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THE REALITIES OF BEING ON THE FRINGE OF SOCIETY

Separatism within the LGBT-movement in Sweden and
England

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand the reason for why queer people of colour create separatist groups and events from the LGBT movement. In a comparative analysis between separatist groups in England and Sweden the aim is to find out what function separatist groups have in the LGBT movements of these countries, when they are supposed to be open and welcome to all. To analyse why this is, the study used an intersectional theoretical framework. Intersectionality emphasises the influence that different social stratifications that interact can have on a person's social, economic, and political status. This study was conducted using in-depth semi-structured interviews with queer people of colour who have participated in a separatist group of any form. The result of the study found that people seek out people who are similar to themselves, as well as need to feel some level of safety and support which they did not feel existed within the larger, mainstream LGBT organisations they have previously come across. Furthermore, the reasons behind it are similar in both England and Sweden, even though separatism is a well-established concept in the first and controversial in the latter.

Keywords: Queer people of colour; separatism; LGBT; intersectionality; interchangeable accounts; Instagram; white-washing; racism; homophobia; England; Sweden;

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Definitions and abbreviations:

LGBT (or LGBTQIA) - used as an umbrella term for all people who have non-normative sexualities, or are on the sexuality spectrum, rather than being heterosexual. However, within this study the focus is mostly on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Queer and the moniker LGBT will be used throughout.

People of Colour (POC) - This is an umbrella term meaning all people of colour who do not identify with the racial and/or ethnic majority, e.g. white people. It concerns everyone who is racialised because of their skin tone as non-white.

Queer people of colour (QPOC) - Used within this study as an umbrella term for people of colour who are also LGBT.

Pride - an annual event and parade that celebrates different sexual identities and genders. A celebration that first originated in the US but today has spread across the world. Usually attracts not only LGBT people but also heterosexual allies.

BAME – acronym for Black Asian Minority Ethnicities, which is widely used as a term in the British context rather than using people of colour. The distinction is important because the biggest minority groups in the England are Black and Asian people, particularly South Asian, who are the most affected by discrimination and stigma.

Separatism - Defined within sociology as the practice of separation of a certain group of people from a larger body on the basis of ethnicity, religion, sexuality, or gender.

White-washing – Defined as erasure of the people of colour involved in the making of, for example, in accounts of historical events, in media, and instead portraying events and history as being made by and for white people only.

Whiteness – means enforcing a structure of white hegemony, which then exotifies all non-white people within that society.

Pink-washing – Defined as exploitation of LGBT people and their rights in order to legitimise racist and discriminatory arguments against people of colour.

1.Introduction

Departing from an intersectional theoretical framework the study contributes to an understanding of how multiple social inequalities interact and shape an individual's experiences by combining in different ways. Specifically, what is supposed to be targeted in this study is how a person of colour interacts with being an LGBT person as well as racialised and how these two distinct identities intersect with each other. Most of the previous research around this subject has been based in North America, specifically in the US context. There is simply not enough research having been done in the European context which follows very different historical trajectories, as well as social and political situations. Therefore, it is interesting to compare two differently structured LGBT movements, that is, in England, and Sweden. Thus, the question is how the LGBT movement is perceived by queer people of colour, a minority within a minority. This is interesting to see as the way dominant members and organisations view on issues pertaining to queer people of colour plays an important and integral part in how people of colour experience the LGBT movement. This study looks at how people of colour perceive their imagined place within the LGBT movement and how as a form of revolt from the dominant normative 'white-washing' of the LGBT movement queer people of colour have formed their own separatist groups and organisations. What is also important to tackle is how whether separatism can be used as a method to create more inclusivity within the LGBT movement by highlighting the necessity of representation and validate queer people of colour.

Contrasting the progression of LGBT movements in England and Sweden with the emergence of separatist queer people of colour groups, raises questions about the inclusion of said people. In particular, why do these LGBT groups exist separately from other LGBT organisations, and what can their experiences tell us about life in the LGBT movements, and European life in general? Furthermore, it raises the question of why separatism elicits different responses in Sweden compared to in England, an interesting comparison in context of Europe as they are similar countries but have different political and social aspirations.

2.Previous Research

2.1 Separatism as controversy

In England, separatism is a very different concept and does not have the same controversial status as it does in Sweden, where it is widely contested and almost seen as a threat to Swedish culture and political traditions (Hübinette & Lundström, 2011). In Sweden there has been through the early twentieth century, a strong unified people's movement and creating separatist groups have been seen as contesting that solidarity, and unity, which is why separatism seems to get negative connotations in Swedish academia as well as the public. This is illustrated by the countless debate articles that surround the contested subject of separatism, some which are promoting it, while others are contesting its need (Hill, 2015; Holmström, 2018; Kolsjö, 2018; McMillen, 2016). While Hill (2015), and McMillen (2016) are in favour of creating separatist movements because of different reasons such as safe spaces for people who are traditionally excluded, representation, and having spaces to voice their needs, Holmström (2018), and Kolsjö (2018) believe it is dividing the Swedish LGBT movement and creating more segregation rather than integration. So how the LGBT movement in Sweden relates separatism is quite interesting concept to examine, but what this study will focus on more closely is what people within those separatist communities themselves experience. In Sweden some of the first separatist movements that were formed were lesbian foundations who felt that they were discriminated against by their fellow gays in the Swedish LGBT scene, and then as now separatism creates as much tension. Compared to in Sweden, there are many separatist groups in England that are well-established. The idea of separatism does not produce as much controversy as it seems to do in Sweden, based on the lack of literature.

According to the British foundation *Stonewall*, the first official black gay organisation, *the Black Lesbian and Gay Centre*, was established in the UK in 1980 (Stonewall, 2016). However, there are many reasons to believe that some groups for queers of colour were created in secret and therefore have not been accounted for by history. The reason for this was and still is for the safety of their own members, since they are at risk of being outcasted. Andrew Flinn (2011) illustrates that because of discrimination and racism, there exists, or have existed, many practices of erasing people of colour from historical archives, in order to tell a narrative which erases people of colour from historical events. Consequently, there might be some inconsistency in which stories have been told and preserved (Flinn, 2011).

Many more queer people of colour groups began to emerge shortly after the first one back in the 1980s. These groups had to face not only homophobia, but racism, and sexism as well against the women in these groups (Murphy, 2016). Separatist groups formed as a resistance to the discrimination queer people of colour felt they had deal with within both the society and the LGBT movement. Compared to this, the first officially recorded as a queer of colour group that emerged in Sweden was not until 2016 when some members from *Black Coffee* (a big separatist network for black people in Sweden on Facebook) started organising a separatist *Black Coffee LGBT group*. This was one of the first groups with any major public media coverage, other than that many separatist groups may have been created locally, however these have traditionally been difficult to get access to and locate as they are internal and usually secret in order for the members to feel safe. Compared to other LGBT movements in Europe the groups in the UK and Sweden are some of the oldest ones in the most liberal countries. The UK and Sweden are continuously being ranked within the top ten countries in Europe for their LGBT rights and protection against discrimination (ILGA 2019).

Pride parades all over Europe are as evidenced in the study by Peterson, Wahlström and Wennerhag (2018a) not appealing to the true diversity of the LGBT people in these countries. This is examined by following the pattern of the protest normalization theory, which states that engaging in protest demonstrations has become increasingly normalised as well as today attracts a more ‘normal’ sort of crowd, meaning a better representation of the general population rather than more people from specific political and social demographics. However, what they find is that this is not true for pride parades which have an overrepresentation of white well-educated, middle class, younger people. Notably, what this study does not illustrate is why pride parades are not appealing to the full LGBT demographic even in countries where all major political parties support LGBT rights, as well as the general population is statistically more LGBT-friendly such as Sweden, the UK and the Netherlands (Peterson, Wahlström, & Wennerhag, 2018a). Different reasons have been examined in other studies.

For example, Terriquez (2015) examines the DREAM movement in California in 2010-2012, where there was a high number of queer undocumented immigrant youths, who became activists in the movement, which worked with undocumented youths. This is argued to be contributed to one main factor, “the acknowledgement and activation of participants’ multiply marginalized identities at the movement, organizational, and individual levels can deepen engagement among minority subgroup members” (Terriquez, 2015; 358). Essentially, by

engaging in “intersectional mobilisation” (Terriquez, 2015; 345) of the activists’ multiple identities, there was a notable increase in participation among queer youths compared to their straight counterparts within the marginalised group of undocumented youths in California. This illustrates further what was argued in Peterson et al. (2018a), that there has not been an increase in normalisation of social movements, but rather people still tend to engage in the social movement that they have a visible connection to. Pride has been traditionally white in the European countries, therefore there is still a higher percentage of white people engaging with that movement. By recognising and highlighting queer undocumented youth, the DREAM movement managed to increase those youths’ activism and social engagement.

2.2 The lack of research

One of the biggest separatist events in Europe is *UK Black Pride*, which is a separate Pride event happening each year the day after London Pride. It is the largest party in Europe for LGBT people of African, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Latin American descent. It creates a safe space for people to celebrate their sexuality, culture, and shared experiences. This is a pride parade that is formed out of resistance and exists in order to showcase the diversity of people that exists within the LGBT-spectrum, but which often is rendered invisible. It becomes even more symbolic because it happens the day after the London Pride, making a big statement. In their mission statement, it clearly states this purpose: “*UK Black Pride* promotes unity and cooperation among LGBT+ people of diasporic communities in the UK, as well as their friends and families” (Black Pride, 2018). Recently, a similar event called *Pride of Colour* started in Stockholm. Since 2017, some queer activists started a separate pride train for queer people of colour that live in Stockholm or are participating at Pride in Stockholm. It is made separatist by only allowing queer people of colour to step onto the platform created by a truck, however anyone who wants to support the cause can dance or walk alongside the truck on which they are all inside (QX’, 2016).

There is a wide lack of research on queer people of colour in both England and Sweden, and particularly on the subject of lesbian, bisexual, non-binary and trans women of colour. There is an absence of knowledge on how subjectivities are formed for those living with plural identities, and how in particular the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality are experienced. However, drawing on the literature that focuses on these intersections from the United States of America can be beneficial as there might be some similarities between the US and European countries, even while their gay and lesbian historical trajectories are quite different.

One of the reasons behind this state of disequilibrium seems to be because of the degree of stigmatisation and social exclusion which some LGBT-people feel that they would be the subject to if they were visible with their sexual identities. Many, especially people of colour, therefore choose to downplay their sexualities to keep a good standing within their own racial or ethnic communities (El-Tayeb, 2012). El-Tayeb examines different queer spaces that showcase the lack of critically examining the lack of anti-racism work within queer spaces and accounts for the difference between policies and implementation in reality. It highlights the inability for white progressive groups to understand and engage with anti-racist critique made by queers of colour. In previous studies, there has been some input into how people negotiate their multiple identities by, for example, downplaying or ‘covering’ (defined by Kenji Yoshino 2006 in Moore 2010:217). People minimise their stigmatised identity in order to reduce tensions and to fit more comfortably into a category or group identity. This is illustrated to be a strategy used by black gay men in the historical Los Angeles black community where there was a telling lack of LGBT people (Moore 2010: 217). The reason behind this perceived necessity to cover one’s sexuality could be due to the fact that not only black people, but also other people of colour believe that their racial and ethnic communities have generally negative or disapproving attitudes towards the open practice of homosexuality (Moore 2010:217). At the same time, black people feel more connected to their racial identity as it is primary compared to their sexual identity, but while older generations seem to accept this separation of identities, Moore (2010) argues that the younger generations are revolting, and they are trying to force their racial or ethnic communities to accept that their identities can co-exist and do not threaten their strong relationship to one or the other (Moore 2010: 218).

2.3 Whiteness as normative and the rest as “others”

At the same time, while it has become important for LGBT organisations to promote and include queer people of colour, the structure of how this is done, can, in fact, rather than create actual diversity and change, enforce a white normative culture within those very same organisations that are trying to combat their ‘whiteness’. Whiteness is defined as enforcing a structure of white hegemony, which then exoticifies all non-white people within that society. “This assumption that white people are just people, which is not far off saying that whites are people whereas other colours are something else, is endemic to white culture.” (Dyer, 1997: 2).

A study by Ward (2008) in Los Angeles examined how one of the major LGBT organisations tried to restructure their work by introducing corporate diversity strategies which draw heavily

on cultural differences and thus normalises whiteness. As a result, by introducing these strategies, it had the opposite effect of making people of colour, who were their majority cliental, feel excluded and erased. This is a result of diversity strategies that inherently reinforce, rather than challenge, white supremacy. Additionally, because these strategies are hailed as good strategies, many leaders of LGBT organisations, both white and people of colour, have been unable to resist implementing them, due to the fact that such diversity strategies are what gains an organisation financial support from white lesbian and gay donors. Thus, even while an organisation imports diversity strategies, there are organisational structures that hinder the process of true diversity since some organisations are defined by their whiteness and have not proactively worked to dislodge themselves from the corporate whiteness that encompasses them (Ward, 2008: 566).

Pursuing this further, another manner in which whiteness and white-washing occur is through lack of representative diversity. When this is not available, whiteness becomes the normative way to be. In Sweden, Hubinette and Lundström (2011) argues that this is very prevalent as “Swedish” is used synonymously with being white and any person of colour is seen as non-Swedish, despite having been born and lived in Sweden all their lives. Assimilation into Swedish culture can somewhat lower that feeling but the fact is that most non-white swedes often experience feelings of exclusion or like an outsider. Non-white swedes often feel that their experiences are strongly dismissed by Swedish people because of Sweden’s reputation of being one of the most equal countries with strong anti-racist values, dismissing the evidence that tells them that it is not. Therefore, any form of resistance is seen as a personal attack against Swedish society and causes strong refutation. As Hubinette and Lundström put it:

“In the end, all these self-images risk feeling threatened by the presence of non-white, non-Christian, and non-Western migrants. It is this double-binding force of both having been at the top of the world as the most progressive and left-liberal country, and of having perceived itself to be the most racially homogeneous and pure population of all white ethnicities, which makes it almost impossible to deconstruct Swedish whiteness and in the end to attack and annihilate it and transform Swedishness into something else within which people of colour will also be accepted and treated as Swedes.”(Hübinette and Lundström, 2011: 50)

What the idea of being the most liberal and equal country also leads to is the view of other countries as being the opposite of that. Thus, also assuming that Swedish people are more liberal on LGBT matters than what, for example, muslim people, or any non-white people are, in

Sweden. In consequence, they often excuse or portray homophobia as being still prevalent in the Swedish society by pointing at the muslim population or other people of colour. What this then creates is a bigger barrier between communities, as well as renders the LGBT people within those communities invisible. It also allows for extreme right-wing parties to use this as a tool for pink washing their political agendas (Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research'2018).

Queers against pink-washing (2011) defines the term as meaning exploitation of LGBT people and their rights in order to legitimise racist and discriminatory arguments against people of colour. This is done by claiming that people of other races than white are more discriminatory towards LGBT people and therefore racist political agendas are inserted into LGBT spaces and can cause a threat towards the queer people of colour that are also in those spaces. They are then able to exploit LGBT spaces in order to gain support for their racist agendas. By hiding their politics behind the struggle for LGBT rights in different countries, extreme right-wing parties in Europe are able to gain some form of legitimisation and broaden the support for their racist and islamophobic politics. This is important to mention because by using this strategy, political parties throughout Europe have been able to gain some form of precedence within LGBT movements and this has led to further feelings of exclusion for queers of colour, especially queer muslim people who are affected the most because of the spreading of islamophobia. At the same time, these extreme right-wing parties rarely have LGBT friendly politics, but these are then hidden or downplayed in order to appeal to LGBT voters (Queers against pinkwashing, 2011). As this study focuses on the lives of queer people of colour, and some of the respondents are queer muslims, it is important to recognise the additional social stratification of religion and the effects of pink-washing on the LGBT movement.

Another example of when it becomes clear that the real underlying issue is white supremacy in Europe is examined by Bacchetta, El-Tayeb, and Haritaworn (2015). They examine how queer people of colour use translocal spaces in Europe to form resistance against different forms of exclusion and discrimination that targets queer people of colour through gentrification practices, pink-washing, and the increase of concealing racist agendas through pitching LGBT rights as in danger because of people of colour, specifically muslim immigration to European countries. For example, in London in 2011, the neofacist English Defence League organised a pink-washing event in East End, a mainly Muslim populated area, where a march was to be held that said to protest homophobic posters that had been attributed to 'islamists'. When it was exposed for what it was, it was cancelled, however, it was later reorganised by left-wing

organisers under similar banners, ignoring the critique of the event that queer people who were from those communities had voiced about the event (Bacchetta, El-Tayeb, & Haritaworn, 2015: 772).

2.4 Separatist groups

There have also been many instances where lesbians of colour have been excluded from mainstream LGBT movements. While this has changed today somewhat, it is argued by Alimahomed (2010) that there are different forms of discrimination targeting queer women of colour, which used to be focused on exclusion from different groups, and now issues seem to be around inclusion and erasure within those groups. Historically, issues of race and class were seen as secondary within the white feminist movement, as well as in the LGBT movement and therefore there was no space for women of colour, since it erased their intersectional experiences. However, while women of colour feel excluded as well as erased from the movement, these women have been able to use this discrimination to form a movement of resistance by creating their own spaces that are separatist from the mainstream queer movements. These queer movements elicit a lot of negative responses and critique for being exclusive. The focus on only one axis of stratification erases and makes women of colour experience difficulties in voicing their issues and needs. But their queerness also negates their full inclusion within their racial communities because of the stigmatisation of LGBT people (Alimahomed 2010).

Another reason why people of colour and in particular women of colour experience different forms of exclusion is also coming from their own ethnic or cultural communities. Sexuality generates a hostility because it is perceived as going against conventional family values and can in some cases be viewed as ‘traitors to the race’ (Kalra, Kaur, & Hutnyk, 2005: 63). Yet, diasporic groups continue to organise as queer and (ethnic or cultural) groups. For example, the group *NAZ project* in London that promotes the normalisation and awareness about the South Asian gay community (NAZ project, 2018). Studies about this subject occur not only in queer studies but also more importantly, in diaspora studies. Studies indicate that the exclusion and homophobia that queer BAME (Black and Asian minority ethnicities) experience leads to fundamentally different ideas of settled and normative notions of home. “For the diasporic individual, home is an unsettled category due to migration; for the queer, home is unsettled because of normative heterosexual expectations” (Kalra, Kaur, & Hutnyk, 2005: 63-64).

Stonewall, one of the largest LGBT foundations in the UK, conducted a study which looked at the depth of racism within LGBT communities. It highlighted that nearly half, about fifty-one percent of BAME population have at some point experienced discrimination from the wider LGBT movement. This percentage only goes higher for black people with nearly sixty-one percent saying they have faced discrimination from other LGBT people (Stonewall, 2018).

Similar to the *NAZ project*, queer people of colour throughout Europe have created several separatist groups that are to be creative safe spaces for QPOC. Such groups include the *Strange Fruit* in Amsterdam during the 90s that focused on addressing many of the issues that are faced by the QPOC community such as racial profiling, immigration law and racism within progressive white organisations. Another such group is the *Lesbiennes of Color*, who have their roots in the collective from France called *Groupe du 6 novembre: lesbiennes issues du colonialisme, de l'esclavage et de l'immigration*. This group was founded in order to decolonise the LGBT movements. Today *Lesbienne of Color* has been split into several other separatist movements that form different types of resistances to the hegemonic whiteness of the mainstream LGBT movement in France (Bacchetta, El-Tayeb, & Haritaworn, 2015:773).

Many more groups exist in both Sweden and England that seek out queer people of colour. Two such groups from England are *Warwick Pride POC*, which is a student club at University of Warwick in Coventry, and *Birmingham South Asians LGBT* which is a social and support group located in Birmingham, created specifically for South Asian LGBT people. These two groups are mentioned because they are relevant to this study, which will be illustrated further down in the text.

In the study there are also a variety between the types of separatist groups that are mentioned. In addition to physical separatist groups there are also groups on social media that operate as separatist forums. Some that are relevant to this study are accounts on Instagram. These accounts are often interchangeable, where the host change every few days or once a week for example, and then they write about their personal experiences or whatever they want to. These accounts are often open, because their whole purpose is to create visibility and representation. However, they are separatist in the sense that only other, in this case, queer people of colour, are allowed to post comments and interact with the hosts. In that way it creates a visible representation of people who usually feel excluded and erased from mainstream LGBT movements.

3.Theoretical frameworks

Using an intersectional framework this study will specifically offer insight and hopefully new perspectives into the lives of queer people of colour and see how race, class, and gender, shape the representation of queer politics and identity by various axes of inequality, subsequently challenging dominant discourses that privilege middle class and white as the normative and authentic queers. The intersectional perspective was first introduced within the field of sociology as part of black feminist theory by sociologists such as Patricia Hill Collins and Kimberlé Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1991). The purpose of intersectionality was to examine how a person understood and negotiated multiple social stratifications. Those stratifications could be based in race, sexuality, gender, class, functionality, but also other stratifications that might not be as obvious like religion and age (Alimahomed, 2010:153). Without acknowledging how different power structures interact with each other it would be difficult to grasp the different forms of discrimination that occurs on a daily basis for people with multiple sources of stratifications in their identity. Intersectionality is an analytical tool which can be used to not only illustrate the different axes of inequality which interact but also forces us to be more aware of the interlocking systems of oppression and privilege (Engstrand & K Larsson, 2013). Using an intersectional basis for this study is important in order to understand the reasons behind why this study is being done in the first place and why it matters.

Next, what is interesting to look at is how white-washing and whiteness has been used as a tool to sustain the status quo of white being the norm that everyone else is put in opposition to. Sara Ahmed (2007) defines whiteness as being seen as the default race. Because of this it becomes invisible, while non-white bodies in contrast are highly visible. In addition, spaces are angled towards white people and therefore non-white bodies seem like intruders as neither the spaces nor the people have the ability to adjust to them being there without also having to expose the underlying social hierarchy that pertains to whiteness. Recognising this is uncomfortable for white people and therefore is often strongly thwarted by them (Ahmed, 2007).

Separatism is a form of exclusivity. Only people who identify with and who are perceived as being part of a certain group can join it. This creates a dilemma because the main objective of separatism is to create a space for certain people who are usually excluded from the mainstream. There is something provocative in saying that not everyone is allowed in to a space and therefore separatism can create conflict (Bacchetta et al. 2015; Bacchetta 2009). However,

when people in separatist movements like the queer people of colour in this study tries to engage with the mainstream movement, they are still excluded from it. Which leads to the question of how to relate to separatism within an already separatist movement such as the LGBT movement. Furthermore, it is interesting to study what function separatism fills within that movement, and whether there is any perceived difference between Sweden and England in this question.

3.1 Aim and research questions:

The aim with this study is to examine the interactions between separatist groups for queer people of colour and the more mainstream LGBT movements in Sweden and England with different people who either organise or participate in different forms of separatist events or groups. I wish to study the reasons behind why the Swedish LGBT movement is perceived as exclusionary for some and compare that to its equivalent in England. There is also an interest in understanding these differences through approaching what the bigger organisations and organisers of LGBT events (such as Pride events) are using as strategies to create more inclusive structures or the lack of such programs. England and Sweden both have some of the most liberal stances toward LGBT people and well-established LGBT movements, so to see that there are still different forms of discrimination targeting specifically queer people of colour is worth examining as these countries are often portrayed as the ideal for other European countries in terms of equality, as well as have outspoken and well-established LGBT movements. A question is also whether the participating people believe separatism can influence the LGBT movement into moving towards more inclusivity, and if that is the aim of such groups.

3.2 Research Questions:

1. *Is there a perception of the LGBT movement as being exclusionary for queer people of colour in Sweden and England?*
2. *Is there a perceived need for separatist queer people of colour groups in these countries?*
3. *How do separatist groups interact with the mainstream LGBT movement, and how does it compare in Sweden to England?*
4. *Can separatism be a tool to create more inclusivity for queer people of colour in the LGBT movements of both these countries?*

4. Method and Material:

What this study aims to do is illustrate queer people of colour's own view on separatism within the LGBT movement in Sweden and England. The method that is the most relevant is conducting a qualitative study, with in-depth interviews, with the relevant queer people of colour. The reason for why this is the most rewarding method compared to, for example, analysis of texts written by QPOC about this subject is that I want to come as close to my subject matter as possible rather than read secondhand source materials. The interviews followed a semi-structured approach, which gave space for each respondent to be able to tell their personal experiences and allow for the interview to diverge into a multitude of perspectives. This is the preferred method when trying to both explore a topic, and at the same time, find new ground to break within that subject (Justesen & Mik-Meyer, 2011: 53-54).

The study was conducted with interviews with queer people of colour within one separatist organisation such as *Warwick Pride POC* which is a student organisation at Warwick University in England that organises events targeting specifically queer people of colour students. Through this group I came into contact with three of my respondents, who then helped me come into contact with the other two people who I interviewed in England. The last person I interviewed in England was a personal acquaintance, which could have affected that person's responses as they might have known more about the project than the others of the study did, however, I would argue that it had a positive consequence as they felt safe and relaxed during the interview and therefore more willing to share. Several of the people I interviewed in England were part of different separatist queer people of colour groups. Either in the student club *Warwick Pride POC* mentioned above or *Birmingham South Asians LGBT*, as well as smaller secret groups that were anonymised as per request by the respondents in question.

In Sweden the interviews were conducted in a different manner, more than half of them were telephone interviews and four out of six interviews were done with people I had personal acquaintances with previously. The reason behind this was that because of time constraints, I did not have the ability to visit Stockholm and other cities where my respondents lived. Most of them were some sort of organisers in different separatist movements as well as had participated in the mainstream LGBT movement events such as West Pride in Gothenburg, Pride Stockholm, Pride in Malmö and different events hosted by for example, RFSL.

Most of the respondents are students, all of them identify as women of colour and LGBT. All of them being women was not planned but they were the people who were willing to participate and easier to reach. Because of this another intersection needs to be mentioned, which is gender. Gender is another social stratification which is visible, like race. This did affect the study because many spoke about not only having to deal with homophobia and racism, but also sexism, which is mentioned more in depth further down. Five of them were also religious, one of them a Hindu from England, one a Christian from Sweden, and the other three Muslims, one from Sweden, and two from England, which can be important to note as their engagement with their own community was different than others. Safety and being anonymous seemed to be more of a concern to them compared to the respondents who had no religious affiliations. All of them being young, around the age of their early twenties, was also important because the purpose of the study was to understand why young generations are relating to their multiple identities in a different manner than their older counterparts (see 2.2). Their ethnic heritages varied, however many came from similar cultural backgrounds. All of the respondents from England are of different BAME backgrounds, which tend to be quite similar, at least in their response to LGBT people. One of them is black, two are South Asian, two are East-Asian and the last one has middle-eastern heritage. Less of a variety between the Swedish respondents, however, two are notably different, one is of East-Asian heritage but adopted by white parents, another one has biological parents that are half-white and half-Arab but lived with white foster parents. The other four have middle-eastern heritage. As this study as an intersectional framework, it is important to note the respondents' visible identities and how these affect their experiences, however, all except for one of them are visibly people of colour, which means many of their experiences were shared between them.

Intersectional analysis of the interviews is required to understand why these young queer women of colour experience the world in the way that they do. Their identities which are made up of multiple social stratifications have an impact on the way that they interact with their surroundings and a study that wants to assess their personal attitudes and experiences with being one identity, must also recognise and illustrate the interaction between their other identities. However, social stratifications can be numerous, and while all are interesting to analyse, the focus in this study is the intersections between sexuality, age, gender, ethnicity, religion, and race.

This study focuses on people's personal attitudes and experiences. These interviews were in-depth semi-structured in order to let people express themselves based on their own experience with openness for different perspectives and trajectories. It is a comparative study and therefore based on the resources and possibility the same number of interviews were conducted in both Sweden and England. The interviews have been based on a phenomenological approach as it is about the respondent's feelings and perceptions. The data gathered from these interviews will then be analysed using the theoretical frameworks for perspective in addition to the research questions (Justesen & Mik-Meyer, 2011).

What is also important is to consider the ethical implications of conducting interviews. Firstly, what space does the interviewer occupy in the study and how it could affect the respondents' answers. In order to approach the relevant people, I got in touch with the student group in England by taking part in one of their meetings and there introducing myself and asking for interviews, which meant that some of the respondents in England had the opportunity to see me before having the interview, maybe making them more comfortable with me. As it was important in this case to approach the respondents with care, as this was, for some of them, a delicate subject matter, I think that had a positive effect on the study. As mentioned before, some of them were personal acquaintances from before, which also could mean that they knew more about the study and their answers could have been affected, however, I believe this to not have been a problem but rather gave more substance to the interviews as they were more willing to share their thoughts.

In total I was able to do 12 interviews, of which six were done in England and the other six in Sweden. This was important as I wanted an even spread between the participants in both countries. At the start of each interview I got each participant's consent to record them. All the participants were anonymised, especially since a few of them were not publicly out at the time of the interviews and therefore did not want to be accidentally outed through this study. During these interviews I noticed a good variation between each individuals' experiences but many similarities as well in how they relate to being LGBT and a person of colour.

5. Analysis:

1. Is there a perception of the LGBT movement as being exclusionary for queer people of colour?

From the data gathered by the interviews, it is clear that there are many reasons why the mainstream LGBT movements in both England and Sweden can be perceived as exclusionary. There were many similarities in both countries. The main reasons that were mentioned during the interviews concerned representation, safety concerns, and a perceived feeling of exclusion and erasure from the movements.

During the interviews, all of the participants expressed how they felt excluded or othered within those mainstream LGBT movements and events. Many felt that they could not see themselves portrayed at Pride events, in media or in the movement. Almost all of them, except the two (both from England) who were not openly queer, had taken part in or were part of some form of separatist group. This included different Instagram accounts that are interchangeable accounts, meaning a person got to host an account for some period of time between a few days to a week and write about their experiences as queer people of colour. Often only people who are in this case, queer people of colour, are then allowed to comment on those posts, making it a form of separatist group. Yet, a lot of comments that have been made are by white straight people, even though it is clearly stated they are not supposed to interact in these forums. Many of the comments posted have been racist and homophobic. Therefore, organisers have to be vigilant about removing comments in order to sustain their accounts. When questioned why they continue to put so much effort into their account one of the respondents who had a quite popular account in Sweden replied saying:

“A lot of people start realising who they are younger than in university and there needs to be that representation I never saw already then. Which is why I have started my Instagram-account which highlights different stories made by people who look like me and are LGBTQ. There is such a lack of representation for us out there. I hope my account will help at least one person feel like they are not alone. If there is just one brown girl who looks at it and feels like ‘okay this is normal, I am not a freak’, then I have done my job.”

These types of accounts exist because of the lack of visible queer people of colour in social media. Accounts are created by minority groups who seek out a forum that might be more accessible and at the same time occupies a space outside of the mainstream.

Many participants also spoke about how there was a lack of spaces in their own communities where they could feel open and safe to discuss their feelings. In order to find some common ground, they then reached out to the larger LGBT groups that exist in their cities. In these groups what they found was rarely someone who looked similar to them. There is a general feeling between many respondents that you become exposed in these organisations. One respondent said that the pressure to come out can be difficult to deal with. *“You tend to stand out which can lead to pressure from other people in the movement concerning coming out to your family, being a representative for a whole people, and that people put you on a pedestal because of your identity.”*

Another participant claimed that having a double identity, a duality which is in constant friction, there are difficulties in finding spaces that are understanding and welcoming. Not even all separatist groups can be felt to understand, which was illustrated by one participant from Sweden, who is a bisexual woman, currently in a relationship with a man. People with two identities quickly realise that they will never be able to fit in completely anywhere, and that is a struggle to accept.

“Having been in a relationship with a dude for the past years, I have not felt much of the disadvantage that comes with being openly queer, but, I have not been felt like part of the movement either because there is no space for women who are bisexual and in a heteronormative relationship. Which makes sense, but is also sad, because I still want to be part of my community.”

However, feeling excluded from an LGBT movement is generally not the only concern for queers of colour. They also have to deal with their ethnic, religious, and racial groups. Multiple sources accounted for the feeling that a lot of people within their communities’ struggle with understanding them. There is a lot of prejudice concerning LGBT people. Many people both within the LGBT movement and the communities of colour believe that being gay or lesbian is a “white thing” only. On the other hand, one respondent replied with saying how rather than homophobic comments being made by their middle-eastern dad, they had experienced more

homophobia from their white mum. Nevertheless, one account does not negate the other eleven experiences. Most of the respondents had at some time been subject to or heard their own family or relatives say something homophobic. The feeling that most ethnic, religious or racial minority groups are prejudiced and have little knowledge was well-known for both respondents in Sweden and England, and it was summed up by one person in particular:

“I have definitely felt that a lot of people, especially people of colour, struggle with understanding who I am and tend to deny my self-expression by ignoring the labels that I identify with and rather use the pronouns that they see fit. I think they are often afraid of anything outside of their expectations and cultural beliefs. At the same time, I feel that there is an image in our society that only white people can be gay, and that all lesbians are quite masculine and there are no other ones. I think there is a lot of resistance to understanding that identities and people can be quite complicated, instead people want to just generalise people into categories, and if someone doesn’t fall into those categories it is seen as a provocation almost.”

All of the respondents emphasised the lack of representation that exists in their LGBT movements. During pride events, in media, and in other forums they rarely see themselves portrayed in the mainstream, even while being a significant percentage of the LGBT population in their country. One of the respondents from Sweden even stated that they cannot provide the name of even one lesbian Persian artist. *“I believe there is not enough representation, I for example cannot even name one single lesbian famous person from any middle eastern country”*. They also said that trying to create that visibility within the LGBT movement had proven to be difficult, because many white LGBT people tend to dismiss queer people of colours needs as LGBT issues are more prioritised.

2. Is there a perceived need for separatist LGBT groups?

That there is a perceived need for separatist LGBT groups was illustrated by the fact that all respondents had a good explanation for the necessity of such groups’ existences. The importance of getting support, finding people who are like yourself, gaining that group, and just for safety reasons, the need for separatist groups are essential.

Another important thing for many of the participants I spoke with was online communities. At least some of the people didn’t see any LGBT people that looked like them for a very long time

until they were able to find those people through social media. One of the respondents said that she felt it was necessary to be vocal and visible on social media as a lesbian of colour because that is where young people can see and come into contact with her. *“This year, I just started a page on Instagram, because I am a history of arts student, so I do a lot of arts, and it is just a lot about just LGBT artists, and the page is public, and for me it is quite important, because it is some form of representation.”* This is where a lot of the separatist safe spaces are being created and cultivated. On social media there is a plethora of separatist accounts like those mentioned previously which can be important if you are living in a place that is majority white as well as heteronormative, having a safe space where you are able to come into contact with like-minded people makes it easier to feel part of a community. Many participants spoke of how lonely it can be when you are questioning your sexuality or realise that you do not fall into the normative structures and the complete isolation that it can cause. One of respondents stated that:

“I think it is very important to have separatist groups, because I know people who are queer people of colour and have joined separatist groups, where that has given them a home, a lot of hope and support in times when they might have been struggling. I think that there is only so much you can relate to when you are part of the whole LGBT movements and you need to have those smaller subgroups because it gives people a safe space, and a chance to learn and relate to them which I think is one of the most important things with sexuality because often you can feel so alone, like how I felt when I was younger. I was so alone in my struggles, because I knew nobody who was queer and a person of colour. I think it would have provided me with some feeling of validation. I think it also allows them to feel like they are positively contributing to something by supporting others in the same position as them. Anyway, it does boil down to the fear of being exposed, and the fear of being around people who do not truly understand the risks you go through.”

However, while social media does give access to the wide middle-classes and more, it still is important to have physical locations and separatist groups so that true human connection can be formed, and the loneliness combatted, which was mentioned by one participant who is active on social media as a visible queer middle eastern lesbian from Sweden. *“It can feel hopeless and lonely for younger queer people when they are unable to find any people like me, like I did when I was a kid.”* It is not enough to exist in the cyberspace, people need to form human connection through seeing each other face-to-face and therefore groups like the ones at

University of Warwick and others are important places for people to find likeminded friends and supporters.

3. How do separatist groups interact with the mainstream LGBT movement, and how does it compare in Sweden to England?

What became obvious is that there is not that much of a difference between separatism in Sweden versus England. However, how people talk about separatism is quite different. The reasons being since separatist groups are well-established in England, there is less controversy around them. In Sweden there is a whole plethora of new and existing academia around how controversial separatism is. In Sweden it is seen as dividing people, rather than as uniting through difference.

One of the participants from Sweden made a very telling remark about the different ways of viewing separatism between the two countries. *“Separatist rooms exist to in the end essentially not needing to exist. It’s not about excluding anyone. It’s a reaction and resistance against inequality and an indication of flaws in our society. To me [redacted] is a place where I am allowed to exist, where my voice is heard and where my feelings are taken seriously.”*

This showcases what separatism truly is about for many people of colour. It is essentially a place where people feel that they are valued and seen as equal, rather than being outsiders and excluded. Separatism being seen as enforcing division or exclusion, is a lack of understanding the privilege one possesses as white and feeling part of every group and in every room one walks into.

In many cases the mainstream movement does not interact with separatist groups at all because this is what is desired by the separatist groups. In some cases, they do. Such as Pride of Colour during Stockholm Pride when it became a group that was sponsored to some degree by RFSL and their banner was parading right next to RFSLs main group, but other than that, minuscule interactions occur. *“It is hard to see one’s own reality where you can live authentically when there are so few people who are open, and that one can compare and identify with. I also think there is a lack of representation and resources to make us visible, like for example, queer groups in areas that are mainly populated by people of colour.”* While some LGBT organisations seem to mind separatism and doesn’t agree with it at all, others welcome the diversity as it is seen as important for queer people of colour, and a way to reach them in a good positive and safe space.

Another thing to consider is the difference between Sweden and England. In England there are many separatist groups that are well-established and therefore do not need as much support from the mainstream groups as other groups in Sweden. But at the same time, almost all the bigger mainstream LGBT groups and organisations in England such as *Stonewall* for example, provide separatist forums for people of colour, especially for women of colour. However, it is also felt by one respondent from England, that there is a need for them to provide more resources, engagement with the community and education about it. “...in one of my photography seminars, a girl did a presentation about sexuality and queerness. My tutor was unable to understand what she was talking about, because he did not have the education that he needed and that just sparked the thought in my brain that, do we, have we come to the point where we actually need to have the government, or the bigger LGBT organisations [like Stonewall], to implement some kind of training for tutors and teachers so they have any clue on what is going on?”

Sweden has minority groups that are growing, but generally speaking most are immigrants who are either first- or second-generation born in Sweden, which also is an important difference compared to England where BAME have existed for over eight decades at least, since there are now big groups of fifth-generation and older people of colour existing and living in England.

4. Can separatism be used as a tool to create more inclusivity for minorities in England and Sweden?

Sweden and England have inherently different ways of viewing separatism. In Sweden much of the discourse surrounding separatism recognises its need but also heavily criticises the fact that it is excluding by default.

However, when participants were asked if separatism is able to reform mainstream movement and create inclusivity all of the respondents answered that they believe that the mainstream LGBT movements try to be more inclusive. Even so, underlying structures of social stratification systems discourage real change. So, while there might be a willingness, there is not a wide enough perspective on what people of colour need. Despite their willingness, there is a lack of progression in most mainstream LGBT movements, both in Sweden and England. Some also pointed out how the first thing that is visible is their race and gender, so they always have to relate every experience to that before sexual orientation comes into question. In relation to this one participant from England said the following. “Everybody’s always surprised, or occasionally shocked by it [her being bisexual]. It’s not always such a strong reaction, but I

definitely say that I have to do a lot of explaining about my sexuality, because I'm so obviously a person of colour and because I am a muslim as well, so those things in most peoples' minds are not compatible. They are still abnormal."

In both countries several participants agreed that separatism is a tool that can be utilised in order to create more inclusivity for minorities. While one participant in Sweden wanted the end goal to be an open queer movement that did not require separatist groups, most others pointed out the need for separatist groups and continued establishment of them as an important form of creating spaces for themselves as well as enforcing the LGBT movements of both countries to acknowledge the multiple different people that also should have a space within the movement.

6. Discussion

The aim of this study was to understand the purpose of creating separatist groups within the LGBT movement. Generally, the LGBT movement is known to be about everyone having the right to love whoever they please and identify with what they want to. It is a movement that promotes openness and the right to choose to be whoever they want to be. However, not everyone perceives it as such.

Queer people of colour have historically and again today been invisible within the LGBT movement in the western society. Therefore, there has been a massive increase in the creation of separatist groups and events aimed at queer people of colour. These groups have the goal to create a safe space for people who are otherwise outcasted from the mainstream movement but also ostracised from society. Queer people of colour are not only subject of discrimination because of being people of colour, but on top of that also are targeted by homophobia. This affects women of colour even more so than others. This is why representation and visibility matters. It provides people with comfort and the feeling of being seen and heard.

This study was not done in order to examine how the interactions between different social stratifications affect people, but rather to understand queer people of colours own perception of having these identities. By conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews with people, the objective of this study was to understand how queer people of colour relate to the mainstream LGBT movement as well as their own ethnic, religious, and racial communities.

As it is already a well-researched subject that this relationship to their own communities and to the mainstream mainly white LGBT movement is a strained one, the thesis subject was how queer people of colour resist or deal with being outcasts. What was then actually researched was how separatist communities or groups were formed as a resistance and how they were perceived by queer people of colour themselves. What importance did separatist groups have for queer people of colour rather than asking how separatist groups are viewed by the mainstream LGBT movement.

Why this study was conducted in a European context of the England and Sweden was because of several reasons. The first being the lack of research having been made about it specifically in these locations. The second because while England does have a long history of separatist movements, it is not established how these movements influence the people participating in them. Neither is it in Sweden. Sweden is interesting also because there is a large discourse

concerning whether separatism is actually promoting exclusion rather than inclusion. During the research part of this study there has been little to no studies found on why people create separatist movements in the first place. Thirdly, choosing countries also came down to the fact that, for me, they are the most accessible in terms of finding people willing to participate because of having the ability to travel to England and Sweden, and having already established connections with some of the separatist groups in these countries. Another important thing to consider while choosing the countries was the fact that both of these countries are known to be liberal in regard to the promotion of LGBT rights. Despite this it was interesting that almost half of the respondents to this study were hiding their sexual and gender identities from their own families and communities. Finally, the online presence of queer people of colour from these countries is far larger than from any other European countries, but that could also have been due to linguistic restrictions in finding other groups or forums online as well as in real life.

The study simply meant to observe as well as illustrate why these separatist groups do matter for the people who are part of them. Those reasons were many, as one can conclude from the different arguments that are described in the analysis part of the paper. In summary, those reasons were as follows. Firstly, it is obvious that the number one priority for all of the respondents to this study is safety. Because the more mainstream LGBT movement in both countries is largely white-washed, whenever a queer person of colour does decide to participate in any event of theirs, they perceived themselves as being very visible and exposed. Secondly, in relation to the previous point many felt that they would be seen as a representative of an entire ethnic group, which is a feeling shared generally by people of colour in society. This puts pressure on that person to behave a certain way. This also means that many of the respondents felt pressure to become a form of front figure and come out to everyone so that others would feel that they could also be open about their sexuality. But not only does this often lead to feelings of being shut out from their own ethnic communities but also 'othered' within the LGBT movement. Again, this relates back to then not feeling safe, but rather exposed. Many of the respondents also mentioned feelings of guilt and shame because they were not comfortable with coming out. This furthermore led to anxiety and feelings of being fraudulent which could in the long term be very detrimental to their health.

Furthermore, by creating smaller separatist groups where they share these feelings with other queer people of colour, they omit the feeling of being alone, or othered. If everyone shares the same experiences of having to come to terms with their sexuality, gender, and racial or ethnic identities there is a deeper understanding. Many of the respondents could in this way feel as if

they were being seen and heard by people who they can relate to better. Generally, humans want to form connections with people they can understand and relate to. Which is technically the whole purpose of creating a separatist group where everyone is the same, or at least have similar experiences. In that way, it offers a space for people to socialise. It allows people to find support and builds a community where queer people of colour can feel confident in their identities and expressing their feelings, which is very important for their well-being. What is also interesting to note is that creating separatist groups highlights queer people of colours multiple identities, and therefore in the same manner as the DREAM movement managed to engage with queer undocumented youths (Terriquez, 2015), separatist groups increases queer people of colours social engagement too.

An important thing I have also noticed during these studies is the fact that while many women of colour struggle with the lack of representation and queer people of colour spaces, many have taken it upon themselves to create those spaces of belonging by themselves by for example being active on different media platforms and other forms of creating belonging. When you are not able to see yourself reflected you have to create that reflection you seek yourself, and in this day and age, because of internet and social medias, it is being a lot more accessible and easier to do just that.

Notably, it was interesting to see the impact that social media has had on queer people of colours accessibility to the LGBT movement. Because of social media, many more people are able to access forums where they can connect with people who are similar to themselves. This has made an obvious impact on the queer people of colour that were respondents in this study as many of them mentioned different forums and separatist Instagram accounts that made it easier for them to access the representation they looked for when they were younger. Respondents from both England and Sweden emphasised the impact social media has made on their lives. They also were excited for the next generation of queer youths who would be able to access information directly and safely from their own homes. Because of the internet, visibility has become less of an issue since everyone is able to create a space for themselves on the vast internet.

There is therefore a need for separatist communities that are forming through social media and letting people feel more connected to others like them. More LGBT people therefore become comfortable in their own sexualities and identities as they find people who give them the acceptance that they desire but are unable to get from home. Separatist movements are more

able to communicate with their members in safe ways and are able to reach out to many more young people. Several of the respondents in this study, in both countries, mentioned how this was an important difference between when they were growing up and figuring out their sexualities, compared to kids today.

While there were many similarities between the perceptions of people from England and Sweden, there were some important variations as well. One particular difference that was communicated was that generally people feel safer to be open about their sexuality in Sweden compared to in England. However, that could also be due to the fact that the people that were interviewed in Sweden were in four out of six cases openly part of the LGBT community while in England only two of the people interviewed had come out to their families. So, there is no actual basis for this observation. Another variation was that while the Swedish respondents argued for why separatist movements are important, their English counterparts could not understand the question. This is most likely owing to the fact that separatism is viewed differently. In England it is not seen as a provocation because separatist movements have existed for long enough to be well-established while in Sweden there is a discourse that argues against separatism because of the political and historical foundations of this country that contests its need.

In conclusion, this study did not find anything that was new or innovative. However, as that was never the aim it still managed to achieve its purpose. Mainly to illustrate the difficulties faced by queer people of colour in a European context by using an intersectional framework and focus on separatist movements within the LGBT movement. For the purposes of detailing those accounts in-depth interviews were used as the base material. There were many difficulties relating to this. Because many of the respondents have not yet come out to their families, they needed to be assured that it would be totally anonymous, but even then, many people were hesitant. Another issue was that while some people could in detail explain their feelings about the subject, others did not have the same depth of knowledge or interest in the subject and were only picked because they were queer people of colour. At least two of the respondents in England had never taken part in any form of separatist events but were still able to communicate their feelings about such groups and events. Many people never even responded to the first request.

Another issue with this study was the timeframe. Will most of the research and data collection had been finished by January most of the writing was not done until in June, several months

later. Therefore, there was a significant period of time between first collection of data and actual analysis being taken place, which could have had an effect on the study. There was also an intention to further analyse the subject by looking at how the bigger LGBT movements relate to queer people of colour by researching their mission statements and policies towards separatist groups but because of the timeframe this was not doable.

It would be interesting to further research the impact that separatism has on mainstream LGBT movements around Europe, as well as what and if social media and the internet has changed the interface of the LGBT movement, which it would most likely have impacted. This research would benefit from being conducted in many more European countries but because of time constraints, inability to speak local languages, and no access to these kind of communities in other European countries this was an inability for this study.

Creating separatist groups can be a tool for creating space for people who are usually excluded from other spaces. In this particular case it is perceived as a form of resistance to a normatively white mainstream movement where brown and black bodies are rarely seen. Queer people of colour create spaces for themselves where they have not seen spaces before, and by doing this they themselves feel safer, included and seen. It is a way to be the representation that most of them wanted and wished for when they were younger and figuring out their own identities. The main reason is to create space that one day will lead to being part of the mainstream movement naturally and confidently.

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Appendix

Interview guide:

1. What are your gender pronouns and sexual identity?
2. What does it mean to be an LGBT POC person?
3. Do you feel like your identities are separate from each other or intertwined?
4. Have you participated in Pride, or any LGBT events?
5. Have you participated in separatist groups or events?
6. Do you feel represented in the mainstream LGBT movement in your country?
7. What do you think the concept representation means?
8. Do you feel that the (Swedish/British) LGBT movement is inclusive for all, for you?
9. Do you feel like there is a need for separatist groups for LGBT POC?
10. What purpose does it have to create separatist groups?
11. Do you feel that being a POC person means more stigma both within and outside of the LGBT movement?
12. Do you want to add anything? Any thoughts?