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“But where are you really from?”

A qualitative study about young Afro-Swedes view on their own identity and sense of belonging

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study is to examine how young Afro-Swedes view their identity and sense of belonging in Swedish society, and whether they face challenges and how it affects their social inclusion. This is examined through eight semi-structured interviews with six women and two men who are all born and raised in Sweden. Furthermore, thematic analyses have been applied to the material. The two concepts that have been used to analyze and discuss the collected data is ethnicity and belonging. The results of this study indicates that young Afro-Swedes do not identify as Swedish mostly because society categorizes them as “immigrants”. There is a clear perception that Swedish people are all white, blond and blue eyed which they as black citizens do not fit into. Because of this, young Afro-Swedes have faced many challenges and some of them feel socially excluded. The challenges they have in common is racism and xenophobia which has negatively affected them in many ways. The result of this study also shows how social environment, skin color, religion, and residential area have a major impact on how Afro-Swedes choose to identify as well as their sense of belonging in Sweden.

Keywords: *Afro-Swedes, Swedishness, Identity, Belonging, Ethnicity, Inclusion, Exclusion, Immigrants, Second-generation*

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"So, here you are
too foreign for home
too foreign for here.
never enough for both."

– Ijeoma Umebinyuo, "diaspora blues"

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Purpose	3
2.2 Research questions	3
3. Theoretical framework	3
3.1 The concept of ethnicity	3
3.2 Ethnicity as a resource	5
3.3 The concept of belonging	5
4. Previous research	6
4.1 How Swedes and immigrants are categorized	6
4.2 Multiple identities	7
4.3 Social structures impact on identity and belonging	8
4.4 The relation between whiteness and discrimination in Sweden	10
4.5 Mass Medias roll in the exclusion of non-ethnic Swedes	10
5. Method	11
5.1 Qualitative research method	11
5.2 Semi-structured interviews	12
5.3 Delimitations	12
5.4 Selection of respondents	13
5.5 Data analysis	14
5.6 Ethical considerations	15
6. Results	15
6.1 The relation between Identity, belonging and Swedishness	16
6.2 Us and them	18
6.3 Social environment	21
6.4 The effect racism and dicrimination have on belonging	22
7. Analysis and discussion	24
7.1 The relation between identity and Swedishness	24
7.2 Young Afro-Swedes experiences with exclusion	26
8. Conclusions	28
9. Future research	29
10. References	31

1. Introduction

The composition of Sweden's ethnic population has changed a lot in a short period through immigration. Sweden started becoming a country of immigration in the 1950s when the country started gaining more labor migrants from Nordic and European countries. The changes in the ethnic structures however, became most apparent after 1980 when more immigrants were coming from countries outside of Europe and settling in Sweden (Törngren, 2020).

According to Statistics Sweden (2021) there are approximately 10 million residents in Sweden, 20% of those are foreign-born which is around 2 million people. Looking at the Swedish-born population statistics show that 6.5% were born in Sweden with two foreign-born parents and 7.7% were native-born with one foreign-born parent (SCB, 2021).

Research by Behtouis (2021) in Sweden has shown an overrepresentation of immigrants and their children in lower-level jobs, with poorer work conditions, lower wages, and a reduced amount of employment security. The urban areas of Sweden also have a pattern of economic and ethnic segregation. In the large cities of the country, where you can find many poor neighborhoods, there is also an overrepresentation of people living there with mainly non-Western backgrounds (Behtouis, 2021).

Edling and Liljeros (2016) writes about how many societies today have social differences that generate disputes and create friction. In Swedish society this can be seen in the way citizens are divided into two different categories, "the Swedes" and "the immigrants". Edling and Liljeros states that even though formally everyone is supposed to be looked at the same way by the eyes of the law, an individual's opportunities, terms and conditions differ depending on whether they are considered "Swedish" or considered to be an "immigrant". This is the case, despite the fact that many of those who are called immigrants are both born and raised in Sweden but still put in that category. Even though they are Swedes they do not get labeled in that way. Furthermore, Edling and Liljeros bring up the discourse around "second generation immigrants" in the Swedish context which they mean tells us that even though, admittedly a person is born in Sweden they are still not to be regarded as an "authentic" Swede seeing as they have a different ethnic belonging and are viewed as having different traditions, customs, and habits (Edling & Liljeros, 2016). Research has also shown that a large part of the people

living in Sweden are discriminated against and systematically separated from what is seen as Swedish, solely because of the color of their skin, certain features, or hair colors they may have that is considered non-Swedish (Hübinette, Hörnfeldt, Farahani & Rosales, 2017).

Sweden does however have clear policies about democracy and human rights that are universal and apply to everyone in the country. These rights state that all individuals regardless of culture, country and context have the same rights and dignity and are born equal and free. Sweden has also implemented the Discrimination Act which is meant to prohibit discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, disability, and transgender identity or expression. The purpose of the act is also to promote equal opportunities and rights for everyone (Government Offices of Sweden, 2022).

Although there are many policies in Sweden implemented to maintain human rights and equal treatment of all, research and statistics suggest that this is not the case. The majority of reports that comes to The Equality Ombudsman (DO) are on the discrimination grounds of ethnicity. In 2020 DO received 3524 reports and 1146 of these reports had to do with discrimination on the basis of ethnicity (DO, 2022). According to statistics from The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (2020) Afrophobic hate crimes are the most common form of hate crime in Sweden and people of sub-Saharan African descent are also more vulnerable than any other group to violent forms of hate crimes.

The United Nations Working Group of experts on people of African descent (2014) also made a statement voicing concerns regarding how the Swedish government addresses challenges that people of African descent face in Sweden. As well as stating that more needs to be done to combat discrimination and racism along with increasing the integration (OHCHR, 2014).

Most of the research that is written on people of African descent living in Sweden and their particular vulnerability and exclusion in Swedish society includes both immigrants and second generation immigrants in the same category. Thus not taking into consideration that experiences and attitudes might differ depending on if you are born in Sweden or outside the country. This study therefore aims to get a better understanding and new perspectives on how Afro-Swedes born in Sweden with parents from sub-Saharan Africa, who we in this study only will refer to as Afro-Swedes, view their own identity as well as how they resonate around challenges they might face in terms of social exclusion.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine how young Afro-Swedes view their own identity and sense of belonging in Swedish society. The aim is to highlight the experiences of Afro-Swedes, as well as what effect their ethnic background can have on their own social inclusion and the challenges they might face. Additionally, the study intends to explore factors that can prevent or contribute to young Afro-Swedes social inclusion in Swedish society.

2.2 Research questions

1. How do young Afro-Swedes perceive their own identity?
2. What does it mean for young Afro-Swedes to be “Swedish”?
3. In which ways do young Afro-Swedes feel excluded and/or included in Swedish society?

3. Theoretical framework

In this section, concepts and perspectives that have been used to analyze the collected empirical data will be discussed and presented. Definitions, processes and main aspects of the theories will also be reviewed in this section.

3.1 The concept of ethnicity

Ethnicity is a concept that involves a classification of people based on ethnicity. Social anthropological studies found that culture was often divided by different groups or that people within the same group did not have the cultures in common. Instead, the concept of ethnicity was found relevant to describe what holds groups together. Ethnicity includes several attributes such as common origin, territoriality, common culture, customs, cultural markers, religion, physical characteristics and language as well as the idea of a common origin has proved to be one of the crucial attributes of the maintenance of ethnic groups (Eriksen, 1993). It is at the border between different groups that ethnicity arises. A group that does not come into contact with other groups does not have to clarify for themselves what distinguishes them, but in contact with other groups requires insight into what distinguishes "us" from "them". At the same time, it creates an opportunity for contact and understanding between groups. But according to Fredrik Barth (1969), ethnicity must be understood and studied in the boundaries between groups. Thus avoiding that ethnic groups will be considered isolated and static, which

he believes is misleading. Ethnic groups arise, are created, changed, strengthened, or weakened in contact with other groups. According to Barth, what creates and constitutes ethnicity is the people belonging to the group and their social organization. Ethnicity has such a strong significance for the individual that it often becomes crucial for their social interaction with other members both within and outside the group. Thus it is not an objective fact that cultural differences make up ethnicity, but how individuals themselves negotiate differences or similarities among other things, cultural considerations in and between groups (Barth, 1969). Barth believes that ethnicity can not only be understood from the above-mentioned attributes but must also be understood in relation to time and space. Ethnicity is not a given forever but a process that must be understood regarding the group's relationship with others.

In social anthropological research in the 1960s, ethnicity came more and more to replace the concepts of race. By using the concept of ethnicity instead, one got a group marker that could include everyone and they came from a hierarchical division of people. Ethnicity has become increasingly important for individuals and groups as a result of the changes that modern society creates in industrialization and migration, it has been shown that ethnicity has not been dissolved, but instead perceived as threatened and resurrected in a stronger and clearer form than before. By then articulating a common ethnicity, a continuity is created with the past that can explain and stabilize the chaotic situation that has arisen. Eriksen believes that one should continue to use the concept of ethnicity when studying people and groups (Eriksen, 1993).

In order for ethnic identity to have any personal significance, it must provide the individual something that they perceive as valuable. Ethnic identity processes and self-perception among second and third generation immigrants tend to affirm that (1) clear acculturation in terms of values and general orientation has taken place; (2) the people in question may vary according to the situation between, let's say, a largely Swedish and a Gambian identity; (3) there are often tensions between these people and their parents; and (4) the limits that prevent complete assimilation can be both internally and externally constructed, in the latter case can discrimination and racism prevent complete assimilation. There is no clear evidence for the assumption that it would be problematic in itself to "live in two cultures at the same time", but it is clear that it can be difficult to deal with such ambiguous situations in one environment where one is expected to have a clear and distinct identity. Second and third-generation immigrants therefore become anomalies, not primarily because of their culture but because they fail to fit into the dominant categories of society's social classification (Eriksen, 1993).

3.2 Ethnicity as a resource

In her book *Ethnicity as a resource in school* Wiltgren (2016) writes that ethnicity is something that is created through social interaction with other individuals, knowingly or unknowingly and not something that people are born with. Although ethnicity is produced in meetings with others, does not mean that this makes it free for individuals to, on a daily basis, change or choose identity. Things such as one's skin color or gender is not something that can easily be chosen. However, it is possible to compromise around these and make them have a meaning. This can for example be done by having a sense of pride over one's own background as well as voicing it (Wiltgren, 2016). Often in the context of having to defend oneself from stereotyping terms. Wiltgren also states that ethnicity is about the ability to possess knowledge and skills as well as using these as resources in one's everyday interactions. Furthermore, Wiltgren highlights the creative aspects of ethnic group belonging and focuses on the resources and assets that exist among youth as well as how they use these in their everyday life. Wiltgren also states that ethnic categories are connected to something that you do. For instance how you communicate verbally and the different ways you express yourself can make you be associated with "Swedishness" thus making you assigned to a certain category. Linguistic attributes can therefore in this way be used to express ethnicity as well as identity (Wiltgren, 2016).

3.3 The concept of belonging

Anthias (2006) states that feeling that you belong to the country you live in and having a sense of collective identity are not two things that must coexist. It is possible for an individual to identify with their country of residence and at the same time not feel a sense of belonging in the way of not feeling like a complete member or not feeling accepted. On the other hand, one may feel like they belong and are accepted while still not completely being able to identify with the country, for instance since one may have allegiances that are split.

According to Anthias, an individual questioning where they belong can be caused by feeling that there are many places, settings, identities, and spaces that they feel they cannot and do not belong to. Furthermore, Anthias states that belonging is multidimensional, one dimension being how a person can feel regarding their own position in the social sphere. Thus making belonging have a close connection to social ties and bonds. Additionally, Anthias explains that this, to some extent, is prompted by the individual's experience of social exclusion. When a person experiences exclusion the concerns of belonging are activated and likely to come up to

the surface. Moreover, experiences of belonging in this case can be formal as well as informal. Feeling a sense of belonging is not solely about duties and rights, for instance having a citizenship, or being able to identify with certain groups. It is, in addition to that about the social spaces that is a construct of said memberships and identifications (Anthias, 2006).

4. Previous research

In this section, the following previous research will be mentioned; how citizens are categorized as “Swedish” or “immigrants”, and how this leads to multiple identities that citizens with immigrant background have. The relation between whiteness and Swedishness along with the consequences that comes with it and how people with immigrant backgrounds are portrayed in media and how it affects their lives and sense of belonging.

4.1 How Swedes and immigrants are categorized

Trondman (2006) writes about the word “immigrant” having another meaning in everyday life in Sweden and it indicating a social problem. Being an “immigrant” means that one is a representation of social problems that exist (Ibid.). The usage of the word “immigrant” in the Swedish context does not only extend to immigrants, on the contrary it covers all individuals who are assumed to be different culturally and therefore not viewed as Swedish (Runfors, 2016).

Runfors (2016) study showed that descendants of immigrants from Bremboda, a low-status urban area, were subjected to racialization. This racialization affected all the respondents with an immigrant background in similar ways, regardless of their different ethnic backgrounds. The study however also showed that the racialization essentially made the descendants united in their non-belonging as well as allowing for them to learn about their self-perception. Additionally, this process also influenced the identity positions the descendants took on as well as the positions that were available for them. Another thing was that they also had resembling experiences of being seen by others as non-Swedish and as “immigrants” as well as having to deal with deliberating representations that are linked to these set ascriptions.

One of the respondents in Runfors (2016) study however, who was born in Sweden but also had an immigrant background, from Finland was the only one of the respondents who was blond, had a lighter complexion and spoke Swedish without any sociolect. Furthermore, this respondent did not experience ascriptions of non-Swedishness and immigrantness compared to other respondents who were non-white and perceived as “darker” and spoke Swedish with a sociolect that is associated to being a “foreigner” and were connected to “immigrant” neighborhoods. These respondents also shared the struggles of getting away from those set narratives and views (Ibid.).

According to Runfors (2016) all these experiences were also connected to place. The study revealed that many of the respondents, when introducing themselves, had designed ways and tactics to use to cope with being rejected of being Swedish and always being pressured to present themselves as being from another national origin apart from Swedish. This in turn made several of the respondents choose to not identify themselves as Swedish at all in order to avoid the confrontations.

The result of the study also showed that when stepping outside of Bremboda the respondents would be positioned as out of place which means that they have passed through socially constructed borders. This also had an influence on their own feelings of belonging to places they described as Swedish. In Bremboda however, the respondents experienced being in the right place amongst other individuals who also recognized diversity as the standard and not something that is strange. Furthermore Bremboda, which is commonly seen as a non-Swedish area became the respondents own place in Sweden and the only place they could actually claim as their own without being questioned or getting disapproval about it. Moreover, in this way, the respondents were able to also create a belonging for themselves at a national level, not only belonging in the area they live in. Their position as “immigrants” made it possible to demand that since that meant they affirmed them being non-Swedish in Sweden without actually declaring to be from the country (Runfors, 2016).

4.2 Multiple identities

In Rysst's (2020) study about identity construction of children in Norway with immigrant background, differences and similarities in how the children form their identity were examined. Children with immigrant backgrounds in an ethnically diverse area where they are the majority

group compared to in an area where they are the minority group were analyzed. The findings of Rysst's study reveals that children with immigrant background born in Norway identify themselves as having two or mixed identities and based on the social context they were in they would activate one of the identities (Rysst, 2017). They also used other classifying labels to identify themselves such as “brown”, “foreigner” and occasionally as only “Norwegian”. This in turn led to some concerns being raised. One thing was the complex relation between ethnic identity, gender and religion. Another thing was how the ethnic minority youth, who in Furuset (an ethnically diverse area in the east of Oslo) is part of the majority, did not seem to want to take on the identity of being Norwegian. Outside of the area of Furuset, this group is very stigmatized in Norwegian public discourse but in Furuset the minority youth are not a minority group. Instead they are seen as part of the majority (Ibid.).

Rysst's study suggests that the ethnic identity construction is closely connected to the construction of gender and it contains factors such as appearance, hairstyle, dress style and behavior. This also encompasses separate ways of communicating and one's choice of free time activities, which is connected to social inclusion and belonging (Ibid.). For instance, the children who attended school in Furuset, the more ethnically diverse area, the discourse around appearance and one's skin color being seen as a factor to achieve the Norwegian identity was illustrated on a higher scale. In addition, many of the children also believed that for them to be called “ethnic Norwegian” they would have to be of a lighter complexion and speak Norwegian at home as well as their grandparents and parents being born in the country. In this case, at the school in Furuset, nonwhite skin was therefore a barrier to obtain the identity of being Norwegian (Rysst, 2017).

4.3 Social structures impact on identity and belonging

Törngren (2020) argues that in Sweden, whiteness is what shapes the meaning of Swedishness. The “immigrant” identity is something that develops through contact and interaction with the majority culture and society. Through this contact the individual becomes aware of their non-whiteness. This in turn leads to the word “Swedish” indicating whiteness in public and everyday conversation while the term “immigrant background” being a category where all non-white Swedes are put together.

Behtoui (2020) on the other hand argues that the racist and xenophobic structures that is part of Sweden's present anti-immigrant climate can also have an impact on the identity

construction of young individuals with an immigrant background. Behtoui writes that with a socio-political environment that is so polarized and harsh as it is in Sweden, with an increase of violent and extreme nationalism and racism, makes it more likely for young individuals with immigrant background to fall back and take on identities that are more defensive. This is a consequence of the cultural racism they might endure which in turn can lead to identifying more with their parents' country of origin (Behtoui, 2020).

Young people born in Sweden with immigrant parents often have different cultural backgrounds compared to the majority population of the country they live in. Bjurström (1997) believes that these young people develop their socio-cultural identity through different cultural systems. The culture they encounter at home, with their family, and the traditions from the homeland, as well as the cultures they encounter in Swedish society, school and among friends. Furthermore, Borgström believes that it is the external social and cultural conditions that affect the identification process, as the individual's self-image is affected by these. Identity, language, and culture also play a significant role in shaping sociocultural identity (Bjurström, 1997). The process that domestic-born young people with a foreign background go through to find one sociocultural identity can look the same in different parts of the world and not least within Europe. Crul, Lelie, and Schneider (2013) have focused on a comparative study of 15 cities in Europe that are characterized by a high proportion of inhabitants who are so-called second-generation immigrants. They found that young people with a foreign background like their parents undergo an integration process. Even when domestic-born young people with a foreign background are born and raised in the same country as children of native-born parents, they face more challenges compared to their ethnic Swedish peers (Crul, et al., 2013).

In a study about high achieving students with immigrant backgrounds in prestigious schools (Wiltgren, 2020), their experiences of social exclusion were examined. The findings of the study showed that students with immigrant backgrounds are appreciated and accepted at a formal level and they also get to attend the school's activities. However, they do encounter various different microaggressions when they are in contact with their peers that they refer to as "the Swedes" (Ibid.). Two of the respondents in the study explained there being a clear division in terms of segregation and exclusions in their class. Furthermore, they both emphasize and concentrate on the issue of the students who uphold these structures and borders by rejecting the ones who are not considered and viewed as Swedes entry and also by isolating themselves in their own culture. The study also showed that in order to be included a form of

similarity is necessary. To be part of “the Swedes” one need to be more like them to be included in the group (Wiltgren, 2020).

4.4 The relation between whiteness and discrimination in Sweden

Previous research has shown that whiteness is associated with a higher degree of Swedishness. Whiteness refers to not only skin color but to a range of visual properties such as straight blonde hair and blue eyes. According to Hübinette, Hörnfeldt, Farahani and Rosales (2017) Swedishness and whiteness needs to be discussed more in order to create a new system of national belonging where the non-white Swedish citizens can feel a sense of belonging and inclusion. Because of the Swedish national identity whiteness remains at the core which excludes everyone who does not have blonde hair, blue eyes, and pale skin, it does not matter how long a person has been in Sweden.

Hübinette et al. (2017) explained that discrimination of non-white people at school, work, and housing market and in society in general has increased during the last 20 years in Sweden. Today, Sweden is considered to be an open and tolerant, diverse country with a relatively high percentage of the population with a foreign background. This indicates that Sweden is in need of a new self-image, meaning that there needs to be a new concept of “Swedishness” where non-white Swedes are included. One of the main reasons why non-white minorities among others are exposed to discrimination is due to differences when it comes to language, culture and religion and that these people are just visible minorities, their appearances differ from the ideal of normative whiteness.

4.5 Mass Medias roll in the exclusion of non-ethnic Swedes

Research has shown that the media repeatedly portrays immigrants negatively. This leads to them often feeling excluded from society, as they are singled out as those who do not belong to society through for example racist and xenophobic views portrayed on the mass media. This creates a negative image of the immigrant that makes them a vulnerability in society. When the mass media talk about immigration, they present immigrants as problematic and as a threat to society. This contributes to the population highly suspecting them of criminal acts and viewing them as criminals and dangerous (Farris & Heather, 2018). The mass media refuses to recognize citizens with immigrant parents as Swedes and attributes negative roles to them such as criminals, which in turn affects the attitudes of citizens towards these individuals. Politicians

also play a role through how they address the societal problems that have arisen from the subject positions assigned to immigrants in the mass media. Even when talking about issues that have to do with citizens with immigrant parents they are called “immigrants”. They are in many cases well aware that they are portrayed negatively in the mass media, they feel that the media's portrayal of them as a threat to society does not represent who they really are. This makes them work hard to disprove this presentation and to get a sense of acceptance because the negative view affects their whole life. Through mass media they can also sense who is viewed positively and who is viewed negatively. For example most Muslim immigrants are aware that society have a dark view on Islam because of mass media. The image of Islam that is presented is mainly negative and violence, war, oppression of women, and political oppression are described as carried out in the name of Islam (SOU, 2004).

5. Method

This section describes the choice of method, delimitations, the selection of the respondents and the interview process. Furthermore, ethical principles and the analysis process are discussed.

5.1 Qualitative research method

Qualitative research is an appropriate method for this study because it is based on semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews focuses on the participant's opinions, experiences, feelings, attitudes, memories, etc. From there a theory emerges during the work processes. There are different types of qualitative research methods e.g., qualitative interviews, analyses of a text, ethnographic content analysis, and focus groups (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2015). Qualitative research emphasizes the meaningfulness of the research, this method allows us to stay close to the empirical world. It is designed to ensure a close fit between the data and what people say and do. For qualitative research, there is something to be learned in all settings and groups. No aspect of social life is too mundane or trivial to be studied. All settings and people are at once similar and unique. They are similar in the sense that some general social processes may be found in any setting or among any group of people. They are unique in that some aspects of social life can best be studied in each setting or through each informant because it is best illuminated. This systematic work with constant collection, interpretation, analysis, and new interpretations leads to material that can be structured and hopefully generate legitimate data on second-generation immigrants' experiences and views on identity and integration (Taylor et al., 2015).

5.2 Semi-structured interviews

In this study, semi-structured interviews are being used to be able to easily analyze and compare the respondents answers, as well as collect qualitative, open-ended data. And to explore the respondents thoughts, beliefs, experiences, and feelings about identity and inclusion, the respondents own perceptions, views and positions are meaningful. Furthermore, they are flexible and compliant because the interview questions can be adapted accordingly to what the respondents think is important. Detailed answers are of particular importance since the researchers studies how the respondents interpret the questions, which can open up to further discussions. This method is also appropriate for this study because it allows for the researchers to delve deeply into personal and sometimes sensitive issues, in this case one's own identity (Bryman, 2018).

Structured interviews had not provided access to all the material that the respondents chose to highlight, nor had they enabled follow-up questions when it was deemed relevant. Therefore, individual semi-structured interviews were chosen, where a flexible approach to the respondents choice of focus according to the questions and the topic would be applied (See appendix I). This led to adaptability in the examination focus according to the associations and topics that emerged in the interview contexts (Bryman, 2018).

5.3 Delimitations

The selection criteria were largely developed according to the respondents backgrounds. They needed to be born in Sweden and have two parents who are from sub-Saharan Africa because that is the group that this study focuses on, this group is also sometimes called second-generation immigrants. The respondents in this study are born in Sweden which means they themselves have not immigrated here, therefore, it is problematic to call them immigrants, which they also pointed were a concept they did not like. In this study, they will therefore be referred to as Afro-Swedes. The study involved eight respondents who were 19 to 23 years old. This is the age where people develop their identity as well as the period of life where individuals with connections to two cultures build up a stable alternative ethnic identity and find a place of belonging. For that reason this age category has been chosen for this study. If the respondents were to be of a younger age the risk could be that they would have not thought about these issues and how it affects their lives. But also, for ethical reasons, in this study only adults have been chosen to be included and participate.

5.4 Selection of respondents

Glaser and Strauss (1967) used the phrase theoretical sampling to refer to a procedure whereby researchers consciously select additional cases to be studied according to the potential for developing new insights or expanding and refining those already gained. Through this procedure, researchers examine whether and to what extent findings in one setting apply to others (Taylor et al., 2015). In goal-directed sampling, the purpose is for the participants to be selected strategically based on their knowledge of the formulated research questions. A goal-oriented selection strategy has been used because the respondents specific experiences and backgrounds were directly relevant to the theme of the examination (Hjerm, Lindgren & Nilsson, 2014). The study also has one snowball selection that was used when selected participants in the study suggested other participants who are experienced in the area (Bryman, 2018). With snowball selection, you can get in touch with a small number of people who are relevant to the theme of the study and then use those to get in touch with further respondents (Ibid.).

This study consisted of eight people, six women and two men, this has to do with the fact that more women were willing to participate. Majority of the interviews lasted for 50 minutes to 1 hour, two of the interviews lasted for 30 minutes. For this study, it was important to involve respondents who have their roots in different regions in Sub-Saharan Africa as well as different religions in order to get a fair result of what the experiences are like for Afro-Swedes from different perspectives. The respondents were also chosen from several different cities in Sweden, they were all studying in different universities in Sweden on various different programs. They also grew up in different types of environments which contributed to several different perspectives and answers to the research questions. Although the snowball selection has been helpful with finding respondents, it also had its disadvantages. A risk well worth mentioning in connection to the snowball selection is that you risk getting people from the same social context and background, which may result in them having relatively similar thought processes.

The interviews were conducted in Swedish since the respondents were most comfortable with Swedish. Most of the respondents also felt that they expressed themselves better when speaking Swedish. When the interviews were transcribed, it was later translated into English. There was not much difficulties with translating from Swedish to English, however there were words

that could not be translated directly into English, therefor those words were excluded from the quotes, or changed into other similar words to make it more readable.

Respondents Pseudonym, Gender	Age	Self-identified respondents	Date of interview
Semira Female	21	Somali	2022-04-23
Aisha Female	21	Gambian	2022-04-23
Beatrice Female	19	Kenyan/Ugandan	2022-04-25
Maimuna Female	21	Swedish/Gambian	2022-04-25
Amina Female	22	Eritrean	2022-04-28
Elias Male	23	Swedish/Somali	2022-05-01
Ahmed Male	22	Somali/Swedish	2022-05-01
Awa Female	20	Afro-Swede	2022-05-04

Table 1: Presentation of respondents

5.5 Data analysis

To analyze the collected material from the interviewees, a thematic analysis approach was used. Thematic analysis is a method that is used to analyze, identify and report certain themes and patterns found within the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In order to identify themes in

the material transcription of the recorded interviews were made. The transcribed interviews were then read thoroughly. One clear way in locating themes within the material was by looking at repetitions and the recurrences in the data. If a concept appears in the material several times it is most likely an identifiable theme (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Another way to identify themes was by looking at differences and similarities within the entirety of the material collected and making comparisons. Subthemes could also, in this way be created depending on different levels of strength in central themes that are identified (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Coding in depth was also used as a strategy in this study to identify the most essential things that were said during the interviews from the respondents. In turn, this made it easier to find the best codes. This strategy was also useful in the way that it assisted in removing information that was not necessary to include and would not be contributing to the purpose of the study (Hjerm et al., 2014).

5.6 Ethical considerations

In research where people are involved there are certain aspects that need to be taken into consideration. In this study, there are four ethical principles that have been applied; information, consent, confidentiality and the utilization of material requirements (Bryman, 2018). All respondents who agreed to participate in the study were handed an information and consent letter before the interviews (see appendix II) where they were told what the study was about and how the material was going to be used and that they could choose to withdraw from participating anytime they wanted. Additionally, before conducting the recordings of the interviews a verbal agreement was also made with each respondent where it was also made clear that they did not have to answer certain questions if it made them feel uncomfortable or if they simply did not want to.

6. Results

In this section the main themes that emerged from the analyzed data will be presented. Four themes were identified and will be introduced in the following order: “The relation between identity, belonging and Swedishness”, “Us and them”, “Social environment” and “The effect racism and discrimination have on belonging”.

6.1 The relation between identity, belonging and Swedishness

When asked how they identify themselves, Semira and Beatrice made it clear that identifying as Swedish is not something that they want nor can do even though they felt more Swedish compared to their parents' country of origin. They did however have different views on what makes someone Swedish. Semira, Beatrice, Elias, Ahmed, Amina and Aisha related it to one's appearance and the way you look, while Awa and Maimuna connected being Swedish to simply living in the country, having the legal right to be in the country or having Swedish citizenship. When it came to appearance being a factor in who is considered Swedish, the correlation was made to whiteness. Having blonde hair and blue eyes was the general thought of what a Swedish person looks like on paper.

Semira, who identifies as Somali and have lived in an majority non-white area all her life explained that for her, Swedishness is based on ethnicity. Her reasoning for this was that it would not make sense for her to identify as Swedish because society has a different image of Swedishness, which does not include her. Semira explained that:

I rather just identify myself as a Somali than having someone come to me and say no, you are not Swedish. The fact that they always ask me where I come from shows that they, the Swedes, do not consider me Swedish. And that of course makes it difficult for me to consider myself Swedish too.

Beatrice on the other hand has lived most of her life in a majority white area and still does. But she has also during a shorter period of time lived in a multicultural area. She explained that this has given her a sense of what it feels like to be black on both sides of the spectrum. Beatrice brings up the fact that her choosing to identify as Kenyan/Ugandan is because that is what she wants to be. She did however express similar views as Semira on embracing your African background and taking that on as part of your identity for the reason that it will not be questioned. Beatrice explained that:

It is hard to love something you do not really feel you belong to. Those who have Swedish ethnicity will always reject you and say you are not Swedish. But I have learned to accept that. If you do not welcome me into Sweden, the country that I still feel is my home, It's just easier that I say I am Kenyan/Ugandan because that will be accepted.

Out of the eight respondents, Awa was the only one who identified herself as Swedish and/or as Afro-Swedish. She explained that over the years, her way of identifying has shifted from

only saying that she is Swedish to also saying that she is Afro-Swedish. Her reason for this being that she felt that it fit in more to the person that she is. Furthermore, she explained that the fact that she was born in Sweden and has Swedish citizenship automatically makes her see herself as being Swedish. When asked about if she has ever been questioned about where she is from Awa explained that:

It has happened that people ask where I'm really from, and when I say Sweden they continue on to ask about my parents and where they are from. They instantly think that I'm not Swedish. And even though they may accept that I was born here, I'm still not a real Swedish Swede, if you can say that.

Awa continued on to share her feelings regarding how being questioned about who she is makes her feel and expressed that when she was younger it didn't bother her but as she got older and went into her teenage years, she started to think more about it and about her identity. In the process of developing her identity she realized that there was a lot more that went behind the questioning. Awa expressed that:

“But where are you really from?” That question, what is it they're trying to imply with that? That you have to look a certain way to be counted as Swedish? When people used to ask me that when I was in my most impressionable years, it used to make me think about where I actually fit in. If people don't see me as Swedish then what am I? I think all this really affected my feelings of exclusion.

Similarly to Awa, Beatrice expressed finding herself in between and not really knowing where she belongs as well as always fighting thoughts on who she is and what group she is actually part of. She describes a conflict between two different identities and that she always ends up moving back and forth between her contrasting group belongings. Beatrice explained that:

You kind of end up becoming two people. When I'm around many immigrants I become a completely different person compared to when I end up around only a bunch of Swedes. And this switching all the time honestly sometimes makes me think, who am I actually?

Feeling pressured to be “the good immigrant” is something that Beatrice also touches on in connection to having grown up in a majority white area. She comes to the conclusion that no matter how hard you try and no matter what you try to change and do, you will never be able to keep up the role of being “the good immigrant”. Beatrice shared that:

When I walk out of my house, I have to think about how I look and that I am presentable enough. I have to think about speaking extra good Swedish and be dressed in a way that makes me stick out from the other immigrants. Doing all this is to look better than other immigrants just for me to still not be accepted as a Swede is not worth it though, it's not something you can keep up and it's not right.

During the interviews, it also became clear that respondents who spoke their mother tongue and visited their parents' country of origin did not have a strong need to feel a sense of belonging in Swedish society. They also identified more with their motherland. However, those who did not speak their mother tongue nor had been in their parents' country of origin had a stronger need to feel a sense of belonging in Sweden. Maimuna had been to The Gambia many times and expressed that she speaks the language fluently. She has spent time in The Gambia and strongly identifies with both Sweden and The Gambia. Maimuna said:

I have been to Gambia a lot and am used to the Gambian culture and the Swedish culture. I have spent several years of my childhood in the Gambia and have very positive memories and experiences. I do not feel less Gambian even though I have spent most of my life in Sweden. The Gambians view me as a Swede but they do not treat me negatively and I do not feel like an outsider.

6.2 Us and them

Semira, Beatrice and Aisha also expressed a clear division between ethnic Swedish people and Afro-Swedes. One thing that often came up to the surface was the categories of “us” and “them”. In this case the “us” group were the Afro-Swedes and “them” were the white Swedes. All of them expressed that the choice to identify with their parents' birth country stems from a constant questioning from the society and ethnic Swedes of where they are from and what they are. Beatrice explained that:

I have never and will never call myself Swedish, but at the same time I could not say that I feel Kenyan/Ugandan because it is a country I visit, it is not my home. I'm like a tourist when I'm over there. I guess I just have to find a home in myself.

Similarly, Aisha also describes feelings of figuratively being pushed out of Sweden, the country she actually feels is her home. She explains the feeling that “the Swedes” expect one to be and act a certain way and if you don't do that, you are categorized as strange and different from them. Furthermore, Aisha points out that being pushed out and excluded from the majority

group lead to having to find another place or group to be part of that will accept you for who you are without you having to change or adapt your way of being. Aisha explained that:

It feels like you're about to be thrown out from your own country, and when you finally get deported, the only thing you have left is to lean against your parents' country. Because there they will at least welcome you in a better way and more than they do for me here in Sweden.

All the respondents explained how they had never thought about their identity or being aware that their skin color was different from the majority prior to someone else mentioning it to them. All respondents shared the fact that they first became aware that they were black and somehow “different” when they started school and had interactions with other children who made it clear to them that they were not the same. For the respondents that grew up in multicultural environments, and went to school with only people with non-European background, the realization of being black looked slightly different.

Semira explained how she lived in a neighborhood with only non-Europeans and how up until the age of 14 also went to a school where there were no white Swedes. When she later on changed schools the feelings of not belonging came up to the surface and became more apparent. This in turn led her to identifying more with her Somali roots because that is where she would feel less like an outsider. Semira expressed that:

In seventh grade I changed into another school where I was the only black person in my class. That is when I noticed I was different. It did feel a little uncomfortable at first and I felt like I didn't fit in because the Swedes used to say stuff like, “how come your Swedish is so good?” or “how come you don't speak with slang?” or they would compare my skin color to theirs. I simply felt different.

These feelings of not belonging however were especially strong in the respondents who had gone to school with majority white Swedes. For Beatrice and Maimuna and Amina who grew up in a predominantly white areas and went to school with only ethnic Swedes it became even more apparent that they were not like the rest. Instead of growing closer to their African background like Aisha did, they actively tried to distance themselves from that in order to fit in better with the rest of their peers and become “Swedish” and be a part of “them”. Beatrice explained that:

I grew up in a completely white and Swedish area and have only gone to Swedish schools. It became very clear to me that I was different and I hated that. I wanted to

neglect my culture and everything that had to do with my blackness. I permed my hair and changed my style, all to feel like one of them, feel Swedish.

When asked about feeling more excluded than other groups of young individuals born in Sweden with immigrant backgrounds, all of the respondents had the same view of it being harder for Afro- Swedes considering they are visibly “different”. The feelings of it being an “us” and “them” was therefore not only exclusive for ethnic Swedes. Semira described that:

I would say people with African background, mainly those that are black, have it harder with social inclusion. For example if you are an immigrant from Europe or an immigrant who looks more white, it is more difficult for others to identify you as an immigrant in Sweden. Especially if you are well integrated in society, understand Swedish culture and can speak the language. For black immigrants it would not be the same. It is easier for them.

Beatrice had a similar thought process and described it as a pyramid where the darker your complexion is the more discrimination you will be subjected to. She stated that individuals that are black have different conditions set up for them and are especially vulnerable because they can be exposed to discrimination from other minorities and individuals too, not only ethnic Swedes. Beatrice expressed that:

I think it's harder for a black person born in Sweden than it is for another non-white person born in Sweden. The reason for this being that we have all the odds against us. You not only have Swedes against us, we even have them, other immigrants, against us.

Elias does not identify himself as an ethnic Swede, but he would also not say that Sweden is not a big part of his identity. When people call him just an immigrant, it does not make sense to him. But at the same time, he explained that he understands, he believes that it is very difficult to have different cultures and try to live in them both. According to him some cultures just do not go together. “Yesterday it was Walpurgis night (*Valborg*) and people went out and drank, tomorrow is Eid” Elias said. He explained that it's always a culture that you have to choose a little more, you cannot maintain the highest degree of both cultures. Furthermore, he explained that you get to choose, there is nothing wrong with choosing between cultures, but it can be difficult sometimes.

6.3 Social environment

Maimuna grew up in the countryside where her family lived as she called it a “typically Swedish life”, she mentioned how they were the only black family in the area. They all celebrated Swedish holidays and felt Swedish. But at an early age, Maimuna realized she was different and she began to think about how she identified herself. Maimuna said:

My family and I have been treated differently in the area we lived in and in school. I started to think about whether I really wanted to identify myself as Swedish because others in the community did not. I later chose to continue to identify myself as Swedish because I was born here.

Elias however said that he did not feel excluded and did not feel different at all when he went to a multicultural school, but when he started high school where there was a majority of ethnic Swedes, he started thinking about how different he was. He received comments that made him feel different. Elias said:

I thought about how I behaved most of the time because I felt like I was representing everyone who looked like me because of their comments. I could hear things like that I knew good Swedish or other types of prejudices they had about immigrants. I needed to remind them all the time that I was born here and that all immigrants are not the same.

Elias, Ahmed and Amina also explained that their parents' have always been clear that it is important that they learn their native language and maintain the culture but also their religion so that they know who they are. Their parents' thought it was important that they have the same culture and it has to do with making their communication easier. Religion was a very important part of their household. On the weekends they all went to Quran school, and there they got to spend time with other Muslims kids and learn about their religion.

When Elias was asked if he feels included, he said that he largely feels included, but that it also depends on what inclusion means for one. Sometimes it's not about society including one but that one does not want to be part of society. Elias said that his friends are people who are very similar to him in many ways, for example, people who also have a foreign background. He has friends who are ethnic Swedes as well as friends with other ethnicities but his closest ones have the same background as him, which he says is a choice that he made deliberately. Elias works and studies and is very happy with the percentage of inclusion he gets. Ahmed also expressed that everything he needs is in his area where he grew up and in that environment they both feel

a strong sense of inclusion. They believe that they would have a different mindset and view on feeling excluded from the majority of the society if they did not grow up in a multicultural environment.

6.4 The effect racism and discrimination have on belonging

When the respondents answered questions about why they would not identify themselves as Swedish or why they do not feel included and if they have experienced discrimination or racism. Everyone had at least one memory of it and chose to share events and memories of racism and discrimination that they have experienced. They have witnessed such events both at school and at work, several of the events they shared are memories from their childhood. When we asked the question about belonging to Amina, she expressed that it would be difficult for her to feel a sense of belonging in a place where people dislike the two important parts of her, that being that she is black and Muslim.

Amina and Maimuna shared that there were no other black people in the schools they went to when they were younger, they talked about their experiences of racism both from students and teachers. They also talked about how their experiences have affected their sense of belonging in Sweden. Amina expressed that:

When I was little, for example, I remember one event that had to do with my skin color from preschool. There was a girl who did not want to sit next to me because of my skin color. I started to wonder if there was something wrong with me and felt very strange I remember. At that age I did not understand what racism was but I understood that it was bad that I was dark skinned.

Maimuna also had many experiences of racism and discrimination and chose to share what she experienced when she was living on the countryside. Like Amina, she said that her first memories of racism were in preschool but for her it did not end there. From preschool to fifth grade she was bullied, she in the end had to change school. The school did nothing to stop the bullying even though the principal and the children's parents' knew about the situation. The feeling of loneliness got worse when she realized that only her parents' and mentor stood by her side and helped her. Everyday she was reminded how she was not welcome and how different she was. Maimuna said:

I was teased for my appearance, for example, they usually called me fish lips because they thought my lips were too big. I was also called the N-word everyday by different kids but specifically one that everyone knew bullied me everyday.

The respondents shared that now that they are older, they have experienced discrimination in the workplace or they have felt that they did not get a job because of their background. Ahmed talked about his name being one of the reasons why he could not get jobs, he was looking for months before he got a job and they would not even call him for an interview. Ahmed shared that:

I'm not just saying this, once I changed my name to see if I would be called in for an interview. I changed my name into a simple typical Swedish name and sent in my application both as myself and my fake name and believe me, I did not get a job but they called me in for an interview which I could not attend obviously.

The respondents who grew up in a multicultural environments shared that they did not think about their skin color or background. They grew up with others from several different backgrounds who also looked “different” and everyone accepted each other. Ahmed and Elias grew up in multicultural areas, where they also went to school. When they left those areas and were in areas with a majority of ethnic Swedes, they felt different because they were treated differently. Ahmed along with Amina and Elias expressed that they felt at home in multicultural spaces, because no one is singled out for not being ethnic Swedish. Ahmed shared that people would question him and his friends when they go out to the majority white areas, for example it was not very uncommon for him and his friends to get followed by an employee when they went into stores. Both Ahmed and Elias believe that this happens because of the media and how they portray multicultural areas. Ahmed said:

Sometimes I understand why people get scared of me and my friends and why they think that we are criminals, when they see us is when we are on the news and that news is always about young immigrants who look like me doing criminal activities, it is annoying because it is not a fair image of us.

Both Beatrice and Aisha reflected on being black women and the different struggles and hardships that came with that. They expressed always feeling objectified and feeling that everyone thinks it is alright to stare, touch and feel on their hair or skin randomly during everyday life without their consent. Awa also brought up microaggressions and described that when looking back on certain events in her life, she noticed that there were elements and traces

of racism that during that time she did not see as racism but more as something that just happened. Additionally, receiving comments from strangers on their looks was also part of their daily life. Aisha shared that:

I had two braids in my hair and my summer camp leader came up to me, grabbed my braids and said “why are they standing up like that? it's like you have metal in there, do you?” He said this because they didn't fall straight down and were standing up a little bit because I have curly hair. At that time and age, I did not really understand that this behavior was completely wrong. I thought it was okay for him to do that and even though I felt weird about it, I did not think I could stand up to him and say anything.

Beatrice also highlighted the issues of exotification and sexualization that she believes many black women are subjected to and that she herself has also been exposed to from a young age. Beatrice explained that:

When I got attention, it was just comments about my body. Never like you are beautiful, your hair looks nice, or you know, something along those lines. It was always comments about my body only. When I was still a child I used to get attention from older men as if I was so much older when in reality I was literally just a child. All of this made me realize from a young age that it's so much more different to be a black woman compared to a white woman.

7. Analysis and discussion

In this section the results are analyzed and discussed. It is explained, interpreted and compared to the theoretical concepts and previous research that has been presented in the study. The analysis is based on two main themes, “The relation between identity and Swedishness” and “Young Afro-Swedes experiences with exclusion” in order to answer the study's research questions.

7.1 The relation between identity and Swedishness

The collected data shows that the majority of respondents perception of their identity, who they are and where they are from, comes from outside factors and being put into a category they do not necessarily want to be put into but have to accept. Even though they felt Swedish, they

could not take that on as their identity due to invisible barriers and the fact that they felt as if other individuals, in this case ethnic white Swedes, did not want them to take on the Swedish identity for not “ticking the box” for who is considered a Swede. As described in the section *previous research* Runfors (2016) argues that individuals that experience the ascription of the position of being non-Swedish and immigrant tend to form a unity with other individuals with immigrant background, regardless of ethnic background, who also get subjected to the same racialization. This can explain the respondents own creation of categorizing themselves as not part of the “them-group” that is “the Swedes”.

Being Swedish was something the respondents in this study all had felt that they were until being put into situations and positions where they realized that this is not the case. The definition of “Swedishness”, what that is and who it includes therefore changed. Instead, many took on the identity of being an immigrant and referred to themselves as immigrants which Runfors (2016) in his study explained extended to all individuals who are seen as not Swedish and culturally different.

Some of the respondents also expressed that they willingly chose not to identify as Swedish. This, because of certain experiences they had with always being questioned about their identity or being rejected the membership to the group that is “the Swedes”. Some respondents also explained that it would simply be easier to just identify with their parents' country of origin because that is something that is expected for them to do. As Ryst (2017) states, one's ethnic identity construction includes factors such as appearance, hairstyle, dress style and behavior. Many of the respondents in the study felt as though factors such as these were the things that also made up for what it means to be Swedish. All the respondents in the study shared that they had received comments on these things, both positive and negative. This in turn influenced and shaped how they view themselves and what they chose to identify as.

Similar to what Anthasia (2006) states in her concept of belonging regarding individuals being able to identify with the country they are living in while at the same time not feeling like they are accepted nor belong, the respondents in this study also felt the same. Although they were born and raised in Sweden, many did not feel accepted or as a complete member belonging in the country. They could identify with being Swedish in the sense of living in Sweden, studying, working, knowing the values, norms and cultures that exist in the country, but at the same time being separated from what is Swedishness and all that comes with it.

Based on Wiltgren's (2016) reasoning, ethnic categories are related to something that you do. For example, how a person talks and expresses themselves can make one be associated with "Swedishness" or not. Several of the respondents in the study also voiced similar beliefs to Wiltgren's and described feeling pressured to live up to certain standards and do things that would make them appear more Swedish such as change the way they speak, switch their names and change their style.

Many respondents in the study who had grown up in multicultural environments described feeling out of place once they left the area they grew up in/lived in and had to integrate with other white Swedes in different spaces such as school and work. Feeling different and excluded had to do with them in various ways being pointed out as "the others". Additionally, these feelings can be distinguished in being positioned as out of place when being outside one's place where you feel at home and being in the right place amongst other people who also recognize diversity and don't question it which Runfors (2016) highlights in his research. On the other hand, the respondents who had grown up in areas where the majority of residents were white Swedes, felt more inclined to call themselves Swedish. Even though most chose not to, there was a common theme of feeling like they should be able to do it without any questions being asked.

As Anthasia (2006) argues, an individual may not be able to fully identify with a place because they have allegiances that are split. Several of the respondents in this study were having conflicting thoughts and feelings as to which country they should choose to say they are from. Since the respondents had allegiances that are split between Sweden and their parents' country of origin some expressed being in a "betweenness" and being confused about how to identify themselves the correct way.

7.2 Young Afro-Swedes experiences of exclusion

In previous research Wiltgren's study (2020) about students with immigrant background in school was mentioned. The findings of the study were that the students encounter various microaggressions when they come in contact with their peers that they refer to as the Swedes. They also experienced segregation and exclusion within their classrooms, the study also

showed that the students were rejected if they were not considered Swedish enough. They needed to change and show similarities so that they could be included in the group. This correlates with the experience of the respondents in this study. They needed to prove to their new peers that they are Swedish too and those who experienced direct discrimination knew from the start they would never be accepted and the feeling of exclusion stayed permanent. Their classmates who were majority white Swedes kept their distance while others welcomed them and questioned them about their ethnic background. The questions and comments they received from their peers made them understand that they were viewed differently and therefore excluded from the majority of the class. To be accepted they needed to change and become more “Swedish”, but they would still get comments and questions about their religion or ethnic background, which made the respondents realize that they never could be seen as Swedish. They also believed that a lot of the comments and questions were xenophobic. From a very young age they start to feel like outsiders and it mostly is because of their experience in school. The respondents reflection of the society was school, so when they started to realize that they were viewed and treated differently it became difficult for them to feel a sense of belonging. According to Anthias (2006) a sense of belonging is not solely about duties and rights, for instance having a citizenship, or being able to identify with certain groups. It is, in addition to that about the social spaces that is a construct of said memberships and identifications.

The majority of the respondents have experienced racism, islamophobia and discrimination at work, school and generally out in the community. Those who identified themselves as Muslims said that they experienced more discrimination for their religion than their skin color while those who were not Muslims experienced more discrimination for their skin color. The difficult thing about this is that it's hard for them to know exactly why someone discriminates against them, it may be because of their faith, it may be because of gender but it can also be due to the color of their skin. One of the respondents explained that he did not feel a great need for inclusion in Swedish society, if it meant that he gave up the rest of his identity and religion to be included. For the respondents who lived and grew up in an ethnically diverse area it was easier for them to accept the fact that they get excluded in other spaces. Most of the respondents grew up in environments where there were other Muslims, black people and different type of ethnicities felt more included and a stronger sense of belonging in that environment, this also corresponds with Rysst's study (2017). The respondents are part of the majority when they are in an ethnically diverse environment, where everyone is different and accepted as they are. They can also relate to each other for belonging to a minority in Sweden.

The respondents who did not have any major problems getting included thought about their parents' and what they have taught them and the culture they have at home. Like Eriksen (1993) mentioned, cultural clashes can sometimes occur between children born in the country to which parents' have migrated to, because of communication and cultural barriers. The respondents in this study seemed to be aware of how it would affect their parents' if they were assimilated into Swedish society. If they became "too Swedish" very quickly at an early age, they would not have been able to communicate and understand their parents as they do today culturally. The respondents expressed that the way they were raised and their culture at home had a big role in why they chose to identify with their parents country of origin. This is however also one of the reasons why they get excluded from the majority of the society. According to Eriksen (1993) being between two or multiple cultures makes one an anomaly not primarily because of their culture but because they fail to fit into the dominant categories of society's social classification.

Two of the respondents in this study who were men have had the same experiences, the two were the only ones who mentioned the media's negative image of the suburbs and individuals who looks like them. Thus leading to them being treated differently in society and often being seen as a threat. This also leads to them feeling excluded from society, as they are singled out as those who makes the Swedish society unsafe through for example racist and xenophobic views on the mass media. This creates a negative image of the immigrant that makes them a vulnerability in society. When the mass media talk about immigration, they present immigrants as problematic and as a threat to society, which corresponds with Farris and Heather's research (2018). This contributes to the population highly suspecting them of criminal acts and viewing them as criminals and dangerous. The mass media also categorizes them as "immigrants" and refuses to recognize citizens with immigrant parents' as Swedes.

8. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine how young Afro-Swedes view their own identity and sense of belonging in Swedish society as well as highlighting their experiences and the effect their ethnic background can have on their feelings of social inclusion and/or exclusion. This study shows that identity construction and identity development amongst young Afro-Swedes is influenced by several different external factors. How they chose to identify mostly has to do with how they believe others perceive them as well as certain experiences they have had in different social spheres with other Swedes. Being exposed to discrimination and

microaggressions as well as constantly being questioned and pointed out as different and not Swedish enough has also been a reason for how the respondents chose to view and identify themselves. The overall picture of what Swedishness is and who is counted as Swedish has also affected how the respondents in the study chose to identify. Pressures of acting in certain ways, changing styles and changing the way one speaks in order to appear more Swedish was something that was brought up by many of the respondents.

Furthermore, the aspect of religion also turned out to have a great impact on the way the Muslim respondents in the study chose to self-identify. This was particularly seen in the visible Muslim respondents. The results showed that these Afro-Swedes way of identifying themselves was influenced more by their religious identity rather than their ethnic one compared to the non-Muslim respondents. The results showed that the Muslim respondents felt that they in certain situations were more subjected to discrimination on the grounds of religion. Moreover, they found it hard to distinguish if their experiences of racism and discrimination had to do with solely the color of their skin or their religion. This, as a consequence of Islamophobia. The respondents who did not identify as Muslim however, did express stronger sentiments of being exposed to discrimination on the grounds of ethnic belonging.

The findings in this study also showed a discrepancy between respondents that lived in multicultural areas and respondents that had grown up and lived in predominantly white areas. The respondents who lived in areas where it was diverse and there was a multicultural environment were more acceptant to take on the identity of their parents' country of origin whereas the respondents who had grown up in areas where the majority were white Swedes were more inclined to question the ideas of Swedishness as well as the idea of not being able to take on the Swedish identity, even though they chose not to identify as Swedish.

9. Future research

Suggestions for further research that could be conducted based on this study is on how social exclusion affects young Swedes with foreign backgrounds and what consequences it has on their everyday lives in the distant future. This group of people are exposed to different kinds of discrimination and everyday racism, it is therefore important to do research on how it affects them, to also get a deeper understanding of the problem and their lives in Sweden. Another alternative could be further research on solutions to the issue, as these people are born here and will most likely one day have children of their own and continue to live in Sweden. Research

on what can be done to prevent the social exclusion they feel and experience could be very useful. In that study, one can include ethnic Swedes as well, to get perspectives from both sides. By studying both groups, one can see more clearly where the problem occurs and what can be done to solve it.

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Appendix I – Interview guide

Theme 1: Background questions

Tell us a little about yourself

- Name
- Age
- Occupation
- Ethnicity (origin of parents)
- How long have your parents lived in Sweden?

Theme 2: Identity

1. How do you identify yourself?
2. Why do you identify yourself as...? and not...? (eg country of parents' origin and not as Swedish)
3. What are some factors that make you identify as ...?
4. What is your definition of "Swedishness"?
5. Do you think there are some particular criteria's/factors that determine if you are Swedish or not?

Follow up: If yes, what are those, and do you think this can have an impact on how you choose to identify?

6. Have you faced any challenges or been exposed to any discrimination in your everyday life? (Optional to answer)

Theme 3: Social inclusion

7. Do you feel included in Swedish society? If not, why?
8. Do you think that identifying yourself with your parents' origin country has an effect on the way your social inclusion looks?
9. What influence do your parents' have on your sense of belonging in the society that you live in?

10. Can being surrounded by two or multiple cultures affect how your social inclusion looks?
11. Do you believe that Afro-Swedes have more difficulty with inclusion compared to other Swedish born individuals with non-African background?
12. What do you think should be done to contribute to better social inclusion for Afro-Swedes?

Concluding question

- Is there anything else you would like to share with us and add that has not been mentioned yet?

Appendix II – Information and consent letter

Hej!

Tack för att du vill medverka i vår studie. Vi är två studenter från Högskolan i Jönköping som studerar vår sista termin på programmet Internationellt arbete – Globala studier och just nu skriver vårt examensarbete.

Syftet med denna studie är att undersöka individer som är födda i Sverige med afrikansk bakgrunds egna upplevelser av identitet och tillhörighet i det svenska samhället samt få en djupare förståelse för deras egna uppfattningar om inkludering och integration.

Intervjun är frivillig och du kan avbryta din medverkan när du vill. Intervjun kommer ta ungefär 30–45 minuter och för lättare sammanställning av resultat kommer intervjun även att spelas in.

Allt inspelat material kommer hanteras konfidentiellt vilket innebär att det endast är vi som kommer ta del av det. Material från intervjun som används i studien kommer inte redogöras med namn, du kommer alltså att vara helt anonym. Materialet kommer heller inte att återanvändas utan är endast avsett till denna studie.

Om du har några frågor eller funderingar innan intervjun, eller behöver ytterligare information om undersökning får du gärna höra av dig till oss.

Vänliga hälsningar,

Nadja Adem & Rahma Nur

Kontaktuppgifter:

Nadja Adem: NadjaAdem@hotmail.com

Mobilnummer: 0700331353

Rahma Nur: Rahmanour74@gmail.com

Mobilnummer: 0704675230

Handledare, Tobias Samuelsson; tobias.samuelsson@ju.se

Genom att skriva under här nedanför intygar du att du tagit del av informationen.

Accepterar du att delta i studien?

☐

Ja, jag har tagit del av ovanstående information och accepterar att delta i studien.

Om du deltar i studien, godkänner du att dina personuppgifter behandlas för utbildningsändamål i enlighet med ovanstående information?

☐

Ja, jag har tagit del av ovanstående information och godkänner att mina personuppgifter behandlas för utbildningsändamål i enlighet med ovanstående information

Om du deltar i studien, godkänner du att dina personuppgifter behandlas för forskningsändamål i enlighet med ovanstående information?

Namnsteckning:

Namnförtydligande:

Hello!

Thank you for participating in our study. We are two students from Jönköping University, studying our last semester in International work – Global studies, and we are currently writing our bachelor thesis.

The purpose of this study is to examine descendants of African immigrants own experiences of identity and belonging in Swedish society and to achieve a deeper understanding of their perceptions of inclusion and/or exclusion.

The interview is voluntary and you can cancel your participation whenever you want. The interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes and for easier compilation of results, the interview will also be recorded.

All recorded material will be handled confidentially, which means that only we will take part of it. All the material from the interview used in the study will not be reported by name, so you will be completely anonymous. The material will also not be reused and is only intended for this study.

If you have any questions or concerns before the interview, or need further information about the study, please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,

Nadja Adem & Rahma Nur

Contact information:

Nadja Adem: NadjaAdem@hotmail.com

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