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# MASTEROPPGAVE

## In the Shadow of the Rainbow

- Phenotypes as a factor in the experiences of women with a lesbian orientation

By Veslemøy Krey Stubberud

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## Abstract

*In this study, one is interested in how appearance is influencing the experiences of women with a lesbian orientation in Norway today. Appearances of women with this orientation have been placed into three different phenotypes, namely the masculine/lesbian-lesbian (MLL) phenotype, the negotiating/neutral-lesbian (NNL) phenotype and the feminine/straight-lesbian (FSL) phenotype.*

*The findings in this study indicate that heteronormativity is a crucial factor in the experiences of the participants, and three different themes have been extracted from the material gathered, namely;*

- ✚ Not looking right – phenotypes as part of the heteronormative puzzle*
- ✚ The “man” of the relationship – the heteronormative lesbian couple*
- ✚ Experiences with family members related to one’s orientation and the knowledge of this*

*The first theme relates to how one’s orientation is connected to one’s phenotype, or, as one will see in the findings chapter – how the orientation is not connected, as in the case of the participants with the FSL-phenotype.*

*The second theme is concerned with how the romantic relationships of the participants are categorized through the heteronormative lens into a heterosexual relationship – where one woman is assigned the role of the man, while the other remains as a woman.*

*The third theme is occupied with how heteronormativity and phenotypes play a role in the coming out-process to one’s family, and how these factors have different consequences.*

*The themes are viewed through different theories related to social work; namely feminist theory, gender theory and queer theory through the postmodern perspective. In addition to this, systems theories have been used supplementary in order to understand the phenomena a family is.*

*Key words: Phenotypes, lesbian orientation, sexuality, gender performance, heteronormativity, queer theory, gender theory, systems theory.*

# Chapter 1 ~ Introduction

## 1.1 Background

One of the main types of ethical issues within social work is the “issues around equality, difference and structural oppression – balancing the promotion of equality, with due regard to diversity; the social worker’s responsibility to challenge oppression and to work for changes in agency policy and society” (Banks 2006: p. 13). Women with a lesbian orientation are a minority in the Norwegian society, and equality has for a long time been an issue for these women. In this study, the lesbian orientation the participants have will be seen not only through the orientation alone, but also along with the factor of their phenotypical<sup>1</sup> appearance, put into context of their experiences as women of the modern Norwegian society. Through the discourses<sup>2</sup> of which we navigate and orientate as part of the human race, we are shaped through the processes of dominating norms, cultural traditions and social measures. This process starts the minute we are born with being assigned to a gender, with the expectations that comes with this assignment, and continue throughout our lives in different aspects, such as school, work, family life etc. The dominant views of gender are also linked to which sexual orientation we ought to have. Burkitt (2009: p. 85) explains human sexuality as a key concept in the making of our identity in the Western world. Having a lesbian orientation would thus break with the norm related to orientation, as the desired orientation judging from the dominant norms is heterosexual. The lives of lesbian women will be affected by the populations attitudes towards them – and negative attitudes will affect in a negative matter (Anderssen & Slåtten 2008: p. 15). This attitude will be affected by the dominant norm, which by queer theory is called “heteronormativity”. Through the heteronormative lens, heterosexuality is not only limited to orientation as one might think, but also towards how one perform one’s gender. Belonging to this is the phenotypical appearance of lesbian women, and the complexity of gender performance as a whole. As reality has shown through history, masculine and feminine traits are not exclusively displayed in separate orientation, masculine women are not necessarily lesbian, and feminine women are not necessarily straight. However, when a woman displays masculinity, the heteronormative perspective may cause

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<sup>1</sup> Phenotype is defined as “the expression of a particular trait, for example, skin color, height, behaviour etc., according to the individuals’ genetic makeup and environment” (Phenotype definition: Biology online).

<sup>2</sup> Discourse is in this study defined as “the rules that govern the language and conceptual vocabulary which (through various branches of knowledge) order the world and the relation between the things in it, and also involves the institutional sites and social practices that help to form and put in place the conceptual order of normality” (Burkitt 2009: p. 93).

her to be labelled as a lesbian, and when a woman displays femininity she “fits” into the heteronormative image of a straight woman. This study focuses on masculine and feminine women with a lesbian orientation, and how their phenotype, according to heteronormativity shapes their experiences when facing a society where this normative perspective is still the dominant view.

My own lesbian orientation is partly the reason for the interest in the field. Sometimes one is drawn towards fields with challenges to which one belongs, and for me, a lot of comments and experiences as part of the Norwegian society have left me looking like a question-mark. Over the years, the impression of how ones experiences with having a minority orientation seemed to me to not be linked only to the orientation alone, but how this orientation was connected to one’s appearance.

## **1.2 Definition of orientation**

The essentialist view of sexual orientation, which views sexual orientation as a biological trait that can be covered or revealed but not changed, was a normal perspective of sexual orientation until the 90s, and is still quite common in the Norwegian society today (Bjørkman 2012: p. 4). Ohnstad (2008: p. 17) explains the dichotomization<sup>3</sup> of heterosexuality and homosexuality as part of our understanding of sexual orientation – one is either one or the other. This has changed for many in the later years, as the social constructionist understanding of sexual orientation has advanced, where one keeps the categories, but gives them a more dynamic space and acknowledges that the concept is shaped through historical and cultural produced frames (Bjørkman 2012: p. 4). In this study, the participants define themselves as women with a lesbian orientation. However, as the questions were formed as “how would you define your sexual orientation” rather than simply asking if they had a lesbian orientation, differences within the orientation became more visible. Participant B explained it as being “bi-lesbian” as she is attracted to women with masculine traits, which shows that not only the biological sex is taken into account for her, but also the gender performance as a whole. Another example is participant C, she didn’t want to define herself as a lesbian, but did so several times during the interview, which may be explained by her internal insecurity regarding how others react to her being married to a woman. *Id est*<sup>4</sup>, lesbian orientation is influenced by more factors than just who one desires in a romantic way.

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<sup>3</sup> Dichotomization means a binary view where traits as hetero/homo are viewed as polar opposites.

<sup>4</sup> *Id est* is defined as “that is to say”.



### **1.3 Phenotypes**

The women that participated in this study were asked to place themselves on a scale that ranged from 1 to 10, 1 being very feminine, 10 being very masculine. They were then asked to talk about where they think others around them would place them, and if this differed from how they perceived themselves. Then the participants' answers were interpreted into three phenotypical categories, which will be explained further in the theoretical framework; chapter 3.5. The experiences of the participants are viewed through the heteronormative lens and how the phenotypical categories influence on these. How a woman negotiates her phenotypical appearance in accordance to the Norwegian society will influence her experiences with the others belonging to this society. This has consequences for the people that are influenced by this dominant discourse on an every-day basis. According to Walker et al. 2012: p. 91) the scope of lesbian appearance range from the "butch" lesbian who have a gender performance that is within the masculine gender spectrum, while the lesbians that have a feminine gender performance are often called "femme". In this paper, the masculinity and femininity the participants display have been interpreted into phenotypes rather than using labels, because labels are often the result, or the beginning, of stereotypes which can result in unwanted processes that follows.

### **1.4 Research problem and research question**

Equality regardless of for e.g. sexual orientation and gender is what is strived for through the anti-discrimination laws and human rights implemented juridical in the Norwegian society. Compared to the 60s, one may say that today's reality may seem as a Utopia for lesbian women. However, there are several challenges related to having a minority orientation where the majority is, as usual, connected to the desired dominant norms. Grønningsæter & Lescher-Nuland (2010: p. 11) states that especially the heteronormativity is an important challenge when equality and inclusion for lesbians, gays and bisexuals are discussed in today's society. In order for this to happen, one needs to change how one views "the others", in this case, the women with a sexual orientation that differs from the dominant view, which today, as in earlier times, is re-produced through the heteronormative discourse. Within social work, we work with people, and most of them do not fit into the narrow categories that the norms and traditional values allow. For the participants in this study, the different phenotypes results in different consequences, and in some types of experiences, the phenotype is not a factor, but orientation is. The experiences I have had personally as a woman with a lesbian orientation, my own prejudices, and meeting other women with lesbian orientations, and listening to how

their experiences were similar to mine, caused me to become fascinated on how gender performance might be a key to understanding how the heteronormative discourse may be influencing on several levels. Not only does the orientation not fit into how a woman is perceived through this discourse, at the same time, heteronormativity results in negative consequences whether you are feminine or masculine, but in different ways. Masculine women fit the picture of a lesbian and this result in both negative and positive experiences in facing the heteronormative society Norway remains to be. Feminine women don't fit the picture of a lesbian, and have their positive and negative experiences because of this. The orientation alone does not seem to be the main factor, but rather how they perform this orientation along with how they perform their gender, and how this is connected, and by whom. The research question that has been developed is as follows;

*“How does women's phenotypes, when having a lesbian orientation, influence her experiences in facing the Norwegian society?”*

The paper seeks in other words mainly on how the phenotypes of the participants, in interaction with their sexual orientation, influence their every-day life as part of the Norwegian society, and what these experiences have meant for the participants.

## Chapter 2 ~ Previous Research

Norwegian research relating to women with a lesbian orientation is somewhat limited. The knowledge base is not very large, and in several cases, the different groups within the LGBT<sup>5</sup>-population have been put together as one homogenous group, even though in reality this minority shows signs of having great variations. Even within the “lesbian group” there are great differences – and different challenges and consequences following the differences. According to Anderssen & Slåtten (2008: p. 14) we have, seen all together surprisingly little knowledge about the general populations attitude towards lesbian women and gay men compared with for e.g. USA, and even less to no knowledge regarding the attitudes towards bisexual women and women and trans persons. Within international research “for the past 20 years in lesbian studies, there has been a recurring interest in providing a working definition of the term “lesbian” and the identity (or the set of identities) associated with that term”(Tate 2012: p. 17). International research has also had a much greater focus than Norwegian research on how gender performance and orientation may be seen together as a whole. “In much of the lesbian studies literature of the past 20 years, there has been a similar appreciation of the separation of gender role adherence and gender self-categorization. For example, scholars have considered the dynamics of female masculinity as well as female femininity in terms of “butch” and “femme” classifications” (Tate 2012: p. 23). The role of gender performance has becoming increasingly interesting for understanding the lesbian orientation and how the norms influence the experiences not solely on orientation. “Distinct from these prior works, the present analysis examines descriptions by both butch and femme women about the intersection of their lesbian gender and sexuality” (Levitt and Hiestand 2006: p. 39). Thus, while reviewing international research, gender performance has a much larger place in explaining experiences women with a lesbian orientation have, than the Norwegian research has.

Mostly, the Norwegian research focuses on different arenas of one’s life and links this up to the orientation of the person, such as living conditions (Anderssen & Malterud 2013), employment (Grønningsæter & Lescher-Nuland 2010) and bullying (Roland & Auestad 2009). In all of the research that is discussed in this chapter, one theme is apparent in all of them, and that is the one of heteronormativity and the consequences this have for the people involved. This study focuses on lesbian women only, thus the research will be linked towards this topic, even though the research in general tends to relate to minimum gay men, if not

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<sup>5</sup> LGBT: Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual

more groups within the LGBT-population, as well. The reason for reviewing Norwegian research is that the research question focuses on the Norwegian society and will thus be most relevant to this paper. Research regarding the connection between gender performance and orientation has mostly been conducted in other countries than Norway, but some of this research connects well to the Norwegian research that is reviewed in this chapter and will be added supplementary.

Levitt and Hiestand (2006: p 50) explains femininity and masculinity as traits with a belonging political desire – “For desire to be engaged both genders required not only the appearance of gender signs, but the display of agency and strength. Femme women were respected and admired for being strong enough to enact a defiant femininity, and butch women for defying femininity itself” (Levitt and Hiestand 2006: p. 50).

## **2.1 Attitudes**

Within different cultures, different traits of a person would influence on their experiences by being a part of this culture. This study is about experiences, and the need of an understanding of what may influence on these experiences is of great importance. One aspect that would influence on the experiences of women with a lesbian orientation is the attitudes they are met with by the majority in this society. This may also influence on how their phenotype evolves as a result of these experiences. There is done a study that seeks to reveal these attitudes by Anderssen & Slåtten (2008). They mention three reasons for why these attitudes towards LGBT-persons are important. It affects the LGBT-persons directly, the attitudes has a regulating power with belonging to a wider set of norms with how we view womanhood and manhood, and there is an interest in knowing what direction the attitudes are moving towards (Anderssen & Slåtten 2008: p. 14).

Belonging to one’s phenotype, is how one negotiates in relation to the society of which one belongs. Lesbians and homosexuals use a lot of energy and attention to deal with having a lesbian or homosexual orientation in a society where this is not a given fact (Anderssen & Slåtten 2008: p. 15). Research shows that heterosexual persons interact with lesbian women and gay men a little bit differently than if they interact with a person they don’t know is lesbian or gay; a difference that goes systematically in a negative direction (Anderssen & Slåtten 2008: p. 15-16). This indicates that there are differences in how the majority interacts with LGBT-persons, also in the case of women with a lesbian orientation. This also have additional consequences for women with the MLL-phenotype, which will be explained in

chapter 3.5, as this may lead to negative behaviour as these may be identified as women with a lesbian orientation.

Research also shows that negative attitudes towards LGBT-people will not only affect the LGBT-persons, but also their family and others, through fear of rejection, actual discrimination and internalized negative attitudes within themselves (Anderssen & Slåtten 2008: p. 16). This shows that family is also affected, both through the majority's attitudes, and also through internalized homo-negativity<sup>6</sup> from the LGBT-person, and through negative attitudes inside the family towards LGBT-orientations.

According to Anderssen & Slåtten (2008: p. 18) there have been a great deal of polls executed the last 40 years, often commissioned on behalf of newspapers or organizations, usually only have one question and have focused on timely issues related to LGBT-persons. For e.g. in the 80s the topic was if LGBT-persons should have the same job opportunities, while in the 00s marriage equality and assisted fertilization was more important (Anderssen & Slåtten 2008: p. 18). The considerable number of Norwegian polls about lesbians and homosexuals points towards that fewer and fewer people in Norway having negative attitudes towards this population today (Anderssen & Slåtten 2008: p. 18). This indicates that the living conditions for LGBT-persons in Norway today are overall moving towards a more positive fashion.

The research conducted by Anderssen & Slåtten (2008: p. 48-49) also shows that men, especially men with positive attitudes towards traditional gender roles, religious men and men between the ages of 61 and 80 years are the ones with most negative attitudes towards lesbians. Also found in this study was the tendency towards men with lower education and men from rural areas had somewhat more negative attitudes towards lesbian women and gay men than men from bigger cities and men with higher education (Anderssen & Slåtten 2008: p. 49). The indication is thus that there are specific groups of men that have a more negative attitude towards women with a lesbian orientation, and thus they will often be included in the negative experiences the women have. Men with a negative attitude towards traditional gender roles and men from Oslo and the surrounding areas is the men which reported the most positive attitudes towards lesbian women and gay men (Anderssen & Slåtten 2008: p. 49). Anderssen & Slåtten (2008: p. 50) states that women are more positive in their attitude towards LGBT-persons, but the most negative attitudes follows the same pattern as with men,

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<sup>6</sup> Homo-negativity is a negative attitude against someone based on this individual having a LGBT-orientation.

the women with positive attitudes towards traditional gender roles, religious women and women in the age group 61 to 80 years.

The size of the population with negative attitudes towards lesbians and homosexuals are relatively small, and sinking amongst men, and the total number has decreased in the period 2008-2013. However, women's answers to the question "female homosexuality is a natural expression for sexuality in women" had changed in a negative direction since 2008, where 7 per cent less (39 – 32) found it natural (Anderssen & Malterud 2013: p. 16-17).

A project was finished in 2013, and examined the living conditions through different studies of LGBT-population in Norway with the main authors of this project being Anderssen & Malterud (2013). Anderssen & Malterud shows that it from 2008 to 2013 there was a change in positive direction concerning attitudes towards LGBT-people among Norwegian men, but that the proportion that confirms negative statements of LGBT-people is still significant, and negative behaviour occurs among a minority of these men. These findings also indicate that it is possible to have positive and negative attitudes at the same time; a large majority amount of the respondents confirms that they shudder when they think about LGBT-people. There are many positive elements that works against unfortunate effects of homo negativity and heteronormativity, but there is systematic signs of exposure among LGBT-people in Norway today (Anderssen & Malterud 2013: p. 19 & p. 24).

## **2.2 Family**

A study shows that for women with a lesbian orientation, the tendency was that it was more common with a poor relationship to parents and siblings than it was for women with a heterosexual orientation (5 % vs. 3 %), but not directly common for any of the groups (Anderssen & Malterud 2013: p. 10). This shows that for 95 % of the women with a lesbian orientation do have a good relationship to their family. Phenotypes were not included as a factor in this research, and thus it's impossible to say if this is an aspect that would make a difference within phenotypes as well as orientations. Over 80 % of the lesbian women that participated in this study were open about their sexual orientation to their family members, closest colleagues and friends (Anderssen & Malterud 2013: p. 14). This shows that openness is more common than having a covert orientation in this aspect.

### **2.3 Stereotypes, phenotypes and heteronormativity**

A project related to why some women remain in the closet indicates that a reason for this is that “they prefer to be viewed as a completely normal person” (Anderssen & Malterud 2013: p. 21). This research also states that the participants didn’t want to be compared to Media’s review of lesbians and homosexuals as a specific group of people, and they don’t identify with the stereotypical images of the people belonging to their orientation. Stereotypical prejudice about womanhood and manhood is another topic which keeps turning up, several stories related to lesbians and gays that doesn’t break with the habitual expectations of womanhood and manhood, and thus they dare not to come out because of the risk of being associated with all the myths” (Anderssen & Malterud 2013: p. 21). This shows that the more extreme phenotypes associated with the lesbian orientation actually hinders individuals of revealing their orientation by fear of being perceived as a stereotype of some sort as a result.

In a study conducted by Ohnstad (2008), lesbian identities are the main topic. She explains that in the meeting with the cultural heteronormativity the self-understanding to lesbian women will be challenged in how they define their differentness. She also explains the traditional language as a challenge with it reproducing the hegemonic<sup>7</sup> norms for lesbians and gay men in the society (Ohnstad 2008: p. 30). “In the categories between the feminine and the masculine, ambiguity is a way of coping that creates room to move, and tension in how one is perceived by others. The terms that are used are that one navigates in a cultural field between normal and abnormal, femininity and masculinity and between what one is responsible for and what happens by accident” (Ohnstad 2008: p. 55). One can thus see that the phenotypical appearance of a woman with a lesbian orientation has influence on her experiences with the society, and that orientation alone is not the only thing that has an effect on these experiences. The second is that knowing that someone is male or female says very little about how their masculinity or femininity is constructed.

When looking at international statistics, different gender performativity categories have actually been researched quite thoroughly. According to Walker et al.(2012: p. 96) in their analysis of the Sex and Love project from 2005 one can see that it was used a scale where “Seven percent ( $n = 15$ ) of women identified as “butch,” 28% ( $n = 60$ ) identified as “soft-

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<sup>7</sup> Hegemonic ideals will be explained in the theoretical framework, and means in this context that one type of for e.g. masculinity is desired above another type.

butch,” 33.2% ( $n = 71$ ) identified as “butch/femme,” 28% ( $n = 60$ ) identified as “femme” and 3.7% ( $n = 8$ ) identified as “high femme” (Walker et. al. 2012: p 96).

## **2.4 Health sector**

One of the studies conducted within the project above was a study examining how it is to navigate the Norwegian health sector a lesbian woman with the scope concerning minority stress, this study was done by Bjørkman (2012). Bjørkman defines lesbian women as a sexual minority within “a heteronormative society where homosexuality becomes invisible and inferior” (2012: p. VI). The minority stress originates in the heteronormativity as a dominant discourse of our society. The study further explains four aspects of the minority stress, namely experienced homo negativity, expected homo negativity, internalized homo negativity and the question related to if one should “come out” or to remain hidden (Bjørkman 2012: p. 11). One type of homo negativity is parents and siblings reactions to a family member identifying as lesbian, among the lesbian participants in the Norwegian living conditions survey 25 % reported problems in their family, 13 % in relation to friends and 17 % in relation to colleagues (8) (Bjørkman 2012: p. 11). To be lesbian is something the woman has to actively deal with, she has to decide if she will inform about her orientation, and she may have to explain or defend it facing the society, and then she has to take in and process the reaction or be aware of her attitude so the lesbian doesn’t show, depending on if she comes out or not (Bjørkman 2012. p. 54-55). In one of the sub-projects the study Bjørkman (2012: p. 57) conducted, she saw no stories where the doctor asked directly about sexual orientation, but many stories that described forced openness – which one can link towards the heteronormative which also may be present in the doctor’s office. In the same project, several of the participants explained experiences where the doctor had changed his behaviour in an uncomfortable way when they “came out”, some of them were uncomfortable and curious, while others became uncomfortable and insecure (Bjørkman 2012: p. 60).

The participants in Bjørkmans study, describes barriers that can make it difficult to break the heteronormative frame surrounding the medical consultation, where the woman is recognized as heterosexual unless she insists on her own perception of reality (Ohnstad 2008: p. 31

## **2.5 Employment**

Grønningsæter & Lescher-Nuland (2010) has studied how it is to be LGBT in relation to one’s workplace. One of their tables shows that only 6,7 per cent knows someone they think



is LGBT and not open about it, which may mean that the theme exists some places without it being placed there by the one it is about, and that for some, silence is a bad strategy to avoid that someone else understand that one belongs to the LGBT-group (Grønningsæter & Lescher-Nuland 2010: p. 38). They claim that heteronormativity is also a challenge in relation to employment-life (2010: p. 97).

Grønningsæter & Lescher-Nuland (2010: p. 42) found in their study that for many openness about one sexual orientation is a bigger step in the private sphere, especially in relation to family, than it was on the working place. The results indicate that few LGBT-people in Bergen reports experienced discrimination or harassment on their working place, however, one out of five are uncertain whether they have experienced this (Grønningsæter & Lescher-Nuland 2010: p. 66). Grønningsæter & Lescher-Nuland claim that there is reason to ask if this uncertainty may be grounded in it being a form of accept or tolerance amongst lesbians and gays that if one is open one has to withstand a certain degree of harassment (Grønningsæter & Lescher-Nuland 2010: p. 66). Heteronormativity may be a challenge when it comes to working environment; however, the study has few points that points towards that discrimination are a widespread problem (Grønningsæter & Lescher-Nuland 2010: p. 67). The impression of these researchers (2010: p. 81) is that LGBT-employees in the municipality Bergen to a small degree experience to be a minority, and few draws up aspects that can be interpreted as minority stress. They do however state that some work environments have larger challenges connected to openness of one's orientation, then particularly the school and health- and care sector. Grønningsæter & Lescher-Nuland 2010: p. 92-93).

A later knowledge walk-through shows that there is a need for more research to be done within different aspects when it comes to employment in the case of the LGBT-population in Norway (Bakkeli & Grønningsæter 2013: p. 97).

The study conducted by Anderssen & Malterud (2013: p. 12) shows that the majority of the LGBT population in Norway doesn't experience discrimination on their work place or against themselves, but at the same time there is a visible minority that has experienced discrimination within this population.

## ***2.6 Name-calling and bullying***

One of eight men and seven per cent of the women in this study reported that they had called one or several girls/women for "homo", "lesbian" etc. monthly or more often the last year

(Anderssen & Slåtten 2008: p. 88). “There are a lot of expressions that suggests that we live in a heteronormative society which don’t accept LGBT-phenomena, and that this affects many of the LGBT-people” (Anderssen & Slåtten 2008: p. 112). This indicates that using the orientations names as swear-words may influence on how one negotiates one’s phenotype in different situations.

“Some of the participants confirmed negative behaviour facing lesbians and gay men, the most common was joking about lesbians and gays in their study (Anderssen & Malterud 2013: p. 17). 4% of the men had moved physically further away from a lesbian, 39 % had told jokes, while 1 % had hit or pushed a lesbian, 1 % of the women had moved physically further away from a lesbian and 14 % had told jokes” (Anderssen & Malterud 2013: p. 17).

A study regarding bullying and sexual orientation has comprehensive results, and is conducted by Roland & Auestad (2009). Bully definitions don’t focus specifically on gender related bullying, but the definitions are so general in design that they can be used in research about bullying based in gender and gender-roles, however, this has practically never been done – which in turn results in limited knowledge regarding this type of bullying, which also is the case in bullying based in sexual orientation (Helseth, 2007; Roland, 2007, cited in Roland & Auestad 2009: p. 8). Different gender related expressions may be used invective, and the experience will probably depend strongly of what the attitudes in the environment is (Roland & Auestad 2009: p. 9). 10.3 per cent of lesbian youth reports being victim to conventional bullying (Roland & Auestad 2009: p. 30). 10.3 per cent of lesbian youth also reports being victim to bullying by the use of cell phones, while 15.4 per cent reports being bullied through internet (Roland & Auestad 2009: p. 31). Put together, lesbian youth report that 17.7 per cent is bullied in some form (Roland & Auestad 2009: p. 32). For 15.4 per cent of the lesbian girls, they are bullied with homophobic expressions (Roland & Auestad 2009: p. 36).

### **Chapter 3 ~ Theoretical framework**

The study aims as stated to view the every-day life experiences of lesbians in the Norwegian society in light of the phenotypes they have, namely the FSL-phenotypes, the NNL-phenotype and FSL-phenotypes. I have read an extensive number of articles regarding studies done about masculinity and femininity among women with lesbian orientations; some of these have been included as supplementary literature within the analysis in the findings chapter. The included studies are Tate (2012), Walker et al. (2012), Paechter (2006), Ochse (2011) and Levitt & Hiestand (2006). I have also read numerous books, to get a better understanding of the aspects within the different theories. The study focuses on three themes, namely “not looking right” in accordance to stereotypes and expectations from the society, “the guy in the relationship” – a heteronormative view of lesbian relationships and last, but not least “experiences with family”. All three themes will be discussed through the scope of poststructural feminist gender theory and queer theory, but in addition to this will the last theme be also done through systems theory. The reason for system theory being applied to the last theme is that family is a type of system, and is applicable to the other theories as well in that one does not exclude the other; or as stated by an author on the applicability of feminism in system theory; “general systems theory is compatible with the spirit of feminist thought” (Hanson 2001).

The theoretical framework within this study has multiple theories that exist within the same continuum, whereas they supplement each other within the topic of the thesis. The theories that have been applied do not have clear lines which separate them from each other, but rather has sliding overlaps towards each other and together they create an understanding of both gender and sexual orientation which fits this study well.

Within gender theory there is an introduction book, which offers comprehensive information on the matter, called “gender theory” in Norwegian which is written by numerous authors; Mortensen, Egeland, Gressgård, Holst, Jegerstedt, Rosland and Sampson in 2008. The gender theory applied in this study has its main frame from this book. In addition to this, Connell (2010) has been applied to offer additional perspectives with her book called “Gender, short introduction”.

Still grasping within gender theory, but now leaning towards the feminist approach of this, Butler (Jegerstedt 2008 and Butler 2010) has been applied, in addition to her work that is written about in the Gender theory book mentioned above. The main focus in the analysis is however on her work in her famous book named “Gender trouble” because this reflects

heteronormativity as a phenomenon in a way that is applicable to the findings done during the interviews.

Moving on to queer theory which is very closely linked to gender theory, and might even be seen as a theory within a theory, the works of Connell (Langeland 2008) regarding hegemonic masculinity as well as Judith Halberstam's work (Mortensen 2008) regarding female masculinities is used to offer a broader analysis in this study, both written about in the gender theory book from further up.

The postmodern and poststructural scope used in this study is picked out from Healy (2005), Fook (2010) and Connell (2010), because all of these represent poststructuralism in slightly different ways, and thus will be helpful in widening the scope done in this matter. The reason for not excluding postmodernism from the theoretical framework is that where poststructuralism is extensively occupied by the language and discourse we use, the postmodern approach will allow us to also examine what is not said – and how this influence even further the experiences of the participants in the study.

Within the field of system theory, Healy (2005) has been used to view closer at the constellation of family as a micro-system and to how this may be crucial for our everyday-life, along with our other close and personal networks – as the ones with friends. Hutchinson and Oltedal (2012) and Røkenes and Hanssen (2012) has also been used as supplementary to Healy (2005) interpretation of system theory. This theory is however only meant to supplement the main theories explained above because family is indeed a system of its own, and this needs to be taken into account.

“To understand another person empathically involves that we understand the others horizon from our own horizon and in that way create a horizon-fusion” (Røkenes and Hanssen 2012: p.59). This is in one way the essence of the postmodern approach – and in the poststructural. Among post-theories one finds the postmodern and poststructural theories. The most important difference between postmodern and poststructural theory is that where the postmodern theory has a wider scope with theories of society, culture and power, the poststructural theory concerns itself primarily on the “influence of language on power, knowledge and identity” (Agger, 1991: cited in Healy 2005: p. 197).

### **3.1 Feminist theory**

One author within this field is Judith Butler, which is both associated with the queer theory and feminist theory. Even though she originally defined herself as a feminist, she now places herself in a dialog between feminism and queer theory (Jegerstedt 2008: p. 74). Her perspective on gender will be used through her book “Gender trouble” from 1990 in analysis of the findings later in this paper. One reason for using Butler instead of a traditional feminist theory is that the traditional feminism has had a tendency to overlook other types of gender identity and sexual identity, for e.g. homosexuality (Jegerstedt 2008: p. 74).

Butler talks about biological sex as a discursive category, and as described above, it is defined as not something natural or given, but rather an effect of a certain way to talk, in other words, the concept of biological sex points to the notion that we are born as either biological men or women, and that this has a crucial importance for our sexuality and for our identity (Jegerstedt 2008: p. 75). At the same time, Butler is clear in her words; the individual cannot choose freely pick their biological sex (Jegerstedt 2008: p. 78). Butler has however said that our concepts regarding the biological never perform completely free from the discursive practice that produces it, and even though the discursive practice does not cause the biological sex, the biological sex is produced in a way that makes it seem as it is ahistorical, pre-language and necessarily binary (Jegerstedt 2008: p. 79).

Butler claims (in Jegerstedt 2008: p 81) that the problem within newer feministic theory and gender theory is that one thinks of gender as socially constructed is two-faced; gender is constructed on the background of a pre-existing biological body which is basically given, and thus can't be a topic of discussion. The other alternative is that biological sex does not exist at all, and pure fiction created by language, and language is everything that exists (Jegerstedt 2008: p. 81).

Butler says that gender is not something you are or have, it is something you do, and by this performativity alternative to gender, she has offered an alternative way of thinking body, gender and gender-identity (Jegerstedt 2008: p. 76).

In Jegerstedt (2008: p. 77), Butler explains the social gender as the primary above the biological sex by arguing that gender is a performative category, and thus she turns the discussion to how feministic and gender theoretical thinking have traditionally viewed the separation between social gender and biological sex.

«In Butlers later works she continues to analyse the relationship between subject, discourse, power and performativity, with a particular emphasis on the type of resistance that appears or is made possible when speech acts produces results that differs from what is their intention» (Jegerstedt 2008: p. 85, authors translation).

### **3.2 Gender theory**

Within the field of poststructural theory, one has, as with the other post-theories, some key concepts, namely; discourse, subjectivity, power and deconstruction (Healy 2005: p. 199-205). Again, Foucault is mentioned within the power aspect of the theory, and that power in any context need to be analysed in order to uncover the discourses that operates in construction of identity, knowledge and power within the context (Healy 2005: p. 202-203). Connell (2010: p 77) explains this approach to power as “widely dispersed, and [it] operates intimately and diffusely. Especially it operates discursively, through the ways we talk and categorize people” (Connell 2010: p. 77). Again, the discourses are brought up as important to understand our reality, and through the lens of poststructuralism the discourses of language tainted by heteronormativity becomes visible in the findings chapter.

Gender theory is crucial to understand the role phenotypes when these represent different levels of masculinity and femininity. Gender theory has been developed from being part of the feministic critique to be an academic field of its own today, and it’s most important question is “what is gender?” (Mortensen et. f. 2008: p. 11-12). Gender is an important distinction from using the word sex, as Butler is interpreted in Jegerstedt (2008: p. 81), one of the problems when thinking gender is if one bases this solely on a biological body – in other words, where gender is viewed as the biological sex, and thus cannot be discussed. It is central within newer feministic theory and gender theory to view gender as socially constructed. Feminist theorists in the 70s made a distinction between the word “sex” and the word “gender” as sex “being the biological fact, the difference between the male and the female human animal. Gender was the social fact, the difference between masculine and feminine roles, or men’s and women’s personalities” (Connell 2010: p. 57). Gender theory offers in other words a nuanced way of thinking gender – and views gender as more constructed than inherited genetically – although inherited culturally through the social construction of the word.

Mortensen et al. (2008: p. 15) has chosen to divide the gender theory into five methods of approach; the psycho-analytical, the phenomenological, the ontological, the discursive and the

deconstructionist field. These different methods of approach will without a doubt answer what gender is in different ways.

The discursive approach is greatly influenced by Foucault. Egeland and Jegerstedt (2008: p. 70) explains in their chapter about the discursive approach that Foucault defined in 1969 in his book “Archaeology of Knowledge” discourses as practices that systematically shapes the objects they obviously are talking about or concerns. Foucault does not mean that e.g. gender, sexuality and subject is something that exists prior to the discourse and only then are shaped by it, but rather that for e.g. gender, sexuality and subject exists through the discourses that appear to only address them (Egeland and Jegerstedt 2008: p.70).

“Foucault is in other words not that interested in whether a discourse gives a through representation of the reality or not. What seems to occupy him are the mechanisms that allows a discourse to be highlighted, lifted up and spread out as the dominating discourse at the expense of another, in other words; as the setting where what is being said and written about gender and sexuality is validated and thereby true” (Egeland and Jegerstedt 2008: p. 71).

### **3.3 Queer theory**

Mortensen and Jegerstedt (2008: p. 290) states that queer theory base the types of identities and sexual practices that «the dominating culture has defined as different, divergent, abnormal and pervert» and seek to show how these identities and practices has been marginalised to base heterosexuality as the norm, «as the original, the natural and the right» (Mortensen and Jegerstedt 2008: p 290, authors translation). In other words, what the culture is showing off as natural and desired, is always done by the expense of something else being excluded and/or branded as unnatural (Mortensen 2008: p. 290).

As within gender theory, queer theory is sceptical to the «naturalness» of for e.g. sexuality, and is inspired by Foucault in the same matter as in gender theory, and offers an alternative way of thinking gender and sexuality. “Instead of thinking that gender and sexuality is something natural that exists prior to language, and as the language defines, the queer theory points out that our concepts never point back to a world which isn’t already shaped, or that is shaped precisely when we’re naming it. The concepts we understand the world through is a part of numerous discursive practices, they exists at simultaneously with them and as an effect of them” (Mortensen and Jegerstedt 2008: p. 290).

Within the Queer theory field, one of the norms that is subject to large criticism is as stated above the heteronormativity which is dominant in many societies today. “The heteronormative discourse is so strongly rooted in most academic disciplines that it is treated as a “given”, as something that does not need to be questioned, mentioned, criticised or defended” (Holan 2009: p. 1, my translation). This is one of many reasons why the Queer theory is crucial in understanding how this discourse is influencing on people not fitting into the heteronormative lens of reality. Broadbent defines heteronormativity as “the cultural bias in favour of opposite-sex relationships of a sexual nature, and against same-sex relationships of a sexual nature” (2011: p. 1). One of the consequences of this bias is that heterosexuality is viewed as the “normal” sexuality, while lesbian and gay relationships are not (Broadbent 2011: p. 1). This bias may produce prejudices, and labelling processes within the heteronormative scope are produced and re-produced in order for the heteronormativity to keep its dominant grip of how human sexuality ought to be. This norm does not only apply to the orientation of individuals, but also on how they perform their gender. “For lesbians, most societal labelling comes from presentations of masculinity and femininity” (Walker et al 2012: p. 91). Thus, the labelling process does not only end with the orientation as already stated, but also where on the scale they place themselves according to feminine and masculine traits. This will be further explained in chapter 3.5, where the phenotypes used in this research are discussed and explained.

Raewyn Connell is an author that has contributed to queer theory and one of the concepts she has written about is the “hegemonic masculinity”. This was a concept she, Carrigan and Lee launched with the starting point in the class analysis to the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (Langeland 2008: p 293). Connell states the hegemonic masculinity ideal today as a white, western heterosexual man and at the same time she states that this masculinity is only one of several masculinities in a society (Langeland 2008: p. 293-294). One of the consequences of this ideal being in the Norwegian society as part of our western culture is the heteronormativity which is displayed within the heterosexuality of the man. “One of the most important traits with our society’s hegemonic masculinity is a dominating heteronormativity. A masculinity type that is defined outside and in contrast to the cultural norm, and in that way gets to experience the serious consequences of this, is the subordinated masculinity” (Langeland 2008: p. 294). Connell is clear in her view of the masculinity term, masculinity is not reserved only for men, women can do masculinity as well (Langeland 2008: p. 296).



Another important author which is used in this study is Judith Halberstam. In one of her books, *Female Masculinity* (1998), she studies different kinds of just what the title says, female masculinity, for e.g. the tomboy, androgynous women and tractor-lesbians (Mortensen 2008: p. 313). Halberstam says that these gender configurations have been misinterpreted by feminists and gender theoreticians which have viewed these women as trying to get masculine privileges on the grounds of their gender performance (Mortensen 2008: p. 313-314). Instead, Halberstam offers an alternative interpretation of the women performing gender in this way; it is a type of ignorance and lack of respect for the heteronormativity that still rules in society (Mortensen 2008: p. 314). The crucial point is again lifted up into the light, masculinity is not necessarily linked to a male body; this is rather a truth with modifications, carefully constructed by the heteronormative society. “Halberstam challenges our beliefs regarding a “real” masculinity, as something understood in relation to the biological male body” (Mortensen 2008: p. 314). The dominating masculinity is as within the hegemonic masculinity above referred to as the white heterosexual middle class male body (Mortensen 2008: p. 314). Halberstam also talks about hegemonic notions regarding gender and sexuality – and how female masculinity has a critical potential when viewing these notions (Mortensen 2008: p. 315). One of the consequences for “acting up” and break with the heteronormative picture of what a woman “should be” in extreme forms; for e.g. the tractor-lesbian is to be met with a high level of aggression and harassment from the majority in the culture (Mortensen 2008: p. 315).

Through the lens of the heteronormative discourse one can seek to understand why it is that lesbian relationships are separated from the homosexuality and rather divided into the binary gender performances of man and woman. “Heteronormative discursive practices or techniques are multiple and organise categories of identity into hierarchical binaries. This means that man has been set up as the opposite (and superior) of woman, and heterosexual as the opposite (and superior) of homosexual. It is through heteronormative discursive practices that lesbian and gay lives are marginalised socially and politically and, as a result, can be invisible within social spaces such as schools” (Gray 2011).

### ***3.4 Systems theory***

Within the discourse aspect of viewing the society, one discourse can be within one’s own family. “Discourses can be directed both towards justifying what is true, to uncover values, norms and subjective conditions” (Røkenes & Hanssen 2012: p. 37, my translation). A part of

these values and norms within the family can be related to the family being part of the larger society, such as the dominant norms regarding gender and sexuality, namely the heteronormativity explained within queer theory earlier in this chapter. Other parts of these norms and values can be within the discourse of family as a system, which may differ from family to family according to beliefs, local differences etc. The systems theories have been applied as supplementary in the findings chapter regarding family, as this can be viewed as one type of a micro system and important for understanding the foundation of what a family is. The micro system is created in face-to-face situations (Hutchinson & Oltedal 2012: p 192). As part of this micro system when growing up, this has effects towards our identity as individuals as well.

One challenge of using system theory as part of the foundation for understanding the findings in this study is the clash of which feminism and system theory have. Feminists have criticised systems theory as not being systemic enough, and another critique is that systems theory ignores gender concerns – amongst others, it does not recognize the power structure within family systems which “obscures the privilege of dominant groups” (Whitchurch & Constantine 1993: p. 3). However, not everyone agrees upon that general systems theory, or in this case, the branch of family systems theory, is not applicable with each other. Hanson (2001) says that they are indeed compatible with each other – and that “the unnecessary association of systems theory with hierarchy and status quo-oriented proponents has formed a limited impression of what it can offer to feminisms” (Hanson 2001). Whitchurch & Constantine (1993) explains General systems theory as being occupied with systems in general, family systems theory is “an extension of this branch” of systems theories (Whitchurch & Constantine 1993: p. 1). Within family system theory, the focus is shifted from the individual to the family as a whole; some parts that are focused upon is the family’s functioning, communication, conflict and connectedness and/or separateness, and, very important for this study, it’s adaption to change (Whitchurch & Constantine 1993: p. 1).

There is also an emerging systems theory called the “Feminist Systems Theory (FST)” where “gender sensitivity is a vital consideration to help prevent writers overlooking what is distinctive about women’s experience in studies” (Stephens 2012: p. 1-2).

Systems theories can be explained as a theoretical framework in order to understand different phenomena rather than a way to intervene within social work practice (Healy 2005: p. 132). The phenomenon that is understood here is especially in accordance to the key characteristic

that all systems have goals and (hopefully) certain ways of trying to accomplish or reach these goals. Hutchinson and Oltedal (2012: p. 170) lists six key characteristics of the different systems theories, the first one is the wish to create a “full” theory with the whole picture included, the second the desire to understand how a system is built. After this, they list the ability to see the borders between the world and the system itself, how the systems are maintained by the movement through change and equilibrium, circular causal thinking and last but not least to identify the targets and goals the system seeks to fulfil (Hutchinson and Oltedal 2012: p. 170). A goal that a family may seek to fulfil, if functioning in a normal matter, is to maintain a certain degree of stability within its structure.

### ***3.5 Phenotypical categorization***

The word phenotype can be defined as “The expression of a particular trait, for example, skin color, height, behaviour etc., according to the individuals genetic makeup and environment” (Phenotype definition: Biology online). Masculinity and femininity can be viewed as having certain traits. These traits can be linked to the gender performance of a person in accordance to the cultural norms and values of the society to which they belong. Dominant expectations towards how someone “should look” and behave sexually often move towards the same orientation, namely the heterosexual one. For women this may result in being viewed as “abnormal” both if she is feminine and have a lesbian orientation and if she is masculine and have a lesbian orientation because both of these combinations represents a break from the dominant expectation. The phenotypes used in this study are separated into three, which is a simplified way of viewing the reality within the lesbian population. The phenotypes are separated into “feminine/straight-lesbian”, “neutral /negotiating-lesbian” and “masculine/lesbian-lesbian”. All the participants brought up this topic, whether one looks straight or not, and there is a link towards the participants which identified themselves as being more feminine to have issues regarding not being believed fully when they say that they have a lesbian orientation. At the same time, the masculine/lesbian-lesbian and neutral/negotiating-lesbian participants all talk about them “looking lesbian”, hence lesbian may be viewed as a certain look. “The notion of an original or primary gender identity is often parodied within the cultural practices of drag, cross-dressing, and the sexual stylization of butch/femme identities” (Butler 2010: p 187). Butch and femme may be viewed as one way of viewing the stereotypical extremes of the MLL- and FSL-phenotype mentioned later on in this chapter. However, the reality is not as black/white as this representation offer, which will be explained further below in the different phenotypes definitions chapters. “Within feminist

theory, such parodic identities have been understood to be either degrading to women, in the case of drag and cross-dressing, or an uncritical appropriation of sex-role stereotyping from within the practice of heterosexuality, especially in the case of butch/femme lesbian identities” (Butler 2010: p. 187). As part of the heteronormative picture of what a romantic relationship consists of, namely a man and a woman, the butch/femme categorization work, as one has the male traits, and one has the female traits. For most lesbian women however, their phenotype is maybe not a static identity, but rather a result of negotiation in different aspects of their everyday-life, for some more than others. The most masculine participant in this study identifies herself as a “stereotypical lesbian” while talking about her appearance in accordance to her sexual orientation, with this she explains that masculinity can be linked towards different stereotypical nicknames lesbians have, such as “tractor-lesbian”, “butch” etc. Now, a further discussion of the phenotypes will follow.

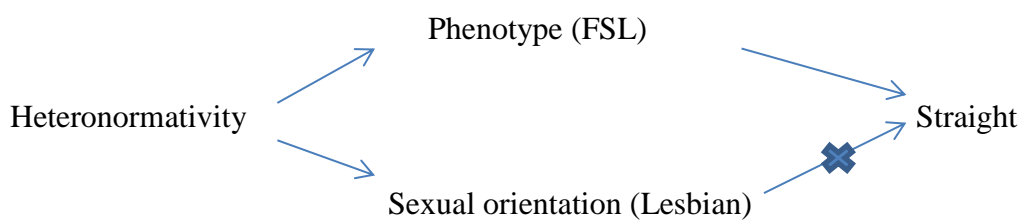
The stereotypes “butch” and “femme” can be viewed as opposites of the scale used in this study. For the majority, a “femme” may also be viewed as a woman that “passes” as straight. One way of viewing this issue is through the lens of the stereotypes “butch” and “femme” as opposites of the scale used in this study. “For example, butch lesbians are often defined as lesbians who present gender along the “masculine” end of the gender spectrum (e.g., clothing style, hair style, mannerisms), while femme lesbians exhibit characteristics along more traditional “feminine” lines” (Walker et al. 2012: p. 91). “Regardless of their origins, these stereotypes may leave a lasting impression on lesbian identity, the way lesbians are viewed in society, and how they interact in their communities” (Walker et al. 2012: p. 91). Walker et al. (2012: p. 91) also explains that for women with a lesbian orientation, most of the social labelling processes are founded in their gender performance within the masculine/feminine scope.

The phenotypes which will now be presented more thoroughly will be of a more simplified matter with only three categories, even though reality does not simplify that easily. Even if one participant belongs to the FSL-phenotype this does not mean that she is automatically belonging to the extreme femininity in her appearance, but rather that she identifies with being feminine, as is the case with the other phenotypes as well.

### **3.5.1 Feminine/straight-lesbian (FSL) phenotype**

The first phenotype which will be explained is the Feminine/Straight-lesbian phenotype. This phenotype includes the women that identify themselves as feminine, “straight”-looking

women with a lesbian orientation, and will be called the FSL-phenotype from now on. Feminine traits are identified through the way one dresses, what kind of jewellery (if any) one prefers, one's relationship to using make-up, hair style, interests, hobbies, personality etc. One way of viewing the FSL-phenotype is to use the heteronormative scope to understand their experiences with the Norwegian society. Their phenotype is put in as the main focus, the sexual orientation they have is disregarded because of their phenotype. Thus, one can draw the line from heteronormativity as being mainly focused on the appearance of individuals in order to identify their sexual orientation, or in simpler words; if it quacks like a duck, and looks like a duck, it's probably a duck. This can be explained through this figure;



As one can see from this figure, the heteronormative lens which is one of the dominant normative ways of viewing gender and sexuality in Norway, appearance can play a key role in order to identify someone's orientation, rather than viewing the orientation alone as the key to identify the orientation (which would be a more logical way of identifying a person's orientation). Thus, having the FSL-phenotype may lead to being identified as a straight woman, even though the reality proves otherwise. There are numerous synonyms and similar phrases to identify a feminine lesbian other than identifying this as a "FSL-phenotype", which is for e.g. lipstick lesbian, femme, etc. One way of defining the FSL-phenotype is that they "pass"<sup>8</sup> through the heteronormative scope of what is identified as a straight woman.

### 3.5.2 Neutral/negotiating-lesbian (NNL) phenotype

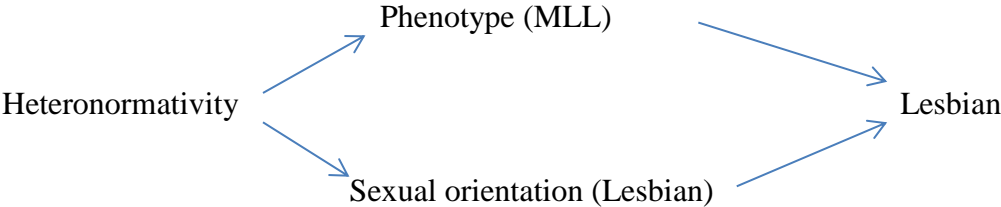
This phenotype is identified with the phenotype being more dynamic, and it may navigate between FSL and MLL judging from which situation the holder of this phenotype is in. This phenotype will be called the NNL-phenotype from this point on. Most of the participants explained negotiation techniques, but only one participant had such a wide span on where she wanted to place herself, ranging from 4 to 7 within the scale, that she would not fit into either of the more classical phenotypes on which one can see the queer theory often talks about when relating gender performance to having a lesbian orientation. This phenotype is thus a

<sup>8</sup> "To pass" will mean to have the appearance that fits to the pre-determined norms regarding how a straight or lesbian woman "should" look.

negotiating mixture between the “clearer” phenotypes, namely the FSL- and MLL-phenotypes.

### 3.5.3 Masculine/lesbian-lesbian (MLL) phenotype

This phenotype will be called MLL-phenotype from this point on. The heteronormative scope also has room for masculine women, which may be identified as lesbians, not only through their orientation, but also through their phenotypical appearance. The masculine traits are identified through aspects like dressing style, what kind of jewellery one prefers, interests, hobbies, personality etc. The figure below will be used to further explain how the heteronormative expectation may be put into reality when viewing masculine women.



The heteronormative assumption has several issues, the most apparent one being partly explained above, namely that not all lesbians are masculine, and frankly; not all masculine women have a lesbian orientation. The two figures show in a simplified matter how the heteronormative expectations have consequences for women with both phenotypes. The MLL-phenotype at its most masculine has an every-day term; the “tractor-lesbian”. Another term that is often used is “butch”.

## **Chapter 4 ~ Methodology**

The methodology can be viewed as the pillars on which the study leans on, and is thus a vital part of the study itself. From how the data is collected, who was asked and in what way the findings were analysed is all parts of the great puzzle in which I will now explain further. How we choose to seek meaning in the world surrounding us will influence on what we find, and how this meaning is constructed into the part of reality we know. How we construct this meaning is again crucial for how we understand the phenomenon behind the meaning we found.

This chapter consists of six main parts, each with a different topic relating to the methodology used for this study. The parts are written in a chronological order; starting off with how the participants were identified and thereafter gathered through different strategies. The second part explains the scale used to interpret the phenotypes of the participants. The third part offers a short presentation of all the participants. Following which, largest part of this chapter will be presented; the interview itself and its structure, herein lies also how the interview was conducted and strengths and limitations concerning the different ways of conducting the interviews – and language as an important side note to this process. The fifth part of this chapter is concerned with the transcription process, and the last part explains the strategy used for the analysis in the findings & discussion chapter, plus two subchapters discussing the validity of the study and additional ethical considerations done in this study that is not explained within the other sections of this chapter.

### **4.1 Sampling strategy**

In order to be able to conduct an interview, one inevitably needs interviewees. In this study the interviewees are called participants. The reason for calling them participants is that for me these women represent an individual that actively participate in a process; in this case the interview, in order for the information to be gathered. After all, an interview is an “exchange of views” according to Kvale & Brinkman (2009, cited in Dalen 2013: p. 13). These exchanges are important in order to find what is crucial in this study; the main themes in what the participants experience in different aspects of life. This part of the chapter will be concerning these participants, who they were supposed to be, who they are and how they were “found”, or rather let themselves be found, through the gathering process, which included different strategies. A part of how these participants were gathered is the information sheet they were given and the informed consent they had to sign to participate.

#### **4.1.1 Desired participants**

After going through the interview guide and the proposal, it was decided that the generation the author belongs to would be appropriate as these have lived their whole life in the “new” world where homosexuality is allowed and not a psychiatric term per se. The acceptance regarding humans having a homosexual orientation in Norwegian perspective is historically pretty new, with decriminalization of homosexuality in 1972, and removal of homosexuality as a psychiatric diagnosis in 1977 (LLH: Historisk oversikt).

The participants were thus desired to be between 18 and 30. As one can see in the presentation of the participants, the participants’ ages ended up ranging from 20 to 32. Things don’t always go according to plan, but having a 2 year bounce upwards will not have large concerns regarding the life experiences of the participants as they are still from the same generation. The participants also needed to identify themselves as having a lesbian orientation, the reason for this was that the goal was to differentiate between phenotypes within the same orientation; different orientations could have created the frame of orientation being the main factor instead. In that way it may favour orientation in relation to phenotypes as the reason for what one experience and in worst case scenario make the phenotypes invisible in factor-wise matter. In addition to this, one was looking for women with clearly defined masculine or clearly defined feminine traits en route with the phenotypes. This might seem as looking at the world with a stereotypical set of glasses, but this decision is reasoned with the fact that stereotypes does influence on the experiences of women with a lesbian orientation. The categorizations are already apparent in our world – and thus putting this into the term of phenotypical appearance will only serve to structure existing patterns in our world. Now that the desired participants have been identified, we move on to how they were gathered – and what techniques proved less helpful when trying to gather these.

#### **4.1.2 The gathering process – a lengthy project**

Before starting the gathering process, I was thinking that it would be a lot of work, but not that difficult and a relatively fast process. Because of the enthusiasm I myself had regarding the study, this might have influenced on how I thought it would be perceived by potential participants. I was, to put it mildly, wildly mistaken, and went into weeks of frustration and no/negative responses before hitting the lottery with a new strategy after failing at the first two ways of finding the participants. These strategies will now be further explained.



The first strategy included to put out a forum post on the Norwegian website for the LGBT-population in this country; [www.gaysir.no](http://www.gaysir.no), to see if there was anyone interested in this study. The response was, to my disappointment, poor. It seemed as though the topic itself was reason for people to become negative in their responses, some of the responses included me being less intelligent, and that stereotypes does not exist in real life. Part of the reason for this reaction must be the way the post was written, so I take full responsibility regarding this. However, it was clear that this forum was not the way to go when trying to find participants to this study.

Because of the reasons mentioned, a new method was now tried to reach out to potential participants, with asking directly members on a gay community website if they were interested in participating. This was starting to feel like an impossible mission, when the ones that bothered to reply at all were all of negative nature, for e.g. them not being “interesting enough” or “ready for such a commitment”. After several weeks of trying this method, there was an actual positive response, and the author was pleased with this result. It was however time to move on to a new strategy of gathering, as gathering one participant per three weeks would mean that the gathering would be finished sometime after the deadline for delivery of this study.

I then remembered reading about the snowball-effect. This would be the way to go, as one was still short of minimum seven more participants to have the magic eight<sup>9</sup>. As a snowball starts from one direction and grow itself bigger by rolling – one can say that this is a modified version of that sampling strategy. Instead of one big snowball where one used the first participant as the gate-keeper for more participants, I decided to use my own network. By asking different people in one’s network one was able to identify several potential participants. As a rule of thumb, I never made first contact before the participant had agreed to this and then given the mail address to the “middleman” who gave it to the author. At first, it seemed meaningless, as none of the potential participants actually responded to the question if they would be interested in participating from their friend. But then, like a lightning strike, all off a sudden two answered in one day and wanted to participate, the next day, two more, then over a couple of weeks, all 8 participants had been gathered through this modified technique of snowballing in one’s own network – only with seven small snowballs instead of one large alone. A month later, even more participants surfaced, and the author actually had to

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<sup>9</sup> The magic eight is the minimum of participants we were told in classes that would give enough responses in order to look for themes in the participants’ experiences.

decline these because of the time frame a master thesis usually have, there was unfortunately no time to interview these as well.

#### **4.1.3 Initial contact and informed consent**

The initial contact with the participants were through an e-mail that shortly explained that they were being contacted because they had displayed interest in participating in the study, this e-mail contained two attachments; the information letter and a form where they signed and at the same time acknowledged that they had received the information letter and still was interested in participating.

Jacobsen (2013: p 46-47) names four main components in the informed consent; competence, volunteering, full information and understanding. These components adds up to the importance of the participants being capable of deciding to participate, that they are free to withdraw from the study at any given time and that all participating is done freely and voluntary and that it is an informed decision which the participant has truly understood the potential consequences of. Thus, the information letter is comprehensive in its information both regarding the criteria's for participating, why the study is being conducted, by whom it is being conducted and how the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants will be preserved during the study, and last but not least what will happen to the personal information regarding the participants at the study's end. In addition to this, to ensure that the information is perceived correctly, the information letter has been written in Norwegian which is the native language of 7 out of 8 participants; the last participant has extensive knowledge of the Norwegian language.

Jacobsen (2013: p. 48) asks the question about how easy it would be to identify a participant from the data collected, and how this will be crucial for the anonymity aspect regarding the participants. This study does not actually display any direct person identifying aspects, names have been removed, even the specific locations for where they are from and live today have been anonymized down to what part of the country they live in, and if this is a rural or urban area in a Norwegian perspective.

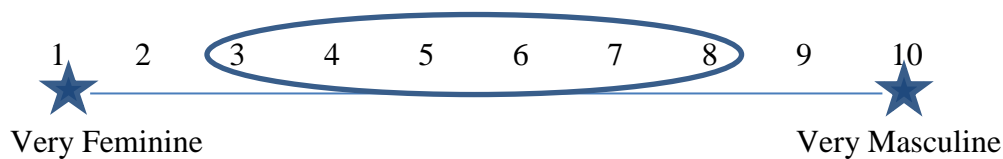
#### **4.1.4 Applying for approving from NSD**

All researchers that are planning to go through with a project that involves personal information, they must send in a form to "Datafaglig Sekretariat" which is tied to the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (Dalen 2013: p. 100). NSD stands for Norwegian

Social Science Data Services and when conducting research that will involve personal information that is sensitive, one is to apply for approving from this service. This was done, and the project was approved for conduction right before the interviews started, with tips on how to store personal information in order to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants involved in the study.

## **4.2 The scale**

The scale was presented to all the participants' in the same matter. The scale was implemented in the question "Where would you place yourself on a scale where 1 is very feminine and 10 very masculine?"



As one can see, the numbers between 3 and 8 have a circle around it. This is because the participants measured themselves to belonging within these numbers and not at the extreme ends. This is an interesting fact, as neither of the participants felt they belonged to either a 1 or 2, or as a 9 or 10, this indicates that the participants view the stereotypes as too extreme for them to fit into them, which again indicates stereotypes often being too simplified for existing in reality. The participants' identified how masculine or how feminine they were, and then this was interpreted into the phenotypes explained in the theoretical framework.

## **4.3 Presentation of the participants and their phenotype**

The reason for assigning the participants letters according to where on the scale they located themselves with A starting with the most feminine and H being the most masculine is because this will make it easier to follow through the letters which phenotype the participant in question has. The reason for not assigning names to the participants is because this in itself may be perceived as a discriminative measure, as names have meaning, and these meanings may go against who the participants feel they are. For e.g. calling a woman with the MLL-phenotype a fictional name that they would relate to someone they know that are very feminine – would actually have the possibility of being offending. Likewise if a woman with the FSL-phenotype got assigned a fictional name that she would relate to someone masculine, might have an unfortunate effect. In order to avoid this issue, names were not assigned at all.

For some of the participants, the scale had to be split up in order to be able to locate themselves; this was split up in two scales, one for personality and one for appearance. For others, the location of them on the scale was easiest to done in one scale alone. The split scales was then put together again, where they assigned one common number that would be applicable when seeing the personality and appearance under one. The reflection process that was needed to assign a common number that would fit both of the split scales led to, from my point of view, to a more thought-through process regarding where they wanted to locate themselves.

The participants in this chapter talks about why they are masculine or feminine, and what kind of traits may be applied to the different “categories” of masculinity and femininity, and how this may relate to their orientation or not. The definitions of the phenotypes are also explained earlier, in chapter 3, theoretical framework. In this chapter we will see that the participants have several traits they self-report as being either masculine or feminine.

Halberstam (in Paechter 2006: p. 258) talks entirely about ‘gender’, doing this in a way in which slides between how an individual understands him or herself and how he or she is perceived by others. She focuses repeatedly on outward appearance, rather than the self-perception of the individual, treating gender as fundamentally about how one is recognized by others, as opposed to who one experiences oneself, including one’s embodied self, to be (Paechter 2006: p. 258). In this sub-chapter, all the participants’ persona and phenotype will be presented shortly, to show where on the scale they are located and how this is relevant.

#### Participant A

Participant A is 23 years old, and grew up in a small municipality in North-Norway. Her network includes parents, younger siblings, to a certain degree an older sister and many close friends. She has recently moved back to the small municipality after a period of living in a city in North-Norway. She is in the beginning of a new relationship, and works in a kindergarten.

Participant A places herself first as a 1, then as a 2. She explains the placing as always being fond of makeup, dresses, pretty clothes, shoes, purses, being occupied with her hair etc. but explains at the same time that she is not a makeup doll. She thinks that the ones around her would place her as a minus 1 on the scale, which she grounds in the same feminine attributes as the ones explained above. She often gets comments regarding “you aren’t a typical

lesbian...” Her guy friends calls her one of them, and this is explained by the participant as having more masculine humour and attitude, when all these factors are taken into account the participant wishes to change her placing at a 3 on the scale. She was a tomboy<sup>10</sup> when little with mostly guy friends, but moved and got a lot of female friends, which naturally consequence in her getting influenced by the new friends, turning towards a more feminine appearance. Her answers have been interpreted as her belonging to the FSL-phenotype.

#### Participant B

Participant B is 30 years old and grew up in a small municipality in Mid-Norway. She has a network which includes mostly friends and a “foster family”, and some contact with her real family. After some years living in a city in Mid-Norway, she moved to a municipality in the east of Norway and is now living with a girlfriend. She works as a teacher.

Masculinity and femininity for the participant has been dynamic values. She places herself as a 3, and thinks that the ones around her do as well. She thinks the reason for this is that she can be both feminine and have to a certain degree masculine traits at the same time. She uses the definition “baggy” regarding her clothing style, which makes her not a 1. She fixes her own car, and does carpentry around the house. She views the feminine as more tight clothes, with more cleavage, and that she can wear a suit, but that it then is a feminine suit made for women. She agrees to the definition of this being that she can wear masculine clothing as long as these preserve a more feminine expression. The participant used to be more masculine, because she thought this was a part of being lesbian, when she found out that these two things aren’t necessarily connected, she went for a more feminine appearance, since this is more comfortable for her. She viewed the masculine as a sort of lesbian uniform. This adds up to participant B having a FSL-phenotype.

#### Participant C

Participant C is 25 years old and grew up in an Eastern European country. She has lived in Norway for three years, and her network includes close friends, best friends and acquaintances from both countries, and her family. She found love in Norway while studying, and is currently living with her wife in a large city in the east of Norway. She is currently not working, but usually works within teaching and language.

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<sup>10</sup> Tomboy is one of the terms that belongs to the MLL-phenotypical category

Participant C chose to divide the scale into two scales, one for appearance, and one for personality. She places appearance as 2/3, and personality as 5. When placing the scales back together to one, she first places them on 4, then 3, then 5, then 3 and a half, before landing on a 3. The reason for her placing is that she likes makeup, if she is going shopping she buys dresses, but at the same time, she repairs things around the house and fixes the economy, which for the participant is a male chore around the house traditionally. At the same time, she doesn't dare to go up to the storage room because its dark there, the participant laughed while saying this. She says that most people are probably a mixture of both feminine and masculine, and that very few would be very masculine or very feminine, and only that. She thinks the others around her would place her as a 1 or 2, because her experience is that they are more occupied by appearance, than they are by personality. The feminine and masculine traits the participant displays and have in her personality has been stable during her entire life span. The participant's answers put her in the FSL-phenotypical category.

#### Participant D

Participant D is 27 years old and grew up in a mid-sized city in the east of Norway. Her network includes a child from a previous relationship, (where she has no legal rights because of the Norwegian laws regarding the use of an anonymous donor), parents, two brothers and close friends. Today, she is living in the same city as under her upbringing with her new girlfriend, and works within the health sector.

Participant D places herself as a 5, because she can dress feminine even though this is seldom. When splitting up the scale in one for personality and one for appearance, the numbers are respectively 5 and 6/7, 6/7 is quickly corrected to 7. She explains her clothing style as “baggy” pants, but a more feminine top. The participant is concerned about what other people might think of her. The looks she gets, she explains an ambivalent relationship to, where in one way its okay, while in another way it's not, for her to wear masculine clothing. She is working with becoming more secure in her own style, because she feels this is the best style for her. She doesn't have a concrete answer to where other people would place her on the scale, and think that this would be very different according to which person was asked. She thinks that many around her views her as more feminine than she does personally, and the participant thinks this has something to do with her personality. The participant's masculinity became more apparent at the time of her first stable relationship with a woman, the reason she explains for this is that she she felt she could relax and that she was accepted. She moderates

her masculine appearance towards a more feminine look when dressing up for something. She corrects herself at the end of this section of the interview with her being everything from 4 to 7 because she negotiates a great deal with the situation she is in. Adding up the participants answers, she has a NNL-phenotype.

#### Participant E

Participant E is 29 years old, and lived for the first 13 years of her life in a city in North-Norway, before moving with her family to a municipality in the east of Norway. Her network includes close friends, parents and an older brother. Today, she is living in a large city in the east of Norway with her girlfriend, and studies within information sciences.

Participant E places herself as a 6. Then she changes this to being in between 6 and 7. She grounds this in always having been a tomboy, and never been a “girly girl”. Her interests are one of the things she explains with placing herself at this place on the scale, she likes playing computer games. She thinks categorizations of humans are wrong at the same time, as she is just being herself and should thus be identified as a human. She thinks it’s wrong at the same time, because she is just herself. She likes to put on mascara, smelling good, to be clean and looking good, but she thinks that everyone should like this to a certain degree. She can wear a dress, but she hates it, this makes her think that others would place her on the same number. When she still orientated as straight, she tried being more feminine, she feels as she can be more herself now, and talks about being very adaptive to being the “straight” stereotypical girl, where she was the accessory of her man, and she gets a bit sick by thinking about that today, and moderates less now, when she was small she also was more masculine, the femininity was just a phase for her. She talks about being dominant and that this is “masculine”, and she is thus more masculine as a person. Put together, participant E has the MLL-phenotype.

#### Participant F

Participant F is 24 years old and grew up in a city in Mid-Norway. She has a large network which includes many close friends, several best friends, some acquaintances, parents and to a certain degree a brother. She is single, and has recently moved to a city in North-Norway where she is working within the health sector.

The participant places herself as between 6 and 7. She thinks it has always been like this. She views her masculinity as a stable trait. When splitting the scale, she thinks personality is a 5,

while her appearance is 7. The reason for this is that she feels her clothing style is much more “guyish”, while personality wise she isn’t that “guyish”. She thinks other people will place her between 7 and 8. She thinks the ones around her focuses more on appearance. When she goes out on for e.g. bars she moderates towards being more masculine. She thinks that the first impression sticks, and this makes everyone remember her as maybe more masculine than she would think of herself. She thinks that some of the reason for her always been a little masculine is that many of the people on her own age in the family are guys, and many of her friends when growing up was boys, and this might have influenced her. She however links the orientation into her phenotype by saying that had she been straight, she would have moderated towards a more feminine phenotype, but that she would not have worn dresses regardless. The participant’s answers gives room for the category of MLL-phenotypical appearance.

#### Participant G

Participant G is 32 years old, and grew up in a small city in the east of Norway. She has a great network which includes friends, her mom and several siblings. She moved at a young age to a large city in the east of Norway and is single. She works within the field of child protection, and has plans to start education within social sciences starting this fall.

Participant G places herself as a 7 on the scale. She has in own view a «guyish» appearance, and this is something she wants to have. She has some worries with being placed in a «tractor»-category<sup>11</sup>, but not many places her in that category. The participant also talks about the difference between traits and appearance, and that she cannot fix cars, and she has more feminine traits as well, and that all humans have both masculine and feminine traits. She does not know where others would place her, because it depends on what they weigh as important in her, the participant ends up with saying that they that they might place her both lower and higher on the scale. Her own mother has told the participant that it is rather a lack of femininity in the participant than a very vivid masculinity present. The participant explains this with her mother having a stereotypical mind-set towards gender, and thus her mother doesn’t view the participant as even a small portion feminine. At this point in the interview the participant laughed and said that this was normal when she meets people in the society. The participant’s answers add up to the participant having a MLL-phenotype.

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<sup>11</sup> Tractor-category is the in the more extreme and/or stereotypical end of the MLL-phenotype.



## Participant H

Participant H is 20 years old and grew up in a small municipality in the east of Norway. Her network includes a large amount of close friends, and her parents. She is currently single, and is today living in a city in North-Norway where she studies within Nature sciences.

The participant places herself as an 8. The reason for not a higher placing is that she knows several women that are more masculine than her. She places herself there because she doesn't use makeup or similar things. When the scale is split up, she still thinks it's 8 on both personality and on appearance. She also mentions gentleman-values as important for her. Others would place her at the same number, some might place her higher. She thinks it's like this because how she views herself, and how others see her, because how she views herself is how she behaves, and how she behaves will be the way they view her. She has interests which are more common for guys to like, for e.g. computer games. She has become more masculine when she got out of the closet, and "I use... cool t-shirts on HM in the boys department, much cooler than those glitter things... glitter tops". This participant's answers are interpreted as belonging to the MLL-phenotype.

### ***4.4 Data collection method; personal interviews***

The study was interested in the meaning-bearing in the experiences of the participants, and was more occupied with how their phenotype would influence on their experiences on a deeper level rather than how many had experienced it. Because of this, a qualitative method would be appropriate to examine the research question. The qualitative method chosen is semi-structured personal interviews. The interviews were conducted in four different ways, mainly because this proved to be cost-effective and at the same time grasp over large geographical areas, thus one was able to interview participants from all over Norway rather than being limited to close geographical areas because of the cost of travelling.

This study seeks to see themes in lesbians' experiences according to their phenotypes, and the bearing of meaning within these experiences. "[...] certain elements of symbolism, meaning, or understanding usually require consideration of the individual's own perceptions and subjective apprehensions. This is qualitative data" (Berg & Lune 2012: p. 15). Because of this emphasis on the meaning in the experiences, rather than the issue of how many that experiences these things, the qualitative method of personal interviews were chosen.

#### 4.4.1 The interview-guides structure

The purpose of this interview was overt in every way possible, as the research question states what the study seeks to find. Jacobsen (2013: p. 147) says that the question regarding covert or overt purposes of the interview is specifically important is that the research question may be sensitive to the participant, because this can cause the participant to be overly careful in her answers. The topic of this study is sensitive indeed, as it is about orientation and appearance, both aspects of one's identity. There would however not be any obvious reason for the participants to be careful in their answers, other than with negotiating with reality as part of feeling accepted.

The interview guide has 41 main questions divided into four separate sections; the first is basic questions regarding the participants background, the second is about the participants' orientation and experiences relating to this orientation. The last section is separated into three smaller sections, the main section being about masculinity and femininity as phenotypes, before the phenotype is linked (or not linked) towards the orientation of the participant and the interview is phased out. These four sections will now be further explained, and the figure below shows how the interview guide is cut up;



The first section related to background and who the participant views itself as and consisted of 6 main questions relating to basic information about the participant. This section had several functions. The first reason for having this section was to learn more about the participant and to view the experiences within their background to see if these could prove to be additional or alternative explanations for negative experiences regarding sexual orientation and phenotype, such as bullying, psychiatric issues etc. The second reason for this section was that it worked as a phasing into the main sections of the interviews and in a way helped the participants to relax and get used to the dynamical aspect of the interview situation. This reason is also listed by Berg & Lune (2010: p. 150) as the first commandment of interviewing, as one should never begin an interview cold. Another reason for starting off with questions like these was also to not go straight to the more sensitive topics. In addition to using this

section as a warming up to the main sections, namely section two and three relating to sexual orientation and phenotype, some minutes was used to just talk about ordinary things.

The second section of the interview related to sexual orientation. This section consisted of 15 questions relating to experiences the participant based as having to do with her sexual orientation, such as experiences in school, with family etc. This section served as a background frame for the third section. It also sought to find patterns in experiences the participants had relating to their sexual orientation. Experiences which could not be explained, in their view, by their phenotype, but which may have some type of similar experiences among the different phenotypes. The sexual orientation chapter thus proved to be helpful as many of the answers from this category was related to the phenotype, as one can see similar themes within these answers that follow the different phenotypes.

The third section of the interview was in many ways where the essence of the study became clear, consisting of 15 questions. This was about the phenotypical differences among the participants, and started with asking where they would place themselves on a scale where 1 was very feminine and 10 very masculine; this is further explained in the chapter regarding phenotypes. Thereafter the section concentrated about how others, according to the participants, would place the participants on the same scale, how it felt to be at that part of the scale and the experiences the participants had which they based in their phenotype rather than in their sexual orientation. Following this, a smaller section within this section, consisting of five questions, regarding how they and how others, according to them, connect their sexual orientation and phenotype was included.

The fourth section, with only two questions had three functions; to check for additional information that has not been shared during the interview, to get permission for additional contact if it turns out that something is not clear during the transcription process and to phase out the interview situation. In addition to this, some small-talk was added in the end relating to more harmless topics, to ensure that the participant had gotten out of the interview-process.

The benefit of separating the experiences related to phenotypes, and the experiences related to orientation is that several of the experiences the participants relate to orientation may be influenced by their phenotype. In the interviews conducted one could see this several times, a question related to orientation was asked, and the answer identified the phenotype as being

the reason for the experience. Thus, by asking exclusively about phenotypes, one may miss out on some of the experiences.

The questions are meant to be open-ended<sup>12</sup>, even though some of them easily could be answered with a “yes” or a “no”, the follow-up questions to these answers ensured a dialogue instead of a fully structured interview where a lot of information could have been lost as just “yes” and “no” questions would have turned the interview into a more quantitative survey rather than a personal interview. Surprisingly, only two participants chose to actually answer yes or no to the questions where this was possible, the rest rather talked about their experiences in this aspect of their life on their own, making it meaningless to ask for elaboration that went further than they already had in their comprehensive answers. In the authors opinion the semi-structured interview has several benefits, both in having some structure remain and thus help to limit the time consume of the interview itself, and also in giving the participants freedom to answer in a richer way than they would have been able to in a more survey-styled interview. This is also affecting the power-structure of the interview, which will be explained further later in this chapter.

#### **4.4.2 Testing out the interview guide**

Several test-interviews were conducted in order to check for faulty questions, dialogue-traps and how the author would react to the interview situation as I didn't have a lot of experience in interviewing from earlier. Dalen (2013: p. 30) states the importance of having test-interviews, one or several times, both to test out the interview guide, and to test oneself as an interviewer. These test proved very helpful, the first test showed several limitations of the interview guide, both in how the questions were structured and the clarity of the essence in the questions. The second test-interview showed that the improvement of the questions resulted in more lengthy in-depth answers than the initial questions would have allowed. However, a new limitation was uncovered; the author needed to have more patience in order to get the full answers. The third test-interview was a success and the third test-interviewee gave several comments upon what could be done to further improve the interview situation and the interviewer's behaviour. In addition to this, all three interviewees said that it would be beneficiary to conduct the interview in Norwegian as the participants would be Norwegian,

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<sup>12</sup> “Open-ended questions are not followed by any kind of specified choice, and the respondents' answers are recorded in full[...] The virtue of the open-ended question is that it does not force the respondent to adapt to preconceived answers” (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias 2009: p. 254).

and this would secure the answers being accurate and the questions be understood fully. This will be further explained in the next part of this chapter.

#### **4.4.3 Language**

The interviews were conducted in Norwegian because this is the native language of 7 of the participants'. There are several reasons for choosing the native language as the language used in the interview. Firstly, when speaking in one's native language, more nuances and reflections are applied, as one is completely confident in one's native language compared to using one's second language. Secondly, if forcing someone to use their second language, one can lose out on potential participants that would prefer answering in their native language. Under the test interviews, there was asked an additional question regarding the structure of the interview, and one out of three test-participants explained that they would have had some issues regarding using a second language because of the sensitivity of the topic, and that when in this situation, one is already a bit insecure, and one does not need language as a factor of more insecurity. The last participant had the choice between English and Norwegian, and chose to conduct the interview in Norwegian, also to use this as an opportunity to practice her Norwegian skills.

As mentioned later in this chapter, the language of how one defines gender and sex in the Norwegian language is that we have the same word for both, and we have to add "social" and "biological" in front of the word to give it different meanings. This indicates that the Norwegian language is more traditional in one way than the English, which also reflects in how we view gender through our heteronormative glasses.

Thereafter, all the quotes used from the interviews were translated carefully to not lose any meaning in translation. One challenge regarding this translation process is that the author of the paper is also a native Norwegian speaker, and thus a lot of time was used to ensure correct translations by cross-checking between different dictionaries.

#### **4.4.4 The interviews**

Jacobsen (2013: p. 142) says that the open individual interview is best when one has few units one is to explore, and when we are interested in what the individual is in fact saying. The study was in other words searching for the meaning-bearing in the participants' experiences, not a quantitative measure of what all lesbians experience.

The interviews ranged from lasting for a little bit more than half an hour to almost two hours. The reason for the variation in time used to conduct the interview may be partly explained by the variation in how the interview was conducted. The longest interview was done through the Skype chat, method 2 explained later in this chapter. The shortest interview was done through method 4, namely face-to-face interviews. When the participant had to write the answers, this is often more time-consuming than delivering one's answer orally, even so, oral answers seemed to follow in a more elaborating answer and thus was quite time-consuming as well. Both the written interview and the oral interviews were dynamic in its fashion, thus it was also up to the individual participant being interviewed how lengthy their answer was, as the interviewer was not interested in "forcing" more answering than what came naturally. Several of the interviews conducted orally lasted up to one and a half hour, and there were no apparent patterns within the participants' phenotype regarding the length of the interview.

Jacobsen (2013: p. 149) states, regarding the length of the interview, that after one and a half hour – 2 hours, both the participant and the interviewer will often be pretty exhausted. This was not very apparent in the interviews, as the answers continued to be full and in-depth throughout the interview situation. One reason for this not being very apparent might be that the interviews were conducted through the computer in the majority of the interviews, and all the longest ones were done through either Skype or phone. One participant said that she started to become tired, but this was in the end of the interview which lasted 47 minutes, which is significantly shorter than what Jacobsen (2013: p. 149) states. Thus one was able to choose one's own surroundings and this may have eased the process and not made it so exhausting. However, in the face-to-face interviews that both lasted for under an hour – the participants started to show signs of being tired also already after 34 and 45 minutes by seeming somewhat distracted, stretching and yawning, but this was in the end of the interview. Taken together, three participants showed signs of what may seem as becoming tired, and one actually stated that she was starting to drift off as well. This may say something about the topic being somewhat sensitive, and that in-depth answers requires a lot of energy from the participant that were interviewed.

The length of the interview itself does not show any less information provided, but the information seems to be provided with fewer words. One thing evident is that there seems to be a more lengthy reflection process included in the answers with the participants that were in the older part of the age range. This is in no way to say that the younger participants did not

reflect upon their answers, but there seemed to be a less nuanced view of the world in general, which is in fact appropriate for their age. The age span was from 20 to 32 and it is natural that for someone with 32 years of age often will have reflected more upon why and how, than someone who is just out of puberty and still often trying to find themselves.

Jacobsen (2013: p. 148) also brings up if one should use a tape recorder, and that if one chooses to use this, one benefit might be that the natural flow in the conversation might be more dynamic as a normal conversation and less artificial. A tape recorder was used for the face-to-face interviews, and the interviews done through phone and Skype orally were taped by third-party software and saved to the computer for later transcribing.

#### **4.4.5 The conduction of the interviews**

The method which was used was the *qualitative method personal interviews*. The interviews were conducted in four different ways, because the subjects are scattered throughout the country. They had the choice between answering in person and by Skype through video call originally, the two other methods used for collecting the data was done because of the participants request to conduct it that way. Four of the interviews were conducted through video call on Skype, one through Skype but without video and in writing, two was conducted face-to-face and one per phone. Only two out of 8 informants had hesitations choosing between meeting in person and “meeting” through video call. The one informant who preferred phone call to video call actually had preferred to meet in person, but due to expenses this was not possible. The informant who wanted the chat function on Skype and not video or audio had hesitations being in the study at all. All four conductions have strengths and weaknesses. These will now be more thoroughly explained. Jacobsen (2013: p. 143) talks about how to conduct the interview and lists benefits and weaknesses with both face-to-face interview and to phone-interview. It may look like people have an easier time to talk about sensitive topics when in a face-to-face situation (Jacobsen 2013: p. 143). Jacobsen (2013: p. 144) also mentions that it might be more tricky to see when the participant feels awkward when you don't have a visual with them, but a large benefit towards phone-interview is however the low cost, compared to what face-to-face interviews may end up costing. For the author, it also seemed like it might cost more in a strictly emotional way to actually get on the bus/in the car and drive to an interview, than to turn on one's computer and be in the comfort of ones liking for the interview situation.

### ***Method 1: Skype – video call***

The video call-method of conducting the interview through the Skype software has its strength in wiping out distances and the fact that the software itself is free both to download and to use. All one really needs is access to internet and a computer with the Skype software. This made it possible to gather subjects throughout the country. In addition to this, all of these interviews were conducted with video, making it possible to see each other and actually be able to see the subjects' body language and mould the way of acting in accordance to this. Something that adds strength to this method is that the subjects can sit wherever they want to, which in turn, hopefully, will lead to them being in an environment which makes them feel safe. The main weakness however, is that one is dependent on the technicality being functional. During the interviews, the sound was distorted at several occasions, making the flow in the interview distorted as well, as the subjects needed the questions repeated, or having to answer several times to the same question. In one of the interviews, the video also malfunctioned.

### ***Method 2: Skype - chat***

The second method of conducting interviews which will be addressed is the written interview with no video, also conducted through the freeware Skype. The main strength of this method is the possibility for the subject to remain completely anonymous, but this is also one of the weaknesses. When someone is completely anonymous, the question which remains is whether the personal part of the qualitative method is being preserved in a good matter. The balance between preserving the anonymity of the subject and still being able to keep the interview on a personal level is in question, but there is no simple answer to which side of the scale should weigh in at the heaviest. One strength of this type of conduction of an interview is the same as in the method explained above, in which the subjects can choose the location for where the interview will be performed themselves. Yet another weakness is however that the answers tended to be shorter than the ones given in oral communication. As only one interview was conducted this way one cannot base the differences as being general, but the way the questions was answered was considerably shorter, and a pure logical way of looking at it is that when one writes one tends to be more accurate and shorter in answers in general, also because several functions of oral answers is binding-sentences, like “in a way”, “you know” etc., which one does not usually use when writing. Zhao (2012: p. 55) brings up an important strength to this kind of conduction of an interview, which is that the data is a done transcript when the interview is ended, and this is yet another strength to this method of collecting data.



### ***Method 3: Phone call***

The third way which was used to conduct interviews in this study was through phone. The strength of this method is that the technical side provides more stability than a video call through Skype can provide. All one needs is an actual phone and a way of recording the actual phone call. There are endless ways of recording a phone call, and a comprehensive part of those ways are free. Also in this method, the subject can choose where they want to locate themselves during the interview situation, which might provide a safer environment for the subject, and create a better and more open communication. The weakness is that the question of body language is not answered, as one cannot see the person one talks to. The body language provides to a large amount of the way we communicate with each other. This part is just cut out of the situation when the interview is conducted through a device like this, and one could question if this does not limit the communication drastically. However, when one does not have a visual, this provides an anonymity which can be a strength on its own as subjects can let themselves be more relaxed. Then one could wonder if it is not exactly the cutting out of body language that provides this relaxation with subjects. Jacobsen (2013: p. 143) says that people may hesitate to answer more when during a phone call. For this interview however, the conversation flow was anything but hesitant, and is in fact one of the longest interviews because the participant had so much to say. Jacobsen (2013: p. 143) also says that some surveys show that it's easier to lie or "hit a brick" in the interviewer when phone interview is conducted. It is under the author's impression that lying is not something humans only do when on the phone, and thus this would be an issue when conducting interviews with people at all, no matter how it is done.

### ***Method 4: Face-to-face interviews***

Face-to-face interviews are the final method which was used to conduct interviews. One essential strength of this way of conducting interviews is that one is sitting in the same room, and the full way of communication is present, with oral communication, sounds, facial expressions and body language. This also exceeds the way one can communicate through Skype, as with Skype one can usually only see the other person from the chest and up, with hands. Face-to-face situations provide the entire body of both participants of the interview, so one could pick up on for e.g. legs moving in a stressful matter and ask if the question is unsettling in any way. This is very helpful when proceeding with a sensitive study, as one also would have the opportunity to ask, if the question is uncomfortable, why that is. One possible weakness of this method is that it could prove to be quite expensive if one needs to travel to

actually perform the interviews. However, in this case, travel was not necessary, as only the subjects in immediate surroundings were asked to meet up. A possible weakness is that the participant is not in a known surrounding, which may cause a non-optimal environment for discussing sensitive topics – but this was not visible in these particular participants' responses. Jacobsen (2013: p. 147) says that where one decides to conduct the interview will affect the interview itself, and calls this “the context effect”, but that it is impossible to say if a context is better than another, this is because no contexts are neutral. For the interviews conducted for this study, the situation was artificial, as neither the participant nor the author had any relationship to the room used in specific, however, it was on the university the author attends to, thus it was stranger for the participant than the author.

### ***Comparing the conduction methods***

So, one might see that the different strengths and weaknesses actually vary a bit, and what was most visible to me as the interviewer is that the four different ways of conducting an interview led to different ways of answering, however, the answers were remarkably similar, and one could almost be led to believe that the similarities shows that the way one conducts an interview is not important for the results. This is however a moderated truth, as one with actual speaking also can hear other sounds, like laughter, which is important to understand where the informant sits mentally when receiving a question, and with a visual one can see if the informant is for e.g. smiling or looking surprised or of equal importance, looking insecure, angry or other negative emotions. When writing instead of speaking however, one could edit ones answers and think about the answers in a totally different matter, which is evident as the only interview done in writing lasted for a bit longer than the longest interview done with audio.

#### **4.4.6 Power dynamic**

One important aspect of the interview setting is indeed the power balance, and how this might influence the interview process. Several times I got the question “was that the right answer” during different interviews, where I each time answered with “there is no wrong answer, these are your experiences”, this seemed to make the participants relax more.

The importance of humour also became apparent, because a little comment here and there disarmed the tension in the situation which often appears when talking about sensitive topics. When transcribing the interviews later on, it became evident that there was a lot of laughter throughout the interviews, and small comments from the participants came with after talking

about serious matters, which shows that they took back some control by diffusing their story with either overacting the scenario within sarcastic frames, or talking about how someone is pathetic for not accepting before laughing. This is an interesting phenomenon as this seemed as a way for the participants to actually shift the power balance of the interview situation. One of the participants also seemed to have some issues with the interviewer asking questions in the beginning, and interrupted when questions were asked and answered something completely different, and continued to answer even when the interviewer tried to say that this was starting to be very off-topic in relation to the question asked. This settled down during the first fifteen minutes when the participant started to relax more.

Several times the participants was asked to repeat their answer when the interviewer didn't catch what they said the first time, and it became apparent later on in the transcription process that there was actually differences in the first answer and the second. There were however only small nuances in what they answered, and the meaning was the same.

#### **4.4.7 Benefits and limitations of the data collection method**

The benefits of conducting personal interviews as a way to collect the empirical data are many. Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (2009: p. 237-238) states the advantages of personal interviews as it being flexible, one has a greater opportunity to control the interview situation, one has a high response rate and one is able to collect supplementary information if needed. Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (2009: p. 237) says that the less structured, the more flexible the interview will be. As this interview was semi-structured, it was highly flexible, and this made it easier to collect additional data regarding specific themes. The interview situation was not controlled by me to a great fashion, but if a participant clearly did not understand the question or asked for clarification of questions, I was able to provide an explanation and thus ensure a better flow to the conversation as a whole than if I had not done this. The response rate is, naturally, 100 per cent, because the participants who were willing to participate were interviewed shortly after agreeing to being interviewed. Supplementary information was given by the participants as a natural consequence of open-ended questions as part of the semi-structured interview situation, which also can be linked to the flexibility first noted in this section.

Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (2009: p. 238) states the limitations or disadvantages of this method as it being potentially more expensive, the dangers of interviewer bias and that the participants have a lack of anonymity if one compares this data collection method with

other methods such as surveys. These limitations will now be addressed more closely, and also how they were taken into consideration.

The first limitation mentioned is as stated the expenses of this method of collecting data. This was sorted out by using the software Skype to conduct interviews if the participants were far away. As many others, the author has a cell phone with free call-minutes every month, this was used to conduct the interview that were taken by phone call. In other words, the interviews were more or less free to conduct. The face-to-face interviews were conducted at a room on University grounds, thus this was also free. The high cost mentioned by Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (2009: p. 238) is thus not an issue in relations to how the empirical data was collected for this study.

The second limitation mentioned is “interviewer bias”. My position as a researcher and having the orientation to which I am researching, may result in my pre-understanding being coloured by own experiences. However, knowing that I have met challenges in the Norwegian society should not only be seen as a limitation, but also as a strength in me not having to navigate through unknown territory and finding informants that would explain the phenomenon of having a minority orientation as such.

The third and last limitation is the issue regarding lack of anonymity. Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (2009: p. 238) says that one would have directly person identifying traits such as phone number, email-addresses, name etc., and that this might be an even bigger issue when talking about sensitive topics, as this study does. In this study, phone numbers were only collected for two out of eight participants, and these were deleted shortly after the interview was conducted to ensure these participants anonymity. All of the participants provided their email-address; these were saved on an email-account especially made for this study, again to ensure their anonymity. The only part of their name which was asked for was a first name, thus most of the participants never identified themselves completely with their full name. All names were removed during the transcription process and replaced with letters accordingly to their phenotype in alphabetical order. In all, one cannot be completely anonymous when participating in an interview, but anonymity may be protected by the confidentiality to a great level. A lot of measures were as described taken to avoid disclosure of the participants’ identities; this was done to create a safe environment for all the participants.

## **4.5 Transcription**

Put together, the interviews lasted for 8 hours, 36 minutes and 25 seconds. Out of this, 6 hours, 41 minutes and 27 seconds are interviews done orally, while 1 hour, 51 minutes and 58 seconds is the interview done through the interview conducted by the Skype chat function. For the face-to-face interviews, there was used a Dictaphone, while when through Skype video-call and phone there was used software to record the conversation directly to the computer for later transcription purposes. It was not possible to transfer the files from the Dictaphone, hence the transcription process was more time consuming through this media as one had to manually start and pause the audio-taped interview when transcribing. For the recorded interviews which were directly transferred to the computer, a transcribing-software was used to ease the process, which proved very helpful. Jacobsen (2013: p. 187) says that the first step in a qualitative analysis process is to transcribe the interviews, and that this is called the raw data. Silverman (2010: p. 200) brings up two important aspects of the issue of transcription, first that its very time consuming, second that the quality of the transcripts themselves should “not be neglected” (Silverman 2010: p. 200).

Jacobsen (2013: p. 189) states a limitation with transcribing the interviews in order to create the raw data being that it is quite time-consuming.

The transcripts document ranged from 17 to 59 pages in size, the smallest transcript being the interview done through Skype chat, the largest was the one done through phone interview. Added up, the transcripts were in total of 242 pages written with Times New Roman, font size 12 with a spacing of 1.5. An interesting side-note to this was that the women identifying with a feminine phenotype had shorter transcripts than the ones with a masculine phenotype. Participant A had 17 pages, participant B 26 and participant C 19 pages. Participant D with a neutral phenotype had 26 pages, while participant E, F, G and H had respectively 37, 32, 59 and 26 pages.

Silverman (2010: p. 240) mentions how one benefit from audio-tapes and transcripts is that one has the possibility to replay the tapes. One also has the possibility to re-read through the transcripts. In this study, both replaying of the tapes and re-reading of the transcripts to double-check for patterns have proved very helpful, as not all patterns were highly visible at first glance. In many ways, one can see these as tools for helping in a chaos-like beginning where there are only a seemingly endless number of pages which are to conclude the meaning-bearing results of different people’s experiences within the same topic.

There are inevitably grounds for this part of the study being simplified with having the interview in writing from the beginning. However, because of what may lie between the words, this is more easy to confront in a conversation done orally than in writing, also because of the tone of the voice, the benefits from having most of the data orally outweighs the limitations that are in the work that awaits in the matter of transcription, and this was a lengthy process. The process of transcription was thoroughly done, and by re-hearing each word many times, an understanding of the sentences was gained which had not been gained had this process not been done. One gets familiar with ones data, and thus has a benefit just from hearing it again and again when writing up the transcriptions.

#### ***4.6 The analysis strategy***

In order to conduct well prepared interviews, the theoretical framework needed to be set. This was done also to decide of which lens the interviews should be viewed through. The analysis thus started already at the point of the theoretical framework that was decided to use in order to understand phenomenon within experiences that may be influenced by the participants' sexual orientation in the light of their phenotypical appearance. While still conducting the interviews, and to a certain degree before they were conducted, studies were read relating to the subject of gender performance in relation to sexual orientation. This was also because of curiosity of what I would find in my study, and if this related to other studies that were done abroad, as most of the research relating to the subject is done in other countries. During the transcription, the mind-set of the theoretical framework resulted in heteronormativity being more visible than it might have been with a different theoretical framework. As Ohnstad (2008: p. 25) puts it, the heteronormative term forces the researcher to view gender in a different manner than other theories would allow, on a meta-theoretical level.

Already while still conducting the interviews there seemed to be some patterns that followed the interviews and certain themes seemed to be of importance for many of the participants, if not all. While typing out the raw data, these themes became more visible, especially when I found a way of viewing these themes in a more structured way. This process will now be explained. Jacobsen (2013: p. 189) mentions several benefits regarding why one should write down the interviews one has audio-taped. One of the benefits he mentions is that the coding process will be much easier when we have an actual document, and not only the tape itself, also when finding patterns and themes. After writing down all eight interviews from beginning to end as described in the transcription chapter above, different ways of viewing

the interviews were tried. Firstly, question by question was compared with all eight participants to view the patterns within their experiences. This did not prove fruitful, as one participant may answer related to a certain subject in accordance to for e.g. a question in the sexual orientation-part of the interview, while another participant would answer more comprehensive about the exact same theme to a question in the masculinity/femininity-part of the interview, or even in the background-part for that matter.

After this, another way of viewing the transcripts were tried out, the three main parts which are displayed in the figure above, were written down and separated to each participant's answer. This again, proved to meet the same issues as the previous attempt to look for similarities and potential themes to analyse further, as the answers were comprehensive, but often different, as explained above.

A third way of viewing the answers was then tried. A document was made, meant only to describe all the themes apparent within the transcripts, and where the answers were taken from were now disregarded. This showed evident patterns in several topics/themes in the participants' lives, and proved fruitful for further analysis within three distinct themes; phenotypical appearances and orientation connected through heteronormativity, gender roles that are assigned through a heteronormative process in a lesbian relationship, and finally the participants' experiences with their family regarding their orientation in the light of their phenotypical appearance.

After structuring the findings in a satisfying way, the themes were separated and added together across questions if they had the same theme apparent. This made the themes even more visible, and indicated a strong correlation across the different interviews regarding the meaning bearing in their experiences facing the Norwegian society with its dominant normative view of gender and sexuality. Three themes stood out as important for all the women that participated in the interviews; the appearance of a lesbian woman, how romantic relationship between two women are labelled in a heteronormative way, and their experiences related to revealing their orientation to their family and how these experiences was influenced by their phenotypes.

These themes were then structured further and quotes were extracted from the transcripts, the audio-tapes were also listened to again to double-check that these were correctly written down to avoid misquoting any of the participants in their stories of experiences they have had.

Thereafter the themes were put into the poststructural context of queer theory, and explained with the understanding of gender and sexuality through a mixture of gender theory, queer theory and feminist theories as described in the theoretical framework. For the experiences relating to family members additional theory was used to understand the phenomenon described by the participants. I felt that a clear theory related to how the family may be perceived was necessary and chose to use systems theory as a supplement for this purpose.

One could say that the analysis started long before the interviews were even conducted, through the process of applying for accepting from NSD, through the making of the interview guide, ethical considerations done underway, and with the reading of related material, both described in the chapter named theoretical framework and in the chapter that is called earlier research. The ethical considerations were a vital part of the process and will be discussed further in chapter 4.6.2.

#### **4.6.1 Validity & credibility**

Another word for validity is “truth” (Silverman 2010: p. 290). Several measures have been taken and explained in this chapter regarding the validity of the methodical approach taken to conduct this research. For e.g. in the case of the questions in the interview guide, these were tested beforehand in order to see if different questions which were basically asking the same thing would produce different answers. According to Silverman (2010: p. 272) the claim is that this is a logical way of testing that the open-ended questions is indeed open-ended and would not be leading in any way. For the reliability to be tested, it is of high importance that the methodical procedure is documented in a comprehensive matter and that categories have been used consistently (Silverman 2010: p. 290). The aim of this chapter have been to explain this procedure in such a way that it would be possible to do this research again and come up with similar results. Silverman says that “reliability refers to the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions (2010: p. 290). The interpretations of what themes were apparent and how these were extracted have been explained in the analysis strategy chapter above.

Credibility may be defined as “The extent to which any research has been shown to be based on evidence” (Silverman 2010: p. 433). This chapter has aimed to do precisely that, through explaining how the different aspects of the research have been interpreted, analysed and worked through.



#### **4.6.2 Ethical considerations**

One ethical consideration that was done early in this study was the concept of using categories as this may re-enforce the image of heteronormativity being the desired norm within the way gender is viewed. I was concerned with how the participants would react to the question where they are asked to measure their masculinity/femininity in a scale, as this simplifies the image severely. Silverman 2010: p. 156) says that harm to the participants in a study must be avoided, and thus it was a fine thread to walk with using the categories without starting a label-process which could turn out to cause harm. Thus the participants' were informed thoroughly in the information letter they received, so this would be known beforehand starting the interview process.

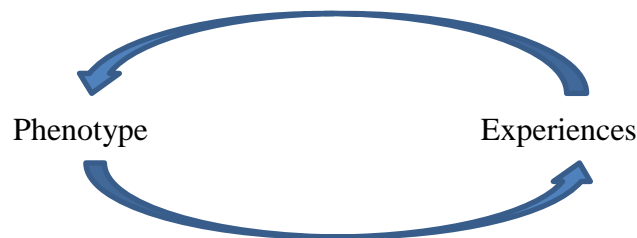
Another ethical consideration that was done while this study was prepared for interviews, was to balance the questions in order to not over-step my boundaries as a researcher, and in that way lead the participants to answers that I might want instead of them answering the questions out of their own experiences. Because of this, one of the test-interviews focused considerably on opening up the questions, and removing any leading elements within them. The solidarity the researcher may feel with the participants, especially if the topic of the research is within something that affects the researcher herself, may become a methodical problem according to (Dalen 2013: p. 20). This is similar to the interviewer bias that is explained in limitations of the data collection method. The interviewer bias is not limited to the interview situation but also when analysing and conveying the data one has collected (Dalen 2013: p. 20). Thus, it was even more important for me, as the interviewer and researcher, to keep a distance from the participants and not "lead them on".

A third ethical consideration was raised when the preparations for the interviews were done and the first interview was about two minutes from starting. "The confidentiality of information supplied by research subjects and the anonymity of respondents must be respected" (Silverman 2010: p 155). What if an outsider heard my end of the conversation and thus got confidential information? This was however easily solved by placing me and my computer in a locked room with the curtains and windows closed. However, the Norwegian society is small, and the minorities even smaller – and individuals and groups will be easily identified, and may be labelled as a consequence of this, especially in the case of informant belonging to a visible minority (Dalen 2013: p. 19). Thus, measures were taken to never actually have the whole name of the participants in my possession, and the personal

information I did have was safely stored in accordance to the suggestions I received from the NSD along with the approval for my research project.

## Chapter 5 ~ Findings & Discussion

This thesis seeks to understand the main themes within the experiences of the women interviewed, and how these experiences may be influenced by or even be a direct consequence of their phenotypical appearance. While most, though not all of us are men in male bodies and women in female bodies, how we understand ourselves as masculine and feminine varies according to time, place and circumstances (Paechter 2006: p. 261). What is also interesting is the negotiation process that comes as a result of the experiences, and in that way shapes the phenotype. This may be shown like this.



As part of the Norwegian society with the dominant view on sexuality being the heterosexual one, the participants negotiate in greater or smaller degree to fit into this heteronormative assumption, all the while having the lesbian orientation which is a minority orientation. “Theorists have argued that a discourse or technique of heteronormativity has been set up, and subsequently dominates, social institutions such as the family, the state and education” (Gray 2013).

The empirical data consists of stories related to experiences which have been provided through the interviews conducted with the participants discussed in the methodical chapter. These experiences are of course subjective, as most experiences are, and may be viewed as narratives, parts of the participants’ life stories. Fook (2010: p. 67) explains the idea of narrative as having a clear link to the concepts of discourse and language. The discourse of heteronormativity as the dominant way of viewing the society influences on these experiences, and is in fact a part of the experiences by it measuring what is “normal” and most desired of the orientations and gender performances/representations. The narrative is one side of the reality, and may be “coloured by the position and perspective of the person whose story it is, and that this version might change according to the context of time and place” (Fook 2010: p. 67).

The themes that have been processed to be vital in accordance to the experiences of the participants are many, but three of these have been chosen to be more focused upon. These are;

- ✚ Not looking right – phenotypes as part of the heteronormative puzzle
- ✚ The “man” of the relationship – the heteronormative lesbian couple
- ✚ Experiences with family members related to one’s orientation and the knowledge of this

The first theme relates to how the participant’s phenotype and sexual orientation are connected, or the lack of this connection being made for the participants with FSL-phenotypes, and in some cases for the participants with the MLL-phenotype as well. It is, as they say, all in the eye of the beholder. The experiences of the participants’ points towards a pattern with them being directly exposed to the heteronormative assumption that straight and lesbian are certain “looks”.<sup>13</sup>

The second theme relates towards the participants’ experiences regarding the roles that are expected to be played out when in a relationship. It is thus not about the participant as an individual per se, but rather as part of a bigger constellation; the potential relationship with another woman. The roles that are applied to this constellation indicate a heteronormative categorization technique where the roles are, true to traditional heterosexuality, one man and one woman.

The third theme relates to the participants’ experiences with their family, this will mainly relate to the process or lack of coming out to family members, and the participants explanations to why it is the way it is. This theme has two smaller themes, the first sub-theme will relate to which family members know of their orientation and their reaction when finding out. The second sub-theme will relate to which family members don’t know, and explanations to why it is this way. It is within this theme the systems theory has been used supplementary in order to explain the system of one’s family as a possible lens of viewing the experiences through.

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<sup>13</sup> “Look” is the same as having the MLL-phenotype discussed earlier.

## **5.1 Not looking right – phenotypes as part of the heteronormative puzzle**

The theme relating to how one's phenotype is connected to one's orientation was something all the participants saw as an interesting phenomenon. Each participant has experiences in communication with others – and some with themselves- on how a woman's phenotype is influenced by her orientation, and how her orientation may impact the phenotype. Masculine and feminine traits fit or don't fit into this pre-constructed image of a lesbian, and the phenotypical differences identified with these traits have consequences for the participants in different aspects in their life. The participants with the FSL-phenotype have experiences within the frameset of “not looking right” and is thus every so often misbelieved when informing about their orientation. The women with FSL-phenotypes are able to “pass” as straight as previously mentioned, and this has both benefits and limitations in their everyday-life. The participants with MLL-phenotypes is being labelled as “manly”, “butch” etc., and their orientation is thus accepted as truth which results in them “passing” as lesbians which, as with the women with FSL-phenotypes, result in benefits and limitations on a day-to-day basis.

An interesting phenomenon is that of two participants with similar challenges relating to their identity versus others view of their phenotype. For participant F this was that the people around her tended to identify her as more masculine than she personally feels that she actually is. Participant C says that she often register that people around her identify her as more feminine than she in reality feels she is. Both of these participants had the same answer to why this happens; humans tend to identify these traits by a rather superficial method, by mainly labelling them after their appearance rather than how their personality is. As Burkitt (2009: p. 112) puts it, we tend to attribute a person's gender by looking at for e.g. behaviour, how they dress, hairstyle and other physical features.

For the majority to identify you as a real woman, you must oblige to the norms that follows the category to which you belong as a human female. These norms and rules includes expectations regarding how you should look, what kind of interests you should have, and who you should fall in love with etc. What happens if you don't fit into this frameset of “woman”, and what happens if you fit in through some of the aspects, but not all of them? “For the most part, feminist theory has assumed that there is some existing identity, understood through the category of women, who not only initiates feminist interests and goals within discourse, but constitutes the subject for whom political representation is pursued. But *politics* and

*representation* are controversial terms (Butler 2010: p. 2). Butler (2010: p. 2) argues that representation has two approaches; “the operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility to women as political subjects” and “representation is the normative function of a language which is said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true for the category of women” (Butler 2010: p. 2).

### **5.1.1. Dichotomous reality – gender performance**

According to Levitt and Hiestand (2006: p. 39) historically, stretching back to the post World War II, lesbians became visible as a culture, first mainly through the butch-femme communities in USA. The gender constructs were “distinct from heterosexual genders, they entailed all the complexity of heterosexual genders at that time, including the pressure to maintain a dichotomous gender system” (Levitt and Hiestand 2006: p. 39). Dichotomous thinking is brought up by Fook (2010: p. 12-13) as one of the main themes of poststructuralism, and means to bring meaning to our reality by categorizing different phenomena into binary opposites, one example of this is the male versus female binary, another example is hetero versus homo. The problem with dichotomous thinking however that is it doesn't fit into reality. “Human life does not simply divide into two realms, nor does human character divide into two types. Our images of gender are often dichotomous, but the reality is not” (Connell 2009: p. 10).

Participant H has gotten comments regarding that she needs to stop being “such a boy sometimes” from her friends. Again, we see the use of words that it is about the actual gender of man, not masculine traits. Participant D has gotten comments regarding her being “such a man” from her friends, but disarms this by saying that it's only humour from her friends, and not meant in a bad way. However, this shows for a gendered view of the world, where if one doesn't fit into one category, in this case namely the category of “woman”, one must be man. Again, there is no room for variations of the gender “woman”. This is again in line with Connells (2009: p. 10) explanation of the dichotomous relation between woman and man as two opposite poles.

### **5.1.2. Stereotypes**

One of the stereotypical categories is named “tractor-lesbian”<sup>14</sup>. This category was interesting for several of the participants, as it is often also used as a swear-word. For participant G, it

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<sup>14</sup> Tractor-lesbian is as mentioned earlier a term for an extremely masculine woman with a lesbian orientation, and part of the MLL-phenotype.

would be an issue to be placed in this category; she worries about being labelled as this. The reason she explains for the worrying related to being labelled as a tractor-lesbian, is that she feels that society views it as a stereotype which they have a relation to, and at the same time, it has a negative charge. Butler (2010: p. 187) explains the parodic identities of for e.g. butch/femme performance of gender as overly stereotypical within the practice of heterosexuality. In other words, the worry of being placed in the extreme end of the MLL-phenotype can be viewed as a sort of worrying of being forced “into place” by the heteronormativity itself, with the consequences that would follow by this. Simplified, heteronormative measures may try to force a woman with a MLL-phenotype into the role of a man, because this would simplify the process with categorization of the individual.

*“Sometimes I see myself from a certain angle, and think, well I am, I am so a tractor, or, look at that lesbian, she had a very tractor... one has the categories... one does it too”* –

participant G

The indication from all interviews is that stereotypes are non-existing in their life, but the assumption where heteronormativity places them in the stereotypical ends of the phenotypes is very much at play, which shines through in their experiences. Levitt and Hiestand (2006: p. 50) views the gender performances within the stereotypes butch and femme as being, amongst others, politically framed; where the women belonging to the “femme” categorization are viewed as strong for maintaining their femininity despite their orientation, and the women with a butch categorization for challenging the feminine ideal.

The term tractor-lesbian is used by another participant as well. For participant E this term serves to explain that a lesbian woman is very masculine. In addition to this, she often jokes around with stereotypical ways of acting, often in relation to her FSL-phenotypical girlfriend. This is for her a reaction to the focus society has on gender and gender roles today, and she views this joking as a parody of that focus.

For participant H, which was the most masculine participant in this study, she saw herself as close to the stereotype of a butch lesbian;

*«Stereotypes... They come from... There’s a reason for it, we end up within it, it’s not that unnatural, it feels okay»* - participant H

One can see from this statement that the most masculine participant in this study is completely aware of her being close to the stereotype. However, stereotypes are simplifications of reality, as one can see from participant G when talking about gender expressions, and how people tend to view her either as too masculine to be a woman, or too feminine to have masculine traits;

*«It provokes me, because I think it's an over-simplified humanity view that doesn't hold any room for people»* - participant G

A stereotype is, as already noted, defined as an oversimplification of reality.

Many humans have a natural preference towards structuring the reality around us by using categories, this would offer a possible explanation to why it is that feminine women are “really straight” while masculine women are lesbian, and also perceived as men. If one does not fit into the, for many, narrow category of “woman”, one is categorized as “man”. Ohnstad (2008: p. 24) explains humans as being more than just mere categories, which makes it difficult to generalize both gender and sexuality.

(Mortensen 2008: p. 315) states that when performing extensive masculinity, for e.g. in the case of a stereotypical tractor-lesbian, she will be met by a high degree of aggression and harassment by the majority culture. “These alternative actors that operates in the border of the culture, challenges the forced heterosexuality and the rigid norms for polarised gender identities, not by loud protest, but rather with their attitude of ignorance and lack of respect for the cultural impositions” (Mortensen 2008: p. 314, authors translation).

### **5.1.3. Hegemonic masculinity and empathic femininity**

From different ideals of how a gender should be performed, the different phenotypes displayed by these participants have consequences. Hegemonic masculinity becomes, according to Connell, normative in its expression (Burkitt 2009: p. 132). For women with the MLL-phenotype, masculinity is central in their gender performance. The “rejection of the feminine goes along with identification with boys, with the adoption of a form of hegemonic masculinity and a claiming of a share of male power through acting as an honorary boy” (Paechter 2006: p. 257). Judith Halberstam (in Mortensen 2008: p. 313-314) states the opposite however – the alternative gender configurations such as the tomboy, the butch, etc., is misinterpreted by feminists and gender theoreticians in that they are just resisting the heteronormative majority culture, and is not looking to gain “male privileges”. They are



however challenging the heteronormative image of the categorization “woman” by challenging femininity itself from a political standpoint (Levitt and Hiestand 2006: p. 50)

Participant E places the *dominance* as a masculine gender performance, and *submissive/passive* as feminine gender performance, and this is part of the reason she places herself as having a MLL-phenotype. This is much in the same lines as Connells view on the hegemonic masculinity versus empathetic femininity (Langeland 2008).

For the women with a FSL-phenotype, the claim of male power would be challenged by the femininity they display. “There can be no hegemonic femininity, because being in a hegemonic position is also about being in a position of power; it is about being able to construct the world for oneself and others so that one’s power is unchallenged and taken (more or less) for granted as part of the order of things” (Paechter 2006: p. 256). Even though participant G has a MLL-phenotype, she brings up something important within the subject of performance of femininity;

*This one theory I have is that our society gives women more possibilities to develop emotional and people-skills; we expect different things from men, than we do from women – Participant G*

#### **5.1.4 Heteronormativity controlling womanhood**

In a society where heteronormativity is given, all non-heterosexuals are minorities and the assumption is thus that if not explained otherwise, one is heterosexual (Bjørkman 2012: p. 10-11). People have a tendency to categorize, and when there are no well-established categories of which one may put a phenomenon into, one finds a category that one might be able to squeeze it into non the less. This simplifies the reality, but in order to maintain the simplification, stereotypes are created, which in its own turn is not applicable to the reality of which we belong. “When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one” (Butler 2010: p. 9). “The “presence” of so-called heterosexual conventions within homosexual contexts as well as the proliferation of specifically gay discourses of sexual difference, as in the case of “butch” and “femme” as historical identifies of sexual style, cannot be explained as chimerical representations of originally heterosexual identities” (Butler 2010: p. 43).

One of the challenges the women with lesbian orientations but FSL-phenotypes meet is the majority's seemingly lack of possibly connecting these two traits as compatible. One way of reacting to someone coming out, is disbelief. Participant A has experienced this multiple times when "coming out" as a lesbian in the terms of receiving the response that she doesn't really look like a lesbian. This has often been immediate reactions, which has changed for acceptance later on. This is however not the case for participant B;

*"There seems as some people get confused, and think that I'm not a lesbian because I wear feminine clothing [...] Many people says «why can't you just be with men, you're feminine» and then I say, well can't I just be allowed to be feminine?"* – Participant B

The women with FSL-phenotypes experience that they are more or less disbelieved as having lesbian orientations, while the women with MLL-phenotypes both experience being "part of the stereotype" and being called men. This is inevitably linked towards heteronormativity and the way the Norwegian society views gender. If a woman is feminine, she is just that. If a woman is masculine, there seems to be a tendency towards re-gendering her in the shape of a man, rather than just letting it be with assigning her masculine traits. In a way, this may be both positive and negative. In one way, it points towards our society being more open towards assigning genders solely on the social performance of the gender of the individual. On the other side, it points towards the biological sex being rejected because one doesn't fit into the expectations belonging to this sex. This may explain why the participants with the FSL-phenotype get their orientation "rejected" because their phenotype does not match the orientation. This may also explain why the participants with a MLL-phenotype are labelled as lesbians before they even get the chance to say that they have a lesbian orientation.

The process of coming out doesn't seem to ever be truly done, even more so for women with FSL-phenotypes, as one doesn't look the way the majority of the society perceive as lesbian. This seems, for the participant, to be a quite tiring affair, and at the same time, one can see that the women with the FSL-phenotype are more private about their orientation than the women with MLL-phenotypes. This might be partly explained by the FSL-phenotype having the benefit of "passing" as straight at their wishing, in other words, the "passing" as straight is both a tiring experience – and at the same time a type of freedom as to who is allowed to know about their orientation. The women with MLL-phenotypes do not seem to have this option to the same degree, as they do not "pass" as straight because of the markers, explained in the chapter regarding phenotypes in the theoretical framework, towards a lesbian

orientation which seems to follow their masculinity. In accordance to newer feministic theory and gender theory, there is an agreement concerning this, Butler however points to a problem with thinking of gender as solely socially constructed; namely that it disregards the biological sex and that language is all that matters (Jegerstedt 2008: p. 81).

According to Butler, “a very feminine woman is not just performing femininity: she is also repudiating masculinity and denying homosexuality” (Burkitt 2009: p. 124). This mind set is some of the issue a woman with a lesbian orientation and FSL-phenotype meets – she can’t possibly have both in the heteronormative image of reality. As Levitt and Hiestand (2006: p. 50) points out however, women with a clearer FSL-phenotype and a lesbian orientation, the ones belonging to a “femme” categorization, are viewed as strong in a political view or maintaining their femininity “despite” their orientation.

Another aspect in one’s life where heteronormativity can be displayed is when one is working with people. Participant D avoids her orientation becoming a topic when talking to patients on her workplace; she does this both to shield herself, and her workplace. Patients assume she is straight because of this, and asks this participant about the man in her life, which shows that if not instructed otherwise, one is heterosexual in the eyes of the beholder in the heteronormative discourse our society implements as the desired one. This participant has the>NNL-phenotype, and her negotiating between the masculine and feminine traits makes her able to “pass” as straight in many cases.

For participant F, there is a similar experience when she was interviewed for her current job. Subject F when interviewing for a new job remembers them talking a lot about guys in that city, and how they were nice, and handsome and single, and a lot of them, which made her a bit nervous about her orientation, and reluctant to inform about this. This shows that even with a MLL-phenotype, one will meet heteronormativity in different aspects of life.

Participant B also founds the reason for her trying to live a heterosexual lifestyle for a period by pursuing relationships with men with the same reactions. A friend of her said “you haven’t been with guys so you don’t know what it’s all about”. At this time in her life the participant accepted this refusal of her orientation, while today she explains irritated feelings if someone tries to refuse her orientation and “change it” to being straight, solely based on her phenotypical appearance belonging to the FSL one. This again tells the story of how our society views orientation as an appearance, not only who we fall in love with.

Participant E has gotten comments regarding both her not “looking right” for a lesbian and thus she is not really a lesbian, and in the opposite pole, with her being “a man”. When viewing the choice of language and how the word man is applied instead of masculinity as a gender neutral attribute of humans, this is quite interesting. As long as she stays on the feminine side of the scale, she is just that, her womanhood is accepted and all is well. When masculinity is put into the picture however, it changes from being about traits and attributes – to being about the gender, she is not just perceived as masculine, she is perceived as an actual man. The participant herself is fully aware of her being a woman and that even though she is masculine, she still looks like a woman;

*“I’m just born that way, I got the chromosomes, like, I’m a girl”* – participant E

Participant G is a part of a binary gendered world, and thus some people have issues with her not acting “girly” – which again shows the use of language towards gendering instead of simply seeing it as female masculinity, which again often results in lacking accept for her appearance in her everyday-life.

### **5.1.5 Navigating through language**

It seems as language itself also is a barrier to overcome. In the Norwegian language, we only have one word describing both gender and sex, and we have to add certain traits in front of it to give it meaning. In English however, one has the distinction in the language itself, making it more “accepted” that gender and sex in itself does not automatically connect with each other. Gender is not a fact sheet where one has two genders; but rather a sliding scale where one is gendered. “Originally intended to dispute the biology-is-destiny formulation, the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the casual result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex” (Butler 2010: p. 8). For participant G, this is a very important issue, as she herself present herself as a human, with the biological sex woman, at the same time she has issues with people over-simplifying her human essence and shortening it down to her being in the category of women, thus she is like this or that, or her being an actual man, despite her biological sex, because of her way of dressing and interests.

Subject C is afraid of people’s reaction to her lesbian orientation, thus she is very careful about not telling anyone, they have to find out on their own. This indicates that there is, to a somewhat greater level for some, a choice to “come out” when you have the FSL-phenotype,

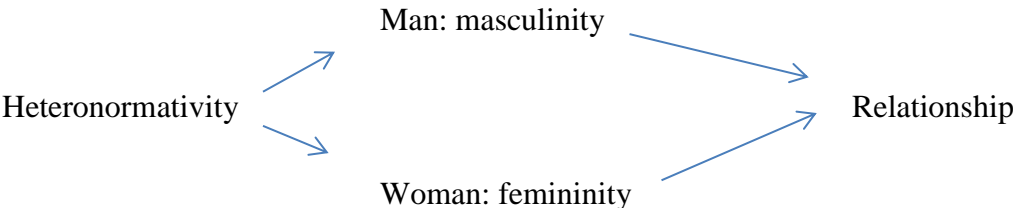
and that the process of coming out has to be repeated often as this orientation is not a “visible” trait, especially not when FSL-looking. Here one can see that language is a way of covering, or revealing, and from ones choices, the experiences follow.

**5.1.6. Negotiation of gender performance**

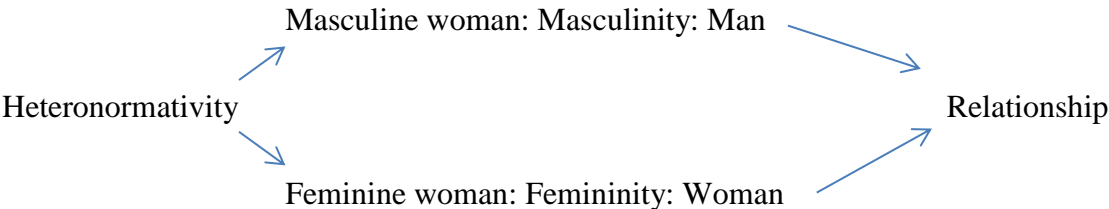
As a side-note to the gender performance challenges, an important acknowledgment is to the way all the participants explains their phenotype to differ in different situations. For e.g. participant B used to have a MLL-phenotype – because she thought that to have a lesbian orientation, one had to “look” lesbian. She shifted towards a FSL-phenotype when finding out that this was not the case. Participant A was a tomboy when she was a little girl, but when her family moved she had more female friends, and thus changed towards a more feminine appearance because she was influenced by the other girls to do so. Participant D with a negotiating style in general, and having the NNL-phenotype, loves to wear feminine tops, and masculine pants.

**5.2 The “man” of the relationship – the heteronormative lesbian couple**

Through the heteronormative lens, a relationship needs two things in order to be labelled as a relationship, masculinity and femininity, displayed through a man, and a woman.



When the man in the relationship is another woman, this causes the dominant norm, namely the heteronormativity, to be shaken by the ground. How does one fit a woman into the role of a man? The two main components of the relationship thus needs to be changed in order for a lesbian relationship to be fitted into this scope, and the indications shown in this study will now be shown through a re-building of the figure shown above.



The theme relating to how the gender roles of heterosexual relationships are applied to lesbian relationships seems to be occupying the participants to a great level. In all the interviews, the binary gender-view perceived from the society regarding the participants' relationships, and lesbian relationships in general, the theme kept coming up as something they found peculiar, irritating and wrong. The first fault by applying these roles is that it is not applicable for all relationships, because not all lesbians are in relationships where one claims the butch- or "man"-identity and the other the femme- or "woman"-identity or have these phenotypical roles at all (Levitt and Hiestand 2006: p. 49). All the same, if one do identify within this frameset, as with the participants having the FSL- and MLL-phenotype, this is not the same as these phenotypes being static or written in stone. For e.g. a woman with a MLL-phenotype, she is still a woman, being a man would mean that she either was transgendered or born a man, which is quite different indeed. "The heterosexualization of desire requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between "feminine" and "masculine," where these are understood as expressive attributes of "male" and "female" (Butler 2010: p. 24). "People attracted to their own sex are as diverse as heterosexuals and to consider sexual minorities as a group with similar feelings and traits of character is a grave misconception" (Holan 2009: p. 7)

### **5.2.1 The woman and the (wo)man**

All the participants told stories related to this theme. Even the participants that, for different reasons, had yet to pursue serious relationships, brushed upon the topic when asked about how sexual orientation and phenotypes can be linked together – with the answer that society seems to connect it not only through the individual itself, but also in relation to their partner(s). Within the frames of a heterosexual relationship, there is no room for a second woman, and thus one woman is given the role of the man in order for this to fit into the desired heterosexual frameset, shaped by the heteronormativity. This may be compared with classifying a cod as a salmon, both have benefits, but a cod will never be a salmon. One way of viewing why the society seems to be occupied with classifying lesbian relationships as heterosexual ones can be explained by the dichotomous thinking. This is brought up by Fook (2010: p. 12-13) as one of the main themes within the poststructuralism and can be explained as an effort to bring meaning to our reality by categorizing different phenomena into binary opposites, where one great example applicable to this study is the male vs female binary view, or the hetero/homo dichotomy. The experiences will now be explained through the lens of the theoretical framework.

There seems to be, for participant A mainly, a view amongst her friends that it is a goal to not be identified as the male party of the relationship. She has gotten comments regarding her “at least not being the guy in the relationship”. This seems to be a two-edged sword – where one side is personally accepting her and her orientation, while the other side shows a reluctance to identify her as a lesbian all-together, by naming her potential partners as the man. The acceptance related to her remaining on the heteronormative view of what a woman is in a relationship by maintaining her femininity, and thus it’s “okey” that she doesn’t like guys, because she is still the representing role of the feminine energy within the relationship. This can in turn be linked to the previous theme – where one doesn’t look right as a lesbian, and in this case, looks right for a woman in a relationship. One can here see the evident use of gender instead of masculinity/femininity as traits to identify her role in relationships as the woman’s. She is therefore maintaining her femininity despite her break with the heteronormative picture in regards to her orientation. Levitt and Hiestand (2006: p. 50) explains this as viewed as strength because she preserves her femininity and can be viewed as a political goal for the women belonging to the “femme” categorization. Having a FSL-phenotype seems to be compatible with the “femme” categorization – although femme is a stereotype.

The importance of gender roles within a lesbian relationship will vary, because lesbians are not a homogenised group. For Participant B, the identification of her being the woman in the relationship is important, and she expresses genuine fear in relation to being identified as the guy in relationships she have, because this would be a lack of acceptance relating to her femininity. She was once identified as the guy in a previous relationship because she was good with their economy, and her former lover viewed this as a “man”-value. Participant C also explains this as a traditional male-value, and uses this as grounds for explanation of why femininity and masculinity cannot be viewed as static expressions – or as she says “nobody is just feminine or masculine”. For participant B it was a genuine issue that her personality was labelled as “manly” when her appearance was clearly feminine. This indicates yet again that the use of gender identities is used at the cost of labelling it as masculinity and femininity.

*“Everybody asks, okey, who is the guy in your relationship, and who is the woman? Oh my God, it’s impossible to answer that, we are two girls first of all, and second, the tasks are divided, so, yeah, I don’t think anyone is very masculine or very feminine”* – Participant C

As one can see from this comment, the participant don't see the need to divide the binary roles of man and woman to her relationship, and that this would be impossible to do anyway as most people are a fusion of masculinity and femininity in themselves – and thus cannot be categorized as they weren't. The gender roles of butch/femme does in other word not apply in this relationship from the starting point of how the women are, and even if it had, it would not be a butch/femme relationship in accordance to male/female roles of the relationship. As a side note the participant says that she is mostly used to this coming from individuals that are brought up in other cultures than the Norwegian one – which seems to back up the assumption that this binary division of lesbian couples is somewhat an international issue. The heteronormative discourse does not know national borders – and thus can be recognized in different countries.

*Especially where I work, one time I was there with my former lover, and they identified her as the guy in our relationship, they missed brutally, you may say, she is... very feminine, she only wears tight pants and does her makeup and fixes herself up and then there I come, the bum, behind her, like, really baggy clothes, so I don't understand where they get that idea” –*

Participant D

Participant D links this to her probably being perceived as more feminine by the people around her than she perceive herself, and that this probably is connected to her personality. Again, we see the pattern with someone having to be the guy, and someone being the woman. Here, the participant is okay with someone being the guy, but this role was hers, not her former lovers, all the while the people around her used personality traits as judgement for who belonged to which heteronormative part of the relationship, while the participant herself used appearance. She has however been called the woman of the relationship, not the man, and does not agree.

Levitt and Hiestand (2006: p. 50) views the gender performances within the stereotypes butch and femme as being, amongst others, politically framed; where the women belonging to the “femme” categorization are viewed as strong because they are maintaining their femininity despite their orientation, and the women with a butch categorization for challenging the femininity itself.



Participant E has gotten the question “who is the man in your relationship” on multiple occasions from several of her friends. When this question rises, she, while being aware of not existing in a gender neutral world, would like to be accepted for what she is;

*“If the guy in the relationship is the one who likes to talk about politics, and like to... I’m a gamer, I love to play computer-games, but at the same time I’m more occupied with my appearance than my girlfriend is, I have a greater focus on how my hair looks when I’m going out, like... in relation to us, it’s very strange to think about... I get a little bit grumpy, I think I do, I feel I get a little bit grumpy when someone asks me that question”* - Participant E

Again when seeing how the participants explain the roles, one can see that it’s not as simple as it being divided into two, the tasks and values are rather divided after interest, rather than being a question of gender, at the same time as the indication of how the society works around them tends to go against doing just the opposite. “Peplau (1988) argues that most same-sex relationships do not conform to traditional male and female roles. Instead, there is a role flexibility and turn-taking” (Ochse 2011: p.10).

Participant G, having a MLL-phenotype, views relationships as being constellated with a feminine and masculine energy, and that she possesses the masculine energy, and thus wants a feminine energy to fulfil a kind of harmony as with the symbol of yin and yang. She explains that being labelled as the man in a relationship would however be strange, as she is a woman. She has no desire to fulfil the heterosexualization of her relationships, as she is not a heterosexual.

The participants seem exhausted by defending why a lesbian relationship consists of two women, and not one woman and a man-woman. The way of using language in this normative discourse is a process of moulding lesbian relationships into the shape of heterosexual relationships. Fook (2010: p. 65) says that language is not neutral, but rather “an expression of a particular attempt to make (or impose) meaning in a situation. Language is therefore about much more than words – it is about *power* (Fook 2010: p. 65-66). The heteronormative discourse that dictates our society is as stated superior, and the power of language reinforces the image of this by the sentence “who is the man in this relationship of yours” and degrades the reality of the two women having a relationship without a man present.

One answer to why lesbian relationships is degraded in this way to being heterosexual in its gender performance is offered by Mortensen and Jegerstedt (2008: p 290); in order for

heterosexuality to be fronted as the norm, other sexualities needs to be excluded. To have something in common unites the majority, but at the expense of the minorities, such as women with lesbian orientations. “The terms we understand the world through, is a part of numerous discursive practices, they exist simultaneously with them and as an effect of them» (Mortensen and Jegerstedt 2008: p. 290, my translation).

The role of being the “woman” in the relationship is reserved by the people around for the woman that is perceived as being the “apparent holder”<sup>15</sup> of femininity, namely the woman that has the FSL-phenotype. The experiences relate both to colleagues, friends, family etc. Thus, being labelled as the “woman” in the relationship is not only a result of how the participants in this study view themselves, but rather how the people around perceive them. To be for e.g. NNL in one’s phenotype can be perceived as being feminine and masculine, and the participant with the NNL-phenotype in this study was viewed as being the “woman” in the relationship, which she did not agree upon, she felt as the guy in the relationship. This shows that not only does bystanders brand who “plays” which gender, but this might also become a topic for the parties in the relationship itself, as with the experience of participant B being identified, in her own mind wrongfully, as the man in her former relationship, by the other woman in this relationship.

One possible interpretation of why these women are “chosen” as being the woman of the two women in the relationship is provided by Butler with an example related to when a baby is born and goes from being an «it» to a «she» or «he» - and how this labelling done through language constructs a set of expectations regarding how this baby later in life will act, interests, who you will fall in love with etc. (Jegerstedt 2008: p. 82-83). The feminine women breaks with the expectations of the gender they fall in love with – but at the same time they preserve some of the expectations that are connected to how one acts and looks if one is a woman, at least when one looks through the heteronormative scope when defining a woman.

Again, we can “blame” this phenomenon on heteronormativity. As already stated, humans like to categorize. Having a lesbian orientation is not new in itself, but the Norwegian laws protecting women with this orientation is historically relatively new as already stated. There is no homonormativity regarding relationships that has followed the humanity for thousands of years at the same level of the heteronormativity. Thus, we don’t have any well-established

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<sup>15</sup> Apparent holder in this context is understood as what the society chose to use as label for defining the woman in the relationship by referring to the femininity of which she displays.

categories for lesbians that have been available for the majority until recently, and for the sake of categorization it is not a far stretch to view this as part of the reason for heteronormative categories being used in the scope of making meaning out of a lesbian relationship.

The simplification can be viewed as a type of discrimination, and one way of viewing the discrimination process is by terming it as homo-negativity<sup>16</sup>. One can clearly see from this definition that this process done through our language and different discourses is in fact discrimination. The simplification does, however, fit to neither reality or the real people involved in the process. The discrimination is probably not even thought of as discriminative by the people commenting upon who the guy in the relationship is, but rather an effort to try to categorize the relationship into a “meaningful” constellation, constructed from the dominant normative sexuality in the Norwegian society, namely heterosexuality, and thus again it is guided towards a heteronormative behaviour which lies implicit in our culture, thus in our behaviour.

### **5.2.2 Reality check**

Yet another problem with this oversimplification is also brought up by participant E when talking about a couple she knows;

*“She’s a stereotypical tractor-lesbian, because she is the way she is, but then there’s the wife, what is she supposed to be [in this view] is she a tractor-lesbian light? Right, because there it’s not so clear where you have one of them in a dress and the other one in pants, right, because that’s often how its measured, if you like wearing pants, you’re the guy in the relationship”* – Participant E

Again, the visibility of how the heteronormative categorizations are is not applicable to a lesbian relationship. The way the participants create meaning in these experiences is that the society is wrong, and that a relationship involving two women should be recognized as just that, a relationship involving two women.

The example above shows that the masculine/feminine, or the MLL/FSL phenotypical, relationship is just as false as it is true – in some relationships it will be a more binary gender performance between the women, for others there will not. In other words, one way of viewing the question regarding “who is the guy in the relationship” is that this is a stereotype,

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<sup>16</sup> Homo-negativity may as mentioned be seen as a negative attitude that directs itself as a prejudiced view of orientations including lesbian, gay, queer, bisexual etc.

created by the society's view of women with lesbian orientations. The women in lesbian relationships can perform their gender in a more binary matter – but this does not in any way mean that this is an overall truth in *all* relationships that needs to be applied. Either way, the heteronormative machinery is visibly at play – but is meeting resistance. As one can see from all the participants, they all resent this binary application to their and others relationships.

### ***5.3 Experiences with family members related to one's orientation and the knowledge of this***

Family<sup>17</sup> as stated in the theoretical framework can be viewed as a micro-system, and within this system, one may have a goal of maintaining the stability of this system in order to maintain the status of a family. The systems theory is meant to be a supplement to the other theories in order to explain differences between the experiences of the participants, both within the phenotypical categories, and across the phenotypical categories as well.

Hutchinson and Oltedal (2012: p 170) states that one of the key characteristics of systems theory is to see the borders between the world and the system, and for many one may see an indication of having a separation between the family one grew up with, and “the rest”. It is however important to note that this is not always the case. Family in this context is meant as a separate system from one's friends and other significant people in one's life.

Hutchinson and Oltedal (2012: p 170) explains that within system theories, one is interested in seeing how the systems are maintained by the movement through change and equilibrium and to identify the goals the system seeks to fulfil. An important process that happens when the participants come out to their family is the change in expectations to the future of the participants. As one can see these expectations range from the grief of not having grandchildren, the safety of one's child when having a lesbian orientation, to the hope of having a daughter-in-law and getting a closer relationship. One can also see the pattern of how not everybody was surprised when being informed about the participants orientation– and how this may be linked towards having a more masculine gender performance, and belonging to the MLL-phenotype.

The first part of the experiences explained in this chapter relates to the practical information regarding which of the participants' family members knows about their sexual orientation, and which ones they have chosen not to reveal this information to. Thereafter an explanation

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<sup>17</sup> Family in this context is only meant as the closest relatives going in an upward-fashion, thus meaning grandparents, parents and siblings.

of how the ones that have this knowledge reacted when finding out, and a discussion regarding how the experiences related to this felt for the participants. The last part of this chapter reflects upon the participants' explanation of why not everybody in their family knows.

An important question to ask when discussing how these experiences influence the participants' life and how the phenotype of the participants acts as an additional factor in this process is how the family as a system and heteronormativity work together. "Theorists have argued that a discourse or technique of heteronormativity has been set up, and subsequently dominates, social institutions such as the family, the state and education" (Gray 2011). All the participants have heterosexual parents, thus, they grew up with the image of man and woman being "normal" when talking about romantic relationships.

### **5.3.1 Who knows & who doesn't**

To have a lesbian orientation may be a private matter, and it is not given that everybody knows that a person has this orientation if they haven't been informed that this is the case. According to Hutchinson & Oltedal 2012: p 192) the microsystem is created in and through face-to-face situations. By sharing the information regarding ones orientation, one is creating and shaping the microsystem a family may be viewed as. For many women with a lesbian orientation, part of their coming out-process includes informing their families about their orientation. However, if ones microsystem is threatened by this information, one may choose to not reveal the information to the parts of the microsystem, namely certain family members, if there is a good chance this won't be accepted. Discourses may be directed towards both what is true, to reveal values, norms and subjective conditions (Røkenes & Hanssen 2012: p. 37). The discourses within a family may have different values and norms, but the family is a part of larger systems, such as the society as a whole, which is influenced by the heteronormative discourse.

Firstly, the choices of the participants' displaying a FSL-phenotype will be explained regarding which of their family members that has the knowledge about their orientation, and which one doesn't. Participant A has chosen not to tell her father, and for that matter, all the members belonging to his side of the family, about her orientation. She has also chosen to not

tell her youngest sister. Participant B is “out”<sup>18</sup> to her entire family. Participant C has, as participant A, chosen to not inform her father about her orientation.

Moving on to the participant displaying a NNL-phenotype, Participant D, has chosen to inform all the members in her family about her having a lesbian orientation, and states this as “Everything that can crawl and walk knows” – and displays content feelings regarding everybody having this knowledge.

The four participants’ with a MLL-phenotype (E, F, G and H) have chosen differently when deciding who should know about their orientation. E and H are “out” to everyone in their family. Participant F has chosen to not tell anyone of her family members, and while her grandmother was still alive she did not know about this orientation. They do, however, have knowledge about her orientation which seems to be explained partly by her phenotype.

*“I’ve never said it directly, but I know that they know so, my mom has been hinting at it... so she knows. [...] I don’t feel I have to [inform them], It’s like, and if one is hetero then one isn’t supposed to say one is hetero... so...”* – Participant F

This is an interesting side-note to the experiences, here the participant shows reluctance to “obey” to the rigid forms of heteronormativity by side-lining her lesbian orientation as just as normal and thus nothing that needs to be informed about to her family. The family hints to her about her orientation regardless of the participant’s attitude towards a “coming out-process”, and her masculinity taken into account, can be part of why they are hinting at it. The family as a system is thus interested in knowing, so the goals and maintenance can be adjusted thereafter.

Participant G is also “out” to almost all her family members, but has chosen to not tell her grandmother. The reason for this will be further explained in chapter 5.3.3. This may also be explained by her father’s reaction when hearing about her orientation, as this is her father’s mother, his reaction is further explained in chapter 5.3.2.

From this, one can see an evident pattern with it seemingly being more openness about ones’ sexual orientation if one has a MLL-phenotype, while with the FSL-phenotype, one can see that several of close family members among parental and sibling generation has not been told. With a MLL-phenotype, indications show that it may be more difficult to keep ones

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<sup>18</sup> “Out” refers to being out of the closet, in other words to be completely open about one’s orientation.

orientation covert. The heteronormativity that dominates in the Norwegian society may as explained in previous themes discussed, help to explain this. If one doesn't fit into the heteronormative expectance of how a woman should look, one may be categorized into a lesbian orientation more or less regardless of one's own will to be categorized as such.

### **5.3.2. Reactions from family members**

The reactions the participants' have met in relation to their coming out-process have both similarities and differences within and across the phenotypical categorizations. It is therefore chosen to divide the experiences in the similarities these represent rather than to categorize these according to the phenotypical differences among the participants. This is done to avoid repeating patterns in this representation of the experiences discussed. The experiences will be explained according to the degree of negativity or positivity represented in them.

The first type of reaction that is explained is the lack of acceptance in different ways. Starting off with direct lack of acceptance as reactions to them informing about their orientation to their closest family is the reactions participant C had; her mother tried to forbid her to have a lesbian orientation all together. Participant G chose to not tell her father about her orientation originally because she knew he wouldn't accept it; however this did not remain covert.

*“I did not tell him, but then he started hearing a rumour in the town, and then he asked me about it, and demanded details regarding when I had sex with a girl for the first time, and completely out of line and extremely unjustified attitude...”* – Participant G

Participant A's mother didn't believe her at first, and then proceeded to tell the participant that her youngest sister would be bullied if this was true, before retreating and said that it was ok when the participant was heartbroken about her reaction. Participant B's mother and stepfather told her she had the most visible “look” in accordance to being lesbian in the family, and was later reluctant to her showing physical affection towards her partner(s) when around them, but this is gradually changing for the better. Belonging to this story is that participant B used to have a more masculine gender performance than she displays today – this was part of her coming out-process where she realized she didn't have to be masculine to have a lesbian orientation. Walker et al. (2012: p 91) explains that most of the societal labelling comes from presentations of masculinity and femininity in the case of women having a lesbian orientation. Thus, one can see that the masculinity displayed by participant B at the time of her revealing her orientation to her family, was a type of “hint” that made it be

not that surprising for the family members that she indeed had the orientation that “follows” the masculinity, the MLL-phenotype, through the heteronormative image of women and their appearance. The phenotype in interaction with coming out to one’s family will be further explained later on in this chapter together with a figure explaining how family as a micro-system may interact with a goal of stability in its structure.

Participant D’s experiences are that her mother has some issues with her having a lesbian orientation, while her father does not. This is mostly evident in her mother being not very accepting of her showing physical affection towards her partner(s) when being in the same room as her mom, much like participant B’s experiences with her mother.

*“What was a pity was that it would be no grandchildren [...] that was probably what was the worst I think”* – Participant B

For the sake of an example, if one views how the change for the system is important in the maintenance of the system; one of the goals of the family can thus be identified as the heirs’ ability to birth the next generation. The expectation of women providing grandchildren is something that is given already at birth through our social norms and culture (Burkitt 2009: p. 111). The queer family and the possibilities of women in a relationship having children together are relatively new in the Norwegian law system. The queer family is alone in challenging the heteronormative family as the ideal and that a family needs to be heterosexually founded (Stiklestad 2012: p. 12). Thus, through the heteronormative image, one needs to be heterosexual to have children – and if one has a lesbian orientation, having children is impossible. This is of course not the case in modern Norway. The expectance for grandchildren shifts to not expecting this anymore and for participant B this has resulted, combined with her mother’s reluctance to her showing physical affection towards her girlfriend, in lesser contact with her mother. The system has in other words partly stagnated because of this.

Another example will be that many parents goals for their children is that they are happy, thus a fear for them experiencing negative things because of their orientation and them wanting to shield the participants from these negative experiences can be viewed as the family-component, namely the mother, trying to maintain the goal with their children being happy in the future, regardless of orientation.



Worrying is not a lack of acceptance, but rather a fear of lacking acceptance from other people. Participant E and H both have mothers which are worried about their future, because they have heard about LGBT-persons meeting consequences of their orientation in different ways, both to not getting a job because they are open, and more extreme experiences with physical and psychological violence from homophobic people. Grønningsæter & Lescher-Nuland (2010: p. 58) states in their study that even though the overall image of attitudes towards LGBT-employees is positive, there is a minority of individuals with large prejudice against this population group lurking under the surface. These individuals may be part of the reason for the mothers worrying about their children in these cases.

In the case of parents for the participants with MLL-phenotypes, the pattern was relatively similar for several of the participants. Participant E's and G's mother was not surprised and are fully accepting them and their orientation, which may be partly explained by their MLL-phenotype. Both the father and the mother of participant H were prepared and fully accepting, as the participant brought up this topic already as a small child.

The father of participant E was surprised but is fully accepting of her. This indicates that even though he had a more negative view of LGBT-people before he knew about her orientation, he chose to change his perception in order to keep the good relationship with his daughter – which may be viewed as a way of keeping the system of the family stable, and to keep the family fully functioning through maintaining this stability.

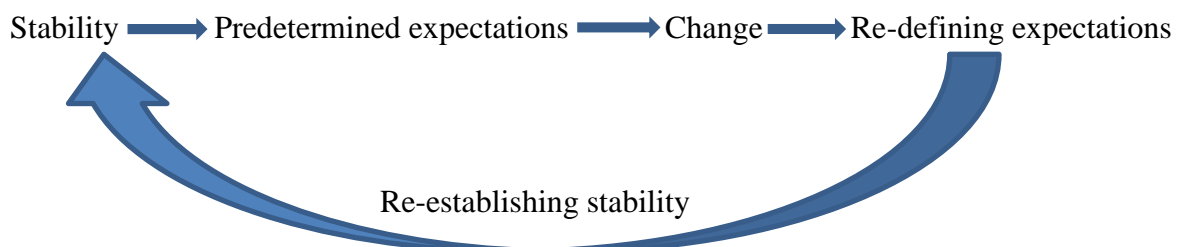
Participant F is reluctant to tell her family, but they show acceptance of her possible orientation without her actually telling them. The indication of this is that this participant's family has seen signs of her having a lesbian orientation, maybe partly through her MLL-phenotypical appearance, and thus have changed their perceptions of her orientation, and then came to terms with it.

Even though one can see that the participants' with a MLL-phenotype seems overall more accepted within their family, this does not mean that all the participants' with MLL-phenotypes are fully accepted; as in the example of participant G's father. For participant D, with the NNL-phenotype, she is not fully accepted by her mother, but by her father. Participant A has a FSL-phenotype and is still fully accepted by the ones that know about her orientation. In other words, the patterns not only go within the phenotypes, but also across them, which may be explained by for e.g. family structure and other variables.

Another interesting fact regarding the acceptance level is that all the participants feel fully accepted by their siblings; several of the participants even have experiences with their siblings thinking that it is “cool” that they have a lesbian orientation. Regarding siblings, only one participant has not told all her siblings. Participant A’s choice to not tell her youngest sister, can be linked to her mother’s reaction when she came out. The knowledge about homosexual relationships today is incorporated in the school system and there seems to be an openness surrounding homosexual relationships in general. That all the participants feel accepted by their siblings is an indication towards younger generations being more accepting of alternative lifestyles to the heterosexual one. This is partly in accordance with research conducted in Norway by Anderssen & Slåtten (2008: p. 50) that states that the younger women are, the more positive they are towards LGBT-persons. Thus, statistically if one has a sister, she will be likely to be more accepting than one’s grandmother, as an example in chapter 5.3.4 will show.

### 5.3.3 Differences in experiences based on phenotypes explained by “the figure of stability”

“When analysing discourses, it is therefore crucial to understand how they operate, for whom, and in which particular times and situations” (Fook 2010: p. 90). The critical reconstructive process consists of four stages, namely the critical deconstruction, then resistance, with challenge following and finally critical reconstruction (Fook 2010: p. 90). As mentioned earlier, Hutchinson and Oltedal (2012: p 170) explains that one of the main issues the system theories are occupied with is to see what kind of goals the system seeks to fulfil and how the movement through change is maintained. When viewing the critical reconstructive process through the lens of how goals and change are approached and maintained, one may view it as this figure;



This figure has been developed in order to explain differences in the coming-out process based on phenotypes, crossing the scope of postmodern applicability to social work and

systems theory regarding the goals of the family as a system. One of these goals may be to maintain a certain level of stability within the family structure in order for the family to maintain a functioning system and thus to remain a family. This possible goal can be shown as in this figure. Stability is the goal, the predetermined expectations comes with this stability, and will need to be deconstructed and challenged when approaching the lesbian orientation of the family member in order to maintain itself as a system through the process of change. With the wish to reach its goal of stability, the process of change will also be a time for challenging what comes with this change, before one move further to redefining the expectations, which may be viewed as a critical reconstruction process in order to re-establish the wanted stability.

From this figure, one may see why women with MLL-phenotypes and FSL-phenotypes can end up with different kind of experiences regarding their phenotype. For several of the participants with a MLL-phenotype, the families were not surprised when they revealed their orientation. If one uses the figure to explain this, one has to go back to the birth and childhood of these participants. It all begins with birth. Butler (Jegerstedt 2008: p. 82-83) says that a part of the materializing process of gender is the statement where a new-born goes from being an “it” to a “she” or “he” as mentioned above. Burkitt (2009: p 111) explains that a child’s gender shapes our expectations of how they will behave, what kind of activities they will prefer, interests, feelings, sexuality, self-identity etc. Thus, the gender performance process is already at play when we are born into this world. Later in childhood, some women in this study displayed a more tomboy-like attitude and performance of their gender, and this caused the predetermined general expectations to shift within their families. This includes the participant with the NNL-phenotype – as she identifies as more masculine than feminine. Through this change in the predetermined expectations, if one chooses to see this through the figure shown above, the expectations were re-defined at an earlier time in accordance to their masculinity, and thus towards a MLL-phenotype, in order to maintain the stability of the family structure. As none of the normally functioning family members of the women with MLL-phenotypes were overly surprised by them having a lesbian orientation, one can connect this to the masculinity in their childhood being connected to this orientation at the re-defining of expectations much earlier in the participants life. The family has in other words not needed an additional go-through of the figure to maintain stability as this has already been done.

For the feminine participants, two out of three have always had a FSL-phenotype – while the last one had a period in her life where she was more masculine, which was also at the time of

her coming out to her mother and stepfather. One can see in the experiences around this that the participants with the FSL-phenotype were met with a greater level of surprise, and unfortunate statements at the basis of this. The families of these two participants did not have the earlier process of re-defining the expectations because they fitted into the general predetermined expectations. Butler (Jegerstedt 2008: p. 82-83) explains that the definition “it’s a girl!” creates an expectations of for e.g. interests this girl will have, and who she will fall in love with, and that these expectations always build on an already determined set of norms. One example of these norms is, as stated, the heteronormativity. Thus, the participants with FSL-phenotypes are expected to fall in love with males, and when this expectation is all of a sudden removed by the participants coming out as lesbians, the family has to go through the figure of change as shown above in order to re-establish the stability of the family structure. The last participant with a FSL-phenotype had, as already stated, a more masculine phenotype at the time of her coming out, and this caused the family to say that she “looked the most like a lesbian” of the family members. This indicates that they had already gone through the re-definition of their expectations regarding her sexuality based on her phenotype.

#### **5.3.4 Why doesn't everybody know**

As stated in chapter 5.3.1, not all the participants have informed all their family members about their orientation. System theory is occupied with everything being connected in a system, and that one can't touch one part without it having consequences for other parts (Hutchinson & Oltedal 2012: p. 170). A common factor for all the participants which have made a consciously choice to not tell certain family members is because they are nervous about the reaction from these because of earlier statements and attitudes from them.

Participant A's choices regarding who shouldn't know can be explained both by her father's rather unfortunate comments regarding lesbian parenthood, which he has stated as “wrong” and bad for the child, which isn't compatible with the participants orientation and wish for future children. Revisiting the values and norms that may differ between different families, and family members within the same family, one can clearly see that here the discourse her father puts into parenthood, as something belonging to the “straight”, has consequences for his relationship with his daughter, even though he doesn't know about it. This may harm the system as some of the system knows, while other parts don't, and the goal of stability may be influenced as a result. The participant, if ever having children, will have a family constellation that is the sole challenger to viewing family as something founded in heterosexuality

(Stiklestad 2012: p. 12). The irony is that because the Norwegian laws making it possible for the participant to have children are so new, her father didn't grow up with them, and is thus stuck in a heteronormative picture of what a family should be, and thus he is unknowingly following in a tradition that is on its way out of the normative view of family.

Participant C's reason for not telling her father is grounded in her father's traditional values and the cultural differences between her birth country and Norway. In this case, the mother of the participant is not accepting of her at all, and this may be grounded in her parents belonging to a larger system, the society of her home country, where homosexuality is viewed as wrong by the majority.

Both participant F and G chose to not tell their grandmother. For participant F, the reason for her not informing about her orientation was;

*“One of my grandmothers died after I found out, but she wasn't someone I met very often, so I didn't want to pick up the phone and say hello I'm lesbian”* – Participant F

For participant G, the reason for not telling her grandmother is slightly different;

*“And my grandmother that is alive, is very religious, I've never talked to her about [my orientation], because she is, she is so old, it isn't any point, she is from a completely different generation, so she would probably have felt that it was very difficult to relate to, but, eh, it's understandable when one is kind of born in 1934”* – Participant G

In addition to this, an interesting pattern is that two of the women displaying a MLL-phenotype show reluctance to telling their grandmother about their orientation. This can, as one of the participants talks about, be linked to generational shifts – and how the butch/femme binary is actually known for the younger generations, while for the older generations this was not something that was usually talked about when they grew up, as homosexuality was still illegal and the relationships often more covert. Having a lesbian orientation and being able to be open and proud of it without it having any consequence is new in a historical perspective. Homosexuality was decriminalized in 1972, and was removed as a psychiatric diagnosis in 1977 (LLH: Historisk oversikt). Another reason for the hesitation of the participants may be founded in statistics their grandmothers belong to. With women between 61 and 80 years, religious women, and women with positive attitudes towards traditional gender roles are the

most negative in their attitude towards LGBT-persons according to Anderssen & Slåtten (2008: p. 50).

## Chapter 6 ~ Conclusion

The findings in this study indicate that heteronormativity is present in all aspects of the participants' lives. The interaction between the participants' phenotype, their orientation and dominant norms seems to be influencing their experiences in different ways. The heteronormative measures begin at the moment they are born, or even before, through expectations that follows their gender in what kind of persons they will become later on in life. This influences them through early childhood through controlling how they should act, and the possible consequences if they don't act in a particular way. These consequences follow through their adolescent years and into the world of grown-ups. The sword of consequences has several sides – on one side the participants' with MLL-phenotypes remembers uncomfortable situations that can be directly connected to their phenotypical appearance. On another side the participants' with FSL-phenotypes seems to be defending their right to have a lesbian orientation on a deeper level, as they don't seem to “fit” into the heteronormative image of what a woman with a lesbian orientation looks like. The case of the participant with a NNL-phenotype is also quite interesting, as it seems this participant faces both the benefits and the more negative consequences of both worlds. This offers additional understanding of the connection between phenotypical appearance and orientation as factors in experiences, as this phenotype is, as the name indicates, more negotiating in facing the dominant discourses of this participant's life.

Another interesting indication that is found through these findings is that the experiences the participants' explained and narrated in the interviews is that of the connection between the orientation and the phenotype. In some cases it seems as though the phenotype acts as a sole player in how the experiences are perceived by the participants, while in others, the indication is that the orientation plays a greater part in the experiences – regardless of phenotypes. Again, if we turn to the heteronormativity as an explanation for this, one point is that if not explained otherwise – one is straight. Several of the women who have experienced being labelled as lesbians without revealing this information, which have the MLL-phenotype and to some degree also the participant with an NNL-phenotype, also have experiences related to being talked to as if they were straight. However, it seems as this is more “normal” within the category of having a FSL-phenotypical appearance, from what the participants having this phenotype have experienced, it seems as their orientation is more or less always received as a surprise when they choose to reveal their orientation.

The introduction chapter in this study states the research question;

*“How does women’s phenotypes, when having a lesbian orientation, influence her experiences in facing the Norwegian society?”*

The answer to this question is complex. In some of the experiences, the phenotype influences through normative measures in different ways – from being mistrusted of their orientation as they don’t display the “right look” to being labelled as the man in their relationship.

In experiences with the coming out-process to their families, the indication is that for normally functioning family members the MLL-phenotype often provides suggestions towards the participant having a lesbian orientation before this is actually revealed. The family members of participant with the NNL-phenotype had, as in the case of the participants with FSL-phenotypes, a more surprised attitude towards her having a lesbian orientation. When having a FSL-phenotype it seems as the coming out-process has a greater element of surprise among the family members.

Other experiences seems as though not being influenced greatly by the phenotypes of the participants. However, it seemed as the connection between the orientation and the phenotypical appearance still played a role in the experiences, though in a more discrete manner.

The phenotype thus seems as often being a factor in the experiences, and there is yet another interesting aspect of these experiences. The experiences the participants have seems as being somewhat influencing their phenotype. In other words, the experiences are not only influenced by the phenotype, the phenotype may also be influenced by the experiences where the phenotype is a factor to what they experience. The indication is thus that the phenotype and the experiences work together in a circular process mutually influenced by each other, and by the dominant normative expectations and perspectives, such as through the heteronormative discourse.

As the participants’ navigate through the landscape of dominant discourses, they negotiate with the discourses in different ways. For the participants’ with a MLL-phenotype the indication is that they challenge the normative image of what a woman “should be”, while for the participant’s with a FSL-phenotype, the femininity they display is a challenge to the normative image of what a woman with a lesbian orientation “should be”. The participant



with the NNL-phenotype post a challenge to both these normative indications – as she moves between the phenotypes and thus also the challenges connected to these.

When displaying a MLL-phenotype, one may be perceived as a lesbian solely on how one looks and behaves through the heteronormative scope, and the experiences of these women connected to this are different. From not being allowed to play with the boys in elementary school because one is a girl, even though the girls are not interesting in playing with this individual because she is too masculine – to being identified as “the man” in one’s relationship later on in life. These experiences may have some influence effect towards negotiating her MLL-phenotype towards FSL or NNL. Other experiences as being complimented for ones looks, for being called brave etc. may influence her to being more secure in her gender performance with a stronger link to the MLL-phenotype to which she has. For all the participants’ that identified with this phenotype through the masculinity aspect and “looking lesbian”, they showed a pride in being themselves, and that this is who they are. Because masculinity is connected to having a lesbian orientation by many in the society, the women belonging to this phenotypical appearance often meet negative consequences without having the choice to cover their orientation to the degree women with the FSL-phenotype would be able to.

When displaying a NNL-phenotype, one is navigating through the society on a whole other level, with negotiating through how one dress in different situations, and how femininity and masculinity is mixed together by the very visible example of having masculine pants, and a feminine top. This indicates that the gender performances of some individuals are far more dynamic than the narrow heteronormative discourse gives room to, in this case through the static approach one may have to phenotypical appearance.

The participants with FSL-phenotypes often experience being perceived as not having a lesbian orientation, but rather, through the heteronormative lens, the perception of this woman having a straight orientation is, quite wrongly, re-produced. The participants’ showed irritation towards being second-guessed because their appearance is not well connected to the orientation by the people they tell. One of the participants’ was even talked into being straight for a period – which shows how strong the heteronormative discourse is, especially when it comes to the participants with FSL-phenotypes. The coming-out process of these women seems to be a lifelong project where every time they meet someone new, they must make the decision to either cover or reveal their orientation as part of showing who they are. Even if

they decide to reveal their orientation, they may have to go through the reaction of disbelief from the person of which they reveal their orientation to, and may be met with negative consequences as with the participants with the MLL-phenotypes, because they in fact have the lesbian orientation they do.

The indication of this study is that the phenotypes play a role in the experiences of the participants', through dominant discourses which continues to influence on how our society views human-beings. The phenotype influence on the experiences of the participants, and the phenotype may be influenced by the experiences they have. Different experiences may lead to different reactions and negotiations of the phenotype.

The Norwegian field of lesbian and queer research would benefit from researching this subject further – as a great level of the queer research today focuses on orientation alone, while physical appearance of the holder of the orientation has been given less room than this project may indicate that it actually has.

*“Let’s face it. We’re undone by each other. And if we’re not, we’re missing something”*

- Judith Butler

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## ~ Annexes ~

### **Annex 1 – Interview guide**

#### **Intervjuguide**

##### **Bakgrunn**

1. Hvor gammel er du?
2. Hvor vokste du opp?
  - a. Hvem vokste du opp med?
  - b. Trivdes du der?
  - c. Hvor bor du nå?
    - i. Hvorfor flyttet du?
3. Hvordan er forholdet ditt til familien din?
4. Hvordan vil du forklare din nåværende sivilstatus?
5. Hva slags forhold har du til dine venner?
6. Hva jobber du med/studerer du?

##### **Seksuell orientering**

7. Hvordan vil du forklare din seksuelle orientering?
8. Hvor lenge har du identifisert deg med denne orienteringen?
9. Vet familien din om denne orienteringen?
  - a. Hvis åpen om orientering til familie; hvordan opplevdes det når du fortalte familien din om orienteringen din?
  - b. Hvis ikke åpen om orientering til familie; hvorfor ikke?
10. Finnes det områder av livet ditt du ikke er åpen om din orientering?
  - a. Hvorfor?
  - b. Hvorfor ikke?
11. Vil du definere din seksuelle orientering som stabil?
12. Har du opplevd mobbing/erting på grunnlag av orienteringen din i skolesammenheng?
  - a. Hvis ja, hvordan opplevdes det?
  - b. Hvis ja, har det påvirket deg i noen grad? Hvordan?
13. Hva med positive erfaringer i skolesammenheng?
  - a. Hvis ja, hvordan opplevdes dette?
  - b. Hvis ja, har dette påvirket deg i noen grad? Hvordan?



14. Har du opplevd uønsket oppmerksomhet på grunnlag av orienteringen din?
  - a. Hvis ja, hva?
  - b. Hvis nei, hva med ønsket oppmerksomhet?
15. Har du negative erfaringer som kan knyttes opp mot din seksuelle orientering i forbindelse med byturer/fester der alkohol blir konsumert?
  - a. Hvis ja, hva har du opplevd?
  - b. Hvis nei, har du positive erfaringer i forbindelse med byturer/fester i forbindelse med orienteringen din?
16. Hva med sosiale sammenkomster som ikke normalt sett innebærer alkoholkonsum?
17. Hvordan er dine erfaringer i jobbsammenheng?
18. Hvis åpen om orientering, hvor lenge fra du møter en ny person vil du anslå at det tar før din orientering, hvis i det hele tatt, blir et tema?
  - a. Hvordan oppleves dette?
19. Føler du deg nødt til å informere om din orientering noen gang?
  - a. Hvis ja, hvorfor og hvordan føles det?
20. Har du hatt ubehagelige opplevelser i forbindelse med å informere om din orientering til noen?
21. Er du i et homomiljø?
  - a. Hvorfor?
  - b. Hvorfor ikke?

## **Maskulinitet/femininitet**

22. Hvor vil du plassere deg på en skala der 1 er svært feminin og 10 svært maskulin?
23. Hva gjør at du vil plassere deg der?
24. Hvordan føles det å plassere seg der?
25. Hvor tror du at de rundt deg vil plassere deg på samme skala?
26. Hva tror du er grunnen til at de plasserer deg der på denne skalaen?
27. Hvordan synes du at ditt syn og de andres syn på deg i denne sammenhengen samsvarer?
  - a. Hvorfor synes du det?
28. Har din maskulinitet/femininitet vært et stabilt trekk ved deg i hele ditt liv, eller har dette forandret seg underveis?
  - a. Hvorfor tror du det er sånn?

29. Har du opplevd mobbing/erting på grunnlag av din maskulinitet/femininitet i skolesammenheng?
- a. Hva?
30. Har du opplevd noe positivt i skolesammenheng på grunnlag av din maskulinitet/femininitet?
- a. Hva?
31. Hvordan er erfaringene dine i jobbsammenheng?
32. Hva med i vennekretsen?
33. Har du hatt negative erfaringer i forbindelse med dette når du har vært på bytur/fester der alkohol har blitt konsumert?
- a. Hva?
34. Har du hatt positive erfaringer i denne settingen?
- a. Hva?
35. Hva slags erfaringer har du i forbindelse med sosiale sammenkomster der alkoholkonsum normalt sett ikke vil bli sett på som naturlig (f.eks. kirke, familieselskap, barnebursdager, familietreff etc.)?
36. Er det områder i livet ditt der du velger (bevisst) å moderere din maskulinitet/femininitet?
- a. Hvorfor?
  - b. Hvorfor ikke?
37. Hvordan ser du den seksuelle orienteringen din i forhold til maskuliniteten/femininiteten din?
38. Hvordan tror du de rundt deg kobler maskuliniteten/femininiteten din til din seksuelle orientering?
- a. Hvordan føles det?
39. Har du fått kommentarer vedrørende denne koblingen noen gang?
- a. Hva?

### **Praktisk informasjon**

40. Er det noe du ønsker å tilføye til slutt?
41. Kan jeg ta kontakt på et senere tidspunkt hvis det er noe mer jeg lurer på?

Takk for din tid

## ***Annex 2 – Information letter***

### **Forespørsel om deltakelse i forskningsprosjektet:**

#### **“In the shadow of the rainbow - Lesbians experiences based on their own and society’s definition of their phenotype”**

#### **Bakgrunn og formål**

Denne studien blir gjort i forbindelse med en mastergrad innenfor programmet «Master in social work – with a comparative perspective» ved Universitetet i Nordland, fakultet for samfunnsvitenskap. Formålet med denne studien er å finne ut hva slags erfaringer, dette være seg positive og/eller negative, lesbiske kvinner gjør seg i dagens samfunn i Norge, med et grunnlag i deres fysiske utseende. Bakgrunnen for min interesse innenfor dette feltet er at jeg selv er lesbisk, og har en maskulin fremtoning. Gjennom samtale med mennesker i mitt eget nettverk, har vi sett en tendens, uten at forskning kan si så mye om dette, til at maskuline lesbiske og feminine lesbiske møter mange av de samme utfordringene, men at det også er forskjeller.

Grunnen til at du får dette skrevet er at du har vist interesse for å delta i dette studie, etter at noen i ditt nettverk har spurt. I utgangspunktet er aldersgruppen satt til mellom 18 og 30 år, men denne aldersgruppen er ikke satt i sten. Du må ha en lesbisk orientering, men du behøver ikke å ha hatt denne orienteringen hele livet. Utgangspunktet for fenotypene er ytterpunktene svært feminin, og svært maskulin. Hvis man ser for seg disse to ytterpunktene som hver sin ende på, eksempelvis, en skala der svært feminin er 1 og svært maskulin er 10, er det ikke nødvendig at du er innenfor ytterpunktene, men en fordel om du ikke er midt mellom, altså på 5, men heller mot en av de to ytterpunktene, da eksempelvis at du plasserer deg selv mellom 6 og 9 eller 2 og 4.

#### **Hva innebærer deltakelse i studien?**

Deltakelse i denne studien vil innebære et personlig intervju med en varighet på ca. 1 – 2 timer. Intervjuet kan gjøres via Skype hvis den fysiske avstanden blir av en slik grad at dette er hensiktsmessig. Noen av spørsmålene vil være av sensitiv karakter, da oppgavens mål er å finne ut om maskulinitet og femininitet er en faktor som er relevant i en lesbisk kvinnes erfaringer i møte med samfunnet. Noen av spørsmålene vil også handle om forhold til familie, venner, tidligere partnere, nåværende partner, negative erfaringer etc. Data vil registreres ved notater og diktafon, evt. Opptaker via data hvis Skype-intervju blir benyttet.

### **Hva skjer med informasjonen om deg?**

Alle personopplysninger vil bli behandlet konfidensielt. Det er kun jeg som har tilgang til direkte personidentifiserende personopplysninger (Navn, mailadresse), indirekte personidentifiserende personopplysninger vil student og veileder ha tilgang til.

Personopplysninger og opptak vil bli lagret i et låst skrin når dette ikke er i bruk, dette for å øke sikkerheten til at personer ikke vil kunne bli identifisert.

Deltakere vil ikke kunne gjenkjennes i publikasjon da data blir anonymisert i etterkant av intervjuene.

Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes 15.08.2014. På dette tidspunktet vil opptak være slettet, og transkript etter intervju anonymisert. Personopplysninger vil bli slettet ved innlevering den 15.08.2014.

### **Frivillig deltakelse**

Det er frivillig å delta i studien, og du kan når som helst trekke ditt samtykke uten å oppgi noen grunn. Dersom du trekker deg, vil alle opplysninger om deg bli slettet og data fra ditt intervju vil bli fjernet fra oppgaven.

Dersom du ønsker å delta eller har spørsmål til studien, ta kontakt med masterstudent Veslemøy Krey Stubberud på telefon: 41 45 10 08, eller på e-post: [VkreySt@gmail.com](mailto:VkreySt@gmail.com). Det er vedlagt et samtykkeskjema på siste side i dette dokumentet. Samtykkeskjema kan tas med og leveres inn på intervjuet.

Veileder for denne oppgaven er universitetslektor ved Fakultet for Samfunnsvitenskap på Universitetet i Nordland, Jorid Krane Hanssen.

Studien er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS.

## ***Annex 3 – Consent form***

### **Samtykke til deltakelse i studien**

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

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(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)