MALMÖ UNIVERSITY

Queer in Malmö

Exploring a queer safe space in an uncertain time of increasing intolerance

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Abstract

This thesis has investigated the term safety in relation to queer spaces located specifically in Malmö. The aim was to explore a newly opened queer bar in relation to safety, because of the increased intolerance being shown in Sweden. As shown in the examples of school students' negative attitudes towards the group of homosexual, bisexual and trans people which has increased and in relation to the fact that Malmö Pride and RFSL have to keep their meeting locations private because of threat images. During the beginning of the work a new queer bar had just opened in Malmö, which became an important part of the cultural lens for this work.

The thesis has explored this queer space as mentioned with the lens of phenomenology and ethnographic methods. By applying Sara Ahmed's concept of orientation along with other theorists such as Jack Halberstam about queer spaces and Katie Goldstein's queer homes: has been central for the understanding of queer spaces. This thesis has through qualitative research contained my own phenomenological experience followed by interviews and conversations with people within the queer community that I had the chance to meet and investigate at the bar as mentioned. The analysis identifies five different themes connected to safety and to understand the bar as a safe space. Finally the thesis highlights the need for continuous work for safety within queer spaces in a world of increasing intolerance and the need for more of these spaces in Malmö, where I argue that more resources need to be put into these locations.

Keywords: Queer space, orientation, safety, phenomenology, inclusion.

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1. Introduction

For a long time Malmö was a rich city regarding night life and club culture. There were lots of clubs, underground clubs and gay clubs. But during the years something changed and a lot of clubs were closed down. Commonly known as “klubbdöden”, *the death of the clubs.* Since in the last twenty years almost half of the clubs In Malmö have disappeared. The nightlife is a big part of the cultural ecosystem and important to a city. It's a way for young musicians to get a chance in the industry and for people to experience culture. It also opens the question of safety, since clubs bring people out in the evenings where people otherwise can feel unsafe walking home alone. Having people out “is bringing eyes to the city” (Studio Ett, 2026). The question I therefore started reflecting on: What does that do to a city if many places close down? Coming from cultural studies and a cultural perspective, I also view clubs as important for a city. They bring joy, music, culture and dance - it's a way for people to come together and share experiences. I came to think about what it did with Malmö´s club culture.

As someone who has lived my whole life here, I love Malmö. However I can miss some of the old clubs I used to go to. Around the same time as I'm starting my thesis process with an interest in the nightlife of Malmö, a new queer bar is finally opening in town. Atemlos, introducing itself as Malmö´s only queer bar. They describe themselves as: “Not a club. Not a trend. But a space” (Atemlos, 2026). Introducing itself as a space caught my interest and on this term, I realized I wanted to explore the queer night life in Malmö and investigate it in relation to safety. Because not only did I miss some of the old night places, I also felt that Malmö was lacking labeled queer places. As Sweden's most diverse city, and also described as a queer city by many. Why do we have so few queer places? What does the newly opened bar mean to the queer community in Malmö?

The topic queer safe spaces has been researched in multiple ways and settings in different places of the world before. One example is Thayse Madella (2025) who explores how xicana literature has navigated between safe and unsafe spaces in the borderlands through a decolonial perspective. Mandella is using the term (un)safe space to describe the reality of these people. With the starting point of the novel *Forgetting the Àlamo* she analyzed how queer women of color are written into history to challenge colonial power structures. The term safe space is not a place in this literature but a constantly ongoing process of a movement and an alliance in an hostile environment (Madella,2025:13).

Continuing the queer nightlife has had a big importance for queer lives and community. We see it in history with the Ballroom culture which was shaped during the 19th century Harlem Renaissance era and took its prominence within queer communities in the 1970s in New York. This is also where voguing, which was a form of dance created by black and latino LGBTQ+ community where marginalized groups created their own balls to be able to express themselves freely. These places served as safe places for LGTBQ people of color. “The ballroom scene saved my life. Sometimes people think it's simply a club scene, but it is a family scene.” (Soto,2024).

Amin Ghaziani (2024) writes in his book about the LGBTQ nightlife in modern London and describes how the queer nightlife is not disappearing as being said but instead the format is changing into inclusive underground parties. With his own personal experience in different night clubs he shows how queer meeting places have been an important cultural phenomena over the decades and still is. He describes the complexities of the new queer nightlife scene in London with positivity over the new diverse places, but on the other hand it can be hard to find for those who do not know about the existence of them.

Another Swedish example of previous research regarding queer spaces is a paper by Layla Khairallaha and Catrine Andersson (2026) who write about the experiences of LBQ women and non-binary persons of color and regarding queer spaces in Sweden. Where they experienced both inclusion and exclusion within these spaces and uncertainty around coming out within different settings. The paper illustrates their strategies to navigate these dynamics and describe how Swedish and western norms shape these queer spaces where the participants described the experience as being forced to either adapt to a form of subordinate inclusion or turn to spaces directed to persons of color.

The authors write that “Despite increased knowledge and rights, LGBTQ persons in Sweden face worse health and discrimination risks than the heterosexual population, mirroring findings in other countries” (Khairallaha & Andersson, 2026:1).They also mention Sweden as an interesting example since LGBTQ rights are normalized but at the same time there is a colorblindness and racism that remains largely unspoken. Which leads to remaining discrimination and affects LGBTQ persons, especially those with racialised background (Khairallaha & Andersson, 2026:1).

With this background my interest landed on queer spaces specifically in Malmö. Especially since we had a brand new queer bar. The founders of the bar Atemlos described the need for this type of space in Malmö: “A safe space was needed. It represents happiness and is open for everyone. It's a place to have fun, it's everyone's livingroom” (P4 Malmöhus, 2026).

It is not a coincidence that they expressed the need for not only a queer space but a safe queer space. In Sweden there has been an increased intolerance towards LGBTQ people. The latest example of this was shown in the authority *Forum för levande historia* (2026) who investigated Swedish school students' attitudes towards minority groups and also their exposure to bullying, threats and violence. In the result of this report in comparison to the latest one published in 2013 one of the outstanding changes is that negative attitudes towards the group of homosexual, bisexual and trans people has gone up from 3 to 15 percent (Österberg, 2026). This highlights the importance of places to turn to as a queer person, and that even in the year 2026 we live in an uncertain world that is constantly changing and nothing is set. Which makes the need for safe spaces of even bigger importance.

Another example of this specifically tied to Malmö is an increased threat image towards both Malmö Pride and RSFL, who were forced to keep their meeting location a secret. They also had to take measures such as tinted windows to prevent people from being able to see in. “It's because people are gonna be able to feel safe here, because unfortunately we do live in a world where we are not. We cherish our family and take care of each other, so people can come here and not have to look over their shoulder. ” (P4 Malmöhus,2026). The operations manager of Malmö Pride expresses that she never picks up the phone on secret numbers. She's saying that it's a harsh climate, referring to the increased tolerance. She argues that it is usually shown on social media and since it's also election year, she says that they can see clear signs that people are against what we work for (Muhsin, 2026).

I found it interesting exploring this tension in Malmö with new queer happenings at the same time as there is an increased intolerance and violent occurrences happening. Sweden is often viewed as on the front line when it comes to LGBTQ rights and Malmö is a city with a strong diverse and community feeling. Still, we see these things happening. Even if a city like Malmö can look safe from the outside, it can still feel unsafe from the community. I myself living in Malmö reading and hearing about these happenings, noticed a change in attitudes from various quarters. At the same time I experienced the community feeling as it is still

growing strong. This tension is something that I wanted to investigate further with the new bar that just established itself. With this background I wanted to explore the space through my own and other people of the queer community's experiences of the newly opened queer bar and the culture of queer night life in Malmö.

1.1 Research question

My research question for this thesis is:

- In a world of increasing extremism of opinions and actions, how do people in Malmö experience the bar Atemlos as a queer safe space?

2. Theorising queer spaces

The following section will be a guideline to the theories and concepts that have been used throughout the process of my work to investigate, analyse and understand the queer scene in Malmö. I will account for the following concepts that have been important to understand and analyse the material I have gathered.

2.1 Orientation

Starting off with Sara Ahmed's (2006) concept of orientation which is her way of putting queer studies in a closer dialogue with phenomenology. This aligns well with my research where the phenomenological approach along with other perspectives became an important part of my understanding of Malmö's queer scene. Ahmed's concept of orientation is about the bodily inhabitants of a space. It allows us to rethink space itself and how our body acts in that space (Ahmed, 2006:6). Which is something I wanted to explore myself visiting the new bar in Malmö, which will be explained further down in the research process.

If orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence; of how we inhabit spaces as well as ‘‘who’’ or ‘‘what’’ we inhabit spaces with. After all, queer geographers have shown us how spaces are sexualized (Ahmed, 2006:1).

I find this interesting in the work of exploring a queer space, because a queer space is not itself queer. It is filled with people who make it a queer space. Ahmed writes that when we are oriented, most likely we do not notice that we are oriented, it's something that we don't think about or even know that we should think about. However it's when we experience disorientation that we can notice that orientation is something we do not have (Ahmed, 2006:6) Continuously she writes that “It is by understanding how we become oriented in moments of disorientation that we might learn what it means to be oriented in the first place” (Ahmed, 2006:6). In relation to my work this becomes important since the need for a queer space can occur out of disorientation.

Continuing Ahmed argues for that space therefore becomes a question of “turning”. It's about the directions we take and how we find our ways through the world. By how we situate ourselves (Ahmed, 2006:6). “The question of orientation becomes, then, a question not only about how we “find our way” but how we come to “feel at home” (Ahmed, 2006:7). To feel

at home is something that for me highlights the importance of having a place to go to, or to be able to have this feeling within.

This process of inhabiting a space involves a negotiation between the familiar and unfamiliar. Where it is still possible to create new impressions depending on the way we are turning, and is affected by what is within reach (Ahmed,2006:8).

Ahmed also describes how orientation is about the familiarity of the world (Ahmed, 2006:7). Through orientation we seek to find our place and to make the strange familiar through our bodies into space. Disorientation occurs when this fails. Some spaces extend certain bodies and do not leave room for others in that space (Ahmed,2006:11). Ahmed's concept became central for me in the orientation within the new queer bar.

Ahmed (2004) brings out another valuable point for me in this work where she argues that emotions are cultural practices opposed to only psychological states. She describes how bodies are given value through emotions, and how these cultural politics of emotions create "others" by aligning some bodies and marginalizing others.

"In conclusion, I want to consider the relation between emotions and (in)justice, as a way of rethinking what it is that emotions do. We can ask: How are emotions bound up with stories of justice and injustice?" (Ahmed, 2004:218). Emotions can be used as a way to work for justice, they can be used in social movements which become relevant for me in the work of safe spaces in an uncertain time.

2.2 Queer spaces

Continuing to the definition of queer spaces, there are different ways to define both the term queer and the term queer space. In this section I have chosen to lift a lot of different perspectives on queer spaces for the purpose of understanding but also to highlight the fact that it can be described and used in different ways and can have different meanings to different people. I decided to use the term queer for the sake of simplicity in the work and to be able to include all people belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community.

I want to start with Jack Halberstam (2005) who writes that he thinks about queerness in line with Michel Foucault as a "way of life" rather than only sexual identity (Halberstam, 2005:1). Halberstam writes that: ""Queer" refers to nonnormative logics and organizations of

community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time" (Halberstam, 2005:6). Halberstam's view on non-normativity and space becomes relevant for me especially in exploring a queer space.

Halberstams argues further that *queer space* in turn refers to place-making practices where queer people engage. Queer spaces describe new understandings of space enabled by the production of the queer audiences (Halberstam, 2005:6).

Katie Goldstein (2018) also defines a queer space by quoting Yana Walton: "A queer space is never finished, but it is an active process created by the shifting identities inside and around it to undo racist, sexist, classist, capitalist, cissexist, colonialist and essentialist notions of who we are and how we should be treating each other" (Goldstein, 2018:272). Walton also writes that being queer comes with an active un-learning and re-creating process. She makes a point that places can be queer without the classic definition we first think about (Goldstein, 2018:272).

Alva Zalar (2024) is using the term queer as an approach to her research and writes that space is always a relational component. She is using queer theory as a lens looking into the production of normality and difference in architecture. Even if she is not specifically discussing sexuality and gender she is using queerness with a broader definition. Zalar refers to Butler and writes that; "I argue that 'queer' can be thought of less as an identity and more as a movement of thought, a language that constantly poses an alternative to accepted ('normal') forms of thinking and knowing." (Zalar, 2024:250).

In relation to the queer space Z Coltman (2025) distinguishes between normative space and queer space. Normative space is oriented towards the hegemonic centre, meaning it is a space that enables easy existence for people within normative identities. While queer space Coltman describes acts as a heterotopic mirror to normative space. Queer space makes it possible for people to exist in non-normative ways (Coltman, 2025:368).

This aligns with Halberstam's argument as well: "Queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality and reproduction. They also develop according to other logics of location, movement and identification" (Halberstam, 2005:1). He means that queer subcultures produce alternative ways to live and

to imagine your future, outside of the normative expected way to live as in marriage and reproduction as the only way to imagine your life.

Obviously not all gay, lesbian, and transgender people live their lives in radically different ways from their heterosexual counterparts, but part of what has made queerness compelling as a form of self-description in the past decade or so has to do with the way it has the potential to open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space (Halberstam, 2005:2).

Halberstam's view on this becomes relevant for me where it highlights the alternative a queer space brings. The creation of new narratives is what a place like a queer bar brings into a city.

2.3 Queer homes

Katie Goldstein (2018) writes about queer homes which brings an insight in the perspective of queer spaces. She describes how the queer home can be a place where you are not seen and marginalized for who you are and who you love. Creating a queer home redefines the definition of a home and what it can be and it also challenges the marginalization and invisibilization of the queer community. “Creating queer homes puts a queer mark on a non-queer landscape and, through that act, demands that queerness be recognized as an identity that must be seen.” (Goldstein, 2018: 269). The description on queer homes becomes interesting for me in relation to the queer space in Malmö. It opened up the question of feeling at home, which can be in your own home but it can also be the place you go to that becomes a home.There can be different aspects and factors making it not possible to create a safe queer home, where the bar in this case can become a form of home, or a place to go.

Continuing Goldstein defines a queer home as a queer space that is created by queer residents. It's a space for queer folks to celebrate and to be recognized for their identity. Queer homes are often shared with other queers, because unfortunately a common queer experience is the displacement from spaces and communities due to your sexuality and/or gender presentation (Goldstein, 2018:271).

In queer homes, there is space for variant and gendernon-conforming folks to be seen fully for their gender identity within the created queer space. Some queers have both experienced a physical displacement and a cultural displacement where their sexuality and gender identity is not represented or celebrated by mainstream culture (Goldstein,2018:272).

Goldstein highlights the cultural aspect of a queer space where the displacement can appear both psychically and culturally. Continuing she writes:

> Queer homes are important in that they resist this displacement and create a new narrative. They provide an alternative to an expectation that one lives by oneself until it is time to be partnered and re-create the nuclear family. Queers have always created alternative family structures, and the queer home can be a part of those alternative systems of support. (Goldstein, 2018: 272).

This can be connected to the queer space as well. I see it as whether it is a queer home or a queer space where you can create a new narrative, the queer space becomes an opportunity to do this, to create alternative systems of support.

2.4 Safety

The discussion about safety becomes an important aspect of the thesis in relation to the increased intolerance introduced above. Goldstein writes that: “The active creation of queer space contributes to queer safety.” (Goldstein, 2018:271). Queer safety was the starting point for my thought process during this thesis. Nightlife spaces have for a long time been an important social infrastructure for queer communities. “They can serve as ‘safer space’ as well as incubators for cultural innovation, grassroots public health initiatives, alternative modes of sociality, and even political organizing (Hanhardt 2013).” The queer clubs become an important part of a city in this matter, since it serves as a safe place.

Bringing in Judith Butler (2024) to the discussion, Butler explains how the anti-gender movement still existing today affects and does a lot of harm for people trying to live freely without the fear of attacks and to feel that you have an equal place alongside others in the society. The fear of gender Butler argues is shown in institutions, in policies and it is seeking to dismantle the practices that have tried to create freedom and equality. “It is, rather, a way of organizing the world wrought by the fear of a destruction for which gender is held responsible” (Butler, 2024: 11).

Tina Askanius (2024) discusses in her article how gender, misogyny and anti-feminism are key to understanding the recent rise in far-right extremism. Where contemporary conflicts over gender roles, norms and values are used in political discussions. She writes that digital technology in the latest years has helped mainstream extremist ideas about gender roles and norms. “Networking technologies, algorithmic logics and platform policies have elevated

misogyny and gendered extremism to new levels of violence”(Askanius, 2024:7). Extremist ideas and anti-feminism are spreading on a larger scale through technology and are no longer hidden on the dark web but circulate relatively openly online.

She argues that we need to understand extremism as a political phenomenon rather than personal attitudes from smaller groups (Askanius, 2024:4) and also not strictly focus on physical violence but also spotlight symbolic and cultural violence as key dimensions of extremism. “Importantly, it encourages us not to look elsewhere for the "real threat to democracy" but also within our own institutions and social systems, and the spaces permeating our everyday lives.” (Askanius,2024:5). This shows the need for a queer safe space, which is something that Malmö was lacking, in the sense of a labeled place that specifically expressed itself as that, just a couple of months ago.

Goldstein also writes about safety in relation to queerness. She writes:

> We must ask the question of where is it safe to be out and queer? Where can I be in public with my partner/ lover? Where is a place I can be where I am not discriminated against because of my gender presentation and sexuality, whether in the workplace or simply walking down the street? Thus, the importance of queer space: a place to be where people can fully practice their gender and sexual identity. In the city, there is creation of queer space through a queer community that can be made up of folks from the city and not from the city, but who share having found the city as a place where we have made our home. (Goldstein, 2018:271).

She highlights in this quote the importance of a queer space, and the importance it has for a city. This becomes relevant for my research question, where I was interested in the newly appeared queer bar in Malmö.

This led me into Leslie Kern (2021) who writes about the feminist city which becomes relevant in the discussion. She explains how women struggle with problems in cities built by men. She highlights important aspects that become relevant in relation to queer spaces because it is a part of the city. She makes a point about queer women spaces and describes that some important urban spaces for lesbian and queer women have been lost (Kern,2021:76) . "Historically, lesbians have struggled to find spaces in cities, as gay neighborhoods typically focused on the interests and lifestyles of young gay men” (Kern, 2021:76). This highlights the importance of different aspects of the term queer.

3. Methodology

The methodological process has included close readings of queer theories, phenomenological method followed by ethnographic methods such as situated observations, conversations and interviews. In the following sections I will describe each of these more deeply.

I wanted to combine phenomenological methods with ethnographic methods for a broader understanding and investigation. Michael Schnegg and Julian Sommerschuh (2026) wrote about combining phenomenology and anthropology, where they highlighted the benefits of combining different methods that study lived experiences in different ways. With the conclusion that an exchange between two different disciplines can give a deeper understanding of how the human world is structured between different cultures. They write that “Ethnographic accounts provide thousands of cases of lived experience, far more varied than any single mind could generate through phenomenological imagination alone.” (Schnegg &Sommerschuh, 2026).

I wanted to have a phenomenological approach but I also wanted to have in-depth interviews, because I felt that would strengthen the knowledge I could gain from phenomenology. I did not want it to be only about my experience. Which is the reason for me to choose to combine it with ethnography and do structured in depth interviews. In the end, I was able to acquire seven contributions to my work. These could be divided into different categories: two in-person interviews, where one of these was a group interview. One digital interview was implemented through a video call and I had four conversations in the space, with four different people.

3.1 Literature review

A central part of the methodological process has been a literature review throughout the process, which has been of importance to understand and to guide the work towards the end goal. This will be evident in my analysis and reflection.

3.2 Phenomenological method

A significant method combined with the ethnographic method has been a phenomenological approach where I have used phenomenology both as a theoretical way of thinking as shown above but also as a method itself.

Phenomenology can offer a resource for queer studies insofar as it emphasizes the importance of lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of nearness or what is ready-tohand, and the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds (Ahmed,2004:2).

As Ahmed describes this method becomes relevant in queer studies, and is a good approach in investigating lived experiences. One of the starting points to my research process became a couple of field visits to the queer bar Atemlos, where I proceeded my phenomenological work. The phenomenological work has contained two different parts where one of them has been focused on my own experience and feeling within the space and the other one has consisted of conversations with people I met within the space. I found it of big importance to start by exploring the place myself because I wanted to understand the place and get my own feeling of it first.

Susan Kozel (2015) explains phenomenology as an embodied and situated methodology where you go from experience into writing. It can be done in various ways that is most suitable for the situation or the researcher. “In short, when I refer to phenomenology I mean a reflective process that is subjective, embodied, and situated, but also exploratory and critical” (Kozel, 2015:56). Phenomenology is not a complete method that is just applied to something, but a process, a process that can even be messy at first (Kozel,2015:54). The phenomenological reflection is about understanding the experience.

An important part of the method is the process notes. A common way in the process is to take notes mid-flow or after. It can be done in different ways, individually what's best suited. The researcher can be reflecting while doing or have a more structured reflection afterwards (Kozel, 2015:56).

Phenomenology is experiential and corporeal. In a way it can be a form of storytelling - and it is not only the researcher, Kozel writes that phenomenological experience does not only come from the performer, but the audience and participants have their own experience in the context (Kozel, 2015:57). This is also what I am investigating and what becomes interesting

in the conversations that I have with people in the space, not only my own phenomenological experience is of my interest, but also theirs. I have been doing phenomenology by being in the space, feeling my body. I have been going there different nights in the week to get the feeling of the place at different times. Fiona Buckland (2002) writes about doing research within club spaces. She writes:

> I did not sit at the side of the dance floor and take notes. I wanted to be immersed in the movement, rather than looking at a notepad, trying to think of the appropriate term. Field notes were written on my return home from the club or the next day. Therefore, in common with most ethnographers, my writing of the event is at a spatial and temporal distance from it (Buckland, 2002:11).

This aligned with my methodological work, where I also preferred writing my text afterwards, giving more room for reflection. She writes that this approach emphasizes the use of the space rather than the planning of it. She also writes that: “In a club itself, more than one thing happened. Human action and interaction shaped clubs, and participants shaped themselves by going to them” (Buckland, 2002:11). This aligns with the queer bar, where the people in the space shapes the bar itself.

Dan Zahavi (2025) describes phenomenology as the study of phenomena. It’s a method that focuses on the richness of everyday life, where everyday experiences can be turned into analysis and bring valuable knowledge. He writes that: “Even the everyday experience of simple objects can serve as the point of departure for a phenomenological analysis” (Zahavi, 2015:13). For me interested in studying nightlife, a phenomenon that is a part of everyday life phenomenology felt suited as a methodological approach.

Zahavi also discusses the body as an important factor in the methodology and explains how the human body is an object itself. In phenomenological methods the bodily embodiment becomes central. Implementing phenomenology is a way of getting to know something closer: “But all of this calls for and involves bodily engagement and interaction” (Zahavi,2025:16). It is also a process that takes time. Phenomenology work he means, is interested in *how* we experience rather than merely *what* we experience (Zahavi,2025:13). He also describes that one same object can appear in different ways. Different perspectives will have different experiences:

For Zahavi the body in the phenomenological work becomes very important.

> Whereas I can approach and remove myself from spatial objects, the body is always present as that which makes it possible for me to adopt a perspective on the world. Indeed, the body is first and foremost this perspective on the world, and, therefore, not originally an object that I take a perspective on (Zahavi, 2025:86).

Since my interest landed into conducting the research in a bar setting, it felt natural that phenomenology became the most accurate method for me to use. Since the bodily experience becomes very relevant in a club and bar setting where there is music, people and dance. The body becomes a central part of that space and therefore is this perspective highly interesting and relevant. Continually Zahavi writes:

> The body is, consequently, characterised by being present in every perceptual experience as the experiential zero-point, the absolute “here” in relation to which every appearing object is oriented. The bodily “here” is not one point among many, but the anchor that makes other coordinates meaningful (Zahavi, 2025:87).

With this starting point, a part of the research became my own phenomenological experiences. Where my phenomenological work contains my own experiences and thoughts written in my notes after visiting the queer bar. After acquiring information, it became clear that my focus landed on the queer nightlife and it felt important to explore the newly opened queer bar. Before doing further research regarding the place I wanted to get my own experience of the place and my own embodied emotions and orientation within the space. I wanted to do this before I had the time to hear what other people thought of the place so opinions wouldn't affect my first experience of the place. Which was also the reason for me wanting to implement the phenomenological work before the interviews.

I decided to do my first phenomenological experience through my first visit. I asked a friend to accompany me because it felt more comfortable having someone with me. I do not usually go out on my own, and would have felt strange doing it to a new place. I wanted it to feel like it normally does when I go out in Malmö. My friend was happy to accompany me and we decided to go there on a saturday night, assuming that would be the best day in the week to

go. The phenomenological experiences I had in the bar Atemlos I structured as follows: I went to the bar, I tried to let the feelings, the place, and my body guide me in my own exploration of the space. While capturing my thoughts and feelings about it. When I came home I wrote down my reflections. However, I also wanted to have an insight into other people's experiences as well: That served the point of the conversations in the space. Because we will experience the place completely differently and have different phenomenological approaches, as Zahavi explained.

3.2.1 Conversations in the space

Instead of having formal interviews I made the conclusion that conversations with people within the space would suit the situation more. Therefore I am calling it *conversations in the space.* Michel Yeomans et al (2023) defines conversations as a verbal interaction between two or more people and as pervasive, complex and consequential human behavior. It is a fundamental activity in the social world and a valuable research method. I had conversations in the place spontaneously and I was talking with people without set questions or specific approach to the situations. I tried not to lead conversations but let the people, the meetings and the place lead me towards the conversations and the directions they have taken. Which I figured was a more simple way to conclude it, because a lot of people were really interested in talking about the new opening place, and more than once they approached me to talk and not the other way around. There were different reasons for the decision to have conversations in a bar instead of interviews. In relation to Buckland I also made the decision for some ethical reasons. Bickland writes: “Within the club, I did not want to mark myself as an outsider, which I felt walking around with recording equipment would have done” (Buckland, 2002:12).

She also acknowledged the fact that the research takes place in a “safe space” and that it can disturb that feeling of safety to be approached by a stranger with a notepad or a recorder. She also mentioned that people come to these places to have fun. And she didn't want to interrupt that. She also makes the point that in a club or a bar people may have taken alcohol or drugs or can be in an affective state which can make the question about content hard. (Buckland, 2002:11). This will be discussed further in the ethical section.

3.3 Ethnographic methods

Continuously at the same time as I conducted the field visits to Atemlos and implemented the phenomenological work I decided to combine my phenomenological method with one ethnographic method. This method has included both in-person interviews where I separate these interviews from the phenomenological conversations I previously explained above. Since these took a more formal approach and were planned in advance, structured and recorded. These interviews were conducted with other researchers active in the queer community.

3.3.1 Semistructured interviews

Svend Brinkmann (2017) describes the interview as a verbal exchange where the interviewer attempts to elicit information, expressions of opinion or beliefs from another person or persons (Brinkmann, 2017:999). Interviews are a valuable method to understand the people you meet and can be done in many different ways. They can be both formal and informal, with the starting point as getting people's options.

Brinkmann writes that the purpose of qualitative research as interviews is to produce knowledge (Brinkmann, 2017:1001). Interviews can be used as a method for many different purposes, but in line with a phenomenological perspective they normally seek descriptions of how people experience the world. These types of interviews can capture the episodes and events of their world, rather than thoughts about why they have these certain experiences.“In most interview studies, the goal is to acquire the interviewee’s concrete descriptions rather than abstract reflections or theorizations” (Brinkmann, 2017:1002).

Sometimes in interviews Brinkmann explains that the interviewer cannot prepare for the stories that might come up by having a lot of questions prepared, instead you think about how to facilitate what comes up in the story. He means that it is a way of spending time with the interviewee. “After the opening request for a narrative, the main role of the interviewer is to remain a listener, withholding desires to interrupt, and occasionally asking questions that may clarify the story” (Brinkmann,2017:1001). Brinkmann argues that even if interviewers are generally interested in people's experience instead of abstract theorizations as described

above, as an interviewer we still often need to engage in interpretations of the experiences that are described to us in the interview (Brinkmann,2017:1004).

Interviews became an important part of the research where I met with different people in the queer community to discuss the topic of queer spaces specifically focused on Malmö and what it meant for them. The qualitative interviews were quite long and became a good basis for the analysis, we had plenty of time to discuss the topic which was very valuable. I had two different face-to-face interviews with other researchers also working on the same topic and interested in queer spaces whom I got in contact with through the university. Even if there were similarities between the three semistructured interviews I conducted, there were also some differences separating them. The first interview was with one interviewee which became sort of a collaborative interview, where we exchanged knowledge and perspectives on each other's work, followed by a more formal interview where I had prepared questions regarding my research. The second interview was a group interview also with researchers who worked on the theme queer spaces earlier. For this interview I had also prepared questions and we discussed the topic based on those questions. For the third interview I met a person working with drag clubs in Malmö, this interview was not a face-to face interview but instead we had it digitally over a video call.

Annie Irvine, Paul Drew and Roy Sainsbury (2013) compares semi-structured telephone interviews to face-to-face interviews and investigates the differences in interaction between these two different ways of conducting interviews. However the result of the authors work is that interviews conducted over the phone often are shorter, and the interviewees more often ask for clarification and doubt their answer. Also the researcher often gives less confirmations during the call, which can also affect the outcome such as body language and facial expressions. usually often shorter, but not in my case. Could be because it is a video call.

The authors argue that the way you choose to conduct the interview has effects on how it goes. And it is something researchers should consider. I reckon there are similarities in having an interview over the phone and doing it digitally. The difference is that with a video call we could still see each other and see different types of facial expressions for example, which help making it similar to a face-to-face interview. I could see differences in the three different interviews,

I did record the structured interviews to be able to transcribe them. As Rwamahe Rutakumwa et al (2020) writes the use of recording interviews has become a taken-for granted approach when conducting in-depth interviews and serves in a lot of cases a big purpose in the process of collecting the information. I saved the recording on my phone, and deleted it once I transcribed it.

For me the recordings of the interviews were important and served the purpose of not wanting to miss important details that can be lost if you do not record and only rely on your notes and on your memory as Rutakumwa et al writes (Rutakumwa et al., 2020:577). In the interview that was recorded more details were captured, it is harder from just notes to capture everything. It was also important for me to be sure not to misquote anyone.

The conducted interviews

I conducted three semistructured interviews with people within the queer community. The first interview was conducted with another researcher active in the queer community and working on the topic queer spaces himself. This interview contributed to insights and perspective and started out as a collaborative conversation where we shared knowledge, perspectives and insight about each other's work. Followed up by a more structured interview where I asked a couple of questions related to queer spaces and Malmö's queer scene. For this more structured part, I had prepared a couple of questions in advance but I did also leave room for the conversation to lead. We met face to face at the university and when we started discussing the topic I took some notes for myself to remember. When the interview started I recorded the interview, and asked the questions I had prepared. This was a way for me to be able to have my full attention to the interviewees answers, without having to take notes, knowing I would be able to listen to it again. The meeting lasted around an hour, where the interview lasted for about 30 minutes.

The second interview I conducted became a group interview with three other researchers from Malmö university who did a similar project about queer spaces earlier. It became a valuable discussion about queer spaces, safe spaces and about Malmös queer scene. We did also meet at the university and at first we talked without recordings where I explained the aim of my thesis and what I was interested in knowing from them. Once we started the interview I recorded it and followed the same structure as in the previous interview explained above.

The interview started with them sharing some of their research and insights regarding queer spaces in Malmö which in turn led to a constructive discussion about the topic. The focus of their project was based on queer day time events in Malmö which was something they felt was missing. Their project was completed before Atemlos existed in Malmö. “We were looking specifically at how Malmö is known colloquially as a very queer city in Sweden. I have heard it at parties being called the lesbian capital of Sweden but even though it has the reputation of being a queer city, there aren't a lot of announced queer spaces. When queer people specifically don't have a gathering site, what do they create and why do they create it?” They visited events and talked to the queer community. This led us into further discussion about specifically Malmö.

For the third interview I had the chance to meet the founder of a drag club, hosting events at different locations in Malmö. We met digitally but the structure following this interview was similar to the two previous ones. I started by explaining what I was investigating with the research and why I was interested in meeting. Once I started with the questions I had prepared, I started the recording of this interview as well. By now I felt comfortable with conducting interviews and I knew which kind of structure worked the best for me.

3.4 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations have been a part of the thesis during the whole process. It has been especially of big importance for me since the research involves a marginalized group and since I am visiting something that is supposedly a safe space. It has been of big importance that I in no way could disturbed that feeling or do my research in an unethical way. For this reason my focus with the field visits and with my phenomenological work has been exploring the space and not specifically the people visiting. With this I mean I have not been looking at people individually. For it to be a queer space, it is of course of importance of who is there, but I have been interested in how the space makes people feel and what about it is important.

When I have had interviews and conversations I have made sure to make these anonymous and to not include any details or information that could in any way reveal any personal information or anyone. Especially, which I also will discuss further down in the analysis

about digitality, in a queer place there is always a possibility that people who are there are not out or cannot be seen for different reasons. I have also asked and explained about consent, anonymity, and have especially left out all details that could connect to people individually. When it comes to the conversations I also had a lot of considerations in relation to Buckland's thoughts regarding her research within a club, which I explained above.

In the space conducting the conversations I did not ask any personal or sensitive questions. The conversations became a part of the phenomenological work in the sense that they did just happen. I did not walk around to find people to interview but it happened naturally. Most of them started talking with me first, which led to a conversation about the space but not about them personally. I did not want to ask sensitive questions that they could not fully consent to, about their personality or identity. The questions were only focused on the place itself, even though it is connected to identity in the sense that it is a queer place.

When it comes to the structured interviews we could naturally have more in-depth discussions and that is also the reason for the research to be of a more qualitative form.

The last thing to mention regarding ethics is my use as a researcher of Artificial Intelligence (AI) which I have only been using as a research tool in the sense that the AI overview is the first thing that comes up when you are using google to search for different things. To find relevant information, material and literature. This has been my personal preference and a decision not to use it other than this, has been for the simple reason that I both as a researcher and personally do not feel comfortable with using it more than for this reason. I was more likely to have my working progress the way that I am used to. I have not yet come to the point where I use it regularly and have for this reason also not seen the point of using it in the process of writing this thesis. All the text is my original work and has been written by me.

4. Research process

In this part I will present the material I collected in the work that occurred in and around the bar Atelmos along with the material from the interviews. As stated the research process consisted of phenomenology as part of my personal experience, followed by ethnographic work in forms of interviews and conversations. The combination of the examples helped shape the research process and formulate my analysis.

I started to conduct some of the site visits I aimed to do in order to get an overview and understanding and also to be able to narrow my focus to Malmö's queer scene. This process started off online where I started looking up queer communities and queer places in Malmö by searching for different insights and information. I got the sense of a strong queer community in Malmö and saw a couple of places organizing queer events. One insight was that it was mostly temporary events and only two places outspoken permanent queer places.

As previously stated in the introduction with the RFSL article, Malmö has had an increase of intolerance and threat towards queer people and organisations. This forced the organisers of the nightlife to shape the events differently in order to maintain guests' safety. The newly opened queer bar Atemlos became relevant in relation to queer safety and I wanted to explore this place. My interest landed in the newly opened bar and that's where I wanted to have my focus for my phenomenological work.

4.1 Analysis themes

In this part I will present five different themes that were identified during the analysis process of the collected material. This will be presented below in analysis with the theoretical framework.

4.1.1 The queer space

The understanding of what a queer space is and how it can be identified from different experiences became an important starting point to understand Malmös newly opened queer space and therefore also the first theme I identified. Different definitions of a queer space were seen in the discussions but also a lot of similarities. It became relevant for me to understand what a queer space can be to different people and what they would describe is needed for it to be a safe space. My research process started with my own phenomenological experience to get a sense of the queer bar Atemlos to help me in my own understanding of the space. Later I was able to connect my experiences to the material I got from the interviews and the conversations. For this reason I'm starting with my first visit to the queer space in question.

My phenomenological experience 1

Atemlos Malmö

2026-02-21

I pay my first visit to the new queer bar Atemlos in Malmö on a Saturday night. As I walk towards the bar, I can hear voices and laughter. As soon as I see the place I see there is quite a long queue which I didn't expect. It gives me a good feeling and a happy surprise that there are so many people waiting in line. I see that there are people of different ages, all standing in groups talking, they look excited.

I see that there is a sign saying "no photos" inside the space. Reading the sign more closely I understand that taking pictures inside is restricted, meaning that you are allowed to take them as long as you make sure you are not getting strangers in the picture without their consent. It is explained that it is for safety reasons. This immediately gives me a good feeling, I feel happy that they have taken measures like this trying to work actively for the safety

inside the bar. For me it means that they have given it some extra thought, in the process of creating this queer space and explicitly are having signs explaining that they work for the safety here. It brought up the awareness of consent relating to pictures, since it is increasingly spoken about. It highlights the awareness concerning such a common practice but usually executed unconsciously.

After standing in line for a while, a person working there comes up to everyone, telling them that it is crowded tonight. Which is the reason for the line and for the waiting time. Explaining and apologising for the wait. This surprises me, I have not experienced this waiting in other lines before. This also gives a feeling of a community and in a way I also connect it to safety measures. I feel seen and I get explanations for what is happening and why. The security guards working in the doors welcome us and check our IDs, they are friendly and talkative. They asked for consent before they looked through my bag and explained that they needed to check ID and bags before we walked in. They asked if that felt ok for us.

Well inside, the atmosphere feels warm. I hear the music, I see discoballs and people dancing, enjoying themselves. I once again felt surprised because my idea of a bar was different from what I saw here. This was bigger than what I expected and it also had a dance floor.

I see people sitting in groups talking or standing by the bar ordering something to drink. The night continues and I participate in the space by dancing, sitting and talking and enjoying my time. I do really enjoy the atmosphere and I notice a politeness in the space that feels welcoming. Standing in the line for the toilet, people offer me to go before them if I need to, which never happened to me in other spaces.

Some thoughts that stay with me are the feeling of safety the whole night. Compared to previous experiences of nights out, I did not see a single fight and I did not get approached in ways that made me feel uncomfortable. I leave the bar happy and with a feeling of wanting to come back.

I left my first visit filled with joy about the new place but also surprised by the amount of people that were there. This aligns with my first interviewee, where we in the first interview started talking about Malmö´s queer scene and about the new bar Atemlos. The interviewee expressed a feeling that Malmö is lacking outspoken queer places. He said that Atemlos is also the only official one that just opened, but queer people have been here longer than that. He clarified that for him he thought that we are lacking labeled spaces "But I don't think that those spaces don't exist. Because queer people exist. I think that because queer people exist, queer spaces exist" (Interview 1).

He continues by describing the importance of having those spaces, which is shown in the popularity Atemlos has got. Which was something I noticed myself on my first visit. This aligns with Halberstam's definition of a queer space as a place-making practice, where people engage. To be able to create this engagement, the need for a space becomes important. More examples of the excitement and need for the new place is seen in all of the conversations I had within the space:

Conversation 1

The second conversation started when I was sitting in one of the couches waiting for my friend. This time I also asked the person what they thought about the place. "I love this place!" He continued telling me that it was his first time visiting the place and that the first impression was very good. He says that he likes that you can just show up as you are and enjoy yourself. What also comes up in the conversation is that he and I can talk as he expresses it: "without it being weird" He explains that he has a girlfriend but that we still can "talk and hang out without you thinking I am hitting on you". This is something that he feels happens in other clubs or night places, where you would immediately assume that if you are a person of a different gender the only reason for talking is to be romantically involved.

Conversation 2

We started talking in the queue. This person tells me that they were here a couple of times, and already came back twice this day. "My partner wanted to go home, so I followed them home and then I came back because I didn't want the night to end. I really enjoyed the place and I had such a fun time just dancing and being with my friends".

In both of these conversations I can see an excitement which shows the importance of having this kind of place. This can be connected to what Goldstein explains about the importance of having a place to go to where you are not marginalized for your identity. Creating this place whether it is a home or in this case a bar to turn to, can be vital especially for those who may not have another safe place to turn to or a home where they can be themselves.

This leads the conversation into Atemlos where the interviewee 1 makes a point regarding the place itself. “I think Atemlos is an interesting example because of the interior architecture of the space. Since Atemlos is a bar, but also half a club. I think that's even more interesting to tie to a queer space, because of the non-normative assembly of the space itself” (Interview 1). This observation corresponds to Halberstam's description of a queer space as a place-making practice with new understandings of space enabled by the queer audience. It is shown that this is what Atemlos aimed to do in the setting of the bar, which was noticed by visitors and plays a role in the experience of a queer place.He explains further that when you walk into Atemlos you have the vision in your head of how a bar usually looks. You expect to see bar stools and tables walking into a bar.

But you walk in and you see couches, you see clothing racks where people just leave their clothes without thinking that someone is gonna steal it. Then you have a dj booth behind prison bars next to a small stage. There are all of these theatrical elements and Berlin club-vibe elements, tied into this so-called bar. I feel like that's queering the space and also such a big queer attribute of specifically Atemlos. I feel like the design of the space is also representing the social aspect of the space. I think that's something that I really tie to specifically Atmelos (Interview 1).

In this interview it is clear that the design and as he describes the queering of the space plays an important role and is something that he enjoyed. However, what is highlighted in all the different interviews is that a queer space is not about the place itself but about the people within that space. Interviewee one gives the example of his friends hosting a party and how that itself is becoming a queer space. He describes a queer space as non-normative, with no normative expectations of behaviour. This aligns with Coltman's description of a queer space as non-normative, where he further explains: "It's not the space itself that makes it queer. It's the people that go there that make it queer.” (Interview 1). The non-normativity can also be seen in the conversations, an example of this is shown in conversations three that can be read further down, where he talks about behaviours in different spaces and how he experienced a difference from other places he has visited.

I have a big friend group of queer people, and whenever someone hosts a party as their place for example, that immediately is a queer space. Because I walk in and all I see is queer people and I feel like this is a queer space. It's not a public space where people come in and order drinks but it is a queer space immediately. So even if it's an apartment that is not public, I still view it as a queer space and I view my home as a queer space as well. (Interview 1)

He brings up an example of a friend who's queer as well and who got invited to a paint and sip event for people of color:

My friend shared a memory where she was the only white person within that space and was entitled to that space. She told me that it was so freeing, the atmosphere in the space was super chill and accepting. It was so lightweight, even though she was the only non-person of color in that space she was completely accepted and I think that's exactly where queer culture comes in. That's what queer culture is about. For me any space that's freeing, non-normative or filled with people from marginalized groups who come together, that's a queer space. Perhaps not all the participants are queer, but if the space itself is non-normative it automatically says queer to me. (Interview 1)

He explains further that he doesn't go out often, but when he does he always prefers a queer space. “I cannot be bothered to go to a normative space and behave in a normative way. So yes, I always opt for a queer space of any kind and if it's not a queer space I often opt for a queer crowd. So I make it a little queer space within a non-queer space. I always chose a queer space to either follow me or for me to go into a queer space.” (Interview 1). Again his description of being able to act in non-normative ways and choosing or searching for queer spaces can be understood through Coltman's theory that describes how queer space makes it possible for people to exist in non-normative ways.

The third interviewee working in the field with hosting queer clubs started by describing how their work first was as a show that later became a proof that it wasn't just about the show. “The more we grew and the bigger it became, it felt important that it was also a place to meet. There was such a good atmosphere so you wanted people to be able to stay in that feeling. Which is why it's also a club now” (Interview 3). My first question was: *How is it to run a queer club in Malmö?*

I have a hard time describing how much it has meant to be working with this. It's the biggest and most important work that I have ever done. The way we have been received by the queer community in Malmö, with so much love and a feeling of community, is almost hard to put into words. Of course it's a special type of job, it's always a lot of work and can be stressful at times. But after just being in that environment and seeing the happiness in the people there, supporting. It's like walking on clouds, and it feels like a big family (Interview 3).

Continuing the interviewee describes the starting point of the organisation. They explained that even though drag had been in Malmö for a long time, they still felt that drag events were missing here. It was after the pandemic and a lot of places were closed down, which are related to the so-called *klubbdöden* as previously mentioned. There were a lot of pop-up events but not so many regular meeting places, they explained.

It led to the start of this. I went to a place that was a bar/ club, not an outspoken queer place but we got the possibility to start hosting events there. We started with one day per week and from day one it just came to so many people. It was full. It was clear that there was a big need for this. We have never had a show that hasn't had any audience. We sort of exploded fast and people needed a place to go to. Even though this wasn't a regular queer place, at least they knew when the next event would take place (Interview 3).

Further on they explained that it has been a lot of work and a process, especially since it was a challenge to get funding for the club. “Now we have good financing. I think the city and the region have started to understand the value of the work we do and that's the reason we have now gotten cultural support. It has also been a struggle to make people understand and see drag as something serious and as an art form that deserves funding” (Interview 3).This exemplifies how the city of Malmö was in a need for places after many closed down and also after queer spaces. This was a time before Atemlos existed, but the interviewees experience shows that the need for it was already here then. It is similar to the descriptions of Atmelos arrival in Malmö and how well received it was.

4.1.2 (Dis)orientation

To be able to use Ahmed's concept of orientation in relation to the space I used my own phenomenological work. The theme orientation was also shown in some of the material from the interviews following below. As explained above, Ahmed describes orientation as the familiarity of the world, where we orient ourselves in order to find our way in places and through our bodies in these spaces. With this as my starting point I went to Atemlos two more times in order to pursue my phenomenological work.

My phenomenological experience 2

Atemlos Malmö

2026-03-22

The second time I wanted to try a different approach to my phenomenological experience. I wanted to sit down to reflect within the space and I therefore went to the place with a notebook and a pen. I took place at a table and I wanted my feelings of the place to decide for me. I took some notes of what I thought of and felt.

This time I arrived later than last time. I had to pay the entrance fee to get in since it was after eleven. But it was not expensive, it only cost 50 Swedish crowns, which is cheaper than most of the clubs. I come to think about accessibility.

Further on, once I get in I see that it is a Karaoke night: which brings another vibe than last time. The place was not as crowded, but there were still a lot of people. I heard someone singing on the stage. I was not in the best mood that night, which affected my experience. However when I got into the place I felt like it was okay, that I could come as I am. The music and the people felt warm and welcoming, and that helped my feeling. The guards were opening the doors for us, smiling and asking how we were. I got something to drink and I went and sat on the sofa, which gave me a good overlook of the dance floor and the people singing karaoke. I feel good sitting here.

My phenomenological experience 3

Atemlos Malmö

2026-03-26

The third time it's on a Thursday night which means quiz night. I brought a friend with me and we arrived at the place at six when they were opening. We had a chat with the bartender. I asked about the expectations of the night and if it is usually a lot of people coming on a night like this. The bartender explains that they never know but that it is usually always full, even though you can't book it. We ordered something to drink and then sat down and talked. Some time goes by and people are starting to come. Tonight the place feels more like a bar than a club as it was the times before. People who arrive come with backpacks, maybe they came right after work. It feels like a place to land and to have a chat with friends. Some order food, some just have drinks. Most of the people sit together in groups and talk. There is music in the background but it is not too loud, it is still easy to talk. It feels more like an easy going night and a space where people come together.

The other times visiting the place felt more familiar, like Ahmed describes. All of the different times that I visited the bar became a part of my orientation within the space, where my body was trying to get a sense of the familiarity of it. Through these experiences, visiting again made me know what to expect. It made it easier for me to orient myself and it highlights the importance of having this place too. I interpreted that's what others who came there multiple times did as well. I saw people coming to the bar relaxed, to meet up with someone without expectations. It felt like a place people came to share experiences with others. Which can be read through Goldstein's argument regarding queer homes, where this could be a place to come and relax as a recognition and free from expectations.

My experience varied on three different kinds of nights and on different days. The more visits to the place played a role allowing me to get different perspectives and to collect more contributions each time. Highlighting the differences depending on when you go to visit the bar, shows the ability to make the place your own and use it as you please. Which is a form of orientation. This creates a narrative outside of normative expectations, where in my observation I interpret that people came here early on a more easy night to be able to relax.

During interview 1 we also talked about orientation. The interviewee was well aware about Ahmed's concept which led to valuable knowledge exchange about the concept. He explained how he is constantly looking for ways to orient himself and find his way and to feel at home at different places. He described how he is always turning to queer places and if he cannot find them he is creating them. He explained how he views his home as a queer space as well, which aligns with Goldstein's view on queer homes. As a place where you are not marginalized for your identity or for who you love. Which is also being described in the way he is referring to his own home as a queer space or when his friends are hosting a party, that turns into a queer space. The person in this interview was very aware of his orientation, when he feels oriented and not. He's looking for queer spaces because he knows that's where he will feel at home, like Ahmed writes. He is aware of when he feels disorientated outside of these spaces as well.

In interview 2 we discuss topics related to the feeling of disorientation which can be seen both outside of and within queer spaces. The people from this group interview all described their view on Malmö as a queer city. Where they knew a lot of people who moved here for this reason, because of the big queer community. Which can be read as a form of orientation. They also expressed the feeling of needing more queer spaces that they felt Malmö was lacking. They argued that there are queer spaces, but you have to know that it is a queer space, you have to know where to look. Which again can be connected to orientation if you are not able to find these types of places and orient yourself. Ahmed writes that disorientation occurs when you fail to orient yourself within a space. Which can be a bar, but it can also be within a city. Moving to a city can be hard and moving to a city with expectations and then having trouble finding queer spaces to turn to can lead to disorientation.

I would still say as a visitor, the queer scene of Malmö for what the city is, is still lacking. It's such a queer city and Atemlos is the only place we have. I mean, they are doing their best, but not everyone is a club person. Compared to other places in America for example there is gay coffee shops, gay clubs that are clubs, gay bars that are bars, board game-places. You know, it is easier to find community in the context of a shared interest. Which is something that I think Malmö is kind of lacking. Or building towards, if I want to be more optimistic. (Interview 2).

In relation to Ahmed's concept of orientation I used my own body as a part of my research when visiting the bar. Ahmed writes that orientation is about the bodily inhabitants of a space

where it allows us to rethink how our body acts in that space. Reflecting afterwards on how my body acted in the space I felt happy, calm and safe. I asked myself the question: How did these feelings affect my night and my experience? The first thing that I acknowledged and that made me think about safety, was the photo sign. Other aspects that felt safe for me were the guards and their approach. They had a different way to approach and talk to people than what I was used to, for example asking for consent in a completely different way than other guards had done before. The fact that I could look around and see people I could relate to, and seeing people happy, enjoying themself and dancing. In a way I felt at home, and by that means I would describe it as I did feel oriented.

Lastly what I reflected on after the visit was that even if it was my first time there, it felt almost familiar. I did also experience a big difference going out to other places that are not a queer space. Ahmed describes that we usually do not think about orientation when we feel oriented - it's when we feel disorientated that we do. Through our bodies and through a space we seek to find the familiar. That's why it felt like that for me, because I was surrounded by my community.

4.1.3 Freedom

Being within a queer space could be connected to a feeling of freedom, which is something that can be interpreted in the bar from the different conversations. Multiple times in different conversations it is mentioned that what is the most appreciated about this bar is the feeling of being able to go out and dance, enjoy and talk to people without getting approached or disturbed in different ways. This I interpreted as a form of freedom where you can act in a certain way without the expectations from others. Interview 1 described it like this: “I would say the feeling that I would connect with queer spaces would be the feeling of comfort, the feeling of ease and the feeling of freedom” (Interview 1). When I asked the question: *What are the thoughts and feelings you connect with the term queer space?*

What I connect to queer spaces supposed to non-queer spaces: is the feeling of when you're in the space you don't need to look over your shoulder. For danger or for you know people looking at you the way that you are dressed or the way you are presenting physically. Nor in the way you are dancing or whatever you are doing. I feel like within queer spaces there are no normative expectations of people to behave one or the other way, and I think that non-normativity is something that I would tie

to queer spaces so heavily, because for me that's the biggest attribute to queer spaces. The non-normative construction of those spaces (Interview 1).

The freeing feeling within the space and inside of Atemlos was also described in the third conversation.

Conversation 3

In the last conversation the person told me that they liked the place and enjoyed spending time here. I asked what they liked most about it. "The fact that I don't feel like people are staring" Which they explained is something that happens in other places. Continuing she explained that in other clubs there are always people staring at you when you dance, and they are also not getting approached in the same way which they expressed felt relieving. She continued by telling me that they haven't experienced anyone here being extremely drunk, which they also described felt relieving. "It's a place that is really well taken care of and it shows". Lastly, she mentioned that there are also people of different ages in the bar which they appreciated. Even though it was a chill night that night, and she had more fun last time she was here, she still always enjoys coming here.

This conversation aligns with the experiences from the group interview as well, where when I asked the question: *What would you describe as the biggest difference between a queer and a non-queer space?* These were some of the answers:

Looking at the two queer places in Malmö. I go to page 28 over another bookstore in hopes to find books I'm interested in. Because I am interested in queer books and it's more likely that this place is gonna have things that are targeted towards me. Then with Atmelos as a bar, I personally don't go to not-gay bars as a femme presenting lesbian, because I don't want to be hit on by men. That's not a good night for me. So I think that those spaces are important because you can kind of know your expectations and know that people can likely make an assumption as to why you're there, and there are layers of disclosure that you get to avoid (Interview 2).

The vibes are always super different. I have been to a lot of bars, parties and clubs. But, there is something even if it's not always the best or safest feeling in a queer space it always feels like you have more opportunities to be yourself or to assume that others are going to assume that you are not straight or heteronormative or whatever it is and that feels better, just in general (Interview 2).

The third person agrees and says: “It sort of feels like you take this mask off, you can relax a bit more” (Interview 2). Another participant says: “I think that there is also a lot of joy in seeing other queer people having fun, and they play better music” (Interview 2). We launched at the music comment but moved on to other examples of successful events:

> It was just fun to be around so many other queer women. Who were just out, dressing like queer women, behaving like queer women and kissing. It's just a nice energy to be around and you don't get to see this every weekend. To feel that no one is going to stare at me for what I'm doing, because they are also doing it. That takes pressure off (Interview 2).

What is being highlighted here is the importance for these women to be able to go out and freely have a night of fun. Where they can be relaxed and feel like they can be themselves without thinking about it. Goldstein wrote that a queer home or a space that is created by queer residents, is a space for queers to celebrate and to be recognized for their identity. Which is precisely what the woman in this interview is describing. To see other queer people enjoy themselves, dancing or kissing. It highlights the importance of a queer space that feels free and safe to do this within. Goldstein writes that queerness through this act can be recognized as an identity and it is important that this is being seen.

4.1.4 Safety

Defining what a queer space means to different people has led me into the discussion about safety. As explained in my introduction there has been an increased intolerance towards the queer crowd and it has manifested in various ways. This makes the question of safety even more relevant in relation to having a queer space. For this reason this became a central topic both in the interviews but also in some of the conversations. Feeling safe can vary from person to person and can play out differently for different people. The other themes above become in a way all connected to safety. For an example to be able to feel free as explained above, there is first a need for the ability to feel safe. Starting of with this conversation:

Conversation 4

This conversation started spontaneously when we started speaking in the queue to get in. The person I started talking to tells me that she's there with her friend and that it's their first visit to Atemlos. They are very excited and have big expectations about the place and about the night, because they have heard good things about it. This led us to a smaller discussion about Malmö´s nightlife. They were new in Malmö and were trying out new places, and expressed that they didn't feel like there were that many places. Which made the excitement of a new place even bigger. Later during the night we met again and they expressed a good first feeling about the place and their night. I asked again what their thoughts were on the place and they described how they had been feeling safe the whole night. When I asked how she told me that it was such a relief to go out and have no men approaching them or behaving unpleasant. Which they expressed happens often when they go out otherwise to other places.

In this conversation above but also in the previous conversations people have mentioned that Atemlos is a place where they can go out and feel safe and free from unwanted approaches or being flirted with. Which often happens in other clubs or nightlife places. This factor creates a feeling of both relief but also safety, which aligns with Goldstein's argument around queer safety. Where she wrote that it's an active creation of a queer space that contributes to queer safety. Interviewee 1 also talks about safety, where he describes that within a queer space he doesn't need to look over his shoulder for danger. Where the queer safe space plays a huge role.

In the third interview the discussion on safety was related to the interviewees professional role in relation to actively working with organizing and creating a queer spaces and the difficulties they met in their work. The interviewee highlighted important and valuable insights regarding working within queer spaces and lifted a different perspective coming from the other side of the topic.

I asked: *What does the term queer safe space mean to you? And in your work?* The interviewee describes that this is something they are taking into consideration a lot in their work, how to keep the feeling of safety within the space. They described a gap that they had noticed working in the nightlife and refers to a recently released study done by RFSL: Safety rapport (2026) showing that LGBTQI people’s perceived safety continues to be lower than in

the general population. What especially stands out is that this group feels the most unsafe when being out having fun. It also shows that the trust for the police and security guards is lower in this group. This has highlighted an important aspect in the interviewees work related to queer nightlife organizing their events and for them in creating a safe space.

They explained further that it becomes a challenge when you run club activities. For them it is of big importance that the audience feels safe during the events but it becomes a question about power dynamics. They highlight the gap between organizers, the place for the events and the security guards. This is because within the Swedish context in hosting events where you are serving alcohol there are specific rules on how it needs to be handled and coordinated. You are for example obliged to have security guards according to law. From a queer perspective this becomes more complex than what it seems the interviewee explains. Because they are all subject to different regulations. The security guards for example go under the police and not under the place. The queer crowd that comes to the hosted events need to feel safe, but there also needs to be guards there. The interviewee described this as difficult. They exemplify incidents regarding queer people and guards, especially non-white queers that have been subjected to racism and treated in problematic ways, where they explain the frustration around this. But they also explain how they constantly work with this issue and different factors to create a safe feeling. Where they for example have audience hosts on spot working for the safety and guidelines on the walls tied to this specific queer event.

In my point of view it's almost like we wouldn't need security guards here, if that is what can cause people to feel unsafe. I understand why there are rules for the safety in case of fires or if someone from the outside would come in with extremism ideas or risk of violence and so on. We do need security guards for that safety aspect. But I feel like the majority of incidents could have been handled differently internally. We are already working with an oppressed group that may have trauma connected to security guards or the police. The collaboration with the place we are at also becomes extremely important as an organizer. You have to be lucky to have people who understand the situation and the type of event. Some things as an organizer are outside of our control (Interview 3).

Continuing the interviewee explains how everyone is welcome to the events. But it's important to highlight the norms you create in the space. “In this space, even if you are not queer, the most valuable thing is the mindset. For us the importance is that when you are in

this space, you know what kind of norms are existing here and how you are expected to behave in a drag show. Regardless of who you are attracted to or how you identify”(Interview 3). This is a place-making practise that the interviewee is taking as Halbertstam explains. In the work they are doing in creating this safe space they are enabling the production for the queer audience.

The interviewee continues to tell me an example where it became very clear how different it can be within a certain space and outside of it. The example is from a very successful night of an event, where an international artist came to perform. The show was a success and everyone was really happy. To continue the night afterwards, they left the event and outside in the street they got a completely different situation. They had to witness people yelling, threatening and approaching them in a very problematic way. The interviewee wanted to highlight the importance of a safe space. “This was an eye opener even for me, to see that this is the reality outside of this bubble we had within the space. Just a few blocks away, it was something completely different” (Interview 3). As Ahmed (2004) describes, emotions used in social movements can be a way to create justice. In times of increasing intolerance and examples of extreme opinions, the interviewee turned her feelings from this experience and used it in their continually work in creating safe spaces.

Further on this is an example of the threat image existing in Malmö and why the need for these spaces exists. This example brings us further into the topic of the political climate in Sweden which is also something they have in consideration. They say that they are aware of the change in attitudes that is being shown in different ways in Sweden. “The bigger we have become and the bigger events we are hosting, the risks also can increase. We have to think about it more and have this kind of awareness to create a safe space. We are very political, it's a show and is supposed to be fun but it is still important to stand for what is right, whether it's against racism or transphobia, we have a platform and it's important to also use it” (Interview 3).

The political climate in Sweden as the interviewee refers to aligns with Askanius and Butler discussion about extremism and the interviewee also pointed out that this is something that affects their work and that they need to take risks into consideration. As Butler explained, the ani-gender movement is still existing which is being shown in these examples and does harm

for people trying to live freely without the fear of attacks. Which is being expressed by interviewee who talked about having to look over your shoulder or in this example where they were just going from one place to another.

This example was a direct violent example where it becomes clear how dangerous it can be to just exist as a queer person. As Askanius argued for us to understand extremism as political phenomena, these examples are also saying something about the cultural violence and can affect queer people in Malmö's feelings towards going out and feeling safe. It also highlights the continued need for a safe space and how different it can be within and outside different spaces. This can be understood in relation to what Goldstein and Hanhardt wrote that queer spaces and queer nightlife spaces contribute to queer safety. It becomes clear that it is a constant and active work to create these safe spaces and as the interviewee makes a point about as well: they can never guarantee anything but they can work to create *safer* spaces. At the end of the interview I asked if there was something they wanted to add in the discussion about queer safe spaces.

One thing I can add about queer organizers in general. When you say that you arrange a queer club: for me, just by saying this comes with a responsibility. You have to take responsibility in creating this room. I have been in queer clubs, where it's been clear that it was more about making money and not taking that responsibility for how the people in the space are doing. Which for me becomes provocative. I think that everyone who arranges night clubs, or meeting places for specifically queer people has to take responsibility for ensuring that it is a safe space. I also like the term safer spaces, because you can never guarantee anything. It is something you have to work on continuously. Situations can happen, it's not something you do once and it's done. We can't ever promise anything that is out of our control, but we can do what we can. Otherwise it's just pinkwashing (Interview 3).

I think that you as a queer person should be able to go to a queer event and relax, and feel that someone thought of me here. We can never promise 100% safety, but we can show that we have thought about it and tried. That there is a will, that's important for me. Unfortunately I have been to places where this has not been done, where drag or just gender non-conformity was being exotified, and that's not a safe space. All spaces within the queer world should be a safe space, that has to be the ambition (Interview 3).

This leads me into some of the reflections regarding safety I had from my phenomenological experience and got me thinking about what attributes I saw at Atemlos that creates the feeling of a safe space. One example of this that I reflected on was the sign saying “no photos”, highlighting the work the bar constantly has to make to work for it to feel and become a safe space. The importance of a sign like that reflects that they have thought about aspects like people within the space who are not openly out, or can´t be on social media for safety reasons. That also highlights the importance of queer safety and the active process in creating this space, accounting to what Goldstein wrote where you constantly need to ask the question of where is it safe to be out and to be queer? This was something I noticed since it is something I have not seen in other bars in Malmö. Likely since other places do not think about safety in the same way that a queer bar needs to do. As Coltman describes queer spaces makes it possible for people to exist in non-normative ways. To be able to do this in a space, there are different factors like for example the no photo policy that need to exist to achieve this.

Something else I noticed from my experience in Atmelos was the way their security guards acted, which made me feel both safe and seen in another way. They asked for consent and acted in a more polite way than what I am used to. It's most likely that they are also aware of the RFSl study the third interviewee mentioned and that this is an active choice they make to have security guards behave in a certain way to make people feel more safe.

In Interview 2 we also discussed safety where they highlighted the safety aspects within queer spaces, specifically regarding the place itself to actively work with creating a safe place. In that discussion they referred to their experiences regarding IDs and safety. Some of the interviewees said that they couldn't remember if they really had to show ID every time they went to Atemlos. That brought the discussion to the importance of the place to take responsibility for the safety in the place. One of the interviewees makes a point: “Just because a space is gay does not mean that a space is safe” (Interview 2). Another one of the persons brings the perspective of safety in relation to history. “I think that's really important for people to know that gay culture historically has had a lot of unsafe histories and practices that have come out from places of real trauma” (Interview 2). She exemplifies factors that like inappropriate age gaps or alcohol and drugs use.

Those things can definitely filter into contemporary gay spaces, and I think it's important that gay spaces are responsible for knowing about and managing them appropriately. To be aware and recognise if things come into the space. To be strict about checking ids or bags and so on. There are things to watch for. I think sometimes people hear queer space and they see a very cuddly version of what that can be, and that's not always true (Interview 2).

This again highlights the place itself and the active role the organizer as interviewee 3 is referring to och the bar itself as Atemlos, where they have to have guidelines and know how to approach these types of situations that can occur in a bar.

4.1.5 Inclusion/exclusion

The last theme I identified from the research material was inclusion and exclusion. Something that was particularly evident in interview 2. They had all been visiting Atemlos a couple of times and expressed a positive experience towards the bar, but did also share some critical aspects. One of the interviewees said: " I feel like I go there and think "where are the lesbians?" (Interview 2). Another participant interjects:

I got some straight vibes there as well. That's the "problem" with queer clubs: they are often filled with straight women, because they are seeking to get away from men harassing them. Of course, I want straight women to have a space to not be harassed by men, I would like for every space to be that space. But it does make it sticky as a non straight woman in those. It brings us back to this again that it's hard to define a queer space: It is not a one size fits all. Even though I do think a queer space should be inclusive of straight people, not all spaces always, but just in general. Queer should be an inclusive term because people can be exploring or whatever it is (Interview 2).

Another participant also shared her feelings around the term queer:

I almost resist things that label themself as queer, because queer is such a big word. It means a lot of things and it doesn't necessarily mean that, as a lesbian I am queer, but I wouldn't identify as queer first. It doesn't mean that just because a place is queer it's going to necessarily include me. Like we talked about here, a lot of gay bars are for men, and that's alright, that's their business. And a lot of events do have very specific demographics, but because we are so interested in controverting these spaces where we can be together and be free of certain expectations which is what I think a lot of these spaces seek to respond to. It becomes hard to cultivate, you can't create a one size fits all. It's a

real challenge. I think queer people feel that dissonance, or when I talk to them they do at least. And that doesn't mean that spaces aren't needed also, it's just a persistent challenge (Interview 2).

These insights align with what Kern wrote about how lesbians have struggled to find their spaces in the city since it is often focused on gay men. They describe the feeling of exclusion that can and has arisen for them in some queer spaces, that is meant to fit everyone. They describe the need for more alternative queer spaces than what is usually seen in Malmö. As example they mention queer spaces that are not party focused and argue also for the need for more specific crowds. What is also seen in this interview is the different aspects of inclusion both in relation to queer and non-queer places. Having a queer space can be a form of inclusion, where you can feel included and welcomed as a part of the community. However, it can also create the feeling of exclusion within the space itself. In their perspective the term queer does not automatically involve them, as one interviewee describes she defines as a lesbian first. Places and events they have attended do sometimes feel exclusive to a certain crowd and male dominated which does create the feeling of exclusion. However they still agree on the need for queer spaces in Malmö, even more, to meet the different needs in the community.

Further on another perspective of inclusion is one of the interviewees in the second interview mentions disabilities in relation to queer spaces. They told me about the findings in their project where a lot of queer spaces often are party-focused which may not always be accessible for people. One of the interviewees expresses that she is not a party person herself which creates a small accessibility of queer events to join. She's speaking about not being able to have the energy for a party event but also the practical accessibility that some places lack. For example not having ramps or missing other things that people could be in need of. “So if you are unlike the if we would call it the "party norm” of the queer culture, then you might have trouble connecting with your community in different ways” (Interview 2). The group felt that Malmö was lacking that, because mostly it is party events. Which is why they focused on day time spaces, which they expressed didn't find tons of them but they do exist.

The most interesting insight that we took from the project is that when you don't have specific spaces you end up creating small events. Where the main thing people have in common is being gay. Being gay is not, despite what some people think really a personal trait or an interest that you have. This

grabs bags of people that don't really have that much in common. That also becomes hard to create a sense of community and to create a culture because you're all kind of there under various interests. Maybe some people are looking to date, maybe some people are just looking to get out of the house and you know it's tough (Interview 2).

When you talk about a queer space just in general, I also sort of have the underlined feeling that it's going to somehow still be male dominated. Or gay man dominated. Which is not always bad but that's not always the vibe you're looking for. Not always the safest vibe either as a non-man. That was the point I wanted to make that it feels different between a queer space and something that is specifically targeted to for instance only trans people or trans allies, or whatever the distinction is (Interview 2).

This highlights stereotypes of queer people and the assumption that it is a homogeneous group. It also highlights the need for diverse perspectives on queer spaces since different people have different needs. It also brings out the gendered perspective connected to these spaces which is an important insight.

5. Conclusive discussion

The focus for this essay has been on the newly opened queer bar Atemlos with the aim to understand if and how people experience it as a safe space. With the focus on Malmö and the experiences of people living here because the interest for the topic arose from an increased intolerance among school students in Sweden and threat images towards Malmö Pride and RFSL. With these circumstances the need for a safe space became highly relevant. As shown in my own phenomenological work, the conversations in the space and the semistructured interviews, queer spaces become very important for a city and just as important in Malmö. In my material it was highlighted that there is a strong queer community in Malmö, at the same time there is a need for more queer spaces.

The material I collected during the research process was analyzed combined with the literature using Ahmed's concept of orientation. I used the concept of orientation as a lens in understanding the queer space and whether it can be experienced as a safe one, through both my own bodily experience within the space and through others experiences in the bar. Simultaneously I could interpret experiences of disorientation as a queer person moving to a city like Malmö, struggling to find places to turn to.

Further on I used Goldstein's theory on queer homes and queer safety, where the queer bar Atemlos contributes to queer safety serving an important role in being Malmös only queer bar. Where queers who seek can turn to and are not marginalized for their identity. Halberstam's description of a queer space as a place-making practice with new understandings of space was helpful in understanding Atemlos as a queer safe space and what I could also interpret from the interview material is that people experienced Atemlos as this space. In the way it is created it is challenging the traditional ways to design a bar, which can be seen as success regarding these new understandings of a space.

Askanius' argument of extremism as political phenomena helped formulate the understanding of these violent examples towards queer people and show how safe spaces and the nightlife can contribute to queer safety.

Kern's theory on how lesbians historically have struggled to find spaces in cities that have often been targeted towards men was also used, as this was something that aligned with the experiences of some interviewees, that lesbians in Malmö do also relate to this feeling of exclusion.

Focusing on the queer bar Atemlos in this work I proposed the question: *In a world of increasing extremism of opinions and actions, how do people in Malmö experience the bar Atemlos as a queer safe space?* I identified five different themes in the analysis to help me understand how Atemlos is experienced as a safe space based on these perspectives. These themes I identified are: The queer space, (dis)orientation, freedom, safety and inclusion/exclusion. It was highlighted that these five all play different parts in the experience of the bar as a safe space and are in different ways also connected. With the qualitative research I conducted I was able to get an in-depth understanding coming from the queer community in Malmö.

I can draw the conclusion that people in Malmö do in different ways experience Atemlos as a queer safe space. I can make this conclusion because I can see that it is a place where people can be able to orient themselves. It is a place where people can feel free, safe and included. This comes with some different opinions connected to individual preferences or experiences, for example did some of the interviewees who identified as lesbian express a form of exclusion in general queer spaces. However they still appreciated Atemlos as this space where they know what to expect. I can also draw the conclusion that Atemlos in general has good attributes to consider it a safe space. These attributes are targeting a queer crowd and actively working on making it a safe space where people visit the bar for this reason. It was needed with a queer space in the city for people to be able to freely go out, be themselves and not having to worry about danger.

Naturally experiences are individual and people experience it differently. It would be hard and to be asking a lot from one individual bar to fit everyone's different needs. We are different people and it would be simplified to say that it's enough. However Atemlos is a good attribute to Malmö and something that was needed for the queer community. The need for multiple but also different kinds of queer spaces was highlighted in the material, since what is considered a safe queer space can also depend on who you are asking. It becomes

clear that the city of Malmö needs to put more resources into the queer scene to recreate the feeling of safety. As was highlighted in the interviews, safe spaces is something that needs to be continuously worked on, especially in times where intolerance is increasing.

The aim of this thesis has been to lift perspectives and insights from different perspectives within the queer community, specifically based in Malmö. By taking a glance through the bar Atemlos. This work can be a start and a ground to stand on in the continuing work in investigating or creating safe and safer queer spaces in Malmö. Parts of this thesis considerations could be used for future work and also as a starting point for future clubs and events. Other aspects for future work could be looking into queer spaces in Malmö from a lesbian perspective. Something that was highlighted in the second interview is that queer spaces and especially queer clubs still can inhabit the feeling of exclusion and being directed to queer or gay men.

Lastly, since my research has been focusing on Malmö, future work can also continue looking into the question. When Atemlos has been more established and hopefully more queer places have occurred here. This essay can be a start to the conversation about queer safe spaces both in Malmö but also in Sweden and contribute to the creation of more queer spaces. I am of the impression that it would benefit the city having more of these spaces to make more queer people feel seen and safe.

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