The Narrative Identities of Queer People of Color

Interviews with Queer People of Color in Long Beach, CA

Elin Mattsson
Abstract

Queer people and people of color are two groups that are exposed to much stereotyping and discrimination in the United States. When these two identity labels coincide they sometimes conflict. In this study, five queer persons of color were interviewed on their identities and their life stories, to find out how they create their identities through narratives, negotiating and rewriting the meanings of social categories. Using Johnson's Quare term as inspiration, and analyzing the data with the use of Riessman's performative narrative analysis and Muñoz's Disidentifications, I find several common tropes of identity creation and performance as well as practices of resistance and disidentification. I then discuss the word Queer as used by respondents to label practices and attitudes that can be considered disidentifying.

Keywords:
disidentifications, identity, people of color, performative narrative, queer,
queer people of color
# Contents

1. Introduction ........................................ 1

2. Purpose ............................................ 2
   2.1 Questions ..................................... 2

3. Previous Research ................................. 2
   3.1 Queer youth: an intersectional perspective ......... 3
   3.2 The racialized queer ................................ 3
   3.3 Coming out narratives ............................... 4
   3.4 Narrative perspectives and what they may reveal .... 5

4. Theory ............................................... 6
   4.1 Queer theory ....................................... 6
   4.2 Quare theory ....................................... 7
   4.3 Disidentification ................................... 7
   4.4 Acknowledging my position .......................... 8
   4.5 The privilege of oppression ......................... 8
   4.6 Identity as a story .................................. 9

5. Method ............................................. 11
   5.1 Sample ............................................ 11
   5.2 Interviews ........................................ 12
   5.3 Coding ............................................ 13
   5.4 Ethics ............................................. 16
   5.5 Quality & Dependability ............................ 17

6. Analysis ............................................ 18
   6.1 Data ............................................... 18
   6.2 "Hey, normal people are queer too!" .................. 20
   6.3 "Her opinion was more important than anyone else's" 23
   6.4 "Not that we're ashamed of it" ...................... 25
   6.5 "Someone who goes against the rules intentionally" 29
   6.6 The narrative of queer identity ..................... 31

7. Discussion ......................................... 33
   7.1 Important influences on the making and performing of minority identities .... 34
   7.2 Identity narratives formed by and reforming social norms .......... 35
   7.3 Queer = Disidentification? ......................... 35
   7.4 The creative queer .................................. 36
   7.5 Future research .................................... 36

8. References ......................................... 37

9. Appendix ........................................... 39
   Appendix 1. Interview questions .......................... 39
   Appendix 2. Information letter ........................... 40
   Appendix 3. Table 3. Narrative codes ..................... 41
1. Introduction

The word queer has many, varied uses. It is used as an adjective to describe something or someone as "not normal". It is used as a noun to describe someone who does not subscribe to a straight, heteronormative or gender binary sexuality. It is used as a verb to study something from a perspective of power, gender and sexuality (Dilley, 1999:457-458). In everyday speech it is frequently (but not always) used interchangeably with the word gay. Queer was coined as a term to call into question the idea of a fixed identity, and is as such a postmodernist idea. Yet, the term is often used as an identity in and of itself, and is used to describe and negotiate social norms in groups that identify as queer (Butler, 1990. Dilley, 1999:469).

The queer/gay subculture (if there is indeed such a thing, and not simply an amalgamation of many connected subcultures) is typically portrayed as very male, very white and very middle class (Muñoz, 1999:87). The gay rights and queer movements have been positioned as an identity movement for the white (Harper, 2000:645-646) and the gay neighborhoods of large American cities are mostly intended for white, economically well-off gay men. Kopelson writes in her 2002 article *Dis/Integrating the Gay/Queer Binary* that "marginalized groups organize to rectify their outsider status" and that this process leads to such groups projecting a unified, homogenous front. In an attempt of the identity political group to project as strong in order to argue for their legitimacy, differences within the group may be ignored or excluded (ibid:24). This may leave people who identify both as queer and a member of an ethnic/racial minority out in the cold, or else make them choose between which part of their identity to focus on more.

I argue that to assume that all queer people face the same challenges, suffer from the same injustices and enjoy the same privileges is to also assume that they have all other social categories in common, or else that there are no other social stratifications, for example racism, classism or sexism, that matter. While there may certainly be similarities in how, for example, a lesbian muslim and a gay white man is perceived and how they describe themselves – they may both define themselves as gay, may both encounter homophobia – their experiences will differ, both in regards to other social categories as well as in their understanding and definition of the same words and symbols used to define themselves.

Further, someone may choose to identify with one word – gay, queer, trans*¹, black, white, latin@², ¹ Trans* with an asterisk is used as an umbrella term to be more inclusive of identities not included in the male-female binary, for example genderfluid people and two-spirit people (Killerman, 2012).
² Latinos/Latinas. A word that not only includes both females and males but also non-binaries (Frijoliz, 2012).
et cetera – without blindly accepting all traits commonly attributed to that category of identification and contributing to the social hierarchy. Muñoz (1999) uses the term Disidentification to signify a method of identifying with a group while still claiming individual traits that sets one apart from the common idea of what that group is like. It is through this perspective that I will analyze the identity making and resistance practices of a number of queer people of color.

2. Purpose

In this paper I intend to explore the narratives of identity creation and identity negotiation of queers of color in Long Beach, California. I will be using Muñoz's Disidentification term together with queer theory to analyze the narrative life stories of the interviewees. I will attempt to illustrate how performance and telling of identity is formed by and is intended to reform social norms and structures, both within a supposed majority population and within subgroups. A secondary purpose is to make the stories of queer persons of color heard, and argue for the importance of diversity in media representation.

2.1 Questions

The following were my research questions to guide me through conducting the interviews and analyzing the material:

1. What are the important influences on the making and performing of queer/minority identity?
2. How are identity narratives formed by, and intended to reform, social norms and structures?
3. In which ways can queer people of color act to rewrite social norms and stereotypes through disidentification?

Using the theories presented below, I intend to answer these questions and gain insight into the identity creation and presentation of queers of color.

3. Previous research

There is a lot of research about queer people, and a lot of research about people of color. There is not, however, a lot of research about queer people of color. This essay, I hope, will contribute some to this field of research, as it is an urging for further intersectionality in queer and feminist research. Here I will talk about some research into queer youth, the racialized nature of the word queer, research on coming out narratives, and research on hidden perspectives and grammar in narrative analysis.
3.1 Queer youth: an intersectional perspective

Driver (2008) focuses on the creativity of queer youth subcultures, and has an important perspective of intersectionality. Though the focus is on youth in particular, Driver makes some important generally applicable points. She particularly protests against the way queer research has been;

[...] failing to consider how historical experiences, such as racial discrimination and marginalization, immigration, poverty, cultural and linguistic alienation, and isolation might destabilize the narrow parameters within which queer youth are studied. (Driver, 2008:6)

This may well be applied to the study of queer adults as well. She talks about how whiteness and heteronormativity is the unacknowledged frame of reference, both in society at large and social research, against which some are defined as "different". Further, she discusses queer success stories of empowerment, of fitting in and becoming accepted.

Empowerment becomes a sign of fitting into familiar and nonthreatening models of identity and belonging [...]. Normalization works to [...] creating safe, sanitized images that conform with white middle-class standards of visibility and value. (Driver, 2008:5)

Such models of identity and belonging may be going to school, getting a job, getting married, and so on. This stresses the conflict between the desire to fit in, to be normal, and not "challenging the status quo by looking and acting too queer" (Driver, 2008:5).

3.2 The racialized queer

Queer is not simply a neutral category of identification. Queer as a word and as a concept is racialized, argues Barnard. He writes that "race and sexuality are not two separate axes of identity that cross and overlay" but rather concepts to limit and define "systems of meaning and understanding" (Barnard, 1999:200). He argues that identity is not simply an additive index of oppression and privilege, for example black + woman + lesbian = triple oppressed. An individual occupying a specific identity does not simply borrow bits and pieces from more dominant identities, for example a bit black man + a bit white woman + a bit gay man, but rather has her own very specific identity.

In the struggle for recognition and acceptance in a larger society, the queer community has sought to emphasize the commonly recognized "positive" traits, needs and values, and thus making invisible those who do not fit into that image. Barnard uses the example of the economic prosperity of white
gay men and how it makes invisible homeless and poor gays and lesbians. Similar to Driver's (2008) statement about conformity, these success stories work to homogenize the idea of the "queer" – and, simultaneously, the idea of "non-white" people.

If only well-off white people are visible as queer, the suggested subtext is that people of color and the working class are not queer. Combined with the recent trend to associate gay-friendliness with progress and civility (Barnard, 1999:204), the conclusion would be that people of color and the working class are simply less civilized. This of course is based in a classist, racist and westcentric idea of sexuality and identity, in which those who do not neatly fit into the "queer success story" are ignored.

Barnard's conclusions about the racialized nature of the concept of queer are important in motivating the need for this study, and the need to bring attention to intersectionality in queer studies. Although the study was published 15 years ago, I argue that Barnard's findings are still highly relevant and important today.

3.3 Coming out narratives
Bacon (1998) wrote *Getting the story straight* from the perspective of a writing teacher. In this study she analyzes the narratives of coming out, looking at how these stories work to reify queer identities while simultaneously negotiating identities both individual and collective. She argues that coming out is a process, not a single act, in which the person coming out (as gay, lesbian, queer...) is constantly negotiating and asserting their identity, both to others and to themselves. Her conclusion is that identities are made in dialogue rather than taken on as essential categories.

Bacon raises the challenge to "foster a narrative that allows for multiple, perhaps even contradictory selves" (1998:258). She writes from a linguistic perspective using both queer theory and symbolic interactionism to draw her conclusions. However, the study is not very in-depth. While she argues for the negotiation of more diversity in identity-making she has no intersectional perspective. For the sake of my study, the most important part of Bacon's paper is her point about the dual character of the self-narrative; "To tell the story of your life is to demand self-definition, and at the same time to trap oneself within a specific definition of self based in sexual identity" (1998:252).

This, certainly, applies to other categories of identification as well, be they gender identity, racial or ethnic identity, or local identity. When you define yourself, rather than allow others to define you, you choose which words to describe you, and can also add modifiers based in the associations
linked to those words. To say "I am lesbian, but I wear my hair long", for example, is to simultaneously negotiate assumptions about lesbians, and cement those assumptions. It is to decline the categories others might place you in in favor of those you prefer, while at the same time boxing yourself into other categories. But as Bacon begins to argue, one needs to make visible these popular categories in order to negotiate their meanings. This point is further developed in Muñoz's (1999) disidentification theory which will be covered below.

3.4 Narrative perspectives and what they may reveal

Subtle shifts in word choice and perspective may reveal hidden information, suggests Polya, Laszlo & Forgas in their quantitative study on audience perception of life stories about negative life events that lead to a shift or realization regarding social identity. They suggest three perspective forms: retrospective, experiencing, and re-experiencing. These forms differ only through the use of different grammatical tenses. The result of their study is that the retrospective narrator is perceived as more secure and adjusted, the experiencing and re-experiencing narrators as more conflicted and suffering unresolved identity issues. They draw the conclusion that such subtle and subconscious shifts in narrative perspective are very informative, containing information about the narrator (Polya, Laszlo & Forgas, 2005:787-795). However, one might argue that they only measured the audience's perception of the narrator, rather than the actual psychological state of the narrators themselves. Despite this, Polya et.al.'s study shows that word choices in narratives are significant in conveying meanings and identity processes. Polya et.al. has inspired part of the narrative analysis of this study, where I address insecurities in the stories as marked by subtle word choices and grammatical tools.

Riessman (1997, 2002, 2011) also talks about subtle grammatical tools revealing positions, meanings and meaning-making processes in narratives3. Riessman (2002) writes about using grammar and other linguistic choices to discover such positions and see how people make meaning from memories, not merely retelling their past but shaping how they remember it, and thus how it affects their present. "Narratives do things; they are motivated and purposeful", writes Riessman (2011:315), noting however that these motives and purposes are not always conscious, urging researchers to remember that a narrative is not the unfiltered truth but a version of the truth told through the narrator's perspective and with words chosen for a reason. That reason may be to make sense of the past, to motivate ones own actions, to further a cause or gain sympathy and understanding, for example, or to create a coherent sense of self and identity (Riessman, 1997).

---

3 See section about narrative analysis in Part 4.6 below.
4. Theory

The theoretical field for this study is social constructivism in general and performativity more specifically. I see identity categories as socially constructed, created and recreated continuously through our daily interactions. In this section I will detail the queer theory of Judith Butler, the quare theory of Johnson, disidentification theory by Muñoz, and the theories of narratives as defined by Ezzy, Singer, and Riessman. This is my theoretical framework, which I will use to analyze the interviews.

4.1 Queer theory

This study has its very basis in the foundation of queer theory. Queer theory has two "main schools"; one that assumes that gender is essential and natural but questions the hierarchy, and one that assumes that gender is constructed and questions both the hierarchy and the dichotomy. I assume that identity, the "I" or the "self" is created in dialogue with social expectations, historically and culturally contexted, and that gender is a construct as well as a performance. Therefore that is the perspective I will have throughout this study.

Butler (1988) writes that the self, or rather the cultural and social meaning of the body, is a place of possibility but also of limitation. The self, which is internal to the body and not some abstract, external force, is limited by the perception of others based on the shape and behavior of the body. The possibilities of expression open to each body is limited and shaped by the historical and cultural contexts and grouped into styles, but also differing between each individual. There are rules to how each style should be performed, be it gender, race or sexuality, and breaking those rules warrant some punishment. But these rules are socially constructed and historically situated, and therefore also subject to (gradual) change. Although Butler speaks mainly of gender, it is not much of a stretch of imagination to apply her theories to the identity categories of sexuality or race.

Butler (1990) further develops her arguments and talks at length about the insufficiency of existing language to describe women's lives, after establishing that "woman", or for that sake, "man", are categories that are neither real, natural nor allowing for difference. However, in the name of identity politics, "woman" is frequently used as a reified category in order to justify the struggle for gender equality (Butler, 1990:4). In order to fight for just treatment of all women, one must first assume that "woman" is a fruitful category, and that all "women" have similar wants and needs, not taking into account intersecting categories of identity and discriminations.
4.2 Quare theory

Butler is often criticized today because of the lack of an intersectional perspective to her writings. Johnson strives to correct the lack of intersectionality in queer theory by deploying the vernacular variant, "quare". Although the term queer is thought to be an umbrella term for non-straight sexuality or the dismissal of inflexible categories of identity, Johnson argues that in effect, it is rather used in a way that largely ignores the experiences, realities and contribution of people of color (Johnson, 2001:4-5).

It is also important that one acknowledges their own privilege so as to not "maintain the force of hegemonic whiteness, which […] has gone uninterrogated" (Johnson, 2001:9). Johnson's "Quare" studies are about applying queer theory, in combination with racial and class awareness, to the material reality. Johnson makes use of Muñoz's disidentification term (detailed below) to show how queers of color subverse cultural expectations in order to survive oppression yet make room for themselves within these social structures. To claim an identity label (gay, queer, woman, black, etc.) is to make room (or accept the room given) in the social structure. But one can then work from within the structure to gradually reform it, by redefining what those identity labels mean, and at the same time refusing to be fully defined by those labels.

4.3 Disidentification

Muñoz writes about minority subjects (queers, people of color, queer people of color) that take on an identification that only partially fits them, partially denounces them, in an effort to change the normativity of the identity frame from the inside, something he calls disidentification.

A person is not only one thing or another, not simply their gender, their sex, their race, their sexuality, but all these things at once, and they perform these identities in dialogue with the norms of majority and minority groupings as well as their internal resistance to being labelled and defined. He suggests that the act of forming and enacting identity within and in opposition to the hegemonies of heteronormativity, misogyny and white supremacy is in itself an act of rebellion and resistance to assimilation as well as an attempt to redefine the norms and power structures of society.

Muñoz speaks of making identity, although inside the confines of societal discourses. Although it is also a question of choosing identity, the choice is not the same as a blind acceptance of all that is associated to the identity in question, be it a sexual identity, a gender identity, or an ethnic/racial identity. Rather, it can be seen as the "remaking and rewriting of a dominant script" (1999:8-31).
4.4 Acknowledging my position

Johnson (2001:9) calls for critics to take responsibility for their privilege, and as I hope to do quare theory justice or at least negate some of the harmful effects of a very white, very middle class queer theory, I feel that I should clearly state my perspective. The same kind of reflexivity is called upon by many feminist theorists (Hesse-Biber, 2007:140-141)

I am white, with a working class background but middle class aspirations. I am female, but have at times considered myself gender fluid. I label myself as lesbian for simplicity's sake – perhaps too narrow a category, but to call myself other things have needed more explanation. I am not born or raised in the US but in Sweden. Though I have consumed much American culture, I am aware that my experiences and perceptions of issues such as gender, class, race, religion and sexuality have been formed in my specific context, and that is a Swedish context and it is a white context.

Though I regard myself as queer, "my" queer is informed in the context of a small, very masculine, very religious, very straight and very working-class town. Though I have experienced harassment in public on the basis of my sex and gender, from growing up poor, from coming out as and being seen as a lesbian, I am privileged in having been raised in a family that has been very loving and understanding of my sexual identity. I am privileged in being a white swede in Sweden and in being able to pursue a college education. I am further privileged in having had access to a computer with an Internet connection growing up, and so learning English, and so meeting a friend, then girlfriend, now wife, in the US. She has, as an African-American, often described growing up feeling conflicted – too black to get along with white kids, too queer to get along with black kids. This is a problem I have never and will never experience. But I do remember growing up growing up neither boy nor "like other girls", reluctantly defining myself as female, with several reservations and "buts".

Thus my interest in the issue of consolidating conflicting identities, of adopting identity markers only partway, stems from a position of partial outside-ness and partial inside-ness. These issues are, in part, my issues, but simultaneously I am viewing them from a (literally and figuratively) foreign perspective.

4.5 The privilege of oppression

The idea of feminist standpoint epistemology is as controversial as it is important. Brooks writes
that just like a victim of abuse must understand the emotions and experiences of their abuser to keep
themselves safer, a person who is oppressed understands the perspective of the oppressor(s). This
creates a kind of double consciousness, where the oppressed sees the world and themselves not only
with their own eyes, but also with the eyes of the dominant group (Brooks 2007:64-66).

In this feminist perspective, it is assumed that the dominant group (in general) does not see or
understand the standpoint of members of the minority group because their privilege allows them to
be ignorant of the desires and attitudes of said group. For a member of one or many minority groups
it can be lethal to ignore or be unaware of the desires and attitudes of the dominant group. This
gives the oppressed minorities a very special position in social research, as they are aware not only
their own position but also that of many others, far beyond what a member of the dominant group
is. One who is member of many minority groups, for example a lesbian latina in the US, will have
multiple standpoints. She is aware of what it means to be both woman and man, to be latina and
white european, to be lesbian and straight, et cetera (Brooks, 2007:70).

Though it does assume a binary of identities (man or woman, white or not white, straight or not
straight), this theory and epistemology is valuable in that it gives unique privilege to oppressed
minorities. Rather than simply having minorities be the studied object of research, minorities
become the very source of social knowledge. Despite that standpoint epistemology can be seen as
essentialist, Brooks (2007:77-78) argues that, through allowing the differences within each group to
be seen, it can also be an important tool to facilitate dialogue and improve the conditions of
oppressed groups.

4.6 Identity as a story

The term identity as it will be used in this essay is the narrative identity as used by Ezzy. He
combines Mead's and Ricouer's theories about the self and identity, and adds Goffman's insights
about politics and power. Identity, then, is the story we tell about ourselves and our history. The
narrative of identity is a meaning-making process in which the random events in our lives become
plot points of a story in order to create coherence and a sense of self. This story is under continuous
rewriting as more events are always added, that recontextualize earlier events. This creates a sense
of meaning and continuity to life and a feeling of being a whole, real person (Ezzy, 1998:245-247,
250).

The writing of identity is often made in accordance with culturally acceptable, traditional scripts,
and always in dialogue with others – either an actual physical other, or an internalized other (Ezzy,
A narrative needs an audience. There are power structures regulating the possible scripts, and also regulating the individual use of a particular script, certain events as told in one's narrative might be brought into question by another (Ezzy, 1998:249).

The cultural context and "moral dictums" provide the possible scripts, characters and plots, and also what lessons we learn from them, or "what meaning we make of the narratives we have created" (Singer, 2004:442-443). Our cultural context tells us which life events are defining, for example our first love, a death in the family, the first time we move away from home, and how these events can play out, as well as how they should affect us – how they should shape and change our identities and personalities.

In narrative analysis, the objects of study are the stories told about certain events, such as life story narratives, and how and why they take the shape that they take. The narrative scripts available to us are based in the myths, fictional works and common stories within our culture as a whole, and our ethno-familial contexts. There are common scripts, character archetypes and plots that make up the narrative discourse of life-story telling. Narratives are meaning-making processes in which we try to write ourselves as protagonists in our own lives. Crises and conflicts of the past are made into plot points to be overcome in order to further the story. Narratives serve to create a unified, consistent sense of self, of identity and to perform a preferred identity, or to explain a current negative state of being as the causal effect of an earlier event (Ezzy, 1998. Riessman, 2002. Singer, 2004).

To analyze narratives is to examine the creative agency of individuals as they make sense of their lives and form their identities, tailoring the telling of their life-stories to the audience and constantly rewriting it throughout their day-to-day lives. The narrative requires an audience by definition, whether that audience is the internalized Other, a conversational partner, or the reader of this report. The intended audience affects what is said and how it is said. The narrative also has a meaning, whether that meaning is to create a sense of consistency, to share wisdom, or to make sure the narrator is seen in the preferred light. Likely, a narrative will be all these things and more at once. The narrative is not an absolute truth, if such a thing exists, but it is the reality as seen through the eyes of the narrator, filtered through experiences, expectations and sociocultural context.

In performative narrative analysis, one talks about different scripts being available to different groups of people. These scripts are "rules" that dictate what meanings different life events should have on certain people, how they should act in response, what sort of lesson will be learned, how they will progress, et cetera. For example, a heterosexual script may be finding a partner in a bar,
going out with them, falling in love, getting married, having (biological) children. This is a script that is (mostly) unavailable to queer people due to different factors; difficulty finding a safe way to meet a partner in person, not being able to legally marry, inability to concieve children, not being able to legally adopt. A gay script may be realizing one differs from the norm, exploring those feelings, telling others (coming out), facing discrimination and hardship, and coming to terms with ones sexuality.

Which scripts are common and acceptable differs between groups, cultures and are temporally bound. When people tell their life stories, or make up fictional life stories (as in books, movies and TV shows), they add some variation to the collection of already available scripts. Of course, these scripts do not regulate what actually happens to us in our lives – but they do regulate how it is acceptable and appropriate for us to act and feel in response to events, as well as which events we should consider important. In some scripts, academical achievements will be considered important milestones, in others familial matters are of higher importance, for example. Scripts also contain tropes and characters. Since the narrative process strives to create a sense of unity to otherwise disparate memories, the narrator may place themselves in the position of hardworking hero, tragic protagonist, unwilling participant, et cetera, which also influences how they react to certain events and what kind of meaning they make from them.

5. Method

This study is an interview study based on 5 interviews with queer persons of color in Long Beach, California. The data has been analyzed using constant comparison coding (Glaser, 1965) and performative narrative analysis (Riessman, 2002). In this segment I will first address the sample, then elaborate a little on the nature of the interviews. After that I detail the coding work, before talking about issues of ethics and quality.

5.1 Sample

Four of the respondents identified as female, one as male. There were two African-American respondents, two Asian-American respondents, and one Arab-American. One respondent identified as lesbian, one as gay, one as bisexual and two as queer. They were at the ages 20-35.

All of the respondents were, or had at one point been, living in Long Beach, California. I chose this place as the focus of my study because of its uniquely diverse demographics and, as the respondents have also confirmed later, its friendliness toward such diversity. California in general is seen as a
queer friendly state, with San Francisco as the typical example. 42% of San Francisco's 2010 population were non-Latin@ white, compared to 40% of all of California and 63% of all of the United States. In 2010, only 29% of the population in Long Beach were non-latin@ white. 14% of Long Beach residents were black (6% of San Francisco, 6% of California, 13% of the US), 13% Asian (33% of SF, 13% of CA, 5% of the US), 41% Latin@ (15% of SF, 38% of CA, 17% of the US) (United States Census Bureau, *QuickFacts*). While as queer friendly as San Francisco, if not as famous, Long Beach has a significantly higher percentage of black and Latin@ residents than San Francisco does. This makes it the perfect location for studying the identity making of queer people of color.

Informants were chosen using a so-called snowball sample (Hammersley & Atkins, 2007:105), that is to say, I got in touch with a key person, who then directed me on to others who may be of interest, and who were interested in speaking to me. The criteria were that the informants are people of color, that they identify as queer in some manner, and that they live or used to live in the area of interest. There may be some additional ethical considerations in having many of the respondents knowing or knowing of one another, such as respondents being able to identify one another. This is further discussed in Part 5.4.

Even so I had some trouble finding respondents willing to participate in the study, perhaps due to time constraints, perhaps due to distrust or disinterest. Some respondents, when asked to refer me to others who may want to participate, revealed that they did not know many queer persons of color.

### 5.2 Interviews

I conducted five interviews which were semi-structured, giving informants room to indulge in storytelling and share their narratives. The interviews were conducted around certain themes that are of interest to the study. The interview guide is attached as Appendix 1. Each interview was between one and three hours. Two interviews were conducted in person, while three of the informants requested to be interviewed via the Internet. Whether the interviews were conducted in person or on the Internet, the interview guide was used whenever the conversation seemed to stall, and to guide the general direction of the interviews. At times the interviews took a different turn than I had anticipated, and I allowed this in order to allow the respondent to participate at their own terms. My interview strategy was inspired by Hesse-Biber. Her feminist interview method stresses the importance of reflexivity, in-depth interviews and listening to the informant (2007).

---

4 Latin@ and Hispanic people sometimes fall under the category of white in demographic surveys in the US while still experiencing racism, which is why there is a distinction.

5 The census data for all of the US is for 2012.
Both of the interviews conducted in person took place in the respondent's home. In one case there were other people present in the house, though they were in another room and the respondent ensured me that their presence was not a problem. One of the Internet interviews took the form of a text chat in real time, in which I sent one question and the respondent answered, and I could add follow-up questions or ask for further details. The other two Internet interviews were originally intended to take the same form, but the respondents informed me later that they would not have time for that. I proposed that I could send them the interview questions in the form of a questionnaire and that they could answer all the questions at their own leisure, and then send me the answers. They agreed, and although I feel the information given in these interviews was less in-depth than the information from the other interviews, I decided that it was preferable to having fewer interviews to work with.

In this study, I have encouraged the respondents to indulge in storytelling, to share their narratives with me, because I believe this is the best way to learn what factors most influence their identity creation and in which ways. Muñoz (1999) wrote that the creation of minority identity is in itself an act of resistance against the hegemonic scripts, and Johnson (2001) calls for making room in queer theory and literature for people of color.

5.3 Coding

I coded the transcribed interviews guided by Glaser's constant comparison method (Glaser, 1965), which entails that each coded incident is compared to previously coded incidents, in order to allow for quick analysis and attempt to allow for theoretical saturation. I also used narrative analysis (Riessman, 2002) to examine the storytelling elements of the interviews.

To illustrate the coding process worked in further detail, I have added an example from one interview, together with the codes it yielded:

Table 1. Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[me] So is it important to be out, then?</td>
<td>Expecting discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ip2] Yeah! I'm like, I don't wanna fucking be in the closet again, no!</td>
<td>Lying about identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like, bleugh. It's not fun. To be paranoid, and...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I even feel weird when I lie to customers I'll never see again, that</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brought up my husband. So, I.. no, I don't</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6 An incident is when something new happens in the text. It can be a sentence or a paragraph, and there may be several incidents within a sentence or paragraph.
wanna do that. It's just...

It's stupid, and then it's... then it's like... subconsciously, there's probably shame happening. You know. Even if it's, I don't feel ashamed in general, it's... having, lying about it, means something isn't right about it. Psychologically. [me] Like you're accepting the way thing are?

[ip2] Yeah, and I don't... it doesn't feel good. So yeah, I don't... it's important to be out.

[me] Just for you, or as a sort of statement in general?

[ip2] For me? Well, for me. But also as a statement in general. Like... people, you know, I might not be out if Ellen didn't do her thing and if like, there wasn't the L word, or like, things showing that "hey, normal people are queer too!" Like, you know what I mean? So I think it's important.

Coming out is a duty

As I began to transcribe and analyze the first interview, it revealed interesting tendencies toward expressions of disidentification and redefinition of the meaning of identity categories. After the initial coding, I went through the codes once more, comparing to theory, and developed four main themes under which the narrative sequences about identity formation fell. I dubbed these themes **Media Representation, Close Relationships, Fear of Discrimination and Disidentification**. After condensing the initial codes into four themes with some key subcodes, I went through the material once more for a more focused coding, comparing the data incident to incident (Glaser, 1965:440-441). This yielded some additional subcodes and rendered others obsolete. The final themes, categories and codes concerning identity influences and identity performance are shown in **Table 2** below. To the far left are the themes, in the middle are the categories contained within the theme, and to the far right are the codes contained within the categories.

**Table 2. Focused coding.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Media representation</strong></td>
<td>Identification through media</td>
<td>Finding self in media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Discovering diversity through media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative representation has bad effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Normalizing the queer</td>
<td>More queer content in media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>More diverse queer content in media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rolemodels</td>
<td>Feeling more comfortable due to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Close relationships</strong></td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Family's opinion matters most</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Family shapes identity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Friendship | Coming out to friends  
|           | Realizing sexuality through friends |
| Intimate relationships | Realizing sexuality through intimacy  
|           | Strength through love  
|           | Bad relationships  
|           | Wanting relationships |
| Fear of rejection | Fear of rejection by family  
|           | Fear of rejection by friends |
| **Fear of discrimination** | Living in safe places  
|           | Finding a community  
|           | Considering the future  
|           | Having to live in unsafe places |
| Careful about openness | Coming out to other queers  
|           | Lying about identity  
|           | Coming out as black  
|           | Coming out is a duty |
| Tight knit groups | Congregation/segregation  
|           | Conforming to stereotypes |
| Living with discrimination | Internalizing hate  
|           | Expecting discrimination  
|           | Being discriminated is strengthening |
| **Disidentification** | Rejecting stereotypes  
|           | "I'm not that kind of person"  
|           | Resistance to being normal  
|           | Queer is complicated/fluid  
|           | Presenting as queer |
| Creating new traditions | Queer means breaking the rules  
|           | Creating your own rules  
|           | Taking symbols not meant for queer |
| Queer is the new normal | Most people are queer  
|           | Queer is normal |

These four themes encompass the different influences through which they create their identities, and based on which they perform their identities in different situations. What these themes entail are detailed more closely in **Part 6.1**.
I also coded for narrative tropes and grammar. In this coding I either coded long segments (narratives) or short words and symbols (grammar). These categories and codes were not used in the analysis as they are, but are tools that helped me analyze the data and understand the narratives of the respondents. Table 3 showing the categories and codes for the narrative analysis can be found in Appendix 3.

Riessman (1997, 2002) warns against overly fragmentizing narratives, thus taking away the context and format of the story. She calls instead for allowing the long stories to remain long stories. Due to space restrictions I could not possibly heed that in full by quoting entire stories, but I did take it into consideration in the analysis, where each segment quoted is analyzed in the context of the entire sequence of storytelling it was taken from. This will also serve to further assure the accuracy of the data (Becker, 1996).

5.4 Ethics

Each chosen interviewee were informed of the purpose of the study, as well as the fact that the transcribed and de-identified versions of their interviews would be discussed within the faculty. All interviews were conducted with the interviewees made aware of this. The respondents were given an information letter explaining that their data would be handled anonymously, that they could quit the study at any time, and a brief explanation about the purpose of the study. The information letter has been attached as Appendix 2.

After gathering and transcribing the interview data, each transcript was given only a code. Any information given in the interview that may serve to identify the informants was removed or distorted as to ensure the privacy of the informants. However, most of the interviewees were found by referral from a previous interviewee, which leads to some potential problems with anonymity.

As many of the informants know each other, they may identify the data contribution of others more easily. This was rectified by not giving out information that may identify the participants to other participants that may know them better. There is still a risk that personal information that is vital to the study – race, gender, orientation for example – might let participants identify statements as made by a certain individual. This is unavoidable. But in the extent that they occur, such statements will be separated from other statements made by the same informant, so that more information cannot be tied to any one person.
Before writing the proofed version of this essay I allowed the informants to read the draft in two steps. First, they were given the option to read and comment on the parts of the essay referencing their data to make sure no private or identifiable information was spread. Then, they were also allowed to read and comment on the final draft before it was handed in.

With these precautions taken, I judge that the respondents should suffer no negative effect from the information published in this paper. However, some of the questions are of a potentially invasive nature, and may bring up traumatic memories. To warn respondents of this, I stated in the information letter that "you will be asked a few questions about formative events in your life" (Appendix 2). Due to this, I judge that all participation has been informed of that possibility. Whenever such sensitive events have come up, I have attempted to handle them respectfully, attentive to the respondent's willingness (or unwillingness) to talk about them.

**5.5 Quality & Dependability**

As briefly mentioned, I have in part conducted this study from an outsider perspective. While this may be seen as a hindrance in some respects, it may also, as suggested by Hammersley and Atkins (2007:109) and Hesse-Biber (2007:142-143) be a strength.

Becker (1996:6) writes that one main point in achieving dependability in a qualitative study is simply, "don't make up what you could find out". It may seem obvious, but Becker warns still that it is difficult not to attribute meaning and thought to respondents, or reading too much into the data they give us. As a researcher strives to understand the interviewee, they may project their own understandings and experiences onto the other.

Many of the responses I got were the result of conversational interactions – I wanted the answers to be as natural as possible despite the extraordinary situation of being in an interview, and so part of the interviews were conducted as a trade of information. To clarify the feelings and meanings of the respondents, I gave examples from my own life, which I felt were similar, and that drew either clarifications, if I had misunderstood them, or further examples, data I don't think I would have received if I had simply gone through my interview guide question for question. Though this also means that I, the researcher, am "infiltrating" the data (Riessman, 2002), or risk that I "guess what can be observed" (Becker, 1996:5), not only through my analysis later on but by my prompting information.

In the interview quotes I will use throughout this paper, I will make note of the context of the quote.
and what I said to bring out the information. I hope that this will limit my own influence on the data, or at least show when and how I may have influenced the answers.

Becker (1996) talks about the important quality markers for sociological research as being accuracy (if the data is as close as possible to the observed) and precision (if the data is close to the subject at hand). Since my data is sourced directly from informants, I would say that it is very accurate, according to Becker's definition. My research questions for this study were how performance/telling of identity is formed by and is intended to reform social norms and structures, what the important influences on the making and performing of queer/minority identity are, and how queer people of color act to rewrite social norms and stereotypes. Those are the questions I strived to answer in my interviews. I judge that the interview data contains the answers to my research questions, and therefore that the data is also precise.

6. Analysis

This segment contains first a summary of the interview data. After that, I go through each of the themes discovered through coding one by one, illustrating examples with quotes from the interviews and suitable theories. After that, I talk about the results of the narrative analysis.

6.1 Data

When asked, most of my informants had a story about how they "discovered" themselves and their sexuality and, subsequently, came out after a varying period of contemplation and self-doubt. Most express coming out as queer (here used as an umbrella term for non-straight sexual orientations) as being a stressful experience. Fear of rejection, discrimination and turning into someone they are not were common. After coming out the first time, respondents felt either relieved or yet more conflicted, depending on the reactions of their closest relations. Most of them also expressed unhappiness with having to come out repeatedly to people, and to avoid having to do so, taking on visible markers for their sexual identity.

Being out and openly queer is spoken of as being true to oneself, or even truthful to others. To not be open about one's sexuality is seen by my informants as a form of deceit. Simultaneously, white-passing informants express similar attitudes regarding their race. "Hiding" one's identity as "different" is regarded as a lie – but one that is an acceptable strategy to avoid persecution in some situations. Being out, then, becomes an act of self-sacrifice, risking danger to improve the situation of others. In other words, it is assumed that if more people are openly queer, persecution on the
basis of sexual identity will become less common. And indeed, media representation and the general presence of queer people is also said to be an important factor for respondents to "realize" who they are, and to feel better about it.

But trouble arises when non-white racial identity intersects with queer identity. "Do I really have to be gay on top of this?", one respondent remembered wondering when they were younger, referring to their mixed race. Respondents talk about stricter social rules for people of color, while "No one expects white people to act a certain way", or speaking in terms of performative narratives, there are fewer scripts for people of color than white people. For people of color, building queer identities may not only mean to alter a common script, but to write a completely new one. This is associated with anxiety and stress, but also with greater freedom of choice - "I definitely don't have to follow any of that […] because I'm out of the playing field". Building a queer identity is, particularly for people of color, an act of resistance, and is associated with freedom and empowerment.

Yet the stories of my respondents still contain certain "tropes" or influence categories that determine how they "discover" their identity, and influences that determine how they "show" their identity. I've dubbed these influences representation, close relationships, discrimination and disidentification, and they will be discussed below, with examples from the interviews. After that, I will discuss the narratives themselves – tropes, scripts, narrative positions and grammar.

The Representation influence regards whether and how different categories of identity are seen in media, literature and popular culture. The respondents often speak of either coming to realize their sexuality, or accept it, through seeing people in similar situations in movies or books. The nature and prevalence of such media representation thus affects how they identify, as well as how they feel about that identification.

The Close Relationship influence regards the zone of both conflict and comfort found in close relationships, whether familial, platonic, romantic or sexual. The fear of rejection by friends and family is a big source of conflict, while supportive relationships allow respondents to express their identities more openly. There seems to be a strain between wanting to please ones closest relations, and wanting to rebel against them.

Fear of Discrimination is another strong force that affects how and where queer and non-white identities are performed. This is a dual force, at one hand fear that leads to avoidance and silence, at the other hand anger that leads to confrontation and resistance to discrimination. Congregation into
safe places and enclaves is a common way to avoid physical and symbolic violence, although this often entails assimilating into the subgroup which one seeks out.

Finally, Disidentification influences how the respondents reject norms and stereotypes in order to write themselves as individuals, more than their race or gender or sexual orientation. There is also a distinct tendency to up-end the sexual/gender binary, where respondents time and again insist that the Queer is the new Normal – although this can be argued to be either a victory for sexual identity politics, or a failure to crush the norms by simply replacing one normative sexual identity for another. These different themes will be discussed further below.

In addition to these categories or topics of the narratives, I also coded for narrative tools and positions. How the respondent positioned themselves to the events they told me about, how they organized their life stories, whether they regarded a certain event the result of their own actions, or something unavoidable.

I discovered that respondents were, as Riessman (2002) writes, well aware of and making use of the conventional rules for storytelling. Their accounts were given in some cases chronologically, in some cases by topic. Stories began slowly, with false starts and pauses, and then trailed off with what Riessman calls "exit talk", sometimes to be called back later to "edit" the story, informing me of events that happened in between other events, or adding forgotten pieces. The narratives informants shared with me were retold meticulously and carefully. One informant in particular corrected my mistakes often whenever I forgot or skipped an event when I asked for clarification. The performative narrative analysis, as detailed by Riessman (2002), requires a detailed transcript. In my transcriptions I have made note of pauses, laughter, reported speech ("She was like 'hey'."), appeals ("You know?") and other such conversational tools. In the text interviews I could not do that, but I found that respondents used such tools in text just as well as in speech, marking humor ("lol"), pauses ("..."), false starts ("Uhm...") and reported speech ("He was like...") just as they would in a vocal interview. For all intents and purposes, I would argue that the vocal interviews and the text based interviews are similar enough to be analyzed in the same manner.

6.2 "Hey, normal people are queer too!"

- The effect of minority representation on identity presentation

Representation means turning on the TV and seeing someone who looks like you. It means walking down the street and seeing faces you can recognize yourself in. It means knowing that there are
people looking out for your interests in positions of power. It means reading a book with a main character that is not entirely unsimilar to you. It means not being the only one in town with your skin color, sexual orientation or native language. It means knowing that you won't be thrown out of the bar for kissing your partner.

Unsurprisingly, minority representation is important in building confidence, but is also positioned as a "moment of revelation" in my respondents' identity narratives (Muñoz, 1999:78). The feelings of romantic and/or sexual attractions, and/or feelings about gender identity, have usually been there before, but media representation such as movies or books labels these feelings and give them scripts of performance. "I don't remember the title but the main character comes to terms with his sexuality of being a homosexual. That's when I realized I was doing the same thing!", one respondent tells me, talking about watching a movie with friends. The respondent had always been attracted to the same gender, but did not put words to their experience until seeing the movie. The word "homosexual" is put to similar feelings and experiences that the respondent was going through, and so the respondent identifies with the character in the movie. He also attaches the words "coming to terms with" to his experiences at the time, and thus placing himself not only within a category of identity but in a process, a script associated with homosexuality.

These labels and scripts may give a sense of security and belonging, but simultaneously limit the individual (Muñoz: 1999:6). The individual who likes other men becomes "gay", and then his preference for wearing skinny jeans might make him a "twink". The person who identifies more with women than men becomes "transsexual", and then faces the expectation of undergoing gender reassignment surgery. There are expectations to each label. But these expectations change with time, too, as more scripts are written – a term that is highly appropriate in this case, hinting both at the performative nature of the identity narratives, and also at the movies and TV shows that seem so important in identity creation.

Seeing other people do things – perhaps especially in movies or on TV – may give people the courage to do the same. "I might not be out if Ellen didn't do her thing and if there wasn't the L word, or things showing that 'hey, normal people are queer too!' ", says one respondent, who said that she had first been afraid that she would have to adapt to stereotypes of lesbian women if she came out. Representation doesn't just mean seeing queer people on TV, it means seeing many different kinds of queer people. Diversity in representation not only for roughly divided social categories, but also diversity of scripts for each social category, allowing for a complexity in portrayals of queer people. In a way, queering the queer. "I was like, 'oh, I could be gay?' I didn't
even know! I'd never been masculine. Which is what I thought that gay women were", continues the
same respondent, explaining her fear of becoming a "bulldyke", an identity she did not feel
comfortable with. It seems that in some cases, the performative acts and associated traits – having
short hair, acting masculine – may be seen as stronger indications of lesbian identity than being
attracted to other women is. These outward markers are more visible, observable to others when
feelings of attraction are not. If people, who do not comply with these images of how a member of a
certain group or category of identity is supposed to look, are given space in the media, this image
will slowly begin to change, diversify.

Representation may also be cause for fear and stress. One respondent told me that they "saw the
movie Boys Don't Cry. [...] That one I identified with consciously. Just because she was... he was...
ostracized, you know. [...] I was afraid that that was... that would be me". The movie Boys Don't
Cry is about a young transgender man in a small town who starts a relationship with a young
woman while letting her believe him to be cisgender7, and upon being outed as transgender, he is
beaten and raped. The fear of violence, sexual or otherwise, is something almost all of my
respondents have talked about, and almost all of them have a history with. Sexual and racial
minorities are at a much higher risk of being targeted for such violence, too. But the prevalence of
"negative" portrayals in media – not only negative as in queer people and people of color being bad
people, but negative as in bad things happening to queer people and people of color – might drive
that fear further. My respondents talks about this kind of fear as being an excuse for not always
being open about their sexual identity, a "crime" that is otherwise frowned upon.

One respondent also expressed frustration that sexuality is always such an issue, or is seen as a
crucial identity label, calling for the normalization of queer identities. "I'm hoping that we'll
eventually get to the point where more people are using main characters that are, if not gay, then
queer, so that it will no longer become a thing. 'Cause it's always a thing". This sentiment is
repeated throughout the interviews; the desire to make queer so common that it becomes as normal
as anything else – to make it invisible. Muñoz (1999:166) addresses as similar strategy of
disidentification, striving for invisibility. At first glance, the respondent's statement sounds like
nothing but weariness at sexuality being the center of attention. But by defining queerness as
something that should "no longer be a thing", it is defined as normal, as nothing special – or
something just as special as everything else.

---

7 To be cisgender is to identify as the gender one was assigned to at birth, i.e. A man who looks like a man and was
born as a man (Oxford Dictionaries). The term is used mainly in queer contexts to bring attention to and question the
heteronormativity and gender binarity.
6.3 "Her opinion was more important than anyone else's"

- Close relationships and the performing of identity

If media influence is a triggering factor to begin identifying as queer (note the difference between identifying as and becoming), then the influence of close relationships is the most important determining factor in how (and when) respondents perform their queer identity. Respondents expressed having feared being rejected or misunderstood by their families when coming out, yet no one has refrained from coming out to them, save for to more distant relatives, that "don't need to know". This may be for purely practical reasons, as in wanting to be able to live openly and perhaps find a partner, without hiding from their families. It may also be due to some sense of duty, that the parents deserve to know. Or it is simply because "that is what you're supposed to do". Butler (1999:524-525) talks about the presumed default of heterosexuality, and how it needs to be reinstated through constant performance. The act of coming out is to clearly state one's difference, to distance oneself from the heteronormativity – yet, unfortunately, to confirm it at the same time by the very act of defining oneself in opposition to it. Bacon (1998) also considers it as such.

The reaction of family seems key to how the informants express their queer identities, and how they feel about them. The importance of the reaction depends on the importance of the relation; "I think her opinion was more important than anyone else's at the time cause I lived mostly with my mom", says one informant, who at the time of coming out was financially dependent on her mother, just as many queer people are when they first come out. Beyond the emotional and social need for acceptance, there is the financial need of not alienating ones caretakers, and risking to end up on the street. This informant's mother luckily accepted her child; "She left a long note saying 'I love you no matter what'." With that reassuring acceptance, the informant expresses their queer identity confidently. In contrast, a negative reaction from family leads to insecurity and doubt. "They didn't take me seriously. So I was like, maybe not. I went back and forth for a while. Mainly on outside feedback", says one respondent about coming out to her parents, who beyond this statement expressed a bigger uncertainty, wavering between whether to consider herself bisexual or straight before finally settling on the more loosely defined "queer". Another respondent also experienced not being taken seriously when coming out as gay, and then likening his mother's reaction to the stages of grief; "She went through the 'typical' phases of coming to terms with my coming out. Guilt, confusion, blamed me, blamed her, blamed her uncle that I never met because he had aids but died before I was born". And then finally, acceptance. In amusement, the respondent added that his father's reaction to him going to music school instead of law school or medical school was much worse than that, referencing the expectations he felt he had on him as an Asian-American.
Friendship is another important aspect – either finding acceptance with one's existing friends, or seeking out new friends with more things in common. "I was looking for queer friends. It was partly because I wasn't as comfortable with myself, and in general. [...] I think I felt safer", says one respondent, who was uncomfortable in their small town, and sought out others who would understand. The fear of discrimination is something the same respondent pinpoints as the reason for seeking out similar people, and this will be elaborated on later. "I would just feel weird and out of place and awkward. But with that, I met people who were or thought similarly so I never felt that left out", says another respondent about coming to terms with their sexuality while in school. One respondent joined the school LGBTA association to meet others. Internet is another way to find like-minded. The drive to find friends with which one can be open seems to be strong. After all, if being openly queer is a risk in some situations, and being in the closet is some form of deception, then one either needs to find friends with whom one can definitely be open (such as other queer people), settle for always lying, or isolate oneself from company.

While it may be hard, depending on where one lives, to find other queer friends, it may be even harder to find other queer friends of color – and so there may be a choice between openly identifying as queer, and having friends who understand other parts of one's identity. Finding sexual and/or romantic partners is also a challenge, according to informants. "Some people I dated, they would like 'get' it. The color thing. But they don't get it. They'd be like, 'well you don't look black, so what's the point?'", said one (white-passing African-American) informant about their history dating white people, and how much of a relief it was to finally be in a relationship with another queer person of color. Another expressed the frustration of trying to meet people on gay dating sites, where people either were not interested in Asian men, or fetishized them, addressing the racism of white gay men and the stereotypes of gay Asian men as feminine and submissive. Muñoz (1999:88) addresses this common view as it is seen in gay porn, possibly showing an overlap between representation (of gay Asian men as submissive), stereotype and intimate relations.

Bad sexual and/or romantic relationships may be cause for doubt, as one respondent states; "I hadn't dated a girl in four years and because the chemistry was so bad, I was like [...] maybe I'm straight now", while a good relationship may build confidence and ease stress; "It helped me accept it more to have her be the piece of the puzzle of like, you don't have to worry about being queer or black anymore, cause you're awesome. She loved all those things about me. [...] So that was the final help

---

8 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans*, Asexual, etc. Sometimes the abbreviation contains more letters, sometimes fewer, depending on how inclusive it is made.
of like, me accepting myself too". This quote is not only heartwarming but it is also the example of one pervasive symptom of oppression and discrimination. Good reactions from others are internalized, and so are bad ones. This respondent had internalized both racism and queerphobia and had a hard time accepting herself, until she came across someone who loved her race as well as her sexual identity.

6.4 "Not that we're ashamed of it"

- Fear and resistance strategies

Issues of race, gender, class, religion and sexuality inevitably came up in all interviews, often without being prompted. All informants spoke about facing structural discrimination and micro-aggressions, and had developed strategies to avoid being the victim of physical or symbolic violence. But avoidance was not the only tendency – all informants also had different ways of consciously trying to question and change the norms, potentially putting themselves at risk to better the situation for everyone.

Being out as queer can, in itself, be seen as putting oneself at risk of persecution, in part an act of self-sacrifice. Not being out is seen as hiding something, being untruthful. Though coming out may potentially mean becoming estranged from ones family, it seems as though that is a risk that one must take for the sake of not "lying" to those closest. Since "heterosexual" is the presumed default, undisclosed deviation from the default is seen as deception – even when one hasn't stated belonging to the default to begin with. Another reason for the strong inclination to come out in spite of the risks may be that it is an integral part to the common "gay" narrative – if you do not explicitly state that you are non-straight, you're "not fully gay" or "in denial".

"To really be 'out' as queer, we must deny straight people the possibility of assuming we are straight", writes Bacon (1998:250), "we have to challenge heteronormative assumptions with our very 'being' so that we aren't constantly involved in a rhetorical exchange on the topic". Bacon positions the act of coming out as a constant process, as "[persuading] the public world to accept their queer identities into the cultural imaginary" (ibid:251). She talks about adhering to stereotypes as a way to assert queerness and ensure that queerness becomes accepted. By acting visibly queer, non-queers will not be allowed to ignore the existence of queer people. My respondents talk about the positive sides to being obviously queer as "not having to talk about it if I don't want to" - or in other words, not having to be involved in a constant rhetorical exchange about it. "It's up to everybody individually, but I do think it's important to be out. If it's safe. Or at least if you're in the
closet, don't be a fucking homophobe”, says one respondent to answer the question whether being openly queer is important or serves a higher purpose. Being in the closet is associated with shame, even bigotry on the side of the person who isn't openly queer, unless there is good reason for remaining in the closet – such as fear for one's safety. In fact, being out may be a duty;

[...] as I see issues of oppression more and more, particularly overseas like in Uganda and recently in India, I think it is becoming ever more important for people to come out and say 'I am gay too, we are not invisible'.

Coming out as a duty and as a risk is something that Bacon elaborates on;

In order to create a world safe for same-sex relationships, gays and lesbians must 'come out' and fight the legal system which discriminates against them. At the same time, the assertion of an identity based on such same-sex attractions can be both life threatening and politically inexpedient. (Bacon, 1999:252)

Being in the closet or being reluctant to bring up one's minority identity may, according to respondents, also be a sign of internalized hate or self-loathing, brought on by internalizing stereotypes and bigotry; "I don't wanna fucking be in the closet again, no! [...] I even feel weird when I lie to customers I'll never see again [...] subconsciously, there's probably shame happening. Even if I don't feel ashamed in general, lying about it, means something isn't right about it". One respondent elaborated on the difficulty she had to accept herself, which lead to alcohol abuse; "That was part of the drinking. I mean, to accept it, but also like, 'I hate myself'. Like 'I don't want to be like this'. But when I'm drinking, I don't care."

Racism is more difficult to hide from, as a person's racial identity is often more visually obvious than their sexual identity; "I am more likely to be harrassed or bothered or feared just because I'm black. They don't even know that I'm gay. Half the time, they don't even know I'm a woman!" This is not always the case, as some people can be considered white-passing, and some people may perform their queer identity in ways that are very "visibly" queer. In these cases, it is up to the individual just how "open" they choose to be – depending on how big the risk is of being discriminated against or being target for violence, balanced against how dishonest they feel being in the closet; "I have to come out all the time. As black, and as queer. Which is kind of annoying, to have to tell people. [...] I can choose when I wanna be discriminated against or not."

Being in the closet as a white-passing person of color may be especially loaded, and respondents
talk about feeling guilty for benefitting from their white-passing appearance over other people of color who cannot pass as white. Similarly, one who identifies as bisexual may be more free to "fake" normalcy and avoid persecution; "Maybe if I'm bi, I'll just date men and then not date the women, cause I don't wanna deal with all that. Be afraid. I think there's a lot of fear around it, for me". Though this respondent saw this as not being true to themselves, they considered to perform a straight identity in order to avoid violence and discrimination.

To avoid oppression, respondents sought out safe places to live, moved to cities like Long Beach to find people like themselves, or at least people who did not hate them. "People would yell like 'faggot' ahead of friends, at gay friends. We were walking by this frat house. [...] I was like 'this place is a shithole'," explains one respondent, as she lists her reasons for moving. Seeking not only a place where she could avoid discrimination, but a place where the queer is common, normal; "I stopped thinking about it so much, because it doesn't feel weird, in Long Beach. Like it doesn't feel like a Thing."

Future plans are also important when it comes to finding a place to live. One respondent talks about finding a safe place to raise children, where they will not suffer because their parents are queers of color. The most commonly expressed strategy of dealing with these problems is congregation – whether by physically moving to another city, or by seeking out the company of other queer people. This may be particularly important for queers of color, who already deal with discrimination, and queer women.

To counter persecution, it is very common for a targeted group to gather in tight-knit communities, usually with very rigid social rules. "[Communities of color] are like 'no, we're trying to normalize ourselves in America today, to be taken as equals, and then you're gonna go and be a homo?'," said one respondent, talking about the one-sidedness of many identity political movements – the feminist movement is meant for white middle-class women, the gay movement for white middle-class men, the civil rights movement for black men. So, queers of color find themselves in the position where they have to choose between fighting for equal rights from a racial perspective, or from a sexual identity perspective.

"And there's a lot more gender stereotyping. I mean, that's a stereotype too. [...] There's more machismo like that in cultures, in the African-American culture, like, you've gotta be a man", adds the respondent, addressing their experience of narrower gender roles among African-Americans. "It felt like people definitely fell into the stereotypes more. And looking back I think it was more to
have a sense of community. 'I wanna be a part of this community, so I might change myself a little bit to fit more'," said another, remembering how it was living as queer in a small town. Adapting to stereotypes may be a survival strategy – to create unity within a group, and to seek protection from the group. Barnard also speaks of this, though he instead sees it as a projection from those (men) who "experience only one site of oppression" (1999:202). Black straight men experience racism, and thus see racism as the main (or only) struggle for black people, and will "infuse" the category with straight male content. This shows the importance of conducting studies with a standpoint epistemology, to ensure that our knowledge of social phenomena and social injustice is as complete as possible (Brooks 2007:64-66).

Like the importance of getting approval from ones parent, not only because of love but also because of financial dependency, getting the approval of those that are like oneself is important, because fitting in with "your own" is what keeps you from having to fit in with "society". In fact, as both Muñoz (1999:5-7) and Johnson (2001:3) argue, the adoption of social labels and the enactment of such roles serves as self-preservation in a personal context as well. The individual often recognizes that they are "not as others", that is, that they are not a perfect match to the stereotype. However, to become part of the group, as Kopelson (2002) writes, one may adapt to the stereotypes or "scripts" associated with social labels in order to attain the protection of belonging.

To try to fit in can be hazardous to a person's health, as demonstrated by one interviewee, who told me; "That was part of the queer culture that I knew, drinking, lesbian bars – where else was I gonna meet lesbians, you know? I just couldn't keep it up, I couldn't keep up with anybody cause I'd just be drunk right away. So I went to rehab". Struggling with her own identity, and exposed to bigoted reactions from others, she sought out a smaller community of likeminded and adapted to their norms – even when those norms were harmful – until she couldn't do it any longer, and left the group. She fled one set of rules that she was uncomfortable with, only to submit to a new set of rules that were at least set by people she identified with. Then finally, she realized that these rules were unhealthy as well, and resisted.

Queer is resistance. Identifying as queer is, in itself, an act of resistance against heteronormativity, as far as my respondents are concerned, and the political associations of the word is something that they are very aware of; "When I hear 'queer', I think of men and women but who are activists for gay causes", says one, and there are other statements that are similar. Most see performing as queer as being a form of resistance. All acts of queer identity can become a form of resistance; "People don't want to see gay people get married. So we should celebrate it. Instead of being ashamed of it".
Identifying as a queer person of color is political and politicized; "I'm queer. And if I do end up with a man, so what? But queerness is a big part of me. And like... I'm black, I'm not persian, I'm not jewish, I'm not all these things that people want me to be. So what, tough shit,"

One respondent addresses the social awareness that comes with being different; "Being queer you have to [...] look at [social rules] sooner. And you kind of have to get to know yourself more quickly than straight people". They talk about how straight people can get along with their lives just following the rules, while others are forced to break them, and thereby come to understand said rules better. This is evidence of the so-called double consciousness that comes with being a member of an oppressed group (Brooks, 2007:64-66). A person who is raised as a woman will know what it is like to be a woman, but by necessity also what it is like to be a man. One who lives as a racial minority will also know, by comparing the social rules imposed on them, what it is like to be white. One who is queer will notice the rules and limitations imposed on sexuality.

Respondents also suggest that, being made to break the rules early on as a queer person, makes you braver and free to break social rules again. Media and dominant social scripts tell queer people and people of color that they are oppressed and that they are more likely to suffer violence and mental illness, that young queer people are more likely to take their own lives, and that many are ashamed of their sexuality or the color of their skin. Perhaps an even stronger form of resistance is to identify as a queer person of color, and be confident about it – or more appropriately put, to disidentify.

6.5 “Someone who goes against the rules intentionally”

- Queerness and disidentification

Disidentification (Muñoz, 1999) is a process in which someone chooses not to entirely identify with the mainstream (white, straight, etc), nor entirely counteridentify with the minority (black, queer, etc.). To identify as either of those two is to accept the dichotomy, hierarchy and status quo. Muñoz talks about the third option of disidentification, in which one rejects the narrow categories, and combines categories not commonly combined. For example, identifying as gay (a typically white identity) while also identifying as a black man (a typically straight identity). It also involves claiming symbols, words and actions not typically associated with ones identity categories (claiming marriage for queer people, claiming classical music for black people, etc). To disidentify is to claim a word – queer, black, etc – and add traits that go against stereotypes and narrow definitions.
Who is the typical queer person? I posed this question to all my interviewees. "Someone who just kind of goes against the rules, but intentionally", or some variation thereof, was the answer that was most common. Someone who is political. And, interestingly, "most people are queer". Not all of them identified with the word queer, but rather with the words gay or lesbian. Most used to identify with gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc. before changing to queer later on. "I think there's too many categories, and subcategories, and subsubcategories. And when you say queer, you're just like, alright, you're just a unique person. It covers everything", says one respondent, referring to the more flexible nature of the word queer. In that case, to take on the label of "queer" is to reject identifying with other labels for sexuality (and sometimes also gender). "I kind of want it to not exist. Because in the end, it just kind of... creates too many unnecessary borders, I guess. Conflicts. Regulations. Rules", says another respondent, talking about the word queer, or indeed any identity label. "People are people", she concludes. Bacon (1998) states that, choose to identify with one word or another is to ensnare oneself in the meanings associated with that word. From this, the wish to not be defined stems, which can (partially) be handled by acts of disidentification, of adding alternations to the labels; saying for example that "I am gay, but I like sports" and thus claiming the label – gay – but also an interest not typically associated with gayness. Simultaneously, that is to affirm the meanings associated with the label you are disidentifying with.

"This girl in our class was like, 'I'm really surprised that even though she's a lesbian, she could be so maternal'. [...] So then came out to the class. I was like 'Hey guess what. I'm gay, and I'm maternal. Like, she's still a woman, you know'. Or she's still a human being", details one woman, refusing stereotypes and coming out at the same time – not just rejecting stereotypes about lesbians, but also gender stereotypes, by insisting that not only women are maternal. "She's... I dunno... she kind of dresses like a boy. But she's not like, you know, manly at all. I dunno". This hesitance may suggest that, while the respondent does not want her partner to be seen as "manly" or "typically lesbian", she still wants to bring up her "boyish" clothing style, meaning she considers a female dressing in men's clothes to be important enough to mention, yet is careful to assert that the relationship is a queer one, not a straight one. She identifies her partner as appearing like a "typical" lesbian while also rejecting the assumed masculinity that is associated with it. The context in which she talks about her partner is the context of the relationship. One might say, then, that she is disidentifying with the stereotypical lesbian relationship, in which one partner is assumed to be "the man". She also talks about how she and her partner has met with people who assume on first glance that they are a lesbian couple due to one of them presenting as more feminine and the other as more masculine. This is something she simultaneously reject and takes advantage of – saying that it's a relief to not have to come out as queer constantly, as the very presence of her partner "outs" her.
Another respondent chose to identify more as a musician than as gay – as that felt like a bigger conflict with his Asian identity than being gay did; "Being gay doesn’t feel like a defining identity to me. When I took psychology, I learned that we identify most with the part of us that feels like the most minority". For him, that was going against his parents' expectations, adopting a symbol (music) that is not typically associated with his identity label (Asian-American). Respondents have also claimed other symbols while disidentifying. One respondent in particular claimed video games (and particularly a very masculine video game series) as a symbol for queer female identity, when video games is more commonly associated with a male heterosexual identity, saying that "It's kind of a very queer war game". Finding the queer in media, or perhaps queering the media, is a common strategy of disidentification. By taking not the intended meaning from media, but the meaning one prefers, by reading media in alternative ways, to "dismantle dominant codes" (Muñoz, 1999:25-26).

Another respondent disidentified with both their black and their queer identity to create their own tradition; "We said vows, and we jumped the broom, because it's traditionally a slave thing. Because they couldn't legally get married [...] Since it wasn't legal, we were like, we're gonna jump the broom". Connecting themselves to the racial history of slavery and the very roots of African-American identity, while associating the legal status of queer people to that of black people at the time of slavery, and disidentifying with both (heterosexual) blackness and (white) queerness. This informant respected these two parts of their identity while combining them in an unexpected and queer way. This gesture may have simply been an act of family tradition, but its symbolical value and political statement is strong nevertheless. It is an act of resistance, by comparing the legal status of queer people to that of black slaves, bringing together injustices both historical and modern. "People don't want to see gay people get married", said the respondent. "So we should celebrate it". Johnson (2001:12) also relates Muñoz's disidentification to both slavery and the resistance of queer people in society today.

### 6.6 The narrative of queer identity

#### results of the narrative analysis

The narrator (in this case, the informants) creates their own life stories. While based in real (and imagined, as shown by the importance of fictional accounts) events, the feelings, reactions and meanings taken from the events are personal and in part created by the narrator themselves. Narrators "select and assemble experiences and events so they contribute collectively to the intended point of the story" (Mishler, referenced in Riessman, 2011), purposefully telling the story
in a particular way. The way the story is told affects how the protagonist (in this case, also the narrator) is seen – in other words, which identity the informant wants to promote in those particular circumstances.

The respondents' stories fall into remarkably similar tropes of self-discovery and struggle. The typical ingredients of coming out-stories are there in most cases – self-discovery, doubt, coming out, learning to live as queer, facing persecution, overcoming self-doubt, acceptance. If any of these ingredients are missing, respondents always have an excuse as to why that is – living in an accepting community, not being exposed to queer culture, being too busy with other things; "I never really put much importance in identifying myself to a label", says one respondent, explaining why she came out so late. "It didn't occur to me that [imagining kissing girls] was a gay thing to do", says another. "Dating wasn’t as big a concern to me", says a third, explaining why they didn't focus much on their sexual identity. These quotes may be seen as explanations or excuses as to why the script wasn't followed. Unless there was an awareness of how things 'should be', there would be no reason to explain why things did not happen in that way. There are obviously clear tropes for how a queer identity is formed, and my respondents are all very aware of and relating to these, mapping their life events to these scripts.

A common script among informants is the script of overcoming adversity. In this narrative, there is a past trauma or difficulty, an attempt to overcome it, and a present or projected future success or victory. Coming to terms with ones identity, recovering from abuse, or finding ones place in life. These success stories are not dissimilar from Susan Driver's writings about the normalization of queer youth (Driver, 2008:5), although it is difficult to tell which narratives are queer success stories and which are success stories in general, and where and how these intersect. Regardless, there is a clear tendency to have the narrative "end" - either as a present state or a projected future state – with the narrator (and protagonist) in a state of success, or "okayness" as measured against some mode of norm for a good, or at least decent, life. Independence, having a job, finishing school, becoming healthy and starting a family are these "markers of success" that informants strive for in their stories.

Another narrative is the self-sacrifical narrative, which is also common among my respondents, sometimes but not always in combination with the narrative of overcoming adversity. "I guess I would just rather sacrifice all of me before I ever sacrifice someone else", says one interviewee, talking about how some people do immoral things to survive. This is similar to how coming out can be construed as (at least partially) an act of sacrifice. There is also a notion of going through
hardships to become a better or stronger person; "I think of everything that I have gone through as being my make-up. [...] I have learned from the mistakes I have made and the bad things that have happened to me", and "When you don't let people [discriminate against you], there's no power. [...] I mean, shit still hurts sometimes, but [...] I don't even notice it anymore". This trope gives meaning to suffering, making hard times not only be a cause of stress, but also of personal growth.

Some statements were marked by tones of uncertainty or seeking recognition, thus possibly signifying more sensitive or controversial subjects (Polya et. al., 2005:787-795). Some respondents were more predisposed to false starts, pauses, "uhm"s and "you know"s than others. The following statement by one respondent illustrates how these tones of uncertainty may appear:

Uhm... yes and no. [pause] I kind of feel like, or the way I've started looking at things...
I think I was pretty young when I first said it, and everyone in like, high school thought
I was funny, but I just said, I'm going to assume you are queer until proven otherwise.

Here we see the initial hesitation, the pause to gather thoughts, a reminder that this is a personal opinion, and then a "disclaimer" that the respondent does not entirely remember when the event took place followed by another disclaimer, stating that other people at the time did not take the respondent seriously. "But I just said" might also denounce resolve; despite others thinking it was a joke, the respondent adamantly stuck to their convictions.

The identity formation narratives of the interviewees in this study can be said to follow one certain pattern. First there is innocence, unawareness of being different, or life before a turning point or traumatic event. Then comes the disruptive event or realization, for example a death in the family, being the target of abuse, or understanding that one is not "normal". After this comes a process of recovery or acceptance, in which the interviewee comes to terms with the event and learns to deal with the effects of it, for example seeking rehabilitation for substance abuse, or finding ways to deal with discrimination. Then, the event has been processed and becomes "the past", internalized as part of that person's identity; "I have learned from the mistakes I have made and the bad things that have happened to me", says one, "What I go through does not define other people, only myself", says another, "I'm grateful for who I am. I used to hate it", states a third.

7. Discussion

I begin the discussion by addressing my research questions and attempting to answer them. Those questions are "What are the important influences on the making and performing of queer/minority
identities?", "How are identity narratives formed by, and intended to reform, social norms and structures?" and "In which ways can queer people of color act to rewrite social norms and stereotypes through disidentification?". I then address some problems with this study, and propose how such problems may be solved in future studies.

7.1 Important influences on the making and performing of minority identities

Through narrative analysis and partial life story narratives from five queer persons of color, I found which factors influenced their identity formation and how they talked about performing said identities. Representation of queers and minorities was shown to be an important influence in formulating identity, as well as diversifying the idea of what certain identity categories entail. The positive presence of queer people and people of color in media (not to mention in the local social context) allowed respondents to put words to their feelings and gave them the confidence to identify as queer, gay, lesbian, bisexual, et cetera. This means that positive, diverse media representation is important, as it gives confidence to the people who may identify with the people portrayed. This means not only more queer people in media, but more people of color in media, as well as queers of color, ones that are unique and individual, and that get happy endings.

Close relationships were the most vital factor in how the chosen (queer) identity was performed. Accepting families allowed the respondents to relate to their queerness in a more confident manner, while non-accepting families caused doubt and insecurity. The dependency on acceptance and fear of rejection, especially for young queers, may keep them from openly performing their identities. Romantic/sexual partners may validate the respondents' queerness, making them feel more confident in performing their identity.

Fear of discrimination also regulates how the respondents perform their identities, when and to who they are "out" as queer or, in the case of white-passing persons of color, "out" as non-white. Finding safe places to live, and safe groups to socialize with were common strategies to avoid being targeted. Avoidance was not the only tendency, however, as the respondents all had strategies to deal with discrimination and even to fight it. It was shown that "being out" as queer may in part be an act of self-sacrifice, in which one risks violence to give visibility to the group. Respondents also considered being in the closet somewhat shameful and "not being truthful to oneself", suggesting that there are other factors to whether one who considers themselves queer or some variation thereof comes out or not, such as an idea of an essential, true self to which one has some form of duty.

Another act of resistance that affected how respondents talked about themselves was
disidentification. Rather than simply saying "I am gay" or "I am Asian", the respondents all added modifiers to such statements. This shows that they are all aware of tropes and social rules regarding such labels of identity, and that they actively position themselves against these rules and expectations. Respondents show creativity and resourcefulness in claiming symbols and traits not typically associated with their labels of identity. In generating more accounts and life story narratives to be read by others, these narrow frames of identification can become wider and more inclusive.

7.2 Identity narratives formed by and reforming social norms

With few exceptions, the identity narratives of my respondents followed similar patterns – in fact, when they did not follow the pattern or script, the respondent in question had an explanation or excuse for this. Even if they did not follow the script exactly, they were aware of what the common narrative scripts were, especially in regards to coming out narratives.

The queer narratives typically followed either the trope of "overcoming obstacles", or the trope of "self-sacrifice", or a combination of the two. There was a clear script for how respondents talked about difficulties and overcoming them, as well as for "discovering" and coming to terms with their identities – ending in an either current or projected future "success", involving becoming confident, going to school, having a job, and starting a family. Respondents talked about queer becoming the new normal – and whether they meant that queer people are in greater numbers being assimilated into a "normal" lifestyle, or whether they meant that the "normal" lifestyle is becoming more queer is uncertain.

7.3 Queer = Disidentification?

Interestingly, as I analyzed the interviews using Muñoz's disidentification term as a tool, I noted that many of the things I coded as a disidentification had already been given another term by the respondents themselves – queer. When not used as the umbrella term for sexual minority identities, the interviewees used it to describe something more complex, something strange that went against the norm, something political and rebellious. Queer, in the way my informants used it, could just as well mean disidentification – not with the word queer, but with other labels of identity it's combined with. Queer then denotes the modifier of a substantive. "I am a man, but I enjoy baking", or "I am African-American, but I love Japanese pop culture". To my respondents, it seems, the queerness lies less in the sexual orientation and more in a general attitude of resistance to what is considered normal. Many felt like queer was more and more common, that society is becoming more and more
7.4 The creative queer

Not only had my respondents devised ways to hide and attempt to avoid discrimination, but also very clear oppositional strategies, intending to change their situation and the situation of others like them both short term and long term. The individuals I have spoken to have all been strong and resourceful in creating and telling their identity. By allowing more room for positive portrayals in media, it is possible to strengthen the confidence of queer people of color. It is also likely to affect the attitudes and awareness of others, which would be conductive to creating a better, less oppressive situation for many queer persons of color. A greater diversity of representation allows for more diverse modes of identification and confidence, and this study can be seen as a contribution to this goal. The stories of queers of color needs to be heard in a much greater extent and with a greater diversity that better matches their living reality.

7.5 Future research

During this study I ran into some problems. One of the biggest ones was finding respondents. Despite going to a highly diverse area, it wasn't easy finding people willing or able to participate. After each interview that I did get, I asked the interviewee if they knew someone else I could speak to. The common answer was "Sorry, I know a lot of of queer people, but almost all of them are white". If anything this illustrates the importance of more research into the needs and conditions of queers of color. If time had not been an issue, a much larger study could have taken place, possibly relying on survey data as well as interview data. This could also highlight local differences depending on the demographics and history of different areas.

Although many informants mentioned issues of economy and class, time and space constraints did not allow me to pursue that in order to make a further intersectional study. Almost all of my informants came from a working class background (as is usually the case with people of color in the United States), and it's not unlikely that my results would have looked different if I had had a broader sample.
8. References


United States Census Bureau. QuickFacts:
- Long Beach (http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/0643000.html)
- San Francisco (http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/0667000.html)
- USA (http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/00000.html) All controlled 2014-01-08.
9. Appendix

Appendix 1. Interview questions

Who are you? (Introduction questions)
- Age, gender, background, work, orientation, interests...
- Where do you live? (Why here? Where have you lived before?)
- If you would describe yourself with five words, what would those words be?
- How do you think other people see you? Friends? Family? Strangers?

When did you "realize" you were queer/gay?
- How important is being queer (gay/lesbian etc) to your identity/sense of self?
  Is it something you consciously think about in day to day life, or only in certain circumstances? What are those circumstances?
- Is it important to be "out"?
  Queer identity as politics? As a statement? As "being truthful"? Or is it irrelevant, unimportant?
- Are you "out"? To everyone? Who have you not come out to?
  Who do you feel you can trust, or are you afraid of bad reactions? Or is it irrelevant to come out?
- (if out) Tell me about how you came out.
  How did it feel, what did you think...?
- If you think about the word queer (gay, lesbian, etc), what do you think about? Who is the "typical" queer (gay/lesbian, etc)?
  What do you think, vs what do you think that "people in general" think? Positive things, negative things? Stereotypes?
- Do you think it's easier or more difficult to live as queer (gay/lesbian etc) for a person of color or for a white person?
  What is easier/more difficult? Are there different stereotypes? Easier for some than for others?

If you think about your life so far, what are the 5 events that most defined who you are today?
- List them
  If you can't think of 5 right away, list as many as you can.
- Tell me more about each event, please.
  What did you do, how did you feel, why was that important?
- How did it affect you?
Appendix 2. Information letter

Dear reader,

My name is Elin Mattsson-Smith, and I am a Sociology student from Umeå University, in Sweden. I am born and raised in Sweden but currently working on moving in with my wife in the United States. The study you are participating is my bachelor's degree exam work.

The study is about the identities of queer people of color. You will be asked a few questions about formative events in your life, things that made you who you are today or simply things that made a big impression on you.

The interviews can take place anywhere you feel comfortable, such as in your home or at a cafe. They will be recorded with a voice recorder, then written down. The analysis of the interview transcripts may be discussed with teachers and other students. All recordings will be deleted to ensure your privacy. No private information or information that may identify you will be published. Details about you may be changed or removed in the final text to keep you anonymous.

You may quit the study at any time and will not need to give any reason for quitting. If you do, all material from your interview will be destroyed, and not included in the analysis or final essay.

If you have any questions, please contact me or my University teacher:

Elin Mattsson-Smith
elinmattsson91@gmail.com

Åsa Gustafson (teacher)
asa.gustafson@soc.umu.se
### Appendix 3. Table 3. Narrative codes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Plot**   | Fighting evil  
|            | Journey of discovery  
|            | Controlled by destiny  
|            | Working hard to make ones way up  |
| **Tropes** | Self-sacrifice  
|            | Hardened by life  
|            | School is hard  
|            | Defined by early experiences  
|            | Growing up, away from insecurities  
|            | Recovery  
|            | Success  |
| **Protagonist** | Caretaker  
|               | Fighter  
|               | Victim  
|               | Rebel  |
| **Grammar** | Hesitation  
|              | False start  
|              | Pause  
|              | Exit talk  
|              | Seeking confirmation  
|              | Past tense  
|              | Present tense  
|              | Future tense  |