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Constructing Rural Identities – A Diverse Narrative

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Abstract

So far, rural people and communities have not received much consideration within the field of gender studies while urban individuals and their lifestyles have been normalised. I argue that the rural space inhabits a huge variety of people who deserve to be recognised within the field and can contribute to the production of new knowledge.

Therefore it is my aim to study people who live in the countryside, whereby I examine and analyse how they construct their rural identities. Also, I want to see how they relate to gender norms within their society and how that might influence them in their rural identities.

I have done semi-structured in-depth interviews with five people in a rural area in south-western Germany, who gave me an account of their rural lives and what living in a rural space means to them. These demonstrate how diverse experiences in one rural space can be and consequently how differently rural identities can be produced. I come to the conclusion that rural identity depends very much on the intersections of time and space, who, in this case, are highly intertwined with age, class, gender, the body and sexuality. Moreover, I can detect that concepts like home, the rural idyll, nature and the binary between rural and urban are involved in constructing and giving meaning to rural identity.

Keywords: rural space, rural identity, gender, sexuality, class, age, time, the body, qualitative research, narrative research, Germany

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I. Introduction

From personal experiences of growing up in a rural space in south-western Germany, I know that many people in the countryside think gender issues to be far off from their world, and that, for instance, queer lifestyles are part of urban life. At the same time, I have encountered very little engagement with rural societies and rural people in gender studies. Considering queer studies in particular, I have support from Jack Halberstam who coined the term *metronormativity* to express that the urban space is visible and normalised within queer research, while the rural is subordinated in the rural-urban divide (2005). Moreover, Sara Gagnesjö, writer of a master thesis in queer studies from a Swedish and rural perspective, claims that this perspective has so far been neglected (2014). I join them in their observations and argue that issues about gender roles and norms, and sexual identity are as important and present in everyday life in the countryside as anywhere else and should gain more space within gender and queer studies. Due to this unequal power relation between rurality and urbanity, the latter's point of view is the norm and often remains unquestioned while rural life is treated as different. Hence, in gender studies research on rurality, researchers often take an outsider position (Forsberg & Stenbacka 2013).

Therefore, I aim to provide a valuable contribution to the field of gender studies, by approaching the rural space in its own right and give an insight into rural inhabitants' lives. I have interviewed rural people and listened to their stories without comparing it to urbanity as a norm or as a binary opposite, but by putting rural life in the front. Thereby, I both hope to encourage further research on rural societies within the field of gender studies but also an engagement with a gender and intersectional perspective to politics in rural areas. Hence, my motives for this paper are political, but also personal. So far, I have spent more than half of my life in the countryside and although I have now lived in cities for some years I go back whenever I find the time. As I balance between cities and the countryside, I observe that within discourses on rural and urban life, differences are constantly produced, reproduced and affirmed. This is something I aim to disrupt.

In the following paper, I will concentrate on the examination of rural identities. Thereby I question: How can rural identities be constructed and how may they intersect with other factors of life? Moreover, I have talked to the interviewees about gender norms in their communities. How do they relate to them and how do they make meaning of gender?

My research material are interviews that I have gathered in the small federal state of

Saarland in south-western Germany. Hence, I do not claim this material or the outcomes of the analysis to be universally applicable, neither world-wide, within Europe, within Germany or even within that specific region. These are rather some examples of a variety of stories that show how rural lives and identities can look like. Moreover, it is noteworthy that I will solely use western literature to account for the research background, as this seems most useful for my work. Western rural areas show similarities in history when it comes to industrialisation and technical progresses within agriculture. Moreover, there are certain concepts and theories around rurality that can be used within various western regions, which will be explained further on. Also the demographic change of migration from the countryside to the cities can be detected in many western countries like Norway, Sweden and Germany (Bye 2009, Forsberg & Stenbacka 2013, Wiest 2015).

II. Research Context

1. Critical and Gendered Rural Geography

I will give an account of the history and development of the field of rural geography, which shapes the context of my research. Moreover, I will go into more detail by describing the gender research in rural studies and the feminist approaches to it. The review will be restricted to rural geography in western societies as industrialisation and globalisation has resulted in similar developments within rural societies in the west, and my research is based in a western country.

In the first part of the twentieth century, the focus within rural geography was on capturing and defining different rural landscapes and agricultural land, whereas the latter's economic power ensured an ongoing interest in it. The lives of rural people and the dynamics of their communities, however, were of little interest at that time. In the 1960s and 1970s, geography started to direct its attention more on cities and urban areas, which resulted in a neglect of the countryside. The limited research that was done on the rural space focused on measuring and classifying different kind of settlements that overlooked people and their social relations (Little 2002a).

As the political economy in the west became more complex during the 1980s, rural areas underwent a major economic but also social restructuring. Hence, rural geographers got increasingly interested in the mechanisms and principles of agriculture and food production to

show how these were related to the global market. The international competition led to a high deficit in local agricultural industries and thereby to new challenges for the whole rural landscape. Geographers now realised the complex and vital relations between local rural areas and the state but also the great effects of international structures and movements on the former. This was the point where rural geography started to look at local politics, cultural practices, social class, and recognised the diversity within the countryside. Especially class formation was seen as highly important to understand rural communities and their structural changes (Little 2002a).

In the 1990s, the universal perspective of the past was thrown off in favour of the study of people living and visiting the countryside and their individual experiences (Little 2002a). Christopher Philo coined the concept of 'neglected rural others' and thereby criticised the dehumanising rural studies of the past decades, which had resulted into a disregard of comparably unprivileged people, which were, for instance, women, elderly, disabled and people of colour (1992).

This studying of 'neglected rural others' has led to a critical engagement with the way in which the rural space has been culturally constructed, for example by concepts like the dichotomy of 'the rural idyll' and 'the rural crisis'. The research on the rural which followed, dealt with people's individual stories and experiences instead of creating concepts and analysing differences, which is still relevant today (Little 2002a).

A gender perspective in rural studies was introduced in the 1970s and 1980s when researchers started to investigate labour relations within family farms and thereby looked at women's tasks and contributions to the business. This opened up for an awareness of gender relations that determined the lives of farm women and men both when it comes to labour divisions but also to property rights (Little 2002a).

In the 1990s, research on rural communities revealed how unequal gender relations produced and influenced the lives of whole communities. Thereby the concept of the 'rural idyll' helped to uphold these inequalities and manifested the rural woman in her domestic and mothering role, while the dominant spaces within the community were inhabited by men and their rules and values (Little & Panelli 2003). However, the formerly hegemonic position of 'the rural idyll' has later been criticised in noting its severe implications for the power structures within the rural space (Little 2015).

Rural women have also been recognised as part of 'the rural others' which led to further studies on their marginality, power relations and gender differences. However, to consider 'rural women' as a homogeneous group which fostered and manifested certain truths and implications about the countryside, became later highly contested (Little 2002a). So, in the beginning of the 21. century, research on gender identity started to focus on women's singularity and intersections with categories like class and age (Little & Panelli 2003). Moreover, rural geographers started "...to go beyond the categories *women* and *men* in an examination of a range of different sexual and gendered identities" (Little 2002a).

Today, feminist perspectives on rural studies have removed the focus from gender to look more specifically at femininity and masculinity, and the particular features that are tied to them. Thereby female and male identities and their relationship to nature play a dominant role. However, these are not static but shift with the changes in the rural space, where for example technology has created alterations in dominant rural masculinities (Little & Panelli 2003).

The investigation of sexuality was brought to the centre at the turn of the millennium. Homosexuality had so far not been considered in research on rural life while the heterosexual nuclear family was deemed the norm. Now, an interest in individual gay and lesbian experiences in the countryside arose. Moreover, constructions of masculinities and femininities within heterosexual relationships became objects of investigation (Little & Panelli 2003).

2. Theories and Concepts

2.1. Identity and Intersectionality

As I will examine rural identities, it is necessary to account for the discourses and meanings around the concept of identity, which are not definite. In looking up the word 'identity' in a dictionary one learns that it comes from the Latin word 'idem', which means 'same'. In the English language it goes back to the 16th century, where its meaning was 'quality of being identical'. Today, it is defined as 'the fact of being who or what a person or thing is' and 'a close similarity or affinity' (Definition of identity 2016). Hence, identity is both in its origin and today's meaning associated with sameness and consequently also with difference (Heckman 1999). So, by identifying as someone or something, or with someone or something, one feels a closeness and sympathy to particular people or things, while, at the

same time, one marks a difference to others. This, again, implies that there must be prior meanings to, for instance, 'femininity', 'masculinity', and 'rurality' that people have learned in relationships with others, in order to identify with it (Litosseliti & Sunderland 2002). It shows that identity is socially constructed, unfixed and differs through time and space (Little & Cloke 1997), and is therefore both socially but also personally unstable and fluid (Little 2002a). Hence, identity can be described as a way of taking position and make sense of oneself at a particular moment in time and is not an essential part of a person (Leyshon 2011). In contrast to the dictionary who describes identity as the *being* of a person, the analysis of identities requires to "... understand identity as a dynamic, emergent and ongoing process of *becoming*..." (Corlett & Mavin 2014, emphasis added). And yet, on a personal level, it is important to perceive oneself as having a stable identity in order to know *the own position*, and make decisions and act based on it (Heckman 1999). Also, identities are naturalised as fixed which makes people expect and demand coherent and stable identities of those they interact with (Gagnesjö 2014).

For my analysis, it means that I cannot claim to determine any fixed identities of my interviewees, but I can just examine how they identify at this particular moment in their lives or how they interpret their identities of the past (Heckman 1999). Also, as the construction and embracing of various identities is interlinked with privileges and power relations, it is vital to consider the different social categories involved, and also raises the question in how far one is capable to influence or choose one's own identities (Little 2002a).

Therefore, intersectionality will be a valuable tool for investigation. The term was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw whereby she explained the invisibility of the experiences of women of colour within the research on gender and race, as they inhabit subordinate positions in both areas (1991). Consequently, scholars became aware of the fact that it is not possible to do justice to women as a homogeneous group, because, besides gender, there are other factors which influence their positions within power hierarchies (Corlett & Mavin 2014). Intersectionality visualises the inequalities that exist between social groups due to a set of categories like gender, ethnicity, age, sexuality, class and functionality. Thereby it serves to analyse interactions between people both by looking at the multiple intersections within and across categories to understand how power relations work. However, all categories cannot be treated as equals but have to be adapted individually to the situation (Corlett & Mavin 2014).

Also, I will be careful not to reproduce and manifest them, but rather use categories as fluent and changeable tools of analysis.

2.2. Rural Space

Space is not a modern concept but "...has a history in western experience and it is not possible to disregard the...intersection of time with space" (Foucault 1986). In "Of Other Spaces", Foucault describes two types of spaces. There are utopias, which are not real spaces and can therefore be freely constructed in any way. The other ones are heterotopias, a notion that became an inspiration for Marxist geographers (Halberstam 2005), and refer to spaces which actually exist and inhabit 'superimposed meanings' that serve certain purposes in society, like holy spaces for instance (Foucault 1986). I argue that also rural spaces bear characteristics of a heterotopia, for example in the concept of the 'rural idyll' which serves to preserve an image of the past but also to keep alive certain traditional values in the present (Little & Austin 1996).

The rural space can be described to consist of back country and smaller settlements that are surrounded by natural landscape and fields, but there are further features to be mentioned. From an economical perspective, agriculture can be named as to represent the production in the countryside. It also represents a rather coherent way of consumption, as there is a small number of people with similar needs (Halfacree 1993). However, these aspects have been highly contested and with consideration to the deficits in the agricultural industry during the 1980's and the following restructuring which were mentioned above, one can assume that rural societies do not circle around agriculture any more but that rural people have a variety of jobs and interests and therefore also consume in various ways (Little 2002a). Hence, one can say that there is not one rural space which can be recognised by certain features but that there are several social groups which form their own spaces that overlap geographically (Little & Austin 1996).

Yet, it can be stated that discourses of the rural as consistent are ongoing, for instance that it is a heterosexual space (Little 2002a), while in fact it is not steadfast but ever changing (Neal 2009). Another feature is the assumption of rural spaces to be classless, while actually the middle class has and still determines the matters of rural societies (Pini & Leach 2011). This apparent consistency leads to a dominance of certain people over the rural space, while others are marginalised and their needs and worries not heard (Bryant & Pini 2011).

Contrary to urbanity, the rural space has formerly been described "...by stability, integration and rigid stratification, with individuals coming into contact with the same people in a variety of situations" (Halfacree 1993). This was later contested by saying that "The rural is hybrid, co-constituted, multi-faceted, relational, elusive" and that there are "many different rurals" (Pini, Branth & Little 2015), which suggests the "...`unfinishedness` of the meaning of rurality" (Neal 2009). Therefore, it is not possible to give a single definition of the rural space or render rural spaces coherent in themselves but their meanings constantly circulate through time, space and individual discourses, so they have to be investigated from within to detect their many facets (Murdoch & Pratt 1997).

2.3. Community, Belonging and Meaning of the Nation

The rural community is a prominent object to investigate as it forms an important part of people's lives in the countryside, and reveals the mechanisms of social cohabitation. It has come to have certain symbolic meanings which go beyond the community that is actually lived (Little 2002a, Neal 2009). These nourish a longing for safety and fellowship (Neal 2009), and the notion of the rural community as a social group that helps and looks after each other, which in turn confirms the notion of a rural idyll and induces a sense of belonging (Little & Austin 1996). Doreen Massey argues that the concept of the rural idyll enables to dwell in memories and to keep a space static, which is more comfortable than thinking about changes for the future (1994). However, I think that Massey has produced a binary which can be disrupted because it is possible to both have 'a sense of place', as she calls it, and set about the future.

All interactions and common activities that take place within the community serve to maintain and establish values, whereas it is the everyday occurrences rather than the bigger events that bind people together. Interestingly, both Leyshon and Woods mention gossip as a form of everyday community practice (Leyshon 2011, Woods 2010). I can confirm this from own experiences. Where I grew up, you have a lot of knowledge about what is going on in the neighbourhood and constantly hear stories about people you might not even have met, yet, everyone knows everyone, at least from hearsay. Hence, the rural community can imply safety and belonging for some, others might rather be bothered that their private affairs are publicly talked about (Halberstam 2005).

Moreover, the notion of community is ruled by gender norms and unequal gender

relations, whereas dominant patriarchal structures make sure that they are sustained. Jo Little, a prominent scholar within gender rural studies who has researched on heterosexual relationships within the rural space (2002a, 2007), argues that the countryside has been constructed as a space for heterosexual families and the upbringing of children. Within these families, duties are clearly divided. The women take care of the children and the house, whether or not they also have a paid job, and men work full-time. Additionally, women are the ones who organise activities and events for the community, while men usually keep out of it (Little 2002a). The social organisations and clubs who prepare these activities also produce a sense of belonging and a way to identify with the rural space (Neal 2009). Little and Austin argue that the 'truths' that have been created around the rural community, influences women in their lives so that they accept what is expected from them (1996), because if you did not you would not be welcomed (Little 2002a). Communities work through marginalisation and the construction of otherness, whereby they define who is allowed to belong and who is not (Bryant & Pini 2011, Leyshon 2011). Yet, the community spirit is capable of covering and oppressing the exclusions and inequalities that actually exist within (Little & Austin 1996, Neal 2009).

So, rural communities are about belonging, which is governed by power structures. An example for that can be drawn from Michael Leyshon's research among rural teenagers, where the youth's describe that they were often excluded by older people due to their age but found their sense of belonging to the space by walking in the nature around the village (2011). So, not only solidarity among people but also the land itself is influential in this.

As a writer within a British context, Sarah Neal identifies the rural landscape to be a white space that stands for the traditional and original Britain and therefore came to represent the nation. This goes back to the First World War when rural Britain "...was emphasised, mobilised and idealised as 'home' " (Neal 2009). Furthermore, Neal argues that other countries within Europe also use their countryside to constitute a meaning of the nation (2009). Therefore, ethnicity is a particular factor that influences the inclusion and exclusion into the rural space (Pini & Leach 2011). I argue that it is not possible to universalise this and yet, it raises the question whether rural identity can have a connection to national identity.

2.4. Nature and Landscape

To me, nature, the landscape and also animals are highly involved in what constitutes

rurality. It is when I am surrounded by nature that I see, hear, smell and feel that I am in the countryside. Therefore, it is interesting that literature on rurality focuses mostly on the people and the communities that inhabit the space, while the landscape plays a subordinated role. However, within rural gender studies there is a dominant western notion of women being close to nature or even part of it due to their fertility, which might induce a special relationship to the land. At the same time, men are those who control, tame and cultivate nature. This idea both produces heteronormative gender differences and relations, and a dichotomy between nature and culture (Little & Leyshon 2003).

There is a binary of nature and society which has been discussed and questioned within the field of rural geography. Yet, there are no lines that can be drawn but the land and the people co-constitute each other and give each other meaning (Little 2002a). Hence, rural people's feelings about their environment is important as it is linked to how they live their lives and how they see themselves (Neal 2009). This becomes visible in research by Leyshon on young people's experiences in the countryside, which brings up nature and environment as a dominant feature of the rural, or rather the adolescents that are interviewed do. They clearly identify the landscape outside of the village as crucial to characterise rurality, which due to its fields is closely connected to agriculture and described as "...the powerful preservative of a way of life" (Leyshon 2011). Furthermore, the youths explain their own personal connection to the land, which is part of their lives in so many ways. They walk in it on the way to school, for leisure and exercise, to escape the structures and eyes of the village, but also solely for the sake of the land and the nature itself (Leyshon 2011). These records confirm the theoretical concept of nature as a site of tranquillity, where you rest from people and the demands of everyday life and draw strength for future duties (Neal 2009).

2.5. 'Rural' versus 'Urban'

I do not want to oppose the rural to the urban in my research and in general reject this dichotomy. And yet, this concept is, although criticised, still discussed by researchers as it has played an essential role in the attempts to define rurality within rural geography. Rurality and nature have been discussed as detached from intellectual and academic work, which in turn has been assigned to urbanity. So, it can be questioned whether this rural-urban division is based not only on today's norm of urbanity both in academia and society as a whole, but always has been the starting position of research on rurality (Little 2002a).

Halfacree argues that not only the rural-urban binary is incorrect but also that a continuum of these spaces does not work (1993). The lives of most people and communities go beyond any divided assumptions about urbanity and rurality, whether they reside in cities, small towns or villages. In Germany, there are studies from as early as the 1950's which show that the living conditions in rural and urban areas get more and more alike. Also, at that time people increasingly moved outside of their village both for work and for leisure. Therefore, it did not contain their whole world any more but has come to be just one of many places in their lives. Today, where most people own a car and every remote village has internet, this has become even stronger (Beetz 2015). It has led to the notion of a "post-productivist countryside" (Neal 2009) where the binary is disrupted and other categories like gender are included to investigate the dynamics of communities (Neal 2009). However, the people who construct these spaces and thereby distance themselves from others, keep the discourses around the rural-urban divide alive and constitute their own identities by it. The young people in Leyshon's study use this binary to define and describe their own identification with living in the countryside (Leyshon 2011).

It can be concluded that it is not possible to separate city and country life because this divide is not real for any kind of people. Yet, it is a way to create meaning about spaces, people, lives and to structure the world and make it understandable. Therefore, the dualism is lived in so far that people use it in discourses and to identify themselves, which becomes important in my investigation of identities. Hence, as I stated in the introduction, I will not use the rural-urban dichotomy as a basis for my analysis, but will go into it if my interviewees name it in a way to express their rural identities.

2.6. 'Rural Idyll'

The rural idyll describes the concept of an idealised picture of the countryside, where the world is quiet, peaceful and harmonious, and people live surrounded by a beautiful scenery (Leach 2011). Thereby, the rural space is linked to former and better times that one wants to cling on, while the present and the future is filled with uncertainty. Little and Austin criticise and disrupt this notion. They argue that the rural idyll, like other concepts, has been made up to serve a few, while the majority had to work hard to make it happen. In other words, the rural idyll of the past was for the wealthy, while the rest was living a hard life (Little & Austin 1996). Today, the notion of the rural idyll is still intact and attracts the middle-class to move

to the countryside, which is called counter-urbanisation, or to have a week-end house there (Neal 2009). Hence, the rural idyll has always just been there for a limited group of people of a certain class, but still manages to cover the unequal living conditions that exist within the rural space (Little 2002a). Moreover, it is based on specific and highly patriarchal gender roles, where the woman's main role is that of a mother and carer for the family, and research shows that many women are influenced by this notion in their lifestyles and adapt to it (Little & Austin 1996).

Consequently, the rural idyll is not only a misinterpretation of rurality, but considering the changes that have happened during the past decades, it is also dangerous (Little 1999). Due to a decline in agricultural production in Europe (Neal 2009), and a lack in work opportunities, there is a steady out-migration from the countryside into the cities (Bye 2009, Wiest 2015). These shifts have led to a dichotomy of rural idyll and rural crisis, where the latter is described by decay and loss of people and occupation, and thereby as a space without future opportunities (Neal 2009).

2.7. Rural Identity

Not only categories like ethnicity and class are relevant for shaping identity, but every part of our lives and every bit of experience, so the spaces that one lives in are also highly influential (Little 1997). And while a space takes part in shaping individual and collective identities, in turn, these identifications also form the space (Cloke & Little 1997). This demonstrates that there is a wide range of rural identities, however, as notions about rurality are constructed by excluding diversity, identities of rural people are assumed to be homogeneous (Bryant & Pini 2011). Through my research I aim to show that this is not true, but that rural identities can be very diverse, contradicting, but also overlapping. It cannot be denied that the prominent stories that are told about rurality and rural lives influence the identities of people living in the countryside (Neal 2009), but there is more to it.

Michael Woods emphasises that identity is not so much something that one has, but that one performs, saying that by doing specific activities in relation to certain people within rural localities, one actively produces rural identities (2010). Hence, communities and the meanings they offer are very important for the identification with a space. Yet, it does not only involve human interaction, but also the walking in the rural landscape can nurture feelings for the space (Leyshon 2011), and the emotional relationship of people to nature and the rural land

affect how they see themselves (Neal 2009).

Furthermore, rural identities are shaped by collective feelings of sameness and consequently also by marginalisation and othering (Little 2002a, Little 1997). Therefore, the dualism of rurality and urbanity serves people to create rural identities by connecting and distancing themselves from the urban, and claiming an identity of "...being an authentic country person through their consumption and production of rural space" (Leyshon 2011). Hence, "...connotations of authenticity, realism, and/or naturalism" (Phillips 2011), opposed to the modernity and unnaturalness of city-people, are very strong markers of rural identities (Bye 2003, Phillips 2011). However, there are also rural people who do not see this distinction of rurality and urbanity as clearly and can identify with things that are considered to belong to the urban space (Leyshon 2011). Consequently, it can also be argued that identifications are rather shaped by the various spaces that one engages with, than by distancing oneself from them (Massey 1994). Therefore, although some similarities in rural identities can be detected, one has to remember that there is no single rural identity, and also, that they cannot be generalised (Little & Cloke 1997).

2.8. Gendered Rural Space

Sex and gender are not opposed to each other but both regulated, regulatory and informed by a heterosexual framework and normativity that restricts their number to two (complementary) genders (Bryant & Pini 2011). There is a demand for 'intelligible genders' (Butler 2006) that are marked by a coherence in sex, gender and sexuality, and thereby generate one unitary category of women and one of men. Consequently, gender roles and identities are highly informed by the power structures and norms circulating around the notions of sex and gender that only allow certain roles and identifications while excluding others, which in turn shows that they are not personal and individual but reproduce an ideal (Butler 2006, Butler 2011).

Within the context of the rural space, nature has become a part in producing and reflecting gender norms and relations. Men are framed as the masters of nature who tame wilderness through strength and courage. Thereby they are closely connected to the land by having power over it. At the same time, women are pictured as to be afraid of the uncultivated wilderness, but due to their fertility also as incorporated into nature. Hence, nature is used in favour of heterosexual gender relations where women are part of nature while men are the ones who

tame it (Little 2002a). Therefore, physically heavy activities in nature play an important part in constituting masculinity and masculine identity (Bye 2003). The way gender relations circle around nature offers a good illustration of how unequal power relations are maintained within the rural community.

One area where this becomes very visible is the labour market. By promoting the nuclear family that ties women to the home (Little & Austin 1996), and at the same time having economic structures following a male norm (Wiest 2015), it becomes very hard for females to compete on the market (Forsberg & Stenbacka 2013). Moreover, crucial public spaces in a community are often ruled by men and their norms and beliefs, which again enforce their power within those spaces (Little & Panelli 2003). Although inequalities and distinctive gender norms also exist in urban areas, it is argued that traditional gender values are more protected in the countryside (Leach 2011).

As the connection between gender norms and nature indicate, rural masculinity is characterised by physical strength, handiness, honesty and reliability (Leach 2011). The industry sector in rural areas is influenced by those norms (Leach 2011), but especially the sectors of farming and forestry are very male-dominated (Reed & Davidson 2011) and preserve the notion of men as the rulers over nature (Little 2002b). The same can be detected in hunting, where women are excluded because they are not considered strong and tough enough to belonging in that space (Bye 2003).

Rural femininity is very much rooted in norms around the heterosexual family and constructs women as domestic and caring mothers (Leach 2011). However, gender norms are not completely binary and fixed. In rural spaces, manual skills and practicality are valued in both men and women (Bye 2009) while a very feminine appearance is often not regarded as appropriate (Little 2003). Also, skills in business and management have been added as a variation to the values of strength and practicality (Bye 2009). Hence, rural femininities and masculinities are actually more nuanced, and also gender norms and relations are changing (Wiest 2015).

2.9. Sexualised Rural Space

By examining the notion of the 'intelligible gender' (Butler 2006), one can observe that sexuality is regarded as highly important to regulate genders and the relations between them. The heterosexual norm that regulates sexual practices and gender categories defines the

simple formula that sex determines gender which in turn determines desire (Butler 2006). Accordingly, the heterosexual norm does not only affect heterosexuals, but also people with non-normative genders and sexualities perform gender norms or, if they choose to perform differently, these differences are oriented towards the norm (Butler 2004). Also, there is a close connection between sexuality and space, as the space influences how one performs sexuality and the other way around. Moreover, “bodies are sexualised through how they inhabit space” (Ahmed 2006).

Within gendered rural geography, the rural space has often been constructed as a heterosexual space, where the heterosexual nuclear family with children constitutes the norm and is constructed according to “highly conventional ideas about masculinities and femininities and the relationship between men and women” (Little 2003). Moreover, it is argued that heterosexuality is naturalised and also desexualised because it is not about sex itself but about procreation and living in a stable family constellation that ensures the continued existence of the rural community (Little 2003). This applies especially to farm families as they are seen as the ones who keep the community values together, and therefore heterosexual masculinities and femininities are particularly important within the farm context (Little 2007). Also, one can argue that the ideal of the heterosexual nuclear family and traditional gender relations is very much a middle class ideal as, following the gender norms, the woman stays at home and takes care of the family, which in turn means that they have to be able to afford to live on only one salary. These interdependencies between sexuality, gender norms and space very much affect the way people use space and put all people who deviate from the norm into a marginalised position (Little 2002a). There is research which shows that many homosexual people feel isolated in the countryside and have to live according to the heterosexual norm because there is just no other alternative (Little 2002a). Moreover, other studies reveal how lesbians and gays are excluded from the rural environment just to maintain heterosexuality as the natural form of organising the community (Little & Panelli 2003). Hence, the rural as heterosexual space is a representation of the dominant social and sexual structures that are kept in place, but it does not illuminate actual sexual identities and performances of rural people (Little 2007). Consequently, I argue that the notion of the rural heterosexual space can be deconstructed.

I will start by breaking the rural-urban binary when it comes to heteronormativity, as this norm actually applies to most spaces (Gammerl 2015), which in turn makes the discrimination

of people who do not live according to that norm exceed the rural space by far (Gagnesjö 2014). Furthermore, in the previous chapter I described how nature has been used to support heteronormativity, but it has also been used in favour of alternative sexual experiences by offering a freedom to experiment and thereby challenging the tight norm of desexualised heterosexuality (Little 2007). Consequently, while a surface of heteronormativity is upheld there is actually a diversity in sexual cultures in the countryside (Halberstam 2005). Hence, the space may seem heterosexual but is not, which, I argue, offers the possibility to construct it as a queer space (Bell 1994). For many queer people, the countryside is seen as an alternative to the queer space in cities, where norms around queerness are already in place. So, the rural space offers a freedom to create an individual lifestyle (Gagnesjö 2014).

III. Methodologies

1. Interviewing

I chose semi-structured interviews as my way of interviewing, because it seems suitable both for my research and for the field I am researching in. Those take place as planned interviews with some prepared questions but it is left open how they develop. New questions and topics derive from the conversation between interviewer and interviewee. To make it an in-depth interview it should at least last 30 minutes, but can take up to several hours (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006). Even though the semi-structured in-depth interview is a very free and open form of interviewing, one has to be aware that this type of conversation is a specific and limited way of talking to each other (Wertz 2011). Therefore, in having made myself familiar with different positions of how interviews work, I have adapted the localist position which claims that interviews do not reveal any truths about the world outside the interview situation but produce situated knowledge between the interviewee and the interviewer (Qu & Dumay 2003, Rapley 2010). Hence, the interviewer is not a passive and objective listener, but the relation to the interviewee is decisive for which experiences are told and how they are told. Therefore, it is my job to create a good atmosphere to make the interviewees feel comfortable and trusting (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006).

Informed consent given by the interviewee, confidentiality on part of the interviewer, and mutual trust are named to be three important preconditions for a successful interview (Ryen 2010). I think these are all very crucial and therefore I do not want to leave my interviewees in the dark when it comes to my motives and research aims. They should know for which

purposes they are interviewed and agree to them, which establishes trust between us.

When it comes to anonymity, an important means of confidentiality, I have read different opinions on how to proceed. There are those who claim that anonymity must be absolutely guaranteed (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006). Other voices disrupt this notion of anonymity by revealing that it is a western approach, and there being cultures who have a norm of listing the real names of people (Ryen 2010). I, who knew about this anonymity code before and never questioned it, started to reflect on this in terms of power. Maybe I should give my interviewees the power to decide for themselves whether they want to be anonymous or not. Consequently, I determined to ask the interviewees in the beginning of every interview whether they want to be anonymous or not, and also to repeat the purpose of my interviewing them, to be sure that I have their consent.

Moreover, I had the idea to get away from the table and conduct the interviews outdoors walking in the woods or in some of the interviewee's territories, but I wanted them to be free to choose the place of our meeting. I am well aware that giving the interviewees' some freedom will not erase the unequal power relations between us because I set the themes, ask the questions and record the dialogue, which makes it into my material. So, in order to soften the hierarchy, I aim to also talk about my own experiences and thereby offer a bit of myself in exchange for their narratives.

2. Narrative Analysis and Discursive Tools

After having considered both discourse and narrative analysis as a method to analyse my research material, I chose narrative analysis as my main method. I want to focus on the individual person and its story, which narrative analysis does, while discourse analysis examines parts of the story and focuses more on language and how something is said (Josselson 2011, McMullen 2011). However, discourse- and narrative analysis have a constructivist approach in common, and the former can be a useful tool within narrative research (Wertz et al. 2011).

Narrative research argues that almost everything that people tell can be a narrative, as we, in connecting events in a certain way, make sense of our and others' lives as stories. Narratives are always constructed as certain experiences which are picked, interpreted and assembled for a particular audience. It is not assumed that people express reality, but narrative approach examines how the narrator links experiences and events that are told (Josselson

2011). Hence, the narrative can be considered true at the moment it is told because it is what the person tells you. Therefore, narrative research accepts the 'trueness' of the narrative and tries to detect its various meanings (Corvellec 2007).

Narrative research does not regard any person as fixed but pays attention to the ways a person is presenting itself, which is never coherent. As I will study the 'I' positions in looking at identity, it is very helpful to bear the tensions in mind that might occur in the narrative and work with those dynamics, rather than look for coherence (Josselson 2011).

As stated above, I also want to use a bit of discourse analysis in looking at how the narrative is told, and how the conversation between interviewer and interviewee is constructed (Kitzinger 2010). Moreover, I want to compare the narratives to each other and deal with the differences and similarities, or other interesting tensions that might become visible (McMullen 2011). One can also say that discourse is part of the narrative as people are influenced by external discourses in what they tell, constructing and reconstructing their own identities in reference to them (Baxter 2007). In turn, they also take part in producing discourses by telling their story (Corvellec 2007). Therefore, I argue that using discourse analysis within narrative research will enable me to better understand the whole story and to put certain themes into a wider perspective.

To conclude, I think that narrative analysis will serve my purposes because it allows me to focus on the individual stories, but also to identify certain themes and parts that can be examined more deeply to give meaning to the whole narrative. Moreover, the narrative approach is not generalising, which I also want to avoid, but as it deals with human experiences, we might learn about how human beings construct and make meaning of their lives, which is an ongoing process and never really finished (Josselson 2011).

3. Situating Myself

My positions towards the fieldwork and the paper are crucial for its processes and outcomes. As Donna Haraway points out, there is no objective knowledge but previous experiences and knowledges that one brings into a project will influence the production of new knowledge (1988).

Since I am in a rural space to do my research, I am taking part in performing rurality both as I grew up in that particular rural space, but also as a researcher on rurality (Woods 2010). Hence, my situated relationship to the research is very much involved with me being both an

insider and an outsider to the space I am researching in. The insider and outsider position are neither binary and unitary, nor are they in any way stable but constantly in motion throughout the research process. On the one hand, I have been part of the rural space I am researching in for most of my life. Also, as my parents are farmers, I have always had a close relationship to animals and nature, because they determine much of the rhythm on the farm. Therefore, I have a rural identity and feel like belonging to this rural community. That definitely influences my research and writing. On the other hand, I have been living outside of this community during most of my adult years, which of course influences my point of view. At this point, I come from another place as a researcher with knowledge that I have gathered elsewhere to use on and with the people and the place. Moreover, my engagement with gender studies, and my involvement in feminist and queer circles, has shaped how I view gender norms and gender identities within the community.

Ulrika Dahl who has written on making research in her 'own community', which in her case is the queer community, has argued that one is both subject and object at the same time, and that the balance of being both insider and outsider can be tricky. Also, the assumption that you are at home in academia and away in the field is not that simple because you have a certain relation to your research projects (Dahl 2010). In line with Dahl, I use my networks to realise this research. Hence, I enter this research with overlapping knowledges from being both insider and outsider. The possible dilemmas deriving from that will be discussed below.

To conclude, I want to point out that there are, as in every person, limits to my self-perception and consequently also to the situated knowledges that I lay out here.

4. Ethical Dilemmas

To do research and to write a text is a huge responsibility that one has to account for. Consequently, it is crucial to always consider potential outcomes and to be aware of the power dynamics in the research process. As a researcher one is in charge of a certain project and therefore has more power than other people and texts involved. Hence, one has to reflect the own power and to pay attention throughout the process not to have a top-down view and to be respectful towards others' accounts (Gorman-Murray, Johnston & Waitt 2010, Woods 2010).

The greatest dilemma that was occupying my mind at the beginning of the research, was my position of being both insider and outsider within the community that I am researching in. I hope to contribute to the community by doing research there. But is that possible or will I be

seen as an intruder with a concern that is considered irrelevant there? These questions really made me hesitate to start the research and particularly to ask people for participation. During the interviewing process I then realised that the most important matter was to be aware of my position. I could not have entered the interview trying to be only the researcher, neither could I have attempted to pretend to have a private chat with the interviewees. So what I did was to find a balance which ended up in blurring the insider-outsider binary in the conducting of the interviews.

Furthermore, I have to be conscious about how I produce and reproduce existing research within the field of rural and gender studies, as well as my own conducted material. There are dichotomies like 'rural idyll and rural crisis' and 'the rural and the urban' which I aim to disrupt, and still, I describe and use them in my analysis. Hence, the balancing act of using categories and disrupting them is very fragile. As Judith Butler points out in *Bodies that Matter*, there are both advantages and disadvantages to use categories. Categories help to reveal inequalities and to illuminate power structures, at the same time they put people into certain boxes which simplifies the complexity of the human being (2011).

In focusing on rural people as a category, I have to be aware not to produce them as unitary or as "the other" in difference to any norm. I aim for a nuanced picture that destabilises binaries and uncovers an apparent homogeneity to reveal the heterogeneity and diversity of the rural community. Therein lies the danger to impose yet another assumption about rural communities and its people. Therefore, it is important for me to emphasise that I do not claim any universality, and also to listen as carefully as possible to my interviewees' narratives. When it comes to analysing the interviews I feel a huge responsibility and try to sound out how to go about it without imposing anything on the participants but at the same time have the freedom to reflect critically. It will not be perfect but I will try to be both transparent and careful.

These ethical dilemmas show that there is not a coherent way in doing research and that it is not possible to give answers to every question. Moreover, there is no true interpretation of the interviews, but I will make sense of them and offer one way of looking at them (Jackson & Mazzei 2012).

IV. Research Material

1. In Preparation for the Interviews

1.1. Regional Context

My interviews have been conducted in the federal state of Saarland, which, apart from the three city states Bremen, Berlin and Hamburg, is the smallest federal state in Germany with a size of about 2570 km² (size of Germany ~ 360.000 km²) and a population of roughly one million people. The capital with 177 000 inhabitants is named Saarbruecken, and the rest of the region consists of small towns and villages, so it is very rural and without any metropolitan area (Statistisches Amt Saarland 2016).

The state, named after the river Saar that flows through it, is located in the south-west of the country at the French border which has significantly influenced its development and what it is today. Throughout history, this territory has belonged to both France and Germany several times. Before the French Revolution it was a province founded by the French, but after the revolution it was split and its parts belonged to the principalities of Prussia, Bavaria, Oldenburg and Saxony-Coburg-Saalfeld. After World War I, the Treaty of Versailles assigned the territory to France, but in 1935 the population of the Saarland voted for an incorporation into the German Reich which was then already ruled by the Nazis. After World War II, the Saarland became economically attached to France and received a limited autonomy before it was politically and economically reintegrated into Germany in the period between 1957 and 1959 (Geschichte des Saarlandes 2016). Being a border area has led to the development of an own culture where, although having been German a long time now, French influences are visible, for instance in the language where certain French words can be traced. However, there is not one coherent dialect but there are two main dialect groups which formerly drew a line through the Saarland and today, due to increased mobility, have become more mixed.

Coal mining has been very influential and important for the region, both in the past and today. A nationalisation of this sector in the 17th century led to a very early approach towards industrialisation that developed farther in the 18th century. The coal mines were active until after World War II but then gradually closed, while the last one was shut down in 2012. Also, as the coal mining provided a great supply of fuel for a long time, it fostered the steel industry that is very important for the region today (Lehnert 2015). Companies like Bosch and INA who produce for the automotive industry have settled in the region and generate many jobs. Websweiler, a village of today about 314 inhabitants in eastern Saarland was founded by the

end of the 18th Century to provide housing for mineworkers as there was a mine nearby (Websweiler mein Dorf 2016). As all of my interviewees live in or close to that village today, whereas two of them grew up there when the mining industry was still vivid, this part of Saarland's history will appear in some of the stories.

Because I grew up in rural Saarland as well, on a farm outside of Websweiler, I will give an account of how I experience and have experienced the mentality of the people, which has become especially visible to me as I have been living outside of the area for some time now. As in the language, French influences can also be discovered in the mentality. Generally, people are open minded and one could say that there is a touch of the French *laissez faire*. People are very talkative and open to meet and talk with each other in public places. Another crucial characteristic is the sense of home that makes many people stay in the region. I know from own experiences that many young people stay with their parents during their vocational training or studies at a university close by and also remain in the same village or nearby after that. In many families it is a very alien thought that their children should move out after school or even leave the Saarland. The majority of my former school mates stayed in the region, while others have come back, and from some conversations I understand that it is the feeling of homeliness, comfort and the closeness to friends and family which makes them want to stay or come back. Some years ago I could not understand that. I just wanted to get away from the closeness to see new and exciting places. But now that I have had my share of that, I can comprehend why the familiar can be so important.¹

1.2. The Participants

As mentioned above, my research participants all live in villages in eastern Saarland at the border to the neighbouring federal state Rhineland-Palatinate and are at present part of the environment that I grew up in. Consequently, I either knew or knew of them before, and asked all of them directly if they wanted to participate. Also, I informed them about my research and why I am interested in talking to them.

Sabine, my first interviewee, is a 34-year-old nurse who moved to Websweiler some years ago and now lives there with her girlfriend, three dogs, a horse and a cat. My motives for choosing Sabine are twofold. From what I knew of her, I assumed a great interest in animals, nature and outdoor activities. Also, I was curious to hear why a young lesbian couple moves

¹ Images on the Saarland in Appendix 1

to a small village where they do not seem to have any connections from before, how they like it, and how they experience the community.

The idea to ask my second interviewee Marie came to me quite in the beginning of my project when I was reading literature about women and farming, which only discusses farm wives who work on their husband's farms without getting paid, and supposedly without training. Marie is 24 years old, has completed a master craftsman training in farming and has now been employed at a farm for a couple of years. Therefore, I was interested to hear how she ended up in farming and also how she experiences gender relations and norms within the agricultural sector. She is an acquaintance but I had not talked to her much before the interview.

Andrea is the only participant that I had never met before but only heard about. She is a 57-year-old trained social worker but works as a freelance journalist. I knew that she has undergone a transition from male to female and stayed within the community that she grew up in although she got divorced from her family and was shut out from her former life. Therefore, I became curious. How did she tackle her transition in a rural area? Does she think it had or has any impact on her? And why did she stay?

Having grown up with hunters in my immediate surrounding, I got interested and inspired by Linda Marie Bye and her research on rural masculinity in hunting in rural Norway (Bye 2003, 2009). My grandfather has a hunting ground around Websweiler where a group of hunters are active. One of them is Thomas, 53 years old, whom I know as a very devoted and successful hunter. He was a professional soldier in the German army but is now retired and spends whole nights on raised shooting shelters. I was curious to hear about his relationship to nature and hunting, and about gender norms within the latter.

My last interviewee is Georg who is 55 and grew up in Websweiler. He moved away for his training as a nurse and later as a theatre nurse but came back to the village more than 20 years ago. Today he lives there with his husband. I knew that he has been doing travesty very successfully throughout the years, and that he has his own fan club among Websweiler's residents. So, I was interested to hear more about that, how it started, what travesty means to him and how the rural community responds to it.

1.3. The Interviews

I let the interviewees choose time and place for the interviews to make the situation as

comfortable as possible for them. Sabine and Georg both invited me to their respective house, while the conversations with Andrea, Thomas and Marie were conducted outdoors. With Marie I was sitting in the cowshed after her working day was finished, while Thomas and I talked on a bench in Websweiler as it was a very fine and sunny day. Andrea proposed a walk in the woods as, being a frequent interviewer, it is her preferred interview situation.

I planned to gather about one hour of taped conversation with each interviewee and had collected a list of questions beforehand that were mostly ideas I got from reading scholarly books and articles on gender and other critical perspectives on rurality. These were both general questions on how they grew up, where they live today and on their professional lives. More specific questions were on the communities that they live in, how they evaluate the gender norms within them, and if there are any changes they would wish for in their community or village. I also wanted them to reflect on their gender identities and whether they feel any pressure concerning their gender performances. Moreover, I planned to talk about nature and what it means to them. None of the questions contained any reference to a rural-urban dichotomy as I did not want to influence my interviewees in that way. From this list, I chose some and added some individual questions depending on who I was talking to and the interests in that particular person which I elaborated on above.

At first, I was much more into the discursive way of thinking and had the idea of asking them a lot about the region and about the community, but in planning the separate interviews I realised that I have to put more focus on them as individuals. Hence, I chose the questions accordingly and also said in the beginning of the interview that this is not about their opinions on certain issues, but about their lives and their stories. It was good that I changed the focus from opinions and evaluations on the surrounding to their individuals lives, as the opinion-questions that I put were hard to answer while it was very easy for all of them to talk about themselves.

I started by shortly explaining again what I was interested in to make sure that they are aware of what I am aiming for. Moreover, I asked them whether they wanted to be anonymous or not. They all said that I was welcome to use their real names, so I was happy that I made the choice to ask. However, when I started to analyse the interviews, I realised that I had to make them anonymous after all because the knowledge that I would use their real names restricted me in my analyses. It might not necessarily have become a bad analysis, but a different one.

I asked as few questions as possible and let the interviewees talk because I found it more important to give them the freedom to guide the conversations. Listening seemed more important than asking a lot of questions and trying to lead the way according to my assumptions about them. And that was very interesting, as one could see where they put the emphases and consequently what is more and less important to them in their lives. Hence, with some people I only used one or two questions, as they started from the beginning and told me their life story. Others needed more questions and seemed to want more guidance.

2. Retrospective Notes on Conducting the Interviews

I was really nervous in the prospect of the interviews and especially so before and during the first one. However, Sabine was so talkative, open, and willing to cooperate that I could not have had a better first interviewee. With her I also realised that it is actually harder to listen carefully than I thought, especially when one is nervous. So, after the interview with Sabine, I aimed at getting better in listening in the upcoming interviews. What also surprised me in the first interview was that, although being used to make notes during lectures, speeches and seminars, I did not write down anything during the whole time because I was so concentrated on listening. This did not change in the upcoming interviews where I also never wrote a word.

In the second interview, I felt much more relaxed and secure and could therefore be more attentive to what Marie was saying, so it became actually very fun. It was also during this interview that I started to understand how valuable research interviewing is, as I feel that I really learnt about human experiences. It is not in the way you talk to friends and learn to know them, but I went into the interviews as a researcher and asked questions I would not ask in a private conversation. Moreover, as I am close in age to both Sabine and Marie, the interviews with them developed into easy-going conversations because I could relate to much of what they said and there was a bonding through our rural backgrounds with both of them.

My third interview was of a very different nature, by far the most exhausting one, and I even felt a bit overstrained by it. I basically did not use any of the questions that I had planned beforehand, and when Andrea talked about her very problematic and painful past I did not know what to reply or ask next. All my questions felt so stupid and void after the story about her difficult childhood and her transition later in life, and her narrative did not let me go in the days that followed. After one hour with her I switched off the tape recorder but we continued our walk and it was much more relaxing, at least for me, because I did not feel the pressure of

being in an interview situation. Although very tense, the interview with Andrea was both interesting and complex, and I could see how much time and effort she had put into learning to know herself and her situation in relation to her surroundings. I had to listen to the recording several times in order to grasp everything that she told me.

As it was really important to me, I memorised Andrea saying that she trusted me in the usage of the material. Sabine did the same after our interview was finished and emphasised it to be connected to her knowing me from before. I did not ask any of them about it, so it must be something that they had thought about before when they decided to participate. Relating to my thoughts around the insider-outsider binary that I explored in the section on ethical dilemmas, I can say that they not only trusted me but treated me as a community insider, and I also felt more like an insider than an outsider. Hence, the fear of being an intruder from academia did not come true.

Thomas was very capable to give a full account of his most important life stages and memories without me asking anything. However, he struggled with my questions on masculinity and gender norms within hunting. Interestingly also Georg and his partner, who joined our conversation in the question on gender norms in the community, had a hard time to relate to my question and did not really seem to know what I meant by it. In contrast to this, all the women that I talked to could, and answered according to the way they understand gender norms. Yet, I learned that all my interviewees except for Andrea had not thought so much about them, and Marie suggested that it would have been better to get these questions beforehand in order to have time to think about it. Hence, for future research it might be useful to give the interviewees some questions in advance. However, this way I got more spontaneous and less constructed answers.

My initial interests in the participants were rightly motivated but it turned out that other things were often even more interesting. Doing fieldwork has been great and I have gained a fascination for human experiences. You learn to know people that you would not have approached otherwise, and also in a very special way. It showed me that everyone has something interesting to tell, so these people really enriched my life.

3. Analysis

As I want to do the narratives justice and not run the risk to miss out on any part of them, I decided to transcribe the whole interviews and not just bits of it. Especially for a narrative

analysis where the focus is on the individual stories and how they are constructed, it seems reasonable to have the whole conversation written down. Also, the transcribing turned out to be a crucial part of the analysis process, which brought me closer to the narratives and made me see peculiarities, similarities and differences between the stories, and interesting themes to be further discussed.

3.1. Sabine

... It is perfect. I would always move to such a dump (Ger. Kaff) again [laughs]
... (my translation) (1.1)

I start our interview by asking Sabine if she identifies with a gender and, in case she does, what that means to her. She answers that she identifies with being a woman, and also shows that she is well aware of certain discourses around the female gender.

I am a woman, wholeheartedly [...] basically I always say that women exist to get children [...] Although I do not say that a woman has to cook and clean and should not work. Not at all [laughs] ... because I for instance do also not cook at all. As far as I am concerned we could close up the kitchen. So I do not identify through that. It is more the role of the mother that is to me decisive for being a woman. (my translation) (1.2)

Sabine thinks of female identity in terms of the domestic and mother-role while she refuses the former and embraces the latter. And although she has no children yet, the wish to become a mother in the future is pronounced very clearly and decisively by her.

Later on in the interview I asked about gender roles and norms in her community and whether she feels any pressure when it comes to that. She found the first question very hard to answer but then took her own family as an example, explaining that there was a very classical division of tasks in her grandmother's and mother's generation. Although her grandmother worked in the family business, which was a pub and a restaurant, and the mother is self-employed, both were primarily entrusted with taking care of the children and household tasks while their husbands were the breadwinners. With her own partner it is different, she says, as she is in a same-sex relationship. Hence, she actively contrasts heterosexual and homosexual relationships and deems gender norms less relevant in the latter.

... now for us, as we live in a same-sex relationship [...] purely from how I feel everything is equal ... at our house everyone does everything ... we both work ...

J. (girlfriend) likes to cook, I hate cooking [...] if I have to I also have to [laughs] ... well, yet there are typical things ... J. is a bit taller than I am and tackles a bit more and in that sense I am more the girl [...] J. for instance takes care of the garden and I am more responsible for indoors ... but I think it is more about preferences ... I would not relate that to gender ... it is not like that for us anyway ... although purely from how we look ... everyone says about us “J. is more the masculine type” ... and I do not know how often I have been asked “is J. the man in your relationship?” ... then I said “if someone is the guy in our relationship it’s me” [laughs] (my translation) (1.3)

From this quote one can see that she evaluates gender roles to be about equality between genders, and as she and her partner are both women it is obviously an equal relationship. Then she goes on to position herself as more feminine than her girlfriend, who does the heavy and dirty work at home and has a more masculine appearance. Still, she refuses there to be a “female” and a “male” part in their relationship and jokes about the fact that people are asking about that all the time. I note that Sabine is only speaking in terms of gender relations, so she sees gender norms as something that you play out against each other and not in isolation. Therefore, she finds it hard to speak about that in her relationship. What they both contribute to the household is said to be rather about preferences than gender. She also does not go beyond the division of household tasks in her argumentation.

Moreover, she does not talk about any gender norms in her community, which can be explained by her saying that she does not care much about other people. She also shows that in the answer to my question about whether she feels any pressure when it comes to her gender identity and gender performances. To that she answers in the negative, saying that she thinks it is a matter of character and that she does not care about what anyone thinks any more, which she did when she was younger. She takes her relationship as an example:

... when someone says “your husband” [...] or patients also ask “yeah, are you married?”, “what is your husband working in?” ... 10 years ago I wouldn’t have said anything in reply and just covered it up ... and today I say “my wife” [laughs] ... so I rather don’t care any more what anyone thinks and I do also adapt ... of course in some way one has to integrate and adapt [...] but otherwise I do not feel that I am pushed into a certain role concerning my gender ... (my translation) (1.4)

Here she constructs herself as a strong and independent person. Also, I feel that she resists against her performing gender in a particular way and according to society norms but that she is “herself” and does not care about what others say and think about her.

When it comes to her rural lifestyle, she proves her independence of others by pointing

out that her closest friends and also others she used to spend time with when she was younger moved to bigger cities, her best friend even moved as far as to Melbourne in Australia, while she embraces her rural identity:

... so for me it is important, I need it, I want to go outside here and immediately be in the woods with my dogs ... I think it is brilliant that I go out here and I am instantly with my horse ... it has been deliberately chosen and it is part of life [...] I would describe myself as a little country bumpkin (Ger. Bauerntrampel) and never as a city kid [...] I am a little country kid (Ger. Landkind) ... (my translation) (1.5)

This statement summarises some of the key aspects of how she expresses her rural identity throughout the interview. By far the most dominant one is her strong dislike of and disinterest in cities. Without me mentioning anything about it, she starts to produce the rural-urban binary very early on in the conversation when she tells me how she and her partner came to buy a house in Websweiler:

... because we both agreed that it should not be in a city, everything around should not be too big. Yeah, it should be rural because of the dogs, the horse ... I mean one knows that this is what one likes and loves and not ... city life would not work for me at all ... it is all too fast for me and I get disorientated very quickly ... (my translation) (1.6)

This feeling of disorientation is picked up again later when she develops experiences that she has made in cities:

... in Saarbruecken (capital of the Saarland) I just see ugliness. But I am also totally anti-city, I always have been [...] a city like Berlin ... for me that is a waste of time, I am not interested in it [...] then I have to look through a whole city map to check how I can even get anywhere and with which means of transport. All this speed ... people are just running past me ... everything is totally overcrowded ... that makes me stressed ... (my translation) (1.7)

In contrast to the crowd of people, the fast rhythm and the ugly buildings, Sabine pictures the countryside as calm and full of wide landscapes. I can see that she does not care so much about the community because she claims not to know much about the people around, so it is rather the absence of people than the people living there which makes the countryside attractive. More important to her are her animals, the ability to have them close, and to be in the nature with them. From her story how she did get the horse that she owns today, I understand how much it means to her. The question on her horse was the one she answered in

most detail, which made me realise how much time, money, energy and love she puts into it. Her dogs frequently emerge in the narrative and she declares all her animals to be family members who should live as comfortably as she and her partner do. Also other animals like Canadian wild geese that occasionally inhabit the space are described both as cute and as to belong to the place. Hence, the closeness to both her own domesticated animals and the various wild animals give meaning to her rural life.

Her meaning of nature is also strongly connected to her animals as the time she spends in the woods and the fields is either on horseback or when she walks her dogs. Experiencing nature by exercising with her animals is the way Sabine relaxes:

... that is my relaxation [...] riding in the woods, not seeing and hearing anything is of course the icing on the cake (Ger. I-Tüpfelchen) ... (my translation) (1.8)

I find this statement of not hearing and seeing very crucial, both for the meaning of nature and in considering the demanding and overstimulating world we live in today. Riding in the woods is for Sabine a way to escape her work and other duties and just live in the moment. Yet, she does keep her eyes open to the sceneries that are laid before her, and mentions how she observes changes in nature and how much she appreciates the beauty in different seasons and different times of the day, like the coloured leaves in the autumn and the sunsets at the end of the day. Also, she criticises that people drop their waste in the woods, saying that this is not what nature is for. Thereby she shows that she not only enjoys the benefits of nature but feels a responsibility for it and understands that the resources we get from it are not endless.

During our conversation, I agree with Sabine and also lament that many people seem to acknowledge the woods to be a garbage dump. There are also many other instances during the interview where we can relate to each other and confirm each other's experiences. From examining the conversation afterwards, I can detect two main keys to this shared understanding. We both grew up in the countryside and have similar childhood memories of playing in the woods. I believe that growing up in a rural environment is very decisive for our rural identities, which we both proclaim by talking about the advantages of country life and declare our aversions against big cities. As Sabine herself produces the rural-urban binary, I feel free to also share some memories related to that. How I longed to get away from the countryside when I was a teenager and dreamt of going to a big city like New York. And how I later realised how uncomfortable and trapped I felt when I lived in Berlin and therefore now long to move to the countryside again. Hence, our common rural background and identity

makes this interview into more of a conversation because we understand and can feed into each other's experiences. The second key point is that she now lives in the community that I grew up in and knows my family, so it serves as a ground to build arguments and examples on. Sabine uses for instance my sisters and my mother to reflect on gender relations in her community. So, there was really a bonding and an exchange between us that originates in common knowledge about rural life and this particular rural community.

By the end of the interview we talked about gender connected to rurality and whether or not the countryside is conservative. Again, Sabine produces a binary between the city and the countryside, saying that it is more anonymous in cities while here people gossip about her and her partner, especially older people who are interested in what other people are doing. She also thinks age to be a very decisive factor in the question whether people are conservative and live traditional gender roles. Still, she produces her village as a space where many homosexual people live and feel comfortable without being discriminated. Hence, it can also be pictured as a queer space alongside being a heterosexual space, but one that differs from the metropolitan LGBTIQ communities. Sabine proclaims not to be interested in these communities, although she went to some parties when she was younger, and dismissively describes them as "celebrating (Ger. zelebrieren)" their identities. She rather wants a calm and private life with her partner, animals and hopefully future children. Thereby she embraces the nuclear family concept and a woman's calling to be a mother. One could argue that she thereby adapts to the heteronormative ideals of society, but I do not want to produce the dichotomy of the heterosexual, monogamous and ordered nuclear family on the one side and the wild and hedonistic queer lifestyle on the other. There are just so many more life concepts and Sabine's is one that breaks up this binary. She and her partner live openly in a same-sex relationship, so in that they do not adapt to the heterosexual society. But they also do not follow the norms of the metropolitan gay scene. Consequently, they seem to simply have chosen the way they prefer to spend their life. Taking up the rural-urban binary again, Sabine concludes the interview with a very good summary of how she likes to live:

... everything always has to be about nature, animals, or peace and quiet, and not about fast, loud and [...] I can also go partying in the city every three months and loud and dancing and jumping ... that is then restricted to a couple of hours and then it is enough again for the next three months ... it is all too fast for me ... (my translation) (1.9)

3.2. Marie

... that is what constitutes rural life for me ... wide ... you are free ... you can walk wherever you want ... yes ... you go outside and you are in the nature ... yes ... and as I said before, the people also ... (my translation) (2.1)

It is very easy to talk to Marie about rurality and she is very enthusiastic about her rural lifestyle. This quote shows what I interpret to constitute two major parts of Marie's rural identity, which are nature and outdoor life, and the people in her community. As stated above, I wanted to talk to Marie because I was interested in her experiences within the field of agriculture which still is a very male-dominated environment. But it turns out that she talks much more about her village and its community. As I am also interested in the question of how to make the countryside attractive for people to live in and thereby to make it sustainable, it is very interesting to hear of the measures that are taken and the development that the village has undergone so far.

Marie grew up in Fürth, a village of about 1500 inhabitants in eastern Saarland, where she still lives with her parents. At the age of 10, she got a horse which was then accommodated at a nearby farm. The condition for her to keep the horse was to take care of all the related tasks but soon she also started to help out in other parts of the farm. She enjoyed the work so much that she decided to go into agriculture as a profession. Hence, it was her interest in horses that brought her into farming. Today, she owns several horses which, as she says, take up a lot of time. It seems that the horses are her greatest passion and an important part of her rural identity.

... I am a country person and that is the way it should remain [laughs] ... well, no, I grew up like this, that is what I am used to ... it has shaped me ... also through my hobby, through the horses ... (my translation) (2.2)

Her work in agriculture also feeds into her interests in animals and being active outdoors and she describes her job to be a calling.

...I already started to like it in the past and it is diverse and one is outdoors ... I am an active person anyway [laughs] ... and I would say that it is rather a calling ... (my translation) (2.3)

Marie's rural life shows that, although also admiring the beauty of the landscape, nature and animals are for her much more about living and working with it than in it. Throughout her

private and working life she has gathered a lot of knowledge around crops and animals, and the performances of this highly constitutes her being a rural person.

What really stood out in the interview was her appreciation for her rural community, especially people's mentality.

It is the mentality of the people ... nothing is going that fast, well I have been in Berlin and in Paris with my class and also on vacation, er, I do not like that hustle around me and those loud noises and ... well ... for instance Paris is also rather not clean [laughs] ... in our village everything is very idyllic [...] everybody knows everybody, I think that is extremely good ... you know each other and help each other ... (my translation) (2.4)

Consequently, she produces a rural-urban dichotomy and contrasts her community to what she knows from her visits to a metropolitan city like Paris. She further says about her community:

They are warm ... sometimes straightforward, but I also like that ... I mean they are not so sneaky ... they tell you directly face-to-face if they have a problem ... at least most of them ... yes, helpful, gentle, easy going, familial [...] when you need something then someone knows a person who knows a person and that person has what you need ... [laughs] ... I do not know if it is also like this in the city ... where everything is moving so fast ... (my translation) (2.5)

Again, when Marie starts to describe the people in her community, she contrasts it to the city, assuming that life there is very different to her own in the countryside. Especially her village Fürth plays a dominant role in her narrative and she tells me a lot about the initiatives that have been taken to make the village sustainable and attractive for current and future generations. It started with a small company who built its storage at the outskirts of the village. The local mayor supported this, tried to develop it into a business park and succeeded. Today, there is a small industrial area and also young entrepreneurs who have shown a lot of commitment to the village. Exhibitions are held twice a year to inform the inhabitants of Fürth about what kind of business are located in their village, as these are smaller family-run companies one would otherwise not know about.

When the elementary school was about to be closed, the citizens fought against it and many volunteered in renovating the school building. Hence, there is an ongoing dynamic in the village which Marie explains to be much due to the local mayor who also helps people to find housing:

... if a teenager or rather I mean a young adult is looking for flat-sharing in Fürth then he is also doing some intern research ... who wants to move, which houses are vacant ... he has rather many contacts and also helps [...] he has helped three of my friends to find a flat-share in Fürth [...] so he tries to keep the young people in the village ... (my translation) (2.6)

Additionally, Marie talks about an acquainted family which has moved to Fürth from a smaller town close by.

... by now they have fully slid into the country life [laughs] [...] it is also nice to see that everyone is not just moving into the city but also comes back ... (my translation) (2.7)

In spite of all these positive developments, Marie laments that it has become harder both for underaged and elderly people to live in Fürth and other villages in the area. Children and adolescents often lack other young people to play and spend time with as there are not so many children living in the village any more. Hence, they are dependent on parents to give them rides to meet friends and exercise their hobbies. For older people, the fact that there are less and less shops in the villages makes it hard to manage.

... then for the elderly people I think it is extremely difficult with the shops ... I have now also noticed that in our village ... the shops always go [...] those corner shops that we had in the past are vanishing more and more ... they are almost not there any more [...] they also move towards the cities then ... (my translation) (2.8)

Apart from the fact that she appreciates the rural lifestyle and the people, it is her family which really roots her. Marie acknowledges that she plans to move out from her parents' house but as she is place-bound because of her horses, it needs to be somewhere close by. I get the feeling that she is not very keen on moving and would rather stay as close as possible to her family.

... we are also very family-oriented ... my brother is often visiting, he has now bought a house exactly opposite of ours [laughs] ... and then being completely away, that ... no [...] I am pretty sure that I am not a globetrotter ... maybe to see something else sometimes, sure ... but emigrate without my family for instance, that would be horrific [laughs] ... I would die, that is not possible ... so no, I could not do that ... (my translation) (2.9)

Consequently, her community, friends, the horses and her family constitute her home. So I think the most important reason why she appreciates rural life and her particular village is

because it feels like her one and only home and no other place can compete with that. However, Marie says that she could imagine to move away to another rural area later on but never to a city. So, the rural will always be a criteria for her to be able to feel at home.

In line with Sabine's interview, I can also relate to Marie and her feeling of home and belonging to this space. In the conversation with her I develop what I think is the personal reason why I write this thesis.

... so I think this is partly the reason why I write this thesis, because you are away and in a different environment and then one realises the own ... the own identity, where one comes from ... (my translation) (2.10)

In this interview I also admitted how much I miss the countryside and we develop similar childhood memories. One day before the interview I took a walk with my parents in the woods and talk to Marie about the memories that occurred to me then.

... I passed through there yesterday and thought "that was in the past so ... that was so important for me" ... there I knew every bend of this small path, and it was such an adventure, that was our world then ... we then build our own world there ... that was damned important ... (my translation) (2.11)

Hence, the way we grow up is very important for our identities which also becomes visible when we talk about gender identity. Marie says that her parents shaped her in being a girl by dressing her in girls' clothes and thereby encouraged her to perform femininity. The way she performs today is constructed in two different ways, depending on the occasion.

... when I go out I think "okay, when I go out then I can dress up for once" ... that I do, that is typical for a woman ... at work or in the stable I am rather the tough one ... (my translation) (2.12)

In her job she is the strong woman who can do dirty and heavy work while she shows her 'feminine side' when she goes out by wearing high heels, make-up and straightened hair. It seems important to her to take these opportunities to dress up as work clothes and rubber boots make her everyday outfit. Marie also admits that she wants to show that she cares about her looks although she is in farming because there are prejudices about women in farming being unkempt. At the same time she refuses to comply with a certain image of women but presents herself as dominant in relationships and as very capable to handle the male sector she is working in.

... when it comes to relationships, I have to be honest, there I am really [...] dominating ... so if I want something then I want it, that my partner cannot do anything about [...] I do not let anyone, how should I say, tread on my toes ... I have my own mind [laughs] ... (my translation) (2.13)

... in my first apprenticeship year we were three girls and 22 boys ... of course they were looking strangely at us in the beginning but there were no prejudices and we had a good time with them and integrated [...] on the external courses some people stared but well, one is above such things [...] I like to work with men, honestly ... I like the calmness and ... and yeah, with women, I have that sometimes in the horse stable ... that is really stressful ... (my translation) (2.14)

So, women's presence in the agricultural field is not perfectly natural but, as she and the other girls assimilated to the boys (which is not questioned), Marie does not feel excluded or uncomfortable. The opposite is the case, she distances herself from other women by claiming to prefer to work with men while working with women is rather stressful. To conclude, I argue that Marie constructs her identity as being very feminine when it comes to her looks which she contrasts with her active, independent and dominant self. She does not express these attributes to be male but my interpretation is that she simply does not evaluate them to be 'typically female'. In line with Sabine, Marie disengages herself from the gender norms that she acknowledges in her environment and resists to be influenced by them, especially through her professional life and her dominance within relationships.

3.3. Andrea

... the brain is the biggest genitalia that we have ... (my translation) (3.1)

I start with this quote by Andrea as I really like it and because it is decisive for her gender identity. However, I will go into more detail about that later on and begin to lay out the circumstances of her childhood and youth that she conveys as crucial for her development.

She tells me that she grew up in Bexbach which is a small town about five kilometres from Websweiler. Being born in the 1950s, the working class community her family belonged to processed the war traumas they were suffering from and tried to build up a decent life again. Andrea's father was a craftsman and the mother a housewife who earned some extra money for the family by working as a domestic servant in other people's houses. So due to the traumatised environment and poverty of the family, neither the financial nor emotional and social circumstances were particularly favourable.

... and solely through this social impact I would rather describe myself as a reclusive person because of that ... well, and than these inner difficulties came on top of that ... which means, for me it has always been a life in a social exclusion and at the same time in an inner exclusion ... (my translation) (3.2)

Moreover, she further describes her closest environment to be clouded by a resonant melancholy that showed very little empathy because it was burdened with its own sorrows. Andrea claims that people in her generation have not been brought up to go inside themselves to ask who they are and what they want, which makes it difficult to learn to know oneself.

Due to the lack of empathic adults in her surrounding and the ability to learn to know herself, she was for several decades not able to grasp and understand her feelings around her gender identity. Andrea was unhappy and could not feel any curiosity or lust for life as both her gender identity and self-consciousness remained undeveloped.

... there was simply such an underlying feeling “I am different, I do not belong” ... and it was also ... actually more or less an adaptation and usage of cliches [...] and subliminally one always has the feeling to be worthless, not to belong anywhere and well ... partly also to feel dirty [...] and there one can see how important language really is ... that you need an environment that talks to you and that was simply not the case for me ... (my translation) (3.3)

She began her transition about 10 years ago which was not easy as she had developed a very strong self that was hard to break. But with help of her therapist she managed to find words for her problem and discovered the transition as a solution. She expresses her feelings about that as follows:

... it was like a clearance (Ger. Befreiungsschlag) [laughs] [...] after I had finally found words for my core problem, from that moment on I felt good and went straight on ... (my translation) (3.4)

During that period there were things that Andrea describes as helpful while others were hard and challenging. Her family and her whole circle of friends chose to break with her which she explains to have been extremely painful because she did not only had to leave her old self behind but also her life and all the people in it. At the same time she claims that it was her will and her self-consciousness concerning her professional skills which no one could destruct and therefore helped her to keep up and fight. As she works as a journalist she has to go out and cannot hide from society. Moreover, she links her skills of being able to write, listen and articulate as crucial to survive in it. Both in terms of communicating with the world

outside but also with herself.

Connecting the transition to her rural environment, Andrea describes nature to be excessively important in the process to learn about herself.

... I need nature ... nature somehow gives me ... a lot [laughs] ... in the past I was a couch-potato (Ger. Stubenhocker) but today I prefer to be outside ... all the spare time that I have I am outside with my camera or explore some hidden paths that I have not seen before ... it sometimes feels like a childlike curiosity and I also think that it is much about that ... because I could not develop that in the past I now try to catch up on that little by little although it is sometimes not possible but nature ... there it is possible for me then ... there is no one who stares at me because just to be stared at causes a sense of shame in that situation, and shame blocks everything ... and outdoors there is nothing ... and that is always very liberating [laughs] ... (my translation) (3.5)

Hence, nature helps Andrea to detect and develop things about herself that she was not able to do as a child. Also, there she can escape from the criticising and often rejecting gaze of society. However, she has learned to tackle people's reactions on her being a self-identified trans-woman. While she tried to explain herself to people in the past, today she does not have the urge to take responsibility for other people's insecurities any more.

Despite the rejection that she feels there are two things that made her stay in the region, her work and the fact that she feels rooted in this space. However, later she confesses that, if she could choose again, she would move.

... nowadays yes ... because actually this is where also this rural mentality comes in ... what I somehow noticed in the past ... this restrained behaviour ... and this sneakiness ... it has shaped me somehow ... I still feel it today everywhere in my surrounding ... and if I could escape this, today I would say "yes ... I would do it" ... (my translation) (3.6)

So, now that Andrea has learned to know herself better, she can also evaluate the people around her in a different way. Based on that she describes the gender norms she observes in her surrounding as follows:

... it is all totally patriarchal, chauvinistically marked somehow also ... if I look at Bexbach and at those ladies and gentlemen in my previous surrounding ... they still live according to patterns that they probably inherited from their great-grandparents ... that is ... I rather think that it is more easily passed on in the countryside than in the city ... (my translation) (3.7)

Consequently, Andrea produces a difference between the countryside and more urban

areas that influences the gender norms in society. Yet, although she sees all these deficits in her own rural community, she would not necessarily want to move to a city but just change the region to start afresh.

Andrea has been seeking contact to other self-identified trans-people in the beginning of her transition but soon realised that their life stories were just too different. Many of them had much more opportunities to go out and experiment with their gender identity than she had because she grew up in a rural environment with no space for that.

... so among urban people who then had the opportunity to express themselves sometime despite of all conventions, it was okay ... there at some point it more easily went into certain directions ... but here in this region ... no [laughs] ... (my translation) (3.8)

And today she is not in the least interested to enter an urban or any other trans- or queer-community.

... "I am actually totally normal ... why should I then go into this grey zone" ... (my translation) (3.9)

The most important thing for Andrea seems to be that she has found her identity, the way she wants to live, but also answers to why she has developed a dysmorphic gender identity in the first place. She explains it to be an intertwining of biological factors and societal structures. In Andrea's case a brain trauma in early childhood led to a disturbance of the hormone balance which resulted into her not being able to develop an unambiguous gender identity. This became intertwined with social structures and norms that further influenced her development. As I found it hard to follow Andrea in her psychological and biological explanations on her gender identity I asked her to clarify in an email as I wanted to be sure to get it right. In the email, she distinguishes her trans-identity or transsexuality, a term that is also common, to transgender, where the problem is rather the gender norms in society which the affected people reject. However, in her case, the biological requirements started the process. Therefore she pictures the brain as our biggest genitalia because of its great influence on the development of our gender identity.

Throughout the interview I get the impression that Andrea is more in accordance with herself and how she feels than most people I have met before. At one point when she talks about losing her family, her voice expresses the pain that she must have felt back then and most probably still feels. But apart from that, she shows an appetite for life but also a fighting

spirit which she mentions to have gained since her transition.

Nowadays, as she tells me in the beginning of the interview, she fully identifies as female. It is important to her to not just adapt gender norms which she formerly did in performing masculinity but to be authentic, to be herself and to continue to learn about herself. And with these words she ends the interview:

... “do I now somehow imitate as I did in the past just adapting male roles ... do I now imitate female roles ... any role models or something like that ...” ... no, that is authentic now ... and with this assurance somewhere it is now a bit fun somehow [laughs] ... that is well ... there are development processes that you usually make during puberty ... thankfully I am able to do them now at almost 60 [laughs] ... but it is never too late to learn [laughs] ... (my translation) (3.10)

3.4. Thomas

Thomas offers a very linear narrative of his life which can roughly be divided into three parts. He starts with his childhood in Websweiler, continues with his professional career in the Bundeswehr (German Army) and ends with his passion for hunting which he exercises intensely especially since he retired.

Thomas grew up during the late 1960s and 1970s when the mines were still operating and miners came with buses from other parts of the Saarland to work in the local pit. His parents ran the only pub which was the centre of the village’s social life, so Thomas noticed everything that was going on, as both the locals and the miners from outside visited the pub. Also, he went to a school in the village where four class levels were taught in one classroom. As Thomas never went to any kindergarten, he spent his whole childhood up until the age of seven or eight in and around the village.

... and I got to know that ... a meadow is green and a stream is wet and can also get very cold ... what I want to say is ... if I later ... if I had went to the kindergarten ... I have always thought about whether I lack something that the others have learned ... today I would say “I do not think so” ... today when I ask one of my comrades “is that a beech or an oak?” ... he cannot distinguish a beech from a birch ... (my translation) (4.1)

Thomas shows that growing up in the countryside does not only mean to play in the woods and in the fields but to actually learn about nature and use what it has to offer.

... and nature was back then ... necessarily I was connected with it because ... my

parents said at that time “if you want to have horses ... we have a stable, we have no hay and no straw, but it needs to be done” [...] and therefore we needed to go to Höchen (neighbouring village) for instance to mow a small meadow, hay needed to be forked, the way you know it from today how it is done with the tractor, which is done within four hours ... back then it needed to be done by hand [...] so I knew what nature meant ... what should be in the hay for the horse, the Haflinger ... I dealt a lot with it, also with biology, what it can eat and what not ... they are not as sensitive as many other horses ... and therefore one always has to deal with nature a bit ... (my translation) (4.2)

Hence, knowledge about nature seems to be connected to a past where one was compelled to be close to nature as there was much more manual labour to be done than today. But also answering to the animals and their needs required dealing with the nature of different plants. I can detect the nostalgia Thomas feels when talking about his childhood by which he produces a certain rural idyll which is part of the past and now gone. Thomas also mentions nature in terms of beauty when he describes how he was sitting on the attic as a child and looked down at the endless rapeseed fields below him. For him, it is necessary to learn about nature to make use of it but at the same time he loves to admire its scenery.

By describing his childhood and later adult life, Thomas reveals how important the village is to him as a home. Even though he now lives in a larger village some kilometres away, he is still rooted in Websweiler where his rural identity started to form.

Hence, the village is constructed to be both idyllic because of its rural nature but also because it has always been his home.

... back then we had nature, we went out in the back into the meadows, there was the high grass ... there was the stream, we dammed the stream ... we made some fun and dammed the stream [...] during the summer we were always outside ... my mother said to us, unwritten rule, “at six o’clock when the bell is ringing you come back home” ... (my translation) (4.3)

The affection for his home and the identification with the rural space also become visible when he talks about his professional life in the Bundeswehr. Thomas did his compulsory military service in Baden-Wuerttemberg, a federal state south of the Saarland, which was a totally new experience to him.

... and that was an experience for me when I was really away from the village for the first time [...] from Sunday night until Saturday away from the village, away from home ... totally different situation ... (my translation) (4.4)

So far he had only been living in and moving close around his childhood village which

consequently made up his whole world. Now he faced a lot of different people from the whole country with whom he lived very closely together. After his basic training in Baden-Wuerttemberg he returned to a military base in Zweibrücken, a town about 25 kilometres from Websweiler, where he was employed in logistics due to his commercial training. As he liked the Bundeswehr, Thomas stayed after the compulsory time was finished and had training in different parts of Germany, in an internal school for logistics in Bremen and in the leadership academy in Hamburg. His first arrival in Hamburg he describes as follows:

... when I [...] got off in Hamburg-Altona in 1986 I first looked around and said “where am I ... what is that here?” ... that was a train station, I had never seen anything like it ... Homburg’s (district town that Websweiler belongs to) train station, or the times you have been in Karlsruhe or Mannheim, that was already big but Hamburg-Altona, then the main station in Hamburg ... that was enormous ... (my translation) (4.5)

In his story about the Bundeswehr, Thomas constantly refers back to his rural roots, and despite his travels within Germany, his home remains the location where he always comes back to and he also manages to stay quite close during his whole career.

... in the end always in a circle of ... about 150 kilometres around ... still back to my home ... so I could always say “I was never displaced away from home (Ger. heimatfern)” ... I was not in Eckernförde ... I know the site of Eckernförde but I was never displaced as far as that, and therefore it is good and I am still ... integrated in the village ... (my translation) (4.6)

He would have had the chance to be based in other parts in Germany but chose to stay in Zweibrücken, both because of his partner but also because he needed and still needs the closeness to the village.

During his time in the Bundeswehr, he was always forced to be outdoors but rurality and nature played a subordinated role. However, when Thomas took his hunting license thirteen years ago, he started to engage more with nature again. His interest for hunting did not come with his rural background but with the Bundeswehr. A colleague took him out to hunt for the first time which Thomas describes like this:

... I went out with him on his raised hide, we did not shoot that evening, I remember that very well, but for me I think that was ... yeah, sitting outside, in the nature again ... that is really wonderful ... but agriculture or silviculture or something like that I did not think about ... also not about the shooting ... it was just that evening ... just nature, sitting outside in the reed, have peace, he did not

talk, his dog did not talk, finally no one who talks ... and just sit and watch ... and there I said “wow, this is perfect” ... (my translation) (4.7)

Consequently, it was not the wilderness or the hunting itself which made Thomas take it on, but the peace and quiet in nature. This developed into a real passion, not only in terms of relaxation, but also because he can use and expand his knowledge about nature. Thomas loves to work on strategies to attract wild pigs which for instance involves maize cultivation. Moreover, there is the appeal of unpredictability:

... it goes up and down, and that is what I like about hunting ... it is always ... it is unpredictable ... it is just like [...] “hunting is something where suddenly from one second to another ... like many other things can change, that is what is nice about hunting” ... and you can observe for hours with the wild boars ... like tonight ... that was an experiences where I say “alas, slept for one second and it was over” ... I was too slow ... that is part of it, that’s what also makes it interesting and fun ... (my translation) (4.8)

So, hunting is a challenge and an adventure. This is why Thomas prefers to go for wild boars as they are smart and therefore hard to hunt. It requires strategy, cunning and observation to find them. Also, as wild boars cause a lot of damage on the fields, it is necessary to keep their numbers down which increases his motivation further.

Moreover, he emphasises the diversity within hunting, which are silviculture, agriculture, knowledge about birds and fish but also game diseases.

... hunting is not only shooting, I also said that ... it is much much more that is part of it ... there are much more ideas behind it ... and there are also nice things involved ... (my translation) (4.9)

Thomas denies hunting to be a hobby but constructs it as compensation and a relaxation from work. Hence, despite the excitement, it is first and foremost nature and the calmness which makes it invaluable for him.

... there was just too much strain at work back then and in the barrack ... too much suffering where you were just happy to sit on the raised hide in the evening, and then you tried to relax ... you tried it with nature [...] to find peace, and then I also found it ... (my translation) (4.10)

It is apparent that it is not just the hunting itself that Thomas identifies with but the hunting area around his childhood village in particular. This is where he belongs, what he is a part of, also in terms of hunting. Therefore it was important to him to join the local hunting

group back when he started.

... „[...] when I have my hunting licence then I will ask H. if I can come and hunt in Websweiler” ... because that is for me ... our village here ... our rural landscape ... there I know everything, I know the places today, I know exactly what is going on here ... how the water is running ... (my translation) (4.11)

From Thomas' life story, I can see that it has always been very dominated by men. He grew up with a brother and worked in the Bundeswehr which is very male-dominated, the same can be said about hunting. Therefore, I ask him about gender norms within hunting, wondering whether it still is very masculine. He tells me that there are more and more women joining both in hunting and in the hunting horn group.

... it is not a man's business only ... for heaven's sake, it is not, you should ... there are many women joining in the last couple of years ... but maybe it is also, that's my personal opinion ... but maybe it is also a temporary fashion ... (my translation) (4.12)

Thereby he suggests that women might start to hunt due to a temporary fashion and that one contributing factor is showing off in expensive hunting clothes. When it comes to the hard work, like gutting the animals, he acknowledges that there are women who do it themselves while others let their husbands do it. From all that Thomas tells me concerning women and hunting, I can see that hunting is still very masculine. Women are not unwanted but are expected to adapt to the mentality that is already there and caring about appearance is not part of it.

3.5. Georg

... and I always wanted to come back to the village ... I grew up here, people know me, and also the homosexuality is accepted here ... everyone knows it, it is ... we have no problems here ... not at all, zero ... on the contrary ... I have the feeling that one is more popular in quotation marks among some people ... compared to a heterosexual ... (my translation) (5.1)

Georg grew up in Websweiler but left the village as soon as he was of age to do his compulsory military service. After that he lived in Munich for a nursing training and subsequently also stayed there for a while to work. Then he moved to Ulm, and afterwards to Wiesbaden to get the professional training to become a theatre nurse. Since the beginning of the 90s, he works as a theatre nurse at the university hospital in Homburg which is the district

town that Websweiler belongs to. When Georg started to work he chose to live in Homburg and bought a flat, but was never happy there. As quoted above, he always wanted to come back to live in Websweiler. He tells me that his family owned a small house in the village that they rented out, so he could move there and lived alone in the house for a long time. Now, he is happily married with his husband and they live in it together.

His family has always been important to him and Georg describes the close relationship he always had to his parents and his brother. He was especially close to his mother which makes her death four years ago all the more painful.

... my mother died four years ago at 68 ... that has er ... phew ... well that has ripped out a part of my heart I have to say ... because that ... [starts to cry] sorry ... she could not witness any more how I met R. [his husband] ... how we fell in love ... how we married and everything was so great ... it would have been nice if she could have been a part of it but ... (my translation) (5.2)

This shows how emotionally attached he was to his mother but also how much he values his family. Although the parents had problems to accept his homosexuality when he first came out, they always supported him afterwards, especially the mother. Georg would also love to have a family of his own. He and his husband have now been together for about four years and from what Georg tells me I can see that he hopes for it to last forever. He always wanted children but that never happened.

Georg also constructs the village as his home to be very important by coming up with memories of how he grew up. He describes how much time he spent on the farm at the outskirts of the village when he was small and how he was there during the potato harvest. With no machines to help them, the women of the village were employed to pick and sort the potatoes that were also part of their salary. Georg describes this time as an idyll, also by contrasting it to the city.

(Note : The farm Georg is speaking of was back then the farm of my grandfather. Therefore he presumes common knowledge when he talks about my grandmother and father.) ... your grandmother she has then always when it was milking time, then you got the milk directly from the cows ... all fresh ... or she made coffee and then there were sandwiches and everything ... you ate in the open, that was ... that was nice ... it was not like in the city ... here you were in the open, that was wonderful ... and then I was there every day somewhere ... together with your father and there and that was ... well was just ... was a very great youth ... there were no computers, that did not exist and that did not exist ... (my translation) (5.3)

This idyllic life partly crumbled when Georg came out to his parents which he describes as a great hurdle. They sent him to a psychologist because they believed that homosexuality is a sickness that can be cured. Hence, Georg got therapy and even hypnosis until the therapist made it clear to the parents that he cannot cure their son because he is not sick. As a consequence, the relationship to the parents was a little disturbed for a while so that he even temporarily moved out. But as stated above, his sexuality was soon no problem within the family any more. At work however, it took a while until he was open with his sexuality. Before he came to the hospital in Homburg, he concealed his homosexuality. So always when there was some kind of party at work, and his colleagues expected him to bring his girlfriend, he came up with excuses why she could not make it. However, when he applied in Homburg, Georg decided to stop pretending.

... and I was tired of hiding and always looking for excuses ... as I already said at work back then and there or some excuses or having fake girlfriends ... no ... at some point I said "I am who I am, and I am the way I am, and those who do not like me like this can leave it" ... (my translation) (5.4)

Today, Georg is glad to have made this decision. He has faced some prejudices throughout his professional life but in general he is met with understanding. He even seems proud to be gay because, as he says, it is something special compared to the random heterosexual. He also observes that women have become more attached to him since he lives openly with his sexuality and even talk to him about their marriage problems and ask for advice.

When Georg was younger, his female friends even liked to go out with him to gay bars and discos as they appreciated to dance and have a good time without any men getting intrusive. However, it was not so easy to be homosexual in 1980s Germany when Georg was in his twenties, especially not in this very rural area. He tells me of §175 in the German criminal code that was not abolished until 1994 which penalised sexual contact between men. So when he started to visit the gay scene in Saarbruecken, Georg always had to make sure no one saw him. While living in Munich for some time during the 80s, he experienced a freer and open life as a homosexual in a great city like that. Before he even moved to Munich, Georg dreamt of the big city.

In the past I always wanted to go to the big city some time ... most preferably to Berlin because there we had relatives and then I thought "Berlin ... and then into a high-rise, at the very top ... and in the city" ... but that was back then also more a thought of escape because I knew from relevant newspapers and that and that ...

that it is easier for homosexuals in big cities or ... that there are much more premises and meeting places or that you do not need to hide like in the countryside ... but this wish was soon gone when I realised ... that it is also accepted here and that the people ... do not say anything against it ... (my translation) (5.5)

Hence, Georg realised that he does not have to leave the space he loves to live in as he can be himself living in the village. Already back in the 80s, there were several homosexual men living in Websweiler. Georg tells me that they knew of each other but just did not talk about it. Today, he says, there are seven or eight gay men and two lesbians living in the village which he deems to be a lot considering that there are about 300 inhabitants, and they are all accepted.

... were the others who are also gay here and so ... then we grouped together a bit and everything and ... we are popular in the village and we really do not have any problems ... maybe the people rant behind our backs but somebody always rants or so but ... when we married that was ... the people sent cards and ... it is really accepted here in this small village ... everybody also knows everybody as there are so few people ... (my translation) (5.6)

Georg's husband joins us at the end of our conversation and points out that he is astonished that homosexuality is so accepted in the village. Nevertheless people are quite open-minded, so it was natural for Georg to stay in the place where he grew up and everyone knows him.

This is also where he started his career in travesty in the mid-80s. Georg and another man from the village began by giving a carnival speech in the local pub, the following year they did a men's ballet which Georg argues to have been very unprofessional but the audience loved it. Then they started to perform as different female singers.

... that was scorned in the past men in women's clothes or so somehow that was not normal ... and here in our small village with back then 280 inhabitants ... we are not many more today ... so we started to do this at carnival ... (my translation) (5.7)

Hence, in the beginning Georg restricted his performances to the carnival season. He tells me of his biggest performance where he sang *My Way* in German while removing his make-up and transforming from woman to man. This was always very emotional for Georg as the message is to "live your life" and the people could get a glimpse of him in real life.

After several shows at carnival and also at private parties where he and his stage-partner

had been invited, they formed a group with official shows where one had to buy tickets. Their first big show was in Websweiler's local pub but later the group also had performances at village and town fairs in the rest of the Saarland, in the Black Forest and in France.

From the examples of performances that Georg tells me about, I can detect that it was crucial to play with and uncover gender norms. Besides *My Way*, he also performed *I am what I am* where he enters dressed as a male soldier and transforms into a woman in the course of the song. He further did a performance where he was half man and half woman while always standing sideways to the audience so that they could only see either the female or the male side. The way I understand Georg, performing as both man and woman while singing songs like *My Way* and *I am what I am*, is a way of showing that both the feminine and the masculine are part of himself. Especially considering the performance of *My Way*, it seems important not to hide behind another character but to reveal something of himself.

Playing with gender norms on stage seems to be very appreciated among the villagers, so I ask Georg and his husband how they evaluate gender roles and norms in the village in everyday life. I got the feeling that they did not really know how to relate to the question but told me that they could not detect any norms of being typically female or male. And in line with Sabine, they refer to their own relationship which is not dictated by gender norms as they are two men living together. Yet, they also get the question who is the woman and who is the man in the relationship, so it seems that some people want to place them in a heterosexual norm.

3.6. Crucial Themes

Throughout the interviews I could detect certain themes and means of constructing rural identities. Those were both overlapping and contradictory or merely discussed in different ways. I have chosen to concentrate on the four main issues of nature, rural idyll, time and space, and gendered and sexualised space, as they provide key material. Thereby one has to remember that despite structuring the material into four main issues, there is an overlap between these points which I will attempt to visualise.

3.6.1. Nature

It became visible in every interview that nature was among the first things that my dialogue partners thought of in their rural lives. I can trace an aesthetic and emotional

relationship to nature which, as Sabine puts it, is part of her well-being. She needs nature to feel well, where she can go for a ride while shutting the world out and absorb its sensations. Marie also describes nature as a sensual experience by referring to the scenery of the landscape and its colours. Both Marie and Sabine mention nature's trait of wideness which makes them feel free to move and go wherever they want. Thomas emphasises the beauty of the landscape and the fields that he just loved to watch and admired when he was a child. Georg also takes childhood memories to express his feelings for nature. Thereby he depicts the sensation of accompanying the adults in the village for harvest and then sit in the open to have lunch. For Sabine, Marie, Thomas and Georg, nature was a part of their childhood as they played in the forest and fields close to their homes. For Andrea, who describes herself as having been a couch potato as a child, nature is important now as she is both very curious about it and because it helps her to explore her own emotions which she was unable to do before her transition.

Thereby, Andrea visualises the strong connection between the body and its performances within space. This relationship has often been referred to as associating "nature and rurality with the fit and healthy body" that spends time on "forms of rural leisure" (Little and Leyshon 2003). From Thomas', Marie's and Sabine's narratives I can detect that they very much meet this description. They have all been rambling in nature as children, while today Thomas is active in nature as a hunter, Sabine exercises by herself and with her animals in the woods and Marie refers to herself as an active person who enjoys to be in motion outdoors, both in her work as a farmer and in her leisure time riding her horses. Thereby, their bodies all release energy but also gain energy from being outdoors in nature. Andrea has become an outdoor person who likes to walk in the woods now that she is able to know and express herself. However, nature also offers her to get rid of the human gaze on her body which, as Andrea say herself, always produces a sense of shame. In nature there is no one who judges her and she can therefore be free in her body and gender performances. These experiences can be linked to Michael Leyshon's article on young people in the countryside which I discussed in the chapter on theories. Those adolescents also walk in the nature to escape the rules and gazes of the adults in the village (2011). To conclude, nature offers a site to free the body, both in giving possibilities to move and to have breathing space from people's critical looks on non-normative bodies.

It is visible that all my interviewees evaluate activities in nature and the sensual

experiences of it as relaxation. What stands out is their need for peace and quiet, as for instance both Sabine and Thomas value that there are no noises and no one who talks. Naturally there are also sounds in nature but they are not perceived as disturbing. On the contrary, for Thomas nature acts as a compensation for his stressful everyday life in the military barracks. At the same time that nature offers relaxation, it also implies work for a lot of people living in the countryside, whereas the most prominent example is farming (Little and Leyshon 2003). However, work and relaxation do not necessarily have to be contradictory, which is demonstrated by Marie and Thomas for whom nature also means physical labour. As a child, Marie learned that she had to work in order to keep her horses. The fact that she then went into farming shows that she enjoys working in and with nature and that it is also a form of relaxation for her. Thomas tells a similar story of how he and his brother had to mow hay and cultivate food for their horses. Certain parts of hunting are also concerned with labour as it, amongst other things, involves agriculture, silviculture and evisceration of the game.

Moreover, nature is very much involved with animals and knowledge about them and the whole natural life cycle. Marie and Sabine spend a lot of time, work and love on their horses. This becomes evident as they talk a lot about them, especially Sabine who gives a lengthy and detailed description of how she got her horse and how she works with it. You can detect that they both have a lot of knowledge about horses, whereas Marie also shows knowledge about cows when she tells me about current problems with diseases. Andrea who does not speak about animals and only a little about nature still demonstrates her interest in knowledge about them as she comments on a bird during our walk that she can recognise just by hearing it twitter. Thomas shows that animals have been crucial for him in getting to know nature as a child. Especially in his narrative, knowledge about nature becomes very dominant. He talks about all that he has learned about animals, the forest and plants during his childhood which other children that grew up in more urban areas did not learn. Today, he learns a lot about agriculture and silviculture connected to hunting. In Linda Marie Bye's text on hunting in rural Norway, knowledge about hunting is referred to as unspoken knowledge that is being passed on from father to son (2003). This is different for Thomas as there were no hunters in the family and knowledge about hunting is very much spoken of during the interview. He mentions plants, birds, fish and wild diseases but also strategies around hunting. By the way he talks, one can see that he values this knowledge very highly. In looking closer at both

Thomas' interviews and Bye's articles about hunting (2003, 2009), I argue that there is a connection between hunting, knowledge about nature and animals, and masculinity. Linda Marie Bye refers to physical labour, challenges and hard drinking as part of hunting. All of which make it into a masculine space (2003, 2009). However, this does not seem to align with Thomas who rather emphasises mental labour by gaining knowledge and developing strategies. This is also mentioned by Bye who acknowledges that strength is now often replaced by "administrative and managerial control" (2009). Hence, controlling and mastering nature is decisive, whether it is through physical or mental labour.

To conclude, nature means a lot to my interviewees. It helps them to relax and feel comfortable and provides a space to spend time with themselves and animals they love. However, they also give back to nature by learning about and caring for it. Although contested and not generalisable, as there are many ways of operating it, agriculture, forestry, and also hunting are considered as preservation of the countryside. Moreover, Sabine shows how much she cares about nature by having strong feelings about people throwing waste into the woods, arguing that this is not what nature is for. Therefore, my interviewees identify with nature as an important part of their lives and use it to construct their rural identities.

3.6.2. Rural Idyll

The theory of the rural idyll I have discussed earlier claims it to be an untrue and idealised picture of the past whereas the present and the future are seen to be full of uncertainty (Little & Austin 1996). Two of my interviewees indeed produce the past as a rural idyll by referring to their childhood. However, also the present and the probable future are described in positive terms in the interviews. Moreover, I can also detect references to a rural crisis, of the past, present and future.

I will start by discussing the ways the rural idyll is constructed which, amongst other things, is done by the notion of home. Thomas and Georg, both born and raised in Websweiler during the 60s and 70s, identify the village as their home. For Thomas, who has been travelling around in Germany due to his duties within the army, Websweiler has always been the place he went back to. It was important to always stay close to home and to not be 'heimatfern' as he says in German, which means to be away from home. Although he is not living in the village any more but close by, it has remained his true home. It is important for him to have his hunting ground there and to remain integrated in the village life. Georg does

not use the word 'Heimat' but Websweiler seems equally important to him. He used to live in cities outside of the Saarland during his early adult years and later also in the small town of Homburg, located not so far from Websweiler. But he felt the village to be his home which is where people know him and like him the way he is. Thereby it is crucial to him that his sexuality is accepted among the villagers. The village as his home is also linked to a strong connection to his family which he expresses by stating the good relationship that he always had to his supportive parents and beloved nephews who also grew up in the village. Marie is very attached to her village Fürth which is particularly marked by the close relationship to her family members and her horses who all live there. Moreover, all her friends live in the region which is why she believes that she would feel very lonely if she moved away.

Within the British context, it has been argued that the countryside represents the true home of the nation where traditional values are obtained and therefore induce a certain national identity (Neal 2009). I could not detect this in my interviewees, however, I argue that a local identity is visible which can especially be seen in Andrea and Marie. Although Andrea does not describe her childhood or the present community as idyllic in any way, she still feels rooted in the region. With Marie I also talked about the region and the mentality of its people which we both appreciate to be very open, talkative and familial. Hence, the rural identity of my interviewees is also a regional identity. As Germany consists of federal states, their specific cultures and identities are very distinct and can also be connected to the German idea of 'Heimat'. According to the German dictionary, 'Heimat' means to be either born and raised or to feel at home in a certain country, region or place because one has spent a lot of time there (Heimat 2016). Hence, 'Heimat' is generally connected to a spatial location. However, it does not describe the place but a feeling of belonging and is therefore also part of one's identity (Larkey 2008). In the case of my interviewees, I claim the notion of 'Heimat' to be applicable as a sense of belonging to their village or to the region, but not the nation.

Another feature of producing the rural idyll is by referring to the rural-urban binary. As I stated before, I never mentioned that binary in the interviews but all of my interviewees brought it up. Sabine and Marie, having both lived in rural Saarland during their whole life, construct the rural-urban binary in a very similar way. They make the countryside into an idyllic place which is clean, green and peaceful while the city is portrayed as dirty, full of people, loud and stressful. Thereby it is noteworthy that they do not speak badly about urban people and their lifestyles but just refer to the urban space as not suiting them. And yet, Marie

wonders whether people are as helpful and friendly in the city as she knows it from her rural society because she cannot imagine this to be as easy in the fast pace of urban areas. Thomas and Georg, who unlike Sabine and Marie have lived outside of the Saarland and in more urban areas, do not produce such a strong dichotomy and also disrupt it. Thomas, who has been stationed all over Germany and also in cities, recognises that the environment is different but does not make any negative comments. Georg has also been living in various cities where he could see that homosexuality was more accepted during the 80's. However, when it comes to the present, he disrupts the rural-urban binary and claims that homosexuality is equally accepted in his village which is why he prefers to live there. Hence, both Thomas and Georg disrupt the rural-urban binary in the sense that they have lived in various spaces which have shaped them and their perception of environments (Beetz 2015). Moreover, Georg's experiences break the prejudice about homosexuality being more accepted in urban areas than in rural areas.

The rural community is valued in different ways. Sabine, who says that she is not interested in the community, seems to simply appreciate that there are so few people living around her. This impression is reinforced by her mentioning that there are too many people in cities and that she also prefers places with few people when she is on holiday. At the same time, Marie, Thomas and Georg like their community because of the people and their mentality and also feel a sense of belonging to it. This becomes visible in Thomas' narrative when he talks about how he grew up in the village with his parents running the only pub where he could witness everything that was going on. He also makes it clear that he is integrated in the village community. Even though he does not live there any more, it is crucial to him to still belong. Georg and Marie are the ones who directly address their impressions of their community. Similar to the results of a study on safety in rural communities among New Zealand and UK women, they both describe people in their village to be open and friendly (Little, Panelli & Kraack 2005). In this study people also mention their community to be "helpful", honest and that "everybody knows everybody" (Little, Panelli & Kraack 2005). And these are the exact words that Marie uses. Georg goes more into the communities' relation to him being homosexual and doing travesty. He emphasises how much people love his performances which shows that they are open-minded. Also, he mentions several times how much homosexuality is accepted and approved of.

Marie does not only illustrate how much belonging she feels to her community but also

how its solidarity and the commitment of its major makes the village sustainable for the future. Thereby my analysis contradicts Doreen Massey's notion about 'sense of place' (1994) which expresses that people sink "...back into the comfort of Being instead of forging ahead with the project of Becoming" (1994). In Fürth, the villagers live their 'sense of place' by volunteering so that the local kindergarten and primary school can remain open. Also, the major is running projects to encourage people to settle their private and professional lives in the village. This has proved to work as companies are establishing businesses and people are moving there. There is a lot of village life with festivities but also open house days where people can get information about the local businesses. So, all in all, Fürth is a good example of how the rural space can be made sustainable that is by having competent and engaging leaders and a sense of belonging together which makes things happen. However, Marie also mentions the downsides that threatens the future of her village, especially the quality of life of children, adolescents and elderly people. As there are less and less children living in the village, they often do not have others to play with. Young people suffer from the poor public transport which makes them dependent on parents and grandparents to drive them to friends and hobbies. At the same time, elderly people face disadvantages because the shops in the village vanish, leading to a need of support for doing their shopping. Sabine has similar experiences and thoughts that she also connects to her own future. Webweiler does not have a single shop, not even a bakery and it has been like that for quite some time. The woman who lived in her house before had to move because she could not take care of herself any more. So, although Sabine would love to stay in the village forever, she wonders whether that will be possible when she and her partner are older.

In contrast to the rest of my interviewees, Andrea rather produces a rural crisis than a rural idyll, both of the past and the present. I argue that this is both connected to class and her being a self-identified trans-woman. She grew up in a poor working class family which was suffering from war trauma. This has had a huge impact on Andrea's development as the parents had no resources to give empathy to their child. Moreover, Andrea claims that the current young generation cannot understand the feelings of their grandparents' generation when it comes to the aftermaths of the war and therefore leaves this area. Today, it is her body performance that restricts her access to many parts of society (Skeggs 1997). Andrea observes that people are insecure and do not know how to behave towards her. Moreover, in contrast to Marie, she experiences people to be dishonest and disregarding already before her transition.

Although Andrea claims to be rooted in the region, there do not seem to be any feelings of belonging to the people in the community. Hence, there is a huge gap between the feelings that community induces to what nature offers her. While the latter frees her body and mind, the former limits her freedom.

To conclude, different people can make very different experiences within the same region, both depending on age, class and gender. Thomas and Georg, who are of the same age, picture their childhood as a rural idyll while Andrea, growing up at about the same time, suffered in her traumatised and poor environment. Also, the former have passing bodies which gives them unrestricted access to their community. Meanwhile, Andrea is not passing and therefore has a troubled and constrained relationship to society. Marie and Sabine, who are from a younger generation, both describe the rural idyll but are at the same time aware of the current and future problems in the rural space. Hence, the past, present and future of a particular rural community can at the same time be constructed as idyllic and problematic depending on the individual positions and experiences of the people.

3.6.3. Time and Space

As many researchers proclaim, space can never be regarded without its intersection with time (Foucault 1986, Halberstam 2005, Massey 1994). This becomes highly visible in my interviewees as time is a crucial aspect in framing their narratives. Thomas and Georg who are both in their fifties identify strongly with their past and use memories of their childhood to produce their rural identity. For Georg, the past is decisive, both when it comes to his rural identity and his sexuality and travesty activities. He dwells in nostalgic memories about playing outside and spending time on the farm close by and, in interaction, we recalled that we both played at the stream that runs through the forest close to Websweiler. His memories on how it was to be homosexual in the 80s are not equally idyllic because one had to hide as it was prohibited and still regarded as an illness by many people. However, at the same time, the travesty was well received although, as Georg himself remarks, men in women's clothes were a complete taboo back then.

Thomas is very detailed in the descriptions of his childhood which reflects the idea of a past where people had knowledge about nature that is mostly lost today. He illustrates that by referring to what he learned about the forest and its animals as a child that today's children do not know any more. Hence, he idealises the past as better than today's society when it comes

to closeness to and knowledge about nature. Thereby, he both produces a rural idyll of the past and his own rural identity.

Marie and Sabine also refer to memories but do not pronounce as many and these are also not as decisive for their rural identities as they are for Thomas and Georg. As mentioned before, I am close in age to Marie and Sabine, so we produced similar childhood memories in our conversations. Marie and I shared stories about how we played outside and that it meant a lot to us. Also, Sabine proclaimed that she always played outside as she grew up close to a forest. My conversations with Marie, Sabine and also Georg therefore show how we produce memories in collaboration with each other and feed into each others' narratives to confirm our rural identities.

In Andrea's narrative, memories did not so much reflect her rural identity but the particular historic circumstances that she grew up in. The preceding Second World War had had a great influence on her childhood as she pictures her whole environment back then as traumatised by it. She produces a world of despondency, despair and struggle which gave no promises of improvement. It strongly influenced Andrea in the way that she withdrew from people and could not develop a sense for herself. At the same time it marks her view on her environment which she regards as an involuntary community that, as a result of the war, struggled with reconstruction work until the 1970s. According to Andrea, this rendered people incapable of developing any knowledge about their own emotions. Although Georg and Thomas were born at about the same time and in the same area as Andrea, the war did not play any role in their narratives. However, Thomas refers to history in terms of the mining that was still a crucial industry in the 60s and tells about the miners coming to the village every day to work in the pit.

Regarding the narratives of Thomas, Andrea and Georg, it is interesting to see how different their experiences of the same time and area are. I argue that the differences in this case are much due to class. Thomas and Georg did not refer to the class or economic situation of their families but one can detect that they were not struggling as Thomas family could afford a horse and Georg's parents owned at least two houses in the village. However, Andrea's parents struggled to manage, both financially but also with their emotions which they eased with alcohol. The reflected way in which Andrea refers to her family background and environment shows that she is well aware of the significance of her class background when it comes to the development of her gender identity. Hence, my interviews illuminate the

intersections of time and space with both age and class but also with gender which will be discussed further in the next chapter.

3.6.4. Gendered and Sexualised Space

In the interview with Andrea, she gives me a very reflexive explanation of gender roles, claiming that they are totally irrelevant because they are not natural but an imitation of role models. However, I argue that they become relevant because people live them, so I talked with my interviewees about gender roles and norms in their communities. I am aware of that the term *gender roles* is not used within current gender studies, but it is part of everyday talk and that is why I use it in the interviews. In my material I can detect that my interviewees mostly talk in terms of binary gender roles in relation to each other. Marie describes the gender roles in her community as mostly following the traditional concept of women staying at home and taking care of the children while the husband works outside of the home. However, in some couples she sees the division of roles to be the other way around. Sabine and Georg both deny that gender roles are of any significance to them because they live with a same-sex partner and thereby link gender roles to sexuality and imply that they only matter in heterosexual relationships. Sabine argues that she believes gender norms to be very much connected to the generation one is born into and that today's young heterosexual couples have more equal relationships than the previous generations. Andrea, on the other hand, claims people to be still living according to the highly patriarchal patterns of their great-grandparents which she believes to be a signifier of rural spaces. The fact that Marie naturalises heterosexuality by universally talking about heterosexual relationships without referring to them as heterosexual, Georg and Sabine draw on their same-sex relationships when talking about gender norms, while Andrea is very aware of the ruling gender norms because she does not conform to them, shows how important it is to be aware of features like age, sexuality and gender as they highly affect how people make meaning of their lives and their surrounding.

Many of my interviewees also mention appearance as a signifier of performing gender, interestingly however only in connection to femininity. Marie describes how she tries to make an effort to dress up in feminine clothes, wears make-up and nice hairstyles when going out, both for herself but also to contradict the farmer-stereotype. She acknowledges that she wants to accentuate her femininity and that it is part of her being a woman. At the same time, Andrea and Thomas statements on the subject correspond to research among rural communities and

farming where “fashionable and hyperfeminine appearances were seen as ‘unsuitable’ ” (Little 2007). Andrea takes a dismissive attitude towards hyperfeminine style that she claims to be an imitation of Hollywood films while Thomas makes it very clear that wearing expensive clothes for hunting, which he sees many women do, is not valued within the hunting community.

Hence, conforming to gender norms is much involved with the body passing in different spaces. Sarah Ahmed describes passing as an “act of assuming an image that constitutes the subject” (1999) which means that our body tells the surrounding a story about us that they produce according to certain values and norms. So in order to be ‘read’, one’s body needs to conform to certain gender standards to be ‘intelligible’ (Butler 2006). But how about bodies that are not intelligible according to gender norms (Ahmed 1999)? And is it always clear which body is intelligible and which is not? Ahmed takes travesty as an example of destabilising the intelligible body and revealing the act of passing, and at the same time argues that passing involves much more than just the acting but “complex social and psychic mechanisms” (1999). In comparing my two interviewees Georg and Andrea, I can agree with Ahmed. Georg, who has been doing travesty since the mid-80s has always felt welcome in doing that and feels a belonging to the village as a man who is wearing female clothes on stage. I argue that this is because it is clear to his audience that he has a male body who is ‘just performing’ femininity by acting different female figures. So the body itself is never questioned, which makes it pass. Hence, travesty is to play with gender roles, and by its obviousness it is not threatening any gender order. It is different for Andrea who illustrates herself that she can be seen as an ambiguous body. She depicts the uneasiness of people that she meets in her daily life especially reacting to her male voice. Moreover, Andrea thinks that many are uncomfortable in meeting her because that uncovers their own inner conflicts. Hence, her body triggers uneasiness but the origin of this is to be found in people themselves. Nevertheless, her being a self-identified trans-woman makes people refrain from her which restricts Andrea’s access to her community and opportunity to occupy space (Skeggs 1999). Andrea’s situation clearly illuminates the passing mechanisms and the desire to identify and distinguish bodies. The fear, which her ambiguous body creates, serves these mechanisms (Ahmed 1999).

Sabine and Marie do not struggle with their passing but they are aware of their bodies and what they do within spaces. Sabine acknowledges that her girlfriend is more masculine and is

therefore often seen as 'the man in their relationship'. She describes her own appearance as more girly and I argue that it makes her pass more easily than her girlfriend. Marie knows that she needs to be tough and practically dressed at work, so she conforms to that. At the same time she is aware of the prejudices against women in farming and therefore makes an effort to pass as very feminine in other contexts. I claim that Thomas is the one who passes most easily in the rural space as he matches the ideal of rural masculinity. He is a cis and heterosexual military man whose body is strong and has learned to endure rough circumstances. Moreover, he has a close relationship to nature that he both controls and uses as means of relaxation (Little & Leyshon 2003).

Referring back to the chapter on the rural idyll and how my interviewees construct the relationship to their communities, one can see that it is closely related to the passing of the body within the space. Georg, Sabine, Marie and Thomas all feel comfortable and a belonging to the people. They are met with open and friendly attitudes because their bodies are recognised and understood. However, Andrea is not welcomed because her body deviates from the norm. Hence, she cannot develop a positive feeling towards the people in her community but sees the cracks in the idyll.

Considering the passing of the body in the rural space, I also want to take a closer look at gender norms and passing within the fields of farming and hunting. Marie acknowledges that women do not correspond to the male norm within agriculture but claims that she does not feel disadvantaged. Rather, by arguing that she prefers working with men to working with women she approves of the structures within the farming sector. Previous research has argued that agriculture demands fit and resilient masculinity (Little 2007) and that there is a clear division of tasks between men and women which can be challenged by women taking on male tasks but not the other way around (Woods 2010). Some even go as far as framing agriculture as a male space only while women are degraded as merely helpers (Kazyak 2012). Marie disproves this notion as she is a trained farmer and employed as a fully adequate member of staff. I argue that one has to reconsider the idea of modern farming as a masculine space because new technology and the shift from family farms to agricultural holdings has changed the required qualifications. Marie has to manage the technology of milking robots and to have knowledge of veterinary medicine rather than being strong which is a shift that has also been acknowledged in research (Bye 2009).

Similar developments can be traced within hunting. While Thomas tells me that there

were no women in hunting about 40 years ago and barely any when he started to hunt thirteen years ago, now more and more women get involved. The way Thomas talks about it shows that they are not unwelcome but deviate from the norm and have to prove themselves more than any man who is entering the space. I argue that this originates in established gender differences. Thomas describes that some women do the hard work that is part of hunting while others let their husbands do it. This shows that it is generally not expected from women to be capable of doing hard work. Moreover, Thomas constructs women as being interested in fashion and connects it to their interest for hunting, arguing that some of them show off in fancy hunting clothes but have no skills. Hence, my interpretation is that there are norms of having knowledge, being skilled and willing to do hard and dirty work which one is expected to fulfil. And as there are prejudices about women to be less interested in nature and hunting and to be physically weaker than men, it is harder for them to prove themselves. Hence, female bodies have come to pass more easily within the agricultural field than within hunting where women's presence is relatively new.

Thomas resists the idea that hunting is a male space on the grounds that there are also women engaged in hunting. This shows that he is not aware of the gender norms that circulate within the space. Similar resistances can be detected in other interviewees. Georg and his husband argue that they cannot observe any gender norms within their community and also that there are no people they would identify as typically feminine or masculine. I did not ask further questions at this point but from what they say I understand that they are not aware of the structural gender norms that circulate around them.

While Thomas and Georg show resistance in referring to gender norms in their society, Sabine and Marie do so in the effect gender norms might have on them. The former resists the idea that there could be any connection between her performance of femininity and her gender, claiming that it is more about preferences and upbringing. Moreover, Sabine says that she does not feel the need to adapt to any gender norms and is consequently not doing it. Likewise, Marie shows resistance by denying that she is influenced or tries to correspond to any feminine gender norms. Hence, Georg, Thomas, Sabine and Marie can all clearly not see the hidden gender norms that surround them as they are so normalised. Moreover, I could feel that they all had difficulties to talk about gender and resisted the idea that it is of any importance to them. It shows that they all more or less conform to these norms and do not have any problems to pass.

Moreover, as Foucault argues that “as soon as there is power relation, there is the possibility of resistance” (1989), the resistance they show illuminates the unequal power relation that exists between me and the interviewees in this situation. I am the one who has more power as the researcher who decided on the topic of conversation. Therefore, parts of the power that they have is exercised as resistance. Hence, resistance can be interpreted as just a certain kind of power (Heller 1996). Consequently, the resistances in the narratives both say something about my interviewees’ perception of gender but also about how power and resistance work in interaction.

Andrea also shows resistance but in contrast to the others, she denies my proposal that it has been very decisive to her that she grew up in a rural space. Yet, when it comes to gender she demonstrates a great awareness of the powerful gender structures in her community and their influences on her life as she does not comply to them. In one instance, however, she shows similar resistance as Sabine which is their distancing from urban queer communities. They both do not feel any belonging to those spaces which I argue is because they do not consider themselves queer. Hence, a queer or LGBTIQ identity is not given just because one is homosexual or trans (Gagnesjö 2014).

Still, I aim to offer the possibility of constructing this particular rural space as a queer space, not measured by any self-named queer spaces but in producing an alternative queerness. Research that constructs the rural space as a heterosexual space claims that homosexual identities are mostly marginalised from the social life of rural villages. Moreover, in a study on homosexual people in rural Australia it is shown that many homosexuals visit metropolitan areas to consume a homosexual lifestyle and thereby enforce their homosexual identities (Gorman-Murray, Waitt & Gibson 2012). I argue that this is not the case in my interviewees Georg and Sabine who live in same-sex relationships but are not excluded from village life and also do not have the need to affirm their homosexuality by consuming a particular lifestyle. Rather, I claim that one can identify with being homosexual in many different ways and in Georg’s case one can observe that he both identifies strongly with being gay and a rural person (Gammerl 2015). As Halberstam argues, LGBTIQ people do not necessarily live very different lives to heteronormative people and I see that this is what Sabine, Georg and Andrea are doing (2005). Sabine and Georg both live in steady relationships and support the value of the nuclear family while Andrea considers herself ‘normal’ and does not feel to belong to any pronounced queer groups.

By constructing the rural space as a queer space, I do not only think of LGBTIQ people within the space but of lifestyles that oppose traditional heteronormative gender norms and relations that have been discussed in the previous chapter on the sexualised rural space. In framing the rural space as a heterosexual space, Jo Little has argued that rural women are defined by their roles as mothers and carers for family and community (2003). Both Sabine and Marie contradict this notion as they do not have any children and pronounce that they do not like to engage in domestic tasks. Andrea has children of her own but does not live as a part of that family any more. When it comes to the norm of marriage and the nuclear family (Little 2003), I have to conclude that none of my interviewees conform to that. Georg is married, Andrea has children and the rest of them is neither married nor a parent. As people both adapt to and shape the spaces they move into, the queerness of my interviewees contributes to the queerness of the space. Also, I challenge the rural-urban binary by claiming that urban and rural areas are equally heterosexual at the surface which supports its heteronormative structures but that they both inhabit a range of different sexualities, gender identities and queer lifestyles.

V. Conclusions

My analysis illustrates that rural identities can be constructed in different ways and by various means. One can further conclude that, in this case, they are highly informed by intersections of age, class, gender, the body, and sexuality. Moreover, the interviews show that intersections of my interviewees' and my own memories have also been productive in constructing rural identities.

Sabine's narrative illuminates that nature and animals, the absence of people and peace and quiet are decisive for her rural identity. Moreover, she is the one who produces the strongest rural-urban binary by completely dismissing cities and the lifestyles they imply. Hence, the overall picture of her rural life is very positive and idyllic. I argue that it is first and foremost her passing normative body that makes her feel comfortable in the space but her sexuality is also decisive for how she places herself within the rural framework, both in terms of gender norms and family life and in distancing herself from queer urban life.

For Georg, I see sexuality as the most crucial factor in his narrative, but also the body, gender and age. He mostly values his rural village due to its people and the encouragement he gets, both in terms of his homosexuality and travesty shows. Unlike Sabine, he really

struggled when he was younger as masculine homosexuality was prohibited and labelled as an illness. By mostly using his sexuality and the notion of home to constitute his rural identity, he sketches the past as problematic but constructs a personal rural idyll of the present. Today, his homosexuality is recognised and accepted and Georg passes very well due to his cis body and normative appearance when he is not on stage.

In line with Georg, Thomas is very attached to his childhood village which still constitutes his home. Also, his narrative circles strongly around hunting and knowledge about nature and both wild and domestic animals. I argue that due to Thomas' age, gender and body, he is a highly normative figure within western rural spaces and conforms to many traits of modern rural masculinity that includes physical fitness, technical knowledge and a strategical and controlling manner of dealing with agriculture, hunting and silviculture. That allows him to identify with rurality in a positive and undisturbed way. However, due to the privileges he enjoys, he misses the understanding of ruling gender norms which do not make the spaces that he moves in equally accessible to everyone.

Marie, being a woman in farming, realises that her gender and body is not the norm within the agricultural field but claims that it is no problem for her to fit in and that she likes to work in a male-dominated environment. Hence, her rural identity is not clouded in any way but she produces a strong rural identity by praising her village and its people, describing her active outdoor life both at work and in her leisure time with her horses and contrasts this life to the picture of a more noisy and dirty urban life. Thereby she produces a strong rural idyll, especially in terms of the mentality of the people.

Andrea however, in contrast to all the other interviewees, constructs her rural space more as a rural crisis. Due to both her poor and working class family background and the time she grew up in, as well as the troubles with her gender identity and non-normative body, she has and still does experience the space in a different way than the others. In her narrative, childhood was not idyllic but a traumatic and lonely time. Unlike Marie, she does not see people as being open-minded but sneaky and I claim that the insecurities and consequent rejections she meets make it very hard for her to feel welcome. Therefore her associations to this rural space are rather negative. Still, she feels a sense of belonging to it because it is where she has her roots. Moreover, she appreciates nature because it allows her to be herself and escape human gaze.

The occupation with the social structures of rural spaces and the lives of individual people

has lead me to realise that the countryside offers many possibilities of doing valuable research and that so much more can be done. In examining rural identities, I focused much on gender, the body and sexuality. The issue of ethnicity did not come up in the interviews because all my interviewees correspond to the white norm and consequently have no troubles with that. Hence, although I did not choose to focus on it, it is also very relevant here. Considering Sarah Neal's argument that there is a connection between national and rural identity and that European rural spaces are constructed to be predominantly white, I think it would be interesting to look more into ethnicity connected to the countryside (2009). Also, the question of rural spaces and class, which I only touched upon, seems very relevant to discuss further as the notion of the rural idyll and the rural space as a heterosexual space for nuclear families is a middle-class concept that render many people's lives invisible (Little 2003).

Research on rural spaces is not only interesting for the academic field of gender studies but also for the sustainability of the spaces themselves. The question of sustainability and what can be done to foster that within western rural spaces has been with me since the beginning of my research. But apart from addressing it as one question in some of the interviews, I had no opportunity to go further into it as it would have gone beyond the scope of my thesis. However, what I got to hear induced certain questions about sustainability and age that would be important to examine further. How is elderly and younger people's situation in the countryside today? What would they need to get more quality of life? Also, a more general approach to sustainability would be interesting considering the current rapid urbanisation all over the world which causes a desolation of rural spaces. From a gender perspective, one could ask whether and how a more equal and diverse countryside could slow down urbanisation. Also, what kind of politics of i.e. gender, class and ethnicity would be needed for that?

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Appendix 1: Images



(Liquid 2015a)

A close-up on the Saarland



(Liquid 2015b)

The Saarland in relation to the whole of Germany

Appendix 2: Original Quotes from the Interviews

1. Sabine

1.1. ... Das ist optimal. Ich würde jedes mal wieder in so ein Kaff ziehen [lacht]

...

1.2. Ich bin Frau, voll und ganz [...] im Grunde genommen sag ich ja immer Frauen sind schon dafür da Kinder zu kriegen [...] Obwohl ich nicht sage eine Frau muss kochen und putzen und nicht arbeiten gehen. Das auf keinen Fall. [lacht] Weil ich zum Beispiele koche auch gar nicht. Von mir aus könnten wir die Küche zumauern. Also darüber identifiziere ich mich nicht. Eher so die Mutterrolle ist für mich das Frauendasein bestimmend ...

1.3. ... jetzt bei uns, da wir ja in einer gleichgeschlechtlichen Beziehung leben [...] rein von Empfindung her ist halt einfach alles gleichberechtigt ... bei uns macht jeder alles ... wir gehen bei arbeiten ... es J. kocht gerne, ich hasse kochen [...] wenn ich muss muss ich auch [lacht] ... so typische Sachen sind halt schon ... es J. ist ein bisschen größer wie ich und packt halt ein bisschen mehr an und da bin ich dann doch mehr Mädchen [...] es J. macht zum Beispiel den Garten und ich bin eher für drinnen ... aber das hat ich glaub ich einfach was mit Vorlieben zu tun ... das würd' ich jetzt gar nicht aufs Geschlecht beziehen ... ist ja bei uns eh nicht so ... obwohl es halt rein optisch ... bei uns sagt man ja auch „J. ist ja doch so eher der maskulinere Typ“ ... ich weiß gar nicht wie oft ich schon die Frage bekommen habe „ist J. bei euch der Mann?“ ... da hab ich gesagt „wenn bei uns einer der Kerl ist dann bin ich das“ [lacht] ...

1.4. ... wo dann jemand sagt „Ihr Mann“ [...] oder Patienten auch fragen „ja, sind Sie verheiratet?“ , „was schafft denn Ihr Mann?“ ... vor 10 Jahren hätte ich dazu einfach nichts gesagt und das überspielt ... und heute sage ich „meine Frau“ [lacht] ... also mir ist das ziemlich egal mittlerweile was irgendjemand denkt und ich passe mich auch ... natürlich in gewisser Weise muss man sich ja integrieren und sich anpassen [...] aber ansonsten fühle ich mich da jetzt auf mein Geschlecht bezogen nicht in irgendeine Rolle gedrängt ...

1.5. ... also mir ist es schon wichtig, ich brauche das, ich will hier rausgehen und direkt im Wald sein mit meinen Hunden ... ich finde das genial dass ich hier rausgehe und direkt bei meinem Pferd bin ... das ist schon ganz bewusst und das gehört schon dazu [...] ich würde mich als kleiner Bauerntrampel selbst bezeichnen und niemals als Stadtkind [...] ich bin ein kleines Landkind ...

1.6. ... weil uns beiden klar war es darf nicht in einer Stadt sein, es soll nicht zu

groß alles rund rum sein. Jo, es sollt halt schon ländlich sein weil Hunde, Pferd ... ich meine das weiß man ja schon das man das alles mag und liebt und nicht... das Stadtleben geht für mich ja gar nicht... das ist mir alles zu schnell und dann werde ich ganz schnell desorientiert ...

1.7. ... Saarbrücken, da seh ich schon direkt: häßlich. Ich bin aber auch total anti-Stadt, war ich aber auch schon immer [...] so ne Stadt wie Berlin ... Das ist für mich verschwendete Zeit, mich interessiert das nicht [...] Dann muss ich erst mal einen ganzen Stadtplan gucken wie ich überhaupt irgendwo hinkomme mit irgendwelchen Fortbewegungsmittel. So dieses ganze Schnelle... die Leute rennen nur an dir vorbei... alles ist total überfüllt... das ist für mich Stress ...

1.8. ... das ist halt meine Entspannung [...] im Wald reiten, nichts hören und nichts sehen ist natürlich das i-Tüpfelchen ...

1.9. ... es muss immer alles mit Natur, Tieren, oder Ruhe zu tun haben, und nie mit schnell, laut und [...] ich kann auch mal alle drei Monate feiern gehen in die Stadt und laut und tanzen und rumspringen ... das ist dann begrenzt auf ein paar Stunden und dann reicht es wieder für die nächsten drei Monate ... das ist mir alles zu schnell ...

2. Marie

2.1. ... das ist das was das Landleben für mich ausmacht ... weit ... du bist frei ... du kannst laufen wohin du willst ... ja ... du gehst raus und stehst im Grünen ... ja ... und halt wie gesagt die Leute auch ...

2.2. ...ich bin ein Landmensch und das soll auch so bleiben [lacht] ... ja, nee, ich bin so aufgewachsen, ich bin das so gewohnt ... es hat mich geprägt ... auch durch mein Hobby, durch die Pferde ...

2.3. ... das hat mir früher schon gut gefallen und ist abwechslungsreich und man ist draußen ... ich bin sowieso so ein aktiver Mensch [lacht] ... und ich würde eher sagen so Berufung ...

2.4. Es ist die Mentalität von den Menschen ... es geht alles nicht so schnell, also ich war schon in Berlin und in Paris mit der Klasse und auch schon in Urlaub, ähm, ich mag nicht diesen Trubel um mich herum und dieses Laute und ... ja ... ich sag mal Paris ist auch nicht gerade sauber [lacht] ... bei uns im Ort ist eben alles sehr idyllisch [...] jeder kennt jeden, das finde ich unheimlich gut ... man

kennt sich, man hilft sich ...

2.5. Die sind herzlich ... direkt teilweise, aber was ich auch mag ... also die sind nicht so hintenrum ... die sagen dann direkt wenn sie ein Problem haben ins Gesicht ... also die Meisten zumindest ... ja, hilfsbereit, freundlich, locker, familiär [...] wenn du was brauchst dann kennt der den und der den und der hat das ... [lacht] ... ich weiß nicht ob das in der Stadt auch so ist ... wenn alles so schnelllebig ist ...

2.6. ... wenn man als Jugendlicher oder ich sag mal junger Erwachsener eine WG sucht in Fürth dann tut er so teilweise auch ein bisschen intern recherchieren ... wer umziehen will, welche Häuser leer stehen ... der hat da schon sehr viele Kontakte und der hilft auch [...] der hat nämlich 3 Freundinnen von mir geholfen eine WG zu finden in Fürth [...] also er versucht auch schon zu gucken dass die jungen Leute im Ort bleiben ...

2.7. ... mittlerweile sind die voll ins Landleben rein gerutscht [lacht] [...] das ist auch schön zu sehen dass nicht nur alle in die Stadt ziehen sondern auch zurückkommen ...

2.8. ... dann für die älteren Menschen find' ich das mit den Geschäften extrem schwierig ... bei uns im Ort hab ich das jetzt auch mitgekriegt ... die Geschäfte gehen immer [...] diese Tante-Emma Läden wie wir sie früher hatten werden immer weniger ... die sind ja fast gar nicht mehr da [...] die ziehen sich auch schon so Richtung die Städte dann ...

2.9. ... wir sind auch sehr familiär ... mein Bruder kommt oft zu Besuch, der hat jetzt genau gegenüber ein Haus gekauft [lacht] ... und jetzt so ganz weg, das ... nein [...] also da bin ich mir ziemlich sicher dass ich kein Weltenbummler bin ... vielleicht mal um so was zu sehen, sicher ... aber jetzt zum Beispiel auswandern ohne Familie, das wäre für mich ein Horror [lacht] ... da würde ich sterben, das geht nicht ... also nee, das könnt ich nicht ...

2.10. ... also ich glaub das ist auch so bisschen der Grund warum ich diese Arbeit schreibe, weil man ist mal weg und ist in einem anderen Umfeld und dann wird einem so das eigene ... die eigene Identität bewusst, wo man herkommt ...

2.11. ... ich bin da gestern durchgelaufen und hab gedacht „das war früher so ... das war so wichtig für mich“ ... da hab ich so jede Biegung von diesem kleinen Pfad gekannt, und das war so Abenteuer, das war dann so unsere Welt ... wir haben uns dann so unsere Welt dort aufgebaut ... das war verdammt wichtig ...

2.12. ... wenn ich raus bin denke ich mir schon „ok, wenn ich fort gehe dann kann ich mich schon schick mache“ ... da mach ich schon, das ist typisch Frau halt ... auf der Arbeit oder im Stall bin ich eher der Robustere ...

2.13. ... Beziehungstechnisch muss ich ganz ehrlich sagen, da bin ich ja wirklich [...] dominant ... also wenn ich was will dann will ich das, da kann der Partner machen was er will [...] da lass ich mir eigentlich nicht, wie soll ich sagen, auf die Füße treten ... da hab ich schon meinen eigenen Kopf [lacht]

2.14. ... im ersten Lehrjahr drei Mädchen und 22 Jungs ... natürlich haben die erst mal ein bisschen blöd geguckt aber Vorurteile waren gar keine da und wir haben uns auch super gut mit denen verstanden und integriert [...] auf den Lehrgängen ist man teilweise ein bisschen schief angeguckt worden aber ja, da steht man drüber [...] ich schaffe gern mit Männern, ganz ehrlich ... ich mag diese Ruhe und ... und ja, mit Frauen, ich hab das ja im Pferdestall teilweise ... das ist wirklich stressiger ...

3. Andrea

3.1. ... das Gehirn ist das größte Geschlechtsorgan dass wir haben ...

3.2. ... und alleine durch diese soziale Einwirkung würd' ich mich eher irgendwo so als zurückgezogener Mensch schon dadurch irgendwo beschreiben ... ja, und dann kam halt noch diese interne Schwierigkeit dazu halt ... das heißt, es war für mich selber eigentlich immer so ein Leben in einer sozialen Abgekanzeltheit und gleichzeitig in einer inneren Abgekanzeltheit ...

3.3. ... das war einfach so ein latentes Gefühl „Ich bin anders, ich gehöre nicht dazu“ ... und es war ja ... eigentlich mehr oder weniger so ein Anpassen und benutzen von Klischees halt [...] und unterschwellig hat man eigentlich immer so das Gefühl von nichts wert zu sein halt, nirgends dazu zu gehören und ja ... sich zum Teil halt auch beschmutzt zu fühlen [...] und da merkt man halt wie wichtig Sprache eigentlich ist halt ... wo man ein Umfeld braucht dass mit einem spricht und das war bei mir einfach auch nicht da gewesen ...

3.4. ... das war wie ein Befreiungsschlag [lacht] [...] nachdem ich endlich für mein Kernproblem halt Worte gefunden hatte, ab dem Zeitpunkt war's dann gut und dann ging der Weg geradeaus weiter ...

3.5. ... ich brauch die Natur ... Natur gibt mir irgendwo ... ganz viel [lacht] ...

ich war früher so ein Stubenhocker aber heute bin ich am liebsten draußen halt ... also jede freie Minute die ich hab bin ich mit der Kamera draußen oder am Erkunden von irgendwelchen Schleichwegen die ich vorher noch nie gesehen hab halt ... das ist manchmal fast so wie diese kindliche Neugierde und damit hat's natürlich auch viel zu tun denk ich halt ne ... weil ich das früher nicht entwickeln konnte das versuch ich jetzt halt so peu à peu noch irgendwo draufzusatteln auch wenn das irgendwo manchmal net geht aber die Natur ... da ist es mir dann möglich halt ... da ist keiner der mich irgendwo blöd anguckt weil allein angeguckt werden erzeugt dann irgendwo in der Situation ein Schamgefühl, und Scham blockt dann alles weg halt ne ... und da draußen ist nichts halt ... und das ist immer sehr befreiend [lacht] ...

3.6. ... inzwischen ja ... weil da kommt dann nämlich tatsächlich auch diese ländliche Mentalität dann dazu halt ne ... das was ich früher halt so irgendwo mitbekommen habe also ... dieses Deprivierte ... und dieses Falsche ... das hat einen so geprägt irgendwo ... das spür' ich auch heut' noch überall so im Umfeld ne ... und wenn ich das loskriegen könnte, würd' ich heute sage „ja ... würd' ich machen halt“ ...

3.7. ... ist das Ganze total patriarchalisch, chauvinistisch irgendwo auch geprägt halt ... wenn ich mir nach wie vor so Bexbach so im früheren Umfeld mir die Damen und Herren angucke halt ... die leben immer noch nach Mustern wie sie es wahrscheinlich von ihren Urgroßeltern mit in die Wiege gelegt bekommen haben halt ne ... das ist ... ich glaube fast auf dem Land vererbt sich so was einfach leichter weiter als in der Stadt ...

3.8. ... also bei Städtischen die sich dann irgendwann mal trotz allen Konventionen dann versucht haben auszuleben, da ging das halt ne ... da ging das dann irgendwann besser in irgendwelche Richtungen halt ... aber das hier in dieser Region ... nee [lacht] ...

3.9. ... „Ich bin ja eigentlich völlig normal halt ... warum soll ich da jetzt noch da in diesen Graubereich da rein halt“ ...

3.10. ... „kupfere ich da jetzt irgendwo wie ich das früher gemacht habe halt Männerrollen einfach so zu adaptieren ... kupfere ich ich da jetzt irgendwo weibliche Rollen nach halt ne ... Vorbilder oder wie auch immer halt ...“ ... nee, das ist jetzt authentisch halt ne ... und mit der Sicherheit irgendwo macht's jetzt so ein bisschen Spaß irgendwo ne [lacht] ... das ist ja ... da sind Entwicklungsprozesse die macht man normalerweise in der Pubertät halt ... ich darf die jetzt Gott sei Dank mit fast 60 machen [lacht] ... aber es ist halt nie zu spät zum lernen [lacht] ...

4. Thomas

4.1. ... und ich hab das kennengelernt ... eine Wiese ist grün und ein Bach ist nass und kann auch sehr kalt werden ... was ich sagen will ist ... ob ich später ... ob mir das im Kindergarten ... ich hab mir immer überlegt ob ich irgendwas vielleicht nicht erlernt was Andere mir zuvor hatten ... würde ich heut´ sagen „glaub ich fast net“ ... wenn ich heute einen meiner Kameraden frage „ist das ne Buche oder eine Eiche?“ ... der kann eine Buche nicht von einem Birkenbaum unterscheiden ...

4.2. ... und die Natur, das war damals ... zwangsläufig war ich damit verbunden weil ... meine Eltern haben damals gesagt „wenn ihr Pferde haben wollt ... wir haben einen Stall, wir haben kein Heu und kein Stroh, aber das muss gemacht werden“ [...] und dadurch mussten wir halt nach Höchen zum Beispiel und haben kleine Wiesen gemäht, da musste Heu gewendet werden, also wenden wie du das auch kennst heute mit dem Traktor, mit dem Wender machen die das in vier Stunden ... wir damals, von Hand musste das gemacht werden [...] ich wusste also schon was das auch mit der Natur bedeutet ... was in dem Heu alles drin sein sollte um dem Pferd, dem Haflinger ... hab ich mich viel mit befasst, auch mit der Biologie, was es fressen kann und was net ... die sind nicht so empfindliche wie viele andere Pferden ... und dadurch mussten man sich immer mit der Natur auch so ein bisschen auseinander setzen ...

4.3. ... wir hatten damals die Natur, wir sind hinten raus in die Wiese, es war das hohe Gras ... da war die Bach, da haben wir die Bach gestaut ... da haben wir mal einen Spaß gemacht und haben die Bach mal gestaut [...] im Sommer waren wir immer draußen ... meine Mutter die hat uns, ungeschriebenes Gesetz, „18 Uhr wenn die Glocke läutet kommt ihr nach Haus“ ...

4.4. ... und das war für mich so ein Erlebnis wo ich das erste mal so richtig vom Dorf weg [...] von Sonntags abends bis Samstag weg vom Dorf, weg von zu Hause ... ganz andere Situation ...

4.5. ... als ich [...] 1986 in Hamburg-Altona ausgestiegen bin da hab ich erst mal um mich rumguckt und hab gesagt „wo bin ich denn hier ... was ist denn das hier?“ ... das war ja ein Bahnhof, so was hatte ich noch nie gesehen ... Homburger Bahnhof oder mal, wenn du mal in Karlsruhe warst oder Mannheim, das war ja dann schon groß aber Hamburg-Altona, dann Hamburg Hauptbahnhof ... das war schon enorm ...

4.6. ... letztendlich immer in dem Dunstkreis von da ... um 150 Kilometer um ... immer noch meine Heimat zurück ... also konnt´ ich da immer noch sagen „ich war nie heimatfern versetzt“ ... ich war nicht in Eckernförde ich kenn´ zwar den Stand in Eckernförde aber ich war nie so weit versetzt, und deshalb ist das auch gut und deshalb bin ich auch hier immer noch so ... integriert im Dorf ...

4.7. ... ich bin mit ihm raus auf seinen Hochsitz, wir haben an dem Abend nicht

geschossen, das weiß ich noch ganz genau, aber da war für mich denk ich mir ... ja Mensch, draußen sitzen, wieder in der Natur ... das ist doch richtig was Herrliches ... aber Agrar- oder Waldbau oder so da hab ich gar nicht dran gedacht ... auch nicht an die Schießerei ... ich war einfach nur an dem Abend ... einfach nur die Natur, draußen sitzen im Schilf, Ruhe haben, er hat nichts geredet, sein Hund hat nichts geredet, endlich mal Keiner der redet ... und nur sitzen und gucken ... und da hab ich gesagt „Mensch, das ist doch optimal“ ...

4.8. ... es ist ein Hoch und Tief, und das ist das Schöne bei der Jagd für mich ... es ist immer ... es ist unberechenbar ... es ist einfach wie [...] „Jagd ist etwas wo innerhalb von einem auf die andere Sekunde sich abrupt ... wie so Vieles ändern kann, das ist das schöne an der Jagd“ ... und du kannst beobachten stundenlang bei den Sauen ... wie heute Nacht ... das war so ein Erlebnis wo ich sag „ach, eine Sekunde gepennt, vorbei war's“ ... da war ich zu langsam ... das gehört einfach für mich dazu, das macht es auch interessant und Spaß ...

4.9. ... die Jagd ist nicht nur schießen, das hab ich auch gesagt ... es ist da viel viel mehr was da mit hintendran hängt ... es sind viel mehr Ideen hintendran ... und es sind auch schöne Sachen dabei ...

4.10. ... da war einfach so viel Anstrengung damals auf der Arbeit und in der Kaserne da drin ... zu viel Leid teilweise wo man dann abends einfach froh war mal auf dem Hochsitz zu sitzen, und dann hast du versucht abzuschalten ... du hast es versucht mit der Natur [...] die Ruhe zu finden, und dann hab ich die auch gefunden ...

4.11. ... „[...] wenn ich den Jagdschein habe dann frag ich den H. ob ich da oben in Websweiler zur Jagd gehen kann“ ... weil das war für mich ... unser Dorf hier ... unsere ländliche Umgebung ... da kannt' ich alles, ich kenn' ja heute die Ecken, ich weiß ja genau was los ist hier ... wie's Wasser läuft ...

4.12. ... eine reine Männersache ist das nicht ... um Gottes willen, ist es nicht, das darf ... es sind viele Frauen mit in den letzten Jahren ... vielleicht ist es aber auch, das ist meine persönliche Meinung ... vielleicht ist es aber auch so ein Modeerscheinung ...

5. Georg

5.1. ... und ich wollt immer wieder hier her in den Ort ... ich bin hier groß geworden, die Leute kennen mich, auch die Homosexualität ist hier akzeptiert ... Jeder weiß es, es sind ... wir haben gar keine Probleme hier ... gar nicht, null ... im Gegenteil ... ich hab das Gefühl man ist bei manchen Leuten beliebter in Anführungsstrichen ... wie jetzt ein Heterosexueller ...

5.2. ... meine Mutter ist vor vier Jahren gestorben mit 68 ... das hat äh ... puh ...

ja das hat ein Stück von meinem Herzen schon raus gerissen muss man so sagen ... weil das ... [fähngt an zu weinen] 'tschuldigung ... sie konnte nicht mehr miterleben wie ich den R. kennengelernt habe ... wie wir uns verliebt haben ... wie wir geheiratet haben und das alles so toll war ... wäre schön wenn sie dabei gewesen wäre aber ...

5.3. ... deine Oma die hat dann immer wenn gemolken worden ist, da hast du die Milch gerade gekriegt von den Kühen ... ganz frisch ... oder die hat dann Kaffee gemacht und dann hat es Brote gegeben und alles ... im Freien hast du da gegessen, das war ... das war schön ... das war nicht wie in der Stadt ... da warst du im Freien, das war herrlich ... und dann war ich auch da jeden Tag da unten irgendwo ... mit deinem Vater zusammen und da und da das war ... ja war einfach ... war eine ganz tolle Jugend ... es gab keine Computer, es gab das nicht es gab das nicht ...

5.4. ... und ich war es leid mich zu verstecken und immer Ausreden zu suchen ... wie gesagt auf der Arbeit damals oder da oder irgendwelche Ausreden oder Scheinfreundinnen zu haben ... nee ... irgendwann hab ich gesagt „ich bin der der ich bin, und so wie ich bin bin ich, und wer mich so nicht mag der soll's halt sein lassen“ ...

5.5. Ich wollte früher immer mal in die Großstadt ... am besten nach Berlin weil da hatten wir auch Verwandtschaft und da hab ich gedacht „Berlin ... und dann in ein Hochhaus, ganz oben ... und in der Stadt“ ... das war aber damals auch eher so ein Fluchtgedanke weil ich gewusst habe aus einschlägigen Zeitungen und das und das ... dass es in Großstädten für Homosexuelle einfacher ist oder ... dass es viel mehr dort gibt an Lokalen oder an Treffpunkte oder dass man sich nicht so verstecken muss wie aufm Land ... aber das hat sich ganz schnell zerschlagen als ich gemerkt habe ... dass es hier auch akzeptiert ist und dass die Leute ... da gar nichts dagegen sagen ...

5.6. ... waren die Anderen auch die hier schwul sind und so ... dann haben wir uns so ein bisschen zusammengetan und alles und ... wir sind schon beliebt im Ort und wir haben keine Probleme wirklich net ... höchstens die Leute schellen (schimpfen) hintenrum aber gescholl (geschimpft) wird immer mal oder so aber ... wie wir geheiratet haben das war ... die Leute haben da Karten geschickt und ... es ist akzeptiert hier im Ort in dem kleinen ... es kennt ja auch Jeder den Anderen bei den paar Leutchen da ...

5.7. ... das war ja früher schon verpönt ne Männer in Frauenkleidern oder so irgendwas das war ja nicht normal ... und hier bei uns in dem kleinen Ort mit damals 280 Einwohnern ... viel mehr sind wir ja immer noch nicht ... das haben wir an Fasching erst mal rübergebracht ne ...