# NEUROQUEER(ING) EXPERIENCES OF WORKPLACE WELL-BEING

## A MIXED METHODS STUDY: 7 INTERVIEWS & 92 SURVEY REPLIES

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# Abstract

This master's thesis investigates workplace well-being of people who identify within the intersection between queerness and neurodivergence—in short 'neuroqueers'—and/or people who engage with 'neuroqueering' practices. Nick Walker (she/her) with her concept of neuroqueer(ing) is a great inspiration for doing this study – and her book 'Neuroqueer Heresies: Notes on the Neurodiversity Paradigm, Autistic Empowerment, and Postnormal Possibilities' (2021) lays the primary theoretical foundation. The term is used in its original form as a verb, "to neuroqueer", but mostly as an identity-label, "to be neuroqueer", for delimiting and describing the research population. The research question for conducting this investigation is *How is the 'neuroqueer(ing)' experience of well-being affected by workplace settings?* To answer this question, mixed methods are used for data collection: seven qualitative semi-structured interviews and ninety-two quantitative survey replies. This empirical data uncovers different workplace settings that affect the neuroqueer(ing) participants to different degrees. The intention is not to categorize and conclude on a "typical" experience connected to this or that identity – and put the participants into narrow stereotypical boxes. Instead, neuro-queer(ing) experiences, struggles, and perspectives on workplace well-being are highlighted to recommend workplaces what *to do*—and what *not* to do—for creating the ideal neuroqueer(ing)-friendly work setting. The transcription, coding, and data analysis process revealed seven themes. The most important points from those themes led to the following recommendations for building a neuroqueer(ing) workplace: 1. No ableism, homophobia, transphobia; 2. Transparency – "speak, ask & listen!"; 3. Sensory-friendly; 4. Flexible remote work; 5. Made by & for neuroqueers; 6. Don't "lump" identities together; and 7. Embodied liberation. Based on the neuroqueer participants' experiences and dreams for an ideal neuroqueer(ing) workplace, workplaces are recommended to check, educate, update people and policies on neuroqueer(ing) identities, ableism, homophobia, and transphobia. They are recommended giving words to neurodivergence, disability, queerness and listening to their neuroqueer employees (and their needs). They are recommended sensory-friendly workspaces with flexible non-traditional work hours when possible. Also, workplaces made *by* and *for* neuroqueers with increased representation, pronoun check-ins, gender-neutral bathrooms, and education on not "lumping" identities together. Lastly, managers are encouraged to inform staff and embody multiple ways of functioning, working, and expressing yourself through embodied liberation.


**Keywords:** Neuroqueer(ing), Neurodiversity Paradigm, LGBTQIA+/Queer/Trans Studies, Workplace Well-being, DE&I, (Un)masking, Cis-heteronormativity, Neuronormativity

## Acknowledgements

This study on neuroqueer(ing) experiences of workplace well-being has—consciously and subconsciously—been a work-in-progress for long: not only the last eight months, but also the last couple of years. When looking back, growing up and into adulthood was a journey full of neuroqueer(ing) realizations about identity, mental health, and neurodivergence – and not "fitting into" the socially-constructed binary boxes: "Okay, so I'm not straight, I guess I'm pansexual, no, I'm a lesbian, but I'm not cisgender, damn, am I non-binary, am I transmasc, do I want to transition? Okay, so I also got anxiety, ADHD, and might be autistic". This was not just a process of exploring identity labels. More than anything, it was—and still is—an active process of subverting, disrupting, and liberating from socially-constructed binary boxes, neuronormativity, and cis-heteronormativity (Walker N. , 2021, pp. 160,162). At some point, it became clear that living, navigating, and understanding the world as a neuroqueer individual carries different strengths - and struggles. In particular, having a job and being at a workplace gave rise to thoughts like: "do other neuroqueer employees struggle with masking, social norms, anxiety, and feeling invisible in their neurodivergent and queer identities?". This led to the first ideas for the thesis, but the final "piece-of-art" would not have looked like this without the invaluable help, inspiration, and mental support from the community, friends, and other neuroqueers. Therefore, a special thanks to friends and fellow-neuroqueers, Ville, Malte, and Længste for input, feedback, love, and emotional support - and thank you for listening to many hours of thesis-talk. Appreciation to Aarhus queer and neurodivergent communities for showing that you can find a home and be yourself in a new city. Infinite gratitude to the seven interviewees and ninety-two survey participants who shared vulnerable, personal, and touching experiences - as well as funny quotes and a great sense of humor, so thank you for making us laugh too in the thesis process! Last but not least, a great appreciation to supervisor of this thesis, Suen Wang, for academic and moral support while believing in this neuroqueer(ing) project all along.

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# Key terms

| | |
|---|---|
| Cisgender | "condition of relative compatibility between the True Self and the social performance demands associated with their assigned gender (Walker N. , 2021, p. 179)" |
| LGBTQIA+ and queer | LGBTQIA+ and queer are used interchangeably which is the umbrella terms and "abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, and more (...) used to describe a person's sexual orientation or gender identity (The Center, 2024)." |
| Neurodivergent and neurodivergence | "having a mind that functions in ways which diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards (...) neurodivergence (the state of being neurodivergent) (Walker N. , 2021, p. 38)" |
| Neurodiverse | "A group of people is neurodiverse if one or more members of the group differ substantially from other members, in terms of their neurocognitive functioning (Walker N. , 2021, p. 42)" |
| Neurodiversity | "the diversity of human minds, the infinite variation in neurocognitive functioning within our species (Walker N. , 2021, p. 34)" |
| Neurodiversity paradigm | "a specific perspective on neurodiversity (...) that boils down to these fundamental principles: 1. Neurodiversity is a natural and valuable form of human diversity 2. The idea that there is one "normal" or "healthy" type of brain or mind (...) is a culturally constructed fiction (...) 3. The social dynamics that manifest in regard to neurodiversity are similar to the social dynamics that manifest in regard to other forms of human diversity (e.g., diversity of ethnicity, gender, or culture) (Walker N. , 2021, p. 36) |
| Neurotypical | "having a style of neurocognitive functioning that falls within the dominant societal standards (Walker N. , 2021, p. 40)" |
| Neuroqueer(ing) | "Neuroqueer is active subversion of both neuronormativity and heteronormativity (...) intentional noncompliance with the demands of normative performance (...) choosing to actively engage with one's potentials for neurodivergence and queerness (...) treating cognition, gender, and embodiment as fluid and customizable (Walker N. , 2021, p. 175)" – in this study, used in its original form as a *verb*, and as a *social identity*. |
| Non-binary gender identities | "neither of the binary gender options offered by the dominant heteronormative culture are a suitable fit (Walker N. , 2021, p. 179)" |
| Pathology paradigm | "two fundamental assumptions: 1. There is one "right", "normal", or "healthy" way for human brains and human minds to be configured (...) 2. If your neurological configuration (...) diverge substantially from the dominant standard of "normal", then there is Something Wrong With You (Walker N. , 2021, p. 18)" |
| Transgender | "For some of these people, the ones we refer to as transgender, the socially-constructed binary gender that they weren't assigned at birth turns out to be a far better fit than the gender they were initially assigned (Walker N. , 2021, p. 179)" |

# Chapter 1 – Introduction

"To be neuroqueer" as an *identity label* relates to people who identify within the intersection between queerness and neurodivergence. "To neuroqueer" as a *verb* means subverting, disrupting, or liberating oneself from neuronormative and heteronormative habits, performances, expressions, and discourses (Walker N. , 2021, pp. 160, 162). In our perspective, workplaces are interesting by being infused with (in)visible ideas on how to behave, what to say, which clothes to wear, and who to love. For that reason, workplace well-being must inevitably require that employees are not suppressed or stigmatized by these ideas. This could be socially/culturally imposed binary heteronormative gender roles, neurotypical norms, and embodiment expectations such as certain ways of walking, speaking, gesturing, dressing, or interacting (Walker N. , 2021, pp. 171, 178). People whose "true self" more or less aligns with these norms might experience workplace well-being to varied degrees. In turn, others might experience divergence, disconnect, or distance from their "true self" to dominant norms in ways that causes distress, dysphoria and/or discrimination (Walker N. , 2021, p. 179).

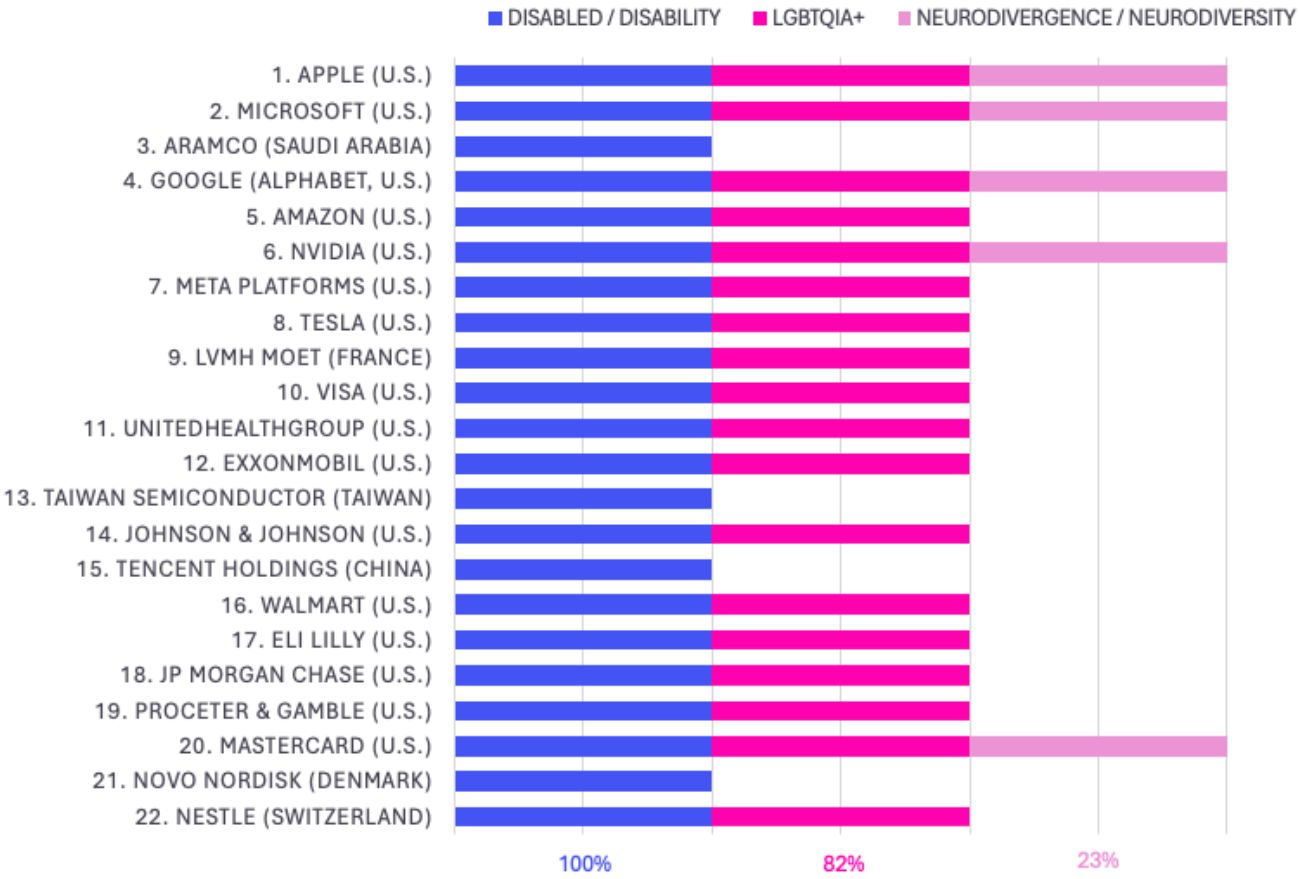
Nick Walker (she/her) who coined the term 'neuroqueer(ing)' in 2008 highlights queer, neurodivergent, and disabled individuals as particularly subject to this experience due to ableist, racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic systems of oppression and power inequalities (Walker N. , 2021, p. 126). In continuation, Walker asks the question of what schools, institutions, and organizations would look like if "neurocognitive norms was not in any way—officially or unofficially—an advantage in attaining entry, employment, inclusion, advancement, or positions of leadership (Walker N. , 2021, p. 78)." This thesis investigates whether workplaces are infused with such norms according to neuroqueer individuals and how they imagine the "ideal" workplace to look like. Looking at statistics, neurodivergent and queer individuals are indeed subject to disadvantages at the workplace. Data from 2024 conveys that 20% of surveyed neurodivergent employees have experienced work harassment or discrimination due to their neurodivergence (Thompson & Miller, 2024, p. 11). Data from 2021 reveals that 33.2% LGBTQIA+ employees of color and 26.3% white LGBTQIA+ employees reported employment discrimination—being fired or not hired—as a result of their sexual orientation or gender identity (Sears, Mallory, Flores, & Conron, 2021, p. 2). This points to a need for improving their well-being at work. But what does that mean? Workplace well-being is defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) as "all aspects of working life, from the quality and safety of the physical environment, to how workers feel about their work, their working environment, the climate at work (International Labour Organization, 2024)." Workplace well-being—or lack hereof—takes place at corporations, institutions, and organizations around the

globe. Corporations have great influence on international politics, trends, and agendas due to vast amounts of money, employees, networks, investors, and branding channels. For that reason, turning to their corporate sustainability aims, goals, and efforts says something about trends in the field.

In fact, every single company within top-22 of 'the 100 largest companies in the world by market capitalization in 2023 (in billion U.S. dollars)' mentions diversity, equity, and/or inclusion (DE&I) (Statista, 2023). This is predominantly about measuring, ensuring, increasing, and reporting on the representation of women, ethnic groups, and age. However, 100% of the companies in top-22 also mention disabled/disabilities, 82% mention LGBTQIA+, and 23% mention neurodivergence/ neurodiversity in their sustainability, diversity, inclusion or ESG reports (Figure 1). Disabled, LGBTQIA+ and neurodivergent people are the population of interest in this study. The word 'neurodivergent' has not yet been widely adopted, appropriated, or applied by the corporate world – only 23% of the companies mention neurodivergence or neurodiversity. For that reason, 'disabled' also refers to the target group of this thesis. Nick Walker explains the link between neurodivergence and disability with: "Those privileged are *abled*, or *enabled* (...) society is set up to enable their participation (...) when we say that a person is disabled, we mean that society isn't properly set up to enable their participation (e.g. building staircases without ramps (...) the expectation of eye contact in job interviews is a barrier to autistic people) (...) You're *dis*abled to whatever degree your participation isn't properly *en*abled within a given setting (Walker N. , 2021, pp. 61-62)

**Figure 1**

*Top-22 Largest Companies in 2023 That Mention Disabled, LGBTQIA+ and Neurodivergence in Their Sustainability, Diversity, Inclusion, or ESG Reports*




*Note.* Data retrieved from Statista (2023, June). *The 100 largest companies in the world by market capitalization in 2023 (in billion U.S. dollars)*. https://www.statista.com/statistics/263264/top-companies-in-the-world-by-market-capitalization/.

The question is whether workplaces *en*able or *dis*able neuroqueers in their own perspective – and not in the perspective of corporations. That is precisely the research aim, objective, and goal of this thesis. To bring neuroqueer(ing) experiences into light as well as take part in, expand, and fill out scholarly gaps in the field of neuroqueer(ing). Instead of understanding neuroqueer(ing) experiences of workplace well-being through statistics, corporate eyes, or 'diversity, equity, and inclusion' initiatives, the purpose is to give voice to neuroqueers themselves. This is carried out by collecting primary data on neuroqueer(ing) experiences by means of a quantitative survey and qualitative semi-structured interviews to gain in-depth knowledge. The research population of interest is people over

18 years old who self-identify as neurodivergent (autistic, bipolar, schizophrenic, ADHD, PTSD, etc.) *and* queer/LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, transman, transwoman, non-binary, gender fluid, agender etc.) *and* are/have been employed. This population is large in size, geographically dispersed, and intersectional because the multiple identities researched are subject to overlapping oppressive systems such as racism, ableism, classism, sexism, and homo-/transphobia (Tahirih Justice Center, 2023).

The physical -, time -, size, and accessibility constraints make it impossible to study this entire population. For that reason, neuroqueers of *any* citizenship status who are permanently or temporarily located in Denmark constitute a sample representative of the population. Importantly, Denmark and Danish workplaces are not of any particular interest to the research scope, but solely function as a geographical entity for sampling. This is to understand the broader global neuroqueer(ing) experiences with workplace well-being. The topic cannot be restricted to Danish borders, citizenship, or nationality, because the LGBTQIA+, neurodivergent and disabled communities exist globally. They are not just independent local communities. This is due to globalization, technology, social media, and global movements' fight for queer neurodivergent disabled rights, awareness, and liberation that cross national borders (Walker N. , 2021). For that reason, the communities come together to form globally. This is important, inevitable, and indispensable to neuroqueer(ing) as a concept, as a practice, and as an identity label. Neuroqueers from countries around the globe with access to the internet can find a collective cosmopolitan community on Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, among others. With network, knowledge, and personal experiences from the Danish neuroqueer(ing) communities, it is established that this is also the case for neuroqueers of Denmark. They are representative of the broader global research population of interest. 'Neuroqueers DK – safe space for neurodivergent queers', 'Queer Exchange DK', 'Queer Club', 'Aarhus LGBTQIA+, what's happening' and 'LGBTQplus Slænget' are just few examples of Facebook Groups for queer and/or neurodivergent people of many different nationalities located in Denmark (Neuroqueers DK, 2024) (Queer Exchange DK , 2024) (Queer Club, 2024) (Aarhus LGBTQIA+, 2024) (LGBTQplus Slænget, 2024). For that reason, it is known before-hand that a sample of the research population exists "out there". Based on this delimited research scope, goal, and objective, the following research question was formulated:

*How is the 'neuroqueer(ing)' experience of well-being affected by workplace settings?*

# Chapter 2 – Methodology

This chapter introduces, explains, and justifies the philosophical and methodological aspects of the thesis. First, the epistemological underpinnings are described alongside doing a "state of the art" assessing existing literature on the field. This is followed by a presentation of the rationale behind choosing the research design and research methods. Third, the study's limitations, validity, and fittingness are assessed. Finally, a reflexivity section positions the researchers' biases, privileges, subjectivity, and ethical considerations in doing the research.

## Intersectional Pluralistic Epistemology

*"Global IR"*

Having studied a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Language and International Studies, English and Master of Science (MSc) in International Relations (IR) both based on interdisciplinary approaches, we have been highly encouraged, motivated, and trained for doing interdisciplinary research (AAU, 2022, p. 8) (AAU IR, 2022, p. 8). A related concept is 'pluralism' or in this case, 'pluralistic IR', which holds that there are multiple legitimate "ways of knowing" – in terms of ontology, epistemology, theory, and methodology. Yong-Soo Eun puts into questions whether there has even been a pluralist turn in IR. The call for a more diverse, inclusive, and critical discipline over an "intellectual monoculture" has come from both post-positivists and positivists (Eun, 2016, pp. 2-3). This does not only regard moving beyond positivism, single scientific methodology, and the three mainstream paradigms (realism, liberalism, constructivism) (Eun, 2016, p. 20). It is neither exclusively about doing research that cut cross philosophical traditions. Pluralistic IR is also a plea for breaking with the disciplinary dominance of the West that has kept out voices of the "Rest" (Eun, 2016, p. 6). Amitav Acharya among other scholars suggests a "Global IR" that "transcends "the divide between the West and the Rest" and embraces "greater inclusiveness and diversity" in the discipline (Eun, 2016, p. 6)." This study is based in that pluralistic global IR "camp" aspiring for more diversity, inclusion, and representation of marginalized voices (see below: 'Citation Justice and Policy'). There is no doubt that investigating neuroqueer(ing) experiences of workplace well-being within IR scholarship calls for interdisciplinary pluralistic research. Even from that brief research goal description, multiple disciplines, theories, epistemologies, and fields of study are at stake. The most eye-catching by first glance are neurodiversity/neurodivergence studies ("neuro"), queer/LGBTQIA+/trans studies ("queer"), social constructivism ("experiences"), and human resource management (HRM) ("workplace well-being"). But how do they all play together?

*Diversity Management*

To begin with the end, HRM is not a discipline per se, but a field of study that draws on other disciplines such as economics, anthropology, psychology, sociology, law, and political science. Three major HRM paradigms have evolved—structural-functionalism, conflict, and feminism—of which the first has more positivist underpinnings, the second has Marxist roots, and the third deals with gender roles, inequalities, power, subordination, and oppression (Bratton & Gold, 2017, pp. 28-30). Clearly, this paper relates to the feminist HRM paradigm. Still, HRM in itself might not be fully compatible with our research scope, because some argue it is deeply rooted in a wider neo-liberal context. Looking at the major IR paradigms, neo-liberalism grew out of liberalism, which along with realism makes limited sense to this investigation. (Neo)-realism and (neo-) liberalism tend to work under positivist assumptions while focusing on states, capabilities, economic interests, and/or institutions (Eun, 2016, pp. 16-17). To this research, they lack pluralistic possibilities, individuals as unit of analysis, and highlighting neo-liberal capitalism as systematically racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, classist, and ableist. In that case, critical HRM (CHRM) is more relevant by centering 'people' and marginal voices in HR practices within the context of capitalist society (Bratton & Gold, 2017, pp. 5,7). Building on that, 'diversity management' might be a HRM field of even more relevance to the philosophical underpinnings of this study – and which are more interconnected with the neurodiversity and queer/LGBTQQIA+/trans epistemologies. Diversity management can be seen as closely linked to but also as a contrast to the 1970s-80s equal opportunities that "people should be treated equally regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation and other social categorizations (Bratton & Gold, 2017, p. 117)." Equal opportunities based on 'sameness' overlooks that discrimination, prejudice, and stereotyping persist in workplaces, organizations, and society despite legal barriers are removed or legal opportunities are granted (Bratton & Gold, 2017, pp. 117-118). The approach also runs the risk of identity/color-blindness and fails to value differences. Instead, diversity management requires that organizations value, recognize, and accommodate differences – and that they carry out a cultural change, a culture of tolerance (Bratton & Gold, 2017, pp. 118-119).

*(Social) Constructivism*

In carrying out a cultural change and a culture of tolerance at workplaces, critical theory and (social) constructivism rightly challenges realism and liberalism's state-centric positivist approaches (Acharya, 2020). Like CHRM and diversity management, this so-called "people-centric" approach is

needed to value ‘difference’ rather than ‘sameness’. In constructivism and critical theory, to center people and not states carries the idea that reality is created and (socially) constructed by individuals and groups. This contrasts with positivism claiming a single reality or truth “out there”, which can be discovered by means of experimental research and quantitative data. On the other hand, constructivism and critical theory has ethnographic research and qualitative data in common (Patel, 2015). As this is a mixed-methods pluralistic interdisciplinary study, we do not buy into the “intellectual monoculture” or strictly single scientific methodology tradition. Positivism is not 100 percent rejected due to the focus on the empirical reality of “what are neuroqueer(ing) experiences with workplace well-being”. It is not normative deeming “what ought to be” or whether experiences are good-bad or right-wrong. Only in the analysis section, normative elements might arise. This is when proposing recommendations for workplaces on how to be inclusive based on the neuroqueer participants’ own experiences, needs, and perspectives. Accordingly, the semi-structured interviews and online survey for data collection are underpinned by neo-positivism. This is by us as researchers taking on a “neutral” role, keeping bias on the low, asking non-value laden questions, and thus producing quality valid findings (Rowley, 2012, p.270). The semi-structured interviews are also informed by constructivism. The data is co-constructed between the interviewer and interviewee. Structured questions with sub-questions function as a skeleton for directing the conversation which then is open, flexible, and adjustable to the interviewee’s answers. The epistemological pendulum swings between a neo-positivist understanding of the social world as providing empirical “facts” and a social constructivist understanding of participants’ narratives being socially constructed and highly context-dependent (Rowley, 2012, p.270).

*Intersectionality & Queer, LGBTQIA+, Trans Studies*

Despite not completely rejecting positivism, mostly social constructivism and critical theory constitute the epistemological foundation. They bring together neurodiversity/neurodivergence studies, queer/LGBTQQIA+/trans studies, diversity management, and intersectionality. These fields are central to investigating neuroqueer(ing) workplace well-being in a way that advances diversity, inclusion, and representation of marginalized voices in “global IR”. Inevitably, this draws parallels to Black feminism and intersectionality. They entered feminist scholarship in ways that questioned and critiqued the single-axis and white feminist frameworks for being ethnocentric, imperialistic, and marginalizing women of color’s voices and social location (Fotopoulou, 2012, p. 20). As Audre Lorde underscores, “It is a particular academic arrogance to assume any discussion of feminist theory

without examining our many differences, and without a significant input from poor women, Black and Third World women, and lesbians (Lorde, 2019, p. 103).” Clearly, intersectionality is the glue of this study providing an epistemological understanding of multiple identities as intersecting with oppressive, racist, ableist, homophobic, and transphobic structures.

As mentioned, this research is also informed by queer, LGBTQIA+, and trans studies which tends to be underpinned by a social constructionist epistemology viewing gender as 100 percent socially constructed, instilled, and performed. Thinkers of this field often reject essentialist claims that cis-heteronormative roles are “natural” and “biologically”-legitimized (Walker N. , 2021, pp. 176-177). This study partly belongs to that same “camp”. It is overly simplistic and reductionist to argue that human biology evolves over time in binary oppositions – in terms of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, culture, and neurobiology. That neglects human diversity and erases the myriads of intersecting identities that are continually, systematically, and historically oppressed. For that reason, this study takes on a social constructionist understanding that identities are shaped by time, place, context, and social norms. However, to say that identities are 100 percent socially constructed and zero percent inherent would also be a simplification. This paper takes on Nick Walker’s position that both essentialism and social constructionism can become overly reductionist. Identities are socially constructed, but human beings also have “their own unique set of more-or-less-innate tendencies and potentials (...) which have nothing whatsoever to do with the shape of a person’s genitals or with so-called “biological sex” (Walker N. , 2021, p. 177).” Like Walker, you might say that this epistemology is around 80-90 percent social constructionist and 10-20 percent essentialist (Walker N. , 2021, p. 177). Human beings are born with their own unique predispositions that to varying degrees are (in)compatible with prevailing ideas, norms, and discourses (Walker N. , 2021, p. 179). Under racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and ableist neoliberal capitalism, some identities are constructed, negotiated, and perpetuated as incompatible – and inferior.

*Neurodiversity Studies/Paradigm*

Neurodiversity studies are defined as a new field of inquiry, critical paradigm, or epistemology at the crossroads between sociology, critical psychology, critical medical humanities, disability studies, and critical autism studies (Rosqvist, 2020, p.2). Herein, ‘neurodivergence’ is used as a position with epistemological and ethical implications seeking to decenter dominant perspectives (Rosqvist, 2020, p.2). The authors are of the conviction that “for too long, the empirical sciences – by way of the dominance of cognitive and developmental psychology, with the anticipated validation of neuro-

science – has had the final say on what it is to be human. By de-pathologizing neurodivergence and the identities of neurodivergent people, it is possible that what is currently known as autism, ADHD, Tourettes, dyslexia, hearing voices, bipolar disorder, Down syndrome, and dementia, may be recognized as components on a broader continuum of sensory, effectual, and cognitive processing (Rosqvist, 2020, p.2)." It is crucial to clarify that 'neurodivergent' means "having a mind that functions in ways which diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards of "normal" ("normal" is not used in this study as it carries an idea of "abnormal") (Walker N. , 2021, p. 38). 'Neurodivergence' (the state of being neurodivergent) can be largely or entirely genetic/innate such as being autistic or ADHD'er, *or* caused by brain-altering experiences such as trauma, long-term meditation, psychedelic drugs, *or* a combination of the two (Walker N. , 2021, p. 38). In turn, 'neurodiverse' and 'neurodiversity' can only be used around groups of people or humanity at large being neurodiverse – i.e., "whose members differ neurocognitively *from each other*" (Walker N. , 2021, p. 43). Nick Walker emphasizes that the most common error when speaking of neurodiversity is mistaking 'neurodiverse' for 'neurodivergent'. Why is it incorrect then – and oppressive too, according to Walker? Firstly, humanity is neurodiverse like humanity is racially, ethnically, culturally, gender- and sexuality wise diverse. A single human being cannot be diverse, but you can have diversity say at a workplace. Just like a single human being cannot be neurodiverse, but you can have neurodiversity at a workplace. Secondly, mistaking "diverse" for "minority" is oppressive by carrying the idea that there is a "normal" which non-normative people should be included, added, or fit into (Walker N. , 2021, p. 44). The focus on diversity and minority relates to why intersectionality can be seen as the "epistemological glue" of this study. Systems of oppression and power inequalities intersect. Racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, ableist structures serve the same purpose: to uphold a neoliberal capitalist binary system that excludes minorities. In this way, an intersectional pluralistic epistemology of queer/LGBTQIA+/trans studies, neurodiversity studies, and diversity management. In relation to workplaces, what the historically oppressed groups centered in these fields have in common is discrimination at work, fired or not hired due to their identity, and companies doing 'diversity, equity, and inclusion' (DE&I) work around them. Workplaces can reproduce and reinforce oppressive structures – or they can resist them. This study aims to investigate that from the perspective of the people that are subject to those structures through an intersectional pluralistic epistemology. For similar reasons, a citation justice and policy has been created to make sure that the topics are spoken about by the people, minorities, and historically oppressed groups themselves that they concern – and not "outsiders".

## Citation Justice and Policy

This study has a citation policy based on the idea of citation justice which is "the process for being intentional about who you cite in your own work to uplift and center gender-diverse, Black, Indigenous, people of color, S2LGBTQIA+ folks (The University of British Columbia, 2024)." The following is an illustration of how we made sure to be intentional about whom we cite and use "insider" voices as often as possible. This was done every time we used a source.

| | |
|---|---|
| Audre Lorde | "was a writer, feminist and civil rights activist – or, as she famously put it, 'Black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet (Lorde, 2019)." |
| Kimberlé Crenshaw | "is a pioneering scholar and writer on civil rights, critical race theory, Black feminist legal theory, and race, racism and the law. In addition to her position at Columbia Law School, she is a Distinguished Professor of Law at the University of California, Los Angeles (Columbia Law School, 2024)." |
| Nick Walker | "is a queer, transgender, flamingly autistic writer and educator best known for her foundational work on the neurodiversity paradigm, her development of the term *neuroqueer* and the concept of neuroqueering (Walker, 2021)." |
| Yong-Soo Eun | "Yong-Soo EUN, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Political Science and International Studies at Hanyang University, Seoul, South Korea, and the Editor-in-Chief of the Routledge series, IR Theory and Practice in Asia (Routledge, 2024)" who "Offers perspectives from both the Anglosphere and Asia, due to the author's dual positionality (Springer Link, 2024)." |

## Research Design

### Table 1

*Research Design Choices*

| **Empirical** or theoretical | Real-life phenomena/data collected |
|---|---|
| **Inductive** or deductive | Empirical facts -> patterns -> abstract theoretical propositions |
| **Explanatory**, exploratory, interventionist, interpretive, **descriptive,** or constructive | Do neuroqueer(ing) experiences vary (description)<br>Why/why not (explanation) |
| **Explanatory: theory generate**, test, or **apply** | Mostly theory generation while applying a theoretical framework |
| Qualitative, quantitative, or **mixed methods** | Survey and semi-structured interviews |
| **Small-N or Large-N sample** | Thick in-depth knowledge complemented by larger-N statistics |
| Positive, normative, or **mixed research** | Neuroqueer experiences as "facts", but researcher subjectivity |
| **Flexible** or static analytical methods | Depends on data collected - content, thematic, 'wpr' etc. |
| **Independent variable** | Workplace setting (cause) |
| **Dependent variable** | Neuroqueer(ing) experiences with well-being (effect) |

*Note.* Data retrieved from Toshkov, D. (2016). *Research Design in Political Science.* Palgrave Macmillan (pp.30-31, 38).

*Inductive Empirical Research*

This is an inductive empirical study using mixed i.e., qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection. That is because first, empirical facts on neuroqueer(ing) experiences with workplace well-being are collected by means of qualitative semi-structured interviews and a quantitative survey. Second, general themes, patterns, or categorizations are identified, and lastly more abstract theoretical propositions are built from the observations. Deductive theoretical research can be performed exclusively in the sphere of concepts with no reference to real-life phenomena. This does not apply the other way around since theory is inevitable and indispensable to empirical explanatory work (Toshkov, 2016, p. 38).

*Explanatory Descriptive Mode of Inquiry*

Research with reference to real-life phenomena comes in a variety of forms including description, prediction, explanation, and interpretation. These are connected by the basic understanding that a reality "out there" beyond the world of abstractions can be found, described, interpreted and/or explained. The so-called reality "out there" described and explained in this study is neuroqueer individuals' experiences with workplace well-being. 'Well-being' as an open, abstract, and not fully defined concept has been chosen to let participants themselves bring their experiences, understand-

ings, and sentiments into light. This is based on not wanting to be biased and presumptuous about people's experiences. But how is that reality "out there" identified and why is it relevant to this study? Preliminary research on neuroqueer(ing) was initiated based on an interest that came from professional and personal experiences within neurodivergent queer communities. First, three years of volunteer work at LGBT+ Denmark showed that many volunteers and children/youth participants were both queer and neurodivergent. Second, Aalborg University's global gender studies course introduced us to like-minded that were also queer and neurodivergent. Third, participating in panel debates for Queer Nord, Aalborg Pride, Aarhus Festuge, and Århundredets Festival opened our eyes to how many neurodivergent queers are in fact "out there". Fourth, queer, activist, and international spaces like Kromosom (FØNiKS), UKH, Super, and Café Mellemfolk have been driving factors in getting to know Aarhus' diverse queer neurodivergent community. Last, organizing, protesting, and meeting up with queers of Aarhus to free Palestine since September 2023 has opened for even more contacts in this intersectional community.

In this way, the reality "out there" was identified through neuroqueers around us whose stories, experiences, hardships, and joys we wanted to empirically delve into. Having spent a lot of time, hours, years in this community, we realized that a topic that often comes up is workplace well-being – and/or lack hereof. Continuing preliminary research on neuroqueer(ing) but in relation to that topic clarified that this field is of limited literature. It became evident that our interest, motivation, and purpose was to fill out this scholarly gap on neuroqueer(ing) experiences with workplace well-being. Vis-à-vis, we arrived at a central research goal which is to explore whether these neuro-queer(ing) experiences vary (description) and to understand why/why not (explanation). Clearly, explanation requires some prior description of the collected empirical facts by seeking patterns within the neuroqueer(ing) experiences. For that reason, this study combines elements from explanatory and descriptive modes of inquiry (Toshkov, 2016, pp. 30-31). This empirical explanatory research design was deemed highly appropriate for directing the investigating towards the stated research goal. To clarify, delimit, and navigate the research more, the following research question was considered appropriate for the study's purpose:

*How is the 'neuroqueer(ing)' experience of well-being affected by workplace settings?*

## Research Methods

*Mixed Methods for Data Collection*

The intention behind carrying out qualitative semi-structured interviews is to harvest "facts" on neuroqueer(ing) experiences of their well-being at workplaces (Rowley, 2012, p. 260). We want to give them voice, listen, and try to understand their perspectives. That is for them to speak on behalf of themselves and ideally, to bring their lived stories to the table at workplaces when managers, leaders, and HR discuss neuroqueer(ing) well-being. For the same reason, individual rather than focus group interviews are conducted. In this way, we highlight that LGBTQIA+, neurodivergent, and disabled people are not homogenous, on the contrary, they constitute a highly diverse group. Initially, this was also a reason for not choosing quantitative surveys despite say 100 responses produce data more generalizable to the research population. In designing the study, we reflected upon the fact that in-depth interviews are constrained by time, space, and accessibility which limits the sample to fewer participants (Rowley, 2012, p. 261). At last, this was not considered a limitation to the research aim, goal, and design. That was due to the intention of collecting in-depth data on personal experiences – and due to the great access to potential interviewees in the queer neurodivergent community. Reassessing our research design choices, we realized that great accessibility was not the argument *for* small-N interviews while being the argument *against* a larger-N survey. Rather, having such great access to a neuroqueer(ing) community that represents the population of interest is the argument *for* doing a mixed methods study. To purposively select six to ten interviewees knowing there are way more "out there" would 1. be a waste of important voices and experiences, 2. pose a risk of researcher/ selection bias, and 3. entail limited validity. For that reason, we chose to complement the small-N qualitative interviews with a larger-N quantitative survey on Rambøll's SurveyXact. This provides broader statistical tendencies, patterns, and observations about neuroqueer(ing) workplace well-being alongside the more in-depth personal experiences from the interviews.

*Interviews for Data Collection*

Choosing an interview type, structured interviews would then make limited sense, because they resemble surveys by asking few questions with short answers in return (Rowley, 2012, p. 262). At the other end of the spectrum, unstructured interviews were neither chosen due to limited control and comparability when talking loosely around a topic. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because elements from structured *and* unstructured were relevant to the research question, research population, and research scope – that is, combining structure with flexibility. Structure is crucial for

making sure that we harvest the desired data from the interviews—i.e., insights, knowledge, and understanding of neuroqueer(ing) experiences with workplace well-being—to answer our research question. At the same time, flexibility is needed to direct, delve and dive deeper into certain topics through sub-questions with the interviewee at hand. Furthermore, neuroqueer(ing) as a theory, a practice, and an identity is fundamentally inclusive, rather than exclusionary (Walker N. , 2021, pp. 166-167). It is only up to the interviewees themselves to define whether they are neuroqueer, engage in neuroqueering practices, and have neuroqueer experiences. This comes in a variety of forms, embodiments, identities, cultures, languages, and neurocognitive systems which requires interview flexibility to give space for. Creating the interview guide was informed by the same reflections while further exploring how to make a neuroqueer(ing) framework. That is to make sure the form, questions, and ways of interacting are specifically designed for our neurodivergent queer participants. The neuroqueer(ing) framework was built from Nick Walker's notes on the neurodiversity paradigm, neuroqueer(ing), and guiding principles for a course on autism combined with Rowley's interview tips. Based on this, the interview guide and questions are made from the framework in table 2.

**Table 2**

*Neuroqueer(ing) Framework for Interview Guide, Conversation, and Questions*

| **Neuroqueer(ing) Framework** | |
|---|---|
| **6 - 12 main questions** | That avoid yes/no replies and has a few sub-questions if needed to delve into a topic. |
| **Direct, not vague, leading or with implicit assumptions** | Rowley's tips matching what Walker calls a "distinctively autistic communication style" of direct, blunt, truthful, and literal statements, questions, and answers. |
| **Non-academic "jargon"** | Interviewees might not know academic terms, but if needed for understanding, they are asked if they want a definition. Overall, the "jargon" is casual for interviewee to be relaxed and avoiding unequal power relations. |
| **Using proper language** | LGBTQIA+ terminology and no person-first language, which has roots in autistiphobia, anti-autistic bigotry. It is not "people with disabilities" or "people with autism", but "disabled people" and "autistic people"[1]. |
| **Respectful** | Not invasive asking about triggering subjects like ableism, or trans-/homophobia. |
| **Initiated with introducing...** | Our research, names, pronouns, length, 100% anonymized, recording permission, offering a summary report, this is a safe space, should not answer if not wanting to. |
| **Based on the neurodiversity paradigm** | That diversity among minds is a natural form of human diversity with no "normal" style of human mind like there is no "normal" gender, ethnicity, or culture.[2] |

[1] This is like saying "people with homosexuality" or "children who have Jewishness" like they were diseases (Walker, 2021, p. 91-92, 95). For similar reasons, we say ADHD'er and not "to have ADHD".
[2] In contrast to the pathology paradigm claiming one "normal" way for human brains/minds to function and when diverging from the dominant standard there is "Something Wrong With You (Walker, 2012, p.18)."

| | |
|---|---|
| **By neuroqueer researchers** | Walker's principle for a course on autism is that the instructor must be autistic, otherwise reproducing ableist idea that non-autistics are more qualified to speak for/about autistic people than themselves. Like if a man was teaching a Women's Studies course or a white person was teaching an African-American Studies course. |
| **Modelling embodied expression of neurodivergence** | Create a zone of freedom where interviewees are free to be, act, look, and sound neuroqueer by us modelling the expression of neurodivergence and queerness:<br>-Offer physical/online meeting options (wheelchair users, anxiety leaving the house)<br>-Do interview in calm settings to minimize sensory input (noise, light, smells, etc.)<br>-Model neuroqueer expression (to stim, not force eye contact, change seat position)<br>-Share our pronouns |

*Note*. Data retrieved from Rowley, J. (2012). Conducting research interviews. *Management Research Review, Vol. 35* (No. 3/4), pp. 260-271. DOI 10.1108/01409171211210154 *and* Walker, N. (2021). *Neuroqueer Heresies: Notes on the Neurodiversity Paradigm, Autistic Empowerment, and Postnormal Possibilities* (pp. 19, 61-62, 65, 104, 146, 147, 152-153). Autonomous Press.

Besides from using that neuroqueer (ing)framework, the interview questions should be designed to harvest data that provide answers to the research question(s). In other words, research question(s) impact the choice of interview questions. Research and interview questions are often created from a mix of practice and experience, theory and previous research. Inductive research is informed by the latter, deductive by the former. Theory and existing scholarly literature on neuroqueer(ing) served as the basis for defining this study's research question making it inductive. However, practice and real-world facts also played a crucial role in delimiting the scope. To illustrate, work-related, community, and personal experiences with LGBTQIA+ and neurodivergence at workplaces also informed the research question making the study deductive. Theory is a starting point for this research, but theoretical propositions will also be deduced from the data gathered in the interviews – i.e. inductive/ deductive research (Rowley, 2012, p.263). Informed by both theory and practice, the interview questions were designed around real-life workplace experiences: pre-employment (recruitment process), during employment (first day, introduction to tasks, being at a workplace) and general workplace well-being reflections (the safe and ideal workplace). Prior to this, we asked some back-ground questions (age, pronouns, ethnicities, neurodivergence, etc.) which were inserted into an interviewee matrix. This led to the final semi-structured interview guide showcased in Appendix A.

*Survey for Data Collection*

The survey was created based on the interview guide and having the neuroqueer(ing) framework in mind. For that reason, the right LGBTQIA+/neurodivergent terminology was employed, long text passages were avoided, and questions were not too many, broad, or abstract. However, since it was a

digital survey, and not a real-life interview, we knew that inevitably, something would "get lost in translation". This means that the questions had to be fewer, shorter, and clearer than for the interview. In this way, respondents would be able to maintain their attention span and we would be able to process their data. Too many questions and too long replies for larger-N quantitative data collection would be too time-consuming - for them and for us.

In light of the neuroqueer(ing) framework, it was important to provide the respondents with in-text response options. To only have multiple choice for questions on gender, ethnicity/ ethnicities, and discrimination at work would be biased, presumptuous, and limiting for people to share their different personal experiences. Therefore, we chose in-text response options, which unfortunately had to be small. It is beyond the scope, time, and length of this study to process many people's long replies. This was knowing that some may find it frustrating, restricting, or impossible to unfold their personal stories in small boxes. That is the premise for conducting surveys which is why we also have in-depth interviews. As a result of these reflections, the survey ended up mixing multiple choice and written response options displayed in Appendix B.

Interestingly, the sampling did not only give us 92 responses. It also provided us with two people's constructive feedback after having completed the survey. First, 'engineering/IT' as an option was missing in the multiple-choice question "What sector do you primarily work in?". Second, the assumption that some would find the in-text response option restricting, frustrating, or limiting to unfolding their personal experiences was right. Appendix C – Feedback: Two Survey Respondents' shows that this is the case. Furthermore, the second comment brings attention to the fact that neurodivergence is a spectrum. Our neurodivergent network testing the survey, said it was clear, easy, and accessible to have the short in-text response option, whereas one of our respondents said it was "a bit odd", "very confusing", and "hard" as an ADHD-person (Appendix C, 2024).

*Sampling / Selection Methods*

To write a basic profile of the interview and survey participants is important for finding the right ones and for the research in general (Rowley, 2012, p.264). In this case, LGBTQIA+ neurodivergent people over 18 years who have/have had a job with workplace experiences to share and who are currently located in Denmark but not necessarily Danish citizens. This profile ensures that the participants have the "authority" to provide the right and relevant insights for the research topic. For that reason, we have answered the question: "who is in a position to answer my questions or to provide the insights that I seek? (Rowley, 2012, p.264)." As mentioned, when doing preliminary research on

neuroqueer(ing), it quickly became clear that we have a large network of neurodivergent queers who are in a position to answer our questions. For that reason, interview invitations were posted on our social media (SoMe) platforms, Instagram, and Facebook, for potential participants to contact us. We did not want to do "purposive sampling" and contact the ones we already know due to a risk of selection bias and/or "outing" them for being neurodivergent queers (Rowley, 2012, 264). Seven people contacted us after having seen the interview poster which was within the desired number for harvesting qualitative data.

Why seven? This number is enough to gain different perspectives and realistic to our research scope, length, and time frame. The goal is to harvest in-depth data which is possible by doing seven thirty minutes interviews rather than say fourteen fifteen minutes ones. This gives time for the interviewees to claim their space and feel comfortable sharing their experiences. Rowley also notes how crucial it is to avoid "drowning in a sea of data (...) if you collect data, you will be obliged to analyse it! (Rowley, 2012, p. 263)." When we also collect quantitative data, doing more than seven interviews would be "drowning in a sea of data". However, knowing there are way more neuroqueers out there than seven, a way to include their experiences is via the survey. To reach out to them, we posted the survey invitation in private Facebook groups such as Neuroqueer DK, LGBTQPlus Slænget, and Queer Club with Danish and international queer and/or neurodivergent members. The interview and survey invitations (see Appendix D) were created from the following recommendations by Rowley (2012): indicate who you are, what university, why you are doing the research, briefly explain research to capture interest of potential participants, state how long it will take (and when for interviews), assure them of confidentiality, provide details regarding their benefits such as a summary of findings, give your contact details (interviews) and/or a link (survey), follow-up if initial contact does not provoke more response (Rowley, 2012, p.264).

## Transcription, Coding, and Analytical Methods

Table 3. *Data Analysis Process* illustrates the data analysis framework for the qualitative and quantitative data collected. Despite this clear step-by-step guide, it was still what Cresswell explains as a "spiral"-kind of process. Meaning that we follow the steps, but also go round, back, and forth, multiple times, before reaching the centre of the "spiral" (Rowley, 2012, p. 267). The overall data analysis strategy is thematic analysis revolving around surfacing, identifying, and linking key themes from interview and survey data into a broader coherent narrative – "you are focusing on meaning," like Rowley puts it (Rowley, 2012, p. 268).

**Table 3**

*Data Analysis Process*

| | **Qualitative Interview Data** | **Quantitative Survey Data** |
|---|---|---|
| Familiarization process | 1. Listen to recordings and notice key points briefly after last interview (April 5, 16.00) | 1. Skim data after 18 days of distribution (April 9 – 26, 12.30) |
| Transcription | 2. Transcribe data in 'DOTE' verbatim (send completed ones to interviewees agreed on checking them or follow-up questions) | 2. Insert data into "presentation rapport" with in-text responses and tables on SurveyXact |
| Organizing the data set | 3. Structure interviewee replies 1-7 in Microsoft Word (neuroqueer(ing) framework: didn't make sense to structure thematically or from interview questions, due to fluid neurodivergent communication form) | 3. Download and structure data, make figures of background question replies in Microsoft Excel – insert in word |
| Getting acquainted with the data | 4. Structured reading in Word, annotate for key pivotal themes | 4. Structured reading in Word, annotate for key pivotal themes |
| Coding scheme | 5. Define six to eight main themes or "codes" (option: sub-themes) from theory, interview questions, and step four | 5. See step 5 in 'qualitative interview data' column |
| Classifying and coding | 6. Code interviews with "codes" from step five to compare chunks of text and retrieve interviewees' experiences of each theme in Microsoft Word | 6. Code survey replies with "codes" from step five in Microsoft Word |
| Interpreting/ analyzing | 7. As two researchers, take turns cross-checking each other's classification, coding, and interpretation/analysis to reduce researcher subjectivity and bias (write section on this) | 7. Insert survey replies and figures where relevant in the analysis of the interview data |
| Presenting and writing up the data | 8. Write up a 'findings' section with main findings from data collected presented in tables, diagrams, or the like and an 'analysis' section with main themes/sub-themes interpreted (should align with research and interview/survey questions) using interviewee quotes | 8. See step 8 in 'qualitative interview data' column |

*Note.* Rowley, J. (2012). Conducting research interviews. *Management Research Review, Vol. 35* (No. 3/4), pp. 260-271. DOI 10.1108/01409171211210154.

*Transcription Conventions*

The transcription conventions are laid out in Table 4. 'Transcription Conventions'. The chosen style is verbatim which means that the interviews are transcribed word by word. Furthermore, the way of transcribing is simple, not complex. That is because the data is not meant for a detailed linguistic conversational analysis focusing on pauses, intonation, and body language. Instead, the focus is on retrieving meaning, experiences, and thematic from the neuroqueer(ing) participants (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2019, p. 5). The few exceptions to the simple style, however, are in the case an interviewee makes a clear relevant <sigh> around a specific topic – or if they STRESS a word. 'DOTE' is used as a digital tool for transcribing efficiently, coherently, and systematically using Jeffersonian conventions in settings.

**Table 4**

*Transcription Conventions*

| Symbol | Meaning | Example |
|---|---|---|
| Text | Filled pause | "Uh" and "um", "uhm" (English)<br>"Øh" and "øm", "øhm" (Danish) |
| : | Prolongation | Oka::y |
| ?, ! | Rising intonation | Right?, Yes! |
| [ ] | Overlapping speech | J: you [see ]<br>P1: [I am ] good |
| ( ( ) ) | Transcriber's comments | ( ( connection lost ) ) |
| ( ) | Unclear sounds | They (say) |
| < > | Emotional expression | <Sigh> (English)<br><Suk> (Danish) |
| ____ | Stress | It's <u>fine</u> |
| CAPS | Louder | I am HAPPY |
| Capital letters | Proper names and pronoun "I" | I worked in Germany |
| Numbers | Spelled, not in numbers | One hundred and four (not 104) |
| Dialects and spoken language | Not corrected to proper grammar | "Sån" or "sådn" is not corrected to "sådan" (Danish)<br>"Cause" is not corrected to "because" (English) |

*Note*. Adapted from Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2019). *Doing interviews*. SAGE Publications Ltd, https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529716665 and University of Rochester website: https://www.cs.rochester.edu/research/cisd/resources/nonwords.html

*Coding and Coding Scheme Table*

The six to eight main themes or "codes" (incl. sub-codes) are exhibited in Table 5. 'Coding Scheme Table'. They are defined from the process of getting familiar and acquainted with the interview/ survey data which revealed some key points, patterns, and preliminary observations. These were highly coherent with the theoretical framework on neuroqueer(ing) by Nick Walker. For that reason, the definitions of the first five codes are found in the theory section 'Neuroqueer(ing) – Theoretical Tools'. The second last codes 'erasure and exclusion' are defined from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and their definitions can also be found in the theory section. The last code 'transparency' is identified multiple times in the interview and survey data. It is relevant because a lot of the interview and survey participants speak of feeling invisible as neuroqueers and needing openness, transparency, and explicit communication on neurodivergence and queerness from their workplaces. The eight codes are not used for structuring the analysis around similar eight themes. That is because the participants speak freely and fluidly of their experiences with say recruiting platforms/job application processes which may bear traits of both (un)masking, burnout, cis-heteronormativity and neuro-normativity. Instead, the eight codes serve as inspiration for organizing patterns, similarities, and dif-ferrences into themes and sub-themes.

**Table 5**

*Coding Scheme Table*

| **"Code" (sub-code)** | **Color** |
|---|---|
| Cis-heteronormativity (presumptions, performativity) | 1 |
| Neuronormativity | 2 |
| (Un)masking | 3 |
| Burnout (character armor) | 4 |
| Embodied liberation (stimming) | 5 |
| Erasure and exclusion | 6 |
| (Workplace) transparency | 7 |

*Note*. The "codes" are identified based on the familiarization process, transcription stage, getting acquainted with the data, and in coherence with the theoretical framework.

## Reflexivity, Subjectivity, and Positionality

This section is about researcher reflexivity, subjectivity, and positionality in relation to the neuroqueer(ing) participants. The way to do this is inspired by Thi Quynh Trang Nguyen: "My position in relation to the interviewees was as a female in her early 30s, a colleague (...), a researcher, and to some participants a friend. My social position of a researcher went fairly unnoticed; rather my positions as a colleague and a friend, and the participants' eligibility as experienced college teachers which was essential for their participation in my study (Thi Quynh Trang Nguyen, 2014, p.37)".

Nico (they/them): My position in relation to the neuroqueer(ing) participants is being a non-binary queer in their late 20s who is a Danish citizen, diagnosed (medicated) ADHD'er, discovering autistic traits, and has dealt with mental health issues. To the interviewee/survey participants in general, I have an insider position from years as a member of queer and neurodivergent communities. This is on a volunteer, activist, community-based, institutional (psychiatry/therapy) and personal level. Concerning the interviewees specifically, my position is a researcher, a fellow-student, a community-member, a cousin to one, and a friend to others. Like Thi Quynh Trang Nguyen, my social position as a researcher went rather unnoticed. My position as a neuroqueer(ing) insider, fellow-student, community-member, friend, and cousin was crucial to the participants' participation in our study – and caused the interviews to be set in a chill, calm, and casual context like having a conversation. Concerning the survey participants, my insider and community-based position was also essential to the selection and sampling. From years of figuring out my own neuroqueer(ing) identity, I have become a part of multiple neurodivergent and queer groups. This equipped me with a certain degree of legitimacy when positing the interview/survey invitations from not being an "outsider". Inevitably, my positionality gives rise to researcher subjectivity because the neuroqueer(ing) population and problematics impact me on a personal-community level. This is not only negative since it gives more understanding of neuroqueer(ing) experiences. However, I still attempt to stay as neutral, unbiased, and objective as possible to not put my own perspectives onto the participants.

Jennifer (she/her): My position concerning the neuroqueer(ing) participants is as a cis straight woman of color in her early 30s and a Danish citizen who has dealt with and continues to deal with mental health issues. In connection to the interviewees and the survey participants in general, I did not have any familiar or friendly connection with any of them. I was a stranger but tried to be as accommodating as possible in the interviews, as this is a new subject area for me. It was important to me that the participants felt safe, heard, and acknowledged. Since I did not know the participants personally, I had to be very conscious of how I represented myself as this subject is

sensitive and personal to many of the participants. Unlike Nico, I appeared as an "outsider" (I assume because no one treated me that way or said anything) as I do not have the same connection to the neuroqueer(ing) community in the same way as Nico. Therefore, it was important for me to establish trust by letting the participants, especially, the interviewees know that I wanted them to be as comfortable as possible and that this paper was about highlighting their opinions and experiences and wanting to know more about how their experiences, with the workplace is. It is not about me but about them. My researcher positionality gives rise to subjectivity, especially to the neurodivergent part, and to mental health. However, I also have a brother who is dyslexic and undiagnosed ADHD, and I have seen closely how not getting the right help and support can impact an individual. This lack of support and help also includes me. But this is not necessarily a negative thing, since it gives understanding to the neuroqueer(ing) participants' experiences as well as being marginalized and discriminated against when multiple layers of your identity intersect. I also have experience with some of the same workspaces as the participants which also gives me a better understanding of what goes on and the type of work culture that sometimes "thrives" in the workplace. However, like my research partner, I try to stay as unbiased, neutral, and objective as possible, as this is about the participants and highlighting their experiences in the workplace.

## This Study's Limitations

A limitation to this study is related to what Kimberlé Crenshaw calls the "et cetera" problem. Reflecting upon intersectionality's utility and limitations, Crenshaw points to "the race/gender/ class/sexuality/nation nexus; the eponymous "et cetera" problem—that is, the number of categories and kinds of subjects (e.g., privileged or subordinate?) stipulated or implied (Crenshaw, Cho, & McCall, 2023, p. 787)." Inevitably, this study of multiple neuroqueer(ing) identities intersecting with various oppressive structures is impacted by the "et cetera" problem. It is challenging to categorize and connect workplace well-being of many different identities into one "typical" experience. Importantly, we are not interested in reproducing essentialist, reductionist, stereotypical, binary oppositions. The focus is on the interviewee and survey participants experiences and not claiming the "typical" experience of this or that identity. They all mention this as an experience from workplaces—to be put into boxes—and we aim not to do the same. The participants are all neuroqueer, but they experience workplace well-being, (un)masking, and (fear of) discrimination differently. This might depend on whether you are cis- or transgender, citizen or non-citizen, and ADHD/ADD'er, autistic, bipolar, dyslexic, epileptic, or paranoid schizophrenic, etc. Making conclusions from that many identities might be seen as a limitation, but there are always areas *within* and *outside* the scope that we can—and cannot—conclude on. Regarding the interviewees, we can conclude on seven neuroqueer(ing) experiences of workplace well-being that relate to the age group 20-26; cis-, trans- and non-conforming genders; queer, pan, asexual (spectrum), lesbian; ADHD/ADD, autistic, anxiety, dyslexic, paranoid schizophrenic, PTSD; stateless, French and Danish citizen; and workplace perspectives from Denmark, England, France, Germany, and Holland shown in Table 6. Regarding the survey participants, we can conclude on 92 experiences in the age group 18-54; and many different cis-, trans- and non-conforming genders; sexual orientations; neurodivergent identities; and sectors displayed in Figure 2.1, Figure 2.2, Figure 2.3, Figure 2.4, Figure 2.5. Another limitation to this study can be seen as whether it is international "enough". That is because data collection was based in Denmark. However, as has been argued, emphasized, and justified before, the interview/survey invitations were posted in Danish-based Facebook/Instagram platforms for *international* neuroqueer(ing) students and employees. This entails that many participants are Danish citizens, but they are also Argentinian, Brazilian, French, Greek, Italian, and Ukrainian citizens, among others, as displayed in Figure 2.6 and 2.7. Furthermore, they have workplace experiences from not only Denmark, but from Argentina, Australia, Belgium, China, England, Greece, Japan, Korea, and the Philippines etc. as shown in Figure 2.8.

**Figure 2.1**

*Age Distribution*

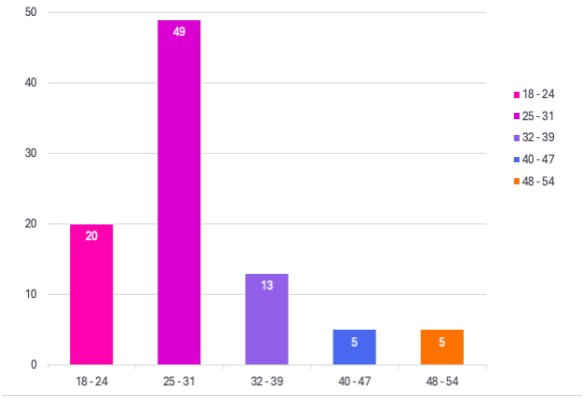



**Figure 2.2**

*Gender Distribution*

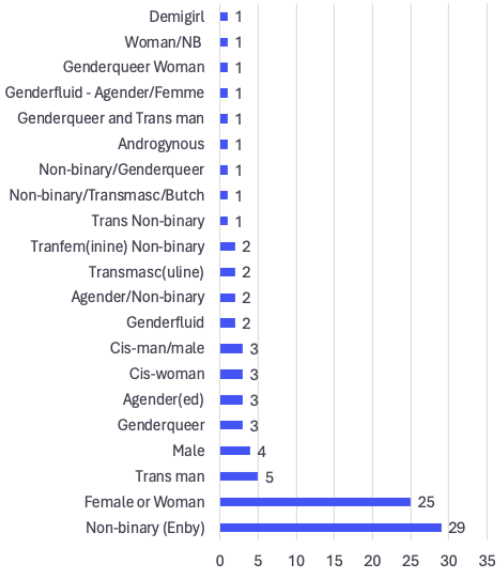



**Figure 2.3**

*Sexual Orientation Distribution*

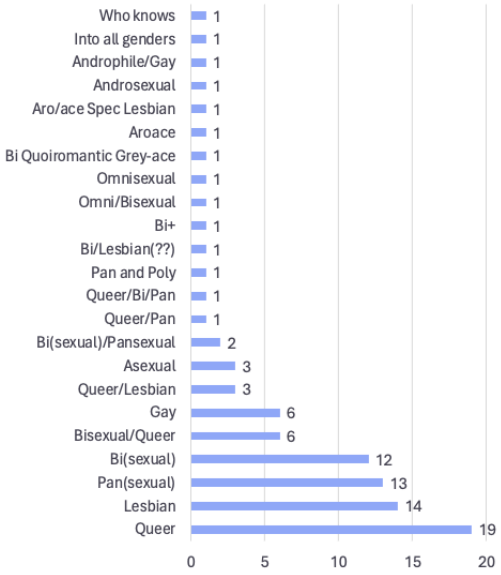



**Figure 2.4**

*In What Way Do You Identify as Neurodivergent?*

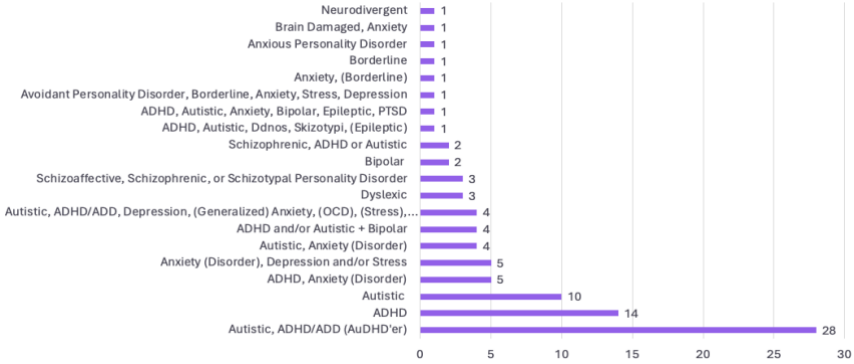


**Figure 2.5**

*What Sector Do You Primarily Work in?*

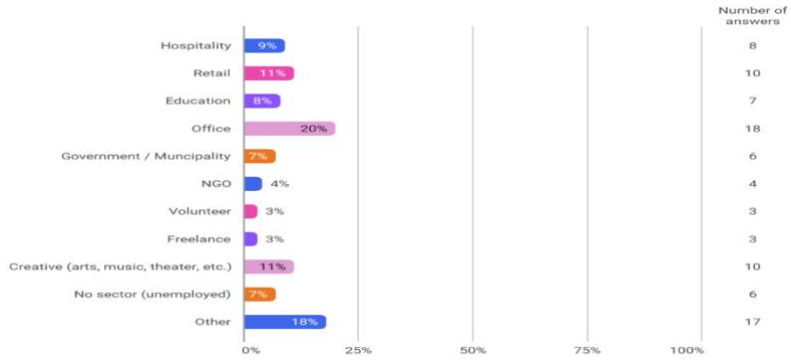



**Figure 2.6**

*Ethnicities Distribution*

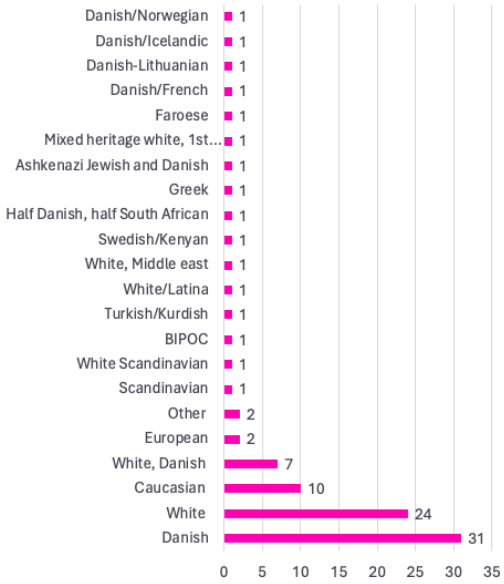
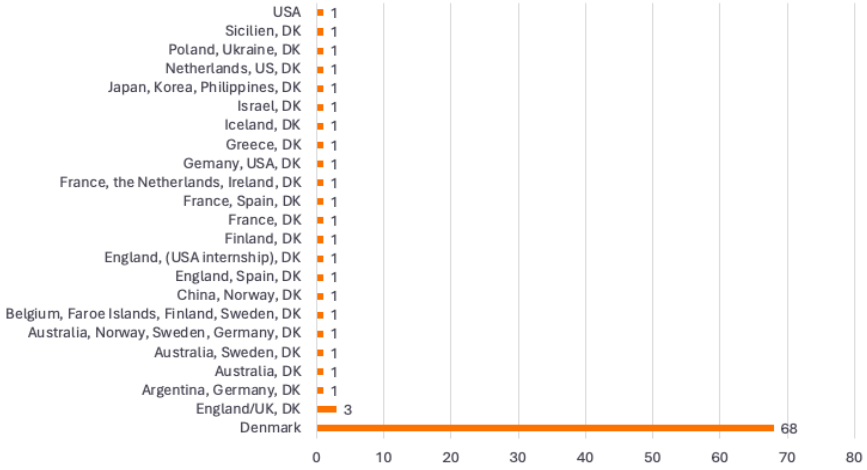



**Figure 2.7**

*Citizenships Distribution*


**Figure 2.8**

*What Countries Have You Worked in?*



## Fittingness, Translatability, and Comparability

Fittingness, translatability, and comparability—instead of generalizability—of this study is reviewed in the following using Schofield's notes. Despite being a mixed methods study, the qualitative data is primary, while the quantitative is used for complementation, substantiation, and emphasis. For that reason, this study is mostly impacted by qualitative studies' so-called "weakness" in achieving external validity and generalizing to a broader population – in the eyes of many quantitative paradigm scholars (Schofield, 2011, p. 3). However, the research aim, goal, and objective are not to generalize to a broader population but give voice to different neuroqueer's experiences of workplace well-being. This is rarely the intention with qualitative research, to generalize, because context-free generalizations are not very useful to unfolding, uncovering, and understanding human, social, and cultural experiences – they are always dependent upon context (Schofield, 2011, pp. 3, 7)

For that reason, 'fittingness' or 'naturalistic generalization', and not generalizability, are reviewed. That is, the extent to which the entity, context, and information studied, harvested, and provided are adequate to be used for other situations – and transferring these findings to understanding other similar situ-ations. In light of this, the research design of this study is considered valid, sufficient, and adequate enough for using with other research populations, sampling methods, and contexts. For instance, one could do a similar study with sampling from other countries, contexts, or communities while still arriving at conclusions on neuroqueer(ing) workplace well-being – but with other participants. 'Comparability' and 'transla-tability' are also reasonable by having illustrated the research population, characteristics, and settings in detail for other researchers to use the conclusions comparatively (comparability) – and by having clearly established the theoretical stance and research techniques (translatability) (Schofield, 2011, p. 8).

A final note on the 'validity' of this study concerns the gratitude showed in the 'acknowledgements' section to the people who were invaluable during the process of this master's thesis research. Not only did they support us, but they also functioned as third-party auditors and tests persons in our pilot studies. Intentionally, they are neurodivergent queers themselves in different ways that have workplace well-being experiences and/or reflections. For that reason, they played a crucial role in giving feedback on whether the interview and survey questions, invitations, and graphic design were neuroqueer(ing)-inclusive reaching our target audience. For the interview, a pilot study was carried out with one of them to assess quality, length, depth, and social set-up in asking the questions. This resulted in a review and rewriting of the questions that were not relevant or a repetition. It also made us pay attention to the way we interact with the interviewees, potential

technical issues that may arise, and time needed to unfold in-depth experiences. We realized that even though the form is semi-structured, we as interviewers should not speak too loosely around the questions. This may have implications for bias, validity, and comparability between the interviews. For the survey, one of the third-party auditors who knew the interview questions checked the questions for content, coherence, and clear communication. Finally, three of them checked whether the interview/survey invitations were designed enough for neuroqueers. Using correct LGBTQIA+ terminology, neurodivergent and no person-first language was checked. Having a simple easy-to-read layout, big enough fonts, clear colours, and graphic design with pictures representing neurodivergent queers was also checked.

# Chapter 3 – Theoretical Framework

Theory is a kaleidoscope lens through which we perceive and make sense of empirical reality. It is a tool to organize, categorize, and generalize the empirical data collected - and gives us a language to talk about it. For that reason, theory should deal with the parts of reality that is relevant to the research problem. Theory is also indispensable to empirical explanatory research, as mentioned earlier, but the role of theory varies quite a lot (Toshkov, 2016, p.38). This study is a hybrid-form of theory application combined with theory generation. That is because the theoretical framework of 'neuro-queer(ing)' by Nick Walker is applied in the process of organizing, understanding, and explaining the primary data collected. Theory generation also takes places by being open to varied abstract theo-retical propositions that might arise from analysing the empirical data.

## Neuroqueer(ing) – Introduction

"One can neuroqueer, and one can be neuroqueer (Walker N. , 2024)."

Nick Walker (she/her) coined the term 'neuroqueering' or 'neuroqueer' in a grad school paper submitted 2008 (Walker N. , 2024). Walker was not ready to publish the term but dropped it on a private Facebook group for autistic bloggers in 2014. She came to realize that colleagues had been thinking along similar lines, and that members of the private group started to spread the concept. Suddenly, "the word caught on like wildfire (Walker N. , 2024)," and appeared all over queer and neurodivergent social media as well as in academic papers. To Walker, the term is first a verb with interrelated practices, second an adjective connected to those practices, and third it can be a social identity. She defines that: "A neuroqueer individual is any individual whose identity, selfhood, gender performance, and/or neurocognitive style have in some way been shaped by their engagement in practices of neuroqueering, regardless of what gender, sexual orientation, or style of neurocognitive functioning they may have been born with. Or, to put it more concisely (but perhaps more confusingly): you're neuroqueer if you neuroqueer. (Walker N. , 2024)." But what does it mean "to neuroqueer" as a verb in Walker's perspective?

The list over practices of neuroqueering is long but can be boiled down to the following understanding or interpretation of Walker's words. Neuroqueering is a degree of conscious "exploring", "embodying", and/or "experiencing" of one's neurodivergence as intersecting with or inseparable from one's queerness impacting the performance of identity aspects such as gender,

sexuality, and others (Walker N. , 2024). This may be tied to an active process of "undoing", "subverting", and/or "diverging" from culturally and socially learned performance, behavior, or habits of neuronormative and heteronormative standards – in turn, this can give space, potential and full expression to one's unique neuroqueer identity. Walker also illustrates this as a "queering of one's own neurocognitive processes (and one's outward embodiment and expression of those processes) (Walker N. , 2024)." Other neuroqueering practices relate to producing literature, scholarship, critical responses, and other artifacts or transforming cultural/social environments that "foreground", "illuminate" and/or "engage" neuroqueer lives, voices, experiences, and perspectives (Walker N. , 2024).

This introduction to Walker's concept of neuroqueer(ing) lays the theoretical foundation for illuminating, understanding, and explaining neuroqueer(ing) experiences of workplace well-being. However, this will not be applied to the collected data per se. The study is more inductive theory generating meaning that abstract theoretical propositions will be retrieved from empirical "facts" provided by the neuroqueer(ing) interview and survey participants. Still, there is a degree of theory application - but not in a classical sense. That is by way of using theoretical tools from Nick Walker's book 'Neuroqueer Heresies' (2021) to identify themes or "codes" for classifying, coding, interpreting, and analysing our collected data. In the following, these theoretical tools are explained:

## Neuroqueer(ing) - Theoretical Tools

*Cis-heteronormativity and Neuro-normativity*

Nick Walker makes use of "normativity" a lot in all her concepts related to neuroqueer(ing). "Heteronormativity" is the performance of the binary opposite heterosexual "feminine" and "masculine" gender roles which society forces upon, gatekeeps, and selects *for* children from the moment they are born by assigning them one of the two cisgenders "girl" or "boy". Due to the widespread essentialist "biological sex" idea, we have chosen to add "cis" to "heteronormativity" and name it "cis-heteronormativity". The belief in two binary opposite gender roles is not only tied to heterosexual dominance, "man" and "woman" as belonging together - and in turn, homophobia. Also, it is tied to cisgender dominance, "cisman" and "ciswoman" as belonging together - and in turn, transphobia. This erases and excludes binary and non-binary trans people. In a similar way, "neuronormativity" is the performance of how a so-called "normal" person thinks, looks, behaves, and functions neurocognitively is forced upon individuals from birth (Walker N. , 2021, p. 57). This gives rise to neurotypical expectations or ableism say at a workplace that may erase and exclude

neurodivergent individuals such as ADHD'ers or autistic people. These normativities give rise to expected behavior that individuals "should" conform to such as ways of speaking, hand movement, posture, and appearance to fit into the so-called "standard". In turn, a neuroqueer(ing) practice or "to queer" heteronormativity and neuronormativity could be an autistic queer person giving full and free expression to some or all their non-normative hand movement impulses – instead of suppressing them for the sake of society's normative performances (Walker N. , 2021, p. 186).

*(Un)masking*

There is a growing body of scholarly and personal literature on the consequences of suppressing non-normative impulses and embodiments to fit into society's norms. Nick Walker refers to how this results in "profound psychological harm to neurodivergent people and is strongly correlated with depression and suicidality (Walker N. , 2021, p. 186)." In other words, society pushes hetero- and neuronormative standards onto individuals who from risk of exclusion, harassment, and/or discrimination seek to pass for "normal" at the expense of their own well-being. Walker compares this to how queer people historically, and still today, have had to stay closeted, which might be seen as a form of masking (Walker N. , 2021, p. 186). Neurodivergent people suppressing their non-normative impulses is also a form of masking. In turn, Walker posits that neurodivergent unmasking is a type of neuroqueer(ing) – and perhaps one of the most vital ones. This leads to Walker's clear-cut definitions of the two theoretical tools of focus in this section:

*Masking*: "The suppression of non-normative embodiments (Walker N. , 2021, p. 186)*."*

*Unmasking: "*The reclaiming of those embodiments (Walker N. , 2021, p. 186)."

*Character Armor*

"Masking" or the continued suppression of non-normative impulses and embodiments forced upon an individual from childhood is maintained by "layers of deep, chronic, unconscious muscular tension". This is also what Wilhelm Reich entitled as "character armor" (Walker N. , 2021, p. 187). It is a physical form of suppression that keeps down the performance of movements, expressions, impulses, and feelings that do not comply with society's normativities. Character armor gives rise to bodily tensions from constantly keeping down one's natural movements to avoid shame, abuse, or exclusion when giving full expression to these (Walker N. , 2021, p. 143). Walker explains the liberation or recovering from character armor as deeply intertwined with the neuroqueer(ing) practice

of unmasking. This could be the act of giving full expression to hand movements or stims that in turn paves the way for living more authentically, creatively, and freely (Walker N. , 2021, p. 187).

*Burnout*

As a result of many years of being forced to or living under the so-called "character armor", an individual might experience "burnout". Regardless of neurodivergence and queerness, this term has been dealt with in workplace settings since the 1960s from which one definition is: "a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion that results from long-term involvement in work situations that are emotionally demanding (Wolbring & Lillywhite, 2023, p. 2)." In this study, the concept of burnout makes sense both in relation to workplaces but also with a specific focus on minority, neurodivergent, and queer groups. A more recent development of the term is "problem-based burnout" or "life burnout" when it is tied to a specific and/or lifelong experience. This could be a result of racism, sexism, LGBTQIA+phobia, ableism, microagressions, and/or inequality in which burnout from these often overlap (Wolbring & Lillywhite, 2023, pp. 3-4). In addition, a highly relevant term is "adaptation burnout" which is "a potential outcome of marginalized groups having constantly to adapt to the non-marginalized groups (Wolbring & Lillywhite, 2023, p. 4)." This can be seen as a type of burnout that relates to Nick Walker's understanding of masking and character armor. There has also been increasing focus on the burnout that disabled and neurodivergent folks experience due to ableism in their daily life. These are called "disability burnout", "disablism burnout", "autistic burnout", or "deaf burnout", which might be relevant to our neurodivergent and/or disabled research population (Wolbring & Lillywhite, 2023, p. 4). Lastly, the University of Manitoba report on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion highlighted that Indigenous and Black students/stuff, 2SLGBTQ+ students/staff, transgender and non-binary staff, and disabled students/staff were more likely to report experiences of microaggressions (Wolbring & Lillywhite, 2023, p. 5). In light of the types of burnout related to racism, LGBTQIA+phobia, ableism, and microagressions, this study points to a probability that these groups might experience some type of burnout as a result of microagressions, discrimination and/or oppressive structures. In that case, the definition used for burnout is the same as the one for workplace settings but leaving out "work":

*Burnout:* "a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion that results from long-term involvement in situations that are emotionally demanding (Wolbring & Lillywhite, 2023, p. 4)."

*Stimming (Embodied Liberation)*

It has been established that burnout is mental, emotional, and physical exhaustion that stems from long-term experiences of microagressions and/or demanding (work) situations. This is tied to suppressing one's natural bodily movements and expressions – to avoid microagressions, exclusion and/or discrimination at work. This suppression is also called masking or character armor, which might lead to burnout. Imagine how draining it must be to keep down impulses, force your body into a certain position, or behave in a way that fulfills society's expectations through life. A part of this might be down-playing, hiding, or repressing the phenomena of "stimming". All human beings "stim" to varied degrees but more so autistic and neurodivergent folks in general (Walker N. , 2021, pp. 108, 189). What is stimming then? It is a characteristic of autistic embodiment and can be defined as:

*Stimming:* "the tendency to engage in repetitive physical movements or other actions that provide specific forms of sensory stimulation (...) serving essential functions of self-regulation and integration (...) to regulate their chaotic experience to avoid being overwhelmed by it (Walker N. , 2021, pp. 104-106)."

There are many different ways "to stim" such as rocking, pacing, flapping one's hands, seeking physical pressure (kinesthetic), touching objects or soothing textures (tactile), swinging (vestibular), gazing at running water (visual), listening to music (auditory), smelling/tasting (gustatory), word/phrases repetition (verbal), and a combination of the latter (Walker N. , 2021, p. 105). To reconnect with, reclaim, or recover one's natural inherent impulses towards stimming such as flapping your hands is a neuroqueer(ing) practice. Based on Nick Walker's neuroqueer(ing) theory, we call it "embodied liberation" being the opposite of masking and character armor. Walker speaks a lot about the healing, authentic, creative, self-expression process in ending the ever-lasting cycle of suppressing bodily movements like stimming (Walker N. , 2021, p. 187). In her words, we understand embodied liberation as:

*Embodied liberation:* "to liberate the body from the ingrained habits, tensions, and inhibitions that keep one locked into the performance of normativity, and to reawaken and cultivate the capacity for spontaneous stimming and non-normative self-embodiments (Walker N. , 2021, p. 190)."

*Erasure and Exclusion*

Critical Discourse analysis (CDA) defines ‘erasure’ as a type of exclusion or marginalization concerning different identity categories. Identities that can be perceived as subordinated are sometimes erased from the language (Baker & Ellece, 2011, p. 40). Furthermore, identities that possibly can push, change, or disturb hegemonic identities or systems can also be erased. That is to make sure that the existing hegemonic power structures between identity categories appear stable and discrete to maintain clear hierarchies of power. ‘Erasure’ happens and can be seen in many different ways. For example, when a state refuses to acknowledge a specific group (Baker & Ellece, 2011, p. 40). ‘Erasure’ also focuses on suppression and/or backgrounding of an identity group, and it can subsume an erased identity under another identity instead of acknowledging the identity groups in question as separate groups and/or identities to maintain a distinction of “us vs. them" (Baker & Ellece, 2011, p. 40).

‘Exclusion’ refers to when a social actor does not appear in a text or is a part of a specific or multiple discourses. Some exclusions can be innocent depending on the context. For example, if readers or audiences are assumed to know the details already, and for different reasons (assuming that people know that police conduct arrests or because of space limitations in newspapers) actors can be omitted (Baker & Ellece, 2011, p. 44). For example, “the man was arrested”, in this instance the police are omitted. However, some exclusions whether they are done deliberately or not, are created for ideological purposes, and are hidden or erased as mentioned above to maintain existing power relations and/or ideological, and cultural beliefs (Baker & Ellece, 2011, p. 44). In addition, it can also be to obscure or downplay involvement or responsibility in different events and contexts. As with erasure, there are two types of exclusion ‘suppression’ and ‘ backgrounding’ (Baker & Ellece, 2011, p. 44)

# Chapter 4 – Analysis

This chapter analyzes the interview and survey data using the theoretical tools. The interviews are primary data for understanding: "How is the 'neuroqueer(ing)'experience of well-being affected by workplace settings?", while the survey replies complement, substantiate, and back up the main analytical observations from the interviews. Throughout the analysis, experiences of working in different countries and experiences of being Danish versus non-Danish are compared (international dimension). For that reason, replies to interview question 5: "If you have worked in different countries, can you tell us about similarities and differences in your experience with workplace well-being?" are divided out on all the identified themes. Finally, Table 6 is an overview of the interviewee's age, gender, sexual orientation, neurodivergence, ethnicities, citizenship, and educational background.

**Table 6**

*Interviewee Information*

| Person | Age | Gender, sexuality | Neurodi-vergence | Disabled | Anxiety, stress | Ethnicities | Citizenship | Education |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 (they/ them) | 24 | Gender fluid, queer | ADHD, Autism[3] | Yes | Several times | Moroccan dad, 2nd generation immigrant | Danish | BA in communication and digital media, AAU |
| 2 (they/ them) | 20 | Genderqueer, pan/ asexual spectrum | Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia | Yes | Anxiety, depression, self-harm[4] | Danish | Danish | STX |
| 3 (they/ them) | 22 | Trans-masc non-binary, asexual lesbian | Autistic[5] | Yes & No[6] | Stress, anxiety too probably | Mixed: half French white, half Caribbean French | French | MSc in IR, AAU, BA in International Political Science |
| 4 (he/ him) | 25 | Man, gay | Anxiety (ADHD)[7] | No | Yes | Danish | Danish | Master student in Political Science, KU |
| 5 (they/ them) | 24 | Non-binary, lesbian | ADHD | No[8] | Stress, sick leave, social anxiety | Danish, Caucasian | Danish | STX |
| 6 (she/ her) | 26 | Woman, queer | ADD[9] | No[10] | Anxiety, work-related stress | Danish | Danish | Marketing Economist, Salesperson specialised in jewellery & watches |
| 7 (they/ them) | 24 | Genderqueer/ agender, queer | Paranoid schizophrenia, PTSD | Yes (invisibly disabled) | Anxiety[11] | Palestinian | No, stateless | Social and healthcare worker (SOSU) |

[3] ADHD: diagnosed, Autism: a work-in-progress
[4] Now most is gone after starting medication
[5] Don't use "neurodivergent": too broad
[6] Complicated feeling validated enough to claim the term
[7] ADHD diagnosis earlier in life, don't use "neurodivergent" and tries not to put a label on it
[8] In getting to know ADHD, see it as a strength - things just need to be different than for neurotypicals
[9] Have a reference to psychiatrist for getting diagnosed
[10] Never thought of it like that, maybe due to traditional family saying "yeah yeah we all have ADD"
[11] Not official diagnosis anymore, but at 12-19 years old

## Theme 1: Recruiting Platforms and Processes

This theme was identified from survey and interviewee perspectives on question 1: "What is your experience with applying for a job in general and on digital application platforms e.g. gender boxes and (non-)accessible websites?". Based on this, the following sub-themes were observed: 'binary boxes', 'poor platforms', and 'I get butterflies'.

### Binary Boxes

A neuroqueer(ing) experience of recruiting platforms and applying for a job can be understood in light of cis-heteronormativitiy. Interviewees one, three, five, six, and seven speak of how the platforms often require applicants to fill out their gender from one of two binary options "man" or "woman". This can be seen as an act of erasure and/or exclusion of non-conforming queer people that do not fit into this binary box (Walker N. , 2021, p. 57). In this experience, platforms are built *from* and *for* an applicant "archetype" who is cisgender and/or identifies with one of the binary genders: "really often (...) you have to fill out your gender and that's very like <sigh> that's very binary u::m and that can sometimes be li:ke really hard to endure as a queer person at least (...) when you are (...) genderqueer (Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." Interviewee five speaks of a similar tendency: "there's a lot of places where you have to check man or women u::h something that I think specifically has been challenging uh in relation to being non-binary (Interviewee 5, personal communication, April 3, 2024)." This means that the recruiting platforms and processes perpetuate an idea of what gender the "typical" applicant might have. In this way, cis-heteronormativity in job application may erase and/or exclude neuroqueer applicants (Baker & Ellece, 2011, s. 40,44). *Erasure* by leaving you with no other choice than "compromise with yourself if you want to apply for this job (Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2024)". That is, because you have to choose between checking the box "man" or "woman" even though you are non-binary, genderfluid, or agender, among many others. *Exclusion* by leaving some queers with no other choice than "always trying to avoid you see applying for a job where it says I have to emit a lot of information about myself (Interviewee 7, personal communication, April 5, 2024)." Evidently, the interviewees have different needs, experiences, and reactions to these binary boxes – "to compromise" (interviewee one) or "to avoid" (interviewee seven). These differences count for all interviewees, however there are some patterns across these neuroqueer(ing) experiences.

Interviewee one and five who are they/them's, gender non-conforming (genderfluid, non-binary), Danish citizens, and have Danish workplace experiences mention recruiting platforms'

binary options as really hard to endure, challenging, and inconvenient when you are genderqueer and/or non-binary, as mentioned. As a result, when filling out gender boxes, they have to "com-promise with" or "overexplain" themselves and their gender identities - if they want to apply for a specific job or for the application to go through (Interviewee 1; 5, personal communication, April 1; 3, 2024). In turn, they express a need, wish, or positive perspective on adding more than binary and biological gender options to recruiting platforms and processes (Interviewee 1; 5, personal communication, April 1; 3, 2024). Interviewee six, she/her, a queer woman, and Danish citizen has the same aspiration based on comparing Danish and German workplace experiences. When she, or her friends, applied for jobs in Germany, the system was more bureaucratic, political, decent, had boxes for things, and asked questions she "wasn't used to back here in Denmark for example what are your pronouns u:m are you disabled (Interviewee 6, personal communication, April 5, 2024)." Imagining herself using they/them pronouns or thinking about friends who do, it would be nice, really appreciated, and give way more clarification that the system, HR, and team leaders would know your pronouns (Interviewee 6, personal communication, April 5, 2024). This would be a way to transform cis-heteronormative recruiting systems that exclude and/or erase gender non-conforming candidates. These three interviewees' experiences can be characterized by a kind of (un)masking process (Walker N. , 2021, p. 186). It seems all three wish to be openly queer in the application process, which the recruiting systems do not accommodate – and for that reason, they suggest more gender options and sharing your pronouns.

Interviewee three and seven, who also use they/them, are gender non-conforming (transmasc non-binary, genderqueer/agender), and have workplace experiences from Denmark, France, and the Netherlands provide another take on the binary boxes. Being openly queer is not an option for all and can be associated with risks of discrimination, stigma, or getting fired/not hired. Interviewee seven always tries to avoid jobs where you have to elicit a lot of personal information - and suggests the option of not disclosing your gender (Interviewee 7, personal communication, April 5, 2024). Similarly, interviewee three, tends to check 'I don't want to answer' to gender and disabilities boxes (Interviewee 3, personal communication, April 1, 2024). In contrast to interviewee one, five, and six, the main concern, focus, or need expressed by interviewees three and seven are not more gender options in the recruitment process necessarily. Instead, their experiences bring attention to structural inequalities and intersectionality. They speak of hesitance, avoidance, and/or caution in filling out certain gender or disabilities boxes – for different reasons yet perhaps due to similar structures. Interviewee seven sheds light on how not only a cis-heteronormative workplace system

has consequences on neuroqueer's well-being by excluding and erasing them from gender boxes (Baker & Ellece, 2011, s. 40). Importantly, as a stateless Palestinian in Denmark, they also point to citizen versus non-citizen structure that underlies and intersects with cis-heteronormativity: "sometimes (...) you have to write your legal name on the job application (...) it would also be a good idea if you didn't have to do that and just write the name you prefer to be called uh because not everyone has the opportunity for a legal name change (Interviewee 7, personal communication, April 5, 2024)."

This relates to why more gender options on recruiting platforms might be first priority to some neuroqueers – while it may not be to others. There are more rights, privileges, social and economic benefits connected to having a citizenship than being a refugee, stateless, temporary or permanent resident for instance (The Danish Immigration Service & SIRI, 2023). Legally changing your name, gender, and/or pursuing gender-affirming care is an expensive, time-consuming, and hard process for everyone. However, it is more accessible to citizens, than non-citizens of a country. The latter might feel less safe, protected, and comfortable with "coming out" as queer, neurodivergent and/or disabled in job market situations. This could lead to neuroqueer applicants "masking" their identities in fear of discrimination, stigma and/or not being chosen for the job (Walker N. , 2021, p. 186). In fact, Interviewee three, who is mixed half French white, half Caribbean French, studying/working in Denmark, speaks of "a too high risk of them being discriminated on/against so let's say that I'm cautious to not (...) be too queer too (...) visibly autistic I guess like from in the application process (Interviewee 3, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." To sum up, interviewee three and seven bring light to masking or hiding your neuroqueer(ing) identity perhaps due to risks of oppressive, discriminatory, and/or exclusionary structures underlying the seemingly cis-heteronormative job application system.

**Poor Platforms**

Another neuroqueer(ing) experience with recruiting platforms and processes is that they are not very user-friendly or transparent and has too many steps making it "complicated", "overwhelming" "tiring", and "discouraging" (Interviewee 3, personal communication, April 1, 2024) (Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2024). In continuation of cis-heteronormativity excluding and erasing genderqueer job applicants, neuronormativity might be doing a similar thing to neurodivergent and/or disabled folks. The platforms and processes seem to be built *from* and *for* an applicant "archetype" who is neurotypical. This perpetuates an idea of what the "typical" brain and

body is which holds no or limited space for how neurodivergent bodyminds function, think, and see the world (Walker N. , 2021). Interviewee one provides the example that "there has been like one page with all the information (...) it could be like more u::h user-friendly if you u:m had some clear descriptions divided it into sections (...) which are not like overwhelming (Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." In a similar tone, interviewee three puts forth the example that "there are too many like processes and too many um steps in them" and "maybe there could be less steps in them it would be easier to apply (Interviewee 3, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." As many different companies are using the same recruitment systems, which interviewee one points to, it might be a structural neuronormative problem for neurodivergent and/or disabled job applicants (Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2024). In other words, recruiting systems do not seem accessible to all neurodivergent and/or disabled potential candidates. To exclude or erase neuroqueer folks in ways that forces them to "compromise" with themselves to apply for, fit into, and/or maintain jobs is a sensible reason to exit the job market – as it is not built *from* or *for* them. In this light, it makes sense that interviewee one says that they "haven't had a job in (...) almost three years (...) because I like have accepted that it also is a a disability where there are things you li:ke I at least myself am challenged by (Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." To be challenged by, from, or in the job market as a neuroqueer person leads back to Nick Walker's question. What would workplaces, organizations, and schools look like if neurotypical (and cis-hetero) norms were not advantageous to gain entry or employment (Walker N. , 2021, p. 78) – and if these institutions were created by neuroqueers?

**"I Get Butterflies"**

Though the experiences above have left fewer desirable effects, interviewee four (he/him), has a different experience when it comes to the job-seeking process and using recruiting platforms. Interviewee four describes job-seeking and job application as enjoyable, something that gives drive, and "butterflies" (Interviewee 4, personal communication, April 1, 2024). Additionally, Interviewee four likes looking for jobs even when having a job, because it is "fun" and allows for the opportunity to imagine what else he could be working with: "Even when I'm not looking for a job, I still look at like the job opportunities because I think it's fun and I like get to try to imagine what I could be working with (Interviewee 4, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." Interviewee four, has not had any hurdles with job seeking and application. He is quite comfortable with both processes and does not think about it too much: "It's not something that I've thought about really except that I've well,

yeah I feel comfortable with this process (Interviewee 4, personal communication, April 1, 2024).” Unlike the experiences of interviewee one, three, five, six, and seven, filling out gender boxes that only consider the binary “man” and “woman”, feeling excluded and challenged, overexplaining and compromising, because they do not identify with the binary options, does not seem to affect interviewee four. As it is something that he has not thought about or put emphasis on, interviewee four’s focus has been more on what feeling the job process gives him, rather than visible things on a job application such as gender and disabilities boxes. It could be argued that since he identifies as cisgender, this is not something that personally affects his process, when he is looking for jobs as it does to others (Interviewee 1; 3; 5, personal communication, April 1; 3, 2024).

In this way, here, cis-heteronormativity does not have an excluding or erasing effect, nor does it have an element of masking. This could also be perceived as interviewee four having the privilege not to worry about gender boxes, overexplaining who he is, or compromising himself. It doesn’t have an impact on his identity directly and therefore probably allows him to focus on something else: “or u::m I really feel like I'm privileged cause I'm like a cis man and white (...) and I'm also well aware of that (Interviewee 4, personal communication, April 1, 2024).” In connection to neuronormativity, interviewee four’s experiences with job search and job application, represent a type of neurotypical expectation. Not that these processes necessarily must be fun, as the interviewee says that they are, but in the sense that the processes do not bother interviewee four or discourage him from doing a job search or applying for a job, as seen with the other interviewees. Because in a neuronormative sense, interviewee four conforms to expected behaviors: “it's not something that I've thought about really except that I've well yeah I feel comfortable with this process”, “u::m well generally I enjoy looking for jobs like I feel it gives me like a huge drive and like a uhm I get butterflies about being in the recruitment process (...) because I think it's fun and I like get to try to imagine what I could be working with (Interviewee 4, personal communication, April 1, 2024)” (Walker 2021, p. 57, 186). In that sense, neuroqueer(ing) experiences of well-being are affected by the workplace setting of job application in very different ways. To some, it is overwhelming, tiring, and discouraging, while to others, it gives drive and butterflies.

## Theme 2: The Job Interview

Neuroqueer(ing) replies to question 2: "What is your experience with job interviews e.g. social norms, eye contact?" led to theme 2 concerning job interviews with sub-themes being 'neurotypical norms' and 'queer quintessential questions'.

### Neurotypical Norms

At the job interview, there are some social norms, expectations, and behaviours to perform, live up to, and "fake it 'till you make it (Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." The neuroqueer participants express varied degrees of well-being in "playing by the rules" at the job interview. Some people's "true self" might align more with such norms than others who feel a divergence, disconnect and/or distance from their "self" to the norms (Walker N. , 2021, p. 179). This also varies whether you are talking about cis-heteronormativity or neuronormativity playing out at the job interview. In this case, the (non-)fear of sharing that you are queer or sharing that you are neurodivergent or disabled. Still, there is one crystal clear pattern connecting six of the interviewee's experiences of workplace well-being. Neurotypical norms or neuronormativity hold them all back from sharing openly that they are neurodivergent and/or disabled. They fear reactions, opinions, prejudice, and being seen as less competent.

About sharing their neurodivergence, the interviewees refer to "you never really know <sigh> well what opinions people have", "I was afraid of a lot of prejudice (...) how people might react what type of prejudice people have", "a too high risk of then being discriminated on", "when you get a job you can't necessarily figure out (...) which prejudices they [people] have", "I don't want it to be something that uh makes me seem less uh competent and I have an idea that that there are some people who think that", and "I was afraid that I would get rejected for the position" (Interviewee 1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 7, personal communication, April 1-5, 2024). They speak from different experiences of neurodivergence—ADHD, AuDHD, Autism, Anxiety, Dyslexia, Paranoid Schizophrenia, PTSD—still, they share the fear or hesitance in "coming out" as neurodivergent to a potential workplace. Due to fearing reactions and rejections, the interviewees either try to fit into certain boxes, over-compensate, hide/not mention it, fake the whole thing or fake it 'till you make it (Interviewee 1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 7, personal communication, April 1-5, 2024). Faking the whole thing or 'till you make it can be seen as behaving, performing, or expressing yourself in ways that align with neuronormative standards (Walker N. , 2021, p. 57). At the job interview, this could be keeping "the right amount of" eye contact, coming up with the "expected" answers, and masking parts of your "true self", identity,

or inherent natural body movements (Walker N. , 2021, p. 186). The participants appear to be masking at the job interview to fit into society's neuronormative boxes that gatekeep, control, and perpetuate standards for the "right" way to think, speak, and act - to land the position, perhaps.

Interviewee one struggles with eye contact, seems to be using every bone, cell, and nerve in their body to focus on it, and in turn, gets rewarded with compliments like "wow, you are really good at keeping eye contact (Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." Having to spend that much energy on a socially constructed norm seems to be a process of overcompensating, masking, and character armor (Walker N. , 2021, p. 187). While being good at keeping their calm in eye contact, interviewee two says "fake it 'till you make it right? (Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." In particular, they felt weird and bothered by not being able to openly show and talk about who they are, their dyslexia, and medication from fear of prejudice when "it is a big part of who I am (Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." Interviewee three speaks of their main difficulty with job interviews from experiences in France being "you're supposed to kind of prepare in advance and kind of just fake the whole thing and just say what they want to hear" (Interviewee 3, personal communication, April 1, 2024).". This can be seen as another experience of masking to fulfil, live up to or perform social norms in a job situation. Interestingly, prior to this, interviewee three had another interview where they seemed to be unmasking more by answering to the questions genuinely (Walker N. , 2021, p. 187). However, they had a hard time from not knowing how to answer to meet the expectations of the one doing the job interview – and for that reason, they figured you just have to say what they want to hear (Interviewee 3, personal communication, April 1, 2024). Interviewee seven has quite similar experiences of job interviews being infused by neuronormativity and neurotypical norms which can result in masking to "fit into the boxes". Job interviews have been a big challenge—rarely a good experience—because they have to perform in a way that shows their desire and capability for the job without sharing their diagnoses. This is based on a fear of being rejected for the position. That is, interviewee seven applied for a job at a nursing home where you have to be in complete good health, so they did not share their diagnoses. As they say: "You li:ke can't really present yourself one hundred percent as who you are (Interviewee 7, personal communication, April 5, 2024)." This also counts for interviewee four and five who have "always left out my neurodiversity [neurodivergence]" and "about my mental challenges I've never been open about that at least not in the process of getting recruited" (Interviewee 4; 5, personal communication, April 1-5, 2024). This points to job interviews being characterized by neuronormativity forcing, pushing, or making neuroqueers mask in the process.

**Quintessential Queer Questions**

This is not only a neurodivergent experience but can be a queer one too. In fact, about not being able to present yourself fully as who you are, interviewee seven says “especially (...) being queer or non-binary or transgender (...) that comes from many experiencing that they have been discriminated against at their workplaces (...) due to that (Interviewee 7, personal communication, April 5, 2024).” In light of these experiences, cis-heteronormativity including transphobia and homophobia seem to play out in workplace settings causing some queers to mask their identities at the job interview. On the other hand, interviewees four, five, and six have contrasting perspectives to interviewee seven about sharing that they are queer. Interviewee four says that “the queer part (...) I've said it especially if it has been somewhat relevant or if I want to show who I am (...) I was interviewing for a job (...) at the embassy in Budapest where there was much focus on LGBT+ rights and I emphasized that it meant a lot to me because I am a LGBT+ person myself (...) and I didn't have a problem showing or expressing that so yeah (...) it's not something that I'm in any way hiding (Interviewee 4, personal communication, April 1, 2024).” Interviewee five expresses that “it is easier to explain u:::h the queer part when you are sitting at an interview with well across from a person versus when you are sending applications and such things u::m and I have actually never experienced a workplace or a job interview where someone has wrinkled their nose or anything like that when I have uh: opened up about it (Interviewee 5, personal communication, April 3, 2024).” Finally, interviewee six also has great experiences with sharing that she is queer “I've only been to (...) two job interviews <laughter> (...) one of them took place in England (...) I was very young and not quite settled with who was I was (...) was about to discover who I was super fine experience um Germany even better very yes open u::m yes cool types to be interviewed by more international (...) it wasn't so: uh you know reserved more like well okay your partner is a woman who already works here blah blah blah and yeah more like they asked more about me as a person naturally also my job function (Interviewee 6, personal communication, April 3, 2024).” What first comes to mind when trying to explain why interviewee four, five, and six’s perspectives on sharing that they are queer is more positive than seven is identities intersecting with varied oppressive, homo- or transphobic structures. Interviewees four, five, and six are all Danish citizens and therefore more privileged than interviewee 7, who is a stateless Palestinian. Secondly, interviewees four and six are a gay cis-man (he/him) and queer cis-woman (she/her), whereas interviewee seven is genderqueer/agender (they/them). As has been established already, it might be more challenging being non-conforming genderqueer, due to cis-heteronormativity that erases and excludes other genders than the binary “man” and “woman”.

## Theme 3: First Day at Work and Introduction to Tasks

Question 3: “What is your experience with being received or welcomed on the first day at work (if you were)?” and question 4: “Can you talk about whether you feel that the way work tasks are introduced to you fits the way you learn/function/work best?” lay the foundation for this theme.

### First Day at Work

To interviewee one, the first day at work has not been “the worst”, but that is “one hundred percent because I have like masked a lot again overcompensated (Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2024).” Even though masking may cause exhaustion, burn out, and/or character armor, they explain the unmasking process at a workplace as “the hardest”. In starting a new job, most people want to make a good impression. To neuroqueers who experience, fear and/or try to avoid prejudice, discrimination, ableism, homo- and transphobia, making a good impression might entail masking their identities at workplaces – in the beginning or indefinitely. This might become standard practice for neuroqueer(ing) job applicants and employees. For that reason, taking the risk or trying to unmask your neuroqueer(ing) identity after some time by “coming out” can be more dreadful. In particular, when “you don't know people's opinion on queer people you don't know people's opinion on yes neuroqueer in general (Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2024).” This is why it might be seen as taking a risk to unmask your identity. That explains why the first day at work perhaps is not “the worst” to some. Instead, when you stop masking, open up, and are honest about your neuroqueer identity, you can bump into cis-heteronormative and neuronormative reactions – in the worst case, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism.

For that reason, interviewee one says they have masked a lot to overcompensate when interacting with people in workplace situations (interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2024). Masking is also seen in interviewee two and three’s experiences with starting at their job. To interviewee two, it was weird having to hide their identity, dyslexia, and medication from fear of prejudice, when they are used to being very open with friends and people in general because “I want to share my experiences and help others (Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 1, 2024). Accordingly, interviewee seven says explicitly that they connect the first day at work with masking. They have never really felt welcomed, accommodated, respected in pronouns, or able to talk about their neurodivergence. Neuronormativity and cis-heternormativity make the interviewee mask to a degree that leaves them with the experience that the first day at work is a struggle. They say: “we also

have to mask or have to take on a responsibility on our shoulders that is not ours (Interviewee 7, personal communication, April 5, 2024)."

In contrast, interviewees three, four, five and six have similar experiences on their first day of work. Interviewee three explains that they had a good experience on their first day at work: "Yes so:: I feel like u:m I've had good experiences being welcomed (Interviewee 3, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." When interviewee three worked in France, on their first day along with other students, the company had someone welcome the group properly, and they also had a contact person assigned to them in case they needed help:

> U:m in France uh when I worked there so I worked as this u::m uh customer assistance um like operator I guess um and we had a person that was assigned to us to help us because we were a lot of students so that went well uh because there was someone to really like like welcome us properly in in the company (Interviewee 3, personal communication, April 1, 2024).

Interviewee three continues to compare the first day at work in France with the one in Denmark, where they work as a dishwasher. In Denmark, they also had a good experience the first day they showed up to work. The welcoming was not done formally as it was in France. However, the environment in the kitchen was friendly and open and the people were nice. Therefore, to interviewee three there have not been any problems so far: "uh here when I worked uh it was not as formal, but I feel like the environment at least in the kitchen is very friendly uh so everyone is just quite um like nice to you and open, so it hasn't been a problem so far (Interviewee 3, personal communication, April 1, 2024)". Unlike interviewee two for example, it seems interviewee three, at least on the first day, has been able to be themselves to a certain degree. And it sounds like that is still possible at the current dishwashing job. Now as interviewee three has not disclosed much about how the first day has impacted them as neuroqueer, it is not possible to say if masking in this specific experience has occurred or not. However, the co-workers, especially those working with Interviewee three in the kitchen, have been "friendly", "nice" and "open" which would indicate that Interviewee three is comfortable in this workspace (Interviewee 3, personal communication, April 1, 2024).

Interviewee four has a similar experience to interviewee three and compares the first day of work in Budapest with the first day at a newer current workplace. His first day at the embassy in Budapest was a good experience where he felt safe in the environment: "...there I got a thorough

introduction to everything and like it was safe and it was really nice (Interviewee 4, personal communication, April 1, 2024).” It was quite the opposite at the new job. Even though interviewee four explains that you are assigned a mentor, who can help, you are mostly left to yourself: “…whereas the new job that I have is like extreme like you have to really like take the initiative (Interviewee 4, personal communication, April 1, 2024).” Concerning neuronormativity, one could argue that as a neuroqueer(ing) person, this could be a potentially challenging work situation. As interviewee four is left to initiate tasks, find projects to work with, and build a network within the company by himself, the work culture seems to bear traits of neurotypical expectations for performance: “...like you have to really like take the initiative and humanly it really requires a lot (Interviewee 4, personal communication, April 1, 2024).” Interviewee four expresses that he enjoys the new job and how the work process and tasks are set up.

Additionally, it stimulates him a lot all the time which is something that he expresses a great need of: “So it's something else that is very challenging however in a way that fits me very well in a way because it stimulates me a lot all the time u::hm and it's something that I believe I need (Interviewee 4 personal communication, April 1, 2024).” But the same thing that stimulates interviewee four and makes the job enjoyable can also be challenging and too unstructured “…but it is also overwhelming and it has truly required that I focus on creating some sort of structure for myself because that is something that hasn't been there in the organization (Interviewee 4, personal communication April 1, 2024).” This is something interviewee four also needs. Now this could downplay his need for structure as a neuroqueer person. This falls under the neurotypical norm of expecting employees to find their way of working and creating their structure without help or guidance, even though interviewee four also mentioned that there is a mentor who can help. Furthermore, this could also have to do with performance and potentially culture, as you want to show that you can do the assigned tasks but that you also do not want to bother another person with your work problems which can lead back to performance and wanting to show that you can do the job (Hearn & Collinson, 2009) (Prasad, Pringle, & Konrad, 2009) (Kulik & Bainbridge, 2009) (Stone-Romero, Stone, & Lukaszewski, 2009) (Karlsson & Rydström, 2023, s. 400-401).

Interviewee five also describes having a positive first-day experience with the job that they have currently. They explain that they were greeted and the other co-workers also asked about their pronouns “U:::m well at my current workplace I had a a great experience hen u:h u::h then they actually asked about about pronouns u:h and also uh several of my colleagues when I met them for the first time (Interviewee 5, personal communication, April 3, 2024).” Additionally, they had their name

put on a work card before it was changed legally. Interviewee five explains that it made them feel understood and included "so already from the beginning they said if you want to use that name then then that's what we put on your card instead and that was that that that made me feel very included and understood (Interviewee 5, personal communication, April 3, 2024)." So, from the first day of work, interviewee five, has been able to be in a process of unmasking their queer identity by sharing their pronouns and talk openly about their name change (Walker N. , 2024, p. 186). This was able to happen as the co-workers were open and asked about it, even the ones that asked in the "old-fashioned way". Also, because the workplace accommodated and accepted the name change by putting it on the work card, even though they had not changed their name legally when they were hired. This could also be an example of workplace transparency because the workplace asked questions openly and enough to make interviewee five feel safe. (Walker N. , 2024, p. 186). This leads to Interviewee five feeling acknowledged and included.

Interviewee six also expresses having a great first day at work: "U:m I've only had good experiences u:m I may also be the type that tries to fit a bit into a work function (Interviewee 6, personal communication, April 5, 2024)." However, the interviewee also states that the first day of work may have gone well because they tried to fit into the job function, potentially leaving a good impression. This is done by, as the interviewee describes it: "u::m so I also show up according to what I or show up according to what I am going in for kinda you know nicely dressed and calm and easy and such so (Interviewee 6, personal communication, April 5, 2024)." However, trying to fit the role by wearing nice clothes and appearing calm and collected, may lead to interviewees masking to fit in and potentially show that they are right for the job (Walker N. , 2024, p. 186). In this way they may not experience exclusion, abuse, harassment, or discrimination, but they will have to sacrifice their well-being by masking, which could lead to stress and burnout. Interviewee six also comments that this has worked for her even in less inclusive workplaces: "… so I've only had good experiences u:m with that even at [company name] <laughter> yeah" and "U::m when I was working at [company name] (…) u::m it's a LESS inclusive environment I would say less inclusive work environment about being queer and to having other ways of handling things or other ways of working (Interviewee 6, personal communication, April 5, 2024)." It seems as if it has become a way to survive the job market and/or workplaces. Even though interviewee six talks about only having good experiences from the first day of work, it seems there are traits of masking – trying to "fit in" (Interviewee 6, personal communication, April 5, 2024).

## Introduction to work tasks

*"One" neuronormative way of working*

Interviewee one, six, and seven's experiences with being introduced to work tasks are characterized by neuronormativity – a workplace archetype dictating how the "typical" brain learns, functions, and works best (Walker N. , 2024, p. 57) Interviewee one expressed that they have not been introduced properly to work tasks and people would get annoyed with them needing more repetition, because "our brains didn't like fit together (interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." This comes from workplaces not accommodating different learning, working, and processing methods. Instead, there is "one right way". Interviewee one refers to a lack of understanding for how things impacted them compared to how things impacted other people (interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2024). As a result, they had to overcompensate, mask, and hide when they were tired or needed more time to process all the new information. In turn, they would get overwhelmed, anxious, stressed, or ultimately, burned out from having to "live up to what all the others were doing even though I couldn't (interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." The workplace did not accommodate their nervous system, or the way they function, process, and absorb new information.

This is the same for interviewee six's experiences from a Danish workplace. She was introduced to tasks in a way that did not fit her. At multiple occasions, she told her manager that "my way of working was to sit with my headphones on somewhere with a view over the entire office uh or sitting facing a wall and I can't be disturbed (...) in order for me to concentrate on this then I have the need or no one coming to me with five questions while I am doing this (Interviewee 6, personal communication, April 5, 2024)." However, a neuronormative understanding of working, functioning, and completing tasks seems to be dominating. That is because, when continuing the story on how she told her manager about her optimal working style, she says: "that wasn't something like they we:re willing to work with (...) because in a week you'll criticize me if it wasn't done properly but you'll also criticize me if I am not doing the five things you bring to me so we need to find a way to solve this and they weren't interested in that they were very much like you have to do as we say (Interviewee 6, personal communication, April 5, 2024)." Interviewee seven also speaks of workplaces setting a standard for "one way" to do the tasks, when in fact "there are thousands of other ways to work and I am best like if I like get the liberty to manage my own task (Interviewee 7, personal communication, April 5, 2024)."

*Multiple neuroqueer(ing) ways of working*

Working best if you get the liberty to manage your own tasks and to work in your own way are reoccurring themes. In fact, interviewee six not only has bad experiences with workplaces expecting "one" neuronormative way of working. She speaks of her current workplace in Germany that accommodates space for her optimal way of working, concentrating, and functioning (Interviewee 6, personal communication, April 5, 2024). Interviewees two, three, four, and five also have great experiences with being introduced to work tasks in ways that do not bear traits of neuronormativity. Interviewee two were just thrown into it without much instruction, which is the best way for them to learn: "getting a thousand instructions does not work for me (...) I'm lucky because this is how the workplace works they just do things and we learn as we go (Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." This is similar to interviewee three who also has great experiences from Denmark and France with being introduced to tasks: "currently being a dishwasher u:m most of the tasks are (...) repetitive tasks like I'm good at them (..) there's not really like proper training so you kinda learn as you're doing it (...) and when I was uh back in France (...) we had um like a week of training um and I feel like I pick up on things pretty fast so:: (...) the way I was introduced to the tasks uh was quite efficient (Interviewee 3, personal communication, April 1, 2024)."

Interviewee four also experiences workplace well-being when he is "thrown into" tasks, rather than having in-depth introductions. He thrives more in fluid and flexible work tasks in contrast to the structured work in Budapest, where he "started to like really like lose interest and the drive because it became too much of a routine (Interviewee 4, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." He explains that "some would say that ADHD plays a role", though he prefers not to put himself into boxes, labels, or identity markers like that (Interviewee 4, personal communication, April 1, 2024). Lastly, interviewee five also has great experiences because: "I was trained by u:h by colleagues then it was constantly in dialogue concerning how I best learned things so yes that was my experience and they were really nice those who trained me <laughter> (Interviewee 5, personal communication, April 3, 2024)." These experiences are very different to those of interviewee one, (six), and seven, which again emphasize how neuroqueerness is a spectrum with myriads of different identities, experiences, and ways of functioning. It also highlights how context, culture, and country of the workplaces play a role and can explain why experiences vary from neuroqueer to neuroqueer.

## Theme 4: To be—or not to be "out"—as neuroqueer

Theme 4 was identified from differences and similarities in how the neuroqueer(ing) partipants experience their queer and neurodivergent identities play a role at the workplace. The interview questions to harvest data on this were question 6: "How do you experience that being neurodivergent plays a role (in having/being at a job)?" and question 7: "How do you experience that being queer plays a role?". This led to the two sub-themes 'to be—or not to be "out"—as neurodivergent' and the same with 'queer', which symbolizes the process, thoughts, and feelings connected to sharing openly at work that you are neuroqueer – or not sharing.

### To be—or not to be "out"— as neurodivergent

*Not to be "out" as neurodivergent*

There are no interviewees that explicitly share or "come out" as neurodivergent in job interviews, due to fear of prejudice, discrimination and/or stigma, as already mentioned (See Theme 2: Neurotypical Norms). This also counts for a lot of the survey participants with "coming out" at work in general. Two elaborations to the survey question "have you experienced discrimination at work because of being neurodivergent and queer?" include: "my neurodivergency is not disclosed (...) from other people talking negatively about neurodivergency", and "I have not experienced discrimination, but that is probably because I didn't disclose it to them" (Appendix F, Table F1, 2024). The survey question, "if you haven't told a workplace that you are neurodivergent and/or queer, would you like to explain why?" provides more in-depth insight into why some might not "come out". Replies include: "im afraid of hate", "so much stigma (particularly around ADHD) and I don't want to deal with their poor knowledge", "Psychosis is very tabooed and I do not want superiors to treat me negatively or with fear", "If I disclose that I believe that I have ADHD, I'm afraid that people will consider that I am not organized enough or can't handle certain tasks", "if I came out as having schizophrenic episodes, I can't imagine the level of insensitive comments", "I know people still discriminate based on it", "this would not bring me any benefits - only potential discrimination", "I have witnessed more casual anti-autistic rhetoric at work in Denmark than in the UK and I fear that my boss and colleagues would think less of me/change their behaviour around me if I disclosed my autism", and "Fear of stigmatisation at work being neurodivergent"(Appendix F, Table F2, 2024).

These reasons to why a lot of survey participants do not "come out" at workplaces are quite similar to the interviewees' reasons for not sharing their neurodivergence at job interviews (See Theme 2: Neurotypical Norms). Instead of "coming out", many of the interviewees have tried to be

honest, open, and speak about how they learn, work, and function best. Workplace reactions to this are sometimes characterized by neuronormativity – that the way the neuroqueer participants express they work best diverge from the norm, expectations, or dominant methods. About how being neurodivergent plays a role in the workplace, interviewee one says, “there hasn't been <sigh> that there hasn't been like quite a lot of understanding for (Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2024).” This is very different from the experience of interviewee two. They have also gradually been more open about how they learn, work, and function best – in spite of fearing prejudice from doing so when first starting the job. Eventually, when they did open more up, there was “full understanding” for their hearing difficulties and dyslexia. Colleagues have gotten used to saying things multiple times, louder, and explaining them without taking it badly (Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 1, 2024). This is also the case for one of the survey participants: “My workplaces have been surprisingly welcoming and open minded (Appendix F, Table F1, 2024).”

*To be “out” or “outed” as neurodivergent*

In relation to neuroqueer(ing) participants not “coming out” as neurodivergent due to fear of prejudice, discrimination, and/or stigma, many survey participants tell their stories about what may happen when you *do* “come out” at work. This includes getting fired or not hired, discrimination, stereotyping, language of the pathology paradigm, and workplaces that do not (want to) make accommodations.

Examples of *getting fired or not hired* include: “I was once fired because my employer learned of my diagnosis, and generally at work now (different place) I feel like I’m treated differently because of my neurodivergency”, “I have been rejected from jobs because of my Autism and have had old bosses not use correct pronouns”, “My previous boss also dismissed others who disclosed neurodivergent diagnosis to him”, “Fired multiple times for both neurodiversity and disability”, “I didn't tell my current boss until after I had worked there for a while, because he's "old school" (or just kind of an asshole) and almost certainly wouldn't've hired me, if he knew I was autistic (Appendix F, Table F1; Table F2, 2024).” There is a longer more in-depth survey participant experience of (maybe) getting fired for being neurodivergent, including gaslighting, neuronormativity, stereotyping, and language of the pathology paradigm, that needs to stand alone due to the immense degree of ableism:

> “I told my manager about being diagnosed with autism and ADHD (...) in the start she seemed supportive and asked me to be open with any accommodations (...) When I began to ask for accommodations I was however told I was just over

> complicating things and not performing as I should [*gaslighting*]. I also got comments from my manager about how she didn't understand how I had managed to accomplish certain work tasks so well/so fast [*neuronormativity*] and kept saying things like "it must be because you're autistic [*stereotyping*], a normal person couldn't do that [*language of the pathology paradigm*: 'normal']". A couple of months later I was fired, officially because of "restructuring", but I suspect the neurodivergence played at least some role in the decision even though I can't prove it [*getting fired* for being neurodivergent]. And I might of course be wrong (Appendix F, Table F1, 2024)."

There are also examples of *discrimination* from "coming out" as neurodivergent: "discrimination because of the autism has been so immense and overshadowing the ones about being nonbinary, but I have had an internship supervisor ridicule my gender identity in front of peers and with collegues, autism has been used against me more than anything else (Appendix F, Table F1, 2024)." Experiences from workplaces *stereotyping* employees because they are neurodivergent include: "I have repeatedly gotten comments that I'm autistic, but I'm "not really autistic", which is based on stereotypes and is not the compliment they think it is", "At my previous workplace, I was made fun of a lot by e.g. my boss who assumed I was autistic (I did not disclose) and e.g. would say how entertaining it would be to watch me on autistic dating shows like "the undateables" (Appendix F, Table F1, 2024)." The last experience is also a case of neuronormativity, ableism, and language of the pathology paradigm, because being autistic is linked to being "undatable". This perpetuates an idea that autism "falls outside" the boundary of what is seen as "datable" in a neuronormative sense.

Lastly, there are examples of workplaces that *do not (want to) make accommodations:* "My last workplace seemed to start panicking when I mentioned I was going to get the diagnosis, and they denied that they had to make even small accommodations (such as shorter 1 on 1 meetings)", and "My boss tells me that there's no special treatment for me just because I have ADHD, and that I need to focus" (Appendix F, Table F1, 2024). This is paradoxical in light of the current diversity, equity, and inclusion trend aiming to do more accommodations for neuroqueers and/or disabled for instance. The survey participants' bad experiences with "coming out" as neurodivergent puts emphasis, weight, and reality to the other participants' fear of prejudice holding them back from disclosing their neurodivergence and disabilities at work – in turn, causing them to mask their identities/diagnoses.

*Strengths and struggles*

Despite the seemingly negative experiences with being neurodivergent at work, the interviewees also speak of strengths. When interviewee two is at work, they experience specific strengths from being neurodivergent such as "The check out system and how it works I'm super good at that (...) I also think that because of my autism and the fact that I'm very good at patterns and I've learnt this because of the dyslexia (...) I can remember all the numbers that we have on things in the store (...) a lot better than some of my co-workers (Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." This resembles interviewee five and seven. Interviewee five says that "at my current job I actually see it as a strength because I am very thorough and it is a cleaning job <laughter> (...) I have been praised for things that I think comes from my my ADHD yes (Interviewee 5, personal communication, April 3, 2024)." Interviewee seven also talk about a neurodivergent strength that they are "a hundred times more creative (...) because of my schizophrenia diagnosis (Interviewee 7, personal communication, April 5, 2024)." This was a part of their answer to how being neurodivergent plays a role to them at work. They speak of some people giving them "pity looks" when opening up about their schizophrenia. However, they show strength, pride, and "take it or leave it"-mentality when speaking about this. To them, it is important that their identity as neurodivergent plays a role at work – and to be honest and open about their diagnoses when possible (Interviewee 7, personal communication, April 5, 2024). Despite bad neuronormative experiences from workplaces previously, their "take it or leave it" energy bears traits of empowerment and embodied liberation. They have experienced a lot of masking but seems to be trying to unmask by saying "this is my identity and I stand by that (Interviewee 7, personal communication, April 5, 2024)."

On the other hand, a way that being neurodivergent plays a role to some of the neuro-queers is that social interactions are a struggle sometimes. A survey participant says: "I just didn't like small talking for much more than a minute or two (especially not when I don't get the social rules of their age group) (Appendix F, Table F1, 2024)." Snappy comebacks, snarky remarks and the social aspect of customer service has become more difficult while having to concentrate – in particular after starting medication to interviewee two (Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 1, 2024). Interviewee three speaks of being neurodivergent playing a similar role in dealing with customers: "talking to customers that I it I don't feel like it comes naturally to me so sometimes it was just a bit um awkward on the phone (Interviewee 3, personal communication, April 1, 2024)."However, they quickly figured out a system by themselves, having a check or to-do list open on their computer, in order to move on from the awkward aspects of customer service. In light of this experience,

workplaces could be more neuroqueer-inclusive by creating methods or measures for handling such work tasks. The social aspect of a job takes up space for everyone—neuroqueer or not—but seems to play a role to some of the interviewees. Perhaps, workplaces are not aware that giving a list procedure, or method for navigating such tasks can improve well-being.

**To be—or not to be "out"—as queer**

How being queer plays a role in workplace well-being varies a lot from neuroqueer to neuroqueer which has already been established in relation to recruiting platforms and processes. However, zooming out and looking at the bigger picture, there are two major patterns. The *first* is that being queer plays a big role with bad experiences of "coming out". The *second* is that being queer plays a mixed role with good and bad experiences of "coming out".

*To be queer plays a big role*

Interviewee one speaks of experiencing quite a lot of homophobia before realizing they were genderqueer – if they talked openly about their sexual orientation (Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2024). For that reason, they explain that being queer plays a really big role unfortunately. In comparing this to how being neurodivergent plays a role, they say that "when I share openly that I am queer it is more stigmatized than if I share openly that I am neurodivergent (...) they most often react worse (...) people yes have had a lot of prejudices and haven't been very kind (Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." Interviewee seven is of similar experiences. It is very important to them expressing that they are queer in some way or another. However, due to experiences with straight cisgender co-workers asking invasive questions about their privacy, gender, and sex life/positions, they do not always want to show that they are queer: "it can be about anything from sex position to sexuality to gender to whether you are this or that since they like to put people in boxes and frames all the time (...) and always you're met with this oh but you are a bit feminine so you must be this well now you are a bit masculine then you must be the opposite (Interviewee 7, personal communication, April 5, 2024)." They have tried to set boundaries, which resulted in people feeling offended and not taking it well (Interviewee 7, personal communication, April 5, 2024).

Many survey participants have similar experiences to how being queer plays a role when asking them about discrimination and discomfort at work. It plays a (big) role with prejudice, discrimination, invasive questions, queerphobic jokes, homo- and transphobia being reoccurring themes. Neuroqueer stories from workplaces about *bullying, discrimination,* and *prejudice* include:

"various forms of bullying due to being different/non-conforming", "discrimination by praktikvejlder, teachers, udannelsesvejleder with both being nonbinary and autistic", "harmful prejudice and inappropriate questions" (Appendix F, Table F1, 2024). The two first quotes are specifically about discriminatory behaviour towards non-conforming and non-binary individuals. The last quote relates to interviewee seven talking about colleagues asking invasive and inappropriate questions about their queer identity.

*Queerphobic jokes* is another theme identified, repeated, and experienced by the neuroqueer(ing) survey participants. In fact, the word "joke" is mentioned eleven times in the survey data. Using queerphobic jokes and sense of humour as a shield, method, or "discrete way" to be queer-phobic is for example when: "Lets just say middle-aged men like to "joke" around with everything being autistic or gay", "Queerphobic banter and jokes", "They already make jokes about me dating men, and I don't want to hear them joke about me dating women", and "Casual jokes and comments about queerness or people being "weird" are common" (Appendix F, Table F1; Table F2; Table F4, 2024). Importantly, it is always outright queerphobia, discrimination, and microagressions even when people "hide it" in jokes and sense of humour.

*Homophobia* (intersecting with transphobia, racism, ableism) is seen repeatedly in the neuroqueer(ing) workplace experiences—directly and indirectly—with the word mentioned explicit-ly nine times. Examples of homophobia are: "a nursing home where homophobic and racist elders were very normal", "toxic masculine homophobia [when I identified as a lesbian]", "openly homophobic boss", "someone used the bible to harass me", "people saying degoratory things about lgbtq persons, and distancing themselves from me", and "several of my coworkers treat me like a queer Wikipedia, and one of them semi-regularly uses slurs or criticises things for being too 'homo'" (Appendix F, Table F1, 2024).

*Transphobia* at workplaces is also experienced in: "people continually using wrong gender vocab", "my boss told me I would "never be a real man" because I'm trans", "It's far worse in France because the language does not leave room for non gendered and people get pretty nasty when they run out of words", and "I've heard my bosses/colleagues make transphobic comments before" (Appendix F, Table F1; Table F2, 2024). There is an act of erasure, gaslighting, and transphobia when workplaces use the wrong gender vocabulary and pronouns – and directly invalidates employees in their gender identities by saying they will never be a "real man". This also bears traits of the binary construction of gender and biological essentialism that erases gender non-conforming folks.

*To be queer plays a mixed role*

While being queer plays a greater role to some, it plays less of a role to interviewee two and three. However, that is because they have not properly "come out" at work. Interviewee two says it does not play a huge role, but that they do not really tell people about it at their workplace. By first glance, this seems like a neutral experience, but they also speak of cis-heteronormative assumptions, stereotypes, and reactions from their workplace. That is, their "colleagues really have created or have assumptions like 'woman' and what's it called maybe straight because I have a partner that outwardly probably resembles a man or u:m yeah even though they use they/them pronouns but that is not something that people necessarily pick up on (Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." Interviewee three speaks of a similar experience. They say it has not really been a problem for now, but that is because they have not "come out" properly. However, there is also cis-heternormativity and fear of transphobia behind this. They say that "I don't really feel the need for people to know because in case someone will be like transphobic then it would just put me in a like in a dangerous and unsafe position and I don't feel like it's worth it (Interviewee 3, personal communication, April 1, 2024)."

Interviewees four and six say that being queer plays less of a role now. However, they do have both good *and* bad workplace experiences. Interviewee four highlights that being queer, comfortable, and yourself at work really depends on the job, colleagues, and sector. Working for a political party, he could be himself to a great extent, whereas working in the public sector, he felt like having to "fit in" more, and a co-worker once said: ""why do I actually have to know that you are gay?" or somehting like that "it's actually pretty private" and that was uncomfortable for me to be alone and having to defend it (Interviewee 4, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." To be put in a situation where you have to defend yourself and queerness in general at work is also experienced by interviewee six. She speaks of an uncomfortable company party in Denmark, where she had to defend her and friends' queer identities in terms of sexual orientation, gender, and the pronouns 'they/them': "one of my colleagues (...) we worked together indirectly started a bit um to question sexuality and like my girlfriend and pronouns too u::m where I then found myself in a situation where I had to stand there and defend that I have people close to me that uses they them (Interviewee 6, personal communication, April 5, 2024)." On the other hand, like interviewee four, this experience was a complete other, when working for another company. She has positive experiences from the German job market, where it was seen as positive or neutral that she is queer and has a girlfriend in the same company. That might have to do with the German workplace being more inclusive and

diverse than the Danish one, because in her team "three out of four are queer so that's a big difference (Interviewee 6, personal communication, April 5, 2024)."

To be queer playing a neutral role at work is shared by interviewee five. In fact, they are at the other end of the "spectrum" over experiences, because they do not mention any bad ones. Interviewee five says they have never encountered anyone wrinkling their nose about them being queer (Interviewee 5, personal communication, April 3, 2023). In fact, they speak positively about how being queer plays a role at work: "well everyone remembers who I am <laughter> I stand out <laughter> but that's not necessarily a bad thing (...) the colleagues I have (...) are all really nice and uh understanding and (...) they're kind to ask in a respectful way if there is something they are curious about so (...) in that way I am lucky (Interviewee five, personal communication, April 3, 2024)." This might have to do with the fact that the workplace has been inclusive by asking for pronouns, using their preferred (not legal) name at the admission card, and being open to whatever uniform they wanted to wear lucky (Interviewee five, personal communication, April 3, 2024).

**To be—or not to be "out"—as neuroqueer**

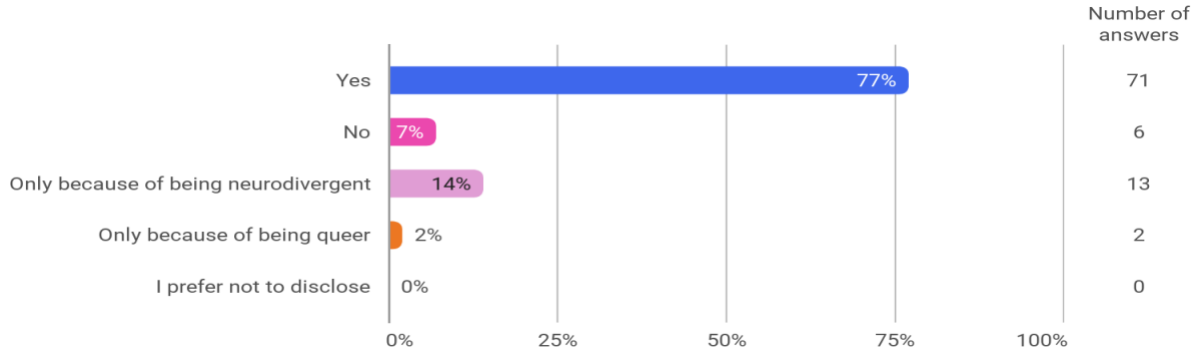
Despite that being queer and neurodivergent play varied roles to the neuroqueer(ing) participants on a micro-level (personal), their experiences indicate a link between how workplaces react to querness and neurodivergence on a macro-level (structural-institutional). The *first* link between workplace reactions to neurodivergence and queerness is discrimination; ableism, homophobia, and transphobia. The fear, awareness, or experience of ableism and queerphobia causes the neuroqueer(ing) participants to not "come out" in certain cases: "I am not "out" as lesbian or neurodivergent at the places I have worked so I have overheard derogatory conversations between colleagues on both subjects often" and "I also had to deal with a colleague who made homophobic, transphobic and anti-autistic comments on a highly frequent basis for years. I did not disclose my identity to him however so wasn't directly discriminated against (Appendix F, Table F1, 2024)."

This link between neurodivergent and queer experiences of workplace well-being is substantiated by survey statistics. Figure 3.1 showcases that 77% of the 92 survey participants have experienced discomfort at work because of being neurodivergent and queer. Solely 14% says "only because of being neurodivergent", and solely 2% says "only because of being queer". Figure 3.2 displays that 32% of the 92 participants have experienced discrimination at work because of being neurodivergent and queer. Exclusively 12% says "only because of being neurodivergent", and exclusively 10% says "only because of being queer". There are more who experiences discomfort

and/or discrimination from being both neurodivergent and queer—in other words, neuroqueer—than one or the other. This points to a link between the two identities.

**Figure 3.1**

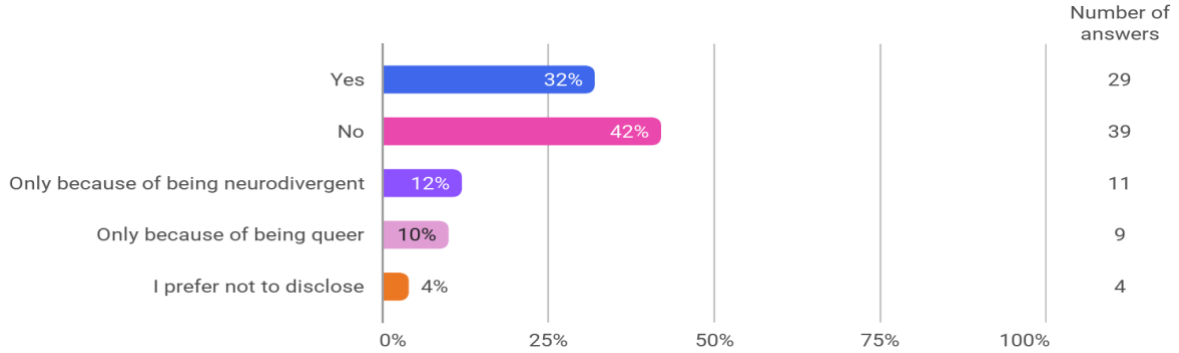
*Have You Experienced Discomfort at Work* Because of Being Neurodivergent and Queer?*




*Note*. * "Now and/or in the past".

**Figure 3.2**

*Have You Experienced Discrimination at Work* Because of Being Neurodivergent and Queer?*



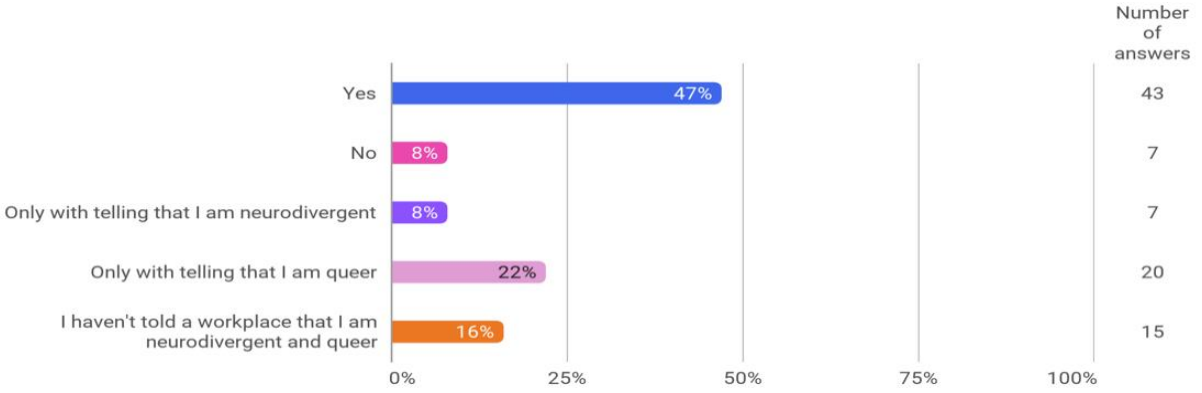

*Note*. * "Now and/or in the past". See Appendix B, Table B1 for elaboration.

The *second* link between workplace reactions to neurodivergence and queerness is workplaces' disbelief, mistrust, and gaslighting of the neuroqueers as valid in their identities. This includes experiences like: "I haven't told anyone that I'm neurodivergent because I know that people Will say "No You're not. You're way to -something-", "I am scared of the reactions from my colleagues. (...) I don't want to be viewed as any different due to my queerness. I already told my boss about my ADHD and she just did not believe me", and "I have worked in many male dominated spaces, they were inherently sexist, homophobic, and ableist. From casual jokes and comments to having to "debate" my position (ie the validity of myidentity)" (Appendix F, Table F1; Table F2). The link here seems to be that workplaces debate, invalidate, or question whether the neuroqueers are legitimate in

their neurodivergent and queer identities. This is another way to erase and exclude neuroqueer employees. An extra layer to this is if you are invalidated when officially-diagnosed, then what not, when you are self-diagnosed: "I don't think many places would be particularly ready to make space for ND's that are self-diagnosed (Appendix F, Table F2)". What can explain the link between workplaces reactions to neurodivergence and to queerness? What does cis-heteronormativity and neuronormativity have in common? They are structures created to dictate, gatekeep, and police what falls *inside* and *beyond* how a "typical" archetype-person behaves, thinks, feels, looks, works, and makes sense of the world. What does non-conforming queers and neurodivergent identities have in common? They might pose a threat to this "archetype" by having potential and power to dismantle the structures. That is, non-conforming queers and neurodivergent individuals (neuroqueers) may disrupt, confuse, and/or play with fixed narrow-minded ideas of gender, sexual orientation, ways of understanding, interacting, and/or engaging with the world – that is, the process of neuroqueer(ing) (Walker N. , 2021, pp. 160, 162). However, on a last (positive) note, 47% of the survey participants also have good experiences with telling their workplaces that they are neuroqueer which is exhibited in Figure 3.3.

**Figure 3.3.**

*Positive Experiences With Telling Your Workplace That You Are Neurodivergent and Queer?*




*Note.* See Appendix B, Table B2 for "If you haven't told a workplace that you are neurodivergent and/or queer, would you like to explain why?".

## Theme 5: Dress Code and Stimming

This theme highlights patterns in the neuroqueer(ing) experiences of dresscode, appearance, showing who you are, and stimming at the workplace. That is based on question 8: "What are your experiences with dress codes and appearance (showing who you are) at the workplace (colleagues/leaders' reactions to this)?" and question 9: "What are your experiences with stimming at the workplace? (colleagues/leaders' reactions to this)".

### Dress code at work

Interviewees one, two, three, and five do not have a lot of (negative) experiences with dress code, appearance, and showing who you are because they used uniforms or general work-wear (Interviewee 1; 2; 3, 5, personal communication, April 1; 3, 2024). Still, interviewee two speaks of wearing alternative clothes, black eyeliner, and a lot of jewellery outside work and the first time co-workers saw this, they were like "wow". However, other co-workers are alternative too, and it has never been looked down on, so it was a positive experience (Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 1, 2024). Interviewee three speaks of wearing colourful shirts to work from not really understanding the dress code, but that it was not a negative experience that affect them – and perhaps more to do with them being young, rather than neuroqueer (Interviewee 3, personal communication, April 1, 2024). Interviewee seven express that most of the time they do not present themselves very queer at a workplace because they "don't want to listen to any comments or just like be met with those big reactions from people (Interviewee 7, personal communication, April 5, 2024)." However, they do express queer at their volunteer workplace now, and what that place does right is that "we give space for everyone to be who they are u:h regardless of what gender sexuality or background they have u:m being more open about it all that is what makes a difference (Interviewee 7, personal communication, April 5, 2024)." This seems to be a workplace of more embodied liberation embracing people for who they are.

Experiences with dress code, appearance, and "showing who you are" also bear traits of embodied liberation in the case of interviewee six. In terms of the Danish experience, this has less to do with the workplace embracing people for who they are, than it has to do with interviewee six embracing her own style. She says that "I didn't think too much about it (I put on what) I put on u:m (Interviewee 6, personal communication, April 5, 2024)." However, this liberty of expression did not count for all employees. Interviewee 6's name popped up in a co-worker's salary discussion about:

> "...the clothes she was wearing to work versus my clothes u::m I worked for a clothes company that produced very feminine clothes u:m and (...) it was commented on that she wasn't the brand's identity where my name then entered the discussion and was like but is [interviewee 6's name] that no but you're not [interviewee 6's name] (...) it could be seen as a huge compliment to me for being my own person and daring to stand by the clothes that I wear even though it's not like that crazy then it's not nice that I have to be a part of another person's salary review and then being told afterwards because I dress a bit differently than the others don't wear a dress everyday and such right (Interviewee 6, personal communication, April 5, 2024)."

This experience echoes interviewee seven's reasons for not expressing themselves very queer and not dressing very true to themself at workplaces - to avoid comments and big reactions. The salary discussion is an illustration of a workplace not minding their own business on employees' appearance. In contrast, based on interviewee six's experience from the German job market, it seems they in fact give space for people embracing themselves – at least in that company. Interviewee six says that (...) where I am working now there's just full liberty to (show up) in sweatpants or suit trousers that's pretty cool (Interviewee 6, personal communication, April 5, 2024)."

Interviewee four also has mixed experiences with dress codes, appearance, and showing who you are as a queer person. Still, he mentions that he probably has more positive than negative experiences. This can be explained by interviewee four mentioning that: "I've been able to pass as straight sometimes or more so in my clothing even the clothes that I would wear myself (Interviewee 4, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." Also, this might be explained by the fact that he speaks of himself as more privileged: "I don't see myself as particularly exposed in the first place (...) I really feel like I'm privileged cause I'm like a cis man and white and well educated and I come from a very socioeconomically advantaged home", but still he says that "it's not like I feel like it's easy for me to have the energy to be comfortable in it (Interviewee 4, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." This "it" being "put into boxes" as the stereotypical "fun" queer co-worker, friend and "exciting element", who adds "spice" to the company, which can sometimes "suck". This is something that plays a big role to interviewee four in workplace well-being, because you cannot always figure out what the

culture, cultural codes, and prejudices are – and so, he is "still figuring out how much comfortable I am in having to play such a role in a way (Interviewee 4, personal communication, April 1, 2024)."

**Stimming at work**

Interviewee one has not reflected a lot upon whether they stim or not until finding out they are autistic – and then it made started to make sense, but they have never had fidget toy with them (Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2024). Interviewee two says that stimming is no problem, that they rarely do it at work, and if they do it is alone in the break room. However, they have noticed that they try to hold back their tics as much as they can – and in turn, they stim more at home to get it out of their body (Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 1, 2024). Interviewee three stims by way of singing, stim toys, and rocking back and forth, which they also tried to hide at first. Then it came to a point where they could not hide it anymore, so they would just stim and "see if people pick up on it or not and if they don't say anything then you kind of feel u:m like just free to continue doing it so (Interviewee 3, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." People have not commented on it, so they speak of it as a positive experience. In contrast, at the nursing home people did comment on interviewee seven stimming with their fidget spinner and asked them to put it away (Interviewee 7, personal communication, April 5, 2024). This experience seems to bear more traits of neuro-normativity in the workplace policing what falls within narrow boundaries of what is deemed okay, acceptable, or standard behaviour. Accordingly, interviewee four also seems to be impacted by neuronormative workplace standards that causes him "to mask" his stimming: "it's probably not something that I like show (...) I think that I need to pull myself together (...) I think that I have methods where I do it discretely (Interviewee 4, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." However, in relation to stimming, workplace well-being, and making it all work, he also says that enough sleep, exercise, and feeling good socially at work have a great impact. This relates a bit to the experience with stimming of interviewee five. They say that factors like being medicated, physically active, and having your hands full at work makes them stimulated – and in turn, stim less (Interviewee 5, personal communication, April 3, 2024).

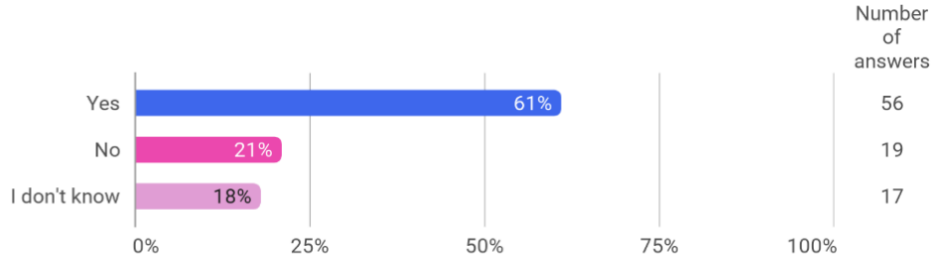
In comparison, 61% of the 92 survey respondents say that they stim at work and 21% says that they do not. When asking "why/why not?", some say that it is something they "just do", "have to do", "always do", "can't help", "don't notice I'm doing", "feel the need to", "don't think about", "can't see why I shouldn't" and is "an instinct" that they "don't supress" (Appendix F, Table F3, 2024). This part of the survey replies on stimming bear more traits of unmasking and embodied

liberation in giving full expression to their inherent natural body movements (Walker N. , 2024, p. 186). In turn, they might experience less burnout and character armor, which some points to: “it is better than me having a full meltdown (Appendix F, Table F3, 2024).”

There is also an example of what can happen if you supress stims and inherent natural body movements: “I’m no longer working due to autistic burnout and several comorbidities (Appendix F, Table F3, 2024).” Other survey respondents say that they do stim or fidget but “only in ways that the majority of neurotypical people don’t recognize as stims”, “not when around clients, have been discriminated for doing it in the breakroom or office”, “in some degree, I need to, but try to keep it to a level that doesn’t annoy others”, “in quite a subtle way”, “without noticing”, “discretely (e.g. wiggling feet) so I don’t think people notice”, “in socially accepted ways that people don’t notice”, or that they “mask and seem as normal as possible”, “supress a lot of my drums because they make me very self aware”, “still feel a strong need to mask in order not to be judged, especially since I’m already perceived as weird and “quirky””, “I feel insecure showing my neurodivergence at work so I mask on all my shifts”, and “I just keep to the ones seen as “normal” – shaking leg etc.” (Appendix F, Table F3, 2024). There are some reoccurring themes in these experiences of stimming at work. It seems a lot of the neuroqueer(ing) participants hide, supress, or mask their stims to “fit into” neuronormative workplace standards – and some even fear or have been subject to discrimination.

**Figure 3.4**

*Do you stim at work?*



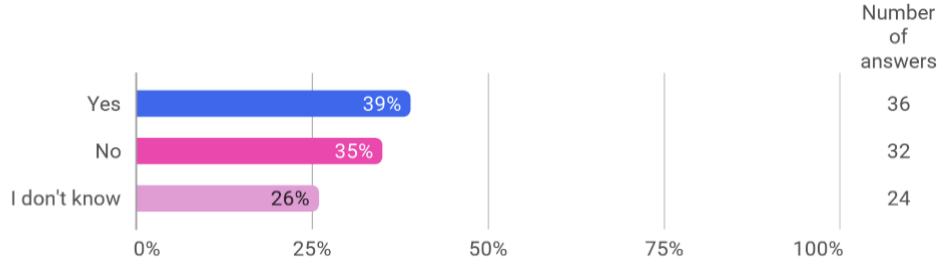

*Note.* See Appendix F, Table F3 for “why/why not” replies.

## Theme 6: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The following three questions on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) at workplaces were sometimes conflated into one or two in the interviews when an interviewee had already replied more or less to them: question 12: "What are your perspectives on diversity at workplaces?", question 13: "What are your perspectives on equity at workplaces?" and question 14: "What are your perspectives on workplaces being inclusive?" In the survey, the three were conflated into one. The idea of 'representation' is included and intertwined with diversity, equity, and inclusion – that is, without representation of different age, ethnic, religious, cultural, gender, and sexual minority groups, there cannot be DE&I initiatives aimed at these groups. A clear pattern within the neuroqueer(ing) experiences of workplace well-being is the lack of and need for representation, diversity, equity, and inclusion of neurodivergent, disabled, and queer folks. Workplace diversity is limited or non-existent from the perspective of all neuroqueer participants. To some, there has not been any form of diversity "neither like u:h race wise nor like u::h neurodivergence wise queer wise (Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." Others say "NO that I don't think actually there is at all (...) a big part of the workplaces we have in Denmark are still putting people in boxes and saying well you are a woman you can't do that you are a man you can do that (Interviewee 7, personal communication, April 5, 2024)." In terms of equity, Interviewee 1 says that "I don't feel that like people that are more stigmatized than others have had a lot of opportunities yeah (interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." Furthermore, workplaces are not always inclusive of neuroqueers. In interviewee 1's experience, they were "a bit like I don't know if you can call it bullied but at least excluded at my workplace because I was queer (interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." In comparison, 39% of the 92 survey participants say "yes" their workplace is diverse and inclusive (now and/or in the past) and 35% says "no" as illustrated in Figure 3.5.

**Figure 3.5**

*Do you feel that your workplace is diverse and inclusive (now and/or in the past)?*




*Note.* See Appendix B, Table B4 for "why/why not" replies.

*"Yes" workplaces are diverse and inclusive*

When asking them "why/why not?" their workplaces are diverse and inclusive, the ones who reply "yes" say that their workplace is inclusive, accommodating and that other co-workers are nice: "They've been open, curious, and accommodating", "They make an effort to be pro-queer and try to accommodate disabilities", "Pretty diverse staff", "My workplace has a tradition of caring about their employees and has a dedicated department for people with disabilities" and "Very international, a lot of queer people and also some neurodivergent people as well (some are both/all three). People are mostly international, so they want to include everyone" (Appendix F, Table F4, 2024). Even though some also answered that there could be a couple of people who would ask questions, have opinions or thoughts, there were also a few at the workplace that did not understand or want to understand: "Some of my coworkers are very inclusive, but some aren't as much, and my boss can be casually sexist/racist/homophones at times", "but most managers are old fashioned in their own thinking" (Appendix F, Table F4, 2024) (Hearn & Collinson, 2009; Prasad, Pringle, & Konrad, 2009). Others also report that based on their past experiences, they have decided to start their own inclusive and diverse companies: "It's my company so I made it inclusive. When I worked for others, I chose the more inclusive places to work (Appendix F, Table F4, 2024)." Some have also said "yes" because they work in organizations that represent either queer and/or neurodivergent people: "It is a queer volunteer organization" and "I work at a queer NGO that also has experience working with neurodivergent folks" (Appendix F, Table F4, 2024). It is also worth noting that when the survey respondents said "yes", workplaces could be inclusive but not diverse enough or vice versa. Depending on the workplace, some have both, and others have one or the other.

*"No" workplaces are not diverse and inclusive*

The ones who reply "no" their workplaces are not diverse and inclusive say the same thing mostly that: "they have generally been quite hostile to difference", "While in my most recent workplace there were more POC, queer and openly neurodivergent people than in past workplaces everyone still had to fit into a very specific mold, so even if they hired "diverse" people there wasn't space to actually openly live as queer and neurodivergent in my experience", and "We are a very small team and have a few neuro colleagues. I think hospitality is overall not inclusive for neuro/queer people because of the unwanted attention and tough work conditions" (Appendix F, table F4, 2024). The survey answers show that there is not a lot of representation when it comes to being queer or neurodivergent. Furthermore, some experience hostile behavior towards them being different, and in other words

"othering" them (Kulik & Bainbridge, 2009) (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000) (Jenkins, 2014). This makes it difficult for them to be themselves openly. One could argue that many have to mask to work where they work (Walker N. , 2021, pp. 186-187). Other survey answers that state similar reasons are the following: "have mainly been working with older, white, cis men", "white and straight middle class", "...but other than that it doesn't seem like a very diverse or inclusive place. It's all white, cis, straight people as far as I know. (It's a gym)", "My workplace is quite homogeneous (white, old, cishet people), I'd say conservative in some ways", and "It is mostly white, straight men and many of them are blind to their privileges. The other major group, white women are oftentimes equally privilege blind" (Appendix F, Table F4, 2024). Evidently, one of the reasons, that has been voiced many times, and why people have said "no" to workplaces being diverse and inclusive is because most of their co-workers, managers, and bosses are middle-aged, white, straight old men. From the perspective of the survey participants, they are also privileged and therefore do not acknowledge that there are other identity groups in the workplace (Appendix F, Table F4, 2024) (Jenkins, 2014). As Hearn and Collion (2009) state masculinities at the workplace can highlight "the diverse nature of power relations there (Hearn & Collinson, 2009, p. 305)" and that the characteristics between "hegemonic, complicit, subordinated masculinities suggest (Hearn & Collinson, 2009, p. 305)" that some masculinities often dominate others. An example of this is the white, middle-class, middle-aged, cis, straight, Christian, and able-bodied man. This is a type of masculinity that is mentioned many times in the survey answers. As mentioned earlier one survey participant stated that the boss said racist, sexist, and homophobic things casually (Appendix F, Table F4, 2024).

*The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*

Hearn & Collinson (2009) argue that this type of workplace environment can be explained by the impact men, masculinity and power have on workplaces, diversity management, and diversity. Often workplaces can become spaces where the production and the reproduction of men's power and masculinity can occur (Hearn & Collinson, 2009, p. 303; Stone-Romero, Stone, & Lukaszewski, 2009, pp. 403-405). However, there can be workplace problems such as culture, decision-making, and "organizational control", that emulate and maintain masculine discursive practices: "Men and masculinities are formed and constructed in work processes of control, collaboration, innovation, competition, conformity, resistance and contradiction (Hearn & Collinson, 2009, p. 303)." Many organizations are also filled with masculine values and therefore many organizations have fixed masculine assumptions in their structure, culture, and practices. Work gives many men symbolic

benefits and resources that mutually reinforce their authority and power in spaces like the home and the workplace (Hearn & Collinson, 2009, p. 303). Men usually also dominate in the highest levels at work and therefore, especially in diverse workspaces, men can show aggressive nonverbal behaviors, speak a lot and interrupt others more often, have more influence, and give more orders (Hearn & Collinson, 2009, p. 303; Kulik & Bainbridge, 2009; Sears, Mallory, Flores, & Conron, 2021).

This coincides with Walker's perspective on heteronormativity and neuronormativity, Audre Lorde's idea of "the master's tools", and the survey participants' and interviewees' experiences. 'Patriarchy' is a system based on the belief and practices that men are authority figures in most social structures. Therefore, men are placed in positions of power in structures such as family, communities, and high-positioned work roles (Baker & Ellece, 2011, pp. 88-89; Hearn & Collinson, 2009, p. 304). Walker (2021) explains that working within a system and playing by the rules, reinforces that same system - whether intentional or not. In this analogy, Walker refers to Audre Lorde's famous idea of "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House (Lorde, 2019, p. 103)." The master's tools (in this case, toxic masculinity dynamics) are never meant to dismantle the master's house (in this case, patriarchy), so when you try to use the master's tools for something you end up building an extension of said house (Walker N. , 2021, pp. 20-21). Walker used this idea for neuroqueer(ing), which builds on Lorde's understanding of racist patriarchy: "What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable (Lorde, 2019, p. 103)." So the dynamics of patriarchy (racism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, obliviousness to privilege, and failure to embrace diversity) are upheld through a workplace's practices of heteronomativity and neuronormativity (Walker N. , 2021, pp. 184-185, 190,191; Prasad, Pringle, & Konrad, 2009).

For that reason, many of the workplaces described in the survey answers uphold and maintain the position of the dominant masculinity explained earlier, and why some co-workers may not understand or are aware of their privilege, why some bosses and managers still think it is okay to say, racist, sexist, and homophobic things at work (Walker N. , 2021, pp. 184-185, 190,191; Prasad, Pringle, & Konrad, 2009). Additionally, failing to embrace diversity and inclusion, exposes neurodivergent and queer individuals to existential, mental health issues, erasure and exclusion of said individuals and other parts of their intersecting identities in the workspace (Walker N. , 2021, pp. 20-21; Stone-Romero, Stone, & Lukaszewski, 2009; Sears, Mallory, Flores, & Conron, 2021).

Based on Hearn & Collinson's perspectives (2009) and Walker's theoretical lens (2021), the interview and survey experiences also show that masculinities, femininites, neuro-divergence and queerness are in themselves diverse - and not fixed. Therefore, these concepts are not just an opposing factor to patriarchy, but they also show the asymmetrical power relations that can occur in the workspace and identity clashes that happen – consciously or unconsciously. These asymmetrical power relations and clashes of identities are seen in how some workplaces choose—again whether consciously or unconsciously—to acknowledge and accommodate their neuroid-vergent and queer employees and their needs (liberty of self-expression and solving work tasks). Or whether they ignore neuroqueer(ing) employees' needs for accommodations, treating them like everyone else, which not only excludes and erases them, but also causes neuroqueers to be exposed, burnout and masking - as they must conform and fit into company norms and culture. This is despite many companies having HR procedures around inclusivity and diversity. The dominating norms that are prevalent in company culture seen in many of the survey experiences erase and exclude neuroqueer individuals. So as many in the survey say and which is also discussed in theme 7 of this paper, workplaces must be more transparent, open, and educate management, HR, CEO and other employees - and be willing to accommodate neuroqueer individuals in the workspace. In the words of Nick Walker based on Audre Lorde's poem "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House": "We must throw away the master's tools (Lorde, 2019, pp. 103-106; Walker N. , 2021, p. 21)."

*Representation is requisite!*

To throw away the master's tools in order to dismantle the master's house, representation of neuroqueers is the way forward. When asking about positive workplace experiences as neuroqueer, almost everyone mentioned a boss, colleague, or team member who was also neurodivergent and/or queer. To interviewee 1, it was nice finding a small community with their gay boss, knowing it is a cool, not bad, thing being openly queer at work, and having him "fix it" if anyone were homo- or transphobic in the otherwise stigmatizing workplace environment (interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2024). Interviewee two also speaks of representation at their workplace. In general, they do not "come out" or speak openly about being queer at work, besides from a bit with their colleague who is a lesbian, has a wife, and family – and they have talked, because "well she's in the same boat one could say as she is also queer (...) and she has asked me some questions (interviewee 2, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." To be able to do this at work is in fact a general wish,

desire, or hope expressed by interviewee two – to say that you are queer and neurodivergent. For that reason, it seems representation makes a difference to them too – and ideally, that you can show who you are not only to other queer co-workers (interviewee 2, personal communication, April 1, 2024).

This is not only concerning being queer, but also being neurodivergent. Interviewee two speaks of that they have "come to learn that there in reality are many of my co-workers that either have ADHD or think they have it but have not been diagnosed (...) that has actually (...) helped in the way that "okay" I'm not alone with this at work when it comes to being neurodivergent (Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." Representation is essential, and something that would make a workplace feel safer, to interviewee three as well. This is about seeing "other like queer people or neurodivergent people or like disabled people um that are like visibly themselves at work (...) seeing representation (Interviewee 3, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." To see more representation, interviewee three says workplaces need to be more open, and hire more queer and disabled people. Like interviewee one and two, interviewee three speaks of their former restaurant chef who was a lesbian, had a wife, and a kid, which was "nice to see like another queer person in like at the restaurant so that I know oh like this is you know like a safe place and people are open (Interviewee 3, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." This experience is from a Danish workplace, which contrasts their experience in France, where they did not see anyone being openly visibly queer or disabled. Evidently, representation makes a positive difference to the neuroqueer(ing) interviewees in seeing that they can be themselves. This is the same for interviewee seven, who says that "what would make me comfortable at a workplace is if I work with people who are similar to me and that could be anything from gender to sexuality to ethnic background to u::h mental illnesses (...) when there is other people who are also open and honest about themselves (Interviewee 7, personal communication, April 5, 2024)."

## Theme 7: The Ideal Neuroqueer(ing) Workplace

This chapter is based on neuroqueer(ing) perspectives on question 10: "What would make/makes you feel comfortable/uncomfortable at workplaces?" and question 11: "What are your perspectives on feeling safe at work? (what does a safe workplace look like to you?)". To understand the ideal neuroqueer(ing) workplace, we asked what constitutes an (un)safe and (un)comfortable workplace. This is used as recommendations for workplaces on what *not to do*. In turn, perspectives on the interview and survey question "What does the ideal workspace look like to you?" are used as recommendations for workplaces on what *to do*. Altogether, this gave rise to our concluding remarks—tips and tricks—on how organizations create neuroqueer(ing) workplaces illustrated with the poster 'A Neuroqueer(ing) Workplace':

### 1. No Ableism, Homophobia, or Transphobia

A safe workplace is where there is no room for hate speech, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism as interviewee one highlights (Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2024). This is also expressed by survey participants that an ideal workplace is where they are not "treating me any different because of my gender or sexuality" and that has "a set of guidelines about no tolerance for racism, sexism, ableism etc. would be ideal. I'm working on it" (Appendix F, Table F5). This requires working actively on eradicating cis-heteronormative and neuronormative structures that infuse workplaces with ideas, norms, and expectations for behaviour, working style, gender roles, and communication forms. This process can start with education, training, and courses on neuroqueer(ing) identities, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, and inclusive language: "educate the boomers about using inclusive language" and "educate all employees on DEI so everyone builds awareness" (Appendix F, Table F6, 2024). It is the responsibility of the leadership as one survey participant brings attention to in their ideal workplace scenario: "it should not be my job to educate people about being nonbinary, leadership should take an active role in making sure colleagues do not discriminate and treat it as a joke. Even in the social/care sector leadership and workforce have no clue as to what autism is, unless they can use it against you, e.g. blaming misunderstanding on you (Appendix F, Table F5, 2024)." Workplaces are in lack and need of education on the topic of neurodivergent and queer identities – and of what constitutes discrimination. This is also emphasized by survey participants in their recommendations, needs, or hopes for workplaces on how to create the best work environment for neuroqueer(ing) employees:

> "Education for leadership, making reasonable adjustments is not an existing concept here. You swim or will be sunk with and because of disclosed diagnosis/handicaps. The law against discrimination against disabled folks has only ever been used against me too. Leadership has repeatedly used it to argue that reasonable adaptations cannot be made, because that would discriminate against non-disabled folks. This is a common occurrence and needs to change. There is no awareness that neurodivergent folks are not only represented but overrepresented within the care field, instead of supporting us, the system utilizes our insecurities against us, its vile and nauseating (Appendix F, Table F6, 2024)."

**2. Transparent Workplaces**

Workplaces being transparent and explicitly giving words to neurodivergence, disabilities, and queerness is an ideal workplace to more or less all the interview and survey participants: "Being vocal about supporting queer and neurodivergent people is a great first step (Appendix F, Table F6, 2024)." Accordingly, interviewee one says that it could be more comfortable if neurodivergence and queerness were not an unspoken thing that "we just do" (Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2024). Ideally, workplaces should give more words to queerness, neurodivergence, disabilities, minorities in general—and the challenges connected to this—and a clear sign to neuroqueers that it is okay to be who they are at the workplace. In other words, so "we could be more um ourselves openly u::m and not just have to like try to like tip-toe around it (Interviewee 3, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." This entails open communication, honesty, listening, and doing something about it when neuroqueer employees speak of a bad experience – in contrast to what interviewee 1 has experienced (Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2024). By speaking openly, honestly, and genuinely about this, "it also becomes less tabooed" and "a norm to accommodate your uh employees (Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." Companies do mention neuroqueers in their DE&I reports, policies, or measures – and think "it's okay". However, "because they don't have (...) any neuroqueer challenges themselves (...) they don't do anything actively about it because they think of course it's just okay here uh because they just like don't have an eye for how marginalized or like stigmatized u:h people and challenges just like are handled in society (Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." This can be seen as a trait of erasure, silencing, and a blind angle around neuroqueer(ing) identities, experiences, and challenges. It is not enough to "name-drop" neuroqueers in diversity, equity, and inclusion reports.

For instance, interviewee three doubts whether this is a marketing strategy for branding the company or if they are genuinely doing something for neuroqueers. For that reason, recruiting managers, team-leaders, and bosses need to give words to neurodivergence and queerness. This is exactly what interviewee three highlights. It would be more comfortable being neuroqueer at workplaces if they openly said this is a queer-friendly and neurodivergent-friendly safe place. It would be safer if they did an explicit talk that the company is inclusive, this is our policies, this is how you contact HR, this is how you can be protected and defend yourself (Interviewee 3, personal communication, April 1, 2024). These things need to be done instantly from the moment you get into the recruitment process and the company. In this way, when "you know that you can be protected (...) you might also be more um open to be yourself at work (...) sometimes I'm kind of afraid to be myself

(...) like I don't know if I can be protected (...) I would not want to be in an environment where I would be discriminated on um and not have any way (...) to fight it cause since like it's hard to find a job for for everyone (...) not just like (...) neuroqueer people then um like you don't want to loose your job obviously (Interviewee 3, personal communication, April 1, 2024)."

In any other case, neuroqueers might not feel safe, comfortable, or welcome to show who they are. Interviewee two also says that "Ideally I'd wish we lived in a world where (...) you could say I'm autistic and I have ADHD and I'm actually also queer at a job interview (...) when you have some challenges (...) to be able to be more open about it (...) also ideally (...) to live in a world where it you could use they/them pronouns (Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." Interviewee two is nervous, hesitant, and afraid to do so based on doubts like interviewee three on whether DE&I initiatives, policies, and reports are genuine. They speak of their workplace having rules for protecting queer and neurodivergent employees, but "what if this changes all of a sudden? (Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 1, 2024)."

This points to a need for more clarity, honesty, and transparency from workplaces on what their policies and protective measures are for neurodivergent, disabled and/or queer employees. This does not only concern bosses, team leaders, and recruiters. The entire organization should be informed, educated, and aware of cis-heteronormativity, neuronormativity – and most importantly, what it means to *be* neuroqueer and *do* neuroqueering. Accordingly, interviewee seven explains that a safe workplace is where you can be happy or sad, talk with your colleagues honestly and openly about how you feel, and reach out for help if needed (Interviewee 7, personal communication, April 5, 2024). This entails that the entire organization know about neuroqueer(ing) identities, experiences, and challenges. A lot of the survey participants echoes this need, hope, and dream for the ideal neuroqueer(ing) workplace. One mentions that the ideal workplace is "where the atmosphere is open and honest enough that being neurodivergent and queer is not something you disclose, but rather just something you can talk about casually (Appendix F, Table F5, 2024)." Another express that "I wish there was more open dialogue about heteronormativity and queerness. I wish that people did not view queerness as something extraordinary (Appendix F, Table F5, 2024)." And a third highlights that "Communication is key! Make your employees feel safe and feel that they can come to you and trust that they will be taken care of and not ridiculed or looked down upon for being "different" (Appendix F, Table F6, 2024)."

In relation to the ideal workplace being transparent and giving words to neurodivergence, disability, and queerness, they should also "listen". This is mentioned fifteen times, when

asking survey participants about their ideal neuroqueer(ing) workplace. Recommendations for workplaces are to “listen and adapt”, “when bringing up the needs for accommodation it is listened to”, “talk to the people you work with and listen when they tell what their needs are”, “neurotypical non-queers that take responsibility, help each other to be educated, listen, and take action”, “listen, learn and support”, “Listen! All marginalized experiences are different (...) listen to the individual”, “listen to what we say”, “listen to the employees who are LGBT/neurodivergent”, and “just listen”, among many others (Appendix F, Table F5; F6, 2024). In connection, they also mention “understand” twenty-nine times. This is sometimes related to workplaces not understanding neuroqueers, but often it is related to a need, hope, and recommendation for workplaces to try and understand neuroqueer(ing) identities, employees, challenges, and strengths.

**3. Accessible, Flexible, Remote Workplaces**

Accessible, flexible, remote, and sensory-friendly workplaces seem to be ideal to many of the neuroqueer(ing) survey and interviewee participants. Being neurodivergent and medicated plays a role to interviewee two in terms of trying to balance their sleeping difficulties and circadian rhythm with varying work hours. The transition from morning to night shifts was rough and a radical change (Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 1, 2024). This workplace problem is also expressed by interviewee three. Workplaces could be more ideal and inclusive to neuroqueers if they were not built *from* and *for* one employee “archetype”. Interviewee three shows exhaustion, overwhelm or burnout symptoms from maintaining a job while taking care of themselves, their dishes, and apartment. They say that there are “some jobs that I don't think I could do (...) just because um like they would feel a bit too much (...) if I have a job full-time (...) I can't really like take care of myself so it's quite hard to just (...) have a job (...) sustainably (Interviewee 3, personal communication, April 1, 2024).” The aim, intention and end goal of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives is that not for jobs to be sustainable for *all* employees – and recruit the most qualified, not the closest to an employee “archetype”?

For that reason, a recommendation for organizations, companies, and institutions to increase neuroqueer(ing) well-being is to build workplaces for multiple types of people, “bodyminds”, and nervous systems – at least if they genuinely want more workplace diversity, representation, equity, and inclusion (Walker N. , 2021). This could be fixed by what interviewee three explains as their ideal workplace “where the work hours are flexible and (...) possibly to work remote (...) when I was working in France (...) during the covid period (...) I also had to like stay at

home and (...) I could just like stim more cause I'm like there's nobody around to like judge or anything so it's just a better way to like to be myself (...) so like I feel like if more work offered the opportunity to work in the evening um and just have like non-traditional hours when it's possible (Interviewee 3, personal communication, April 1, 2024).” Non-traditional and flexible working hours as an option could be ideal because both interviewee two and three express that it can be challenging to balance their routines, circadian rhythm, and sleeping difficulties (Interviewee 2; 3, personal communication, April 1, 2024). This is repeated multiple times by survey participants too. They say that the ideal workplace is where there is “limited hours”, “flexible hours”, ”structure, clear rules, quiet breaks”, “adaptive”, “flexible hours due to being disabled” and “lots of flexibility and patience. I find it hard to book days off in good time and end up with a poor work-life balance” (Appendix F, Table F5, 2024). Interviewee seven speaks of a similar ideal workplace scenario being more flexibility when you have off days – and that someone could cover for you, instead of forcing your body, mind, and psyche to go to work if you cannot. And if you have an off day, month, or period at work, they suggest workplaces to have free therapy rooms (Interviewee 7, personal communication, April 5, 2024).

Sensory-friendly and accessible workplaces are also high on the list of priorities for many of the neuroqueer(ing) participants. Interviewee three says that a perfect safe office would abolish mandatory open spaces because they can get too loud, bright, and uncomfortable: “companies think of accessibility on a physical level but not on a sensory one (Interviewee 3, personal communication, April 1, 2024).” Individual or smaller shared offices are more ideal, because you can control the lights, noise, and heat/cold. Furthermore, interviewee three and four speaks of having the freedom of movement for standing and sitting at their workplaces. In this way, they concentrate better, stim and fidget less. This experience is shared by interviewee two, three, four, and five – if they have an active job, everyday life, and freedom of movement, they experience more (workplace) well-being (Interviewee 2; 3; 4; 5, personal communication, April 1-5, 2024). The ideal workplace to one of the survey participants is also “semi-structured, mostly physical work, outside a lot (Appendix F, Table F5, 2024).” In this way, building accessible, flexible, remote, and sensory-friendly workplaces would ideally lower risks of stress, meltdowns/shutdowns, and burnout. Speaking of their ideal workplace, one participant brings attention to the consequences of a non-neuroqueer(ing)-friendly workplace: “flexible hours are big for me and the ability to go home early if needed. I get incredibly burned out when working a lot and it starts leading to really bad snowball effects. Working 37 hours is too much for me and being able to talk with my bosses about working hours without being seen as a nuisance is really important (Appendix F, Table F5, 2024).

### 4. Made *by* and *for* Neuroqueers

The ideal neuroqueer(ing) workplace as expressed by most of the participants is for it to be made *by* and *for* neuroqueers - or in other words, "shaped by other neuroqueers (Appendix F, Table F5, 2024)." To be made by and for neuroqueers, workplaces need to educate themselves, give words to, listen, and hire more neuroqueers, as already mentioned. In this way, workplaces could be more inclusive, understanding, and accommodating of neuroqueer realities like not having "to share your CPR with your boss", "genderneutral bathrooms is lovely!", and "A simple rainbow flag goes a long way! Having pronouns in their signature. Providing opportunities to retreat when overstimulated etc. (Appendix F, Table F6, 2024)." These are initiatives that might be overlooked or neglected by neurotypical non-queer managers, leaders, and employees. Another neuroqueer(ing) initiative would be normalizing pronouns, pronoun "check-ins", neo-pronouns, and using multiple pronouns: "make it more normal to ask for others pronouns and say them yourself (Appendix F, Table F6, 2024)." Interviewee two express the same wish, need, and desire: "ideally I'd wish I could say or have the courage to say that I use the/them pronouns or he/him is actually better (Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." It is important to emphasize that this is not the responsibility of the neuroqueer employee or job applicant solely. Workplaces need to be open, welcoming, and educated on pronouns, queerness, and neurodivergence – for employees to feel like they can share their pronouns. Interviewee seven has the same dream or desire for workplaces. Ideally, "it is a place that really doesn't care about whether you are a man or a woman or this or that or a third (Interviewee 7, personal communication, April 5, 2024)."

This process of neuroqueer(ing) the workplace starts with knowledge, as one survey participant says: "Making the management education themselves about both neurodivergence and queerness. How it works, labels, diagnoses, how to talk about it, how to help employees etc. KNOWLEGDE IS KEY (Appendix F, Table F6, 2024)". Another suggestion for education, training, and courses for workplaces to be more neuroqueer-inclusive is: "Include non-binary identity validity in diversity training and as an option on HR forms. Also raise awareness of neurodiversity in diversity training. Have a good career mentorship scheme whereby support can be confidentially requested that includes acceptance of your identities (Appendix F, Table F6, 2024)". However, the process does not only start with knowledge, it starts with increasing neuroqueer(ing) representation too. A workplace cannot be made *by* and *for* neuroqueers without hiring more neuroqueers in the first place. As already mentioned, this is expressed by more or less all of the survey and interview participants as something highly important. A survey participant says that the ideal workplace is "my boss also

being queer and having ADHD/autism, being able to small talk about it<3", "it would be nice not being the only queer person", and "hiring disabled and neurospicy people for more than just repetitive "simple" jobs (their words, not min)" (Appendix F, Table F5, 2024)." Hiring more neuroqueers can also be done by them coming to educate workplaces: "Hire neurodivergent and queer people to come educate the workplace (and especially the people in power) about identities, struggles in a workplace and what can be done to better accommodate (Appendix F, Table F6, 2024)."

**5. Don't "lump" identities together**

In continuation of the ideal workplace made *by* and *for* neuroqueers themselves, some of the neuroqueer(ing) participants bring attention to an important part of working with multiple identities – that is, "don't lump identities together". This recommendation for workplaces to understand different neurodivergent, disabled, and queer identities, experiences, struggles, and strengths was based on the following survey reply: "I can't be "out" as schizo and in fact think it shouldn't be lumped in with things like ADHD and anxiety because there is a world of taboo unimaginable to a larger part of the mentally ill grouping. There is sanism in about 10% of what people say, so I don't go a day without feeling discriminated against, even by other queer and neurodivergent people. It's part of why I don't like calling myself neurodivergent. The umbrella term implies cohesion. (Appendix F, Table F1, 2024)." This is an important message to workplaces when doing diversity, equity, and inclusion policies. You cannot "lump" identities together under one umbrella term, which has also been mentioned as a potential limitation to this study. Another survey participant expresses a similar perspective that "Listen! All marginalized experiences are different and can offer immense strengths, all they have to do is listen to the individual and let them do things using their own process (Appendix F, Table F6, 2024)."

**6. Embodied Liberation**

The final recommendation for building the ideal neuroqueer(ing) workplace is for managers, team-leaders, and bosses to set a good example by informing about and embodying different ways of functioning, thinking, working, and expressing yourself. Nick Walker speaks of embodied liberation, that being able to neuroqueer, unmask, stim, and fully express your identity and inherent body movements gives rise to creativity and potential in living authentically as who you are (Walker N. , 2024). "Creativity" can be understood in many ways. On a daily basis, workplaces accommodating your creative freedom in tasks, but also accommodating your creative freedom of expression – in

your identity, gender, sexual orientation, and neurodivergence. Workplaces could also give room for and accommodate embodied liberation more in terms of social interactions. That is, a neuronormative characteristic seen in the workplace experiences is forced social (alcoholic) interactions and company parties. Interviewees three and six have uncomfortable experiences with forced social interaction infused with neuronormativity and cis-heteronormativity. Interviewee six experienced having to defend sexual orientation, gender identity, and pronouns at a company party (Interviewee 6, personal communication, April 5, 2024). Whereas interviewee three says that an ideal workplace would be "if companies didn't make mandatory parties on working time hours. It's better to have the option not to go because it's uncomfortable if you don't have the social skills for it (Interviewee 3, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." Forced social (alcoholic) company parties, events, and happenings can be awkward when you do not know how to navigate a room full of people or when you prefer to socialize with an activity, games, or such (Interviewee 3, personal communication, April 1, 2024).

# Chapter 5 – Conclusion

"One can neuroqueer, and one can be neuroqueer (Walker N. , 2024)."

In this master's thesis, "neuroqueer(ing)" as coined by Nick Walker in 2008 was used in its original form as a *verb*, but mostly as an *identity-label*, to investigate workplace well-being of neurodivergent queer (neuroqueer) individuals. This was investigated by means of a mixed methods study collecting qualitative data through seven semi-structured interviews, and quantitative data through an online survey with 92 replies. The research question to unfold, uncover, and understand neuroqueer(ing) experiences was: *How is the 'neuroqueer(ing)' experience of well-being affected by workplace settings?* In the following, this question will be answered by highlighting partial conclusions of the seven themes identified from the interview/survey data. In a way, this conclusion is more concluding remarks on how to be more neuroqueer-friendly using the participants' experiences, hopes, and dreams for workplace well-being.

*Theme 1. Recruiting Platforms and Processes:* The neuroqueer(ing) experience of well-being is affected by workplace settings from the moment they apply for a job. The job application platforms and processes bear traits of cis-heteronormativity and neuronormativity. Interviewee one, three, four, six, and seven express how you often have to fill out your gender from one of the two binary options "man" or "woman" (Interviewee 1; 3; 4; 6; 7, personal communication, April 1-5, 2024). This might be seen as a cis-heteronormative act of erasure and/or exclusion of non-conforming and non-binary queer people that do not fit into this "binary box". Based on this, workplaces are recommended giving the option of "I prefer not to disclose" and to give more genderqueer options. Neuroqueer(ing) experiences of well-being is also affected by neuronormative recruiting platforms. They are not very user-friendly or transparent, and has too many steps making the process complicated, overwhelming, and tiring (Interviewee 1; 3, personal communication, April 1, 2024). It seems the platforms are built for an applicant "archetype" whose mind, body, and nervous system functions in one way. For that reason, workplaces are recommended making their recruiting systems more accessible and neuroqueer(ing)-friendly.

*Theme 2. The Job Interview:* The neuroqueer(ing) experience of well-being is also affected by the job interview. It seems to be an arena with certain "game rules" for how to act, behave, and perform in order to land the job. What is mostly at stake are cis-heteronormative and neuronormative expectations. The neuroqueer(ing) participants debate with themselves whether to disclose that they are queer and neurodivergent because many fear prejudice, discrimination, ableism, homophobia, and transphobia. For that reason, few share openly that they are neuroqueer at the job

interview because it is too personal, irrelevant, risky, or even dangerous (Interviewee 1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7, personal communication April 1-5, 2024).

*Theme 3. First Day at Work and Introduction to Tasks:* Masking on the first day at work or for all the time being at a workplace affects all the participants in their experience of well-being. They speak of masking because "you don't know people's opinion on queer people you don't know people's opinion on yes neuroqueer in general (Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2024)." A lot of the interview/survey participants are hesitant, afraid, and/or nervous to "unmask" their identities at work—on the first day and after some time—due to risks of getting fired, discrimination, stereotyping, exclusion, queer-phobic and ableist jokes. Some fear more "coming out" as queer, while others fear more "coming out" as neurodivergent. Introduction to tasks is also sometimes impacted by neuronormativity. When neuroqueers try to express how they learn, work, and function best, some experience a lack of understanding, accommodation, or even getting fired – while others, feel lucky because their workplaces have been good.

*Theme 4. To be—or not to be "out"—as neuroqueer:* Neurodivergence and queerness play different roles to the participants. Either they *do not* "come out" to avoid discrimination; they get "outed" for looking, seeming, or behaving neuroqueer; or they *do* "come out" but experience getting fired/not hired, discrimination, stereotyping, derogatory jokes, language of the pathology paradigm, and workplaces that do not (want to) make accommodations (Appendix F, Table F1; Table F2, 2024). This does not mean there are no positive experiences. Interview and survey participants speak of great workplaces, colleagues, and bosses that are understanding, make accommodations, or are neuroqueers themselves. Still, there is a link between workplace reactions to neurodivergence and to queerness: they experience ableism, transphobia, homophobia, and invalidation in their identities. This is substantiated by survey statistics. Figure 3.1 shows that 77% of the 92 survey participants have experienced discomfort at work because of being neurodivergent and queer. Solely 14% says "only because of being neurodivergent", and solely 2% says "only because of being queer". More experience discomfort from being both neurodivergent and queer (neuroqueer) – than one or the other. This points to a link between the two identities which can be explained by the commonality between neuronormativity and cis-heteronormativity. They are structures dictating, gatekeeping, and policing what falls *inside* and *outside* how the "typical" archetype-person "should" behave, think, feel, look, and work. Neuroqueers might pose a threat to this "archetype" by disrupting, confusing, and/or playing with fixed narrow-minded ideas of gender, sexual orientation, ways of understanding, interacting, and/or engaging with the world.

*Theme 5. Dress Code and Stimming:* Neuroqueer(ing) experiences of dress code, appearance, and showing who you are do not seem to be affected much by workplace settings (Interviewee 1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7, personal communication, April 1-5, 2024). That is mostly because a lot of workplaces require uniform, simple, and black clothes, so everyone look alike. On the other hand, stimming at the workplace is a mixed experience. The neuroqueer particpants seem to be hesitant in giving full expression to their inherent natural body movements – at least in the beginning. However, they also speak of it as something they at some point just had to do and see how people react. This was only a bad experience to one of the interviewees, who was asked to put their fidget spinner away (Interviewee 7, personal communication, April 5, 2024).

*Theme 6. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:* The neuroqueer(ing) experience of work-place well-being is highly affected by representation – or lack hereof. Diversity and representation of other neurodivergent, disabled, and queer folks is rare, limited, or even a big fat "NO" to some (Interviewee 1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7, personal communication April 1-5, 2024). In comparison, 39% of the 92 survey participants say "yes" their workplace is diverse and inclusive (now and/or in the past) and 35% says "no" as illustrated in Figure 3.5. Representation, diversity, equity, and inclusion however are quintessential to all the neuroqueer(ing) participants. When asking about positive workplace experiences, almost everyone mention a boss, colleague, or team-member who is also neurodivergent and/or queer. Therefore, a recommendation for workplaces is to increase neuroqueer representation by hiring more while being transparent about policies and protective measures for them to feel safe.

*Theme 7. The Ideal Neuroqueer(ing) Workplace:* In conclusion, the neuroqueer(ing) experience of well-being is affected by different workplace settings to different degrees. Some interview/survey participants are affected by the application process, the job interview or the first day at work, while others are more affected by daily work life. Some are more affected by workplace reactions to their neurodivergence or queerness, while others are more affected by workplace reactions to being neuroqueer. Accordingly, the interview and survey participants were asked: "What does the ideal workplace look like to you as a neurodivergent and queer person?" This gave rise to our concluding remarks—tips and tricks—on how organizations create neuroqueer(ing) workplaces illustrated with the poster 'A Neuroqueer(ing) Workplace'. Ideally, further research will be conducted on designing, creating, and maintaining neuroqueer-friendly workplaces – and hopefully, the poster is only a steppingstone for organizations, companies, and institutions to do similar, better, and more neuroqueer(ing).

# A NEUROQUEER(ING) WORKPLACE

## 1. NO ABLEISM, HOMOPHOBIA, TRANSPHOBIA

Check, educate, update people and policies throughout the entire organization on neuroqueer identities including ableism, homophobia, and transphobia.

## 2. TRANSPARENCY - "SPEAK, ASK & LISTEN!"

Give words to neurodivergence, disability, and queerness - ask & listen to your neuroqueer employees (and their needs). From day one, say "this is a safe space, you can be yourself", "this is how to contact HR and to be protected if you experience discomfort/discrimination".

## 3. SENSORY-FRIENDLY

Create sensory-friendly workplaces and abolish mandatory open spaces: do individual/ smaller shared offices, mute boxes, height-adjustable desks, light/ heat control options, normalize noise cancelling headphones and fidget toys.

## 4. FLEXIBLE REMOTE WORK

Provide the options of flexible non-traditional working hours and choosing between remote or on-site work when possible in accordance with work tasks.

## 5. MADE BY & FOR NEUROQUEERS

Hire more neuroqueers, educate on neuroqueer labels, diagnoses and identities, do pronoun check-ins "e.g., my pronouns are they/them" and have gender-neutral bathrooms.

## 6. DON'T "LUMP" IDENTITIES TOGETHER

Ensure that neuroqueer(ing) identities are not "lumped" together under one umbrella term. Instead, educate yourself and employees on different queer and neurodivergent experiences using experts.

## 7. EMBODIED LIBERATION

Managers: be aware of static, toxic, or exclusionary office culture. Set a good example by informing staff about and embodying multiple ways of functioning, working, and expressing yourself. This embodied liberation can be via stimming, alternative dress code, or changing seating/standing position regularly.
In this way, showing it is okay to be yourself.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A

*Semi-Structured Interview Guide*

### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

**CONSENT TEXT**

*The consent text and 'how we process your data' is signed by the interviewees before the interview.*

**ABOUT**

- Two neuroqueer master's students studying IR at AAU
- I am Jennifer (she/her), I am Nico (they/them)
- Writing our master's thesis about neuroqueer(ing) (neurodivergent queer) workplace well-being because we find it important to advance knowledge on this field that is limited
- Thank you for participating in this 100% anonymized interview, which will take approx. 30 minutes!

**ASK PERMISSION**

It is okay if we record the interview?
Do you want a summary report of the interview afterwards?

**SAFE SPACE**

We would like to emphasize that if you feel uncomfortable with a question, please tell us, and we will move on to the next. Nothing about this interview should feel forced as we want it to be a safe space for you to share your experiences and what you feel comfortable with!

**DEFINITIONS**

Do you need the following terms clarified: 'neuroqueer', 'neurodivergent', 'neurotypical', 'workplace well-being', 'stimming', 'disabled'?

#### BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

1. Pronouns and age
2. Ethnicity/ethnicities
3. Citizenship
4. Languages
5. Do you identify as neurodivergent (if yes/no, will you elaborate?)
6. Have/have had anxiety, stress, or related (if yes, will you elaborate?)
7. Do you identify as disabled (if yes/no, will you elaborate?)
8. Do you want to share your gender and sexual orientation?
9. What is your educational background?
10. Are you currently employed? (if yes/no, will you elaborate?)
    a. How long have you worked there / when was your last job?
    b. What is/was your job title?
    c. Where geographically do/did you work?

#### PRE-EMPLOYMENT QUESTIONS

**"What is your experience with applying for a job in general and on digital application platforms e.g. checking gender boxes, websites being accessible?"**
*"Hvilke erfaringer har du med at søge job generelt og på online rekrutteringssystemer fx køns-kasser og hjemmesider skabt på en bestemt måde?"*

**"What is your experience with job interviews e.g. social norms, eye contact?"**
*"Hvilke erfaringer har du med job interviews fx sociale normer, øjenkontakt?"*

#### DURING EMPLOYMENT QUESTIONS

**"What is your experience with being received or welcomed on the first day at work?"**
*"Hvad er dine oplevelser af at blive modtaget eller budt velkommen på første arbejdsdag?"*

**"Can you talk about whether you feel that the way tasks are introduced fits the way you learn/function/work best?"**
*"Vil du fortælle om hvorvidt du føler måden du bliver introduceret til opgaver passer med hvordan du bedst lærer/fungerer/arbejder?"*

**"If you have worked in different countries, can you tell us about similarities/differences in your experiences with workplace well-being?"**
*"Hvis du har arbejdet i forskellige lande, vil du fortælle om forskelle/ligheder i din oplevelse af arbejdstrivsel?"*

**"How do you experience that being neurodivergent plays a role in having/being at a job?" (next question: same but with "queer" instead of "neurodivergent")**
*"Hvordan oplever du din identitet som neurodivergent spille en rolle i at have/være på job?" (næste spørgsmål: samme, men med "queer" fremfor "neurodivergent")*

**"What are your experiences with dress codes and appearance (showing who you are) are the workplace?" (sub-question: "colleages/leaders reactions to this?")**
*"Hvad er dine erfaringer med dress codes og udseende (vise hvem du er) på arbejdspladsen?" (under-spørgsmål: "kollegaer/chefers reaktioner på dette?")*

**"What are your experiences with stimming at the workplace?" (sub-question: "colleagues/leaders reactions to this?")**
*"Hvad er dine erfaringer med at stimme på arbejdspladsen?" (under-spørgsmål: "kollegaer/chefers reaktioner på dette?")*

#### WORKPLACE WELL-BEING REFLECTIONS

**"What would make you comfortable/uncomfortable at workplaces?"**
*"Hvad ville gøre dig tilpas/utilpas på arbejdspladsen?"*

**"What are you perspectives on feeling safe at work?"**
*"Hvad er din oplevelse af at føle sig tryg på arbejdspladsen?"*

**"What are your perspectives on diversity, equity, and inclusion at workplaces?"**
*"Hvad er din oplevelse af diversitet, lige muligheder og inklusion på arbejdspladser?"*

**"What does the ideal workspace look like to you?"**
*"Hvordan ser din ideelle arbejdsplads ud i din verden?"*

# Appendix B

*Survey Questions*

## SURVEY: ARE YOU LGBTQIA+ & NEURODIVERGENT?

**THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS SURVEY!**

For our master's thesis, we are investigating neuroqueer (neurodivergent and queer) experiences of workplace well-being.

It does not matter if you currently have a job or not (or if you have worked in Denmark or not), as long as you have some experience with being at a workplace anywhere in the world, that you want to share.

Also, you don't have to be officially diagnosed as for instance, ADHD'er, autistic, bipolar, dyslexic, schizophrenic, or with anxiety, stress, etc. If you self-identify as neurodivergent and queer/LGBTQIA+ person, we would love to hear about your workplace experiences!

**The survey is 100% anonymized!**

**CONSENT TEXT**

This is a request for your consent to process your personal data. The purpose of the processing is to investigate neuroqueer (neurodivergent and queer) experiences of workplace well-being for our master's thesis. Your data is 100% anonymized, which means we can't see who have replied what. It is used for research purposes at Aalborg University. We, Jennifer Sibel Adzowa and Nico Helth Achilles Brandt, are the data controllers of your data. Your data will be stored securely, and we will solely use the data for the mentioned purpose.

You consent to the processing of the following data about you which is 100% anonymized as mentioned:
1. General personal data i.e., name, age, employment
2. Sensitive/special categories of personal data: ethnicity, citizenship, gender, sexual orientation

**By clicking "next", I hereby consent to Jennifer and Nico processing my data in accordance with the above purpose and information.**

## SURVEY QUESTIONS

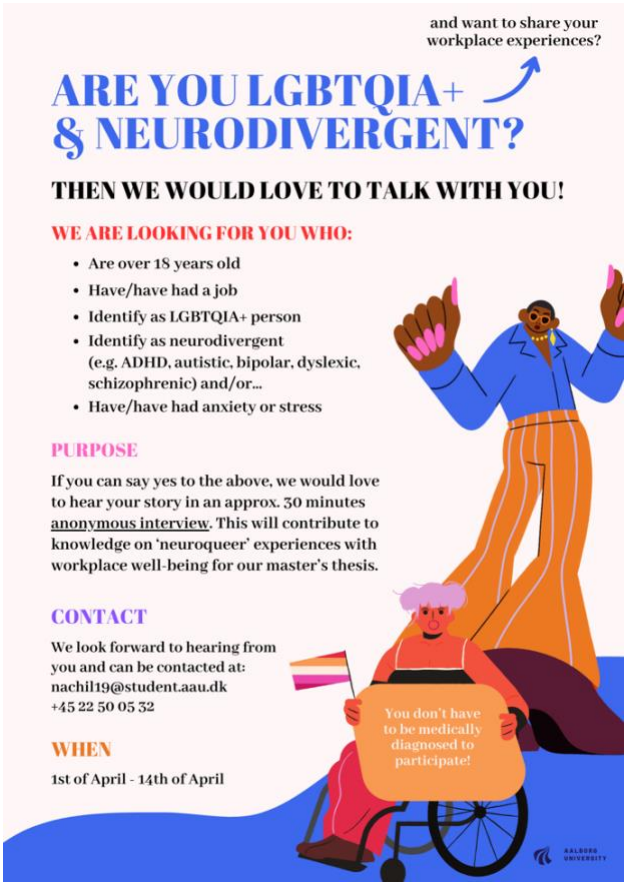
1. What is your age? _____
2. What is your ethnicity/ethnicities? _____
3. What is your gender? _____
4. What is your sexual orientation? _____
5. In what way do you identify as neurodivergent? (e.g., ADHD'er, autistic, anxiety, bipolar, borderline, dyslexic, epileptic, schizophrenic, neurodivergent) _____
6. What sector do you primarily work in? (multiple choice)
   - Hospitality
   - Retail
   - Education
   - Office
   - Government / Muncipality
   - NGO
   - Volunteer
   - Freelance
   - Creative (arts, music, theater, etc.)
   - No sector (unemployed)
   - Other
7. What country/countries have you worked in?
8. Have you experienced discomfort at work (now and/or in the past) because of being neurodivergent and queer?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Only because of being neurodivergent
   - Only because of being queer
   - I prefer not to disclose
9. Have you experienced discrimination at work (now and/or in the past) because of being neurodivergent and queer?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Only because of being neurodivergent
   - Only because of being queer
   - I prefer not to disclose
10. Do you want to elaborate? _____
11. Do you have positive experiences with telling your workplace that you are neurodivergent and queer?
    - Yes
    - No
    - Only with telling that I am neurodivergent
    - Only with telling that I am queer
    - I haven't told a workplace that I am neurodivergent and queer
12. If you haven't told a workplace that you are neurodivergent and/or queer, would you like to explain why? _____
13. Do you stim at work?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I don't know
14. Why/why not? _____
15. Do you feel that your workplace is diverse and inclusive (now and/or in the past)?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I don't know
16. Why/why not? _____
17. What does the ideal workplace look like to you as a neurodivergent and queer person?
18. Do you have any recommendation, needs, or hopes for workplaces on how to create the best work environment for neurodivergent and queer employees?

# Appendix C

*Feedback: Two Survey Respondents*

# Appendix D

*Interview and Survey Invitations*




# Appendix E

*Interview Transcriptions and Coding*

**Interview 1**

| | |
|---|---|
| N: | Hvilke erfaringer har du med at søge job generelt og på på sådan online rekrutteringssystemer ø::h connected til at være neurodivergent og queer ø::m et eksempel ku være sådan med at man skal udfylde nogle kasser ø:h online eller ja det ka være alt den slags også som neurodivergent om siderne hvordan de er designet til at søge job ø::h hvilke erfaringer du har med det? |
| N.eng: | What is your experience with applying for a job in general and through through like online recruitment platforms u::h connected to being neurodivergent and queer u::m an example could be like that you have to fill out some boxes u:h online or yes it can be all that kind of stuff also as neurodivergent if the sites how they are designed to applying for a job u::h what is your experience with that? |
| P1: | Ø:::m jaer altså så::n jeg har søgt job af flere omgange ø::m men jeg tror ik altså specifikt i forhold til altså i forhold til så::n queer aspektet at jeg har været så påvirket af det fordi jeg jo ik har haft et job i hvad er det snart tre år ø::m og det jo ogs fordi jeg sådan har accepteret at det ogs er et et handicap hvor der er nogle ting man så:n jeg i hvert fald selv har svært ved ø:::m men altså da jeg gjorde det ø::m lagde jeg enormt meget mærke til at så:n for det første er der mange af hjemmesiderne jeg ik føler der er særlig så:n brugervenlige og ø:::h gennemskuelige og for det andet så ø:::m har jeg ogs virkelig tit oplevet det der med man skal udfylde sit køn og det meget sån <suk> det meget binært ø::m og det kan nogle gange være så:n enormt svært at være i som queer person i hvert fald sån køh når man er kønsqueer hvad hedder det genderqueer øm at man sån lissom skal gå på kompromis med sig selv hvis man har lyst til at søge det her job ø:m ja |
| P1.eng: | U:::m yeah well li::ke I have applied for a job multiple times u::m but I don't think that well specifically in relation to well in relation to li::ke the queer aspect that I have been so impacted by it because I haven't had a job in what is it almost three years u::m and that's also because I like have accepted that it also is a a disability where there are things you li:ke I at least myself am challenged by u:::m but well when I did it u::m I paid a lot attention to that li:ke firstly there are many of the websites I don't feel are particularly li:ke userfriendly and u:::h transparent and secondly then u:::m really often I have experienced that thing where you have to fill out your gender and that's very like <sigh> that's very binary u::m and that can sometimes be li:ke really hard to endure as a queer person at least like køh when you are kønsqueer what is it called genderqueer um that you like have to compromise with yourself if you want to apply for this job u:m yes |
| N: | O:g hvis vi så rykker videre til sån jobinterviews ø:h hva hvilke erfaringer har du med jobinterviews ogs i samme sån |

*Note.* This is only a snapshot of the 80-pages document uploaded individually. See 'Appendix E_Interview Transcriptions and Coding.pdf' for all interviews.

# Appendix F

*Survey Coding*

**Table F1**

*"Do You Want to Elaborate?*

| "Have you experienced discrimination at work (now and/or in the past) because of being neurodivergent and queer?" |
|---|
| "various forms of bullying due to being different/non-conforming as well as communicating differently" |
| "tease" |
| "no." |
| "no" |
| "no" |
| "I dont" |
| "i could only work there as a substitute as the fulltime work had very odd workhours that my mental state couldnt handle... i didnt see it as descrimination per se but my mental capacity was without a doubt the reason i couldnt get stable work there" |
| "harmful prejudice and inappropiate questions, as well as unsolocited advice" |
| "There was no point in talking about being queer as all the colleagues could understand would be 'normal gay', also a category where some tiresome comments could be made. A nursing home where homophobic and racist elders were very normal, the nursing home did nothing to care for their employers although they clearly knew. Also horrible stressful atmosphere that alongside my ADHD lead to heavy burnout." |
| "Straight people love to make you feel small, being told "you're not unique" when coming out as trans in a recent workspace. It also turned out it had been talked about behind my back among my coworkers because my boss, the only one I had told about it, had told everyone without my consent or knowledge. I was never discriminated against when I identified as a lesbian, other than toxic masculine homophobia." |
| "Someone used the bible to harrash me" |
| "SSA education, both in school periods and internships and dealing with Uddannelse København uddannelsesvejleder, there have been numerable episodes of discrimination by praktikvejlder, teachers, udannelsesvejleder with both being nonbinary and autistic, the discrimination because of the autism has been so immense and overshadowing the ones about being nonbinary, but I have had praktikvejleder ridicule my gender identity in front of peers and with collegues, autism has been used against me more than anything else." |
| "People saying degoratory things about lgbtq persons, and distancing themselves from me." |
| "People continually using wrong gender vocab, and when vocalizing these issues they have been minimized and ridiculed. Not being taken seriously because of being the weird queer mentally sick person." |
| "Openly homophobic boss" |
| "Not really" |
| "Not direct discrimination. However I have experienced several unpleasant 'general comments' in regards to the queer community. I work as an administrative worker in education - so there's a big focus on mental health in students and employees." |
| "Not by the workplace itself (staff and teachers) but by several students. Mostly on being Queer" |
| "No thanks" |
| "No because I took a while to come out here. Making sure I felt safe." |

*Note.* This is only a snapshot of the 26-pages document uploaded individually. See 'Appendix F_Survey Coding.pdf' for all survey replies.