my dissertation was that I could not do 'fieldwork light' anymore since Rainbow House was not allowed to organize meetings. Via this way I could also not promote my research and reach new asylum seekers/refugees.

Second, my strategy to reach respondents changed. My main strategy became the snowballing-effect. After I had waited a couple of weeks, I decided to do interviews online. I explained the situation and my decision to the participants. If they were still hesitant, I postponed the interview till after the lockdown.

Third, I was forced to conduct online interviews. Although I prepared myself in the best possible way, the quality of the interviews can be affected. I was not able to respond in the same way to unexpected situations. For example, a respondent started crying: I offered to take a break, but the fact that the interview was online, caused limitations anyway in the way I could comfort the person.

Last, I anticipated on the situation and started reaching social assistants. This decision was theoretically relevant, but also pragmatic. Reaching social assistants and doing online interviews with them, seemed easier and less uncomfortable (in comparison with LGB-asylum seekers/refugees who have to talk about traumas). Finally, I only interviewed one social assistant because I found enough asylum seekers/refugees.

Signature, student

Preface

My interest in migration, integration and social participation made me decide to study Sociology. During my study trajectory, however, I realized that I am also passionate about the application of LGBTQ-rights and discrimination of the LGBTQ-community. These concerns inspired me to do a two-year long study about homosexual asylum seekers for my bachelor test and master dissertation.

Doing a research about such a specific group that is often forgotten, was not easy. For this reason, I would like to thank some people who made this research possible.

First of all, I would like to thank all the participants. Acknowledging how difficult it must have been to talk about the flight, I am grateful that you wanted to share your story with me. Thank you for believing in my research and addressing your social network.

I also would like to thank Rainbow House and Fedasil: without your help to promote my research and giving me the chance to observe the meetings, this dissertation would not have been possible.

Third, I would like to thank professor Bart Van de Putte. Thank you for your dedication, your belief in this research and your belief in my capacities. Thank you for always being critical and for your constructive feedback.

Fourth, a word of appreciation for my parents and my sister: thank you for being supportive, thank you for encouraging me and thank you for being optimistic (especially in times of Corona).

To all my friends in Sociology: thank you for listening to my insecurities and offering me your sociological insights and personal advise. A special 'thank you' for Sien, for helping me with the translation of the Spanish questionnaire.

To all my other friends: thank you for hanging out with me to clear my mind. An extra 'thank you' to Manon, who helped me to improve my English skills: thank you for your feedback.

Table of Content

1.Abstract

1.1. English Version

Migration studies have noted the underlying narratives, expectations and paradoxes in the asylum requests of LGB-asylum seekers. Sexuality scholars have noted the connection between social support and the self-acceptance processes of coming out and coming in. Integration theories show how the integration trajectory depends on both individual and situational factors. However, these trajectories are discussed separately. As the normative context for LGB-asylum seekers constantly changes during their flight, little research has documented how these three trajectories of sexual identity, legal migration procedure and integration among LGB-applicants are connected. In-depth interviews were therefore conducted with ten male homosexual asylum seekers and five experts. Also, two observations in LGB-associations were done. Findings suggest that there is a constant suppressed desire during the flight. The flight is characterized by a sexual conformity pressure which demonstrates the contradictory expectations about how to express the sexuality throughout different phases of the flight. Three agencies were identified to cope with these expectations: assimilation, marginalization or a middle-way as the largest group. Coming in by significant others, coming into a safe micro-environment and coming into different normative environments were referred to as types of resources to help evolving in this dynamic process.

1.2. Dutch Version

Migratiestudies hebben onderliggende narratieven, verwachtingen en paradoxen aangeduid in de asielaanvragen van LGB-asielzoekers. Ten tweede hebben seksualiteitsonderzoeken het verband tussen sociale steun en zelfaanvaardingsprocessen van coming out en coming in aangetoond. Ten derde hebben integratietheorieën bewezen hoe het integratietraject bepaald wordt door zowel individuele als situationele factoren. Deze processen worden echter afzonderlijk besproken. De normatieve context verandert voortdurend voor LGB-asielzoekers doorheen de vlucht. Weinig onderzoek rapporteerde over de manier waarop drie trajecten over seksuele identiteit, legale migratieprocedure en integratie verbonden zijn. Diepte-interviews werden daarom afgenomen van tien mannelijke homoseksuele asielzoekers en vijf experten. Er werden ook twee observaties in LGB-organisaties uitgevoerd. Resultaten tonen aan dat er een voortdurend verdrongen verlangen is doorheen de vlucht. De vlucht wordt gekenmerkt door een seksuele conformiteitsdruk die de contradictorische verwachtingen aantoont hoe de seksualiteit uitgedrukt moet worden doorheen verschillende fasen van de vlucht. Drie agencies werden geïdentificeerd om om te gaan met deze verwachtingen: assimilatie, marginalisatie en een tussenweg als de grootste groep. Coming in door significant others, coming in in een micro-omgeving en coming in in een verschillende normatieve omgeving werden aangeduid als verschillende hulpresources om te evolueren in dit dynamisch proces.

2. Introduction

Migration as a consequence of the sexual orientation has been made legally possible (Howe, 2007). It was argued that people not only flee because of economic motives. Lesbian-gay-bisexual-asylum seekers (LGB-asylum seekers) are people who have fled because of the sexual orientation. It is stated that sexual migration happens when the reason of a person to flee, is substantiated when there is a level of hope to improve the affective, sexual and/or relational life (Howe, 2007). Protection for LGB-asylum seekers still seems to be necessary since Amnesty International (2018) reported that 73 countries consider homosexual behavior as a crime. In most countries, imprisonment is given. In five countries, homosexual and bisexual persons receive the death penalty (Le Déroff & Jansen, 2014).

Literature about sexual identity trajectories (Herdt, 2004; Gagnon & Parker, 1995; Decena, 2008; Acosta, 2013) shows that there are cross-cultural differences in the way someone's sexual identity is expressed. This trajectory is often described as a Western phenomenon (Herdt, 2004; Gagnon & Parker, 1995). Publicly expressing this identity and recognizing the own homosexual feelings (Dewaele, 2010) -described as doing a *'coming out'-* as well as seeking contact with other LGB-people (Poelman, 2011) -which is called *'a coming in'-*, are central expectations in Western countries. Research (Decena, 2008; Acosta, 2013) always points out the importance of coming out and the fact that this is a Western expectation, but literature lacks a detailed insight about the meaning and the way LGB-asylum seekers in particular deal with sexual identity trajectories (Poelman, 2011). Integration strategies are also not applied on this group. Instead, traditional research about LGB-asylum seekers focuses on the downsides of the juridical migration trajectory (Detrie & Lease, 2000; Fobear, 2015).

To gain more insight into these different trajectories, this research will put them into a new perspective. I plead for a multi-contextual approach to how the sexual identity trajectory, the juridical migration trajectory and the integration trajectory are connected. The trajectories are discussed separately, while this study wants to understand how these processes are connected. It is expected that LGB-asylum seekers need to create a specific agency since they can be portrayed as a double minority role, as being an asylum seeker and an LGB-person at the same time (Yip, 2004). It is convenient to handle this emancipation motive because LGB-asylum seekers are forced to succeed these trajectories since they want to be recognized as a refugee. Therefore, different contexts will be discussed, such as the stay in a reception center for asylum seekers, but also the affiliation with an LGB-association. I will analyze observations in Rainbow House, the most important LGB-association for asylum seekers, and in-depth interviews with male homosexual asylum

seekers/refugees and experts in this domain. By the use of a biographical and chronological interview technique and by asking specific sub-questions, the three trajectories will be clarified.

The main societal proposition is that I want to demonstrate that LGB-asylum seekers need to deal with different contexts and people. Recognizing the importance of these different contexts could change the policy perspective about how to deal with LGB-asylum seekers during the juridical migration procedure and the period of reception in a center. Inglehart (1997) claims that there is an important relationship between public attitudes concerning homosexuality and changes in the court system and public policy. However, it could also be claimed that changes in the court system and public policy for LGB-asylum seekers, could change the experience of the complete flight and the way homosexuality needs to be expressed.

To answer these questions, the dissertation starts with the framework of the context of this research. In chapter three, I elaborate on asylum requests based on sexual migration. I discuss international definitions as well as the Belgian context. This is followed by a literature review to describe the theoretical framework. Since three trajectories will be investigated, the theoretical framework is threefold. First, literature about sexual identity for LGB-people in general is elucidated. Second, the legal migration procedure is discussed with special attention for international research and specific downsides and characteristics of the Belgian system. Third, integration strategies are deliberated. As a sixth chapter, the research questions will be further explicated. Seventh, the methodology will be explained, whereby the democratic interview approach is discussed. After this, the results will be summarized. I claim that LGB-asylum seekers develop an agency throughout these trajectories to deal with the sexual conformity pressure, which is dominant in the home country and in Belgium. Recommendations for different institutions who deal with LGB-asylum seekers and suggestions for future research, will be elucidated in the discussion. Last, the different insights will be enumerated in the conclusion.

3. Sexual Migration

3.1. International Definitions

Immigration is considered as the international movement of people from one country to another (Agustin, 2007). Voluntary migration means people transfer because of personal desires (Agustin, 2007). They believe that there are specific advantages when they choose for migration. Forced migration, however, means people are compelled to leave their country due to cultural, religious, structural, military and political factors. Migration is therefore often considered as a whole of push and pull factors (Tolnay & Beck, 1990). Push factors could force the individual to migrate and to move away from particular circumstances. They can be economic factors, but also environmental, physical, social or cultural factors, such as conflict, discrimination and poverty. Pull factors, on the other hand, are based on the desire to enjoy a better life. They are inspired by economic opportunities, less discrimination, the presence of a local network of family or better living conditions in general.

The distinction between the concept *'refugee'* and *'asylum seeker'* is then essential (Cavaria, 2019). According to the Convention of Geneva of 1951 (Andrew-Robinson, Khan & Vidal-Ortiz, 2018), each individual, regardless of the race, sex, nationality, religion and other protective classes, has the right to live in freedom and in safety. A refugee is someone who is protected, based on this convention. This person can therefore not being send back to the country of origin without a decent reason. By contrast, an asylum seeker is someone who is seeking and asking for protection, but who did not receive this protection yet. However, the Convention was expanded (Andrew-Robinson, Khan & Vidal-Otiz, 2018) since the first discourse expects that all asylum seekers/refugees are heterosexual (Fobear, 2015). Sexual orientation and gender identity were eventually added. The term sexual migration applies to asylum seekers by which the migration process depends on prosecution based on the sexuality (Carillo, 2004; Ascencio & Acosta, 2009).

3.2. Belgian Context

This research focuses on the Belgian context, which was not often discussed yet, excluding the research of Jansen and Spijkerboer (2011) and Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen (2013). In the Belgian asylum procedure, asylum seekers need to register by the Foreign Affairs Service to submit a request (Fedasil, 2020). This service passes on the file to the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGVS). The CGVS calls the asylum seeker for a questioning. For LGB-people, this research is done by a specialized *'Gender Cell'* since 2005 (CGVS, 2005). Applicants have to declare why they cannot go back

to the home country (Andrew-Robinson, Khan & Vidal-Ortiz, 2018). The Convention of Geneva distinguishes two crucial elements. First, the asylum authorities determine whether the reason to flee is trustworthy. When this is the case, a check-up about the rightness of the fear, based on information about the home country, follows (Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, 2013). In other words: the task of the Belgian authorities is to determine the credibility of the story (Cavaria, 2019; Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, 2013). In the Belgian asylum law there are three possible outcomes: being recognized as a refugee, getting subsidiary protection or being rejected (CVGS, 2015).

Since the foundation of the Gender Cell, there is more attention for asylum requests based on sexual orientation and gender identity as a motive. For example, statistics are provided. The numbers represented in table 1, give an indication about the annual amount of asylum requests based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity in Belgium. These numbers also contain the numbers of transgender-asylum seekers. The data shows that 3,30% of the asylum files are LGBT-files since 2009. This is a significant part of the protection applicants. Another noticeable element is the degree of protection: the number of files for which the refugee status or subsidiary protection was acknowledged in comparison with the total files where a final decision was made (CGVS, 2015). Numbers of 2009 show that the general degree of protection was 24%, in comparison with 34% for files based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity. These vulnerable profiles were thus better protected than the average applicants. However, this trend has conversed during time. It is unclear how this changing proportion can be explained. Nevertheless, I conclude that one out of three asylum seekers get a positive advise and are able to get through the legal migration procedure (De Vos & Motmans, 2017).

Either way, we need to be careful with the interpretation of these statistics. After all, there are several indications that the numbers are underrepresented because they only show the number of people who ask asylum for this specific motive (De Vos & Motmans, 2017). In addition, there are people who do not at all ask for asylum and are consequently not included in the statistics (Jansen & Motmans, 2017; Spijkerboer, 2013). Last, a difference can be noticed in the top-3 countries of origin for LGBT-applicants and non-LGBT-applicants. Senegal, Cameroun and Guinee belong to the top-3 countries of origin for LGBT-asylum seekers (CGVS, 2020). In these countries, homosexuality is legally penalized (Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, 2013). In contrary, Middle-East countries where a war is going on (Afghanistan, Syria and Palestine) represent the top-3 countries of origin for all applicants (CGVS, 2020).

Table 1: number of asylum files with an LGBT-motive treated by the CGVS per year

Year	Number of asylum files (all reasons)	Number of asylum files with LGBT-motive	Proportion of LGBT-files to all asylum files (%)	Degree of protection for LGBT-files (%)	Degree of protection for all files (%)
2009	22.954	375	1,6	33,9	24,3
2010	26.559	526	2,0	29,1	21,4
2011	32.271	821	2,5	29,8	23,5
2012	28.351	1.054	3,7	21,3	22,5
2013	21.222	1.200	5,6	20,8	28,1
2014	22.848	983	5,3	30,0	37,7
2015	44.760	703	4,2	33,9	52,7
2016	18.710	678	3,1	37,2	57,7
2017	19.688	701	3,4	37,8	50,7
2018	23.434	565	3,4	44,4	49,1
2019	27.742	533	1,9	/ *	/ *
Mean	26.230	740	3,3	31,8	36,8

Source: Annual reports CGVS 2009-2019 and contact via e-mail with CGVS.

*: No numbers found.

4. Theoretical Framework

4.1. Sexual Identity

4.1.1. Coming Out

Sexual identity is described as a complex phenomenon (Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin, 1953). According to Western theories (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009; Brickell, 2009; Dunphy, 2000), social scientists need to focus on the influence of the society on the acceptance of sexuality. Cultural and social situations would regulate the way sexuality is expressed, the way people deal with this and whether this sexual identity needs to be suppressed (Dunphy, 2000). After all, the exploration of the sexual preference is not authorized in every society (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009; Dunphy, 2000). Some researchers claim it is important to take into account the level of self-acceptance of a person's sexual orientation, as well as potential difficulties and obstacles (Dunphy, 2000; Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin, 1953). It is assumed cultural situations strongly decide the level of acceptance of homosexuality. The self-acceptance and the treatment by others are determined by this.

Classical sexual identity theories are therefore oriented towards the importance of coming out (Poelman, 2011). Doing a *'coming out'* is described as a crucial concept of the acceptance process of the sexual identity (Dewaele, 2010). A coming out per definition means *'a process of the recognition of the own homosexual feelings and publicly expressing this'* (Dewaele, 2010, p.1136). Vincke and Stevens (1999) describe this process by making a distinction between four phases: acknowledgment of the first homosexual feelings, self-identification as an LGB-person, expressing the LGB-identity and starting a first relationship. Furthermore, a coming out can be done explicitly. Hereby it is considered as a linguistic act. However, a coming out can also be done implicitly, by using cultural symbols and signs, such as a particular clothing style or hanging out the rainbow flag. Further on, people can be in the closet in a direct way, aiming that they identify themselves as homosexual but they do not want to share this with others and they do not want to show this publicly (Williams, 2006). Nonetheless, people can also be in the closet in an indirect way. This means that they do not identify and describe themselves as homosexual, although they have sex with someone of the same gender.

Literature also found that this process proceeds differently for men and women (Poelman, 2011; Vincke & Stevens, 1999; Vincke, Dewaele, Van den Berghe & Cox, 2006). The physical attraction of a person with the same sex, happens on a younger age for men. At the age of 19, 69% of male LGB-people have acknowledged

LGB-feelings, in comparison with 53% of female LGB-people. Self-identification is also further developed for men, compared to women (65% versus 50%). However, while looking at the process of revealing the identity to others, a different pattern is seen (Poelman,2011). Men relatively wait longer before they inform others in comparison with women. Moreover, a coming out happens selectively (Vincke et al., 2006). Mothers are informed in 82% of the cases, for siblings this number is 77% and for fathers 76%. In non-family contexts, people are more selective: plus/minus 20% does not say anything at work about the sexual orientation.

Although researchers (Dewaele, 2010; Vincke & Stevens, 1999) take into account the negative reactions a coming out can provoke, most researchers stress the importance of the positive long term impact (Guittar, 2013). It is merely described as a liberating experience. First, the importance of self-disclosure is essential. Second, this is important for the mental well-being. Last, coming out can be a way of public engagement. The underlying idea is thus that doing a coming out is beneficial for the self-image (Savin-Williams, 1989; Rosaria et al., 2001). Contrarily, Yip (2004) emphasizes the additional barriers for LGB-people with an ethnic-cultural background to do a coming out. The importance of family relationships, marriage, sexual reproduction, the position as a double minority group (ethnic/religious and sexual orientation) and the socio-economic neglection is proven. The research found that when LGB-people with an ethnic-cultural background do a coming out, this mainly happens with regard to younger family members. Based on the literature, it can thus be concluded that doing a coming out is still considered as the authentic way to be perceived as an LGB-person in the Western society (Decena 2008; Acosta 2013).

4.1.2. Social Support & Coming In
4.1.2.1. The Importance of Social Support

Several Western researchers indicate that social support is crucial for all LGB-people (Detrie & Lease, 2000; Bregman, Malik, Page, Makynen & Lindahl, 2012). A lot of LGB-people experience stress because of their sexual identity. It is proven that this group has more psychological complaints because they belong to a minority group and feel socially isolated and not accepted (Gover, 1994). Numbers of 2012 (Mutanski & Liu) show that 33% till 45% of the LGB-community has had suicidal thoughts. LGB-people commit significantly more suicide than heterosexual people. Furthermore, 45% of the LGB-people intentionally avoid specific situations out of fear and discrimination.

A social network is therefore essential for the acceptance trajectory of the sexual identity (Detrie & Lease, 2000; Bregman et al., 2012). Significant others are described by Mead (Jakoby, 2015) as people who play an important role in the self-definition and reality maintenance. According to Berger and Luckmann (1967, p. 170) significant others are *'important for the ongoing confirmation of that crucial element of reality, we call identity'.* In other words: significant others are individuals who are most important in the development of the self, such as parents, friends and teachers. From a sociological point of view, they are persons with a strong influence on an individual's self-concept. The role of friends could even be more important in the case family does not except the homosexuality. Nevertheless, family support remains crucial. Social support could particularly be important during the specific process of the coming out (Detrie & Lease, 2000) because research shows that this is the phase LGB-people feel most likely isolated and different. Second, literature describes this phase (Bregman et al., 2012) as crucial for the further acceptance of the own sexuality.

4.1.2.2. Coming into What?

Coming in is a relatively new concept (Poelman, 2011) and can be interpreted as a specific way of gaining social support. A coming in can per definition be described as *'entering the LGBT-community'* and *'meeting other LGBT-people'* (Poelman, 2011). Doing a coming in means that LGB-people develop activities in a place with an LGBT-culture (Rosario, Hunter, Magen, Gwadz & Smith, 2001) as a way to accept the sexual identity. Rosario and his colleagues (Rosario et al. 2001) define a coming in as affecting LGB-contacts, participating to LGB-activities and feeling comfortable that other people know the sexual orientation. The latter aspect stresses the fact that a coming in also includes aspects of identity formation and identity integration.

Theoretically, an evolution between the relation of coming out and coming in is seen (Poelman, 2011). First, coming out and coming in were considered as demarcated acts by time and space. This implies that activities end when this terminus is reached (Plummer, 1975; Cass, 1984; Troiden, 1988). This is called the development paradigm, whereby the identity development has a begin and end phase. However, from a symbolic-interactionist perspective (Plummer, 1975), the sexual identity process of 'becoming homosexual' takes place within social interaction. Coming out and coming in do not necessarily happen in a definite sequence (Poelman, 2011). Feelings and desires, sexual intercourse with people of the same gender, self-identification as gay and an explicit coming out, can take place in every supposable order or can stand apart.

Additionally, coming in is mostly seen from a well-being perspective (Poelman, 2011). Entering the LGB-community is essential (Detrie & Lease, 2000; Bregman et al., 2012) since contact with other LGB-people would reduce negative feelings of fear. Also, it would not be the self-disclosure per se, but the positive reactions of the (micro-) environment who have a protective effect (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004). Another research (Valentine and Skelton, 2003) pursued the role of a coming in during the process of a coming out. It found that LGB-people have more need for an LGB-network during the recognition process of the sexual identity. Diverse LGB-support groups would be essential since they present information and advice about LGB-related issues. Especially LGB-people who grew up in a culture with classical gender role types, benefit from this.

Yet, different barriers make the coming in process delicate (Poelman, 2011) since people sometimes want to avoid a coming out or they only want to do it partially. This requires a certain *'visibility management'* (Poelman, 2011). This is a way to anticipate on and to deal with potential prejudices and discrimination. Visibility management is used as a coping mechanism to deal with a specific stressor. Although, hiding the sexual orientation increases anxiety and paranoia, and results in lower self-esteem, a decreased visibility leads to less discrimination and prejudices. Poelman (2011) categorizes two types of visibility management. First, creating a geographic distance from the community that causes stress, matters. People want to be located in a place with minimal social control. However, this implies that it needs to be possible to move to another cultural environment. Second, people are also selective in the channels which are used. Entering the community can also happen virtually, for example via chats or other online platforms. Last, little research focuses on the coming in process of LGB-people with an ethnic-cultural background, except for the American research of Rosaria et al (2001). They conclude that doing a coming in is mostly related with self-identification. Ethnicity as a barrier, would be less important.

4.2. Legal Migration Procedure

4.2.1. Government as a Power Institution: Top-Down Approach

It can be argued that governments exert a lot of power since they decide whether an asylum seeker can be recognized as an LGB-refugee or not (Brickell, 2009). The problem is that the government needs to choose between accepting all the LGB-asylum seekers or controlling them. The used method of storytelling is not only a so-called surpassed vision of the government towards homosexuality (Andrew-Robinson, Khan & Vidal-Ortiz, 2018), it is also an attempt to drain migration and to prevent misuse of the court system in the context of getting a residence permit. Storytelling is regarded as a necessary criterium to distinguish real homosexual asylum seekers from non-homosexuals (Fobear, 2015). Access to a life in the host country is granted through telling their personal story to the authorities. It serves as a vital resource for asylum seekers to be recognized as a refugee. It can also serve as a mechanism to speak about social injustice. In other words: storytelling is the basis for the outcome of the further process (Andrew-Robinson, Khan & Vidal-Ortiz, 2018).

The problem of this top-down approach, however, is that the application of sexual rights is not universal (Andrew-Robinson, Khan & Vidal-Ortiz, 2018). Variation in the utilized techniques that may minimize the level of re-traumatization and focus on stereotypical questions, can be seen. Given the low number of LGB-asylum seekers in some regions, national authorities appear to lack expertise in dealing with such claims. This has negative consequences for the mental health. Common diagnoses for LGBT-asylum seekers are depression, anxiety disorders, panic disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder. Repeatedly re-telling a history can be traumatizing (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2017). A report of the European Union (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2017) concluded that Sweden focuses the most on specific guidelines for the protection of LGB-asylum seekers to minimize further traumatization, compared to other European countries.

4.2.2. The Importance of Openness and Visibility

According to LGB-asylum seekers and refugees, the focus on visibility and openness of someone's sexual orientation is too strong (McGhee, 2000, 2001, 2003; Murray, 2014; Vogler, 2016). Research found that the expected openness and visibility is in contrast to sexuality that is manifested in another, less noticeable way (Jivraj & de Jong, 2011). They stress an essential contradiction whereby the sexuality of LGB-asylum seekers/refugees was not publicly shown in the country of origin, which makes it difficult to do this

in the new host country (Millbank, 1995). It would be complicated for LGB-asylum seekers/refugees to translate their fears and experiences to a clear and credible story which is believed by the governmental authorities. It is claimed that Western societies, view homosexuals as a specific group (Millbank 1995). LGB-asylum seekers/refugees need to stress the common characteristics of the claimed group.

A first characteristic would be that all LGB-asylum seekers are '*practicing homosexuals*' (Laviolette, 2007; Masoumi, 2016; McGhee, 2000, 2001, 2003). This implicates that they have to be sexually active to prove their sexual orientation (Luker, 2015). However, this is difficult because when they were too open about their sexual preference in the native country, it is believed that the asylum seeker is not in danger. Alternatively, when the asylum seeker was too closed about the sexual orientation in the country of origin, the Western authorities do not believe the person is homosexually oriented. In that case too, the chance to be recognized as a refugee gets smaller. Contrarily, Jansen and Spijkerboer (2011) found that the discretion principle is still observed in some countries, including Belgium. This principle expects that LGBT-people who are in the closet, still can live a good life in homophobic countries, as long as they are discrete about their sexual preferences (Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2011).

 Another article (Lewis, 2013) refers to the term '*perceived homosexuality*'. This means it is assumed from LGB-asylum seekers that they need to prove their sexual orientation by showing a certain level of social visibility (Vogler, 2016). Research from Belgium and the Netherlands (Jansen & Spijkerboer 2011; Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, 2013) demonstrates how LGB-asylum seekers have to answer intimidate questions about their sex-life, the number of sex partners, favorite sexual position and how they have to prove they feel an irresistible urge to have sex with someone of the same gender. Bisexual people or people who do not describe this stereotype, have more difficulties to convince the authorities. Furthermore, LGB-asylum seekers who have children or who had heterosexual relationships in the past, are less likely to get a refugee status. The marital or parental status of the applicants can already be sufficient to deny refugee protection (Refugee Studies Center, 2013).

This implies that the expression of homosexuality is different in Western societies compared to non-Western societies (Carillo & Fontdevilla, 2014). The phenomenon of a coming out do not has a universal definition (Carillo & Fontdevilla, 2014). Even in Western societies people interpret it differently (Hutson, 2010). Researchers argue that there is diversity in the way people understand, experience and practice their sexual orientation (Le Déroff & Jansen, 2014). This depends on the country of origin of that person, the

gender, culture, religion, family background and socialization. Some lesbian women for example (Hutson, 2010), do not do a coming out by appearance -for example, by dressing in an identifiable way-, but by kissing in public or by appearing spontaneously with a girlfriend. Additionally, in several black communities (Icard, 2008), there are other difficulties of doing a coming out. One article (Icard, 2008) shows that black LGB-people have conflicting social identities. The discussion points out how racism in the LGBT-community and the anti-homosexual attitudes of the black community, may result in black LGB-people who develop weak coping mechanisms and poor self-concepts about sex roles and racial stereotypes.

4.3. Integration Strategies

All humans have some likelihood of adopting or reacting to aspects of new cultures they encounter (Schwartz & Zamboanga, 2008). Acculturation comprehends *'those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures, come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups'* (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936, p. 149). Berry (Schwartz & Zamboanga, 2008) describes four acculturation strategies people can apply. First, people are *integrated* when they adjusted themselves to the new culture, but at the same time preserved the own cultural beliefs. Second, when the own culture is preserved but there is no adjustment to the new culture, he talks about *segregation*. *Assimilation* is a third strategy, which implies adjustment to the new culture but no preservation of the cultural beliefs. Fourth, a person can also *marginalize* his- or herself when there is no adjustment to the new culture as well as no preservations of the cultural beliefs.

Bhugra (2004) describes the impact of the circumstances of the flight, to the mental health aspect of integration. He makes a distinction between vulnerability and resilience to describe the context of someone's flight. The level of vulnerability is determined by the personality, whether it was a forced migration and if the person has been persecuted, but also whether there is a culture shock and a culture conflict. Resilience depends for example on the extent the flight was prepared, the level of social support and socio-economic advantages. Additionally, he identifies three different stages of the flight, namely the pre-migration phase, the migration phase and the post-migration phase. It is argued that the different characteristics of a person's vulnerability and resilience, in the different phases of the flight, have an impact on the integration outcome. Assimilation or alienation are the two possible acculturation strategies. As regards, he uses the definition of Berry (Schwartz & Zamboanga, 2008) to describe the concept of assimilation. Alienation, however, results in a mental disorder because the person would have a low self-esteem (Bhugra, 2004).

However, both authors look at this socialization process from a considerable psychological perspective since there is an excessive focus on attitudes, motivations, personalities and preferences of minority groups (Barnett, Broom, Siegel, Vogt & Watson, 1954; Schwartz & Zamboanga, 2008). Later studies show that situational factors are more important in acculturation processes than internal attributes (Brewer & Seelye, 1970). Such findings are easily overlooked by acculturation researchers who focus on internal features. They bias themselves to seek causal explanations in the acculturating personalities, rather than the acculturation

situations (Boski & Rudmin, 1989). Especially for LGB-asylum seekers and refugees this critique is interesting since they want to move from a homophobic environment to an LGB-friendly environment (Cavaria, 2019). It is assumed that they mainly flee because they want to live in a new normative environment whereby contextual circumstances of this socialization process are essential.

The research of Bassetti (2018) is therefore interesting since she researched the integration process of Italian transgender-refugees by looking at the context of the employment market. Allen (2009) argues that when institutional support for migrants is absent, many refugees adopt integration mechanisms commonly used by economic migrants. A common path towards employment is then to first enter the informal economy: a market that relies heavily on someone's social network (OECD, 2014). However, it was found that transgender-refugees often lack social capital, being discriminated by their own migrant community (Bassetti, 2018). The combination of their nationality or ethnicity, causes common cases of discrimination at the work place. Transgender-refugees therefore have to dedicate themselves to sex work, being unable to find any other occupation. This third theory shows that the integration process of transgender-refugees mainly relies on the level of LGBT-friendliness of the host country. The research illustrates that both refugee-specific challenges and challenges based on the gender identity, play crucial roles in hindering their integration (Bassetti, 2018).

5. Research Questions

The aim of this research is to look how three essential trajectories (sexual identity process, legal migration process and integration process), LGB-asylum seekers need to cope with mandatorily, are connected during the flight. The flight is therefore not solely seen as the physical movement from the home country to Belgium. It also concerns the waiting time during the juridical migration process and the life in a reception center for asylum seekers. As a first sub-question, the research needs to clarify the contradiction whereby LGB-asylum seekers are open about the sexual identity by doing a coming out during the legal migration procedure at the one hand, but also experience problems with being open about the sexual identity in general since they are traumatized and since the coming out would be a Western phenomenon, at the other hand. Literature (Carillo & Fontdevilla, 2014; Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, 2013) always stresses this contradiction, but does not explain how asylum seekers are yet able to deal with this. As a second sub-question, this dissertation will research how Belgian LGB-asylum seekers create a specific agency to cope with these three trajectories.

6. Data & Method

6.1. Why Qualitative Research?

A qualitative research is selected because of the nature of the research questions and the population. First, qualitative research is convenient for interpretive research that explores micro-social processes, personal experiences and meaning-giving in a specific context (Silverman, 2000), such as an immigration experience. Second, it is an optimal way to study sensitive topics, such as when research is concerned with social norms and where it interferes the personal sphere (Renzetti & Lee, 1993), as is the case in my research. Third, qualitative research is better to study populations that are potentially suspicious of the researcher and the research project -in my case because I am an ethnic outsider and above all because I am not an asylum seeker/refugee- because it helps to establish trust between the participants and the researcher (Mortelmans, 2013). Fourth, qualitative research is better for exploring topics that are relatively under-researched as if it is more flexible, compared to quantitative research (Mortelmans, 2013). It establishes a strong link between empirical results and theory because of the repetitive approach in which data and theory are constantly linked to each other, which is again the case in my dissertation.

6.2. Studying Belgian LGB-Asylum Seekers: The Sample

The dissertation focuses on Belgian LGB-asylum seekers. Therefore, LGB-asylum seekers and refugees are the first target population. First, this group is seen as people who can maximally be in Belgium for five years. It is expected that people who are for a longer period in Belgium cannot talk in detail about the flight anymore. This number is based on research about the memory of LGB-asylum seekers that represents a reluctance to disclose trauma related memories (Graham, Herlihy & Brewin, 2014). Second, the sample includes asylum seekers/refugees who stay/stayed in a Flemish, Walloon or Brussels reception center because migration procedures differ in other countries. Third, people who did not stay in a reception center are also taken into account.

Fourth, I decided to include variation in the phase of the migration process the asylum seeker/refugee was in. Before the asylum seeker/refugee participated with the research, I had a short conversation with him to have an image about his story. Fifth, LGB-people who lived in a country where it is difficult to do a coming out and to publicly express the homosexuality, were selected. Both people who did a coming out in the home country or who did not, were taken into account as a way to look at variation. This implies that there were no specific countries chosen. Last, only men could participate. This was decided throughout the investigation for both theoretical and pragmatic reasons. First, this makes the sample more homogeneous. Second, I observed that LGB-asylum seekers/refugees are mainly homosexual men, which made it easier to contact male LGB-asylum seekers/refugees in comparison to female ones.

The characteristics of the sample can be seen in appendix 1 *(11.1).* The mean age of the LGB-asylum seekers/refugees is 28 years. The LGB-respondents were on average two years in Belgium since the beginning of their flight. The majority stayed in a reception center, with the exception of two people. One of them stayed in a private apartment, while the other person lived in a social house. All respondents were still in the legal migration procedure, except for two people who were already recognized as a refugee. Furthermore, there was variety in the countries of origin: three people came from Cameroun, two from Palestine, two from Sierra Leone, one from Ghana, one from El Salvador and one from Macedonia. Only one person had already done an explicit coming out in the home country, while all of them have done a coming in in Belgium.

As a second target population, experts were interviewed. It is believed experts have useful insights since they are in touch with LGB-asylum seekers/refugees on a regular basis and in professional circumstances.

As a second reason, experts were included because they have a better understanding how interviews with LGB-asylum seekers/refugees can be conducted in the best possible way. The conversations thus helped to better structuralize the questionnaire. The characteristics of the sample can be found in appendix 1 *(11.1)*. I interviewed people that organize meetings for LGB-applicants and refugees from çavaria and Fedasil. I also conducted one interview and a follow-up interview with a responsible from Rainbow House. An interview with a social assistant that works in a reception center was done too.

As a way to look at variation between LGB-asylum seekers/refugees, it was decided to include extreme and deviating cases. As an extreme case, I did two interviews with LGB-asylum seekers that were open about the sexuality in all circumstances. A deviating case, was an LGB-refugee that did not live in a reception center, by own choice. In normal circumstances, interviews with extreme and deviating cases are conducted at the end of the research to be able to confirm previous results and to clarify the theory. However, for pragmatic reasons this was not possible for the deviating case because I always led the participants decide themselves when they wanted to do an interview. In the end, 17 moments of data collection were done. This includes ten interviews with LGB-asylum seekers/refugees, five interviews with experts and two observations in Rainbow House. All interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1,5 hours. The follow-up interview lasted 35 minutes.

6.3. Negotiating Access

6.3.1. How I Recruited LGB-Asylum Seekers & Refugees

In the first phase of the project, I started by contacting LGB-organizations, since they can be seen as gate keepers (Mortelmans, 2013). I asked them if I can join meetings with LGB-asylum seekers/refugees to spread the word. Several organizations were contacted, going from initiatives such as 'Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen' and 'çavaria' to 'Merhaba'. A list can be found in the appendix *(11.2.3)* as well as an example of the mails I sent *(11.2.1 and 11.2.2)* and the speech I gave to introduce myself *(11.3.2).* Finally, 22 out of 26 organizations did not want to cooperate. This could be for practical reasons because '*they do not know who is an LGB-asylum seeker/refugee'* or it could be out of principle to protect this group, who is '*too often asked to share their story without getting anything in return'*.

Eventually, 'Rainbow House', 'Fedasil' and 'Wel Jong Niet Hetero' became important partners. Rainbow House is an LGB-organization and the most important partner. They offer information and organize activities for specific groups -such as LGB-asylum seekers/refugees-. A detailed overview of the organizations and their crucial role, can be read in the appendix *(11.2.4).* Finally, once I had established a relatively large network of participants, I mainly relied on the help of engaged LGB-asylum seekers/refugees to find more participants. After an interview was done, LGB-asylum seekers/refugees were asked to approach their social network. This tactic is what Mortelmans (2013) describes as the snowballing-effect.

I also designed a pamphlet *(appendix 11.3.3),* in which I explained my research to potential research participants and organizations. The pamphlet was spread via social media, such as Facebook or private, online platforms for LGB-people and/or asylum-seekers/refugees particularly. This was possible after having interviewed experts who were willing to help. The pamphlet was based on Feldman, Bell and Berger's recommendations (2003) on how to convince people to participate. A good pamphlet should attract attention, summarize the project, legitimize the researcher and explain the benefits. In the pamphlet, I tried to attract attention by mentioning that I also belong to the LGB-community. I demonstrated my professional approach through a detailed description of how an interview would proceed *(appendix 11.3.1)* and how anonymity would be guaranteed. Finally, I included the following text *(see below)* to describe how the research could mostly be beneficial to the entire group, but also to them as individuals:

"Everyone can help me out, and so can you! But why would you do that? Maybe you are tired of the fact that LGB-asylum seekers/refugees are often forgotten or maybe you are frustrated about your life in Belgium? Or maybe you just want to talk about your problems or you are looking for someone externally to listen and who does not judge you and who does not belong to an authority?"

The ten LGB-participants were recruited in various ways. Four interview respondents were recruited with the help of Rainbow House. Five participants were a result of the snowballing-effect. One LGB-refugee was recruited via the help of a friend. In most cases, the interview participants had already seen me before. If not, there had been contact via phone. By doing so, I gave people the chance to feel comfortable with me. I hoped that this would enhance trust. Overall, it seemed that the more personal the introduction, the higher the success. Interviews almost always resulted from a face-to-face introduction through organizations or by phone. The method second in line, was the snowballing-effect. The least successful, were responses to the pamphlet. No one has contacted me via that way.

Moreover, it was decided to give all interviewees control in terms of where the interview would take place (Mortelmans, 2013). I gave all of them the possibility to choose the location of the interview themselves. I always told them that I could go to the reception center, the city or any other place they felt comfortable. I also explained that I had an agreement with Rainbow House that the interviews could take place there, in a private room. This was decided since applicants do mostly not have enough money to pay transportation since the centers give a limited amount of pocket money. Second, reception centers are in most cases not easily accessible. Whenever I met people, I tried to create a cozy atmosphere by offering snacks and coffee or tea. In case we met in a public place, I always offered to pay the drinks as a gesture of gratitude, and I always looked for a quiet corner or let the person choose where he wanted to sit.

However, the Corona-Crisis did not make it possible anymore to have face-to-face interviews in the months of March, April, May, June and July. For this reason, I was forced to do online interviews via WhatsApp or Skype. This was clearly communicated before to the participants. If refugees did not want to do it this way, the interview was postponed. Finally, one interview took place in a public place, one in Rainbow House, one in a reception center, one in the apartment of the participant, one at my house and five online. Experts were mostly interviewed at their office or online, for example via Skype.

6.3.2. How I Presented Myself

Researchers bring baggage to the field that can influence the interactional processes and ultimate research outcome (Van Mannen, Manning & Miller, 1989). According to Reinharz (2011) self-presentation is important. He makes a distinction between *personal selves* (the selves one brings to the field), *research selves* (concerned with doing research) and *situational selves* (selves created in the field). Especially the *personal selves* and the *research selves* are essential in the process of gaining access of this dissertation. I agree that it helps to stress similarities, while in other cases, differences can be beneficial (Reinharz, 2011). Being a lesbian woman, I belong to the same sexual category as my research participants. This was a strong asset. For instance, when I presented myself to LGB-asylum seekers/refugees, I described myself as a *'lesbian sociology student that is interested in their personal stories'*. This matters because I stressed aspects of my identity that are most relevant to my participants (Feldman, Bell & Berger, 2003). At the other hand, I also stressed that I am not someone who works in a reception center or for Belgian authority.

Furthermore, I tried to find the right balance between being professional and 'a nice person to talk to' (Green, Barbour, Barnard & Kitzinger, 1993). In line with feminist methodologies, I adopted a so-called democratic interview approach in which I tried to minimize the power imbalance between myself and participants (Van Kerckem, 2014). I focused on creating trust by drawing attention to commonalities. In most cases, I used the shared sexuality. Also, rather than dressing professionally in order to separate myself from my research participants, as is often suggested (Gailey & Prohaska, 2011), I dressed the way I usually do. This can be described as casual urban. This was another way to gain trust and to give the research participants the feeling that power imbalances were reduced.

6.4. Data Collection

It is chosen to conduct in-depth interviews for three reasons. First, in-depth interviews have been identified as especially appropriate for understanding experiences and personal stories (Silverman, 2000). The flight could have been traumatizing for the participant (Graham, Herlihy & Brewin, 2014). By conducting in-depth interviews, research participants can tell their story quietly and at the own tempo. Second, in a personal conversation participants will presumably feel less uncomfortable. Last, it is possible to have heterogeneity since every participant will possibly be in a different phase of the flight and will have expressed the homosexuality in a different way.

As a first crucial element, I built flexibility in the interview (Mortelmans, 2013). For example, I told participants they could take a break whenever they wanted. Second, I asked the questions in a way that made the interaction appear more like a conversation about their flight, than a structured interview. This non-directive interview style gives a feeling of control to the respondents (Brannen, 1988). For these reasons, a semi-structured questionnaire was used *(appendix: 11.4 and 11.5)*. This means I had a range of topics I needed to cover, but the order in which I addressed them and how deep I talked about a particular topic, differed for every participant. Third, I did not avoid asking sensitive questions, but showed understanding when they had difficulties talking about them and offered to stop talking about the topic. Fourth, I usually answered whatever questions people had. In case my answer could potentially affect their own responses, I told them I would answer their question after the interview had been completed. Last, interviews could be composed in four languages: Dutch, English, French and Spanish.

Another crucial element of a good qualitative interview is to apply *'thick description'*: answers that contain depth, detail and richness (Geertz, 2002). In order to achieve this, I had a number of guidelines that I followed for each interview *(appendix: 11.6).* I also used a lot of probes -follow-up questions- after a particular statement was made, to get more detailed descriptions, to explore reasons, motivations, feelings, reactions and consequences, and to contextualize a particular phenomenon (Mortelmans, 2013). A third tool was the drop-off -a short questionnaire with simple questions- *(appendix: 11.4.2 and 11.5.2)* that was filled in at the beginning of each interview. The advantage was that this extra information was used during the interview, to give the research participant the feeling that I was paying attention and that I was interested. Last, during the interview I wrote down additional keywords of sub-questions that came into mind spontaneously as a way to listen attentively and to not forget the question.

Furthermore, the base of the questionnaire is a '*life trajectory perspective'*, which is often used by social scientists (Hildenbrand, 1989). In this technique, research participants are asked to talk about a specific life event. Research participants were asked to visualize the progress of the flight on a timeline *(appendix: 11.4.4).* Via this way, asylum seekers/refugees could declare themselves when the flight had begun, in which circumstances, what crucial moments were and which phases they had gone through. It is assumed that this is the easiest way for participants to talk about the flight because it is something concrete and something they have experienced themselves. For them, it is real and not abstract. Also, this method allows to analyze how sexual identity processes, juridical migration processes and integration processes assemble. Via sub-questions, these trajectories could be analyzed.

After some small talk, which added to the creation of an informal atmosphere and was mostly not recorded, the research topic was introduced *(appendix: 11.4.1 and 11.5.1).* I explained how the interview would proceed. Because interviewing is a well-known activity for asylum seekers/refugees, I felt it was important to carefully explain the topic and purpose of the interview. I always stressed that it was an informal interview that would not influence the legal migration procedure. After this, I introduced the topic without labeling or defining its boundaries (Davies, 2008). Most of the time, I told people that I was interested in what it is like to be an LGB-asylum seeker/refugee in Belgium.

As a thread, it was asked to draw a timeline about their flight and to talk about the most important moments. The subsequent questions were about chronological events. Based on the phase of the legal migration procedure and the phase of the self-acceptance of the sexuality the participant was in, I decided which questions I could ask. First, I always asked to talk about the country of origin and the way the homosexuality was expressed, to finally pass to the moment the refugee had decided to flee. Both questions about the juridical migration procedure and the stay in the reception center, were asked. These concrete events made it easy for respondents to describe how they acted and what they revealed about the sexuality to other people. At the end, more abstract questions about the coming in and coming out were asked. However, the questions were still related to the own life. For example, for the coming in, I referred to Rainbow House (or other organizations they go to) and what this organization means for them.

As anticipated, the questionnaire for the experts was different *(appendix: 11.5).* Although the same chronological sequence and structure was used, the expert interviews were more abstract. I decided to orient the interviews more towards expert's insights and own experiences during the career. As an

icebreaker, I asked them to tell something about the projects they have created and what the most important observations are. In a next phase, I gave some statements about conclusions in literature they had to agree or disagree with. The advantage of these interviews was that the experts could talk about the life of LGB-asylum seekers/refugees in general. In this stage, some insights of literature could already have been carefully confirmed (or not).

To be certain the questionnaire was understandable for the research participants and was valid, a pilot interview was executed *(appendix: 11.7).* A reflection about necessary changes for future interviews was done. This cyclical approach was repeated several times during the research project. At first, it was decided not to analyze the interview because it was aimed to test the questionnaire. However, the interview was an interesting case as if the person already had done an explicit and linguistic coming out in the home country and because he had decided to leave the reception center during the legal migration procedure. In other words: the content of the interview was strong enough, the quality of the interview was good and the respondent met with the formulated criteria.

Last, if ethnographic fieldwork generally involves *'the immersion in a culture over a period of years, based on learning the language and participating in social events with the people of that culture'* (Silverman, 2000), what I did is a form of ethnography light. In contrast to full-fledged ethnographic studies, I did not immerse myself in the LGB- and or asylum seeker/refugee-communities over an extensive period of time. I rather acquainted myself with LGB-communities who arranged meetings for LGB-asylum seekers/refugees by regularly participating in these events and engaging in informal conversations. My ethnographic fieldwork was mainly aimed at building a large network of LGB-asylum seekers/refugees, promoting my research, getting to know the way these meetings are organized and gaining trust. The aim was less to collect actual data (Van Kerckem, 2014).

I made a scheme with topics and expectations -based on the in-depth interviews with experts- *(appendix: 11.8).* During the meetings, I made notifications on my smartphone. Via this way, the respondents did not have the impression that I was writing down every word they said. Second, it allowed me to stay low profile and to gain trust. I also went to the toilet throughout the breaks to insert the scheme and to wright down crucial observations more extensively. After each event or conversation, I made detailed field notes as soon as possible, summarizing what had happened, who I had met and what people had told me *(appendix: 11.8).*

6.5. Analysis Method

This dissertation is informed by three different epistemological and methodological approaches. First, this research project used an emic approach that focuses on the actor's point of view (Agar, 1980, p. 20). This approach studies the meanings they assign to experiences and phenomena (Mortelmans, 2013). The emic approach stands in contrast with an etic approach, which focuses on the categorizations, explanations and interpretations of the researcher. Second, I adopted a coproduction approach by giving the research participants the authority to partially set my research agenda (Mortelmans, 2013) and by focusing my analysis on those themes and stories that are most prominent in their accounts of what it is like to live in Belgium as an LGB-asylum seeker/refugee. I treated every participant as an expert, while always exercising a certain degree of skepticism toward answers that seem unexpected, contradictory or socially desirable.

Third, I applied principles of the Grounded Theory, as formulated by Strauss and Corbin (1990). In this approach, theory is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 21). Theoretical literature is secondary to the data, unlike in many quantitative studies where data is used to test theories. In this dissertation, for instance, the idea of focusing on the life in reception centers and the phenomenon of coming in, was not something I had in mind at the beginning, based on what I had read in literature. Rather, the idea emerged after having talked with experts of LGB-organizations. After this, I turned back to the literature in search of similar findings or ideas. The inductive approach also implies that data collection and analysis are done concurrently, rather than separately. After a period of data collection, the researcher looks at the data, links it with existing research, starts developing her theory and goes back into the field to complete and refine it (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 57).

After having analyzed the first set of interviews, I collected additional data, based on theoretically relevant concepts. For example, after having identified sexual conformity pressure, I collected more specific data in reception centers -by interviewing a social assistant and an expert who work there-. By doing this, I enabled myself to do a comparative study of the impact of the fear in reception centers on the occurrence of a coming in. However, the latter decision was also pragmatic: the governmental measurements that were taken in the context of the Corona-crisis made it more difficult to reach LGB-applicants/refugees. A report about the impact of the Corona-crisis can be read in the appendix *(11.9).* After thoroughly comparing and analyzing a number of existing as well as new interviews, and developing a sort of theory of sexual

conformity pressure, I looked for more people to verify my findings, to better understand the relationships between different categories and to fill in 'poorly developed categories' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 187).

However, creating a theory and reaching theoretical saturation, was only reached to some extent. The time-frame, limited number of data collection moments (in comparison with more professional research) and restricted experience made it almost impossible to reach the standards imposed by an orthodox interpretation of Grounded Theory, formulated by Strauss and Corbin (1990). For this reason, I decided also to focus on the constructivist interpretation of this approach of Charmaz (2014). She stresses to build on explanatory models by using coding families throughout the coding process. As a constructivist, Charmaz (2014) starts from the premise that there are multiple realities and that the researcher is a co-author in developing representations of these realities. The goal of the Grounded Theory should therefore be to show what people see as their reality and how they construct an act on their views of reality. For instance, while analyzing my data collection moments, I focused on how LGB-applicants and experts describe the life in a reception center, what this sexual conformity pressure means for them and how they deal with this reality.

Furthermore, transcription constitutes an integral part of the data analysis process (Wellard & McKenna, 2001). I have used a naturalistic approach to transcribe *(appendix: 11.10),* which captures every utterance in as much detail as possible (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005). This not only includes a transcription of everything that is said, but also involves not correcting grammatical errors and incorporating non-verbal cues, for instance silences, body language and emotional expressions -such as different types of intonation and laughing-. A naturalistic transcription is a logic option because the Grounded Theory believes that closeness between researcher and the text is necessary to construct a theory (Mortelmans, 2013).

Also, all the interviews were transcribed myself in the original language of the interview. The interviews were in Dutch, English, French or Spanish. For the latter option, a friend translated the questionnaire and an interpreter was used to translate some parts of the interview in English. Therefore, quotes taken from the transcriptions had to be translated. I translated as literally as possible, making sure that this does not endanger understanding or meaning (Mortelmans, 2013). In case understanding was endangered, I made minimal changes to the quote or added explanatory information, both of which are signaled in square brackets. In case (a combination of) information could risk the anonymity of the research participant, I left out identifying information or replaced it by a generic term, such as 'a friend' or 'a city', again identified by the use of square brackets.

After this first phase of data management, I applied principles of open coding (Mortelmans, 2013). This implies that important fragments were identified. In this phase there is thus no strong theoretical coding framework. Subsequently, I moved on to the second phase of coding: the generation of findings. I started looking more closely at the different codes and tried to establish links between the different categories, using principles of axial coding (Mortelmans, 2013). I looked for a description of the phenomena, causal conditions, context, intervening conditions, strategies and consequences. In the case of sexual conformity pressure, for example, I explored what it is, under what conditions it is manifested and the different ways people react to it, as well as its potential consequences. In the last phase, selective coding was applied. This means a selection is made of theoretical relevant codes to formulate a theory.

The Qualitative Content Analysis (Cho & Lee, 2014) was considered as an additional method, which was used to create a coding tree *(appendix: 11.11),* with the help of the most recent software of Nvivo: Nvivo 12. The aim of this method is to reduce and classify data. Main codes and sub-codes were made. Furthermore, the codes were clearly demarcated by using four assessing criteria: saturation, uni-dimensionality, exhaustivity and mutual exclusivity. Saturation means that a code can never be empty. Uni-dimensionality does not allow double sub-codes. Exhaustivity guarantees that each interview needs minimally to be grouped partially in one of the codes. Mutual exclusivity means that one text fragment may only appear in one code. I executed a validity check, based on the calculation of the kappa-coefficient, to guarantee that the coding tree can classify every relevant fragment and that it is clear to which code fragments belong. I coded two interviews with a rich amount of data, which represents plus minus 10% of the data, two times each at different moments. The kappa-coefficient for the final coding tree is 0,86 (in comparison to 1, representing 100% agreement) which means that there is a 'very good' agreement. Once I had established a solid coding structure, I went back to the field to collect more data, in order to fill in gaps and validate statements and established relationships.

6.6. Studying a Sensitive Topic: Ethical Side

Ethics is related to the application of a system of moral principles to prevent harming or wronging others, to promote the good, to be respectful and to be fair (Renzetti & Lee, 1993). The ethical side of research is crucial since LGB-asylum seekers/refugees exposed themselves to me. They talked about personal stories and traumas. Most of the participants had already done at least one interview with the CGVS, which is a stressful experience (Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, 2013). The gate keepers were essential because they soothed potential participants. However, it is essential that the researcher also respects the ethical side. Following Guillemin and Gillam (2004), I discuss three types of ethics: procedural ethics, situational ethics and relational ethics.

6.6.1. Procedural Ethics

Procedural ethics refers to the ethical rules that a researcher has to take into account when setting up and carrying out the research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). This includes the principles of informed consent, the protection of the research participant's privacy and the principles of beneficence and non-maleficence (Mortelmans, 2013). First, the rule of informed consent *(appendix: 11.12)* is about the fact that the voluntary consent of the research participant is absolutely essential. This means that the consent needs to be given by someone that is capable of doing so, it must be voluntary and the potential participant has to have sufficient information about the research in order to make the decision (Mortelmans, 2013, p. 175).

None of the respondents were children or intellectually disabled and can therefore be seen as capable consenting. Also, no one was put under pressure to participate. When the organization agreed to participate with the research, I introduced myself and my research to the potential research participants. When people explicitly refused to participate or when they did not spontaneously appeal me to know more about the research project, I did not try to convince them. However, when they seemed hesitant, I did exercise some effort to convince them, mainly by explaining very carefully what the research was about, how an interview would proceed and what the purpose was. The same strategy was used for organizations: several e-mails were sent and phone calls were done to be transparent about the research objective. When they were hesitant, I tried to convince them but when they said no or when did not reply, I respected that.

Furthermore, everybody who participated was informed about the research topic, the purpose of the research, how the interview would proceed and confidentiality. This was done when I explained the

research and repeated before the start of the interview. In both cases this was done orally. Respondents knew in big lines what the research was about. No hidden research was done. However, I used the tactic of Mortelmans (2013) and did not to tell the exact research questions, to avoid that this would influence the answers of the research participants. It was important that the respondents could stress whatever they wanted, without thinking too much about the abstract research questions. Mostly, I told them that I was interested in what it is like to be an LGB-asylum seeker/refugee in Belgium, how it was to be homosexual in their home country and how their life is now, in Belgium. During this conversation, I also explained that the participants need to be willing to talk about the flight to a stranger.

I guaranteed confidentiality by explaining that no one would know what they had said (Mortelmans, 2013). I also explained that I would always make sure they were not identifiable whenever I wrote about them. Everybody got the chance to choose an own pseudonym. I stressed that I was interested in their opinion, that there were no right or good answers and that I would never judge them for anything they would say. I asked them to digitally record the interview, explaining that doing so allowed me to listen attentively. Finally, I told the interviewees that they should never feel forced to answer any question, and that they could end the interview whenever they wanted to.

Second, several measures were taken to guarantee the privacy of the research participants (Mortelmans, 2013. First, I tried to interview them in a setting where their privacy would not be damaged. I looked for places where they could talk freely without having to fear that others would overhear. When people chose to be interviewed in the reception center, we were alone in the office of the social assistant, so that other refugees were not suspicious. If I was waiting in the reception center and inhabitants were curious about the reason I was there, I told them I had an appointment with the social assistant. When people requested to be interviewed in a public place, I let them choose where they wanted to go, again telling them that it was important that they could talk freely. When they had chosen a rather busy place, I tried to pick a spot where we would not be overheard. Second, privacy also entails that I told people that no one else but me and potentially my supervisor, would read or hear the interview.

Finally, beneficence and non-maleficence were the two most important ethical principles, especially because LGB-asylum seekers/refugees are one of the most stigmatized and excluded groups in the refugee community (Yip, 2004). I wanted to produce research that was not going to harm my research participants. By offering my research participants help in return for their participation, I hoped to help them achieve

goals that mattered to them. For example, some research participants asked me to send a copy of their informed consent to their social assistant so that it could be added to their personal file to ask asylum. Another example is that I always asked what their dreams are. Sometimes, I could help them, for example by showing them where safe LGB-neighborhoods or bars are in different Belgian cities.

Last, I wanted to use my research to fight the problems they were facing, by choosing another approach and not only talking about the juridical migration procedure. The following guideline was used to deal with sensitive topics: *'The best strategy for protecting the sensitivities of research participants and community members […] is to design ethical and culturally sensitive research and to interpret finding tactfully, with concern for the interest of the research participants, the gatekeepers and society'* (Renzetti & Lee, 1993, p. 17). Second, I wanted to avoid being a researcher who *'comes into the community, takes what they can get out of it and are never seen again'* (Renzetti & Lee, 1993). For this reason, I decided to help Rainbow House by translating flyers from French to English and Dutch. In addition, I gave my results back to the research population, for example several reception centers, Rainbow House, Fedasil and other LGB-organizations. These actions can be considered as acts of reciprocity.

6.6.2. Situational Ethics

Sometimes it happens that during the research, challenges or dilemmas arise that the researcher was not prepared for and has to respond to immediately, in an ethically correct way (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). In my own case, the most important challenge that arose, was related to stalking. During my research, it happened that research participants asked if they can sometimes contact me on social media. Since I have done voluntary work in a reception center, I understand that applicants in general do not always get the psychological help they need. For this reason, I always said 'yes' but at the same time, I stressed that it might also be good to socialize with other (LGBT)-asylum seekers/refugees. In one case, I did not judge the situation well. I was stuck between my principal of reciprocity and being a good researcher, by also keeping a distance from my research participants. Eventually, I decided to call him and explain my perspective. We agreed to talk once in two weeks and to make an appointment with a psychologist for him.

Additionally, to guarantee I was prepared, I made an appointment for myself with the student psychologist of the University of Ghent. Finally, I went two times. During the first conversation, we talked about my personality as a researcher. We thought about how a researcher can take a distance from the research topic

and not being too involved, but at the same time being enough involved and creating a bond with respondents. For example, this conversation helped me when I had to deal with the stalking case. We also discussed my questionnaire. She gave comments about the kind of emotions these questions could provoke. The fact that I was aware of it, gave me the feeling I was more prepared to do the interviews. I decided to go a second time because I needed to express my thoughts to a professional. One interview was especially mentally tough because it was about rape and family abuse. The session with the psychologist helped me to find a balance between being empathic but also being objective and analytical. A report about the sessions can be found in the appendix *(11.13).*

6.6.3. Relational Ethics

Last, I took into account relational ethics. This requires the researcher to act from the heart and the mind and to acknowledge personal bonds to each other and take responsibility for actions and their consequences (Ellis, 2007). I agree with Ellis (2007) that a researcher needs to find a balance between being friendly and becoming friends with the research participants to acknowledge a personal bond. A bond of trust and mutual respect was essential to be able to talk about this sensitive topic. I created this by going to all the meetings for LGB-asylum seekers/refugees of Rainbow House since October 2019 till the end of the research[1]. The collaboration with Rainbow House also made sure they trusted me faster because they believe in the organization. At the same time, I had to perform my role as a researcher who needs to be critical and skeptical. For this reason, I made sure I was a person whom they could trust and could talk to, but who was not their friend.

The last aspect in the definition of Ellis (2007) about taking responsibility for actions and their consequences, is about protecting the research participants. For example, during one interview, the respondent showed pictures of his surgery in Belgium. He wanted to send me the picture so that I could use it as *'a nice picture in my dissertation to make it more credible'*. I protected the respondent by refusing this. I carefully explained that I already had enough material. As a second example, three respondents did not want to choose a pseudonym at first. When this happened, I respected their decision, but only after having made sure that they really wanted it this way. I asked them again after the interview, once they knew what they had talked about. Finally, they decided to choose a pseudonym.

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[1] This was interrupted in February and March because I was on an international internship. In April, May, June and July no meetings were organized because this was forbidden by the government because of the Corona-crisis.

7. Results

In this part, the different phases of the flight will be discussed chronologically, whereby I start with the physical movement from the country of origin to Belgium, I proceed to the life in a reception center and the outdoor life, to end with the legal migration procedure. I will discuss each phase to demonstrate what the dominant norms are concerning sexuality and which fields of tension manifest themselves. While analyzing the interviews and observations, a clear trend could be noticed throughout the flight: the complete experience for this group is characterized by a dominant heteronormative environment whereby heterosexuality is expected. This role expectation forces inhabitants to be quiet about the sexual identity. Being homosexual is restricted in terms of the way people are dressed, the way people behave and what people do in the free time. I will refer to this characteristic as the sexual conformity pressure theory. This norm is in contrary with the legal migration procedure. In this context, it is asked from applicants to publicly express the sexuality to be believed. Last, I will discuss how LGB-asylum seekers seek agencies to deal with these contradictory expectations, based on integration strategies and types of coming in.

To contextualize the quotes and citations of the different types of participants, the type of participant will be mentioned. LGB-asylum seekers/refugees will be abbreviated by R, experts by E and social assistants by S.

7.1. Physical Movement to Belgium
7.1.1. (Silent) Desire and the (Un)Planned Decision Moment

In the reasons why LGB-asylum seekers decided to flee, a clear trend can be noted at which the emotional side becomes apparent. Crucial aspects in which the non-rational motivation becomes clear, is the experience of emotional abuse, mental violence of the community and personal experiences of physical violence. Every asylum seeker therefore fled to escape from the social norms about homosexuality. All participants felt rejected and five people thought about killing themselves. A distinction between two dimensions (sexual identity trajectory and voluntariness of the flight) of the fleeing motivation can then be made. The combination of these two axes, led to the identification of four groups.

First, a difference is seen in the way people have dealt with the sexual identity trajectory in the home country. The data in general shows how every asylum seeker has reached the last phase of Vincke and Steven's (1999) definition of a coming out by having a homosexual relationship. Previous stages about the

acceptance of the sexual identity (acknowledgment homosexual feelings, self-identification and expressing LGB-identity) are not accomplished, since the respondents explained how they are aware since their childhood that homosexuality is not accepted in the home country. The fear of getting caught, prosecuted or killed, forced them to hide the sexuality towards family, friends and the general environment. Martin (R) and Ziggy (R) for example explained how they pretended to have a girlfriend as a way to make themselves less suspicious. Jacky (R) and Alex (R) were even married and had children. The examples show that people started their flight after they had tried to live as a homosexual person in a homophobic country. This can be further illustrated by a statement of Anthony (R) who explains how this situation pushed him to live a double life:

"A double life means that I had a girlfriend for example just to please everyone, the community and the society. I told my friends from high school that I had a girlfriend and that we had sex, the same stuff they told me, just to make sure that they would believe me, I wanted to be like them."

More specifically, only two respondents have done a linguistic coming out in the home country (Vincke & Stevens, 1999). Martin (R), told his best friend that he was gay when he was 15 years old. He gradually told other friends. At the age of 18, he told his parents. Anthony (R) explained how his mother convinced the rest of his family to accept his sexuality and to protect him against the negative reactions from the community. He and his family decided to keep his sexuality a secret. Another essential element is that most respondents (eight out of ten) were in the closet in a direct way: they all had homosexual relationships or sought online contact with the LGB-community, but they did not share this with others and they did not show this publicly. It can finally be concluded that respondents who did a linguistic coming out in the home country, had a more outspoken desire to be himself, while the others had not done essential phases of a coming out and had a silent desire to be themselves.

The second dimension, is about the fact whether the decision to flee was forced by someone else or was an own decision. Three applicants were forced to flee because a family member accidently found out that they were gay by opening gay chats or because a secret relationship was discovered. Joe (R) described his homosexuality as a shame for his community, and especially for his family. These families did not want to be stigmatized by the community. Physical violence was therefore used to '*heal*' these people. *Forced sex, rape, gay terrorism and gay healing,* were mentioned when the research participants were asked why they had decided to leave their country. Turbey (R) mentioned the term gay terrorism by referring to the physical

violence in Venezuela against homosexuals. He never felt safe, therefore he always took a taxi. Gay healing was mentioned by Raa (R). He explained that his family sent him to a so-called healer to get better. He was beaten, burnt, physically tortured and forced to think about women while masturbating. When it became clear that these conversion tactics of the parents did not work, LGB-persons were forced by their family to leave the country.

Other LGB-applicants/refugees (seven out of ten), did not get an explicit order of the family to leave the country. For this group, the decision to flee was less guided and was more based on accumulating forms of mental and physical violence. The flight could be described as a final attempt to escape from the violent environment. Alex (R) for example, was being ejected by his family and village when they found out that he had a secret relationship with a man. Eventually, he decided to flee because he could *'not be the person he wants to be'*. Furthermore, these people also did not inform their parents, other family members or friends. These forms of both mental and physical violence are examples of push factors for the LGB-people to leave their country (Tolnay & Beck, 1990). The story of Martin (R) is another illustration of this group. He left his country because he had the feeling that his sexuality was not supported by family and public services, such as the police. The conversation below was the final trigger to come to Belgium.

" I had voice notes where I had recorded a conversation with me, my father and the police. My father was yelling at me and I explained this aggression, because I was gay, to the police. But they just said, sorry, we cannot do anything about this, it is normal because you are sick, you are gay and we cannot do anything about this. If you were my son, I would maybe kill you, I don't get why your father has so much patience with you, I don't get why you are so ungrateful and why you called the police, you need to shut up. And I thought like, huh? Why? Dude, I already work, I pay taxes, you are paid by me, I really felt like my rights were not respected. […] This was really like hell."

Although there is variation in the specific circumstances in which the decision to flee took place, LGB-applicants/refugees have consciously chosen to leave their country and to go to a place '*where they can be themselves'* and *'where they can feel safe',* once their flight had started, as Matt (R) articulated. In this manner, these reasons could be considered as pull factors (Tolnay & Beck, 1990). Last, the data shows that the choice of Belgium in particular is sometimes well-considered. Three applicants/refugees looked up information about Belgian gay rights before they started their flight. Anthony (R) for example, thinks that '*the gay community is well-respected in Belgium, there is less discrimination than in France, for instance'.*

7.1.2. Too Scared to Get Caught?

When the forced decision to flee was accepted, only one asylum seeker was accompanied during the flight to Belgium. Anthony (R), fled together with his current boyfriend. The other participants were alone. Second, two people already had a plan and took a plane. Martin (R), for instance, booked a flying ticket to Brussels. Others were not able to plan the flight and used smugglers to succeed the flight. Raa (R) travelled a couple of weeks from Palestine to Belgium, via the help of smugglers. The smuggling trip was arranged after he had been waiting for some weeks. Sometimes the flight was thus interrupted and people had to stay temporarily in another country, with a similar heteronormative and sexual conformity pressure as in the home country. The lack of financial resources seems to be the most important reason for this interruption.

The temporary stay in these countries leads to two different coping mechanisms in the way participants were forced to manage with the sexual identity. A first group of people (six out of ten), has financial support of the family, which makes it easier to find accommodation. However, they were scared that the sexuality would be revealed by other asylum seekers or by locals. Joe (R) for example, lived with other applicants and undocumented people in a small apartment. He decided not to talk openly about the sexual identity as if '*he did not know what the exact rules were about homosexuality and how he would have been penalized when he got caught or how his travel companions would react'*. Also, Jacky (R) was *'scared that everyone would know, because everyone of his country already knew and Guinee was not that far away from Sierra Leone'.* The last example mainly illustrates how LGB-asylum seekers did not feel comfortable in neighboring countries with similar LGB-laws. Last, Matt's (R) smuggler explicitly recommended to not talk about the real reason he was fleeing to Europe. Suppressing the homosexuality was then clearly used as a tactic to survive.

At the other hand, a second group of people (four out of ten) did not have financial support. This sometimes forced asylum seekers into extreme situations to express the sexuality. An example was told by Lotte (S). She reported about an LGB-asylum seeker that was forced to prostitute himself when he temporarily stayed in France. This survival mode can be linked with the integration theory of Bassetti (2018), claiming that transgender-refugees (and by extension homosexual applicants/refugees) are forced to execute sex work in order to survive in LGB-unfriendly countries, as a temporary integration strategy. However, this needs to be nuanced. Experts admitted that these stories are exceptions. Nevertheless, all these examples show variation in the extent of the traumatic aspects of the flight.

7.2. Living in a Reception Center as an LGB-Person
7.2.1. Homophily as a Group Formation Process

The data shows that the life in a reception center is essential, since asylum seekers have to stay there for a long time. Most of the applicants (eight out of ten) had to stay in a center for more than one year. Furthermore, the accommodation types are always multicultural places with diversity in nationalities. Both experts and asylum seekers/refugees described the group formation process as one of homophily, which implies that people prefer association to similar, like-minded others. This means people seek contact with people who have similar characteristics, such as nationality, language and religion. In general, people of the same country or region of origin, interact with each other and form sub-groups in the center. This can be further illustrated by a quote of Lotte (S): *"[…] Afghans do not sit together with Palestinians."* And by an additional observation of Daniel (E):

"All refugees experience a loss. When they arrive in Belgium, the first thing they do is looking for people of their own community because it feels familiar. Because they want to feel safe, they want to stick to those people with the same mentality. They build up a network."

7.2.2. Back to an Anti-Gay Environment?

While LGB-applicants expect the centers to be a safe place where they can be themselves, these expectations are not fulfilled. Respondents have a pronounced attitude towards this phase whereby they rely on the essential feeling of safety to describe their life in the center. Seven asylum seekers/refugees negatively evaluate the safety level in the center. In particular, they testified that they do not feel safe to be open about the homosexuality and to do a linguistic coming out (Vincke & Stevens, 1999). All LGB-asylum seekers/refugees do not mention the real reason of their flight to other asylum seekers/refugees. Doing an implicit coming out by wearing a particular clothing style was also not done by most participants (7 out of 10). LGB-asylum seekers in general experience a constant fear to get caught. It could be concluded that the centers are a specific micro-environment whereby homosexuality is not accepted. This leads to an extension of the sexual conformity pressure theory who is therefore also applicable in the Belgian context.

This becomes clear by referring to two underlying dimensions of the safety level: verbal discrimination and physical violence. First, eight out of ten LGB-asylum seekers/refugees personally experienced discrimination. Examples of this bullying behavior, mentioned by Fourat (E) are that inhabitants avoid to sit

on the same table with an LGB-asylum seeker, walk away when they enter a room or verbally intimidate an LGB-applicant when that person is walking by. Lotte (S) told about a homosexual applicant that was passionate about belly dancing. The man only practiced in her office, where no one could see him, because the other inhabitants bullied him because he was *'too feminine'*. These examples show the mental burden for LGB-asylum seekers to hide the homosexuality in the center. They are careful and adapt their behavior because they do not want to provoke a conflict.

Second, there are cases of physical violence. A minority of two respondents experienced it themselves. Raa (R) for example talked about a personal experience. When the incident happened, he already lived in a smaller center, where he had a private room. He testified that he had never had problems before, therefore he decided to hang the rainbow flag in his room. Other inhabitants had seen this and had ransacked his room, as a way of intimidation, he believes himself. Another illustration was told by Lotte (S). Two men had to be taken apart, after they had been sharing a room, because one man was homophobic and was scared to be raped. This caused physical tension between the roommates. At the other hand, three out of ten respondents heard similar traumatizing stories. This was interpreted as recommendations to be careful about publicly expressing the sexuality. Joe (R) for instance, heard about the incident of Raa (R). He explained that this made him scared. This was a reason not to tell anyone in the center about the fact that he is homosexual. Alex (R) also testified that he keeps quiet if asylum seekers gossip about other LGB-asylum seekers.

The similar sexual conformity pressure as in the home country in combination with the group forming mechanism of homophily, blocks LGB-applicants in four ways. First, the fact that asylum seekers are forced to interact with people of the same home country or region whereby they do not know what the attitudes towards homosexuality are, withholds people to be open about the sexuality. This can be further illustrated by a statement of Fourat (E): *'All the LGB-refugees I helped, were scared of getting bullied in the center. And this is already enough for them to hide the homosexuality'*. And by a quote of Daniel *(E):*

> *"[…] But for LGB-refugees this also means that they have to hide that they are homosexual because a coming out with other people of their own community is quite impossible, they won't say the truth because if they say it, the situation can maybe be worse than the situation in their home country."*

Second, it hinders LGB-applicants to find contact with other like-minded LGB-applicants. At the same time, LGB-asylum seekers mention the lack of privacy as the most important complication in the center because they want to be able to talk with people of the host country or with LGB-friends outside the center. In explaining why privacy is important to them, seven asylum seekers appropriate the dominant heterosexual discourse and the possibility to be a victim of bullying. Fourth, this gives LGB-applicants a feeling of poor social connections. Asylum seekers try to talk with other applicants as much as possible. However, these relationships do not offer social support because they *'just talk with each other to be occupied'*, as Martin (R) made clear. In his experience, conversations in the center are mainly small talk. Talking about specific interests, such as LGB-topics or issues is not possible. The examples demonstrate the need for strong social connections and the limitations within the context of centers.

Contrarily, three participants create a counter-culture and are not afraid to publicly express the sexuality. Jacky (R) and Matt (R) for instance, openly have a relationship in the reception center. Jacky (R) explained that he does not care wearing jewelry and pink blouses in the center, as a way of an implicit coming out (Vincke & Stevens, 1999). This was confirmed by Matt (R) in his interview who argued that he understands why LGB-people in the center are scared, but who does not want to be afraid himself. Also Bonbon (R) did not seem to have internalized this type of fear. After a couple of months already, he had a relationship, which is also described as a way of doing an implicit coming out (Dewaele, 2010). Lotte (E) referred to another exception of a Russian applicant who believed it was important to implicitly express his sexual identity by hanging out the Rainbow flag. This can be further illustrated by an example of Jacky (R) when he was asked how the life in the center is *(see below).* The examples thus illustrate how types of an implicit coming out are done, instead of explicit types.

"I am not scared, […] wherever I go I wear what I want. It are clothes, it is material, […] So I'm not yeah, scared for anyone about this issue. You know, some people will look at you and some people don't mind. You understand? You can mind your own business, what do you (+) like to do? You can do it for yourself. I know actually what is good for me, I choose what is not (+) good for me."

Ziggy (R) coped with the situation by asking to share a room with other LGB-asylum seekers he met during his flight. As an extreme reaction, Martin (R) explicitly chose not to live in a center during the juridical process, after he had experienced it for a couple of days. Due to social connections, he decided to seek a private accommodation. The main reason of this decision is the fact that he did not feel safe in the

reception center. He testified that *'he could not be himself'*. The quote below clearly shows that the life in a reception center forces LGB-applicants to not publicly express the sexual identity. LGB-asylum seekers are obsessed with the thought that other residents will find out the sexual identity. The example also shows that applicants are disappointed that they cannot openly express the homosexuality:

"I didn't see the point of it, I mean, why would I come to Belgium to be protected when I cannot be myself here? It was just too much for me, especially because it is already stressful enough to be a refugee, and then, when you cannot even talk about the real reason you came here, when you're only 19 years old, that's just cruel, you know? I just stayed there for two days, it was just too hard for me."

7.3. The Belgian Outdoor Life

Besides the reception centers, the street is another place where LGB-asylum seekers/refugees do not feel safe. Making the decision to publicly express the homosexuality or not, and doing a coming out in various ways (Vincke & Stevens, 1999) seems to be a well-considered choice. It is based on the feeling of safety and the presence of similar like-minded ethnic communities who might have the same attitude towards homosexuality as in the home country. Martin (R) explained that he is disappointed that in some situations he cannot express the sexual identity: *'even when I am in Belgium, I still have to hide myself'*. Joe (R) said *'I don't know where we can live as we want'.* One LGB-applicant in particular, Raa, clarified that he feels safe in Belgium, but not in every situation, as is described below:

"Yes, sometimes I feel unsafe, once I was stabbed by a man because I was walking 'too gay', I don't know, that guy had a problem with me, he is a friend of my cousin that lives in [a city] , and he knew that I am gay. […] I didn't know what was happening, I was walking to the tram station and then, all of sudden there was a knife."

Participants explained that they have the feeling that they cannot be themselves when they see people with the same ethnic-cultural background. Although nothing happens and these people might not be homophobic, LGB-asylum seekers/refugees associate these groups with the experienced discrimination in the home country. Ziggy (R) for example told how he thinks it is evident not to wear jewelry, make-up or pink shirts in the center, while he wears anything outside the center, in the streets and when he meets friends. Lotte (E) describes the norms in reception centers and the norms outside the center as a double role. She observed how LGB-applicants dress differently outside the center and how it is easier to experiment and to do a coming out. Alex (R), however, was the only (African) respondent who explicitly talked about the African communities in Belgium, their so-called negative perceptions about homosexuality and how this makes it difficult for him to openly express his homosexuality:

"Bah, African people over here, they do not respect homosexuals, they influence the entire African community, which is not good for me, it makes me scared, for this reason, I hide myself. […] I don't say anything about my homosexuality. […] It is so sad, in the beginning of my arrival I cried a lot because for me, this situation is even worse than in my home country. I came to Belgium to be protected, but when I see other Africans, I feel attacked, I can feel problems coming up, it is something I experience a lot."

7.4. Legal Migration Procedure
7.4.1. Queerness in the Eye of the Beholder

Meanwhile, asylum seekers need to go through a legal migration procedure to get the refugee status. All the respondents are in this phase, two of them already got a positive advise. As indicated in the literature (Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2011), there are specific expectations towards expressing the homosexuality to be believed. The data confirms this and shows how five specific expectations about the sexual identity were mentioned. First, the Belgian authorities expect from LGB-asylum seekers that they can prove that they are in danger (Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, 2013). However literature did not stress the importance of referring to official documents. If one does not have documents, such as prove of the experienced violence, voice messages about the intimidation, prove of someone's death, prove of sexual violence or other types of evidence, experts declared that it gets difficult to be believed. In this research, only two out of ten respondents had these kinds of solid proof. Other people *'did not have evidence in the home country or had to leave everything behind',* as Fourat (E) generally summarized.

Second, as literature pointed out (Andrew-Robinson, Khan & Vidal-Ortiz, 2018), it is expected from LGB-asylum seekers that they can defend the claim by pointing out to previous sex experiences and/or relationships. Joe (R) explained that this is difficult to talk about because *'when you come from an environment where they are so hostile to you, you tend not to talk about that'.* Applicants do not feel comfortable to talk about their sex life and to specify how they have sex with their partner. Oliviero (E) illustrated how LGB-applicants have to answer questions like: *'are you the active one or the passive one in a sexual relationship?'* Turbey (R) clarified how these questions are too personal and uncomfortable. Applicants and experts thus claim that homosexuality is reduced as a sexual act. They do not seem to look at sexuality as a whole, feelings and love. Fourat (E) argues that self-perception about being a homosexual is not taken into consideration.

Third, this research confirms how the governmental departments developed specific linguistic expectations (Vincke & Stevens, 1999). Fourat (E) and Daniel (E) argued how applicants are forced to do a linguistic coming out. If they cannot say that they are homosexual, they will not be believed. This power relationship, as if described by Brickell (2009) is then encountered as another trauma. Fourat (E) elaborated how the reduction from homosexuality as a sexual act makes it difficult for LGB-asylum seekers to tell their story since they sometimes heard the word 'gay' for the first time. At the same time, the Belgian authorities are

not willing to reformulate a question, to make it more understandable for them. They stick to the protocol. This can be proven by a quote of Daniel *(E):*

"People really need to say 'I am a man and I have sex with other men' or 'I am gay' because this is considered as the most important thing. They do not look at all the other things around, the professionals really consider homosexuality as a sexual act."

Fourth, it is expected that LGB-asylum seekers tell a lot of details (Andrew-Robinson, Khan & Vidal-Ortiz, 2018) about same sex experiences and the love life. Oliviero (E) for example told how they have to describe *'when they knew that they were homosexual, how they got to see other homosexual men because it was forbidden, which strategies they developed to have relationships without being suspicious and other people knowing'.* Additionally, seven respondents stressed the fact that they had to tell too much details about their life. Joe (R) for example, thought it was *'horrible'* how he had to tell the color of the car he had sex in and all the dates of specific events. Martin (R) underlined the fact that it was very hard to talk about details and to *'relive it because the interviews were so personal'.* The last example underlines the fact that it can be traumatic to talk about the life in the home country, as is suggested by Bhugra (2004), since the flight was a culture conflict with no social support during the different phases.

Last, the CGVS has expectations towards the way homosexuality was expressed in the home country of applicants (Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2011). Daniel (E) explained that the Belgian authorities have stereotypes in mind, which do not correspond with the social life in other countries. The testimonies of Daniel (E), Fourat (E) and Oliviero (E) show that the forbidden principle of discretion (Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2011) is still current, since LGB-applicants have to show the precautions they have taken when they had a homosexual relationship. The example below, based on an experience of Daniel (E), gives a clear image. It demonstrates that LGB-asylum seekers are supposed to be careful to such an extent that it is not always possible, based on the living circumstances. The Belgian authorities have a specific discourse in mind whereby LGB-applicants not only have to be gay, but whereby they also need to show that they have at least tried to live a normal life as a homosexual person:

"So for example the Belgian government can ask: why did you not close the window while you were having sex? Well, sometimes people in those countries do not have windows or do not even have walls, so we

always compare with our own perspectives, the houses in Africa are not the same as ours. So when your

neighbors heard you, it is not that easy to avoid it because maybe you cannot close a window."

7.4.2. To Be or Not To Be Believed: Contradictions

A first contradiction that is suggested in literature (Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, 2013) and confirmed by this research, reveals the expectations from the CGVS that LGB-asylum seekers do not have feelings of fear and shame anymore about the sexual orientation when they arrive in Belgium. The results show how these feelings and trauma's do not disappear by leaving the country of origin. Second, this research illustrates that the self-acceptance trajectory of the sexual identity is not finished, in contrary with the expectations of the CGVS (Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, 2013). A third contradiction is about the fact that the experienced sexual conformity pressure in the home country continues in Belgium, especially in reception centers. These conflicting expectations demonstrate why it is difficult for LGB-asylum seekers to switch between these normative environments and expectations. To summarize the three contradictions: LGB-asylum seekers seem to be traumatized from the flight, they are not convinced that they are safe in Belgium, which makes it difficult to fulfill the expectations during the interviews with the CGVS.

7.4.3. Waiting, Waiting and… Waiting

The long waiting list is also considered as an important barrier of the legal procedure. All the respondents had to wait at least one year to get an advise. This is a problem for three reasons. First, asylum seekers need to stay longer in the unsafe reception centers. Second, they become unsecure about the outcome. Raa (R) for example, was really nervous at the end of his process because he had to wait one year and two months, and there was a gap between his first and second interview. Martin (R) explained how he became addicted to alcohol because *'the stress was too much'.* Third, people are bored when they need to wait and when they have nothing else to do. Three of the ten LGB-applicants/refugees work in the reception center. However, this is an exception since there are conditions to be able to work as an inhabitant.

7.5. From Assimilation to Marginalization: Development of Agencies

The data exposes three agencies which are developed by LGB-asylum seekers to cope with the different normative environments concerning the sexual identity. As a first agency, assimilation is used by three LGB-asylum seekers (Jacky, Matt and Bonbon). This means LGB-asylum seekers adjust to the Belgian culture by being open about the sexual identity and doing a coming out in all circumstances, and do not preserve the cultural beliefs by hiding the sexuality in the home country and only having sexual relations. In other words: this group considers the flight as a progressive situation. The legal migration procedure and the life in the reception center are seen as things that characterize the flight and that they need to undergo to, to be recognized as a refugee. They are therefore not scared to express themselves and have not internalized the fear to get caught. They are convinced that the life in Belgium is better than the life in the home country. This can be illustrated by a quote of Jacky (R), explaining that *'he feels safe in the center'*. This group demonstrates how a counter culture can be created in reception centers by ignoring the sexual conformity pressure, openly having a relationship and showing deviant behavior.

As a second agency, LGB-asylum seekers are at risk to marginalize: there is no adjustment to the Belgian culture but also no preservations of the cultural beliefs. This happens when they are too confused, scared and depressed. People are then questioning the correctness of the choice. According to the Bhugra model (2004), it is expected that LGB-applicants are vulnerable (because the migration process is mostly a forced decision and some people have been persecuted) and not resilient (because the flight was most of the times not prepared and there is less social support during different stages of the flight). This vulnerability and non-resilience would result in a variety of mental disorders. The data shows how some LGB-asylum seekers (1 example from an expert) cope with this situation by committing suicide. Lotte (S) for example, explained that she has experienced it twice that an LGB-asylum seekers made an attempt to end his life while they were in a reception center.

However, the majority (seven LGB-asylum seekers) can be categorized as the middle group: they do adjust to the Belgian culture and do not preserve the cultural beliefs of the home country, but this is no straightforward process. The sexual conformity pressure in the reception centers is confusing and traumatizing, but people are still determined to grow. They follow the strategy to be conform towards the dominant sexual conformity pressure: they hide the sexual identity during the different phases of the flight, except during the legal migration procedure where there is another norm. This confirms and extends the

conclusion of Bassetti (2018) that both refugee-specific challenges and challenges based on the gender identity play crucial rules in complicating their integration. The third strategy is then chosen because they want to avoid conflicts, because they adapt themselves to the dominant culture of micro-environments and because they do not want to be a victim of bullying by showing deviant behavior. Most LGB-asylum seekers therefore find a way to escape from these traumatic environments. They seek help or are guided by several people and organizations, as will be discussed in the next sub-chapter.

Last, there are clear indications that asylum seekers can change towards another agency. Matt (R) for example explained how he was scared in the beginning to be an LGB-asylum seeker in a reception center but how this changed after a while and how LGB-associations learned him what to do if he is insulted in the center or elsewhere. Coming in can then be described as an essential mechanism to deal with the different normative environments. Different forms of coming in were mentioned as essential during the flight in Belgium (see next sub-chapter). Lotte (E) for instance explained how *'LGB-applicants were less in the center because they were strongly connected with the LGB-community, they had a large network, therefore the life in the reception center was less hard for them, because they could escape'.*

7.6. Coming in(to) …
7.6.1. By Significant Others

A first resource that is used by all the LGB-asylum seekers/refugees, is to rely on the help of significant others. This is based on the idea of Mead (Jakoby, 2015) whereby he refers to the important role of self-definition and reality maintenance. Social assistants who work in reception centers seem to be principle agents who help to construct their identity (Jakoby, 2015) as if they are the only safe place in the center where LGB-applicants can openly talk about the sexual identity. Every LGB-applicant explained that their social assistant knows their sexual orientation. Social assistants therefore have a motivational role: they make LGB-applicants aware about the fact that they do not have to hide the sexual identity because they are free in Belgium. The example below of Bonbon (R) illustrates how LGB-applicants are helped to accept the sexual orientation and to publicly express the homosexuality:

"My social assistant is very good to me, he told me that the most important thing I have to do is being recognized as a refugee and getting my papers, well, he learned me that this is another country, that people are free here."

Second, the instrumental aspect of their role needs to be stressed. All LGB-applicants were recommended by their social assistant to go to LGB-associations to get help. Social assistants thus use the coming in and LGB-organizations to create a safe haven. The observations during the fieldwork on the one hand show that this strategy seems to be a standard procedure, but also illustrate how this can affect people in a negative way. Social assistants namely send asylum seekers to meetings of these organizations as soon as they know that they are homosexual, without taking into consideration the personal story of the LGB-applicant and the personal level of traumatization and self-acceptance of the homosexuality. This can be illustrated by an observation of a Latin-American LGB-person who was not comfortable to reveal the sexual identity and to join an LGB-meeting:

"One boy in particular was really nervous, he did not want to talk and he did not want to share his story. He was really shy when I talked to him. But after a while, he told me that he did not want to be at the meeting, he did not feel comfortable. However, his social assistant told him that this would be a good thing for his legal procedure. He was told that he 'would seem more creditable and believable as an LGB-refugee'. After half an hour, this person had left."

7.6.2. … A Safe Micro-Environment

Entering a safe micro-environment by going to LGB-associations that organize meetings for LGB-asylum seekers in particular, can be considered as a second resource for LGB-applicants to deal with the sexual conformity pressure. All participants went to these meetings. Lotte (E) explained how it is remarkable that every LGB-applicant she met is connected with the Belgian community-life, while this is not the case for non-LGB-applicants. This form of coming in is characterized by five incentives. First and most importantly, LGB-respondents explained that they go to LGB-associations because they believe in the ideas of self-discovery and self-acceptance of the sexual identity, as is described by Rosario et al. (2001). Every LGB-respondent told that this is a way to accept the sexual orientation. Alex (R) for example, explained that he went to Rainbow House because '*he wanted to get help and to accept who he is*'. Ziggy said that '*they explain how to love oneself*'. Raa (R) added that '*meeting like-minded people whereby no one has to be in the closet, is essential'.* The conclusion of Poelman's research (2011), who found that LGB-organizations have a crucial role in the self-development and acceptance, is in this way confirmed.

More specifically, applicants are taught that they can express the homosexuality in Belgium, especially outside the center. The organizations learn LGB-asylum seekers/refugees that '*they can be themselves in Belgium, they don't have to be scared, they don't have to hide themselves anymore',* as Oliviero (E) explained. This can be linked with the aspect of safety: LGB-associations are described as a 'safe place' by six participants. Turbey (R) for instance describes it as '*a place where I can finally be myself'.* Fourat (E) describes it as an important '*safe heaven'.* As a concrete example, Joe (R) testified that he decided to grow his hair once he arrived in Belgium, as a way to express the sexual orientation, which was not possible in Palestine. Another example of Lotte (S) shows that this type of coming in inspires LGB-asylum seekers/refugees to do a coming out and to create a new identity (Dewaele, 2010):

"LGB-refugees dress differently in the center than outside the center. In the center they are careful […] but outside the center, they know that they can express the homosexuality. They know it is accepted, these organizations really stress that they can be who they are. So, LGB-refugees experiment with this and for the one person this is easier than for the other, […] but they know that they can be themselves in Belgium, they talk a lot about it in the associations, so they seek an identity outside the center."

Second, all LGB-participants underline the importance of a community-feeling, as is described in the literature (Poelman, 2011). Bonbon (R) for example declared that these associations are *'like a family, you feel comfortable, the people there are like a community'*. It seems to offer a community to LGB-applicants because they can *'meet other people who have a similar story and who have experienced similar problems'* and *'they can share what they cannot share elsewhere'* as Daniel (E) stated. Joe (R) stressed the importance of the relation between self-acceptance and the community feeling, since he said: *'when you are in a community that respects you and that respects your feelings and what you like, this makes me happy and this makes me accept myself more, you know, to be in a place where you know you have rights and where they protect you'*.

Third, friendship seems to be an incentive for six respondents. This can be seen as a concrete way of social support, which is important for the acceptance of the sexual identity (Poelman, 2011). Bonbon (R) for example explained how his friends he met in LGB-associations, help him when he has a difficult moment (in the reception center). He said that *'he has contact with his LGB-friends all the time, also some people who live in the center'*. Anthony (R) explained that his LGB-friends are important because *'they are always there to listen to me, they know my needs, I can always talk to them, it are really my friends who always support me'*. The example of Anthony also shows that entering the LGB-community and making friends in this micro-environment, is a good way to be able to escape from the micro-environment of the reception center.

Fourth, entering the LGB-community, gives LGB-applicants hope. This was mentioned by six LGB-participants. On the one hand, LGB-associations organize specific activities to create this feeling. During one of my observations in Rainbow House for example, a documentary was presented about testimonies of Canadian LGB-applicants who testified about their story. Joe (R) for instance, explained that the documentary made him cry because *'he felt so connected with these people'*. The respondents clarified that the movie gave them '*hope'* and a feeling of '*connection*', not only with the asylum seekers from the movie but also with the people from the organizations. Oliviero (E) stressed that he showed this documentary because he wanted to motivate people. On the other hand, the community-feeling itself gives hope. It helps people to feel better about themselves psychologically. A quote of Anthony (R) clarifies this:

"It is really psychologically. I really need this kind of help. They are there to help me, to give me hope. Because I really thought that I would never get to the point where I want to be, that I would be completely free, but now I think that I am getting there."

A last incentive is the fact that LGB-organizations give practical information. This is in line with results of Poelman (2011) and the role of giving information as an LGB-association, but clarifies how LGB-organizations also help with the pressure to be recognized as a refugee. At the one hand, the observations in Rainbow House and the interview with Oliviero (E) showed that LGB-associations give information about safe sex and HIV, legal protection in Belgium towards queerness and the Belgian history of homosexuals. At the other hand, LGB-associations help LGB-asylum seekers to prepare the juridical migration procedure. Every LGB-respondent mentioned this reason as important go to these organizations. Fourat (E) clarified that they do not give the exact questions, but they *'try to give context and a framework to do the interviews'*. Daniel (E) also mentioned that LGB-applicants are learned to have trust in themselves and in their story. They are taught that they do not have to invent stories or overexaggerate their story to be believed. Bonbon (R) summarized a component of his motivation:

"These associations are important because I learn things about how the migration procedure works in Belgium, what rights exist, there are plenty of people there who can help you, also when you have a question about cohousing for example when you are recognized and you want to cohouse, when you want to get to know other people and things like that."

An important barrier, however, is the fact that most LGB-applicants (seven out of ten) do not want to be seen by people of the same ethnic-community or by inhabitants of the reception center when going to LGB-associations. These people belong to the middle-group of the three agencies. This is an extension of the visibility management concept of Poelman (2011) where she claims that people manage where they want to be open about the homosexuality. Anthony (R) had to convince himself that *'people of the same center who are at the meetings, will not hurt him and are there for the same reason as he is'*. Joe (R) explained that LGB-people of the same center agree to lie about the visit to Rainbow House. Finally, people realize that they are safe in this specific micro-environment. In the quote below, Fourat (E) explains how LGB-respondents felt more safe and changed their minds of not hiding themselves anymore, by inviting other people to the meetings. This change can be explained by the development of the self-acceptance and the recognition that they are safe in Belgium:

"At the end, you could see that people started to take other people of the same center with them to the meetings, while this was their biggest fear in the beginning, this is really an evolution, in the beginning

they really did not want to see other people of the center, they were super scared that anyone would see

them and would tell it to other people of the center."

7.6.3. … Different Normative Environments

A last resource to cope with this sexual conformity pressure, is to seek different normative environments. LGB-asylum seekers revert to the safety-feeling and the extent to which they can be themselves, to evaluate different normative environments. Two respondents referred to gay bars and seven LGB-participants to the Gay Pride. The difference in number can be explained by the fact that applicants do not have enough financial resources to go to bars. The Gay Pride in particular is also promoted by LGB-associations. Both places are described as a safe place, a place where they are protected by the police and a place where they can express the homosexuality. Martin (R) described the Pride as '*a party […], where the police protects them, where they do not have to hide themselves […] and which is impossible to do in their home country […]*'. Anthony (R) even described it as his *'dream'.* People who did not experience the Gay Pride yet, would like to go.

However, this does not imply that LGB-applicants did not hesitate to go to these environments. Daniel (E) told how most LGB-participants are nervous and scared because they cannot believe these events are legal. He assigned a situation whereby LGB-respondents suggested to wear masks at the Pride to make sure they would not be recognized. Nevertheless, after a while they took off their masks because they were encouraged by other people. Daniel (E) described it as *'a recognition of their sexual identity'.* The next Pride, they went without the masks. In this manner, the example shows that the phenomena of coming out and coming in are interwoven, as previous research (Poelman, 2011) noticed. The combination of these feelings of unbelief and fear at the one hand, and excitement and happiness at the other hand to do a coming in and a coming out, are further exhibited in the example of Fourat (E):

"For some people the Pride was the first time they could be themselves. The idea that they could dance on

a truck in front of everyone without getting in trouble, was spectacular for them. They were really

surprised and they couldn't believe that this wouldn't cause problems. We really had to make that clear.

But afterwards they were so excited, these are the important moments to realize for them that they are

safe, it gives them intrinsic motivation, it helps them to confirm that fleeing was a good decision."

8.Discussion

8.1. How Trajectories of Sexual Identity, Legal Migration Procedure and Integration Among Male LGB-Asylum Seekers are Intertwined During the Flight

In this study the connection between trajectories of sexual identity, legal migration procedure and integration among male LGB-asylum seekers were explored. The theoretical framework looked to classical theories of the exploration of the sexual identity and its focus on self-acceptance, and familiar theories of integration on the one hand, and theories of the legal migration procedure and its limitations for LGB-asylum seekers in particular at the other hand. These frames were further developed so that it corresponds with the current societal context in which life during the asylum procedure can no longer be ignored. The common thread throughout the flight is that LGB-asylum seekers are in every phase of the flight forced to meet towards changing normative expectations about how to express the sexual identity. There is a constant sexual conformity pressure.

Furthermore, this research clarified contradictory expectations throughout the flight. First, the legal migration procedure is constructed on a paradox. On the one hand, it is supposed that LGB-asylum seekers demonstrate how they are in danger in the country of origin by being forced to hide the sexual orientation, but simultaneously it is expected that they have not internalized this homophobia. Second, the CGVS ignores the fact that the self-acceptance of the sexuality is not finished once asylum seekers arrive in Belgium. Last, while LGB-asylum seekers want to adapt to the Belgian culture where homosexuality is accepted and publicly expressed, they are confronted with homophobia during the complete experience of the flight. The life in reception centers is described as unsafe because there is a heterosexual conformity pressure. Homophobia is also associated with people of a similar culture: LGB-applicants are scared to publicly express the sexual identity and to experience the same mental and/or physical violence as in the home country. This illustrates how the sexual identity trajectory is obstructed because the violence in these normative micro-environments makes it more difficult to believe that they are safe in Belgium.

This corresponds with results of Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen (2013). Although this research explains how LGB-asylum seekers cope with these trajectories that happen simultaneously. Three agencies, based on the integration model of Berry (Schwartz & Zamboanga, 2008), were exposed. First, a minority was capable to assimilate by ignoring the heteronormative sexual conformity pressure, and exploring different phases of the sexual identity. A second group is at risk to marginalize, by committing suicide. Nevertheless, most

applicants seem to be confused and traumatized throughout different phases of the flight, but want to move forward to be recognized. There is an emancipatory potential but they need help via a coming in. This stresses the instrumental character via the help of social assistants. This research found three aspects of doing a coming in: entering the LGB-community by the help of significant others, coming into a safe micro-environment and coming into a different normative environment. This confirms the importance of a coming in and the improved well-being, as was already proven (Poelman, 2011) but shows how a safe environment is especially important for LGB-asylum seekers because they are extra vulnerable and they need tools to be recognized.

8.2. Recommendations for Governmental Institutions

Although governmental institutions should be aiming towards consistent and clear administrative guidelines (Millbank, 1995), researchers plead for a more transparent asylum procedure (Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, 2013). Based on my results, I focus on three essential aspects. First, it is believed that the vision of credibility has to change (Le Déroff & Jansen, 2014): credibility can only be verified when the LGB-asylum seeker can tell its story in a safe environment, whereby the person has the possibility to choose accents and bring nuances (Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2011), based on the recognition that not every applicant has finished the different stages of the self-acceptance of the sexual identity. Doing a linguistic coming out, as is expected, is not essential. It needs to be understood that other questions need to be asked, whereby there is more focus on the way questions are asked, the personal story and open questions. The research confirms that interviewers need to be willing to deviate from the protocol and the fixed construction about how a homosexual asylum seeker should look like (Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2011).

Second, Belgian organizations (Cavaria, 2019; Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, 2013) plead for a more harmonized asylum procedure, whereby self-identification is the basis criterium to clarify the sexual orientation. This means that it cannot be expected that every LGB-asylum seeker has had same-sex experiences and/or relationships (Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, 2013). Authorities need to recognize variety in the expression of the sexual identity. When there is a conversation about previous relations, there should be more focus on the personal story and how they felt during the relationship. It also means that it needs to be recognized that the sexual identity trajectory is a personal trajectory and that the long-term exposure in reception centers to the same sexual conformity pressure as in the home country, retraumatizes the asylum seekers and creates variety in the agencies. This leads me to the third recommendation and the importance for interviewers to take time for each asylum seeker. Especially for LGB-asylum seekers it is essential to build a bond of trust since they are not only traumatized by suppressing the sexual identity in the country of origin (Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2011) but also during other moments of the flight.

A second group of recommendations must provide an answer to the life in reception centers and the dominant heterosexual conformity pressure that complicates the sexual identity trajectory for LGB-asylum seekers. Coming in is nowadays used as a resource to deal with the different normative environments. An additional solution, however, which is suggested by all the experts, is to provide separate reception centers

for LGB-asylum seekers. Lotte (E) explained how special centers for people with a so-called vulnerable profile already exist in Belgium, but this group also entails minor asylum seekers. The research indicated how processes of self-acceptance of the sexual identity, legal migration procedure and integration strategies are connected. Centers where different types of people with a vulnerable profile live together, do not necessarily solve the problem.

Oliviero (E) therefore pleads to learn from other countries, such as Italy and Germany, who already introduced separate centers. Another possibility is to adopt the model from The Netherlands, whereby a part of the reception centers consist of 50% LGB-asylum seekers and 50% non-LGB-asylum seekers. Via this way, the specific barriers concerning visibility management by a coming in, would be addressed. Second and most importantly, LGB-applicants would be able to continue the self-acceptance process of the sexual identity, by being able to express the homosexuality in a safe environment. Furthermore, there would be professional help since social assistants in these centers would be trained to guide and help these specific groups. This is necessary since Lotte (E) and other experts argued how *'there are no specific guidelines nowadays. Every center has a lot of freedom to help LGB-applicants.'*

8.3. Future Research about LGB-Asylum Seekers

Although one of the aims of this research was to look how agencies are created by LGB-asylum seekers to deal with trajectories of sexual identity, legal migration procedure and integration, the most obvious methodological limitation is that theoretical saturation is not reached. Due to a time limit of one year to collect data and restrictions in financial resources, I was merely able to collaborate with one LGB-organization. I was therefore not able to look at variation between LGB-asylum seekers who go to different LGB-communities, applicants who do not ever go to LGB-communities or people who use marginalization as an agency. More research is needed to better understand in which circumstances the latter group is created, how this integration strategy is applied and what the consequences are for the advises during the legal migration procedure. Additionally, this research suggests that integration strategies will also be essential after the applicant is recognized. Last, this dissertation does not explain why the sexual conformity pressure is dominant in these centers.

Future research could therefore execute the same research in a methodologically different way. A concrete suggestion would be to negotiate access via fieldwork in reception centers. First, this would allow the researcher to observe every inhabitant of the center. Another advantage of this method would be that the life in a reception center and how LGB-asylum seekers develop agencies to deal with the sexual conformity pressure, would be better understood. However, it would be a challenge to take into account moral principles. A clear plan about how to present oneself and how to present the research, are essential. I would recommend to accomplish semi-hidden research whereby the researcher reveals its role but does not explain the exact research questions.

Second, research (Murray, 2014) advises to focus on female LGB-asylum seekers as well as transgender-asylum seekers because there is too little information about these specific groups. Since this research shows how male homosexual asylum seekers experience a similar sexual conformity pressure and fear to be open about the sexuality as in the home country, both inside and outside reception centers, specific questions that arise for transgender-asylum seekers/refugees are how they suppress the gender identity and how they develop specific agencies to deal with these different normative environments during the flight. Additionally, it can be wondered how female LGB-asylum seekers experience this sexual conformity pressure (both in the home country and in Belgium), how they establish agencies of social support and coming in, and how these and other aspects differ with men.

9. Conclusion

In this study I explored how trajectories of sexual identity, legal migration procedure and integration for LGB-asylum seekers are intertwined. More specifically, male homosexual asylum seekers and refugees were analyzed. On the basis of in-depth interviews with applicants and experts, as well as observations in an LGB-organization, I reflected about underlying patterns, connections between concepts and contradictions throughout the experience of the flight. The first sub-question was formulated to clarify the contradiction that is pointed out in literature (Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, 2013) whereby LGB-asylum seekers are expected to be open about the sexual identity during the flight in Belgium, but simultaneously seem to be traumatized from experiences in the home country and have other cultural ideas about publicly expressing the homosexuality. The second sub-question was formulated to examine how LGB-asylum seekers create a specific agency to cope with these three trajectories.

Research (Brickell, 2009) already found how self-acceptance of the sexuality depends on the context. Additionally, this research illustrates that LGB-asylum seekers experience a suppressed desire to be open about the sexuality throughout the complete flight. The results show how the same sexual conformity pressure in reception centers and in ethnic communities as in the home country, leads to a complicated situation for LGB-asylum seekers to deviate by openly expressing the homosexual identity, as is expected during the legal migration procedure. They are seeking for safety, but also during the flight in Belgium, it is complicated to find this. Different contradictory expectations illustrate how the sexual identity trajectory is obstructed because LGB-applicants are forced to deal with different normative micro-environments, to provide an answer to the first sub-question.

These different normative expectations throughout the flight lead to different agencies, as an answer on the second sub-question. A first group uses assimilation as an integration strategy. A second small group is at risk to marginalize. Third, most LGB-applicants follow the in-between strategy: they are traumatized by the flight and are disappointed about the unsafe feeling in Belgium, but they are motivated to move forward and to have a better life. LGB-applicants referred to different types of help in the form of a coming in to evolve in this dynamic process: coming in by significant others, coming into a safe micro-environment and coming into a different normative environment. The first type stresses the instrumental characteristic: coming in is highly recommended by social assistants as a way to escape from the heteronormative sexual conformity pressure at the one hand, and to be recognized as a refugee, at the other hand.

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11. Appendix

11.1. Sample Matrices

Table 2: Sample Matrix for LGB-Asylum Seekers/Refugees

Pseudonym	Age (years)	Gender (m/f/x)	Country of origin	# years since start of the flight	Phase of the flight	Accommodation situation in Belgium during legal procedure	Coming in in Belgium
Martin	24	Male	Macedonia	5	Recognized as refugee	Private apartment	Yes
Alex	32	Male	Cameroun	2,5	Not recognized as refugee	Asylum center	Yes
Joe	27	Male	Palestine	1	Not recognized as refugee	Asylum center	Yes
Raa	19	Male	Palestine	1,5	Recognized as refugee	Asylum center	Yes
Turbey	21	Male	El Salvador	1	Not recognized as refugee	Social housing	Yes
Anthony	26	Male	Ghana	1,5	Not recognized as refugee	Asylum center	Yes
Bonbon	41	Male	Cameroun	1,5	Not recognized as refugee	Asylum center	Yes
Jacky	22	Male	Sierra Leone	1,5	Not recognized as refugee	Asylum center	Yes

Matt	27	Male	Sierra Leone	1	Not recognized as refugee	Asylum center	Yes
Ziggy	43	Male	Cameroun	5	Not recognized as refugee	Asylum center	Yes

Table 3: Sample Matrix for Experts

Pseudonym	Name of organization	Function in organization	Project with asylum seekers/refugees	# years of experience
Fourat	Çavaria	Project manager	Safe Heaven	1,5
Daniel	Fedasil	Coordinator social services	Rainbows United	11
Oliviero	Rainbow House	Spokesman + trainer of staff + project manager of intercultural projects	Rainbow House: meetings with LGB-asylum seekers/refugees	5,5
Lotte	SOI/LOI	Social assistant	Activities in reception center	3

11.2. Contact with Organizations

11.2.1. Example of Mail (1)

This is an example of e-mails I sent to organizations from February until May 2019. I did this to get a better understanding of how difficult it would be to reach organizations and how many organizations actually do have contact with LGB-asylum seekers/refugees.

Dear,

I am Zoë Fransen and I study Sociology at the university of Ghent. In the context of my master thesis, I would like to do research about LGB-asylum seekers/refugees. I would like to understand how they experience their flight and their life in Belgium.

In this early stage of my research, I would like to estimate the feasibility to reach this group. As *organization x,* you have a lot of contact with these people. Based on your expertise, I would like to know whether it is possible to reach some asylum seekers/refugees. Based on your answer(s), I will decide how I will continue my research.

A last essential element is that the interviews themselves, will not go on right now. I do not expect from you that you bring me into direct contact with asylum seekers/refugees right now. This will happen in a later phase (starting from August 2019).

At the moment, it would help me to get a better understanding of the feasibility of my research. Would you be interested to work together with me?

You can reach me via mail: Zoe.Fransen@UGent.be or via phone: 0489/10.58.44.

In case you have further questions, do not hesitate to contact me.
Thank you in advance.

Kind regards,
Zoë Fransen

11.2.2. Example of Mail (2)

This is an example of e-mails I sent to organizations since August 2019. In this stage, the actual part of negotiating access started.

Dear,

I am Zoë Fransen and I study Sociology at the university of Ghent. In the context of my master thesis, I do research about LGB-asylum seekers/refugees. I would like to understand how they experience their flight and their life in Belgium. I believe more research is needed about this topic. I would like to understand their perspective. I will do this by taking into account different contexts and perspectives, for example the perspective of asylum seekers/refugees but also of experts.

However, I am looking for respondents who would like to participate. An interview will be between 45 minutes and 1,5 hours. Both asylum seekers/refugees and experts can tell their story anonymously. It is not evident to reach this group and therefore I would like to cooperate with your organization. After all, you are the best partner who can estimate which asylum seeker/refugee is ready for this and which one is not.

I would really appreciate it if I could come along to discuss this.

On account of the privacy protection, I understand that you cannot give me a list of all the LGB-refugees in your organization. But maybe you could spread my pamphlet (see appendix) to let people know my research exists? Or maybe it is a possibility that I present myself in the organization when there are activities for LGB-asylum seekers/refugees? I think we could mean something for each other as if my research can also be relevant for your organization.

Last, I would like to stress the following aspects:
- I think it is extremely important that the asylum seekers/refugees can tell their story in a safe environment.
- I do not want to push anyone who is not ready to talk about the (traumatic) experiences.
- The interview is completely based on free will.

- However, I believe this research good be an added value for future LGB-asylum seekers/refugees if the information can be spread to other organizations. But of course, asylum seekers/refugees themselves need to feel comfortable to talk about it.
- I am willing to change my research questions to a certain extent to make the research as valuable as possible for organizations who work with this group.

I hope you have the time to discuss this with me. Do not hesitate to contact me in case you have further questions. I am available via e-mail: Zoe.Fransen@UGent.be or via phone: 0489/10.58.44

Thank you in advance.

Kind regards,
Zoë Fransen

11.2.3. List 1: Contacted Organizations

1. Merhaba Brussels (Organization for LGBTQ-asylum seekers/refugees and migrants)
   Klaartje Van Kerckem
   communicatie@merhaba.be
   ➔ *Contact by telephone (1x) and by mail (2x): she argued that there are too many questions from students to interview these people. She thinks these people are overloaded and that they do not get anything in return. She decided not to participate with the research.*

2. Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen (Organization for refugees)
   Valerie Trachez
   valerie@vluchtelingenwerk.be
   ➔ *Contact by mail (2x): she argued that at these moments, she did not have contact with LGBTQ-refugees.*

3. Hart voor vluchtelingen (Organization for refugees)
   welzijnengelijkekansen@stad.gent

➔ *Contact by mail (2x): they argued that they do not have contact with LGBTQ-refugees at these moments.*

4. Hand in hand, Gent (Organization for refugees and migrants)

Handinhand-gent@telenet.be

➔ *Contact by mail (2x): they argued that they do not have contact with LGBTQ-refugees at these moments. Reference to other organizations.*

5. Rosa (Organization for women)

contact@campagnerosa.be

➔ *Contact by mail (1x): no response.*

6. Çavaria (Organization for LGBTQ-community)

Jeroen.borghs@cavaria.be

➔ *Contact by mail (2x): they argued that they do not have contact with LGBTQ-refugees at these moments. Reference to other organizations.*

7. Casa Rosa vzw (Organization for women)

infor@casarosa.be

➔ *Contact by mail (2x): first: no response, later: they argued that they do not have contact with LGBTQ-refugees.*

8. Why me, Antwerp (African LGBTQ-community)

Whyme-2012@hotmail.com

➔ *Contact by mail (2x): first: no response, later: they argued that they do not want to participate because the community is overloaded by researchers.*

9. Shouf shouf (Intercultural LGBTQ-community)

Contact via Facebookpage

➔ *Contact by mail (2x): first: no response, later: they argued that they do not want to participate because the community is overloaded by researchers.*

10. Ella (Knowledge Centrum, Gender & Diversity, Brussels)

ella.info@amazone.be

➔ *Contact by mail (1x): no response.*

11. Bouworde vzw (Voluntary organization for young adults who also organize voluntary work in Belgian reception centers)

charlotte@bouworde.be

➔ *Contact via mail (1x): Reference to direct e-mail addresses of reception centers of the Red Cross.*

12. Rode Kruis Vlaanderen

Integratie.ocwingene@rodekruis.be

➔ *Contact by mail (1x): voluntary work in the summer of 2019 was possible (Reception Center in Wingene) but no LGB-refugees at that moment.*

13. Minderhedenforum

Christelle.Kaisala@minderhedenforum.be

➔ *Contact by mail (1x): No reaction.*

14. In-Gent

Lien.willaert@in-gent.be

➔ *Contact by mail (1x): they argued that they do not have contact with LGBTQ-refugees at these moments. Reference to other organizations.*

15. Holebigemeenschap voor Migranten (Community for LGBTQ-migrants)

➔ *Contact by phone (5x): Responsible was able to help but no contact anymore after 5 calls, explanation: too busy.*

16. Wel Jong Niet Hetero (Organization for LGBTQ-community)

Jenabah.Kamara@weljongniethetero.be

➔ *Contact by mail (2x) and 1 appointment: Informal conversation, but she argued that at that moment, there were no projects with LGBTQ-refugees. Reference to other organizations.*

17. Rainbow House Brussels (Organization for LGBTQ-community + LGBTQ-refugees)

Rachael.Moore@rainbowhouse.be and Oliviero.Aseglio@rainbowhouse.be

➔ *Contact by mail: they were willing to help.*

18. Fedasil Brussels (Organization for Refugees)

Daniel.Huygens@fedasil.be and Martine.Hendrickx@fedasil.be

➔ *Contact by mail: they were willing to help.*

19. Massimadi Festival (Film Festival for Black Gays in Brussels)

Koessan.Gabiam@gmail.be

➔ *Contact by mail (2x): he was not in touch with LGBTQ-refugees at that moment. Reference to other organizations. + invitation to the film festival but I was abroad for my internship at that moment.*

20. Fourat Ben Chickha (Responsible Safe Haven: project for LGBTQ-refugees)

Fourat.BenChickha@groen.be

➔ *Contact by mail: he was willing to help.*

21. Het Roze Huis (Organization for LGBTQ-community)

Marieke.Jochems@hetrozehuis.be

➔ *Contact by mail (1x): they were not in touch with LGBTQ-refugees at that moment. Reference to other organizations.*

22. Boysproject CAW Antwerp (Organization for Gay Black Homosexuals)

Boysproject@cawantwerpen.be

➔ *Contact by mail (1): No response.*

23. Piet De Bruyn (Flemish politician who focuses on LGBTQ-refugees)

piet.debruyn@nva.be

➔ *Contact by mail (4x): he agreed to participate but after a while, no response anymore.*

24. Marcia Poelman (works in Het Roze Huis in Antwerp and wrote a research about homosexuality for migrants and refugees)

Marcia.poelman@hetrozehuis.be

➔ *Contact by mail (1x): no response.*

25. Ines Rombouts (works in Het Roze Huis in Antwerpt and organizes a lot of projects about homosexuality for migrants and refugees)

Ines.rombouts@hetrozehuis.be

➔ *Contact by mail (1x): no response.*

26. Mails to all Flemish Reception Centers of the Red Cross to have an interview with social workers and/or directors about the topic of LGB-refugees.

➔ *4/5th did not respond, if they did respond, they did not want to participate. Reference to other organizations.*

11.2.4. List 2: Organizations who Participated

1. Rainbow House, Brussels

Rainbow House is the most important organization in this research. They are a non-profit organization who organize specific meetings for LGB-asylum seekers/refugees to help them with their particular difficulties. Rainbow House played an important role in this research for several reasons. First of all, I did an interview with the main organizer of this meetings. Second, because Rainbow House is such an important organization for LGB-asylum seekers/refugees, I decided to do fieldwork light in this organization. Third, going to these meetings was also important because the organization allowed me to present my research to LGB-asylum seekers/refugees.

2. Wel Jong Niet Hetero

Wel Jong Niet Hetero is a non-profit organization that focuses on the mental wellbeing of LGBTQI-youngsters. This includes youngsters with or without an ethnic-cultural background. The organization was especially important in the beginning of the research since I had an informal conversation with one of the employers in August who is responsible to include more youngsters with an ethnic-cultural background. The conversation was about 'how to reach LGB-asylum seekers/refugees' and 'what I could focus on more' after I explained my initial research questions. After this conversation, I decided to include the phenomena of coming in since there is little research about it. This approach stresses the cyclical approach of this research again.

3. Fedasil

Fedasil is a governmental organization in Belgium. They describe themselves as the 'federal agency for the reception of asylum seekers'. They 'take care for the reception of applicants for international protection and ensure the quality and conformity of the different reception structures' (Fedasil, 2020). They also coordinate the organization of voluntary returns of refugees to the country of origin. More specifically, they grant material aid ('bed', 'bath', 'bread') with particular attention to specific needs and vulnerable target groups. Their role in this research was to gain more information, via interviews: I did some interviews with the personnel who are specialized in LGB-asylum seekers/refugees. In the first round, but also in the second round.

4. Fourat Ben Chickha: Safe Haven Project, çavaria

It was interesting to interview Fourat Ben Chickha since he was the organizer of the Safe Haven Project of çavaria. This is a similar project as Rainbow House organizes: they organize specific meetings for LGB-asylum seekers/refugees, they guide them during the juridical migration and integration process and they try to help them with whatever they can, e.g. finding accommodation. In other words, they attempt to create a safe haven.

5. Interview with Lotte

I decided to interview Lotte because she is a social assistant in a reception center where she also had a lot of contact with LGB-asylum seekers/refugees. Since this research uses a multi-contextual approach, it was interesting to take into account the perspective of social assistants since they understand the difficulties for LGB-asylum seekers/refugees to live in a reception center, they understand how the reception centers deal with this and how LGB-asylum seekers/refugees are helped and guided by these centers.

11.3. Address Message LGB-Asylum Seekers & Refugees

11.3.1. Letter

Dear,

Thank you for your interest in my research about the experience of the flight of LGB-asylum seekers/refugees. In this letter, I will give some more information about the research and what you can expect when you participate with this research. First, I will present myself ones more.

I am Zoë Fransen and I am a sociology student at the university of Ghent. In the context of my end work, I would like to know more about the story of LGB-asylum seekers/refugees. For this reason, I conduct interviews during the months September, October, November, December 2019 and January, February, March, April, May and June 2020.

These interviews will be conducted by me and are not related with the official juridical migration procedure that asylum seekers/refugees need to do during the asylum procedure.

Privacy will be guaranteed. It is considered as something essential. Privacy will be guaranteed because:

- You can choose another name that will be used to refer to little pieces of your story. I will never use your real name or other characteristics that might reveal your identity,
- I will record the interview to be able to listen to you carefully. After the interview, the audio fragment will be used to analyze the conversation. Only I will listen to these fragments. At the end of the research, the fragments will be destroyed,
- You can decide yourself what you want to talk about and what not. I will respect this at all times.

Also, you can choose the language of the interview yourself. The interview can take place in Dutch, French, English or Spanish. When you want to tell your story in another language, I can arrange an interpreter. Or you can choose someone yourself who wants to translate and who you trust.

The interview will last between 45 minutes and 1,5 hours. The location of the interview, is a place you choose yourself. Choose a place you feel safe and comfortable to share your story. It is no problem for me to come to your house, the reception center, your city or any other place.

Last, the interview is about your flight as an LGB-asylum seeker/refugee. You need to be aware of the fact that you will talk about personal experiences. Important is that you need to know that we can stop the interview or take a break whenever you want. You decide yourself what you want to talk about and what not. You decide your boundaries! In case, you do not want to answer a question, this will be respected at all times.

In case you would like to participate with this research or in case you have further questions, you can contact me via e-mail: Zoe.Fransen@UGent.be, via phone (also WhatsApp): 0489/10.58.44 or Facebook: Zoë Fransen.

Interviews will start at the beginning of September 2019. Do not hesitate to send me a message and I will answer as soon as possible to fix a date.

Thank you in advance for your interest.

Kind regards,
Zoë Fransen

11.3.2. Oral Introduction

This was the speech I gave when I introduced myself in a meeting from Rainbow House. Before the meetings started, there was always a lunch, everyone was eating, and I just participated and talked with the asylum seekers/refugees, so most of them already knew the reason I was there. I just told them in a casual way, the reason I was there and I already gave them the pamphlet.

Hi,

My name is Zoë, I am a Sociology student at the university of Ghent. I am here to tell a bit more about my research. I am doing a research about LGB-asylum seekers/refugees and issues you experienced during your flight but also during your stay so far in Belgium.

I work together with several organizations, for example Fedasil, who would like to know more about this so that they can change things eventually.

I think it is important to hear this from you. Therefore, I do interviews. These interviews last between 45 minutes and 1,5 hours. They can take place at any place, also here in Rainbow House. I can also come to your center or your city.

I also made pamphlets, if you want to read the information again and if you need to think about it. My contact information is also on the pamphlet.

11.3.3. Pamphlet

LOOKING FOR LGB-REFUGEES

September 2019 – July 2020

University Ghent
Zoë Fransen, student

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

Hi!

My name is Zoë and I am a Sociology student at the university of Ghent. My research is about Belgian LGB-refugees. I am interested in their story about their flight and the problems they experience. In contrary with what you might think, this will not influence their trajectory as a refugee. I am interested in what they think about Belgium, how they feel, why they have made certain choices, and so on.

Are you participating?

My research is based on fieldwork and interviews. This means I try to spend as much as time with LGB-refugees and people who try to help them. With some people, I conduct interviews about their life. *Everyone can help me out and so can you!* But why would you do that? Maybe you are tired of the fact that LGB-refugees are often forgotten or maybe you are frustrated about your life in Belgium? Or maybe you just want to talk about your problems with someone who does not judge you? And who does not belong to an authority?

How it will go…

1. Everything is anonymous

I will record our interview but no one else will ever hear it. I will never tell everyone what you have told me. Other people can read little pieces of your story afterwards, but by giving you an anonymous name (you choose yourself), no one will know this was you.

2. You are the boss!

I want to know what you think and how your life looks like. So actually you decide yourself what the interview is about, what you tell me and what not. I will ask you some questions but if there are things you do not want to talk about, I will respect this.

3. Define your own boundaries

The interview will go about personal experiences and stories, so there are no "wrong" or "good" answers. Every story and thoughts are interesting! Also, the interview will last between 45 minutes and 1,5 hours. You can take a break whenever you want. Where the interview will take place, is chosen by you!

4. Do not be ashamed

It is very important that you always say what you think! I would like to know your perspective and have a better understanding of your personal situation. You do not need to be scared that I would judge you or that I would not understand. I will listen to you with an open mind.

5. Choose your own language

The interview can take place in Dutch, English, French or Spanish. If you want to help by doing the interview in another language, this is no problem. I can arrange an interpreter or you can bring a person with you that you trust and feel comfortable with to translate.

"Yes, I participate!"

Would you like to participate?
You can contact me via phone (+32489105844), e-mail (Zoe.Fransen@UGent.be), WhatsApp (+32489105844) or Facebook (Zoë Fransen).

A short message is enough, I will contact you back as soon as possible!

11.4. Introduction, Drop-Off and Questionnaire for LGB-Asylum Seekers & Refugees

11.4.1. Introduction

Hello,

Welcome and thank you for having this conversation with me and taking time for this. I really appreciate this.

Maybe I will explain something about my research once more. So, as I already told you, I am doing a research about LGB-asylum seekers/refugees and I want to know more about your life here, and how you experience the procedure and everything that is going on in your life.

I asked you before I could record the interview, so that I can listen to it again. But after I have analyzed it, I will destroy it and I am also the only one who will listen to it, no one else will.

Also, no one will recognize you. I wanted to ask you if you want to have a fake name if I refer to you in my research, that is another name that no one can recognize you.

Also remember that there are no good or wrong answers, I am interested in your story. If you want to take a break or stop, this is no problem. In case you do not want to answer a question, I will respect this.

Is everything clear for you?

Ok, then you can sign this letter (*informed consent*) where everything that I told you, is explained again.

11.4.2. Drop-off 1 + Reworked Versions
(the term "drop-off", was not used in the interviews itself, but the questions were asked at the beginning of each interview)

Red: changes after pilot 1
Blue: changes after conversations with experts

Pseudonym:

Age:

Country of origin:

Date of arrival:

Phase of the flight: no refugee status yet – refugee status

In case respondent does not have a refugee status yet: specify this?

Duration of the flight:

Language knowledge:

With who did you flee or alone?:

At what age did you come out of the closet?:

The last question will not be asked at the beginning of the interview but will be clear later in the interview. After the conversation, the answer will be added to the drop-off to have a clear overview.

11.4.3. Questionnaire 1 + Reworked Versions

Red: changes after pilot 1

Blue: changes after conversation with experts

Green: changes after interview round 1

Yellow: deleted questions

You can see a <u>time line</u> on the table. Would it be okay for you to image your flight and all the most important moments of that flight?

Following questions were asked little by little when the respondent was telling the story. The list was used in a flexible way. It was difficult to know how the respondent would start the story, therefore it was important to listen carefully. If the respondents did not know for example how to start, the questions were a good start. But in reality, some questions were already answered spontaneously by the respondent or were answered in a different order.

1. Can you tell something more about yourself? If a social assistant or someone from Rainbow House would ask to introduce yourself, what would you say?
    a. What are your hobbies?

      b.   What was your job in your country of origin?

      c.   What did you study at school? What were your favorite courses?

2. Can you tell me something more about your life in your country of origin?

      a.   Could you give me a description of how a regular day looked like?

      b.   Could you tell me something more about your family situation?

          i.   How does your family look like? *(= brothers, sisters, …)*

          ii.   With who did you live together?

          iii.   How would you describe your relation with these people? With who are you close?

3. When did your flight start for you?

      a.   What was a trigger for you to leave your country?

          i.   Can you tell me something more about this?

          ii.   Why was this a trigger?

      b.   How did you feel or know that you cannot be gay or bisexual in your country?

          i.   How did you know homosexuality is not accepted?

          ii.   Who knew that you were gay or bisexual?

              1.   How did you decide to tell it? Or not tell it?

              2.   How did you try to hide your homosexuality?

                 a.   Did you try to hide this in a different way when you were with friends or with family?

4. How did your flight go?

      a.   What was difficult?

      b.   What were the problems you had to handle?

          i.   How did you handle these problems?

      c.   Who was with you during the flight?

          i.   Was it important that this person was with you?

          ii.   How did this person give support?

          iii.   Did you have other support?

          iv.   How did you notice that you had support? Or that you had no support?

5. Could you tell an important story during your flight and tell something more about this?

6. Can you tell me something more about the juridical procedure? The period where you had to do the official interviews?
    a. What did they ask during these conversations?
    b. How did you prepare yourself for this?
        i. Did you talk about this with other refugees?
        ii. Other LGB-refugees?
        iii. Did you get tips from them?
        iv. How did you use this information?
    c. What did you tell during these conversations?
    d. How did you behave?
        i. Did you try to behave yourself in a specific way?
        ii. Based on tips?
    e. Did you tell openly about your homosexuality?
        i. Yes, how?
        ii. Did you do this consciously?
        iii. Can you elaborate this?

7. Can you tell me something more about the period you had to wait for your advice (positive, negative or still waiting)?
    a. Where did you stay during this period?
    b. Did you talk openly about your homosexuality during that period?
        i. Yes, how?
        ii. Did you do this consciously?
        iii. Can you elaborate this?
    c. How did your daily life look like?
        i. Which people were important?
        ii. Who was the most important person?

8. *In case the respondent stayed or had stayed in a reception center:*
    You told me that you have stayed in a reception center, can you tell me something more about this?
    a. Can you describe how it was?

b. How did your daily life look like?

c. What did you do in your free time?

    i. Where are you?

    ii. What do you do?

d. Can you describe the contact you had with people?

    i. How did you seek contact with people in the center?

    ii. With whom did you avoid contact?

    iii. Who are your friends in the center?

    iv. When did you tell people in the center that you are homosexual?

    v. People who worked there

        1. When did you tell you are homosexual?

e. How did you decide to be open your sexuality or not?

    i. What are the difficulties to be homosexual in a reception center?

    ii. How does the center deal with homophobia, according to you?

        1. Can you give an example?

        2. Where there things that helped you to deal with this?

f. Were you scared in the center?

    i. Who helped you in the center?

    ii. How did they help you?

9. When was the first time that have heard of Rainbow House?

a. When did you go there for the first time?

    i. How was this?

    ii. Was your first meeting a group meeting, like the one that I met you for the first time?

    iii. How often do you go there?

    iv. What do you do there?

b. Why did you decide to come to Rainbow House?

c. How did they help you?

    i. Which advice did they give you?

        1. Did you follow this advice?

        2. Did other organizations also give you advice? Or other people?

        ii.   Why is Rainbow House important for you?

        iii.   What does Rainbow House mean for you?

  d.   Would you like to go more to Rainbow House?

        i.   Why or why not?

        ii.   Why do you feel safe there?

  e.   Do you have a lot of contact with people of Rainbow House? For example, during Corona?

  f.   Can you tell me something more about your friends from Rainbow House?

        i.   Do you have a lot of friends outside the center?

10. Do you know the Gay Pride?

  a.   How did you know it?

  b.   What do you think about it?

  c.   Have you been there?

  d.   How did you feel?

11. Have you ever thought about ending your life and killing yourself?

  a.   When?

  b.   Can you tell me something more about that?

  c.   Do you know other LGB-people who have thought about this?

12. What are your dreams?

  a.   Which things would you like to realize?

  b.   If I would meet you again in 10 years, how would you dream your life would look like?

  c.   What are your plans?

  d.   How will you realize these?

13. Summary of the conversation, mention contradictions.

  a.   Are there other things you would like to discuss? Things we did not discuss yet?

Deleted questions:

At what age did you realize that you are homosexual or bisexual?
1. When did you tell this for the first time to anyone?
2. How long did you not tell anyone?
3. How many people knew that you are homosexual or bisexual?
4. How did you decide to tell this? Or to not tell this?
5. Who have you told?

Who have you told that you are gay during your flight?

What was the most important moment during your flight?

How did you have the feeling that you had to deal in diverse ways with your flight?

What does the concept of coming out mean for you?

1. When did you hear this concept for the first time?

2. What does it mean for you? How did this meaning change?

3. When did you do a coming out for the first time, according to you?

   a. In which circumstances?

   b. With who was this?

   c. When was this?

How would you describe yourself as a homosexual or bisexual person?

1. Do you notice in how open you are towards your sexuality in different situations?

2. Would you say that you do this faster, now that you are in Belgium?

11.4.4. Example: Use of Timeline

This is a fictive example to guarantee the privacy of the respondents.

Timeline markings (above the line, left to right):
25/12/2018 — 3 days — 29/12/2018 — 31/12/2018 — March 2019 — May 2019

Timeline markings (below the line, left to right):
arrival — living on the streets — petit château — refugee center — first meeting Rainbow House — Gay Pride

11.5. Introduction, Drop-Off and Questionnaire for Experts

11.5.1. Introduction

Hello,

Welcome and thank you for having this conversation with me and taking time for this. I really appreciate this.

Maybe I will explain something about my research once more. So, as I already told you, I am doing a research about LGB-asylum seekers/refugees and I want to know more about their life here, and how they experience the procedure and everything that is going on in your life.

I asked you before I could record the interview, so that I can listen to it again. But after I have analyzed it, I will destroy it and I am also the only one who will listen to it, no one else will.

I wanted to ask you if you want to have a fake name if I refer to you in my research, that is another name that no one can recognize you.

Also remember that there are no good or wrong answers, I am interested in your opinion and what you do as an organization. I want to know more about this group, based on your experiences and observations. If you want to take a break or stop, this is no problem. In case you do not want to answer a question, I will respect this.

Is everything clear for you?

Ok, then you can sign this letter (*informed consent*) where everything that I told you, is explained again.

11.5.2. Drop-off 1 + Reworked Versions

(the term "drop-off", was not used in the interviews itself, but the questions were asked at the beginning of each interview)

```
Pseudonym:
Name organization(s):
Function(s) in organization(s):
Years of experience (working with LGB-refugees):
Projects/research with/about LGB-refugees:
```

11.5.3. Questionnaire 1 + Reworked Versions

I tried to start with the projects (with LGB-refugees) the expert had done or with a description of their job and the connection with LGB-refugees when I interviewed social workers who work in a reception center.

Projects:

1. Can you tell me a little bit more about the projects?
   a. What are your general observations/conclusions?
   b. What are the most important conclusions?
   c. What are your frustrations?
   d. What would be, based on your experiences, 3 concrete measures to implement or tips that you would give to specific organizations?

Reception center:

2. Can you tell me a little bit more about your job/responsibility in the reception center?
   a. What are your general observations about LGB-refugees? Do you see differences with non-LGB-refugees? What are these differences?
   b. How are LGB-refugees protected in the center? Is there a kind of sensibilization about homosexuality towards all the inhabitants?
      i. Do you hear a lot of stories about bullying or violence?
   c. What are the most important conclusions?
   d. What are your frustrations? What needs to change immediately?
   e. What is the procedure for LGB-refugees? How can you offer help for them?
   f. What would be 3 concrete measures that you would like to implement?
   g. What are barriers that make these changes more difficult?

Specific questions round 1:

3. A lot of research about LGB-refugees is about the phenomenon of the 'coming out' and difficulties LGB-refugees experience with this. It is expected that this group is open about the homosexuality during the legal migration procedure.

    a. What do you think about this?

        i. How do you notice that this is difficult for them?

        ii. Can you give a concrete example?

    b. In which circumstances are they more open about the homosexuality, according to you?

        i. Can you give a concrete example?

    c. In which circumstances are they less open about the homosexuality, according to you?

        i. Can you give a concrete example?

    d. How would you describe the concept of a coming out?

    e. Do LGB-refugees use this concept themselves?

        i. Why or why not?

        ii. Can you give a concrete example?

4. Other research talks about the concept of coming in.

    a. How would you describe this concept?

    b. Is this an important concept when we talk about LGB-refugees, according to you?

        i. Why do you think this?

            1. Can you give a concrete example?

    c. Do LGB-refugees also use this term?

        i. Why or why not?

        ii. Can you give a concrete example?

    d. Some people say that there is no exact order in which coming in and coming out take place, do you agree with this?

        i. Why do you think this?

        ii. Can you give a concrete example?

5. Based on your experiences, what are the most important issues for LGB-refugees?

    a. We already mentioned coming out and coming in, but what are other issues?

6. What are the tips that you gave the most to LGB-refugees?
    a. Could you give a top 3?
    b. How do refugees deal with these traumas?
        i. Where do they seek safety?
        ii. Is it easy, according to you, to find this safety feeling?
7. What would be tips that you would give to institutions on a higher level, for example Fedasil, the government, …
    a. Could you give a top 3?
    b. What are the most important instances?

8. In case you could do recommendations about future research about LGB-refugees, what should future research focus on?

9. Do you have tips for me as a researcher if I will talk with LGB-refugees?
    a. Should I avoid certain words or things?
    b. What are things that I should do, that are important according to you?

10. Do you want to add something to the conversation? Something that we did not talk about but could be important according to you?

Specific questions Safe Haven:
11. Can you tell me something more about this project?
    a. What was the most important goal?
    b. Why was this project so crucial?
    c. What were the most important conclusions?
    d. What are the frustrations?
    e. Why did you need to stop?
    f. What would be 3 concrete measurements that you would like to implement?

Specific questions round 2:

1. What are the tips that you gave the most to LGB-refugees?

a. Could you give a top 3?

b. How do refugees deal with these traumas?

    i. Where do they seek safety?

    ii. Is it easy, according to you, to find this safety feeling?

2. What would be tips that you would give to institutions on a higher level, for example Fedasil, the government, …

a. Could you give a top 3?

b. What are the most important instances?

3. How many people that are an LGB-refugee in the center, are also recognized as LGB-refugee?

a. Could you give an answer?

b. Can you give tips where I could find official numbers?

4. Suicide: do you have an idea whether a lot of refugees in general have suicidal thoughts?

a. Is this an issue in general?

b. Is this an issue for LGB-refugees in particular?

c. Can you give tips where I could find official numbers?

11.6. Interview Guidelines

Points of attention:

- Wright down own assumptions, mistakes, … + influence on interview
- How does the respondent react on me?
    - o General behavior
    - o Sees me as a stranger? Friend? Someone he can trust? …
- Seek for socially desirable behavior (link official interviews during juridical migration behavior) or responding style
- Always be aware of the fact that they might be lying, seek for hints in answering pattern, but at the same do not immediately think this
- Show respect and openness
- Do not be scared to ask questions about their flight or other questions that might seem sensitive, they know what the interview is about, at the other hand, respect boundaries and no not push respondent to answer
- Have attention for different contexts
- Probing!
    - o Examples
    - o Feelings
    - o 'Why do you say this?'
    - o 'What do you mean?'
    - o 'Why is this different'
    - o 'What did you feel?'
    - o 'What was your reaction?'
    - o 'What did you do?'
    - o …

11.7. Report: Pilot Interview + First Expert Talks

The pilot showed that some questions were too complex. These questions were deleted. During the first interview, it also became clear that it is crucial to ask questions that relate as much as possible to the social environment of the respondent. I decided to add some questions who have these characteristics, an example of a questions is 'how their daily life in the reception center looks like'. This question is useful because it gives a better image of the way the stay went. After this, I could ask questions about a more abstract level, for example how the homosexuality was expressed -or not- in the reception center. I also decided to focus more on activities during the interview, for example after the pilot, I decided to ask the respondents to make a scheme about their daily life in the reception center. This gives some variation for the respondents.

Another important addition is that I will focus more on the situation in the country of origin because these events strongly influence the story of the flight. During the pilot, it was sometimes difficult to understand the story of the asylum seeker/refugee since the moment he was in Belgium because he mentioned social support he got from friends of Macedonia who lived in Belgium, this was not clear because I was focusing too much on other questions about the flight itself. This leans on another remark about transitions from the one question to another. In the future, I tried to anticipate more on the way the respondent told the story and things that were said at that moment. I noticed that I was probing too little. In the future, I tried to probe more to avoid that interesting information got lost. I also realized that taking small notes about another question, I want to ask, is a good way to continue being attentive but also being able to remember all the spontaneous questions.

Since September 2019, interviews with experts were done. These interviews gave interesting insights about the research questions. Second, it was also a good way to know more about how to conduct an interview with LGB-asylum seekers/refugees in particular. It gave more information about the question whether the questionnaire was not too long, whether the questions are concrete enough and whether there are enough probes that are theoretically relevant. The most important tip experts gave, was about the fact that it is important to be to the point (because asylum seekers/refugees know the interview is about their flight and their personal story), but at the same time making sure that the respondent feels comfortable, for example by asking questions about their hobbies (at the beginning as an icebreaker) and about their dreams (at the

end, to end with something positive). The most important message was that I needed to be patient and respectful.

11.8. Field Work: Preparatory Scheme

I used this table to tick the boxes when I noticed a similar concept in the meeting. I made this table after I conducted interviews with the experts. These are general concepts that were important. Therefore I was able to keep more attention to other things, I could notice other important concepts and nuances.

	Interviews experts	Meeting
Coming out	- **Difficult** - **Forced** to do it - **Paradox:** some say everyone wants to do it and that they don't want to hide anything, others say some people do never want to do a coming out	
Coming in	- **Really important** - **Slow process:** in the beginning people are scared to come	
General integration	- **Difficult** - **Housing market** - **Job** - Problem for **highly educated people**	
Legal procedure	- **Sexual** oriented questions - Actif/passif (sex) - What about **emotions**? - **Not enough knowledge** about rights - **Occidental perspective**	
Accompaninement	- Preparation interview "what can they expect?" - **Practical questions**	
Distance culture home country	- Choose between **culture and own personality** - Meet people from **own culture**	

11.9. Report: Influence of the Corona Crisis

First, this was the motivation to get a reprieve:

Dear,

The purpose of this document is to get a reprieve for the deadline of the master dissertation in Sociology, as a result of the measurements of the Corona-crisis and the lockdown. This for various reasons:

- First of all, my master dissertation concerns a qualitative research (in-depth interviews and fieldwork) about LGB-asylum seekers/refugees. These LGB-asylum seekers/refugees live in reception centers, spread over the whole country. Physically reaching the target population is therefore impossible.
- Second, the data collection process is not finished yet. The gathered data (10 interviews) is inadequate to submit a qualitative strong enough research.
- Last, it was proposed to some LGB-asylum seekers/refugees to do an online interview. Both the option of video calling as well as calling by phone (without image fragments that can be misused) were suggested. But it seemed that asylum seekers/refugees were unwilling to do this. First, the fear that it would be psychologically too hard to do this, was mentioned. Second, there was doubt whether the privacy would be guaranteed. Last, I also have doubts as a researcher about how I can do this, without harming ethical codes. The interview topics are sensitive and emotional. Without face-to-face contact it can be even harder for the respondents to talk about this.

Naturally, I try to anticipate as much as possible on this difficult situation. A few possibilities will be tested:

- Interviewing experts during the lockdown (online and/or by phone),
- Interviewing LGB-asylum seekers/refugees (online and/or by phone) during the lockdown (but only after I explained well how privacy will be guaranteed and if the respondents feel comfortable about this),
- Interviewing LGB-asylum seekers/refugees face-to-face when the measurements are more flexible.

The extra time that would be obtained, would thus be used to finish the data collection process. The different possibilities will be tested.

I hope that I can count on your understanding.

Kind regards,
Zoë Fransen
01603406

Second, the Corona-crisis influenced some decisions of the research. In general, the Corona crisis had an influence on the data collection process.

- A first consequence for my dissertation was that I could not do 'fieldwork light' anymore. Rainbow House was not allowed to organize meetings. Via this way I could also not promote my research and reach new asylum seekers/refugees to interview.
- Second, I was forced to do online interviews. In the beginning of the lockdown, I was still hesitant and waiting what the government would decide. In the meanwhile, I talked with previous participants and asked them to promote my research to other LGB-asylum seekers/refugees they know. Since the lockdown, my main strategy to reach participants was the snowballing-effect. I explained the participants that we would wait to see what happens and how we can do the interview. However, after a couple of weeks, I decided to do the interviews online. I explained the situation and my decision to the participants. If they were still hesitant, I postponed the interview till after the lockdown. This was the case for one participant, all the other participants were agreed immediately.
- Third, I anticipated on the situation and started reaching social assistants. This decision was theoretically relevant, as explained in the data and methods part, however, it was partially pragmatic. Reaching social assistants and doing online interviews with them, seemed easier and less uncomfortable with them (in comparison with LGB-asylum seekers/refugees who have to talk about traumas). Finally, I only interviewed one social assistant because I found enough asylum seekers/refugees.

11.10. Transcription Conventions

Formulated: 28/04/2019

It is decided to work with a **detailed structure**. The following principles are taken into account:

{	beginning of an overlapping conversation
}	end of an overlapping situation
(1.3)	silence (measured in seconds)
(.)	silence shorter than 0.2 seconds
(+)	voice gets louder
(-)	voice gets lower
W<u>or</u>d	stress of a part of a word
Wo:rd	longer pronunciation of a word
word	word pronounced more quite than other words
WORD	word pronounced louder than other words
£Word£	laughy manner to pronounce the word
#Word#	crying manner to pronounce the word
Wo-	interrupted word
Word-	word pronounced incompletely
>word<	word pronounced quicker than other words

11.11. Coding Structure

The coding structure below is the final coding structure and was used to analyze both the interviews with LGB-refugees and experts, as well as the observations, using the software of Nvivo 12. I made this general coding structure after having coded each interview separately in Word (see Minerva). I made this decision because it allowed me to gain more insight in the data. The Nvivo-document shows how two coding structures were made, after each interview round. Interviews of both rounds were subjected to an analysis in the final coding structure, to gain insight in the data.

The coding structures of each round, as well as memo's, relationships between different concepts and queries can be found in the Nvivo-document that was posted on Minerva.

- Flight
  - Expectations
  - How?
    - Alone
    - Not informed
  - Reason
    - Physical violence
    - Mental violence
      - Community
      - Personal
  - Voluntariness
    - Forced
    - Own decision

- Reception center
  - Homophily
  - Living in group
    - Privacy
    - Quality time
  - Safety
    - Mental violence
      - Discrimination
      - Personal experiences
      - Stories
    - Physical violence
  - Suggestions
  - Work

- Legal procedure
    - Barriers
        - Power relationship
        - Official documents
        - Sex
        - Linguistic coming out
        - Details
        - Home country
    - Preparation
        - Other LGB-refugees
        - Social assistants

- Coming out
    - Barriers
        - Ethnic communities
        - Safety feeling

- Coming in
    - Incentives
        - Micro-environment
            - Self-recognition
            - Community-feeling
            - Friendship
            - Hope
            - Practical information
        - Different normative environment
            - Gay Pride
            - Gay bars
        - Significant others

- Integration strategies
    - Assimilation
    - Marginalization

11.12. Informed Consent

Informed consent: Participation qualitative research about the experience of the flee by LGB-asylum seekers/refugees

Dear,

I am Zoë Fransen, a Sociology student of the University of Ghent. In the context of my master thesis I will conduct interviews by LGB-asylum seekers/refugees and experts in this theme. This will take place during the months of September, October, November, December 2019 and January, February, March, May and June 2020.

My research is about the experience of LGB-asylum seekers/refugees and their flight. I would like to ask you to participate with this research.

An interview will last between 45 minutes and 1,5 hour. It will be recorded (audio) to analyze it. Only I, as a researcher, will use this data.

I take privacy very seriously. That is why I undertake to:
1) destroy the data at the end of this academic year. The professor will storage the data at a save location at the University of Ghent,
2) take the interviews myself, as the researcher of this project only if the interviewer and the respondent signed this letter and each have a copy of this declaration.

Further you can choose the language of the interview. The interview can go on in Dutch, English, French, Spanish or in the mother tongue. An interpreter can be used.

In any case of further questions about the interview, you can contact me via e-mail, social media or by phone.

Zoë Fransen (Facebook or Messenger)
Zoe.Fransen@UGent.be

+324 89 10 58 44

Kind regards,

Zoë Fransen

I, …………………………………………………………….. *(name)* have read the consents of this letter and I want to /

don't want to *(strikethrough the wrong element)* participate with this research about the experience of

LGB-asylum seekers/refugees and their flight.

Date   Name, first name   Signature

11.13. Report: Student Psychologist

First meeting: 16/09/2019

During this first meeting, the aim was to make a plan about how I should conduct the interviews about this sensitive topic. These were the most important conclusions:

- We agreed that the topic is also personal for me (because I am a lesbian woman so the stories could be extra hard and because I am dedicated to change something about it). I have to find a balance between distance and proximity. She gave me an article that talks about how a researcher can do this.
    - Accept my feelings
    - Do not have the feeling that I need to save their world and that I need to be their personal psychologist
    - Do not deny or minimize their story of the flight but also not exaggerate it
    - Do not judge certain decisions of the flight
- It is a sensitive topic but asylum seekers/refugees are aware of this and they know that they can always stop the interview, so I should not be afraid to probe, ask extra questions about the topic because they are aware of this.
- Do not be afraid to immediately ask questions that are relevant.
- Important to make sure there is a break once in a while between the interviews, avoid more than 2 interviews in a week and more than 1 in a day.
- Try to have a direct conversation, for example not by phone or video chat with the asylum seekers/refugees (ok for experts). It is better to have face-to-face contact because they would feel more comfortable to talk about the topic.
- Take my time during the interview. I can also stop the interview, if I want to take a break after I heard traumatizing stories. Also important to give the respondent the opportunity to take a break after such a moment.
- Make sure that I have a support network, for example that I make sure I can talk about this with my family and some friends. Allow myself to talk about this, if I feel the need to clear the conscience.
- Be aware of the most sensitive questions from my questionnaire and give the respondent the time to deal with these emotions. Also think about the order of the questions: not overload the respondent -and consequently also myself- with extremely sensitive questions, try to spread this.

- Have a short conversation with the respondent before the actual interview.

Second meeting: 20/11/2019

The second meeting was more therapeutic. I had already done quite some interviews and I wanted to ventilate about this. Some stories were mentally heavy and the psychologist helped me to frame this. For example, by telling my thoughts, emotions and frustrations it gave new energy to continue doing the research. At the end, this also gave me the feeling that I could analyze the stories in a more analytical way.