

Qualitative interview study on the Umeå Rainbow Group within the Church of Sweden

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This study investigates the Church of Sweden's Umeå Rainbow Group, in Northern Sweden. Originating in 2012 as an engaging group for mainly lay volunteers, the Rainbow Group has currently been institutionalised as part of regional Umeå Pastorat.

The objective of this study is to research the Church of Sweden's LGBTQ+ affirming lived religiosity as it is operating within the Rainbow Group. This study sheds light on the Rainbow Group's actions, challenges and future objectives.

This study is founded upon qualitative interview data that was compiled in Umeå in 2019. This data was analysed by following Braun & Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis.

The results illuminate the Rainbow Group's work as multi-sided enterprises. The Rainbow Group engages in vigorous theological education and queer theology seminars, and takes part in Pride parades and other activities, like 'drop-in' weddings.

The results indicate that the Rainbow Group's challenges have altered over the years. The Rainbow Group's start was shaded by its lacking legitimacy. After becoming institutional part of the Umeå Pastorat, the Rainbow Group is now challenged by its declining volunteer base.

The Rainbow Group kindles hope in re-vitalising as a solidarity group for its laymembers. Institutionally, the Rainbow Group calls for more communal, collective and systematically done LGBTQ+ affirming strides in the Church of Sweden.

This study contributes to queer religiosity dialogue in sociology, gender studies and the study of religion in contemporary academia. This study may perhaps facilitate the Church of Sweden in their assertions about creating a welcoming church for everyone in Umeå.

Keywords: The Church of Sweden, lived religion, LGBTQ people, qualitative study, study of religion.

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1 Introduction

1.1 The context of the study and framing the research problems

This is the first study to investigate the Church of Sweden's Umeå Rainbow Group (in Swedish: Regnbågsgruppen). The Umeå Rainbow Group is an LGBTQ-affirming influence group working within the Church of Sweden in the city of Umeå in Northern Sweden.¹ The Rainbow Group's contexts and its substance are described more thoroughly in section 1.3.

In this study, I chart this Rainbow Group's development, its various religious and social actions and the group's aspirations for their future. In addition, this study offers some important insights into the Rainbow Group's experiences that reach into inner knowledge of the obstacles faced in Umeå with the question of LGBTQ people of faith and faith-based LGBTQ action in mind. The importance and originality of this study are that it explores uncharted research territory in its Swedish context. In addition, the findings of this study contribute to the intersecting fields of comparative religion, queer studies and sociology of religion.

I became interested in the Umeå parish's Rainbow Group after hearing about its existence from a priest associated with the Church of Sweden in Umeå. I was an exchange student at Umeå University in 2017–2018. Moreover, I became interested in similar research after reading about Peter Nynäs and his colleagues' research on the topic in Finland (see Nynäs & Lassander & Kontala 2013; Nynäs & Lassander 2015).

In general, Sweden is considered rather a progressive country globally in regard to the sexual diversity question (Carlström 2020, 28). Exploring the Church of Sweden's LGBTQ-affirming

¹ The LGBTQ acronym here describes to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer identities. On the Umeå Rainbow Group's websites the preferred LGBTQ acronym is used (see Faith, LGBTQ and love – The Church of Sweden in Umeå website). The LGBT acronym was created to represent lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans identities in the wake of the gay liberation movement from the 1960s onwards. However, by now, other identity labels have also been added to the established acronym, such as queer and intersexuality (Page & Shipley 2020, 2–3). That being said, this research study employs the terminology in relation to the LGBTQ acronym chosen by a number of researchers. In this research, I use queer religiosity as an umbrella term to describe the Rainbow Group's LGBTQ+ supporting and affirming religiosity. The term 'queer' has been historically used as a pejorative word, to refer to mainly homosexual men, in Anglo-American countries (Berg & Wickman 2010, 12). The renowned British sociology of religion scholar Andrew K. T. Yip underlines that 'queer' is also about positionality: that is, locating a position in relation to what is hegemonic, well-established and considered as the normative (Yip 2018, 111). Moreover, Yip asserts that queering is, consequently, an action that focuses on deconstructing disciplinary boundaries and subject matters that are perceived in supposedly permanent as well as in normalised terms (Yip 2018, 111–112). Following Page and Shipley's example, in this research 'queer' is used a marker for non-heterosexual identity labels that strives for inclusivity (Page & Shipley 2020, 2–3). As such, I also refer to queer religiosity as a wider phenomenon that occurs both in institutional religions, like the Church of Sweden, and outside the bounds of institutionally occurring religiosity.

religiosity facilitates new understanding about how LGBTQ-asserting religiosities prosper within the backdrop of the Nordic countries. This is keenly noteworthy, as the Nordic countries are internationally considered as especially LGBTQ-friendly nations. Therefore, the Swedish context provides a distinctively framed ‘idealistic’ setting for the study of institutional LGBTQ-affirming religiosity (see ILGA-Europe assessment website, 2022).

In addition, this topic is particularly thought-provoking in the light of the recognition that there is ongoing interest and curiosity, specifically in Finland, about the Church of Sweden’s assertions on LGBTQ questions.² Nevertheless, the Finnish context of any similar kind of studies significantly lacks the Church of Sweden’s church history context.

As an observed case in point, the Church of Sweden is known internationally for its LGBTQ-affirmative stand within its contemporary history and present-day lived religiosity. Specifically, the Church of Sweden has its own church history that provides cultural context that merits a new scholarly gaze into LGBTQ-affirming faith in the Nordic context. Thus, this church history acknowledged background may offer an important contrast in understanding the Rainbow Group’s unique challenges, actions and future objectives. All in all, in general the study of LGBTQ-affirming religious groups is lacking in the Nordic context. Similar kinds of studies in Sweden within the Church of Sweden are scarce, so studying this kind of exclusive group of church ministers, priests and layperson volunteers in the context of Sweden is of the utmost value.

This study gains additional value as it touches upon the Church of Sweden as a place of dialogue on LGBTQ+ rights. The sociologist Karen E. Macke underlines the uniqueness of churches as a setting for political LGBTQ discourses. Macke asserts that churches enact creating distinctive places for morally rich dialogues and debates, where questions of LGBTQ social legitimacy are fought, potentially ever more prevalently than in any other places.³ Churches are a place where many discursive clashes have happened in regard to LGBTQ questions of social justice. (Macke 2014, 18.) This is another reason why it is significantly important to study churches and LGBTQ themes.

² These assertions include the following: the Church of Sweden’s General Synod’s (in Swedish: Kyrkomötet) decided in favour of establishing a blessing prayer for same-sex couples in 2005 (Enstedt 2011, 311). Also, The General Synod ruled in favour of solemnising same-sex marriages within the Church of Sweden in 2009. (History of the Church of Sweden and LGBTQ rights website, 2022).

³ In fact Macke views that these church-based discourses about LGBTQ themes do, in fact, oftentimes uncover more privileged locations of inequality systems, e.g. nationality, class, ability and disability as well as race (Macke 2014, 18). This also resonated in most of my interviews, in the ways my informants reflected over their own positions in the Church of Sweden’s dialogue (TKU/A/20/8; TKU/A/20/9; TKU/A/20/7). This means that most of my interlocutors were considering about their own positions and privileges in the Church of Sweden’s context.

In the pages that follow, this study generates fresh insight into the Rainbow Group's experiences that illustrate ongoing actions to create an LGBTQ+ welcoming folk-church of the Church of Sweden in Umeå in the 21st century.⁴ A scholarly gaze into the Umeå Rainbow Group is increasingly timely, as the Rainbow Group had not yet participated in the Rainbow Key-process model at the start of this interview study, yet this changed before the study was completed (see section 6.2).⁵

1.2 Objectives and structure of this research

The objective of my study is to disclose how the Rainbow Group operates as a socio-religious movement within the Church of Sweden. I approach this research problem through three focused sub-questions:

1. How does the Rainbow Group work as an influence group in the Church of Sweden?
2. What kind of challenges does the Rainbow Group experience in respect to their LGBTQ-affirming religious work?
3. What are the future objectives of this movement inside the Church of Sweden?

These research questions are motivated by the following reasoning. The overarching research question about how the Rainbow Group works as a socio-religious movement is primarily

⁴ The concept of 'Folk Church' has been recognised in differing ways in Sweden. On one hand, the Swedish understanding of the concept derives from spreading the church's gospel to the laity of Sweden. Thereby the gospel's reach for common Swedish people was at the heart of the Church of Sweden object historically, and also in the understanding of the Folk Church concept. On the other hand, this understanding of Folk Church shifted later in its essence, creating a more democratic understanding of this concept. The Folk Church in the Swedish perspective also means that the governance of the Church of Sweden is democratic and thereby it is governed by the laity. (Hansson 2020, 2.) Also, the theology scholar and priest Jonas Idestrom notes that the Church of Sweden locally embodies relationships both between people and between God and people, meaning it is evident that the local church is communally a dynamic body. These relationships, therefore, show how both the function of the church and the essence of the church can be founded. (Idestrom 2009, 280.)

⁵ The Church of Sweden Central Board (in Swedish: Kyrkostyrelsen) encouraged all dioceses to implement LGBT certification in workplaces within the Church of Sweden in 2013, and therefore The Rainbow Key-process model (in Swedish: Regnbågsnyckeln) was established (History of the Church of Sweden and LGBTQ rights website, 2022). The Rainbow Key-process model was designed by EKHO, i.e. the Ecumenical Group for Christian LGBT people, in collaboration with the Växjö dioceses and the Sensus study association. This process model comprises study circles, education, reflection work and visionary work that aim for ongoingly inclusive congregations in the Church of Sweden. (EKHO the process model Rainbow Key website, 2022.) The Rainbow Key-process model strives to provide security for LGBTQ people in Church of Sweden's congregations. (Växjö diocese – Rainbow Key website). The Rainbow Key-process model was first tested in Växjö parish from 2016 to 2017 (EKHO the process model Rainbow Key website, 2022). *Because of practical constraints, this study cannot provide a thorough view of The Rainbow Key-process model's influence and scope in Umeå.* Umeå parishes were not officially undergoing The Rainbow Key -process model in beginning this study (EKHO the process model Rainbow key website, 2022).

influenced by this study's theoretical framework. This theoretical framework is inspired by the queer lived religion approach, which asserts LGBTQ-affirming religiosity as a sociological movement in its own right. See more in section 3.2.

The first research question is aimed to exemplify the Rainbow Group's overall actions. This question is motivated by desire to show the Rainbow Group's multiple actions within the Church of Sweden in Umeå. Therein this group's actions are illuminated both in respect of the group's early years and how they had shifted as time moved forward to the time of the interviews, in 2019. Then, the second research question aims to determine what kind of challenges the Rainbow Group face. This question is motivated by the wish to reveal the various objects and potential trials that the Rainbow Group experience. The last research question about the Rainbow Group's future objectives is foregrounded by the desire to determine how and on what terms the Rainbow Group's interviewed participants saw their group's viability and objectives for their group's future.

This research is structured in the following way. The study begins by laying the foundation of the Umeå Rainbow Group and its background in the Church of Sweden. This is done in the next section 1.3. Subsequently, this study examines the broader contexts of this study, foregrounded in chapter 2. Chapter 2 draws upon a body of literature from previous academic studies and the Church of Sweden's own historical investigations into LGBTQ themes. I have created a historical timeline of LGBTQ developments in Sweden and in the Church of Sweden, that can be found in section 2.2.1. Accordingly, chapter 2 offers an academic literature review, and provides a concise historical overview of the Church of Sweden's assertions on LGBTQ questions in the 21st century.

The middle part of the study continues as follows. Chapter 3 begins by setting forth theoretical dimensions of this study. This chapter is concerned with how queer religiosity has been considered in sociology and the study of religion. The following fourth chapter charts the kinds of materials and methods used to complete this study. Chapter 4 also outlines the ethical considerations that guided this study.

The final chapters draw upon the entirety of the study, by offering its analysis and concluding remarks. Chapter 5 gives the analysis of the study and relates my analytical findings to the existing studies of religion dialogues. Chapter 6 ties up the various theoretical standpoints that guided this study and also provide a brief summary of the research findings. These conclusions propose a discussion of the implications of the findings for the current academic debates in this research area — and offer an afterword that illuminates how the Rainbow Group's situations have developed in Umeå since the research data was collected there in autumn 2019.

1.3 The Umeå Rainbow Group

In the Umeå Pastorat, the Church of Sweden has around 64,600 church members. They also employ 180 people within their personnel over all their six parishes. (About The Church of Sweden in Umeå, 2021.) The Umeå parishes are: Umeå stadsförsamling, Umeå landsförsamling, Umeå Maria församling, Tegs församling, Taveljö församling and Ålidhems församling (The Church of Sweden in Umeå, parishes and office website, 2022).

According to Statistics Sweden, Umeå population was 132 235 people, of which 25 211 people lived as residents in the Ålidhems area in year 2023. Overall, the Church of Sweden's Umeå Pastorat consists of 64 144 members, of which 12 679 people were members of Ålidhem congregation in year 2023. (Dahl 2023.)

The Rainbow Group was first established in 2012, by two priests of the Church of Sweden. Fundamentally, the Rainbow Group has enjoyed the extensive organisational support of the Church of Sweden in Umeå and their respective vicar. (Dahl 2024.) The Rainbow Group started as a group of mostly theology students and other volunteers originally. It originated in Ålidhem parish. The Umeå Rainbow Group has grown and shifted in its actions and aims during its existence. They undertake various kinds of educational and faith-based LGBTQ-affirming social work within the Church of Sweden. This work includes a multitude of possibilities, for example, organising Rainbow Masses and theological study circles (Faith, LGBTQ and love – the Church of Sweden in Umeå website, 2020). The Rainbow Group's also brings LGBTQ+ informed education to the active ministers of their churches in collaboration with the local RFSL.⁶ The Rainbow Group has also taken part in Umeå Pride continuously since 2010 (Dahl 2024).

The group is today considered as one foundation of the Church of Sweden in Umeå, because the Rainbow Group has become affiliated more closely to the institutional body of the Church of Sweden in Umeå. In 2019, the Rainbow Group had active board members of all the six parishes in Umeå Pastorat (see e.g. TKU/A/20/9).⁷

⁶ RFSL (in English: the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex Rights) is the Swedish a non-profit human rights organisation for LGBTQI rights, founded in 1950 (RFSL website 2022).

⁷ According to this study's key informant, the Umeå Rainbow Group also has some members from the Free Churches in Umeå. In this research study only members affiliated to the Church of Sweden were asked to take part because of its subject.

2 The Church of Sweden and LGBTQ questions in the 21st century

2.1 The Church of Sweden's historical investigations into LGBTQ questions

This chapter's aim is to clarify how the Church of Sweden's own investigations have approached LGBTQ matters. The Church of Sweden has long been engaging in a comprehensive discussion about homosexuality. This discussion has affected both the Church of Sweden's internal government and its image in wider society. (Saarelma 2007, 268.)

The Church of Sweden's own website emphasises that the Church has a long history in deliberating on homosexuality and LGBTQ issues (History of the Church of Sweden and LGBTQ rights website, updated 21.1.2022.) This deliberation began with a Bishop's pastoral letter that was published in 1951 (History of the Church of Sweden and LGBTQ rights website, updated 21.1.2022). According to the Bishop's letter (Ett brev i folkets livsfråga in Swedish), having homosexual inclinations meant that people were disobeying God's commandments, yet the same letter also explicitly *condemned* the Swedish State's criminalisation of homosexual acts (my emphasis, Enstedt 2011, 331). The Bishop's letter also referred to medical science as a source for answers (History of the Church of Sweden and LGBTQ rights website, 2022).⁸

Furthermore, the Church of Sweden has produced four extensive investigations on homosexuality from the 1970s onwards. Firstly, in 1974, the Bishops' Conference's working committee produced an investigation, *De homosexuella och kyrkan*. Secondly, a book called *En fråga om kärlek* was produced in 1988, by a conversation group named *Kyrka och de homosexuella*. (Saarelma 2007, 268; Koivisto 2011, 39.) The *Kyrka och de homosexuella* group was founded on the initiative of Archbishop Bertil Werkström, who also wrote the preface to the book in 1986 (Svartvik 2006, 307).⁹ Thirdly, the Church of Sweden's central administrative body (in Swedish: *Kyrkostyrelsen*) produced an extensive article collection in 1989–1994: *Kyrkan och homosexualiteten*, published in 1994. Furthermore, the fourth process of investigation within the Church of Sweden on the homosexuality question started in March 1998. This is when the church government received

⁸ Further discussion of the Bishop's pastoral letters' tensions around homosexuality are to be found in Daniel Enstedt's scholarly works, particularly his doctoral dissertation *Detta är min Kropp* in 2011 (see Enstedt 2011).

⁹ Furthermore, in the mid-1980s, Archbishop Werkström argued that there is a difference between a homosexual *inclination* and homosexuality as *an action*. The first was to be accepted, asserted Archbishop Werkström. However Archbishop Werkström's views were re-assessed, especially because of his perspective that homosexual people needed to live a life of sexual abstinence. (my emphasis, Enstedt 2015, 573.)

support from the Bishop's Conference which enabled it to assert a commission for the Church of Sweden's Theological Committee. (Saarelma 2007, 268.)

In addition, this commission's mission was to create a report that continued the discussion with systematic theology, historical, ecumenical and sociological factors that focused on how to function as a church separated internally by two opposite perspectives on homosexuality. The Church of Sweden's Theological Committee presented their report, *Homosexuella i kyrkan* to the Church of Sweden General Synod in 2002 (Saarelma 2007, 268). All in all, these historical developments within the Church of Sweden on LGBTQ questions can be viewed in a timeline, found in section 2.1.1.

This report of the Church of Sweden's Theological Committee was used as a starting point for a wider discussion within the church ordered by the General Synod. The Theological Committee organised a public hearing relating to questions of homosexuality, which was held in Uppsala in 2004. This public hearing assembled afflicted people, experts and prominent church figures from all sides of the argument. The public hearing was eventually collected into a book, *Kärlek, samlevnad och äktenskap*. (Saarelma 2007, 269.)

Consequently, according to the practical theology scholar Laura Kallatsa, from the early 2000s onwards, the Church of Sweden started to engage in determined work to eliminate the culture of silencing. It attempted to reduce the culture of silencing in Church of Sweden dioceses and parishes by means of active education.¹⁰ This education included knowledge about homosexuality and the needs of homosexually oriented people. (Kallatsa 2020, 25.) Noteworthy, the conversation style within the Church of Sweden is typified by a characteristic emphasis on concession and its openness to be ready to use considerable time to hear the arguments on both sides of the discussion (Saarelma 2007, 269; Koivisto 2011, 39). Furthermore, in addition to this conversation style within

¹⁰ In addition, the Church of Sweden's LGBTQ-affirming stand has been investigated within two *Församling för alla?* projects' (in English: A congregation for everybody?) final reports.¹⁰ These reports were named *När tystnaden blir människa* (In English: When silence becomes men) published in 2002 and *Församling för alla?* (In English: A congregation for everybody?) published in 2016. Hence their results present a compelling timeframe in the Church of Sweden's contemporary history. Some parish representatives, priests and LGBTQ Christians were also interviewed within these projects (Blomster & Svensson 2002, 17, 48; Wickberg & Caspersson & Agernäs 2016, 10). Fundamentally, these reports illustrate more general results for all the denominations presented, thus some of the results cannot be identified as describing the Church of Sweden's standpoints. However, there are some parts of the *Församling för alla?* report which specify the Church of Sweden's local congregations and give more detailed depictions of their answers to the LGBTQ+ concerns.

the Church of Sweden, there has been other programmes related to sexual and gender minorities ongoing within the Church of Sweden.

A case in point is a programme named *Normgivande mångfald*. In this programme, the emphasis was to educate members of the Swedish Army and police forces and members of the Church of Sweden personnel. This programme's education aimed to advance questions of sexual diversity and to help forward professional open-mindedness. In the end, the programme's objective was also to facilitate the career development of gay, bisexual and transgender persons who were working within these aforesaid organisations. (Saarelma 2007, 269.)

In the following section 2.1.2, this study contextualises further the Church of Sweden's key historical LGBTQ-affirming developments with my timeline picture. This timeline begins with the 1940s and ends in 2013. In this timeline, the Church of Sweden's key developments on LGBTQ questions are presented side by side with the Swedish State's legislative changes throughout those aforesaid years. This is to motivate and contextualise section 2.2 for the respected readers.

2.1.1 Historical timeline of LGBTQ developments in Sweden and in the Church of Sweden

	The legislative changes in Sweden*	The Church of Sweden key developments
1940 – 1960	1944 De-criminalization of same-sex relationships in consenting adults.	1951 The Bishop's pastoral letter condemns the states criminalization of homosexual acts.**
1960 – 1980	1972 Legal Gender recognition Act comes into force, and Sweden is the 1st country in world to offer legislative recognition for transgender people. 1979 The National Board of Health and Welfare ceases to classify homosexuality as an illness of mental health.	1974 <i>De homosexuella och kyrkan</i> -book by Bishops' Conferenceses working committee.
1980 – 2000	1987 Discrimination against homosexually oriented people is penalised in the Swedish Penal Code. 1994 The Parliament of Sweden accepts legislation on a registered same-sex partnerships, coming into force 1.1.1995.	1988 <i>En fråga om kärlek</i> -book with an initiative of Archbishop Werkström. 1994 An intercessory prayer is established for registered same-sex couples. 1994 <i>Kyrkan och homosexualiteten</i> -publication.
2000 – 2020	2003 Constitutional inclusion on hate speech on basis of sexual orientation. 2003 Same-sex couples are granted adoption rights. 2009 the Marriage Code becomes gender-neutral, thus it encompasses also same-sex marriage. 2013 Mandatory sterilization requirement of transgender people is removed from Legal Gender recognition Act.	2004 The Theological committee organises an open and documented hearing, named <i>Kärlek, samlevnad och äktenskap</i> . 2005 A blessing ceremony for same-sex unions is established. 2009 The General Synod decides on marriage doctrine, opening it to include same-sex couples. 2013 The General Synod encourages all dioceses to implement LGBTQ certification and therefore <i>The Rainbow Key -process model</i> is established.

*A more extensive chronological timeline is found from the Government Offices of Sweden -website from <https://www.government.se/articles/2018/07/chronological-overview-of-lgbt-persons-rights-in-sweden/>

**The Bishop's pastoral letter's (*Ett brev i folkets livsfråga*) has tensions around homosexuality.

That are further discussed within Daniel Enstedt's doctoral dissertation *Detta är min kropp*, from scholarly field of comparative religion.

Photo 1. Historical timeline on LGBTQ+ developments in Sweden and in the Church of Sweden.

2.1.2 Establishing prayer and matrimony rights for same-sex couples

According to a study, by the religion scholar Daniel Enstedt, the Church of Sweden has historically considered same-sex relationships in ultimately an undesirable light, however gradual moderation has occurred (Enstedt 2015, 565; Enstedt 2011, 331). However, the Church of Sweden had taken notable strides towards their conclusion on accepting same-sex marriage, as they had contemplated homosexuality for a considerably long time already before the 2009 assertion of affirming same-sex matrimony (Koivisto 2011, 39).¹¹ The ethnology scholar Susanne Lindström describes the Church of Sweden's own internal discourse about homosexuality as being characterised by ambiguity and dissolution, specifically within the Church of Sweden's internal documents (Lindström 2005, 165–166).¹²

The initial suggestion towards establishing a blessing prayer for same-sex couples was made in the *De homosexuella och kyrkan* (in English: Homosexuals and the Church) report in 1974. This report was made to enhance knowledge about homosexuality as a phenomenon, and proposed establishment of blessing for same-sex couples. This initial proposal for this blessing prayer suggested a prayer for same-sex couples that would be conducted by a priest within a pastoral situation. Nonetheless, friends and family of the same-sex couple were originally uninvited during this particular pastoral prayer. (Van den Berg 2017, 232.)

The Church of Sweden bishops constructed instructions for an intercessory prayer for registered same-sex couples in 1994. Noteworthy, they preceded Sweden's legislation with officialising same-sex registered partnerships by one year. (Raittila 2020, 166–167; see 2.1.1 section.) The Church of Sweden's General Synod's decided in favour of establishing a blessing prayer for same-sex couples in 2005 (Enstedt 2011, 311). The General Synod voted on confirming a blessing for registered same-sex couples and passed the ruling, voting 160–81 (Saarelma 2007, 270). This decision was unsurprisingly met with varied responses; on one hand, the decision's advocates

¹¹ Contrastingly, Nina Järviö appraises that the Church of Sweden's General Synod has completed only a few binding decisions regarding homosexuality. Many of the official documents by the Church of Sweden that have been considered as the its official standpoint, have in practice been published by something other than the Church of Sweden's church-governmental body or a working group's papers for the General Synod, rather than being assertions by the General Synod's ruling in itself. (Järviö 2012, 19.)

¹² This however should be read with some historical awareness, as Lindström's noteworthy dissertation work was conducted before 2005. This means that the Church of Sweden's conclusion to bless and allow matrimonial ceremonies for the same-sex couples was initiated after Lindström's study, which lends Lindström's work a certain situatedness within contemporary history.

welcomed this ruling, on the other hand, critics found this decision to be an erroneous one (Enstedt 2011, 311).

This resolve to bless registered same-sex couples also had ecumenical consequences for the Church of Sweden. On one hand, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church decided to sever their dyadic ecumenical ties with the Church of Sweden after the said ruling to bless registered same-sex couples. On the other hand, the Faith and Order section of the Church of England also released a statement concerning the Church of Sweden's ruling and its implications. The implications that the Faith and Order section stated to be concerned about related to both ethical standpoints and doctrinal aspects of the Church of Sweden's ruling. (Saarelma 2007, 270–271; Koivisto 2011, 44.) According to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland pastor Antti Saarelma, this statement of the Church of England is worth noting, because its consequence imply that the Church of Sweden's said decision could have a further effect on many churches of the Anglican Communion (Saarelma 2007, 271).¹³

Theology and philosophy scholar Mikael Lindfelt contextualises the Swedish political discussion further. According to Lindfelt, Sweden's Prime Minister Göran Petersson's government set forth a legal investigation on January 27th of 2005 (Lindfelt 2007, 297). This investigation sought to allow a legal marriage to same-sex couples. The legal investigation's conclusive results published in March 2007. These results proposed that same-sex couples should be able to enter in legal matrimony. In this investigation heteronormativity charted as a legislatively exclusive factor. The Investigation's decisive remarks concluded that same-sex couples should be permitted to marry, because it was grounded upon human rights. (Lindfelt 2007, 298.)

At the same time as the Swedish State ruled in favour of same-sex marriage, there also surfaced a public discussion over *vigselrätt*. *Vigselrätt* means the right of religious institutions to officiate, or in other words, solemnise marriages. In the Swedish State, a marriage officiated by a church officiant is a legally binding marriage, where the additional action of a civil servant is not required. (Van den Berg 2017, 233.)

¹³ Overall, the decision-making processes of the different churches *cannot be comparable* as they may, for example, arrive at similar conclusions via notably different routes. This is because, in the real life the inner conversational cultures, theological conventions and administrative styles of different churches differ significantly. That is to say, there are considerable differences among Lutheran churches, not to mention distinct traditions of various denominations. These varying work styles of derive oftentimes from the cultural atmosphere encompassing them. Thus, similar kinds of churches can work on the question of homosexuality in vastly different ways. (my emphasis, Saarelma 2007, 235.)

After the country's legislative marriage developments, the Church of Sweden needed to answer two key questions. The first question was if the Church of Sweden would also solemnise same-sex marriages in its doctrine and rites. Secondly, the question arose as to whether the Church of Sweden wished to maintain its vigselrätt. (Van den Berg 2017, 233.) Koivisto assesses that, after same-sex marriage was legalised by the Government of Sweden in 2009, the Church of Sweden was in a way forced to quickly choose whether it accepted same-sex marriage too, which left the Church consequently unable to conduct a thorough debate upon this decision (Koivisto 2011, 39).

In 2009, the Church of Sweden's General Assembly deliberated over these questions by determining that it would officiate same-sex marriages as well, thereby keeping its vigselrätt rights.¹⁴ This General Assembly's deliberation over the same-sex question was won by a two-thirds majority. (Van den Berg 2017, 233.)

The Church of Sweden's final assertion to accept same-sex marriage did not arise unanimously (Koivisto 2011, 40). Furthermore, the religious scholar Mariecke van den Berg reminds the reader that establishing same-sex marriage is usually contested, with the opposition being significant to religious actors (Van den Berg 2017, 229). In Sweden, there arose a well-established and adeptly crafted campaign that was guided by religious entities and individuals against the acceptance of the legalisation of same-sex marriage (Van den Berg 2017, 230). This opposition was headed by the priest Yngve Kalin. This opposition became apparent when 864 priests signed Kalin's letter condemning same-sex marriage. (Van den Berg 2017, 233; Enstedt 2015, 565.) This even now influential opposition can be identified as deriving from a Christianity that is 'fundamentalist' in its interpretation (Enstedt 2015, 565).¹⁵ Hence, the Church of Sweden retained its right to ordain matrimony.

People affiliated with the Church of Sweden have the right to a gender-neutral matrimony ceremony in accordance with the Church Ordinance. However, a singular priest has a right to ordain

¹⁴ At the same time, the Free Churches were also contemplating their vigselrätt rights, which later remained with them. This was despite the fact that the Free Churches still refuse to perform marriage rites for same-sex couples, as they accept only opposite-sex couples for matrimony. (Van den Berg 2017, 240.)

¹⁵ Fundamentalism refers to a sub-category of an established religious tradition that is typified by its liminal place both inside and beyond a realm of specific religion's boundaries. Fundamentalists are also characterised by their particularly conservative approach to their patriotism, devout observance of fundamental sacred texts and social aggressiveness. (Kaminski Lewis 2023, 45.) Fundamentalism is a word often used by outsiders. Only a few fundamentalists perceive themselves as being fundamentalists, within any type of religious tradition. In contrast, they are likely to view themselves as following historically rightful and unblemished religious teachings — in opposition to what they view as secularised religious groups. Fundamentalism remains a recognised concept that reflects militant separatists within religious traditions in contemporary times, yet it has been also critiqued because of its indistinctness. (Kaminski Lewis 2023, 49.)

matrimony, but there is no obligation for it. In other words, a priest of the Church of Sweden has the right to refuse to marry same-sex couples. (Mustasaari & Hossa 2014, 11.) This notion of the Church of Sweden's priests' refusing same-sex marriages has received assessment within the Church of Sweden. The most prominent example of this is the Swedish theology scholar and Church of Sweden priest Lars Gårdfeldt's disapproval. Lars Gårdfeldt has expressed opposition to the policy which mandates that the Church of Sweden's priests can refuse to solemnise a same-sex marriage on the basis of personal conscience. Subsequently, Gårdfeldt has declared that he will in return decline to ordain marriages with opposite-sex couples resulting from the aforesaid policy. (Mykkänen, 2021.)

What is more, the Church of Sweden Central Board (in Swedish: Kyrkostyrelsen) has encouraged dioceses to implement LGBT-friendly certification at workplaces in their churches from 2013 onwards (History of the Church of Sweden and LGBTQ people's rights website 2023).

2.2 Previous academic studies of the Church of Sweden and LGBTQ questions

This section outlines prior academic studies in sociology and the broader humanities scholarship, about the Church of Sweden and LGBTQ questions. This literature review begins with a theological focus on Jesper Svartvik's and Nina Järviö's scholarly works.¹⁶ Then, it continues with a cultural studies perspective into Susanne Lindström's and Daniel Enstedt's doctoral dissertations.¹⁷

Svartvik conducted exegetical research about how Bible interpretations have been used as an oppressive force towards marginalised groups of homosexuals, Jews and slaves.¹⁸ Svartvik traced biblical examples of homosexuality in their original languages and contrasted their etymological understandings into the Church of Sweden's internal discussions about same-sex questions, which Svartvik traced from 1974 until 2005. (Svartvik 2006.) Svartvik reports that the Church of

¹⁶ In particular, this chapter opens with Svartvik's noteworthy work because of its theological significance to the current-day Church of Sweden. Svartvik's dissertation is currently employed as a vital part of the Rainbow Key-process model within the Church of Sweden. The Church of Sweden Central Board's (in Swedish: Kyrkostyrelsen) encouraged all dioceses to implement LGBT-friendly certification at workplaces within the Church of Sweden in 2013, and therefore The Rainbow Key-process model (in Swedish: Regnbågsnyckeln) was established (History of the Church of Sweden and LGBTQ rights website, 2022).

¹⁷ This chapter's internal partition into theological and cultural studies was done principally in the interest of clarity, yet it could be re-assessed as well. Specifically, Nina Järviö's Master of Arts study could be located under both the theological and cultural studies categories.

¹⁸ Exegetical research refers to scholarly study of the Bible, which is often characterised by a critically and historically informed research approach. Exegetical research methods aim to interpret biblical texts with respect to their initial contexts. While doing exegesis, a theology scholar seeks to understand the researched topic in a neutral sense — hence they should remain unbiased in relation to supernatural concerns. (The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland glossary website).

Sweden's views on the homosexuality related biblical texts are far from unequivocal and self-evident, which also resonates with Nina Järviö's later research findings. Svartvik (2006, 345) stresses that within the Church of Sweden's internal dialogue, it is evident, that the early biblical text cannot always answer modern questions which describe the phenomenon now understood as homosexuality in its contemporary context. Intrinsically, Svartvik's dissertation is prominent in outlining a wide research gap into the Church of Sweden's contemporary exegetics and its Bible interpretation histories on topics of homosexuality, Jews and slaves.

Nina Järviö's Master of Arts study, Järviö studies the Church of Sweden and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland's theological statements from the perspective of queer theology. This study of religion study's timeframe is 1951–2010. Järviö (2012, 1) conceptualises queer theology as a stream of theology which combines queer theory and mostly Catholic theology, developed originally in the 1990s. Järviö's aim was to discover how the Evangelical Lutheran queer theology of the Church of Sweden and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland forms a Nordic approach to queer theology and how it is in connection or in contrast to queer theology that originates from within Catholicism.

Järviö's findings suggest that there are three argumentation paths into how queer theological statement have been assessed and asserted within the Church of Sweden. The oldest argument path is characterised by its usage of the Bible as *a single entity in argumentation*, thus distinct biblical passages remain wholly unmentioned. This first argumentation path stresses that the Bible, as a singular entirety has a clear message of forbidding homosexuality. (my emphasis, Järviö 2012, 32–33.) Järviö traces a second argumentation path to begin already from *De Homosexuella och kyrkan* in 1974.¹⁹ This second path is exemplified by increased deliberation on how the Bible's passages on homosexuality should be read and understood in the Church of Sweden currently.²⁰ Newfound uncertainty arose accordingly about the said passages, as this reflection bears traces of a critically and historically informed understanding of the Bible. The Bible passages on homosexuality are recognised to describe sexual actions, which intrinsically lack an answer to how same-sex-attracted people should be considered within the Church of Sweden. (Järviö 2012, 33–37.) The third argument path considers the Bible as fundamental still. It encourages an ongoing reading of the

¹⁹ *De Homosexuella och kyrkan* (in English: Homosexuals and the Church) was produced by the Church of Sweden's Bishops' Conference's working committee in 1974. This report was made to enhance knowledge about homosexuality as a phenomenon. In this book the initial proposal of the blessing of same-sex couples was established within the Church of Sweden. (Van den Berg 2017, 232.)

²⁰ Biblical passages that are usually seen to describe homosexuality include Rom 1:18–32, 1 Tim. 1:9–10 and 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 (Enstedt 2015, 578).

Bible, facilitating new interpretations. Similarly to the second argument path, this path recognises that the Bible lacks a conclusively explicit answer to how homosexuality should be considered. It returns to the Lutheran tradition's doctrine on *sola scriptura*.²¹ Decisively, the third path upholds that there is a fundamental core message of the Bible in the Lutheran tradition, which is God's love and salvation of humans. (Järviö, 2012, 35–37). Järviö's research fills a key research gap by illustrating how the Church of Sweden's theological assertions have lived and developed in their argumentations from 1951 to 2010. Also, the Järviö's study provided a comparative research perspective by also including the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland in its sphere.

Susanne Lindström wrote an ethnological dissertation *Kamp om rummet* (in English: Struggle about the room) that was also published in 2005. This dissertation focuses on the constant construction of heteronormativity that underlines the Church of Sweden as an institution. In this study, Lindström focuses on researching how heteronormativity presents itself in both the Church of Sweden's own internal enquiries and documents and also in Lindström's interview narratives. (Lindström 2005, 24, 165.) Lindström conducted live history interviews with one district visitor (in Swedish diakon), one elected church politician and also thirteen homo- and bisexual priests of the Church of Sweden (Lindström 2005, 24).

Lindström's findings suggest that there were multiple narrative constructions of 'us' and 'them', which is meant to refer to heterosexuals, in this study (Lindström 2005, 127, 168). Lindström's analysis divides these findings into categories relating to, for example, how the general Christian homosexual 'us' is construed. There also appeared the political 'us' of the interviewed people, and also 'us' in the Church of Sweden in comparison to the homosexual 'them' of the outside world, in Lindström's findings. (Lindström 2005, 125.) That is to say, Lindström traces all these 'us' categories to be found within the "general Christian homosexual us" (Lindström 2005, 168). Fundamentally, Lindström argues that the way in which the aforementioned general Christian homosexual 'us' is construed works in upholding heteronormativity within the Church of Sweden. Thus, in this effort of creating the 'other' or the homosexual in the Church, lines are drawn between the conventional and unconventional, natural and unnatural and right and wrong. (Lindström 2005, 155.) At the same time, Lindström's notable work should be specifically read with some historical awareness. As the Church of Sweden's decision to bless and conduct matrimonial ceremonies for

²¹ *Sola scriptura* (in English: Scripture alone) is a doctrinal principle of Protestant reformation. This principle states that true doctrine can be discovered by following the Old and New Testaments, which are canonical sacred scriptures. The 'Scripture alone' doctrine asserts that these aforesaid sacred texts are the central and absolute foundation of right doctrine. (Leonard 2023, 10.)

same-sex unions was formed after the publication of Lindström's dissertation, this lends the said study a particular historical situatedness. Lindström's work is crucial in filling a research gap by inviting LGBTQ people of faith from the Church of Sweden to take part in the study. Also, Lindström's work demonstrated how heteronormativity could culturally work in Church of Sweden settings, particularly in the lived experiences of their LGBTQ members and church personnel.

In addition, the study of religion scholar Daniel Enstedt wrote his doctoral dissertation (2011) about the Church of Sweden's decision to bless same-sex couples, which transpired in 2005. Enstedt proposes that the Church of Sweden's decision to bless same-sex couples was enabled by the establishment of an idea of 'genuine homosexuality' in the Church of Sweden (Enstedt 2015, 564). According to Enstedt, 'genuine homosexuality' portrays usually monogamous, devoted and long-term same-sex unions that are inspired by agape love (Enstedt 2015, 586–587). The renowned Swedish theologian Anders Nygren [1930/1936] characterises agape love as being fundamentally God's love: that is, a founding place to every kind of Christian love. Nygren stressed that agape is the central foundation of Christianity. Therein, Nygren summarises agape as the highest motive, declaring that "God is love and love, *agape*, is God" (emphasis in original, Enstedt 2011, 92–93.) Nygren's significant work [1930/1936] faced assessment and discussion over his way of separating egocentric eros love and God-centred agape love (Enstedt 2011, 280–284). However, Enstedt argues that this separation between eros and agape from Anders Nygren's theological ideas was influential in the Church of Sweden's dialogue over 'genuine' homosexuality and other same-sex unions (Enstedt 2015, 577).

Essentially 'genuine homosexuality' is considered in contrast with 'promiscuous' homosexuality, which is denounced within the Church of Sweden's principles (Enstedt 2011, 333–334; Enstedt 2015, 574). This is also noticeable within Enstedt's research findings. In the dissertation, Enstedt conducted 21 interviews and also utilised the Church of Sweden's own internal documents. Enstedt collected interviews from both LGBT Christians (i.e. members of EKHO) and so-called protest priests.²² Thus, Enstedt used a research design in which he collected interviews from both afflicted

²² Herein, protest priests refer to the 864 priests that signed priest Yngve Kalin's declaration condemning same-sex marriage (Van den Berg 2017, 233; Enstedt 2015, 565). This even now influential opposition can be identified as deriving from a Christianity that is 'fundamentalist' in its interpretation (Enstedt 2015, 565). EKHO refers to an ecumenical association of Christian LGBTQ people in Sweden, as mentioned briefly before. The association was first established with the formation of EKHO Stockholm in year 1976. (Andersson 2012, abstract.) Currently EKHO is formed of a national umbrella organisation and five local associations: EKHO Gothenburg, EKHO Skåne, EKHO southeast, EKHO Stockholm and EKHO Mälardalen (EKHO association website).

parties.²³ (Enstedt 2011, 331–332.) The dissertation’s findings propose that both aforesaid sides viewed sexual promiscuousness as sinful and incompatible with Christian faith: therein, homosexual and heterosexual sexual promiscuities were regarded as *equally condemnable* (my emphasis, Enstedt 2011, 334). In addition, Enstedt contends that the idea of ‘genuine homosexuality’ enacts in reinforcing the predominant heteronormative order, while excluding some social unions and actions, like bisexuality, polyamorous relationships and philandering sexual behaviours (Enstedt 2015, 564). All in all, Enstedt’s significant study fills a fundamental research gap by tracing a cultural shift in ways that the Church of Sweden understands, arguments and builds its comprehensive theological understandings about LGBTQ matters, especially ‘genuine’ and ‘promiscuous’ homosexualities.

²³ Paradoxically conservative Christians can also share feelings of stigmatisation with LGBTQ people. In the Swedish context, the scholar Carlotta Carlström notes that LGBTQ people paradoxically share feelings of stigmatisation with conservative Christians (Carlström 2020, 39). In the same vein, Daniel Enstedt also encounters this paradox in his doctoral dissertation work. According to Enstedt, his work revealed a similar kind of positioning amongst his interviewees, who included both conservative Christian priests and members of EKHO. This paradoxical positioning exposed itself as the members of both groups viewed themselves as a member of a threatened minority and considered the out-group with the position of victimiser. (Enstedt 2011, 336.) Returning to the aforementioned paradoxical notion, in Carlström’s regard there are Swedish conservative Christians who feel themselves to be discriminated against in current-day Swedish society because of their conservative beliefs. (Carlström 2020, 39.)

3 Theoretical framework

3.1 The discussion of queer religiosity in sociology and the study of religion

In this chapter, the theoretical framework for this study is introduced. This chapter aims to shed light on how queer religiosity has been comprehended, seen and studied within sociology and the study of religion scholarship. The theoretical framework of this thesis builds upon lived religion research. Yet to begin with, I open with queer religiosity as a social movement in its own right, which is informed by religion-social movement research and queer-affirming religion history scholarship. After, I assess the study of religion scholarship that suggests queer-affirming religiosity as religious activism. Section 3.1.2 illustrates the queer religiosity discussion specifically from the view of Finnish academic circles. Most importantly, I explain sociology's theoretical dialogue over lived religion. Thereafter, section 3.2 pursues how a queer approach is pertinent to sociological lived religion research and acts as an anchor for this study's approach.

Noteworthy, there rises a substantial meta-level continuation question: how should queer religiosity be comprehended, seen and studied within sociology and the study of religion scholarship? Regardless, this study's theoretical framework approaches the question on how queer religiosity has been comprehended, seen and studied within sociology and the study of religion scholarship from the perspective of *queer lived religion*.

3.1.1 Queer religiosity as a social movement

The sociologist and Women and Gender studies professor Jodi O'Brien proposes that the religiosity of queer people has a uniquely specific manifestation in history.²⁴ O'Brien suggests that the growth and proliferation of queer Christianity can be recognised as a form of social movement that takes place within churches.²⁵ According to O'Brien, the existence of same-sex members of church powers this within church movement.²⁶ Nonetheless, O'Brien grants that this social movement is

²⁴ A growing body of literature has investigated LGBTQ-affirming religious movements (see Macke 2016; O'Brien 2005; Wilcox 2003). Furthermore, there are some historical studies about religious LGBTQ-affirming movements. Early examples of research into religious LGBTQ-affirming movements include works by e.g. the religious studies and queer studies scholar Heather R. White and sociology scholar Melinda D. Kane (see White 2008; Kane 2013; Fuist & Stoll & Kniss 2012).

²⁵ Queer Christians can also strive from outside institutional settings (see Browne & Munt & Yip, 2010; Larrimore 2015, 6).

²⁶ Notably, O'Brien contemplates congregations' choice in becoming an 'affirming church' with the following equations. Where the affirming congregations' parishioners give emphasis to an equation whereby: God = love and Christianity = community. This 'affirming congregation's' understanding might, however, be viewed as a profound separation from an equation wherein: God = scriptures understood in literal sense and Christianity = the authority for

also influenced by challenges that arise from the existence of distinctively queer Christians inside congregations. (O'Brien 2005, 237.)

Similarly, the sociologist Jason J. Hopkins views queer religiosity as a movement that can be deemed as a form of social movement (Hopkins 2014, 172).²⁷ Hopkins emphasises that this movement's roots can be found historically from the mid-20th century onwards in the United States. In this religious movement, LGBT people of faith began to establish boards and organisation groups within their communities of faith. These collective acts focused on ending the homophobia and LGBT exclusion that existed within their communities of faith. (Hopkins 2014, 163.) Herein, Hopkins concentrates on American Catholic Christianity, even though Hopkins states that queer religiosity movements also exist within each major faith tradition (Hopkins 2014, 173).²⁸

Hopkins proposes that the prospective cultural shift raised within Christian denominations and churches to be more LGBT inclusive results primarily from continuous efforts of LGBT people of faith and their supporters acting towards change within organised religion (Hopkins 2014, 159). Hopkins observes that this cultural shift of queer Christian movements can have multiple aspirations. Firstly, a queer Christian faith association may fundamentally aspire to transform their church doctrines and guidelines that condemn same-sex sexuality. (Hopkins 2014, 160.) Secondly, these movements can also challenge others to contemplate their own encounters with LGBT people as well as to profoundly question and contemplate their doctrinal beliefs. In conclusion, Hopkins suggests that these aims essentially challenge and try to soften symbolic category barriers that associate gay people with the "profane", therein sacralising them.²⁹ In other words, Hopkins

the interpretation. Nevertheless, the 'affirming congregations' have been likened to the early stages of Christianity with the importance of communal values by some. (O'Brien 2005, 253.)

²⁷ Hopkins uses as his preferred term "LGBT-faith movements". That is an uncommonly used research term in fields of sociology and the study of religion, which is the reason why I have utilised here the more commonly employed expression of queer-affirming religiosity and queer Christian movement.

²⁸ Hopkins focuses on conducting research on the Rainbow Sash Movement, an LGBT-affirming social movement in the Catholic Church. Originating in Australia in the late 1990s, the Rainbow Sash movement has gathered global recognition and some polemic since. The Rainbow Sash movement works within Catholic Masses, in particular, the Pentecostal Sunday Mass of the Catholic Church. Their tradition is to join the Mass with quiet and peaceful demeanour, whilst wearing a colourful rainbow sash on top of their clothes as they take part in the Mass. The Rainbow Sash movement's participants aim to join the holy sacrament of Eucharist, which they are most usually denied having. Then after this denial of the Eucharist sacrament, the movement's participants return to their church hall seats, yet they stay standing with empty hands outstretched towards the altar until the Mass ends. (Hopkins 2014, 168–169.)

²⁹ According to the sociology scholar Émile Durkheim, the profane and sacred are considered as two oppositional categories within religious beliefs (Enges & Mahlamäki & Virtanen 2017, 80; Furseth & Repstad 2006, 33). The profane is a contrasting category to the sacred, which is embodied by religiosity (Furseth & Repstad 2006, 33). The profane expresses worldly, secular matters, which conceptualise an oppositional force to the sacred. In addition, sacred matters are protected with sanctioning, which separate them from profane concerns. These profane matters are to be kept divided from sacredness, and consequently the sanctions are as a result applied against profane ideas. (Enges & Mahlamäki & Virtanen 2017, 80.)

proposes that queer Christian faith movements aspire to bring LGBT people into the cultural symbolic category of the ‘sacred’.³⁰ (Hopkins 2014, 159–160.) In other words, Hopkins upholds that queer Christian advocates ultimately strive for a validation of their sacred and moral equality (Hopkins 2014, 167).

3.1.2 Queer religiosity as faith-based activism

In this section, I extend the discussion on queer religiosity as faith-based activism within study of religion and sociology scholarship. Herein, I move to describe how this study’s theoretical preconceptions were founded before going to Umeå. This is fundamental in respect that this study’s prior theoretical understanding shaped my research questions. As such, this section begins by determining ‘religious LGBTQ activism’ as an internationally used, yet also re-assessed, research term. It highlights how this research term has been described and later discussed in the Finnish study of religion. Significantly, this section ends in an assessment of this research term.

Religious LGBTQ activism is a term frequently used in the research literature internationally, but to this date there is no consensus about its precise definition. The term has been used internationally by notable sociologist and sociology of religion scholars such as Karen E. Macke, Melinda D. Kane and Jonathan S. Coley (Macke 2016; Kane 2013; Coley 2020). In Finland, this theoretical notion was first used by the study of religion scholars Peter Nynäs, Mika T. Lassander and Janne Kontala, who conducted their consequential case study of religious LGBTQ activism in Finland (Nynäs & Lassander & Kontala 2013; Nynäs & Lassander 2015). Fundamentally, these studies were pioneering in Finland’s context and topic. Of these two research studies, the latter is now presented in further detail, because of its more up-to-date nature.

The study of religion scholar Peter Nynäs and his colleague Mika T. Lassander conducted a case study of what their research group theorises as religious LGBT activism. Nynäs and Lassander use the term “religious LGBT activist” when describing both lay-people and priests of the Evangelical

³⁰ The concept of the sacred is used to outline religious action by means of various symbols and metaphorical language. This concept of sacred is utilised by people to define particular things, phenomena, times, objects and places in which distinct outlines and choices of value are attributed to them. Moreover, the concept of the sacred is characterised by its versatility, as it is employed as a noun, an adjective and a describing attribute. Nevertheless, the concept of sacred *is a distinct theoretical construct within cultural studies and the study of religion*. Cultural studies researchers are keen to question how and on what terms people regard a certain something as sacred, and in which ways the word is used in its multitude of connections. *In cultural studies, sacred is seen as a concept characterised by its outlining and separating principle — as it distinguishes and divides the sacred from matters considered as profane*. Notable theoreticians of the sacred that have influenced cultural studies history have been theologian Rudolf Otto, religion sociologist Mircea Eliade and anthropologist and sociologist Émile Durkheim. (my emphasis, Enges & Mahlamäki & Virtanen 2017, 78–79.)

Lutheran Church of Finland who work together to celebrate Rainbow Masses. In this research article, religious LGBT activism is a non-institutionally organised nor dogmatically well-defined movement that gains strength from both its reflectiveness and internal diversity. Therein, this movement's key aim is to create a new space for different religious identities as well as to cause an institutional shift within the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. (Nynäs & Lassander 2015, 453, 467–469.) As such, it remains unknown why these researchers find the term religious LGBT activist the most descriptive one. Furthermore, the question remains as to whether the term of religious activists was merely preferred by the researchers themselves, in the hopes of joining more global academic discussions, or did that term somehow resonate in an emic sense within the thirteen interviews that Nynäs and Lassander conducted?

Nonetheless, inspired by this innovative research, some notable scholars of the study of religion in Finland have proposed that activism can be understood as a factor of spirituality and religiousness in itself in respect to LGBTQ religiousness. In particular, Fredriksson et al. (2015, 160) underline that LGBTQ religious activism can be understood as making a transformation on an institutional level. LGBTQ religious activism may find a home in religious institutions and the emancipatory ability of religion, which seeks to establish tolerance-filled inclusionary places and embrace identity formation.³¹

However, it seems that this use of religious activism is in notable contrast with the Church of Sweden's self-understanding from a political sense. According to the church history scholar Klas Hansson, some may view the Church of Sweden as to some extent a political actor in society as it addresses politically viewed questions on various levels, in some cities and at diocesan level or as the Church of Sweden as a complete entity. To this claim, Hansson replies that the Church of Sweden grounds itself in gospel and the traditions of the Church when addressing such concerns. (Hansson 2020, 4.) Conclusively, Hansson (2020, 20) underlines that the Church of Sweden may take a stand on some politically viewed current questions of Swedish society, yet at the same time it abides by Christian traditions and the sacred scriptures. In other words, the Church of Sweden pillars its actions on the public sphere on its own Christian tradition and the word of the Bible, therefore acting as a societal entity as well.

³¹ As such, the sociologist Sarah-Jane Page and the religious studies scholar Heather Shipley suggest a question: what is dreamed of when reflecting on our attention to “religion”? (Page & Shipley 2020, 5). Nancy Ammerman stresses that the category of ‘religion’ is not per se universal nor neutral in its essence. This category of ‘religion’ can differ in places, and it varies too, with what is included or considered as religious.³¹ (Ammerman 2021, 21.) ‘Religion’ as a theoretical concept has also been critically assessed in the study of religion field (see e.g. Morgan 2023).

Noteworthily, the theology and religion scholar Megan Robertson also critiques the perception that inherent activism is needed in order to have queer Christian identities.³² Robertson considers that previous agentive studies into religion and sexualities have relied upon an essentialist and, as such, limiting understanding of queer Christians identities. According to Robertson, this prior scholastic understanding of queer Christian identities seems to indicate that, “‘queer’ is a homogenous group, all seemingly driven by similar motivations to resist and subvert institutionalized religion”. (my emphasis, Robertson 2019, 43.) Furthermore, in Robertson’s viewpoint, this kind of singular linking of transformation, negotiation and resistance with agency can be considered problematic, as the linking implies that in order to be a queer Christian, one has to perform a certain type of activism driven by a queer identity (Robertson 2019, 43).³³

3.2 The queer lived religion approach

This section presents a discussion of the theoretical concept of lived religion within the sociology of religion. Further in this chapter, a queer lens is used to consider this lived religion approach.

Lived religion research developed as a critique of a previous tradition of research (Enstedt & Plank 2018, 11). This earlier research tradition was typified by a structural way of studying religion. It was characterised by a hypothesis that religion could be completely realised by analysing only belief systems, religious traditions and sacred texts. (Robertson 2019, 45; see Larrimore 2015.) It also paid great consideration to religious organisations, their documents and authorised representatives of said religious faith (Enstedt & Plank 2018, 11).

Noteworthily, the lived religion approach challenges this earlier structural research approach by engaging in a poststructuralist epistemology. According to the poststructuralist epistemology, people do not merely re-enact the actions and given beliefs which they have learned from institutionalised religions — instead people *influence and actively shape religion* in nuances of everyday life. (my emphasis, Robertson 2019, 45; see Larrimore, 2015.) The study of religion

³² Herein, Robertson assesses Jodi O’Brien’s prior scholarly work in particular (see Robertson 2019, 43.) That being said, Robertson’s assessment can also here be applied to this conceptual discussion within the study of religion academia in Finland.

³³ Agency refers to a central concept of cultural studies, which is in essence is somewhat contested within academia. Agency has been described as a subject’s ability to make decisions and enact them. However, *agency* is not merely an individual’s own attribute, *rather it always transpires in social relations and interactions*. Agency is shaped by contextual matters, like a person’s and society’s collective histories and their discourses as well as other societal constructions. *The concept of agency is always bound by its contexts and situational forces — in their past, present and future*. (my emphasis, Hynninen & Lindfors & Opas 2017, 174.)

scholar Ann af Burén summarises that, “The lived religion approach, in fact, focuses theoretically on an in-between space in which people are suspended in webs of meaning against which their agency, at micro level, is being played out” (af Burén 2015, 52). Intrinsically, lived religion enacts creating a link that combines lived experiences that intertwine with theoretical concepts (Jackson-Taylor 2021, 35).³⁴

Even though the lived religion approach theoretical tradition has extensively critiqued studying institutionalised religion and clergy, the theology and religion scholar Megan Robertson states that the lived religion approach is valuable precisely in studying these particular areas of research (Robertson 2019, 41). Similarly, the sociologist Nancy T. Ammerman cautions researchers of religion that it is not necessary to choose either studying people’s personal beliefs or studying institutionalised religion. Nor do researchers have to choose between emic definitions arising from the studied community, or analytically used etic meanings that enable us to recognise patterns and similarities. This is because lived religion engages within both. (Ammerman 2021, 22.)

Subsequently, lived religion is employed as a founding idea of the theoretical framework within this study, in which I lean strongly into the scholars Robertson and Ammerman’s aforesaid assertions.

This study follows in particular the scholar Megan Robertson’s theoretical approach. Robertson employs lived religion as their main theoretical approach in their Doctor of Philosophy dissertations. Noteworthy, Robertson studies lived religion of LGBTQ people of faith. Herein, by LGBTQ people of faith, I mean that Robertson’s dissertation focused on studying Methodist Church priests of Southern Africa, whilst highlighting their lived experiences in that dissertation’s forefront (see Robertson, 2019).

I assert that applying a queer lens to the lived religion approach is apt for the following reasoning. The field of lived religion research is by its essence interdisciplinary (Enstedt & Plank 2018, 11). It is founded upon theoretical perspectives from sociology, gender studies, anthropology and the study of religion, among other scholarly fields (Enstedt & Plank 2018, 11; Knibbe & Kupari 2020, 159). Because of the lived religion approach’s interdisciplinary essence, it can align with feminist epistemological undercurrents (Knibbe & Kupari 2020, 165).

³⁴ Meredith McGuire also notes that studying lived religion also allows researchers to cherish even the inconsistencies and disarray found in a specific studied culture and its period, which consequently prevents some needless conceptual disorganisation (McGuire 2008, 16). The concept of lived religion has been used to separate everyday characteristics of religion from definitions and structures of institutionalised forms of religion (Enges & Mahlamäki & Virtanen 2017, 80). Thus, lived religion research often focuses on a bottom-up approach with ordinary practitioners of a religious affiliation at the core of its analytical gaze (Page & Shipley 2020, 5).

Therein, the lived religion approach can be viewed as supporting feminist epistemologies. Feminist epistemologies contend that universally viewed ‘objective’ knowledge is unknown, and the researcher’s perspective can enact benefiting some kinds of knowing over others.³⁵ (Knibbe & Kupari 2020, 165.) The lived religion approach also facilitates researchers focusing their studies on otherwise marginalised groups. These groups usually left out of the scope of research are, for example sexual minorities, women, people of colour and laypersons. (Enstedt & Plank 2018, 10.)

There has been surprisingly scarce prior research on how groups can build upon the ways people understand the connectiveness between sexual and religious identities (Coley 2020, 49). The queer religiosity scholar Wilcox (2003, 17) also considers that it may be that queer studies and LGBTQ studies avoid religion because of the notion that there are only a small number of religious LGBTQ people. However, Wilcox asserts that a prominent body of work from previous researchers proves that this is certainly not the case. Melissa M. Wilcox (2005, 203) continues by stating that oftentimes scholarly attention around religion that is considered ‘official’ lacks insight on other ‘non-recognised’ religiosities, such as religiosities of other disempowered parties

In the same vein, the sociology of religion scholar Andrew K. T. Yip considers that sociology of religion must also pay magnified attention to both the lived and micro dimensions of religions.³⁶ Thus, sociology of religion is then allowed to disturb religion’s collective and institutional dimensions. According to Yip: “[t]his approach recognizes that it is by examining how religious actors — including ‘queer’ ones — live out their religions in the everyday context that illuminates our understanding of the embodiment, messiness, complexity and multiplicity of religious lives”. (Yip 2018, 113.) This resonates with queer theory’s approach of focusing the researcher’s gaze on societally marginalised voices such as sexual and gender minorities.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that LGBT studies, women’s studies, feminist theory and queer theory have all been known to avoid religion as a topic of research. The queer religion scholar Melissa M. Wilcox observes that this might arise from Marxism, which formulates a powerful

³⁵ The study of religion scholar Peter Nynäs stresses that there is also a rising body of research that argues religion to be relocating and, subsequently, current-day subjects of religion are positioned in a changed framework to what was assumed before (Nynäs 2018, 59–60). These contemplations echo feminist epistemological criticality about the concept of objectivity.

³⁶ The lived religion approach is known to try to theorise the prospects of religion within existing modernity, by both abandoning macro-level questions of religion sociology and paying increasing attention to how practised religion operates (Knibbe & Kupari 2020, 159). In the sociology of religion, macro- and meso-level queries focus more on the institutionalised social forces, general structures and organisations that go beyond micro-level interests, whereas micro-level queries cover such topics as interpersonal interaction and direct social relations in the sociology of religion. (Berg & Wickman 2010, 54.)

influence within queer and feminist theory. (Wilcox 2003, 17.) Marxism as a sociological tradition has been known to hypothesise the removal of religion from public areas at the start of modernisation, which is in relation to relatively nonlinear historical developments (Furseth & Repstad 2006, 97–98).³⁷

Furthermore, these ideas are particularly important in the light of the unspoken yet compelling secularist bias of sexuality/gender and religion that powerfully impacts widespread general public and academic discourses.³⁸ Within this bias, secularism is understood as a force that is emancipatory and liberatory towards ideas of gender and sexuality. Furthermore, in contrast to secularism, religion is thus considered as being a fundamentally negative force regarding gender and sexuality according to this secularist bias. (Yip 2018, 114.)

Religion is viewed secularistically as a repressively forced heteronormative institution. This view stresses religion's negatively viewed powers, like institutionalism and authoritarianism. Moreover, according to this secularist perspective, religion is considered to have an intensely tense conflict with matters of sexuality and gender, in particular with people of marginalised gender and sexuality. (Nynäs & Yip 2012, 9.) However, the secularist bias most often disregards the agency that religious actors can have relating to transformative creativity and resistance (Nynäs & Yip 2012, 9; Fredriksson 2015, 42).

In this chapter, I have explored the theoretical dimensions of this study. Above all, the study approach's focus is on ideas of queer religiosity as a historically distinct social movement and on the queer lived religion approaches. However, it was also crucial for me to open a Finnish study of religion dialogue over faith-based activism. This is because Peter Nynäs, Mika T. Lassander and Janne Kontala's scholarly works had an inherent impact into the expectations and question formulations that I had before going to Umeå in autumn 2019. Despite this faith-based activism

³⁷ Sociologist Karl Marx (1818-83) has had a deep-seated impact on the development of sociology as a scholarly field, which has also affected parts of the sociology of religion scholarship. Although Marx's writings on social theory lacked an orderly treatment of religion, his viewpoints are traceable by focusing on his overall social theory and his theorisation about alienation. (Furseth & Repstad 2006, 29–31). In brief, Marx conjectured that the ruling class uses oppressive tools to subordinate their society's lower classes in developed class civilisations. Therein, the most prevalent ideas of any such time enabled legitimation to the higher classes. Nevertheless, religion can be understood as such a widespread idea that is utilised to fill the wants of the lower social classes. The ruling classes themselves were likewise also victimised by this alienating type of vision, as it obscured their understandings of historical and social forces in favour of something transcendent. (Furseth & Repstad 2006, 31).

³⁸ Andrew K.T. Yip reminds the reader with the critique that although gender and sexuality can be divided analytically within lived experience, nevertheless, gender and sexuality are frequently interconnected and filled with enmeshments to one another in lived experience. Thus Yip reflects them as being connected indivisibly within their essence. (Yip 2018, 113.)

tangent, I return to this study's foundational key inquiry about how the Rainbow Group operates as a socio-religious movement within the Church of Sweden. This is responded to by focusing the analysis of this study's materials from theoretical viewpoints of both historically informed social movement research and *queer lived research*, as stated above.

4 Materials and methods

4.1 Interview materials

This study's materials are four interviews with Rainbow Group members. The interviewees' ages ranged from 25 to 45 years old at the time of the interviews in 2019. The interviews that I conducted were somewhat biased in respect of gender. However, I have aimed to fade out the interviewees' genders, and this is why I refer to each interviewee with they/them pronouns. This is done because of my small number of interviewees to protect their identities.

The method of finding my interviewees transpired through this study's key informant. This key informant was able to suggest certain Rainbow Group members whom they knew beforehand from the Rainbow Group's activities. I received these suggested potential informants' contact information and then I sent them personally an invitation to the interview. This was a successful approach, in the respect that I collected most of my interviewees this way.

These key informant's gracious interviewee suggestions impacted who, in the end, could be interviewed. It is likely that my study's data became somewhat theologically biased for the chosen interviewees with the key informant's aid. Noteworthy, as a beginner researcher, I scarcely had criteria for the hoped-for interviewees before going to Umeå. This study's criterion for the interviewees was that emphasis was placed on potential interviewees being members of the Church of Sweden.³⁹ Consequently, this research choice impacted on the persons chosen and excluded from the potential interviewees of the Rainbow Group.⁴⁰ This aforesaid request was apparent in the initial Swedish language interview request (see 8.1 Appendix 1: Research call in Swedish). As such, Frenck and colleagues observe that a key informant's help is a fundamental methodological tool that assists in collecting information about church congregations (Frenk et al. 2011, 78).⁴¹

Furthermore, the interview data was thus somewhat theologically biased, in the sense that the informants were theological experts of the Church of Sweden and as such had a theological education. This means that all the informants were either practising priests of the Church of Sweden

³⁹ Also, Macke asserts that in organisational settings, like churches, to have membership to that particular community is more a defining factor for 'the field' than gender and sexual identities (Macke 2014, 18).

⁴⁰ This study's key informant had informed me that the Umeå Rainbow Group also had some active members of the Umeå Free Churches during the time this study's data collecting took place. However, only members affiliated to the Church of Sweden were asked to take part in this study because of the study's scope.

⁴¹ According to the scholars Steven M. Frenk and his colleagues' research, key informants can offer the most valid perspectives about their congregations' observable organisational features, in particular, when asked directly about them (Frenk et al. 2011, 78.) Frenk et al. (2011, 88–89) note that key informants are quite accurate in giving estimations of the demographic features of their congregations.

or were actively studying to become a priest of the Church of Sweden at the time of the interviews. One of the informants was titled *Församlingsherdar*, which means that they were engrained in a higher place to the Church of Sweden's inner hierarchy in Umeå. Moreover, this theological expertise was a significant feature already in the process of collecting and reaching out to the Rainbow Group's potential members. This became apparent when I reached out to one Rainbow Group's member, who later declined to be interviewed. They stated that they lacked theological education on Church of Sweden matters and for declined this reason.

The interviewees were at the time of the interviews associated with the Rainbow Group, aside from one interviewee. This particular interviewee had previously been part of the Rainbow Group. However they had not taken part in the Rainbow Group's activity in two years by the time of the interview. This means that three out of four interviewees were actively taking part in the Rainbow Group at the time of the interviews. All in all, the interviewees had taken part in the Rainbow Group in somewhat different time periods. Consequently, their temporal remembering of their experiences with the Rainbow Group varied quite considerably.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face at a place where the interviewees felt safe and comfortable in Umeå in a two-week timeframe in autumn 2019. These places varied from a private room in the Umeå University library to the work room of two interviewees. One of the interviews was conducted in the informant's home. Mostly due to practical considerations, as the Rainbow Group meets quarterly long-term ethnographical observation proved unattainable within the bounds of this study. Additionally, the durations of the interviews ranged from around 38 minutes to one hour and 20 minutes. The average length of the interviews was an hour as most of the interviews were long. The interviews were conducted as semi-structured interviews. The language of the interviews was English, although some small parts of them were in Swedish, too, as the interviewees are native Swedish speakers.

I transcribed the collected interview data, and later printed it for analysis. These paper printouts were held safely and destroyed after their use for the active analysing part of this work. The collected four interview recordings and their transcriptions are archived in University of Turku's Archives of the School of History, Culture and Arts Studies. In one interview audio recording, there were strong audio disturbances that may affect its understanding for any potential future research use.

Before conducting the interviews in Umeå, I conducted a few practice interviews to test my chosen interview framework with a student colleague before going to Umeå, as recommended by the

cultural studies scholars Pilvi Hämeenaho and her colleagues (Hämeenaho et al. 2022, 195). Also, I had prior comprehension of the Rainbow Group as I had briefly interviewed one of my informants as part of an exam for a course I was attending in late spring 2018. I did not use that previous interview as material for this study, because this data was meant only for a particular Umeå University course. This pre-interview, however, enabled me to create a tentative interview framework that was later used in my interviews. This kind of pre-information was required and aided my chosen interview method (Hämeenaho et al. 2022, 193–194).

The interview framework was also inspired by an earlier Finnish study of academic discussion of religion over LGBTQ religiosities and conceptualisations of agency by the sociologists Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische. Emirbayer and Mische's emphasis on underlining temporal perspectives of agency, in its past present and future, worked as an inspiration for my interview framework used in Umeå.⁴² I shaped the interview framework to outline the Rainbow Group's past, present and future, motivated by Emirbayer and Mische's work, which enabled my interview frame to emphasise time and continuity.

4.2 Qualitative research and thematic analysis method

This research is based on thematic interviews that were analysed with Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method. Altogether, this research is thus qualitative research by its all-over approach.

The interview transcripts were analysed utilising thematic analysis, inspired by Braun and Clarke. Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method is based on a search of themes from the research data. These themes, i.e. shapes of meaning, are created in the relation of a researcher clearly seeking for them (Braun & Clarke 2006, 7). I chose Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis method as it grants this study a rich understanding of the data at hand. This is particularly advantageous since the study of the Umeå Rainbow Group charts somewhat under-investigated

⁴² The sociologists Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische establish agency as something that appears in social engagements. Agency is seen as a theoretical framework that is grounded in temporally ingrained social action. Agency can be traced with human actions and inactions of past, present and future. (Emirbayer & Mische 1998, 962–973.) Emirbayer and Mische's theoretical conceptualisation of agency has gained wide recognition in the sociology of religion field and sociology. In particular, the sociologist and anthropologist Laura M. Leming describes Emirbayer and Mische's view of agency as more than mere action: that is, as action driven by both visions for the future and memories of the past. Leming highlights that Emirbayer and Mische's view of agency is particularly advantageous for considering religious agency. *Leming asserts that ideas of hope and memory are oftentimes bounded to religious agency. Therein, they are keenly illuminating for understanding religious agency.* (my emphasis, Leming 2007, 76.)

territory, in respect of LGBTQ-affirming religiosity within the Church of Sweden (see Braun & Clarke 2006, 11.)

My mode of analysis is built upon Braun and Clarke's thoughts about reading and re-reading research data in an in-depth way. My ability to conduct the interviews in person in Umeå enabled me to dive deep into the interview data from as early as the beginning of this research project.⁴³ This benefit of being able to gather all the interview data needed for this study was, according to Braun and Clarke (2006, 16), an asset of the thematic analysis research approach in this study.

First, I began my analysis by transcribing all the interviews I had conducted in autumn 2019. Doing the transcription was a fairly prolonged part of my study but, simultaneously, it allowed me to form a comprehensive general understanding of my material. In addition, this study's research questions evolved during the process of transcribing the interview materials. Furthermore, according to Braun and Clarke (2006, 14) the same kind of reformulating the research questions is fairly usual in the thematic analysis method that my study leaned into. It is also almost unavoidable for the research questions to be reformulated and refined during the research process within ethnographic studies (Huttunen 2010, 41–42).

Second, I printed the transcripts for my personal use. I made personal notes and underlined parts of the interviews whilst reading the transcriptions. These notes were about particularly interesting, curious and reiterated interview features. Moreover, I also created my own mind-maps in the hopes of gaining an increasingly deeper understanding of all the interview data and how it related from one interview to another. Leaning into Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis that can be more 'theoretically' driven (2006, 12), I wrote out the most notable and vital parts of the transcripts, and how they related to the questions about the Rainbow Group's actions, challenges and objectives. During this phase of work, I often relied on re-reading the interviews and trying to gather their shared features. At the end of the analysis process, I read through the interviews one more time, to ensure I had conveyed the overall picture of the data to my analysis.

Braun and Clarke's initial method phases were keenly followed in this study, acquainting myself with the data and coding well in accordance with their approach. This said, my method also varied from Braun and Clarke's initial thematic analysis, because my written analysis abandoned defining

⁴³ An advantage of this study is that I was able to conduct the interviews in Umeå in person. Conducting the interviews face-to-face supported positively the original ethnographic aim of this study. This ethnographic perspective later transpired into a qualitative interview study perspective, when I confirmed that this study lacked some features of ethnographic fieldwork.

the themes partly, namely in the writing part of the analysis. (Braun & Clarke 2006, 35–36.) This diversion was done in the interest of showing a broader spectrum of the overall stories within my data.

4.3 Ethical considerations

In this study, there are four main ethical considerations. First, there arose a question of the interviews' brief potential timeframe with my time in Umeå. Second, there was the question of the language of this study. Third, there arose a question of ethicality with the interview questions. Lastly, I reflected on the informants' overall rights and the ethical strengths of this study.

The first weakness of this study was the paucity of time I spent in person in Umeå during autumn 2019. The study's material collecting time was limited to only two weeks there. Subsequently this limited time remained as an uncontrolled factor as it may have been unsuitable or too rapid for some of the Rainbow Group's potentially willing informants, as I arrived in Umeå to conduct interviews at short notice. Furthermore, I was unable to personally join the Rainbow Group's meetings to introduce myself and ask for potential study interviews.⁴⁴ That being said, this distinct absence of me joining the Rainbow Group's meeting and introducing myself in person almost certainly led the study on a different pathway and interview sample as well as its design. It remains unknown whether this lack of meeting me influenced some of the Rainbow Group's members readiness or unreadiness to be interviewed.

Second, the interviews were held in both the informants' and my second language, which offered some challenges to this study. This language choice was done in the interest of clarity, as it offered a clearer and more thorough understanding of the Rainbow Group's work to me. However, conducting this study's interviews in Swedish could have ensured more interviewee-friendly contact. However, this language choice also could be contested (see Winchatz 2006, 83). In addition, the study's first research call to the Rainbow Group was sent in Swedish (see 8.1 section). In this research call, it was stated that this study's interview language would be English. It is

⁴⁴ This study could have extended and been more valid with a broadening of its materials to include real participant observation. In 2019 October, the Rainbow Group had a pre-Pride meeting and assembled jointly to prepare for Pride day and take part in the parade. Regrettably, I was unable to come to Sweden for that collective pre-Pride meeting. However, I was privileged to join in with the Rainbow Group's organised pre-preparation for the parade assembling. I unluckily lost their group of the Church of Sweden assembly participants in the Pride parade's great number of people, before the parade even began. All in all, in view of these feasible challenges as a researcher, I left participant observation outside this study's material choices.

possible that this choice gave some hesitation to potential interviewees, as they may have lacked certainty on which language was acceptable to use during the interviews.

Third, the study would have benefitted if I had realised I should send my interview questions' early structure and forms to the informants beforehand, because this would have clarified the interviews' main topics and themes, which could have illuminated to the Rainbow Group's interested informants about what these interviews focused on. At the same time, it could have allowed the informants to prepare themselves for these interviews beforehand. This study lacked sending the interview questions beforehand because before the interviews my question framework was unfortunately still taking shape. In addition, my questions could slightly be characterised as leading. For example, the question about the Rainbow Group's actions related to Pride were proposed to the informants quite directly, which could have straightforwardly influenced the research data. This decision to include the Pride question was informed by my knowledge of previous research on this topic, in that the ethnography scholar Curtis Neil Dickson conducted a doctorate dissertation on Christian LGBTIQ people's taking part in Pride parades in Sydney, San Francisco and Los Angeles (see Dickson 2018). Moreover, I found it important to ask directly about the Rainbow Group's involvement in Pride, because of the Umeå Pride's topical timeframe with regard to the time I spent time in Umeå during autumn 2019 during Umeå Pride week, and also because of my pre-information regarding the Rainbow Group's workings.

Another factor that almost certainly influenced the scope of informants in this study was my field of studies. I major in the study of religion and comparative religion field, which was pre-emptively informed to all the Umeå Rainbow Group's members. As such, this may have led some potential informants to wonder and maybe discover by themselves what this study of religion / comparative religion major is about. The study of religion as an academic field could have raised potential uncertainty among the Rainbow Group's members as being a separate field to theology, which may have impacted the Rainbow Group's associates' willingness to engage with this study.⁴⁵

This study aimed to follow the Finnish Research integrity guidelines. However, it could have been improved with more sensitive and careful consideration of power dynamics, particularly in its material collecting phase (TENK 2023, 13). Some of my interview questions were inadequately

⁴⁵ Moreover, there was a Rainbow Group member that I contacted in hope of a potential interview, who declined taking part in this interview study as they felt troubled about their lack of knowledge about the Church of Sweden's doctrines. That being said, this study did not directly engage with theological questions about the Church of Sweden's doctrines or creeds. This was however unknown to the Rainbow Group's members prior to the potential interviews.

considered before the interviews, particularly as I interviewed not only volunteers but also persons higher up in the Rainbow Group and the Church of Sweden in Umeå's inner hierarchy. This may have damaged the secure relationship between the researcher and interviewee to some extent.

Nevertheless, I abided by the Finnish Research integrity guidelines extremely well when it came to storing and later archive the research data (TENK 2023, 13; Fingerroos & Kokko 2022, 85–86). All of this study's interlocutors accepted the archiving of the research data. This can aid future students and researchers in their projects, yet it could be also assessed as a slightly uncertain factor in ethical sense, as one lacks knowledge on which kind of research those future research studies will be (Fisher & Anushko 2008, 100).

In conclusion, this study was conducted within the Church of Sweden's small influence group's interview data. Its strength in an ethical sense lies in my keen attempt to anonymise the study's interlocutors (see section 4.1). This is particularly central because humans are the core subject of cultural studies, and the need for research ethics is invaluable (Fingerroos & Kokko 2022, 67–68). Also in this study, the research data was kept exceptionally safely throughout the study process and then safely stored in the University of Turku SHCAS archives (see section 7, Bibliography).

5 Analysis

5.1 The Rainbow Group's actions

5.1.1 Education in the Church of Sweden in Umeå

This analysis chapter answers the first research question: how does the Rainbow Group's work as an influence group in the Church of Sweden? In the hopes of answering this question, the Rainbow Group's actions are divided into three main sections which describe, firstly, the Rainbow Group's educational actions within the Church of Sweden in Umeå. I begin by describing the sociologist Jonathan S. Coley's research work, which helps in examining the educational actions of the Rainbow Group in its early years, then the shift in the Rainbow Group's actions until the time of the interviews in 2019. Secondly, the Rainbow Group's engagements with the Pride parade and Rainbow Masses are illustrated. Thirdly, the other activities of the Rainbow Group are foregrounded.

This analysis uses the sociologist Jonathan S. Coley's scholarly work to build upon similar earlier research on this field. Coley studied LGBTQ groups on four Christian campuses and colleges in the United States. Coley divided those LGBTQ activist groups by their aims into three distinct categories.⁴⁶ The categories are direct action groups, education groups and solidarity groups. (Coley 2020, 53–54; Coley 2018.)

Coley describes *direct action groups* as groups that pursue policy- and structure-related changes in more confrontational ways within institutions (Coley 2018, 68, 123). Direct action groups employ varying action tactics like prayer walks, rallies, sit-ins and so on (Coley 2020, 55). According to Coley, *educational groups* are characterised by a group ethos that focuses on raising awareness about a shared set of values inside a community through institutionally focused and conciliatory means (Coley 2018, 71). Educational groups often draw in particularly religiously motivated participants. In addition, Coley notes that there are also *solidarity groups*. These solidarity groups provide a safe space for and facilitate a place to connect and grow with other LGBTQ people. These solidarity typified groups draw in particularly members with more open LGBTQ identities. (Coley 2018, 7–8.)

⁴⁶ In Coley's research, activist groups are broadly defined as *groups that strive for social change*, whilst enacting various tactics in hopes of facilitating the particular changes they seek (Coley 2020, 51; see also Coley 2018).

Following Coley's categories, I consider that the Umeå Rainbow Group could be described as both a solidarity group and an education group in 2019. Previously, the early Rainbow Group's actions could also be characterised slightly as a direct action group, yet nowadays that is mostly scarce in the Rainbow Group's actions, due to the Group's institutionalisation process as part of the Church of Sweden's Pastorat in Umeå. This prior 'direct action group' like action was mentioned especially in H4's interview.

H4 discussed that in their early days, the Rainbow Group had placed paper leaflets on the coffee tables of the Umeå parishes. Difficult and conflicting Bible passages were printed in these leaflets. These contrasting biblical passages dealt with, for instance, same-sex themes and other challenging topics, like adultery, and they were signed by the Rainbow Group. Regarding these leaflets, interviewee H4 explains that:

We always choose when we read the Bible, and we always (when reading the Bible) have an interpretation. And (with) some (Bible) passages, we like to say: 'Oh, but it stands.' We read it like: 'This is the word of God, exactly this is the word of God.' But a few (Bible passage) verses below, we could like: 'Okay, but we don't do that anymore.' -- We put it (the leaflets) on coffee tables in the parishes. So, on one side was like this difficult text from the Bible, that said something about. I mean not love, more like punish or kill. And then on the other side of it, was a text from the Bible, that is like 'God is love' or 'love one another'. -- [W]e have to choose. And what are, what do you say. What parts in the Bible do we give importance to when we interpret the whole Bible? We don't say that every text in the Bible is as important. I mean Luther says: 'Okay it is Christ. It's the story about Christ and his life, his death and his resurrection and his love. That's the importance and that's of course about grace'. (TKU/A/20/10.)

In this interview excerpt, H4 highlights that the Bible interpretation has to be guided by Luther's tradition of biblical understanding, which emphasises: "the story about Christ, and his life, his death and his resurrection and his love. That's the importance and that's of course about grace." H4 establishes that these leaflets were left by the Rainbow Group on the tables in hopes of facilitating a new ongoing discussion over how the Bible should be read and interpreted within the Church of Sweden in Umeå.

However, this action was received in a somewhat negative light within the Church of Sweden locally in Umeå. According to this interviewee, some parishioners called the vicar because of the Rainbow Group's coffee table leaflets. After that, the Rainbow Group had to remove the leaflets. This was mainly reasoned as being because the leaflets themselves were inadequate as mere leaflets on tables. According to the vicar, those mere leaflets lacked an offering to have a responsible and supported place to discuss these issues with someone. As such, there also arose a question of

whether it was ethical for younger children to read condemning Bible sections on topics like adultery. (TKU/A/20/10.)

It is evident that with this paper leaflets event, H4 as a priest abided with the Church of Sweden's then present vicar's judgement. This example illuminates insightfully how the Rainbow Group's agency and activism persisted in an attempt to stimulate more vigorous theological dialogues and came to withstand some the Church of Sweden churchgoers' emotional response. Furthermore, relating here to queer-affirming clergy and queer clergy, the scholar Megan Robertson (2019, 159–160) reminds the reader that agency can be multi-sided inside lived experience, in that clergy members conduct themselves and live inside and in concurrence with certain day-to-day structure systems.

Nevertheless, relating to these activist aspects of the Rainbow Group's past works, informant H2 considers that there were also benefits to it within the Church of Sweden to open theological discussions locally in Umeå. H2 states:

Regnbågsgruppen (in English: the Rainbow Group) is kind of that, theological, religious motivated activism, in a way. -- (if in) [t]he last years, Regnbågsgruppen hadn't been standing on the barricades. I think in these matters -- for example queer theology that (would have) been spoken earlier. It is kind of a way to motivate HBTQ (in English: LGBTQ) in the religious context. (TKU/A/20/8.)

In this interview quote, H2 pinpoints that Rainbow Group aided the Church of Sweden's queer theological discussion in Umeå locally. Also, H2 describes cautiously the Rainbow Group's work as "kind of theological, religious motivated activism, in a way". When asked further about queer theology, H2 considered that:

It's talking about God beyond gender. And the talking about biblical texts, that is in some traditions talked about male friendship. Is it possible that it was something else than male friendship? Giving another view to look on biblical texts. Saying that you don't. It doesn't have to be in the patriarchal -- way. We don't have to read texts like that. We can, we can stand on another position. Looking at the Bible texts from another position. -- And I think that is queer. (laughter) Not to say, 'it has to be this way because it has always been this way'. No, we can also look it in this way. That's my understanding of queer. (TKU/A/20/8.)

H2 notes here that their understanding of queer is enlightened by the idea that reading biblical texts in a queer way can give an additional perspective and look into those texts. This interviewee underscores that biblical interpretations can also be asserted from a perspective beyond a patriarchal way. H2 exemplifies this with their clarifying that queer theology is: "talking about God beyond gender". Therein, this informant also reflects a queer theological understanding of the nature of God, in a broader sense.

In addition, returning to this notion of activism, one other interviewee assesses this idea distinctly critically. This interviewee proposes that:

[E]verything – – is in some part political. And also, from the underground is activism, I guess. But it's not, it's not. It is not between hard activism. At least I haven't heard about religious LGBTQ groups going on like burning churches (laughter). – – I don't know. That is not, I mean, if you came from like conservative groups from church. It is like a bit, Regnbågsgrupp (in English: Rainbow Group) or similar groups are 'posing a political agenda on a non-political church'. Trying to force the Church in a different direction, which in a way we are (laughter). But I don't know. I don't think about activism in that way. It's more reformation than activism. (TKU/A/20/9.)

In this interview excerpt, the interviewee heavily questions the idea that the Rainbow Group is imposing a political agenda onto the Church, asserting that everything is partly political in its essence. In addition, *this interviewee stresses that they consider their work within the Church of Sweden as more of a reformation, rather than just activism.* (my emphasis, TKU/A/20/9.)

In a similar vein, another interviewee emphasises that they were questioning on a multitude of fronts to how to be “an activist in the Church”. *Fundamentally this interviewee has moved past just being an activist, in their own experience.* Furthermore, the interviewee states that they favoured the inner conversation culture of the Church of Sweden.⁴⁷ This interviewee underscores the importance of the Church of Sweden's internal culture's desire to sit down, talk and listen to one another. (my emphasis, TKU/A/20/10.)

However, the aforementioned interviewee expresses some disenchantment, as they states that this combining of perspectives was also challenging. For example, they asked on which premises, and how a person with a conviction that “homosexuality is a sin” could be welcomed, if they expressed a problem with LGBTQ persons of faith. This interviewee asks reflectively how this living in diversity worked and how they could affirm all the sides therein. (TKU/A/20/10.)

Following Coley's categorisations, during the time of the interviews, the Rainbow Group had done much labour to become increasingly like an education group. Coley's study underlined that educational groups engaged in a wide array of strategies in their conciliatory means, such as movie showings, lectures and safe zone educations (Coley 2020, 58). Similarly, the Rainbow Group was

⁴⁷ This description of the Church of Sweden's established and respectful conversational culture resonated with the scholars Saarelma and Koivisto's perspectives of the Church of Sweden's prior internal communication style (see Saarelma 2007, 269; Koivisto 2011, 39). According to Saarelma (2007, 23) the pastoral reality of churches creates an added aspect of the same-sex question, as the same-sex question focuses on the way churches deal with matters of sensitive and multidimensional issues, as well as on how those churches aim to influence these processes. However, this pastoral reality of churches also shines light onto how people from sexual minorities are treated within the practical parish life and joint work of the churches in question.

engaged in arranging lectures, LGBTQ+ affirming training with the local RFSL and movie showings (see more in section 5.1.3).

The Rainbow Group has also organised various professional lectures. For instance, they have invited the Church of Sweden's priest Ann-Christine Ruuth to discuss how to create a welcoming church. Ruuth is a transwoman and a priest of the Church of Sweden, who shared her story as a visiting speaker during Umeå Pride one year, according to one informant. (TKU/A/20/10.)

Furthermore, the Rainbow Group had invited theology professor Jesper Svartvik to come to give a seminar lecture about his book *Bibeltolkningens bakgator* (in English: *The Back Streets of Bible Interpretation*) (see more in section 2.1). This lecture was arranged as open for all interested people. In addition, they also arranged education by Svartvik for employed members of the Church of Sweden. As one interviewee says:

Sometimes we invited guests and (were) having like open lecture. So, we had Jesper Svartvik who works with theology and exegesis, mostly (with) the Old Testament. -- [W]e have also arranged for like open evenings with lectures but also more education for people employed in the Church. -- It's education in the Bible, in theology because a lot of questions that rise. (When it)[c]omes to LGBTQ issues. 'Okay, I want to say it's okay but in the Bible, it says it's not okay,' because we have some texts in the Bible that people often refer to. So that is. I find out after these years that (that is) a very important question. You can't skip the Bible! In a Lutheran Church. You need to work with the Bible. So Jesper was a perfect choice. A perfect person with his expertise and his knowledge. So, he could really work through these Bible passages. And say 'okay, it's not so was not so easy to interpret or view. You could not say that this is about same-sex relationships'. (TKU/A/20/10.)

This interview excerpt illustrates that the interviewee considered working with the Bible guided by prominent Swedish theology scholar Svartvik as highly valuable for the Rainbow Group's work. The interviewee emphasises that Bible interpretation is an extremely important question in this Lutheran Church.

Furthermore, this interview extract shows that the educational lecture that the Rainbow Group organised had different levels. These levels became apparent as, on one hand, the Rainbow Group arranged more internal education locally in the Church of Sweden for its employees. On the other hand, they also enabled an open discussion evening for interested people. This means that volunteers and other interested lay-people were also included and welcomed to come and learn about these topics.

Also, during the time of the interviews, H1 underscored that the Rainbow group had started a study group for interested lay-people and volunteers (TKU/A/20/7). This study group utilised a book,

called *Så att jag kan komma in* (in English: So that I can come in) that was also mentioned in other interviews (see TKU/A/20/7; TKU/A/20/10). This book is utilised in the Rainbow Key-process model in the Church of Sweden.⁴⁸

The educational aspects of the Rainbow Group's work were placed at the forefront in this section. The Rainbow Group's educational aims underscored respectful and multi-sided conversation culture that resonated with prior scholarship findings about the Church of Sweden's internal dialogues about LGBTQ+ and equality questions. The Rainbow Group has founded two-fronted education within the Church of Sweden in Umeå. First, it has invited and arranged professional lectures about LGBTQ questions in theology and about becoming a welcoming church altogether (see TKU/A/20/7; TKU/A/20/10). Second, it has also enabled volunteers and other interested lay-people to join these lectures and also to have a dialogue-emphasising study group. The Rainbow Group's work to raise discussion about queer theology, LGBTQ and equality issues enabled the professional lectures and education within the Church of Sweden. This education also reached lay-people as an education group based on the *Så att jag kan komma in* material used in the Rainbow Key-process model.

5.1.2 Partaking in the Pride parade

This section presents how themes of the Church of Sweden's taking part in Umeå Pride were discussed in the interview data.⁴⁹ This section begins with the significance of the Church of Sweden's Pride participation, which most interviewees considered as important (see TKU/A/20/7; TKU/A/20/9; TKU/A/20/10). Umeå Pride was first organised in 2002 (Västerbottens museum: LGBTQI history & cultural heritage in Västerbotten website, 2023).

The Church of Sweden's taking part in Umeå Pride was however quite slow at first. According to one informant, the road to the Church of Sweden's participation in Umeå Pride was at first challenging. According to this informant, the Church of Sweden has taken part in Umeå Pride since

⁴⁸ The Church of Sweden's Central Board (in Swedish: Kyrkostyrelsen) encouraged all dioceses to implement LGBT-friendly certification at workplaces within the Church of Sweden in 2013, and therefore the Rainbow Key-process model (in Swedish: Regnbågsnyckeln) commenced (History of the Church of Sweden and LGBTQ rights website, 2022). The Rainbow Key-process model was designed by EKHO, i.e., the Ecumenical Group for Christian LGBT people, in collaboration with the Växjö dioceses and Sensus study association. This process model comprises of study circles, education, reflection work and visionary work that aims for ongoingly inclusive congregations in the Church of Sweden. (EKHO the process model Rainbow key website, 2022.)

⁴⁹ The Pride question was part of the research framework structure during the interviews because of my prior knowledge of the Rainbow Group's connection with the local Pride parade, and the 2019 Umeå Pride parade's timeliness at the moment of the interviews.

2009. The informant grants that there has been a lot of development on this front in the past 10 to 15 years. (TKU/A/20/10.)

However, this development has partly been taxing emotionally to those involved in making the Church of Sweden in Umeå actively take part in Umeå Pride parade from its beginning. Talking about the Church of Sweden's and Rainbow Group's participation in Umeå Pride, this informant expresses that:

We have been a part of it (the local Pride) for ten years now. And it just has been a struggle, because in the beginning (of) it (we) were like three persons walking in the parade on (behalf of) the Church. And (I) felt disappointed and shamed, and sometimes, at least I, felt a bit angry and frustrated. (TKU/A/20/10.)

The informant describes the beginning of the Rainbow Group's participation to the Umeå Pride as being somewhat of a struggle.⁵⁰ This aspect was realised when there was only a small number of people walking on behalf of the Church of Sweden in the parade. At least this informant experienced negative emotions and even feelings of shame, because of this lack in their parade block's participant numbers.

Feelings of shame relating to Pride parade participation has been researched, by the human geography scholars Lynda Johnston and Gordon Wait. Johnston and Wait underline that one of their same-sex informant couples had expressed feelings of shame caused by viewing the local Pride parade on Australian TV. Nonetheless, this shame was different in the respect that it was caused by seeing scantily clothed people taking part in that Pride event on the TV. (cf. Johnston & Wait 2015, 109.) Likewise, the sociologist Curtis Dickson revealed similar informant experiences after studying LGBTIQ Christians' participation in Pride parades. One of Dickson's informants said that they had been feeling unsure about taking part in Pride before, because of scantily clad parade members. Dickson's informant's uncertainty stemmed from considering the relationship of Pride participators and the on-street audiences. (cf. Dickson 2018, 190–191.)

However, these feelings of shame that transpired in the aforesaid research of Johnston and Wait, and Dickson were distinctly different from my informant's negative emotions. I understood the

⁵⁰ In reference to this struggle, the study of religion scholar Peik Ingman stresses that in the future congregational LGBTQ matters should not be left on the shoulders of mere fire-souled volunteers within parish collectives (Ingman 2021). *Furthermore, it has been suggested that church employees that are LGBTQ allies may also experience minority stress when working on LGBTQ issues*, according to a lecture by the clinicians Sanna Metsäpuu and Terhi Väisänen from Perhesuhdekeskus (my emphasis, Metsäpuu & Väisänen 2021). This seminar was arranged by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland online.

informant's negative emotions and even shame as deriving from the Church of Sweden's inaction in Umeå Pride's early years (see TKU/A/20/10). Directly after this interview quote, this informant continues by describing the Church of Sweden's strength in engaging with other human rights issues, yet they grieve the Church of Sweden's lack of understanding of LGBTQ issues as a question of human rights (see more in section 5.2.1).

Returning to the subject of the Rainbow Group's Pride parade participation, informant H1 expresses that the Rainbow Group's aim to create the Church of Sweden's own group for Pride parades in Umeå was fuelled by a desire to have people see them and note that: "[O]h, there're the people from the Church taking part in Pride". The interviewee expresses later in the interview that they carried hopefulness that people would feel safer and more motivated to visit the Church of Sweden's churches in Umeå after seeing the Church of Sweden's Rainbow Group in the Pride parade and other LGBTQ-affirming seminars and other activities. (TKU/A/20/7.)

This resonated with the social movement researchers Elizabeth A. Armstrong and Mary Bernstein's earlier research. Armstrong and Bernstein establish that while joining the Pride parade, gay Lutherans demonstrate that there are ongoing institutional challenges and transformation in their churches (Armstrong & Bernstein 2008, 90).⁵¹ Similarly to this H1 interview quote, Armstrong and Bernstein stress that Lutherans walking in the Pride parade state both that "we gay Lutherans exist" and moreover "we are trying to make continuous change in the Lutheran Church's actions towards sexual and gender minorities for the duration of rest the year". Both new institutional organisational challenges and also new brimming identities are transpiring in these organisations. Armstrong and Bernstein establish this by stating that while joining the Pride parade, gay Lutherans demonstrate that there are ongoing institutional challenge and transformation in their churches. (Armstrong & Bernstein 2008, 90; see Fredriksson et al. 2015, 160.)

In prior research, the Rainbow Masses can also be understood as a reconciliation act from a church organisation towards members of sexual minorities, from the perspective of the church (Ray 2013,

⁵¹ Importantly, my interview frame lacked a question on whether the interviewees identified as LGBTQ in the pre-information about the interviews. It remains unknown whether the interviewees were LGBTQ or not. This lack in my research pre-information questions can be defended by underlining the intended privacy and anonymity of these interviews. However, it can also be critiqued as a characterised absence or lack in the broader study of religion field. As the cultural studies and gender studies scholars Gemzöe and Keinänen assess, there has been a distinctly ongoing mutual blindness in both the study of religion and gender studies in relation to one another. This means that the study of religion research has been lacking in gendered perspectives, whilst gender studies have been scant in topics of religions until quite recently. (Gemzöe & Keinänen 2016, 4.)

93; Fredriksson et al. 2015, 160; Nynäs & Lassander 2015, 458–459). In their Finland study, Nynäs and Lassander also found this to be accurate within their ethnographical observations (Nynäs & Lassander 2015, 469). Likewise, this also resonated within my data – in relation to the Rainbow Group’s participation in Pride. In particular, interviewee H1 underlines this aspect when discussing the significance of Pride to the Rainbow Group. This interviewee emphasises that in their mind this was one of the Rainbow Group’s central interests to do: to both walk on the Pride parade to celebrate love, and also to in a way reconcile the church’s historical mistreatment of LGBTQ people. Interviewee H1 considered:

[T]his is something that we feel like we want to apologise for. All the people we have mistreated during the years and continue to mistreat. So, we feel it’s very important for the Church to be engaged in the Pride festival. Because we have a lot of history of mistreating (the LGBTQ people). (TKU/A/20/7.)

In this interview excerpt, this interviewee deems that the Church of Sweden’s participation in Pride is crucial, because of years of historical and even ongoing mistreatment of LGBTQ people that the Church is involved in. This interviewee highlights that the Rainbow Group’s act of participation in Pride is also done in respect of apologising for this historical misdeed.

Interviewee H3 also expresses similar ideas of respecting the history of LGBTQ people. When discussing the significance of Pride, this interviewee illuminates that they thought of the Church of Sweden’s Rainbow Masses and taking part in the Pride parade as a multifaceted manifestation. H3 reflects about this:

I think in a way Regnbågs-gudstjänst (in English: Rainbow Mass) is a manifestation. It is meant as both an opportunity for us to have service together. – – [B]ut it is also a manifestation showing that we exist, and we have a place. The same thing with the Pride tåg (in English: parade), I don’t only walk for myself. I walk for all people that can’t. I walk for, in Umeå, I walk for people in like Djursholm or Lycksele. There where there is no Pride tåg. Where it is really hard to come out as gay or bi. – – So, for all the people that can’t. And all the people historically that had not been able to be themselves. So it is not just me in present during this time doing it. – – [I]t’s something that is done in remembrance and in solidarity. And I think, that is the similarity between Regnbågs-gudstjänst (the Rainbow Mass), and also two aspects of Pride tåg (parade) which are kind of similar. (TKU/A/20/9.)

In this interview excerpt, the interviewee describes that there are similar features in the Rainbow Masses and participating in the Pride parades. On the one hand, the interviewee describes taking part in Rainbow Masses as a place to manifest a service together and to have a place of existence there. Similarly, on the other hand, this informant underlines that the Pride participation is also done

by the parade participants with an awareness of solidarity and remembrance both in history and today.⁵²

Herein, I suggest that perspective of affects could also be located and inform this study. Religious studies scholar Sharday C. Mosurinjohn (2022) locates the affect as experience that is felt.⁵³ The affect can consequently connect people with others and those who have previously deceased (Mosurinjohn 2022; Alasuutari 2020, 28, 31–32). As such, this interviewee likens the Rainbow Masses and Pride parade to one another, in these respects.

This H3 interviewee’s message resonates with Susanne Lindström’s dissertation findings. In Lindström’s findings there arose a narrative about ‘us’ situated within the Church and ‘they’ whom were only LGBTQ people outside the Church (Lindström 2005, 143, 168). The persecution of homosexuals acts as an initiator wherein the political nature of Christianity can take place, creating the establishment of political ‘us’. Therein, this political ‘us’ could be seen as a sort of counter-discourse of Christianity. (Lindström 2005, 168.) This resonates particularly with this interviewee’s message. According to this interviewee they were walking in Pride for the people who were unable to for various reasons, whether it was about people in history or small towns with no Pride parade. (TKU/A/20/9.)

In this section, I have discussed the Rainbow Group’s participation in the Umeå Pride parade and the Rainbow Masses. At first, the Rainbow Group’s participation to the local Pride was started by a small number of the Church of Sweden’s members. This initial shortage of the Church of Sweden’s participant members created negative emotions in my informants according to my collected data. These expressed feelings of even shame were somewhat incongruent with earlier research about shame in relation to Pride parades. In my data it was evident that these negatively felt affects arose

⁵² Notably, the sociology of religion scholar Danièle Hervieu-Léger states that this kind of *anamnesis*, i.e. recalling of past memory, is oftentimes recognised as form of a religious rite (emphasis in original, Hervieu-Léger 2000, 125). Fundamentally, a religious group’s memory has meaning to the group’s adherents in the way that it strengthens the group’s self-definition and establishes both objectively and also a subjective traceable “lineage of belief” (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 124–125; Misztal 2003, 94). This religious lineage of belief is manifested and asserted by recalling a religious past that grants meaning to the present moment and encompasses the future. Hervieu-Léger maintains that religious memory performs as a normative feature of collective memory. (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 125.)

⁵³ Study of religion scholars Ahonen et al. observe that there are multiple theoretical ways to understand affects, ranging from materialistic energies into emotions. However, in cultural studies, affects are perceived as forms of energy that engage in interaction of bodies, not as individual’s emotions. (Ahonen et al 2017, 283.) Correspondingly, religious and media studies scholar Jenna Supp-Montgomerie (2015, 335) foregrounds that *affective theories shed light away from singular humans as bearer of emotions — into the socially lived experiences, which arise from bodies and matters*. Therein, affects enable an innovative way to understand, in Supp-Montgomerie’s words: “the dynamic topography of power at work in, with, through and as religion,” that engages in lived, embodied and communal religiosity (my emphasis, Supp-Montgomerie 2015, 342).

from the Church of Sweden's members' inaction and gradualness in taking part in the Pride parade, which differs from prior scholarly study findings. In addition, with their participation in the Pride parade, the Rainbow Group's members expressed aspirations for other Pride parades where street watcher and participants see the Church of Sweden's walking in Pride and taking note of that in a positive way. Thus, my informant expressed hopefulness that more people might be more open in coming to the Church of Sweden's events after viewing the Rainbow Group and the Church of Sweden taking a stand in the Pride parade.

This was done with the objective to demonstrate three elements of the Rainbow Group's participation. Firstly, the Rainbow Group hoped others to see the Church of Sweden's active participation in the parade. This was apparent particularly in one Rainbow Group member whose keen hope was that the Church's attendance was noted by the procession attendees and watchers. This resonated with prior sociological research on churches' participation in LGBTQ Pride parades. Secondly, some of the Rainbow Group's members thought that the Group's act in participating in the Pride parade was done as an act of reconciliation against historical LGBTQ discrimination that the Church of Sweden had enacted (see TKU/A/20/7; TKU/A/20/9). Thirdly, the Rainbow Group's participation in the Pride parade was also motivated by remembrance and solidarity. All in all, according to the Rainbow Group's data, they were motivated and expressed strongly felt significance to actively take part in the Pride procession and parade.

5.1.3 Establishing Rainbow Masses, drop-in weddings and other activities

This section centres other activities that the Rainbow Group has worked to establish in the Church of Sweden in Umeå during its active years. Firstly, I discuss and deepen how Rainbow Masses were deliberated on in my interview data and to showcase how drop-in wedding events were introduced in Umeå. Then, the analysis turns to discussing cultural events that the Rainbow Group worked to create in Umeå relating to LGBTQ themes. All in all, this chapter's ultimate aim is to illustrate the multitude of activities that the Rainbow Group has worked on over the years.

The theology scholar Tomas Ray emphasises that the Rainbow Masses act in ensuring that a church is open to all of its members, people from sexual minorities included. Ray underlines that his interviewees expressed that the Rainbow Masses *should not be critiqued*, because the Rainbow Masses were held in homage to the Church's historical past in LGBTQ matters. (my emphasis, Ray 2013, 93–94.)

Contrastingly, interviewee H3 exemplifies that there were people who criticised the Rainbow Masses in Umeå (cf. Ray 2013). These critiquing people say the Church of Sweden is open for everybody in all its Masses. H3 underlines that with this assessment those criticising people, in a sense, placed the blame on the LGBTQ persons. This informant characterises this kind of positioning as being problematic. They assert that:

When in fact, the problem is that the entire structure of it. The congregation, the way we celebrate, makes me feel unwelcome. And the implicit theology, or whatever, makes me feel unwelcome. – – They kind of, kind of take the problem away from themselves and put it on the HBTQ, like on the whole, the people that has been the problem the entire time for the Church. (TKU/A/20/9.)

Herein, H3 underlines that LGBTQ people can experience feelings of unwelcomeness in the church. H3 notes that this may arise from the implicit theology of the overall church and the people that maintain it. That being said, this interviewee underlines that there is a problem which arises as some people blame this overall implicit theology on the LGBTQ people of faith.

At the time when the interviews were conducted, during Umeå Pride in 2019, the Church of Sweden engaged in creating drop-in wedding events in Umeå. Drop-in weddings meant that the Church of Sweden's doors were open and there was a possibility for any couples wanting to marry to walk in to get married. Originating in the Västerås diocese, drop-in wedding events have multiplied around the Church of Sweden recently.⁵⁴

Interviewee H2 describes the drop-in marriage events in the following way:

We have two times a year a possibility to marry in the Umeå Stadskyrkan (in English: the Umeå City Church). And on the last day of the year, 31st of December, also in Backen kyrka (in English: Backen Church). The opportunity to come to the church and get married (laughter). So the Church is open. Opens at five fifteen o'clock. And you come and you say, 'we want to get married'. And you have the hindersprövning (in English: a Certificate of No Impediment). – – Yeah. And then you stand in, kind of stand in the line. You meet a priest and have a small samtal (in English: interview) conversation about marriage and then, well in a church, say 'I do' (laughter). And during Umeå Pride we have had this drop-in vigsel (in English: wedding) for now three years. – – So when I attended Regnbågsgruppen (in

⁵⁴ The vicar Jerker Alsterlund received the Church of Sweden's Innovator of the Year Award in 2013, for innovating the practice of drop-in weddings and drop-in baptisms in the Church of Sweden in the Västerås diocese. The Church of Sweden's jury for this award praised Alsterlund for "grounding the thresholds to God's grace". Vicar Alsterlund was also commended for finding ways to meet the Church of Sweden's members who are not part of the core congregations in a theologically respectful and reflective way. (The Church of Sweden press release, 2013.) It becomes noticeable that drop-in marriage events are also appearing more widely in the Church of Sweden's agenda nowadays, when visiting the Church of Sweden's official websites.

English: the Rainbow Group), we were working with getting this (drop-in marriages) done. (TKU/A/20/8.)

In this interview excerpt, H2 explains the logistics of the drop-in wedding event in the Church of Sweden in Umeå. They also underline that these drop-in wedding events have played an active part during Umeå Pride from 2015 onwards. H2 also notes that the Rainbow Group has been working on establishing drop-in marriages in Umeå for the last three years. In addition, another interviewee similarly mentions the 'drop-in marriages' as an activity that the Rainbow Group was involved with in Umeå, when asked about their current activities (TKU/A/20/7); yet they did so quite in passing.

Also, H1 expressed that the Rainbow Group had also come together to arrange movie nights and informal discussions related too these movies. For instance, the Rainbow Group had shown Prayers for Bobby movie, which had been emotionally impactful yet insightful movie for this interviewee to see. Furthermore, the Rainbow Group has collaborated with the local RFSL to educate the Church of Sweden's personnel. Interlocutor H1 establishes that the Rainbow Group and the Umeå RFSL has educated local churches personnel on matters like LGBTQ-vocabularies and various norms (TKU/A/20/7.)

In this section, the Rainbow Group' actions within the Rainbow Masses and other activities have been discussed further. The earlier section 5.1.2 also focused onto the Rainbow Group's members taking part in the Pride parade and its meanings.

The theology scholar Ray's informant had expressed that the Rainbow Masses were to be uncriticised, as they were held in honour of their church's historical past with relation to LGBTQ concerns. Theology scholar Ray's informant insisted that the Rainbow Masses should not be placed under critique, yet contrastingly, one of this study's interlocutor stated that they had faced critique over the Rainbow Masses (cf. Ray 2013). This critique was founded upon the idea that the Church of Sweden was already open in every church service they had, so there was no need for the Rainbow Masses as a speciality service. My interlocutor underlined that the reason why Rainbow Masses were needed was the overarchingly implicit and condemning theology that has been used against LGBTQ people historically and even in the present day. Additionally, this section presented discussion over 'drop-in' weddings (TKU/A/20/8; TKU/A/20/7) and some of the cultural activities, that the Rainbow Group facilitated in Umeå.

5.2 The Rainbow Group's challenges

5.2.1 Facing opposition and organisational silence

This analysis section seeks to respond to the second research question: What kind of challenges does the Rainbow Group experience in respect to their LGBTQ-affirming religious work? To answer this question, this section highlights what kind of oppositional actions challenge the Rainbow Group's work in Umeå. These oppositional actions are divided into three categories. These categories are the following: unknown oppositions to the Church of Sweden's LGBTQ-affirming work, general organisational silence and problems stemming from opposing theology students. The categories are discussed below in their respective order.

Unknown opposition and resistance to the Rainbow Group's work was illustrated, for example in H2's interview. H2 describes how the Rainbow Group's Pride flag was stolen, during the day of the Umeå Pride festival in 2019. H2 ponders the motive of the people who took the Pride flag, stating that:

During Pride the regnbågsflaggan, the flag with the rainbow colours were cut down from the Church. – – Maybe somebody wanted a flag? – – And they took it. Or maybe someone thought the Church shouldn't do the Kärlekens Mässan (in English: Mass of Love i.e. Rainbow Mass), shouldn't be involved with Pride. And they took the flag to get some kinds of protest? I think that's the main reasons, we can think that somebody took the flag. And I, I guess that it is the second one, – – someone thinks that it's an abomination to have a regnbågsflaggan beside the Church. (TKU/A/20/8.)

In this interview excerpt, H2 reflects on the reasoning that someone removed the Rainbow Group's flag during Umeå Pride.⁵⁵ The original and later stolen flag is visible in Appendix 2, in a picture taken by me during Umeå Pride 2019.

The contemporary culture studies and gender studies scholar Tuija Saresma notes that stealing or ruining flags is a serious action flared by a hate-filled motive. Saresma stresses that an object with great symbolic significance is desecrated (in Finnish: häpäiseminen) in such cases. Saresma equates stealing of the rainbow flag to the desecrating theft of a country's national flag. (Yle news article, 2022.)⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Kärlekens Mässan is the commonly used name of the Rainbow Masses in the Church of Sweden in Umeå (Dahl, 2024).

⁵⁶ Pride flags being stolen is not unheard of in the Nordic countries in the 21st century. As a case in point, the Finnish News Agency STT asked Pride organisers around Finland about their experiences of harassment, vandalism and other disturbances. STT sent the report to all 32 pride organisers, of which 25 answered. Noteworthy, out of the 25 answers, 22 of the organisers had faced harassment or other disturbances. That means that the majority of the Pride organisers

Desecration is oftentimes explained through a concept of sacrilege within the study of religion scholarship. Sacrilege can be defined as “a robbing or a violation of the sacred”.⁵⁷ Sacrilege can also refer to a harmful transgression over sacred beliefs (orthodoxy) or sacred practices (orthopraxy) and their connotational boundaries. (Culianu & Burgdoff 2005, 8010.) Violations transgressing the sacred that arise from within interreligious interaction or with outsiders of a particular religious faith are oftentimes referred to as ‘desecration’. There are also distinct intrareligious actions i.e. violation of the sacred that are committed by the religious group’s insiders referred to as ‘sacrilege’. (Culianu & Burgdoff 2005, 8010.)

Above Saesma underlined stealing of Rainbow flags as an outraged action aiming to defile a significant object symbolising LGBTQ people (Yle news article, 2022). Correspondingly, I propose that, whilst stealing the Church of Sweden’s Umeå Rainbow Group’s flag, the committer/s violated a secular sacred object that is a material symbol representing LGBTQ people’s presence in the world. The study of religion scholars Kim Knott and colleagues explain that the secular sacred can refer to, for example, objects, places, customs and symbols that are ‘non-religious’ in a formal sense yet are honoured and considered both non-negotiable and sanctified by people (Knott & Poole & Taira 2013, 11).

The sociologist Cathrin Wasshede asserts that contextualisation is fundamental when analysing Pride parades and the rainbow flag. Furthermore, this is because in many parts of the world, the rainbow flag is being threatened, and LGBTQ people are fighting against discrimination and even the threat of death, therein the rainbow flag as a transnational cultural artefact is interwoven with questions of LGBTQ people’s life and death. (Wasshede 2021, 149–152.) According to Wasshede (2021, 148–149), the rainbow flag can be considered as materiality in that these stripes of colour assembled together, illustrate a symbol. This materiality of the rainbow flag works to establish

were harassed or faced other vandalism in Finland, according to this evaluation in 2022. According to the event organisers, the most frequent forms of harassment and vandalism were inappropriate and offensive speech and Pride flags being stolen and destroyed. (Yle news article, 2022.)

⁵⁷ Sacrilege can be viewed as a slightly problematic concept in the cultural studies field. This due to how the sacred and profane come into contact inevitably with one another in the muddled lived experience and life. It has been suggested that these absolute bodily and conceptual boundaries summon and might even require people’s transgression. The history of religions scholars Culianu and Burgdoff express that: “The heart of the sacred lies at its edges, not at its center. The transgression of boundaries understood as sacred does not destroy the sacred, rather, it heightens awareness of those sacred boundaries where human desire for the sacred meets the mortal, transgressive reality of human life.” (Culianu & Burgdoff 2005, 8011.) Herein, the concept of the sacred is a *distinct theoretical construct* within cultural studies and the study of religion. Cultural studies researchers are keen to question how and on what terms people regard a certain something as sacred, and in which ways the word is used in its multitude of expressions. In cultural studies, the sacred is seen as a concept characterised by its outlining and separating principle, as it distinguishes and divides the sacred from matters considered as profane. (my emphasis, Enges & Mahlamäki & Virtanen 2017, 78–79.)

communities and groups of belonging, by emotionally connecting people and making their gatherings noticeable. Furthermore, Wasshede argues that in the Swedish public political discussion there has been an impactful discourse over the rainbow flag. Within this discussion, the rainbow flag has been understood as a favourable part of the culture in Sweden which is presumed as a naturalised characteristic of Swedish public political discussion.⁵⁸ (Wasshede 2021, 162.)

Returning to the interviews, H2 underlines that this can be seen as an example of the intolerance that the Rainbow Group experiences. H2 notes that the stolen Rainbow Group's flag was later reported to the police by the Church of Sweden in Umeå (TKU/A/20/8). This case in point about the stolen flag may indicate some negative resistance towards the broader religious atmosphere surrounding the Church of Sweden's LGBTQ-affirming work in Umeå in the 21st century.

In addition, H4 states that there was resistance to the Rainbow Group's actions in Umeå, particularly in the early years of the Group. They describe that this resistance was characterised by its silent approach. H4 observes that it was particularly challenging to face this opposition. According to H4, there arose opposing resistance during the Rainbow Group's efforts to start establishing Rainbow Masses within the Church of Sweden in Umeå. In regard to this, H4 explains:

[T]hese pins and these posters we put up, saying that: 'Welcome to celebrate Rainbow Mass'. Some people took down the posters and we could find our flyers in the garbage. -- People took away the pins in secrecy. Not in public. It was a very silent resistance. And that is often a hard thing to work with. (TKU/A/20/10.)

In the prior quote H4 describes that the Rainbow Group's Rainbow Mass flyers had been taken away and thrown into nearby garbage bins by unknown persons. Similar situations have also happened in other Nordic countries.⁵⁹ This quote also demonstrates how there had been silent resistance within some people in Umeå towards the Rainbow Group's actions.

⁵⁸ Noteworthy, Wasshede's article was published in 2019, around the same time as I gathered this study's interview data in Umeå. Wasshede recognises that from 2019 to the present day, the overall political climate has changed and hardened. In 2019, the Swedish general zeitgeist was more openhearted towards refugees and the rainbow flag. Nowadays, however, increasingly populist and conservative parties, like the Sweden Democrats (in Swedish: Sverigedemokraterna) and the Christian Democrats (in Swedish: Kristdemokraterna) have gained voters. Wasshede reflects personally this current growing conservative and more hostile environment towards LGBTQ, Muslims and refugees feels like "another universe" in Sweden. (Wasshede 2021, 170.) By this, Wasshede underlines the gradually hardened political environment, which also impacts on everyday life interactions and societal atmosphere.

⁵⁹ Similar disappearing flyers of Rainbow Masses has also happened in Finland. For instance, this happened at the first official Rainbow Mass, where the flyers disappeared from the notice boards, in the Helsinki Kallio Church at the end of April 1999. (Raittila 2020, 111.) In Finland, there was also prior LGBTQ-affirming church activity in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland that preceded the Rainbow Masses known today. The earliest Finnish LGBTQ-affirming Mass was held in the crypt of Helsinki Cathedral in 1982. At that time, it was called the Pink Triangle Mass. The Pink triangle was a notifying marker used by Nazis to signify mostly gay men; however it has been established as an

Another interviewee underlines that there is a challenge in the Church of Sweden's internal outlook on LGBTQ issues by some people. This could reflect the organisational silence of the Church of Sweden. Talking about this issue, this interviewee notes that:

[T]he -- issue is the mentality of like, the mentality of 'can we please not talk about this because it is so hard to talk about'. -- Like can we pretend that this doesn't exist? If we never talk about LGBTQ issues, then there are no issues and there is no LGBTQ. And (then) there is no conflict, and everything is good. (TKU/A/20/7.)

In this interview extract H1 describes that they had felt a problematic type of culture of silence within the churches. This mentality was typified by a conversation's silencing atmosphere, which created an ongoing challenge for the Rainbow Group's work.

In the same vein, one other interlocutor contemplates the following:

I'm very careful to talk about the systems but (it's) the small things, I mean sometimes it's just the silence! In an organisation (the Church of Sweden), or silence to do it (the LGBTQ affirming work). It's difficult to handle. It's like ignoring. It's like-- indifference. (TKU/A/20/10.)

In this excerpt, the interlocutor stresses their experience within Church of Sweden's organisation. Therein, this interlocutor has witnessed the culture of silence and some lack of care in LGBTQ-affirming involvements within the church. This is silent stillness is exemplified in practical terms: "[L]ike you're mailing out information and you don't ever get response. Or people say 'oh, I did not hear about that.' So it's, it's difficult." (TKU/A/20/10.) In this interview quote, the interlocutor problematises the overall silencing culture within the Churches. For instance, the interlocutor had posted information, yet they sometimes received scarce response. This may indicate certain indifference towards the LGBTQ issues within the Church of Sweden.

Next, this analysis moves to describe problematics related to Bible interpretation that is typified by opposing theology students. The oppositional priest students were another impactful element in my interview materials. This theme was apparent especially in the interviewee H3's description of how H3 became interested in the Umeå Rainbow Group. Regarding this experience, H3 expresses that:

[P]ersonally I felt that. I thought in my naivety that the people (students of theology who were) -- out to work (as) new educated priests. (I thought these) kind of new persons were open-minded (laughter). And not bigots and not the part of that old church. When I realised that people of my own age, (even) younger than me, (whom were) studying to become

international LGBTQ symbol from the 1970s onwards. The Rainbow Flag is also used as a symbol of LGBTQ minorities, although it became popular later, in the 1990s. (Raittila 2020, 52–53.)

priests and (were) against same-sex marriage and thought it was a sin. I don't know. I kind of felt, it was a bit of a shock to me. (TKU/A/20/9.)

H3 describes that while studying theology, they encountered other theology students who were likewise studying theology to become priests. In this interview excerpt above, H3 describes being shocked by the stark opinions of these opposing theology students, who perceived same-sex marriage as a sin. (TKU/A/20/9.)

Furthermore, those other theology students expressed stark dislike of the Ålidhems parish, for the reason that it was known for its liberal theology approach, although it was generally popular among Umeå students. H3 underlines that these conservative-minded theology students had altogether stopped joining the Ålidhems parish's events. They had chosen to go elsewhere into more conservative-minded churches. (TKU/A/20/9.) This indicates a certain division among even younger theology students and Church of Sweden members. This division could be characterised as being somewhat ostracising against the Rainbow Group's members, in the sense that these aforesaid opposing theology students expressed such strong dislike of the Ålidhems parish events that they conclusively decided to not attend their services.

All in all, these challenges illustrate that there is division within the Church of Sweden in Umeå amongst the mentality of the church members. Some people consider the Rainbow Group's works as unacceptable, hence they tried to dismantle the group's work by, for example, stealing the group's Rainbow Mass flyers and their Rainbow flag. The Rainbow Group's research data suggests that these oppositional acts were hard to combat, because of their facelessness and the churches overall atmosphere of silence and concession emphasising mentality (TKU/A/20/7; TKU/A/20/10). Moreover, this opposing resistance is also apparent as early as in the theology students, some of whom are 'voting with their feet' by going into conservatively minded churches, thus being immersed in the atmosphere that is more like-minded with their conservative held beliefs. This may indicate some ostracism against other theology students and those believers who held LGBTQ+ matters to be significant and valued. Therein, there are impactful challenges in both communication and in faith questions between more LGBTQ+ affirming church members and priests and their lay and conservative-minded oppositions. Additionally, these results indicate that there exists some indifference towards the Rainbow Group's LGBTQ-affirming work within the Church of Sweden in Umeå.

5.2.2 Calling for a human rights aware and self-reflective church

In this section, the Rainbow Group's call for self-evaluating actions by the Church of Sweden is considered. This section starts by contextualising the Rainbow Group's mission within the Church of Sweden against broader global questions such as on human rights. Then the Rainbow Group's values of self-assessment are reflected on.

Continuing from their expressions of some negative emotions related to the Rainbow Group's scarce participation in the early years of the local Umeå Pride, one interviewee asserts that the Church of Sweden in Umeå needs to engage in LGBTQ matters. The interviewee determines that within the Church of Sweden:

– –[T]here are a lot of. We talk about human rights and equality questions and Church is good to work with like poverty and global questions. – – But when it comes to LGBTQ, you don't see the questions of human rights. And I mean if you really look at the international perspective, it is really a question of human rights. I mean people are getting killed because of their sexuality or how they dress or who they love. And that should be a question for the Church to take part in. (TKU/A/20/10.)

In this interview quote, this interviewee states that the question of LGBTQ persons' rights should be seen as an international question of human rights that the Church of Sweden should take part in. They highlight that there is a threat of death to LGBTQ people from an international perspective. Thus, the Church of Sweden should address the question of LGBTQ human rights, because of this reasoning. This interlocutor also expresses that within their Church there are profound human rights minded discussions, with questions on for example abject poverty. However, this human rights concern within the Church of Sweden became progressively more silent and even silenced when it came to themes of LGBTQ human rights.

One other interlocutor also underlines that one should consider societal and global developments in their entirety when considering LGBTQ people's human rights:

I think, if you look at the secular world, at the society as a whole. We have a kind of two separate narratives going on. Or at least there are two separate movements. We have at the same time. For quite some time the society has gotten more openminded, more accepting. It has become a lot better for people, in fact LGBTQ community a better world. It has become a better world to live in, in Sweden for the last twenty years. But at the same time, we have a movement which is trying to reverse that. So we have like a far-right movements, which are paradoxically affirming with the Russia, which is funny or its strange. But maybe not that strange if you consider Russia to be, not a communist, but a dictatorship country. Strong in essence a dictatorship country. And Russia with its anti-gay laws and concentration camps for LGBT people. So, we have like two narratives going on. – – We have different values

going. It hasn't stated to clashing extremely yet. But (I) kind of feel like there are on a head-to-head course. (TKU/A/20/9.)

In this interview excerpt, the interviewee evaluates socio-political narratives that are at force in the world presently. On the one hand, they underline that there is an increasingly open-minded and LGBTQ people-affirming movement in Swedish society. On that, the interviewee considers that while globally the world has become an improved place to live for a number of people, there is a movement and values that tries to reverse this progress. There are also far-right movements that engage with strong Russian anti-gay influences. Moreover, there has been a noticeable climate of increasing homophobia throughout the Russian Federation.⁶⁰ As such, these events were particularly timely observations in 2019, when these interviews were collected, as these events were current news during 2019.

Nonetheless, the data about these interlocutors' socio-political evaluations and reflections tells a story about how concerned and distressed the interlocutors are confronted with these aforesaid profound human rights breaches.

Returning to the Rainbow Group's stand within the Church of Sweden, H1 expressed that in their mind the Church of Sweden will always need to be a self-evaluating church (TKU/A/20/7).

According to Lindström's study's findings, there arose a deep want to liberate the Church of Sweden from homophobia and present the 'true' church, that lacked discrimination (Lindström 2005, 168). This was also visible in my interview data, particularly with H1. H1 describes that the Rainbow Group needs to engage people in the church to change the overall culture in an attempt to create a more welcoming and profound church. According to H1:

[W]e want to -- engage in this question and in this situating. And get active, to change the Church and the culture that we have. So that the Church is, as I said earlier, a more warm and welcome place for LGBTQ+ (people). That is not something we do primarily because we want more members, or something like that. We do it because we are Christians. -- And it is part of our calling. (TKU/A/20/7.)

⁶⁰ Fundamentally, this is because there had been active persecution of LGBTQ people inside the Russian Federation's Chechen Republic starting from 2017, according to Council of Europe Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination report (Council of Europe report, 2018). This development was exemplified by the establishment of so-called *propaganda laws*, which make non-traditional sexualities illegal amongst minors beginning from 2013, despite an international critique of this law. (my emphasis, Council of Europe report, 2018.) This study's interviewee herein stresses that there have been concentration camps for LGBTQ people within the Russian Federation in contemporary history (TKU/A/20/9). As a case in point, according to Human Rights Watch Internet article, Chechnyan police and authorities have enacted anti-LGBTQ purges since 2017. These anti-gay purges included unlawful prisoning, degradation and severe violence towards LGBTQI people, mostly presumed gay men. (Human Rights Watch Chechnya, 2019; see Council of Europe report, 2018).

Here this interviewee highlights that the Rainbow Group's drive to engage in LGBTQ matters is founded upon their Christian beliefs. This Christian 'call for action' is also exemplified a little later in H1's interview as they rhetorically underscore that within the Church of Sweden: "[I]t is important that we show that we are doing this because of our belief. -- If you believe the way we do, then the consequence of that belief should be to engage with these type of questions and problems." (TKU/A/20/7.)

Interlocutor H1 underlines that the Church of Sweden in Umeå has to reflect on: "what would Jesus do" and act according to those reflections (TKU/A/20/7). According to the English language professor Daniel Shore, the question of "what would Jesus do" has become a notable piece of American culture, particularly from around 1995 onwards. This question is commonly abbreviated as WWJD. (Shore 2010, 1.)

Shore asserts that the WWJD question is a form of bringing the two millennia-old historical *imitation Christi* tradition into the lives of current-day Christians. This imitation Christi tradition, Shore argues, is traceable in modern world form with the use of the WWJD question. For example, some Christians contemplate the WWJD question frequently in their everyday life, while to others it brings comfort at times of moral hardship. Shore states that the WWJD question ethically resonates with many evangelical and non-evangelical Christians. (Shore 2010, 2–3.) The scholar Coley also notes that this abbreviation is particularly used by 'liberally' leaning Christians (Coley 2020, 57). Herein, H1 emphasises that there is importance in engaging with LGBTQ matters, because of their Christian held beliefs. Thus, their active Christian faith should, according to this informant, be visible in their actions as well.

With this in mind, H4 recognises that the Church of Sweden is already good a working on some human rights issues, like poverty (TKU/A/20/10). This similar clear appreciation of the Church of Sweden's societal stands, is clear from H3, who states that:

[W]e are working constantly about how a climate footprint, for example, is. -- Like the climate thought is a part of everybody's everyday job. Which is great and there's a theological background to it. And it is really good. -- And I would like the Regnbågsgruppen (i.e. Rainbow Group) to be the same thing. I would like it to be an everyday part of everybody's job as well, to think (about LGBTQ questions) theologically. -- To become like the backbone of the Church identity in the Church of Sweden. (TKU/A/20/9.)

In this quote, H3 expresses hope that the Church of Sweden will engage in LGBTQ matters more rigorously and, in doing that, will support their personnel to think, reflect and consider LGBTQ themes as part of their daily work. Therein, H3 expresses their objective that the LGBTQ+

affirming work should be considered as a background and a pillar of the Church of Sweden's theological and social work.

In this analysis chapter, it has been illuminated that this study's interlocutors were appreciative of the Church of Sweden's stand for human rights. The Church of Sweden's stand for climate consciousness and the Church of Sweden's work against poverty was particularly praised in this study's data.

Nevertheless, this study's interlocutors stressed that the Church of Sweden should also be increasingly LGBTQ human rights conscious church. The study's interlocutors gave examples of ongoing global human rights violations against LGBTQ people, as demonstrated by e.g. persecution against LGBTQ people in Chechen Republic.

The Rainbow Group calls for the Church of Sweden's churches to remain continuously self-evaluative. In that, this analysis chapter indicates that this study's interlocutors considered the Church of Sweden's LGBTQ-affirming work to be founded upon their own profound religious convictions. Taken together, this chapter suggests that the Rainbow Group's members find themselves striving towards human rights conscious churches.

5.2.3 Structural challenges

In this section, the analysis moves to foreground a number of other issues which were identified in the interview data. It is divided into two sections. The first section pinpoints questions of democracy and engaging volunteers in the Rainbow Group's work. The second section is concerned with questions of shared responsibility in Umeå.

The Rainbow Group's volunteer lay-members and their position in the Rainbow Group are touched upon in every interview. However, the question of volunteers and their position in the Rainbow Group is particularly prominent in interviews H3 and H1 (TKU/A/20/9; TKU/A/20/7).⁶¹

H3 stresses that it was intrinsically valuable for the Church of Sweden in Umeå to engage its volunteers. H3 notes that engaging the lay-volunteer base was avidly discussed in the Church of Sweden at the time of the interviews. Concerning this, H3 stated that:

⁶¹ In addition, H1 reflects on the volunteers and how the Rainbow Group would benefit from engaging the volunteers more effectively (TKU/A/20/7). This is discussed more in section 5.3.1.

I think it's kind of strange that a Church that tries, or at least says that: 'We want to make, we want to try to make people feel more involved. We want more volunteer workers. We want to get people engaged at the volunteer basis.' -- 'We want to lift that up and, you know, make that like real part of the Church.' (TKU/A/20/9.)

In this excerpt it is apparent that H3 sees that there is willingness and ongoing aspiration for the Church of Sweden in Umeå to engage its volunteer members. However, H3 sees that the Church of Sweden in Umeå also has a challenge on this front. H3 continues by asserting that:

At the same time when there's a group of volunteers doing something, that then, it does not reach official status until there are paid workers being part of that group. Which lowers the status of the volunteers in the group and makes volunteers not-less [sic] eager to be part of it. So, I think it's a bit of a, it's bit of a strange way for a Church. At least in Umeå, there has been a lot of talk about how we want to make, make people volunteers, different kind of volunteers feel strengthened. Or how can we encourage volunteers, how can we find places or, I don't know. -- And at the same time diminish the volunteer basis of the Rainbow Group in an attempt to make it more official. (TKU/A/20/9.)

Here, there is an unexpected dichotomy with the Church of Sweden engaging with its volunteer members. This dichotomy arises from the Church of Sweden in Umeå's intense desire to try to engage its lay-volunteer members in church activities, yet not granting their own group within the church the legitimacy and authority for decision-making.

The study of religion scholar Anna Wessman, née Haapalainen, notes in her research on the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland that this church too declared itself to actively be an open community for all its members. However, Wessman asserts that it is simultaneously self-evident that at their congregational level, the church's lay-members' agency can be limited by, for example, the church's salaried members' own conviction. (Haapalainen 2020, 1.)

Relating to this, H3 describes that it was vital to try to establish the Rainbow Group as becoming a part of the Pastorat in Umeå, as the earlier mostly volunteer-based group lacked legitimacy in the Church of Sweden in Umeå. Nevertheless, H3 expresses concern that this process may have also driven away some volunteer members of the Rainbow Group at the same time. Observing this from their present priest position, H3 concludes that:

Since it (the Rainbow Group) is official (part of Umeå Pastorat) now. It is not just something that a group of volunteers are doing. But at the same time, I think it makes the volunteer basis of the Group a little bit weaker. -- [W]hen I've been to (the Rainbow Group's) meetings, it kind of makes the democratic aspect of it little bit skewed. So because the volunteers, even those that have been part of it (Rainbow Group) since like forever, my experience is that when people are getting paid to be there, when they have something to say or when they have an opinion about how the Regnbågs-gudstjänst (in English: Rainbow Mass) is going (to) be formed, or when, or where something. Their words weigh a little bit

heavier, – – than the volunteers because, you know, they (the group’s paid members) are the pros.⁶² (Laughter) We are the pros. (TKU/A/20/9.)

In this excerpt, H3 illuminates how they viewed the Rainbow Group’s meeting democracy as somewhat tilted in favour of the Church of Sweden’s salaried members taking part in the Rainbow Group. This showed as a shift that happened after the Rainbow Group became part of the Umeå Pastorat. Moreover, H3 foregrounds here that the salaried members’ voices and opinions had, thus, more authority within the Rainbow Group’s meeting in comparison to the volunteer lay-members of the group. This is because a number of the Rainbow Group’s selected members were paid to be there, as they were assigned to take part in the Rainbow Group by the Umeå Pastorat.

In addition, H3 expresses concern that this process may have also caused some volunteer members to leave the Rainbow Group. H3 condenses that in their personal opinion, if the core people in the Rainbow Group are paid to attend the group, then it cannot be as enjoyable to the volunteering lay-members to attend. (TKU/A/20/9.)

This interviewee’s observation about the tilted democratic shift in the Rainbow Group’s internal structure relates to how questions of authority and power within Evangelical Lutheran congregational contexts have been studied by Wessman. Wessman underlines that there is “devotional substance” that can increase individuals’ authority within Evangelical Lutheran congregational contexts (Haapalainen 2020, 1). Similarly to the aforementioned H3 interview excerpt, Wessman notes that devotional substance can be found from such aspects as theological education background and a long-term position as congregational active or a volunteer, which can grant authorisation to church members (Haapalainen 2020, 17).

These questions of power become particularly important when it comes to everyday work within Lutheran churches. Wessman highlights that *theological orthodoxness is underlined within congregations, because different interpretations of faith and different interpretations of church interact and collide in them*. For example, some believers find that Rainbow Masses manifest hopes for a church to be an experiencing and encountering church. At the same time, conservative believers can perceive that upholding and abiding by heteronormative norms enables a church to be this experiencing and encountering church. (my emphasis, Haapalainen 2020, 18.)

⁶² Here the informant uses the spoken English expression ‘pros’, which is a shortened and informal spoken language expression of the word ‘professionals’ (Cambridge Dictionary website). Thus, the informant refers to the salaried members of the Rainbow Group being professional members in the group.

Comparable to H3's concern over the Rainbow Group's declining volunteer basis, Wessman fundamentally observes that the closer one is to the congregations' grass-root levels, the more vulnerable to conflicts its environment turns. Therefore, individual agency is unequal for all the congregations' members. Who holds the power and how it is shared are significant questions within churches.⁶³ This also resonates with which kind of qualities are supported to receive and/or excluded from receiving power within churches. (Haapalainen 2020, 18.)

Moreover, one other interviewee underscores that the Rainbow Group's priest members now require more assigned time and organised efforts in their LGBTQ-affirming socio-religious work. According to this interlocutor:

Yes! The challenge is like, people are engaged but it's hard to find time to do this. And since we have working quite consciously with getting representatives from different parishes in the Church of Sweden. -- So we have persons but they don't have like time to do it really. So that is, I mean that's why I'm saying, we have to move it to the next level.
(TKU/A/20/10.)

In this quote, this interlocutor is struggling with their church-representative members lack in worktime to engage with LGBTQ equality questions. This shows that there might also be structurally understood challenges with how the Church of Sweden representatives' worktime is assigned in practice in Umeå.

In this section, some of the structural challenges of the Rainbow Group have been presented and compared with similar prior research. It has particularly contemplated the volunteers' position and their lack of power within this group. The volunteers' position in the group seemed to be somewhat restricted, as they lacked a strong say in their early group as their position in the Church of Sweden in Umeå was not taken as seriously. Nowadays, as the Rainbow Group has reached a stronger position in the Umeå diocese, it remains a question if the Rainbow Groups' volunteer lay-members still have an equal position in the group's decision-making life in practice. In addition, the clerical perspective of this study was clearly apparent in this section. This is noticeable as the interlocutors expressed worry over the Rainbow Group's volunteer base that has been gradually declining over the years (see TKU/A/20/10; TKU/A/20/9). In addition, one interlocutor expressed a fundamental practical concern over the Rainbow Group's clerical members being assigned enough working time to engage in their LGBTQ-affirming religious work.

⁶³ Also, prior Finnish research that suggests that pastors who are assembling Rainbow Masses are positioned at a central point of the Church as an institution and therein can be thought to be in a powerful position when meeting people in Rainbow Mass contexts. (Fredriksson et al. 2015, 161).

5.3 The Rainbow Group's future objectives

5.3.1 Striving towards a welcoming church with the Rainbow Key-process model

The Rainbow Group's objectives towards a welcoming church and the Rainbow Key-process model are discussed in this analysis section.

This question of the Church's openness arises in H2's interview. H2 establishes that the Rainbow Group's work was valuable, as it resonated with the overall congregational work towards openness among the church lay- and employed members. H2 accentuates that welcoming should encompass all kinds of people within the Church of Sweden in Umeå. According to them:

[W]e have been working that in our congregation. -- Reflections about how do we make our community, our *liksom* (in English: like) our congregation open. -- [S]o that people are welcome. That is not only white, male or elderly white Swedish people that can attend. Not the race, not the sex, -- is standing in the way. That's one thing that the *Regnbågsgruppen* (the Rainbow Group) has done. (TKU/A/20/8.)

In this quote, H2 notes that the Rainbow Group determined questions of openness in the Church of Sweden in concurrence with other parishes. H2 recognises that reflections on how to make the Church increasingly welcome has been a fundamental part of the Rainbow Group's work so far.

The Rainbow Key-process model was somewhat discussed in my data. Most of this study's interlocutors (TKU/A/20/7; TKU/A/20/9; TKU/A/20/10) spoke of the Rainbow Key-process model's significance and its steps already taken in the Umeå Diocese. This was particularly clear in the interview data of H1 and H4 interviews. They both discussed the Church of Sweden's Umeå Diocese's study group which employed the Rainbow Key-process model's study materials. This is elaborated further in 5.1.1 section.

According to H1 interviewee, the Church of Sweden was unable to get an LGBTQ-affirming certificate directly from the RFSL. This interlocutor states that:

We can't get a Rainbow certificate from RFSL. -- Because of the fact that well, we can't get rid of the Bible. And RFSL feels like there is too many texts in the Bible that can be interpreted in a bad way, so therefore they can't give us certification. -- [S]o the Church have their own stamp of Rainbow approval. (TKU/A/20/7.)

In this excerpt, H1 explains some of the background of the Church of Sweden's Rainbow Key-process model. Likewise, they recognise that there are also tensions of a biblical nature that impact on how the LGBTQ-affirming certificate has been established within the Church of Sweden.

Conclusively, H4 and H1 condensed that the Rainbow Key-process model was already utilized in the Rainbow Group's study circles and in education of some of the Church of Sweden's employed members in Umeå (see TKU/A/20/7; TKU/A/20/10). This is elaborated further in 5.1.1 section.

Moreover, a few interlocutors in my data consider the self-reflection that the Church of Sweden will hopefully gain while it continues its LGBTQ-affirming stand and its socio-religious work. This is considered as one interviewee clarifies that:

[O]f course, not everyone in the Church agrees with this movement. But even, even the people (who) do not agree. (They) still agree that we must feel. We must make everyone feel welcome at Church. That is like a core, a core thing that must always uphold. So at the present time, I feel we are not as much needed as we were just five years ago. So I think, our role at the moment is more to keep the discussions going. --So we don't fall back into sort of laziness and think that 'well, now we have put up a rainbow flag at the Church. Now we are done. Now everyone will always feel welcome no matter what we do.' And then we -- [f]orget to continue having this mindset and this discussion that how we do. How do we make people feel safe and loved and welcome in the Church? (TKU/A/20/7.)

In this excerpt, the interlocutor is aware that not all the Church of Sweden's members agree with the Rainbow Group's LGBTQ-affirming socio-religious work and their actively conveyed faith.

However, this interlocutor locates the middle ground. They state that most of the Church of Sweden's members still agree on the understanding that their church must be a sincerely welcoming and open place for everybody.

The interlocutor (TKU/A/20/7) expresses a slight disdain for complacency within churches, as they express that: "[O]ur role at the moment is more to keep the discussions going. --So we don't fall back into sort of laziness and think that 'well, now we have put up a rainbow flag at the Church. Now we are done'." Therein, this interlocutor calls for the Church of Sweden to remain self-reflective in their continued work for an LGBTQ-affirming stand.

Moreover, interviewee H1 underlines that: "I don't think that there needs to be a group that looks exactly like ours. But the Church will always need a group that makes sure that the people coming to the Church feel welcome. Truly welcome!" (TKU/A/20/7.) In this excerpt, H1 emphasises that the Church of Sweden is always in need of a similar kind of group to the Rainbow Group, to ensure that people feel welcome at the Church of Sweden.

In this analysis section, this study found that the Rainbow Group was already partly engaged in the Rainbow Key-process model study circles during the time of the interviews. This was most significant way that the Rainbow Key-process model was discussed in this study's data. What is more, throughout this study's data, the interlocutors were emphasising their shared value of

openhearted welcomeness in the Church of Sweden. This idea of welcomeness was raised as a shared value of all the members of the churches, and even those who opposed the Rainbow Group's LGBTQ-affirming socio-religious work.

5.3.2 Re-vitalising the Rainbow Group as a solidarity group

This analysis section answers the last research question: What are the future objectives of this movement inside the Church of Sweden? The section aspires to describe how the interviewed Rainbow Group's members reflect and envision their group's future hopes and objectives.

According to interviewee H1, the Rainbow Group has shifted in its composition during its years in becoming a more heterogeneous group. H1 describes this:

The composition of the members of the Rainbow Group, they changed during the years. So in the beginning we were more like voluntary young people. Now it is a lot of employed people that have, they -- are paid to go there. -- And then we said that 'that is wonderful'. Great. But we also sort of want to get back to the roots of voluntary people. (TKU/A/20/7.)

In this interview excerpt, the interviewee underlines that the Rainbow Group has encouraged the Church of Sweden's employed personnel to join the group's work. This development has been thought of with strong positivity.

The Rainbow Group's institutionalisation process was fundamental in giving the group more credibility and, thus, enabling it to have a stronger standing in the Church of Sweden in Umeå. Consequently, the Rainbow Group was institutionalised as part of the Church of Sweden in Umeå, which meant it cannot be overlooked easily. This was viewed as an important process nonetheless, by most interviewees. (TKU/A/20/7; TKU/A/20/9; TKU/A/20/10.)

However, in the prior excerpt, according to H1, there is also a desire within the Rainbow Group to return to a more volunteer-driven group. This resonated within ideas of H4 and H3. For example, both H4 and H3 express sadness over the Umeå Rainbow Group's declining volunteer base (TKU/A/20/10; TKU/A/20/9). This is given significance on two fronts. Firstly, H4 underlines that it is sad that the original lively energy of the Umeå Rainbow Group had diminished over the years (TKU/A/20/10). In addition, H3 expresses concern about how attracting and engaging their volunteer members of the Umeå Rainbow Group felt for the group nowadays (TKU/A/20/9).

When asked further about the significance of the volunteer aspect of the Umeå Rainbow Group, informant H1 was keen to determine that:

Yeah, there is value in having similar interests and meetings. But I also think that you can never, you can always improve and be. You are always good as you are, and you can always learn something new and improve. So, I mean there should always be a Rainbow Group. There hasn't, it doesn't need to be our group. The main goal is that every church has a rainbow group or something like that. That there should always be a place in the Church for people with similar interests to meet and continue developing. (TKU/A/20/7.)

In this quote, H1 expresses that there is a need for a Rainbow group in the Church of Sweden locally. This group does not necessarily need to be this particular Rainbow Group, as there is hope that the local churches would collectively have more similar groups. Later on this interview, H1 describes that the Umeå Rainbow Group is now creating “a ripple effect” within the Church of Sweden in Umeå.⁶⁴ (TKU/A/20/7.) All in all, this interlocutor asserts that there should always be a place in the Church of Sweden for like-minded people to meet and keep on growing.

In correspondence with interviewee H1, interviewee H4 expresses similar hope for increased volunteer activity to be re-kindled in the Rainbow Group's future. H4 emphasises that:

[W]e need a group that we have *lost* now. This, this safe space for people who are interested, people in the Parish who want to or people outside the Parish who want to come and have a safe place to talk about live, faith and LGBTQ issues. (TKU/A/20/10.)

In this quote H4 notes that the Rainbow Group was a kind of solidarity group in its beginning that has in ways disappeared now. In conclusion, most of the interlocutors note that they hope that the Umeå Rainbow Group will remain as a vital solidarity group in the future, for the interested volunteers and others alike (TKU/A/20/7; TKU/A/20/9; TKU/A/20/10).

In addition, H2 expresses that even if the Rainbow Group's consequence may be small to the general lay public in Umeå, their significance might be impactful to some people. According to H2:

[T]he significance to the regular Umeå-bo (Umeå public) is not so big I think. But if you are – – a person related to HBTQ (in English: LGBTQ). Probably (then) you can, you can feel that I am welcome and the Swedish Church in Umeå is taking my life seriously. (TKU/A/20/8.)

In this quote, H2 underlines that although the general public in Umeå might be unaware of this Rainbow Group within The Church of Sweden in Umeå, the Group's significance might be exceedingly great to someone with relations to the LGBTQ community, as they may understand that this stand that the Church of Sweden in Umeå is making with its Rainbow Group, is vital to them as then they are seen in the church.

⁶⁴ In the English language, ripple effect is a noun which describes an event or an action that has an effect on something else, in creating continuous change (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries website).

This also resonated impactfully with H3's consideration. Fundamentally, interviewee H3 reflected about the Rainbow Group as part of the church, observing that:

The Church making a stand, or at least some part of the Church making a stand – – with something like the Rainbow Group, it shows people, some people it gives hope. And it tells some people that the Church is active and is a part of like the good forces of the world. And it's also, the Church is also a living thing. The Church is changing. – – The Church if constantly like evolving along with the society. So that the Church that has the courage to take a step away from the traditional views of a church, is a living and thriving and brave Church. So, I think some people find it encouraging. (TKU/A/20/9.)

In this quote, H3 underlines that the Church of Sweden signals hope to its members with the Rainbow Group's work. They state that the Church of Sweden is constantly evolving with society with its living faith. According to this H3 interlocutor, this church is to give hope and braveness to many people, as it remains this courageous and living place of Christian faith.

In this section, the Church of Sweden's Umeå Rainbow Group's potential future hopes and objectives have been described. In my interview data, most interlocutors believed that the Rainbow Group's institutionalisation process had been beneficial for the group (TKU/A/20/7; TKU/A/20/9; TKU/A/20/10). That being said, many of my interlocutors express keenly that the Rainbow Group would also need to remain as a vital and thriving social solidarity group. Two of my interlocutors express sadness over the decline in this group's lay-volunteer foundations (TKU/A/20/10; TKU/A/20/9). Conclusively, the Rainbow Group's future objectives were still open, as there remained an unawareness of what will happen with the changed composition of the Rainbow Group, due to its institutionalisation process being seen as beneficial yet challenging to lay volunteers.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Discussion

This study's objective was to establish how the Rainbow Group operated as a socio-religious movement within the Church of Sweden in 21st century Sweden. This overarching research question was founded upon the study's theoretical framework on queer lived religion. In this discussion chapter, this study's overall results are considered and reviewed against prior research. Then after, this study's contribution to the study of religion subject is evaluated. In the conclusive remarks, this study moves to suggest some potential future research topics.

The study's results indicate that Umeå Rainbow Group has engaged in multi-sided LGBTQ-affirming socio-religious enterprises throughout its existence, since its original establishment in 2012. My research data proposes that the Rainbow Group engages in theological education with, for example, queer theology seminars and study groups. The Rainbow Group's educational aims are established on two levels. It has established queer theology seminars to which both Church of Sweden personnel and their lay-members were invited. The Rainbow Group has also provided LGBTQ-affirming education to priests and other employees of the Church of Sweden in Umeå in collaboration with the local RFSL. In addition, the Rainbow Group has enabled its volunteers and other interested lay-people to join in with certain theology seminars and discussion assemblies. Volunteer lay-members of the Rainbow Group and other interested volunteers were also invited to a study group that was founded partially on the Rainbow Key-process model's resources.

The Rainbow Group's lived religion was also noticeable when this members took part in the local Umeå Pride parade as the Church of Sweden's parade block. The Rainbow Group's participation in Umeå Pride was started by a few of the Church of Sweden's members initially. The Church of Sweden's initial gradual entry, with a lack of parade block participants in Umeå Pride, caused negative emotions for my interlocutors in this study's data. Their expressed feelings of shame were incongruent with earlier research about shame in relation to Pride parades. In my data it was distinct that these negatively felt affects were caused by from the Church of Sweden's members initial inaction in taking part in the Pride parade, which differed from prior scholarly study findings (cf. Johnston & Wait 2015, 109; cf. Dickson 2018, 190–191). Moreover, my data suggests that the Rainbow Group members were nevertheless keen for the parade onlookers to see that the Church of Sweden representative was walking alongside the Pride parade. One interviewee hoped that this might welcome some estranged people to revisit the Church of Sweden. In addition, half of my

interlocutors (TKU/A/20/7; TKU/A/20/9) underlined that the Rainbow Group's participation in Pride was done in homage to the history of LGBTQ+ people and the Church of Sweden.

The Rainbow Group has experienced its LGBTQ-asserting socio-religious work to be challenged by unknown interference, indifference and even external protest. This opposition to the Rainbow Group's work was particularly visible in the protesting of some theology students, where some theology students had chosen altogether to discontinue attending the Ålidhems congregation's church services and events. These conservative theology students' 'voting with their feet' led to a stark separation among the theology students, which shocked one of my interlocutors. This early division among theology students echoed the overall silent obstacles of the Rainbow Group. These silenced obstacles were also characterised by direct interference with their work. This was apparent with the destruction of Rainbow Mass flyers and the stealing of the Rainbow Group's Rainbow Flag (see 8.2 Appendix 2).

According to my data, the Rainbow Group's internal challenges have altered over the years. In the beginning, the Rainbow Group was a group of mainly lay volunteers that was lacking in legitimacy in the Church of Sweden. The Rainbow Group worked extensively to become more institutionalised in the Umeå Pastorat. This institutionalisation process aided the Rainbow Group in becoming an increasingly established and observed part of the church. The institutionalisation process was obtained as the Rainbow Group worked to get active board members from all Umeå Pastorat's six parishes (TKU/A/20/9; TKU/A/20/10). This institutionalisation process helped the Rainbow Group to gain some authority and have more power in the Umeå Pastorat. However, my data shows that this institutionalisation process impacted the Rainbow Group's inner democracy to some degree. My interviewees expressed concern for their group's lay-volunteer members' agency and preparedness to continue to take part in the Rainbow Group, as its composition had changed over the years. The Rainbow Group's democratic aspect was weighted in favour of Church of Sweden salaried members who were paid to attend this group, during 2019 when this study's data was collected.

Conclusively, the Rainbow Group's future objectives were to continue these discussions inside the Church of Sweden. The Rainbow Group kindled hope to re-vitalise themselves as a solidarity group for the volunteers and interested lay-members. Furthermore, the Rainbow Group called for more systematic and collective LGBTQ+ affirming strides from the Church of Sweden in Umeå Pastorat institutionally. The Rainbow Group's interviewed members expressed that maintaining this Group should not be the greatest end goal of their LGBTQ-affirming socio-religious work. Fundamentally,

the Rainbow Group's members aimed for all the Umeå churches to engage in this LGBTQ-asserting socio-religious work by their own initiative and readiness. This was the way their movement could be maintained with vitality.

My study's contribution to the study of religion is located in three factors. Firstly, this study contributes to religious faith-based activism discussion, relating to the 'religious LGBTQ activism' research terms used. In this study I have partly assessed this research term with relation to queer lived religion. In my data, there was variance in how my interlocutors positioned themselves with the idea of faith-based activism. This study coincides with the theology and religion scholar Megan Robertson's (2019, 43) critiques of the perception that inherent activism is needed to have queer Christian identities. Further, this study enquires if the use of the term 'religious LGBTQ activism' is apt in the case of this Rainbow Group's LGBTQ-affirming socio-religious work. As this study's results cautiously suggest, this research term is incongruent with the Church of Sweden in Umeå Rainbow Group's lived experiences and religiosity. That being said, this study maintains that 'religious LGBTQ activism' research term has benefits, as it facilitates international academic discussion with scholars from various fields, for example, Peter Nynäs and Mika T. Lassander, Jonathan S. Coley, Melinda D. Kane and Karen E. Macke.⁶⁵

Secondly, this study's contribution to the study of religion field ties in with its theoretical framework. This study proposes that queer lived religion research could assist in research of religious LGBTQ people and also LGBTQ-affirming religious groups and denominations. In this sense, this research follows the theology scholar Eetu Kejonen's assertion (see Kejonen 2020).

Thirdly, this thesis is successful in the respect that it provides a small contemporary case study about the Rainbow Group within the Church of Sweden in Umeå. Granted, the sociology of religion scholars Inger Furseth and Pål Repstad critique case study modelled research. According to Furseth and Repstad, case studies can have a kind of imperceptible tendency to overstress an impression that religious movements themselves are locally established, small-scale communities that are

⁶⁵ These aforesaid scholars utilise this research term to describe phenomena that are quite varied and differ from one another. For example, in the study of religion scholars Nynäs & Lassander's article (2015, 454), they refer to sociologist Andrew K.T. Yip's prior research (2007) as 'religious LGBT activism'. Yip's early article is found in the *Journal for Faith, Spirituality and Social Change* (2007). I was curious about this throughout my study project. Hence, I personally contacted this renowned sociology scholar and was graciously provided with a copy of Yip's (2007) article. Then after I discovered that in this article he had described 'LGB Christians and Muslims', whereas Nynäs & Lassander (2015) refer to this part of Yip's article as 'religious LGBT activism'. (See Nynäs & Lassander 2015, 454; Yip 2007.) As such, I imagine that this changed wording was most likely Nynäs & Lassander's decision because these scholars aspire to engage with international scholarly dialogues within the study of religion and sociology with this subject matter and with their own research.

isolated within larger societies of modern world. (Furseth & Repstad 2006, 149.) However, this study still shows that the Rainbow Group has thrived and paved a way forward in accordance with the Church of Sweden's history in LGBTQ-affirming stances (see 2.1.1 Historical timeline of LGBTQ developments in Sweden and in the Church of Sweden).

This study was theologically biased, as my interlocutors were aspiring to become priests, and some were already priests of the Church of Sweden. The study was also built upon prior scholarship. A number of researchers have sought to establish how LGBTQ-affirming affects and is experienced among member of the clergy in the past two decades (see Butcher 2019; Dewey 2011, 2014; Iivanainen 2023). Moreover, this study could be further used in the spirit of this prior scholarship. It would be particularly interesting to continue this study by collecting data from the Rainbow Group and the Church of Sweden's clergy leadership members in Umeå diocese, like the scholars James Jeffrey Butcher and Ani Iivanainen conducted in their studies (Butcher 2019; Iivanainen 2023). Therein, future research topics could be how the clergy leadership personnel reflected on LGBTQ equality themes and their own position in these discussions in the Church of Sweden.

Consequently, this research could be continued by broadening its scope to cover the Rainbow Group's lay-members. This could ensure that the volunteer lay-members' agency and objectives could also be centred. On the one hand, this approach could be developed by following in the theology and ministry studies scholar Timothy Peter Edge's dissertation's footsteps (Edge 2020). Edge draws upon theorisation of ordinary theology and studies the Church of England's active voluntary members.⁶⁶ This would also be beneficial to showcase a practical theology approach to the Church of Sweden's Rainbow Group. On the other hand, future research could be developed to focus on volunteer lay-members' agency, influence and its limiting factors in Umeå. This could be applied research that followed scholar Wessman's prior and ongoing research themes (see Haapalainen 2020).

As such, future research could also be conducted on Rainbow Masses as a speciality of the Church of Sweden's church services. This would follow in the footprints of the sociology of religion professor Per Petersson's prior research (see Petersson 2013). This future path of research could be particularly intriguing from the perspective of an ethnographic research approach.

⁶⁶ The theology scholar Jeff Astley's insight is that in the scholarship of Christian theologians, most have consistently overlooked the great majority of lay-Christians' theological insights and grasp (Astley 2002, 1). Astley hopes to fill this absence by hypothesising a construct of ordinary theology. According to Astley, ordinary theology consist of studying the 'God-talk' of lay-member believers, who have scarce theological education (Astley 2002, 52). This approach offers insights from practical theology.

6.2 Afterword

This MA study was written in the hopes of exploring the Church of Sweden's Umeå Rainbow Group's lived religiosity, and in so, studying the Church of Sweden's distinctive LGBTQ-affirming religious stands. In that, this study was only able to cover a brief period and perspective on the Rainbow Group's time. This period of the study was between 2012–2019.

Afterwards, the Covid-19 pandemic stopped the Rainbow Group's work to a great extent. Currently, the Rainbow Group has challenges in re-starting its momentum. (Dahl 2024.) In addition, the Rainbow Group and the Church of Sweden's LGBTQ+ matters have taken steps forward in Umeå to some extent, after this study's interviews.

Currently, one of the six congregations in Umeå dioceses has been accepted and been granted permission to begin the Rainbow Key-process model. This accepted congregation is the Ålidhems congregation (in Swedish: Ålidhems församling), which began the Rainbow Key-process in 2022 (EKHO the process model Rainbow Key website, 2022).

It remains to be seen how the Church of Sweden's LGBTQ+ affirmative religiosity will continue to develop in Umeå, and whether the Rainbow Group's hopes and calls for increasingly communal, collective and systematic religious LGBTQ+ affirming work will be answered more profoundly within the Umeå Pastorat in the Church of Sweden.

7 Bibliography

Research data

Archive data

The interviews were collected and transcribed completely by the author.

The archive data is located in the TKU collection of The Archives of the School of History, Culture and Arts Studies, SHCAS Archives, University of Turku.

Interviews

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H2 TKU/A/20/8 8.10.2019

H3 TKU/A/20/9 3.10.2019

H4 TKU/A/20/10 7.10.2019

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8 Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1: Research call in Swedish

Hej!

Jag håller på att skriva min pro gradu -avhandling om er Regnbågsgrupp. Jag är intresserad in hbtq jobb inom Svenska kyrkan, och din grupp är en viktig del av den i Umeå. Jag hoppas att jag kan intervju dig om den här gruppen. Jag är mycket intresserat av dina erfarenheter om gruppen och dess hbtq arbete inom Svenska kyrkan.

Jag studerar religionsvetenskap som huvudämne och avhandlingen är den sista delen som saknas av mina studier. Eftersom svenska inte är mitt modersmål, framför jag att intervju på engelska.

Alla intervjuer är konfidentiell och anonym. Utöver är intervju frivilligt, du kan bestämma vad du vill dela om dig själv och dina erfarenheter. Jag kan skicka min avhandling till dig när den är färdig.

Intervju skulle ta 1–1,5 timmar.

Mitt arbete styrs av professor Terhi Utriainen från Åbo Universitet. (university email address and university phone number are redacted).

Jag svarar också gärna på eventuella frågor om denna forskning. Mvh: Elina Mäkinen

(university email address and phone number are redacted).

8.2 Appendix 2: Photo of the Umeå Rainbow Group's stolen flag



Photo 2. This is a picture with the Church of Sweden Umeå City Church and their Pride flag during Pride 2019. The flag was later stolen on the same day (assumably), which is elaborated on in section 5.2. of analysis. This picture was taken by me in Umeå on 29.9.2019.

8.3 Appendix 3. Summary in Finnish

Laadullinen haastattelututkimus Uumajan Sateenkaariryhmästä Ruotsin kirkossa

Pro gradu -tutkielmassani tutkin Ruotsi kirkon sisäistä ryhmään, joka tekee uskonnollista LGBTQ+ vaikutustyötä Uumajassa. Tämä Ruotsin kirkon sisäinen ryhmä on nimeltään Regnbågsgruppen, mikä kääntyy suomeksi nimellä Sateenkaariryhmä.

Uumajan Sateenkaariryhmä alkoi kahden paikallisen Ruotsin kirkon papin vetämänä vapaaehtoisten maallikkojäsenten ryhmänä vuonna 2012. Nykyään Sateenkaariryhmä on institutionalisoitunut osaksi Ruotsin kirkkoa Uumajan pastoraattia. Näin ollen Sateenkaariryhmä koostuu joukosta Ruotsin kirkon hallinnollisia virkahenkilöitä, pappeja ja maallikko vapaaehtoisia.

Aineistoltaan tutkielmani pohjautuu pääosin neljään laadulliseen haastatteluun Sateenkaariryhmän osallisten kanssa. Kyseiset puolistrukturoidut haastattelut tehtiin paikan päällä Uumajassa vuoden 2019 loppusyksystä. Tutkimushaastateltavani olivat pääosin teologian asiantuntijoita, minkä takia haastatteluaineistoni oli tietyin piirtein väritynyttä. Haastateltujen suostumuksilla kaikkien haastattelujen aineistodata ja litteroinnit ovat arkistoitu Historian, kulttuurin ja taiteiden tutkimuksen laitoksen -arkistoon Turun yliopistolla.

Tutkimuksen analyysi metodi on aineiston teemoittelu, missä seurasin Braunia ja Clarkea (2006). Teoreettiselta viitekehykseltään työni tukeutuu uskontososiologiseen uskonnollisten liikkeiden tutkimukseen, uskonnollisen aktivismin tutkimukseen ja erityisesti eletyn uskonnon tutkimustraditioihin. Näin ollen, tutkielmani paikantuu uskontososiologian, uskontotieteen ja sukupuolentutkimuksen tieteenalojen limittyymiin.

Kantava tutkimuskysymykseni on: kuinka Uumajan Sateenkaariryhmä toimii uskonnollis-sosiaalisena liikkeenä Ruotsin kirkossa? Tutkielmani tavoite on valaista Sateenkaariryhmän uskonnollisen LGBTQ+ vaikutustyön käytännön toimintaa, erinäisiä haasteita sekä mahdollisia tulevaisuuden näkymiä Uumajassa. Seuraavaksi avaan tutkimuslöydöksiäni edellä mainitussa järjestyksessä.

Tutkimustulokseni viittaavat siihen, että Sateenkaariryhmän toimii moninaisesti osana paikallista kirkkoa. Alun perin ryhmä palveli vapaaehtoisia maallikkojäseniään. Tällöin Sateenkaariryhmän toimintaa värittivät rentohenkiset tapaamiset, erinäiset kulttuuritapahtumat ja ajoittaisten Sateenkaarimessujen järjestäminen.

Nyttemmin Sateenkaariryhmän toiminta on edelleenkin monipuolistunut. Sateenkaariryhmä on järjestänyt myös erinäisiä koulutustapahtumia, Ruotsin kirkon Sateenkaariavain-prosessimallia hyödyntäviä queer-teologisia lukupiirejä ja aktiivista teologista koulutusta osana Ruotsin kirkkoa. Tutkimani ryhmä osallistuu vuosittain myös paikalliseen Pride-paraatiin. Sateenkaariryhmäläiset osallistuvat Pride-tapahtumiin, muun muassa kävellen osana kulkueväkeä, järjestäen Sateenkaarimessuja ja mahdollistaen niin kutsutut 'Drop-in' -häättilaisuudet osana paikallisen kirkon ja Priden-tapahtuman yhteistyötä.

Sateenkaariryhmä on kohdannut erinäisiä haasteita Ruotsin kirkossa ja nämä haasteet ovat muuntaneet osin muotoaan Sateenkaariryhmän institutionalisoimis-prosessin myötä. Alkujaan ryhmää haastoi sen legitimaation puute osana Ruotsin kirkkoa. Sateenkaariryhmän institutionalisoituminen osaksi Ruotsin kirkon Uumajan hallintorakennetta, on luonut ryhmälle uutta painoarvoa osana paikallista Ruotsin kirkkoa. Tämä prosessi on samalla kuitenkin myös heikentänyt Sateenkaariryhmän vapaaehtoisten ääntä ryhmässä, luoden myös aikapaineita sen kirkollis-virkahenkilö jäsenille.

Tutkielmani aineisto paljasti Sateenkaariryhmän kahtalaisen tulevaisuuden näkymät osana paikallista Ruotsin kirkkoa. Yhtäältä aineistostani nousi esiin ilmeinen tarve jatkaa Sateenkaariryhmän toimintaa osana paikallisen kirkon sosiaalista toimimista eräänlaisena vapaaehtoisjäsenten solidaarisuusryhmänä. Toisaalta aineistoni ilmeni Sateenkaariryhmän jäsenten orastavan halun päästä osaksi Ruotsin kirkon Sateenkaariavain—prosessimallia.

Paradoksisesti Sateenkaariryhmän jäsenet kokivat, ettei tämän ryhmän olemassaolo tulisi olla ryhmän ydin tulevaisuuden toivomus. Sateenkaariryhmän jäsenet peräänkuuluttivat sen sijaan Uumaja paikallisen Ruotsin kirkon kuuden seurakunnan kollektiivista vastuuta ja koko työyhteisöistä aktivoitumista LGBTQ+ asioiden edessä kohti kirkkojen johdonmukaisempaa muutosta.