



JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY

*School of Education and
Communication*

“I am not defined by how I look or where I am from”

An intersectional qualitative analysis about young women with
immigrant background in Sweden and their views on identities

Bachelor Thesis in Global Studies

Authors: Ulrika Ekeröth, Mariana Ortiz

Examiner: Åsa Westermark

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ABSTRACT

Ulrika Ekeröth & Mariana Ortiz

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There are several studies regarding immigrants in Sweden with focus on integration and their situation in the labour market. However, few studies have focused on people with immigrant background and their view on identity, and even fewer have focused on women. In this paper, the aim is to highlight how young women with immigrant background in Sweden choose to identify, explained through an intersectional perspective. The research is conducted through qualitative semi-structured interviews, containing a small group of eight women. The results were presented through four different themes: identify factors, society's impact on identity, "Swedishness" and experiences and challenges. The results were analysed by using previous research and using intersectionality as the theoretical framework. The results showed that aspects such as family, culture and social environment were some of the factors that affected their identity. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents felt that society had a large impact on them and that society's view of "Swedishness" plays a big role in their identity perception. Lastly, the respondents shared experiences and challenges that they encounter in the Swedish society, such as exoticization and racism. Concluding this, it was found that societal structures contribute to the women's experiences of discrimination and the challenges they face because of their multiple identities.

Keywords: Intersectionality, immigrant, women, people of color, identity, Sweden

Mailing Address

Högskolan för lärande och kommunikation (HLK)
Box 1026
551 11 JÖNKÖPING

Address

Gjuterigatan 5

Telephone

036-101000

Telefax

036162585

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1. Introduction

In the global world of today, international migration has become a phenomenon that affects every part of the globe. There were approximately 258 million people living in a country other than their country of birth in 2017, which means that 3,4 percent of the world's population were international migrants. About 78 millions of these people were found in Europe and they were part of the reason to why the European population did not decline between the years of 2000 to 2017 (United Nations, 2017). In Sweden there were 2 439 007 people of immigrant background in 2017, which estimates 24,1 percent of the entire Swedish population. It is estimated that 1 064 041 of the Swedish citizens were born in a country other than Sweden and there were 561 957 people who were born in Sweden, but to immigrant parents (Statistics Sweden, 2018).

Since Sweden is a country with great cultural diversity and still growing, it is of great importance to promote a collective feeling of belonging and an intent to respect and protect cultural differences (Giddens & Sutton, 2014: 447). Being a person of immigrant background in Sweden means having an ethnic identity that differs from the majority, including contrasting cultural beliefs and attitudes that needs to be integrated into one's self-image (Gyberg et.al, 2018: 17). An individual's ethnic identity becomes even more important while immigrating to a new country. Some of the most crucial phenomena associated with immigration are the changes of identity that occur since migration. Each person who lives in a country that is not specifically "their own", tries to find solutions for the battle occurring between the two different cultures experienced (Ayalah & Dalouh, 2014: 225). Immigrants therefore must negotiate a new kind of identity when living in the host culture and reconstruct their lives according to that, to be able to adjust to their new context (Gupta & Sullivan, 2013: 24; Deux, 2006).

Being a woman in Sweden of immigrant background includes many more aspects than these – for example, the feeling of identifying as Swedish but being exoticized and viewed upon as different (Sawyer, 2008: 95), the feeling of not being heard, being homogenized together with all immigrants, and even the common feeling of being in-between cultures and not exactly fitting in anywhere (Cederskog, 2007: 13). Thus, there is a need to get a deeper understanding about women with immigrant background and their thoughts about identity in the Swedish context.

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to examine young women with immigrant background, their perceptions about their own identities as well as feelings of belonging in the Swedish society. In addition, the aim is to explore their thoughts about what makes a person “Swedish” and how this affects them. Therefore, this study intends to contribute to a deeper, intersectional understanding about the challenges they may face and their role as immigrant women of color.

1.2 Research questions

1. How do young women with immigrant background reflect about influences on their own identity in the Swedish society?
2. What does it mean “to be Swedish” according to these women?
3. How do these women perceive and reflect about experiences and challenges they may face in the Swedish society?

1.3 Disposition

This study’s disposition begins with Chapter 1, starting with an introduction in order to raise interest about the subject. The purpose and research questions are meant to clarify what the study intends to research. Chapter 2 gives an explanation about the concepts that occur throughout the paper. These concepts intend to help the reader understand the context of the study’s content. Chapter 3 presents previous research about immigrant women based on international and Swedish cases. This chapter aims to highlight challenges and identity related experiences as well as previous intersectional studies conducted in Sweden. Chapter 4 focuses on intersectionality, which is the theoretical framework of the paper. This section addresses the concept of intersectionality and how it can be used as an analytical tool.

Chapter 5 presents societal structures in Sweden, which aims to give a better understanding about how institutions and politics affect women with immigrant background. Chapter 6 consists of the methodology used in this research. This is a comprehensive section, that covers i.a. the approach used for the study, how the data material was gathered and ethical considerations. Chapter 7 shows the study’s results. The results are divided into four main themes that aim to answer the research questions. Within each theme, there are subcategories that address different aspects identified during the coding process. Chapter 8 consists of an intersectional analysis as well as a conclusion. The analysis’ ambition is to link the results to

previous research and to the theoretical framework of intersectionality. The conclusion highlights the most important aspects of the analysis. Chapter 9 provides suggestions for future research.

2. Concepts and definitions

The following theoretical concepts are important for the results and analysis of this study. These will be explained in detail to prevent misunderstandings for the reader and explain in which context the definitions will be used.

2.1 Intersectionality

Intersectionality means to have multiple identities and social locations, and the possibility of facing oppression or discrimination for more than just one aspects. Intersectionality refers to the overall and coherent aspects of, for example – gender, class, age, ethnicity and race. Intersectionality promotes the idea that some groups of people are exposed to and experience discrimination in multiple ways and that these are connected to each other (Steans, 2013: 36). In this study, intersectionality will be used as an analytical framework to give a deeper understanding of the results.

2.2 Identity

The term identity itself can be divided into different categories: collective, personal, role or social identity. To draw some examples, collective identity refers to when individuals share similar ideas with a certain group, e.g. fighting for or against social or political changes. Personal identity is what defines a person based on their unique characteristics, biography, experiences and values (Andriot & Owens, 2014). In this case, *ethnic identity* refers to shared historical experiences, common culture, ethnicity, territory or homeland between individuals in a group. The people within these groups may create a strong link to their ethnic identity, especially when living in a foreign country with values and traditions that differ from their own (Reuter, 2017). In addition, since intersectionality has a prominent role in this paper, identity refers to multiple identities as well (see 2.1).

2.3 Immigrant

The concept of immigrant has different ways of being interpreted, and this also depends on the context it may be used in. Based on an article about who counts as a migrant, an immigrant may be defined by foreign birthplace or foreign citizenship. Also, the definitions of immigrant

are different depending on e.g. data sources (Anderson & Blinder, 2017). *Immigrant* refers to the people who are born or raised in Sweden but have at least one foreign parent(s), or those who have moved to Sweden (Ds 2000:43: 19). In this study, the focus is on women who were born and/or grew up in Sweden to immigrant parent(s).

2.4 People of color

The term *people of color* has subsisted since the late seventeen hundred. It became a common term in the 1990's and has since been a recommended term to use when referring to people who are not white or from European descent. It has become more common lately and the term is often shortened down to "PoC" (Oxford University Press, 2018).

2.5 Exotification

The concept of *exotification* is considered as the act of assigning characteristics of being exotic or "out of the norm" to other people, which usually affects people of color. An example for this is the exotification of women with Asian or Latino background, where they are considered rare because of their looks, hair or also because of their personality. Stereotypes such as being "submissive", "sexy" or being "mysterious" are common things that these women may be called by certain people (Kuo, 2016).

3. Previous research regarding immigrant women

To understand the purpose of this study, it is important to identify the previous research that has been made about immigrants, their identity and the difficulties they face in the host country. In this section, research regarding immigrant women will be presented on an international level, followed by immigrants' identity experiences in the Swedish society. Then, the content of intersectionality is reviewed, in previous research regarding women of color in Sweden.

3.1 Immigrant women around the world – cases from the U.S and Canada

Immigrant men and women play an important role in different societies from a socioeconomic perspective. A great number of these individuals have migrated to either continue or start a better life, aiming to contribute to the host country society. Their roles are different from one to another, and they could be students, workers or parents seeking a healthy environment for their family. It is estimated that by 2016, around 43.7 million immigrants resided in the United States, where 52 percent of them were women (Zong et.al, 2018). These immigrants are born in different countries around the world, for example China, India, Mexico and the Philippines.

Many of these women hold advanced degrees and seek to work within their professional areas, but their competence is not always acknowledged (OWHN, 2017). Thus, economic and social aspects become challenge for many immigrant women, where discrimination, racism and sexism are relevant problems that they may face in their everyday lives. In the labour market, for example, immigrant women are vulnerable because they do not have the same access to health insurance like U.S born women, even though many of them work full-time jobs and usually have occupations in production and transportation, which may be considered a demanding industry (Status of Women Data, 2018).

A study made in the United States about immigrant women with diverse backgrounds showed that some women with immigrant background do not want to socialize with people from their own background, because they are afraid of not being able to integrate to the American society if doing so. Other women instead felt that they were drifting away from their native culture and becoming more "Americanized". Most women claimed that they tried to keep a balance between both cultures because it was important for them to be a part of both. Several women however, confessed that they had to change themselves and imitate the Americans to fit in – to live like them and talk the way they do. These women felt that they only could be themselves when being at home. Many of the women felt a huge will to integrate and to belong to the American society but by doing so, their native cultural identity often had to suffer (Gupta & Sullivan, 2013: 29).

Many of the aspects named above are similar to the challenges that immigrant women face in Canada. It is estimated that in 2014, around 260 000 immigrants arrived in the country (Statistics Canada, 2014). By the year of 2011, approximately 52.3 percent were immigrant women. Just like the U.S, many of these women come from China, India and the Philippines. Because of this, many of these individuals are minorities who face social and economic challenges in their host society (Hudon, 2015). In addition, a relevant problem in the labour market, just like in the U.S, is that many of these immigrant women hold university degrees but are still unemployed. Many of them find themselves working in a position that does not match their qualifications, which is the opposite for Canadian-born women, who are less likely to hold a degree yet have a higher professional position (Statistics Canada, 2015).

3.2 Immigrants' ethnicity related experiences – cases from Sweden

A problem that immigrant women and men face is the aspect of homogenization. Despite the differences between immigrants, they are often referred to as one group, ignoring their different ethnic backgrounds, education level or life experiences. Some people may even refer to refugees and immigrants as one single group, forgetting the important difference between these two: a refugee is forced to flee from their home country, meanwhile an immigrant migrates because of reasons such as family, work or studies. A study about Swedish youth and ethnicity related experiences describes how these experiences affect young immigrants in the Swedish society. The immigrant groups in Sweden tend to be homogenized due to the segregation between people from immigrant background and “Swedes” (Gyberg et.al, 2018: 19).

Several young people with immigrant background referred to the difficulties that they face in the Swedish society, where they are exposed to challenges such as prejudice and racism. In this paragraph, cases focusing on young women are further explained. An example from an 18-year old self-identified Kenyan woman describes how she was harassed at school because of her Muslim background and her skin color. There were similar examples that showed how women of color tend to be exposed to harassment because of their skin color. Furthermore, a 20-year old Kurdish woman reflected on the white privilege, meaning that if a person is white, there is a higher possibility for them to be an individual without representing a whole ethnic group. Related to this issue, many of the participants of this study felt that because of their appearance, e.g. skin color, people did not perceive them as Swedish (ibid: 24–25). In the final findings of the study, it was explained that those who were more open to talk about their ethnicity-related experiences were young people with immigrant background, and more likely women than men. In addition to this, it was found that emerging adults with immigrant background were more likely to experience identity crisis in the Swedish society.

In a study about the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden (Eliassi & Minoo, 2014), the differences between the younger and older generation were examined. In that context, the younger generation refers to those who are born or raised in Sweden, and the older generation to those who moved to Sweden as adults. The findings showed that the younger generation was more likely to feel belonging to the Swedish society, while the older generation usually compared their previous life in the home country with the life in Sweden, and had strong feelings about the experiences from their home country (ibid: 75). Regarding their identity, the older

generation felt a higher sense of belonging to their homeland making it difficult for them to “build” a new identity while being in Sweden, and felt that they were too old for that. On the other hand, the younger generation had a stronger attachment to the Swedish society. However, it was also discovered that young people felt stuck in-between identities, not feeling neither completely Swedish or having the same ethnic identity as their foreign parents (ibid: 77).

3.3 Intersectional studies about “mixed” women in Sweden

An intersectional approach concerning women with immigrant background in Sweden has been made prior to this. This article (Sawyer, 2008) however, containing interviews and other data collected throughout the years of 1994 to 2007 from women mainly born to one foreign (black) parent and one Swedish (white) parent, and who grew up in Sweden during approximately the 1960's to the 1980's, gives a good image of what it was like growing up as “mixed” in the late nineteen hundred's. Several women described their experiences containing stories of how strangers would touch their hair, which made them feel uncomfortable and degraded, and how they wished that they looked like their mothers with long, blond hair.

Another woman talked about how she felt bad when reading “girls magazines” growing up, since they always confirmed her feelings about being different and excluded because all the hair and make-up tips never ascribed to her. Another woman talked about how she always felt Swedish on the inside and out, but how boys often would exoticify her and view her a way she did not identify herself with (ibid: 92–95). Moreover, the article described that many women felt that they were in-between two worlds, not being seen by others as Swedish even though feeling Swedish, and at the same time not being able to identify to the Black/African community. This was mainly due to most of the women grew up without their biological father and hence, only knew the Swedish culture and context of living (ibid: 100).

This article gives a good pre-understanding about the identity struggles of immigrant women growing up in Sweden, but it does not include women of all kinds of immigrant backgrounds. The article also focuses on women growing up in the nineteen hundred's, and it would therefore be of great interest to see how these experiences would compare to women with immigrant background who grew up more recently, in the 2000's.

4. Theoretical framework

In this section, intersectionality is presented as the theoretical framework of this study. Aspects such as definitions of intersectionality, as well as the importance of intersectionality and how to apply it in practice, are the main topics that will be discussed in this chapter.

4.1 Definitions of intersectionality

In a newspaper in 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" as a way to express and explain the oppression of African-American women (Columbia Law School, 2017). Intersectionality refers to the overall and coherent aspects of, for example – gender, class, age, ethnicity and race. Intersectionality means to have multiple identities and social locations, and the possibility of facing oppression or discrimination for more than just one of these aspects. Intersectionality promotes the idea that some groups of people are exposed to and experience discrimination in multiple ways and that these are connected to each other (Steans, 2013: 36). Intersectionality works different than many other previous theories, where these theories often focus on just one aspect, such as gender, race or class, and then leaves other aspects subordinated to the main one. In intersectionality, all aspects of identity are constitutive. They all affect each other and when put together, they form the way one perceives the world (Smooth, 2010: 34)

But intersectionality is not just a feministic theory, it also is a method for research and a stepping stone for working with social justice. An intersectional analysis aims to disclose multiple aspects of identity, as well as showing the discrimination and disadvantages that come about due to the combination of the different aspects of identities. It also aims at directing focus on the systems that establishes discrimination and inequalities, such as racism and patriarchy, which affects the position of women. The purpose of an intersectional analysis is not simply to point out which group that is more oppressed or which group that is more privileged, but the purpose is to bring light to the significant distinctions and similarities to defeat discrimination and to put all circumstances in place so that all people can enjoy human rights (Awid, 2004: 1–2).

4.2 The importance of intersectionality

Most analytical frameworks with a gender focus, often just focus on the gender relationships between people. And even though it is a common expression and belief that women are not a homogenous group, despite of this knowledge, this still tends to be forgotten during the

application of the theory. Intersectionality is also crucial when identifying acts that applies to a pattern of discrimination and to distinguish these from things that are distinctive about the actor or society (Awid, 2001: 3–4).

As a consequence of possessing multiple aspects of identity, some women get pushed into extreme marginals and experience a deep form of discrimination, while others receive more privileged positions (ibid: 2). Black women are a group that can be viewed upon as multiply disadvantaged, due to skin-color, gender and class position. When all three of these factors interact with one another they intensify and amplify each other (Brewer, 1999: 43). Intersectionality is also important since it links the foundations of discrimination to social, economic, political and legal surroundings that contributes to discrimination and gives structure to events of privilege and oppression. To be able to affect progressive change there is a need to bring light upon the actors, institutions, policies and norms that together creates these situations, and this is what an intersectional analysis aims to do (Awid, 2004: 5).

4.3 Applying intersectionality

To use an intersectional framework, one should think differently in aspects such as identity, equality and power structures. Instead of focusing on categories or isolated problem areas, there is a need to focus on where identities intersect with each other, and the complex and dynamic processes as well as the structures, that define each person's ability to human rights and opportunities. Analytically speaking, the goal always should be to exterminate discrimination and to celebrate diversity to develop and enjoy human rights. Performing an intersectional analysis thus have higher intellectual demands than most other gender approaches (Awid, 2004: 5).

When working with intersectionality the value lies in the "bottom-up" approach, both when researching, analysing and planning. If the subject for example would be poverty, an intersectional approach would not be satisfied or fulfilled if the conclusion would be that women in a specific region are the most vulnerable to poverty. An intersectional analysis would require displaying which group of women are the poorest, since women are not a homogenous group. But it would also require knowing the contributory factors to this conclusion (ibid: 5–6).

In this study, intersectionality is applied in the analysis. There, the intersectional framework is used by embracing the statement of possessing multiple identities, and also by analysing the possible effects of having these multiple identities. Moreover, this study aims to examine societal structures that impact the position of young women with immigrant background. The study also intends to explore differences between these women, and observe which group is most negatively affected by these societal structures.

5. Societal structures in Sweden

In this chapter, different societal structures in Sweden are presented. This section focuses on how school, work life and politics may affect the status of women with immigrant background in Sweden. This chapter is crucial because when doing an intersectional analysis, it is necessary to highlight the structures that affect women's position in society.

5.1 Structural discrimination and intersectionality

According to the report about structural discrimination in Sweden, the knowledge of how different systems of unequal power relations interact with each other, such as intersectionality, is largely missing in the Swedish society. The link between ethnicity, gender and class is specifically related to this issue. Since the 1980's, feminist researchers have talked about the fact that "Western feminism" is unable to analyse the current social structure or represent women with a background other than "white", i.e. women of color. These researchers believe that "white" women, and women (and men) with immigrant background experience different forms of oppression (SOU 2005:56: 463).

5.2 School – impact and power structures

Most people think of school as the place where children learn and gather knowledge, preparing them for adulthood and work life. But besides this, school is also a place where children gather the current attitudes and values present in society. If there are norms present in school contributing to ranking people based upon nationality, ethnicity, religion or gender, as well as visible or non-visible discrimination, there is a risk of affecting how children and youth socialize within the power structures of society (SOU 2005:56: 209).

Even though the Swedish school aims at working with common values that seek to cherish each student's knowledge and experiences, it still is however, the opinion from the majority of the society that gets the heaviest vote within the school world. This perspective unfortunately,

includes viewing immigrants as socially and cognitively below the average Swede (ibid: 215). But aspects including school books and the way school teaches about the "different others" are also contributors to this negative view of immigrants. Many school books give the view of Europeans as people with great imagination, creativity and the ones who discover things, while people from Africa and Asia often are portrayed as lacking reason and abstract thinking (ibid: 218). Several studies show that racist and colonial discourses permeate the Swedish learning system and there are several stereotypical and discriminating pictures used in school books that creates the image of who belongs where in the social hierarchy (ibid: 224).

5.3 Work life – women in Sweden

Regarding women's work life in Sweden, around 2002 it appeared that most women were situated in the industry sector, hotel, restaurant but also other private services. Recent studies about the working conditions for immigrant women in unqualified professions show that the physical and mental work environment, and discrimination adversely affect their health (SOU 2005:56: 260). In addition, there are wage differences between men and women in Sweden, meaning that men tend to make more money than women, which has a negative impact on all women. Also, there are major differences in the working environment between Swedish people and people with immigrant background. One of the example listed is that the physical and psychological work environment is worse for women with immigrant background than for Swedish women. Some important findings have been made in recent years by researchers to broaden the theoretical understanding of how gender and ethnicity affect the opportunities in working life. By using the concept of intersectionality, the researchers have identified the interacting power dimensions of over and subordination regarding class, gender and ethnicity to analyse and clarify the segregation and discrimination in the labour market (ibid: 264).

5.4 Politics – behind racism and xenophobia

An article that explains why racism and xenophobia are formed (Akbari, 2011) concludes that xenophobia in the Swedish society arises because of the current socioeconomic situation, according to researchers and politicians. During the time when society experiences severe economic crises, including high unemployment and impaired access to welfare, xenophobia increases as well. Individuals who suffer from economic difficulties are offered simple solutions such as blaming immigrants as the reason behind why their living situation has changed to the worse. According to the report's results, there is not just a single factor that explains the emergence of xenophobic attitudes in society (ibid: 17). When aspects about

culture and lifestyle are discussed in politics, at the expense of economic aspects, a space for the right-wing extremes is created and thus grows (ibid: 2).

6. Method

In this section, the method for this study is explained. The process is discussed and the different procedures are then presented in various subheadings, i.a. qualitative research framework, ethical considerations and data collection process.

6.1 Qualitative research framework

The approach for this study was the use of qualitative research. A qualitative research tends to focus on deep-understanding of a phenomenon, and seeks to understand why and how individuals perceive the reality of issues (Bryman, 2011: 341). In this study, the focus was to identify underlying factors about young women's identity in the Swedish society by having intersectionality as the theoretical framework. Therefore, a qualitative interview was the most appropriate method to use. There are several definitions for qualitative research and some scholars argue that because of this, it is difficult to see this research method just as a general approach, and that the different methods that can be used within this method are important to consider. Some examples of the most important qualitative research methods are ethnographic content analysis, focus groups, discourse analysis, qualitative analysis of text and documents, as well as qualitative interviews (ibid: 344). The later method was used to conduct this research and is explained further in the next section.

6.2 Semi-structured interviews

The use of qualitative interviews allows interviewees to be open and flexible about their thoughts. In turn, the interviewer has the possibility to interpret and find deep understanding in the material gathered from the interview (Hjerm et.al, 2016: 149). What defines a semi-structured interview is the firm structure yet flexible aspect of the questions. By using semi-structured interviews for this study, it was possible to design interview questions that allowed the interviewees to discuss the subject deeply and at the same time making the interview process more effective. Therefore, having default questions and asking the same questions to all participants contributed to an easier analysis of the results, creating a higher level of validity as well (ibid: 150).

However, it was important to be conscious about the risks of having semi-structured interview questions because in some cases, they create a barrier between the interviewee and the researcher, not leaving space for an open interaction where relevant topics may arise and thus help the researcher with interesting findings. Furthermore, the use of a qualitative method makes it difficult to generalise for a whole population, because the interviews are made using only a limited number of individuals. In other words, the interviewees in this study are not meant to represent all young immigrant women as a group (Bryman, 2011: 369).

6.3 Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling is a non-probability sample, meaning that the aim is to focus on certain criteria of a population of interest. However, the sample that is studied does not intend to represent a whole population, but instead aims to find respondents based on the defined criteria before conducting the research (Lund Research Ltd, 2012). The criteria that the interviewees needed to meet for this study were the following: women born in Sweden with immigrant background, currently studying at university and being between the ages of 19 to 23 years old. In order to find suitable respondents, a Facebook post was shared containing the required criteria, and also by sharing information among acquaintances. When selecting possible candidates for this study, it was of importance to identify those individuals who have knowledge about the research subject. For this study, it was crucial to ask the participants about their feelings, thoughts and opinions about their identity, focusing on different aspects that were discussed throughout the interview (Hjerm et.al, 2016: 153).

The specific ages selected for this study were based on Erik Homburger Erikson's theory of psychological development from childhood to adulthood, divided in eight different stages. The fifth stage is called *identity versus role confusion* which occurs during adolescence, usually between the ages of 12 to 18. Here, most individuals seek a sense of belonging and identification, alternating between roles, exploring different values and aim to understand their identity formation (Erikson, 1968: 134). Therefore, by using the ages between 19 and 23 years old, it was assumed that the respondents were pass the adolescence stage, had a better sense of their identity and could reflect on a deeper level about their ethnic/national identity during the interviews. Moreover, by choosing mainly second-generation immigrants, it was more likely that they have experienced what is like to grow up and live in the Swedish society, and at the same time are aware of their parent's or homeland's culture, values and traditions, giving them the opportunity to reflect about their identity from different perspectives.

6.4 Respondents

	Self-identified respondents	Age	Country of birth	Years in Sweden
Interviewee #1	Burundian	20 years old	Burundi	12 years (Moved to Sweden at the age of 9 years old)
Interviewee #2	Ethiopian	21 years old	Sweden	21 years
Interviewee #3	Swedish/ Colombian	22 years old	Sweden	22 years
Interviewee #4	Swedish/Egyptian/ Eritrean	21 years old	Sweden	18 years (Lived in Egypt for 3 years)
Interviewee #5	Swedish/ Eritrean	21 years old	Sweden	21 years
Interviewee #6	Swedish/Syriac	21 years old	Sweden	21 years
Interviewee #7	Swedish/Ghanaian/ Mozambican	21 years old	Sweden	10 years (Lived in Mozambique/ Kenya for 11 years)
Interviewee #8	Bosnian	22 years old	Sweden	22 years

Table 6.4

Two of the respondents deviated in some way from the criteria. Although the self-identified Burundian woman was not born in Sweden, she had an interesting background and opinions for the study. In addition, she moved to Sweden when she was 9 years old and thus has experience of growing up in the Swedish society. The self-identified Swedish/Ghanaian/Mozambican woman lived outside of Sweden for 11 years, but since she was born in Sweden and moved back a couple of years ago, she had relevant aspects to discuss and therefore was also included in the study.

6.5 Ethical considerations

Before finding respondents for the interviews, it was important to understand and apply Bryman's four different ethical principles. Firstly, a brief explanation of the study's goal was

explained to the respondents, letting them know about the details of the interview process. Secondly, they had to agree to be a part of this study. Thirdly, the respondent's personal information was cautiously used with confidentiality. Also, the respondents were aware of their right to withdraw from the interview or choose not to answer certain questions if they made the respondent uncomfortable. Lastly, it was important to be clear about that the interviews and the results of them were exclusively used for research purposes (Bryman, 2011: 131–132). Furthermore, the interviews were recorded only after having a verbal agreement with every interviewee about confidentiality, explaining that the recordings were only used for this research.

6.6 Interview guide

While preparing for the semi-structured interviews, it was important to have an interview guide for the questions that were relevant for this study (see Appendix: Interview guide). The interview guide was based on the instructions recommended by Alan Bryman (Bryman, 2011: 419). In order to formulate the interview questions, it was of importance to take into consideration the research questions of the study. By doing so, it was possible to receive relevant information from the respondents. The interview guide was meant to be a helpful tool for conducting the interviews, and some of the follow-up questions arose naturally, giving the respondents more freedom to express themselves. Before starting the interview, the interviewers were ethically aware of the subject and explained to each interviewee what the study was about, letting them know about the anonymity of the study, and that their answers were treated confidentially and only for research purposes (ibid: 420). Moreover, the interviewees had the right to withdraw, not feeling obligated to participate in the interview.

By starting with background questions during the interview, the aim was to make the interviewee comfortable before asking the questions regarding their identity. The reason for doing so was because some questions could be more sensitive to discuss, for example, questions regarding personal experiences of discrimination or racism. All the interviews were made in Swedish, since it was easier for the respondents to tell their personal experiences using a language that both researchers and respondents found convenient. Because the answers for the analysis had to be translated from Swedish to English, recording the interviews made it possible to improve the reliability by being able to re-listen, decreasing misinterpretations of the answers and their context (Hjerm et.al, 2014: 94).

6.7 Validity and reliability

The validity was improved by having a list of criteria about the appropriate respondents that suited this study. In addition, going through the interview questions and analysing their relevance gave an insight about the possible outcomes of the interviews. This made it possible to examine if the questions were correct for the study's purpose (Hjerm et.al, 2014: 94). The reliability was tested by carefully listening to the recorded interviews before using the information for the analysis, by doing so it was possible to avoid errors and misinterpretations of the content. Furthermore, maintaining the original expressions and language in the citations used for the result section was of importance to enhance reliability as well. Every respondent answered the same questions from the interview guide, and the researchers were aware of the importance of transparency during the interviews. This helped to avoid biased discussions that could affect the respondents' answers (ibid: 170).

6.8 Data collection process

For this study, a total of eight semi-structured interviews were performed. Each interview lasted about 10 to 25 minutes in total. The place where the interviews took place was chosen for privacy, considering the interviewees anonymity and the sensitivity of the subject. A group room at the university's library was booked for each session where both researchers were present together with the interviewee. It was important for both researchers to be present in the interviews, one of them asked the questions meanwhile the other one helped with taking notes about things that were important to think about when transcribing. This method was suitable to increase the validity of the study (Bryman, 2011: 352). As the interviews were made in Swedish and then translated to English, it was important to be aware of the risk of misunderstandings or wrong interpretations when transcribing these. Therefore, the advantage of being two researchers helped making both the interview and transcribing process easier. In addition, having two researchers present at the interview was of advantage, since one of them was taking notes so that the other interviewer was prevented of being distracted by this (ibid: 428).

The information gathered from the interviews and the results of them were analysed by using the method of coding and thematic analysis. The transcribing process was crucial to find similarities between the respondent's opinions and getting an idea of how the codes could be grouped based on different subcategories (ibid: 529). The strategy used was coding in depth, which was an opportunity to identify the most important aspects of what the respondents answered and thus find accurate codes for the subcategories. This was also helpful to remove

unnecessary information that did not contribute to the study (Hjerm et.al, 2014: 60). The coding strategy can be described as coding for patterns. Coding for patterns is a way of gathering smaller patterns that repeat themselves during the coding process itself (Patel, 2014). This means that both the codes and categories did not have a link to the intersectional framework or to the previous research about immigrant women. Instead, the data material “spoke by itself” and thus it was possible to create subcategories for the results.

After having a ready list of codes and subcategories it was possible to find themes that covered these subcategories (ibid: 69). Four themes were identified: Identity factors; Societal structures’ impact on identity; “Swedishness” and Experiences and challenges. By using these themes, it was possible to answer the study’s research questions. Citations from the interviews were used to clarify examples related to each theme. These citations were slightly adjusted to make it easier to understand, prevent misunderstandings and to avoid excessive informal language (ibid: 81).

Lastly, the analysis was conducted by looking at the subcategories found for the results, and then putting these into context with the intersectional framework and the previous research about immigrant women. When this was done and connections between these aspects were made, it was then possible to make the overall analysis of the results from the study.

6.9 Difficulties

During the writing of this paper, some difficulties were identified that had to be considered. When finding respondents based on the targeted group, it was clear that it was not possible to make generalisation in this study for the whole group of women with immigrant background in Sweden. The reason for this was certain limits such as age group, since all the respondents were between 20 to 22 years old. In addition, these were students at university and therefore the study does not include women with other occupations.

After conducting the interviews, it was noticeable that one of the respondents shared a lot of personal stories. However, even though it seemed like it was valuable information at that time, not everything contributed to the result of the study. From this experience, it was possible to avoid this problem in the other interviews by improvising and leading each interviewee back on track if they were carried away by their own stories (Hjerm et.al, 2014: 164). A pilot interview would have helped to avoid certain problems but the time was limited. At the end,

these were not major problems that interfered with the expected results for this study. Finally, the translation of the citations was a step that was considered in terms of reliability. Although the citations were translated to English, it was important to make the translation as accurate as possible to the original content.

7. Results

The results of this study are presented in different themes based on the data analysis of young women with immigrant background in Sweden and their identity related experiences. In the results, the respondents are referred according to how they chose to identify during the interviews. To observe how the respondents identified themselves, see Table 6.4. The results will be presented in the following order of themes: Identity factors, Society's impact on identity, "Swedishness" and Experiences and challenges. Since each theme was considered comprehensive, it was necessary to divide these themes into different subcategories in order to cover all aspects discussed by the respondents.

7.1 Identity factors

During the interviews, it was noticeable that the respondents had different opinions on what influenced their identity and the reasons behind it. The following subcategories were identified: family and culture, social environment and feeling "Swedish".

7.1.1 Family and culture

The respondents talked about how family is one of the factors that affect the view on their own identity. They expressed that in many cases, a person is born "inside" the family's culture, which may affect how individuals perceive their family culture and how they choose to integrate it in their daily life. Some of them expressed that they often feel more at home with their family culture rather than with the Swedish culture. Many of the respondents felt that they have a sense of belonging in both cultures and can choose the best characteristics from each culture. However, they also expressed that their cultures are combined with each other and it is often why they cannot have just one culture to relate. The self-identified Swedish/Ghanaian/Mozambican woman said:

I think it is because... I have two different cultures, it is still a mix. If I had lived in Sweden, maybe I would have been more like, only Swedish, but because of the fact that I lived within another culture, I feel that my life is

like a soup of cultures and experiences, so it becomes more likely that I cannot identify myself with any other Swede.

On the other hand, some respondents could relate more to the Swedish culture but still felt stuck in-between cultures, especially because they had not visited their parents' home country and did not have experiences from there. Another aspect brought up was that in some families, parents may choose not to raise their children with their own culture, but instead try to make them adapt easier to the values of the country they live in. Some of the respondents expressed that meanwhile family plays an important role in their life, being with the family and being raised within their culture are not the most crucial factors that affect how they identify themselves.

7.1.2 Social environment

The social environment was discussed, where the respondents talked about how growing up in a Swedish environment was something that also affected their personality and thus their identity. They felt that having Swedish friends and learning about Swedish values had a strong impact on them. Because of this, many of the respondents felt that the experiences and the people surrounding them during their childhood contributed to the integration of Swedish values and lifestyle automatically in their lives. However, some of them felt that different “sides” of their identity emerged depending on who they interacted with. An example from the self-identified Swedish/Syriac woman is the following:

[...] I grew up in a very Swedish neighbourhood, so during my childhood I have spent a lot of time with Swedish friends, then of course, I have my relatives too, but then again society and the environment around is something that makes me identify a lot as Swedish and who I am. When I am with my relatives and such, more of my Syriac background comes forward, so to speak.

7.1.3 About feeling “Swedish”

Feelings about being “Swedish” and relating to other Swedish people was an aspect that many of the respondents reflected about. They explained that sometimes they do not expect Swedes to see them just as “Swedish as them”, which makes them have stronger feelings to their immigrant identity. On the other hand, some of the respondents said that although they live in Sweden, they have memories of growing up in the country and other people perceive them as Swedish, they still may feel that they cannot relate to an “ordinary” Swedish person. The

reasons behind this were because of culture, growing up with immigrant parents, having relatives in their parent's home country and maybe not looking like the "typical Swede".

7.2 Societal structures' impact on identity

All eight respondents had the opportunity to reflect about what impact societal structures had on their identity. There was a division among the respondents where some felt that society did not affect their view on identity, meanwhile some felt that it did. In the following subcategories *no impact on identity* and *impact on identity*, the reflections of the respondents are presented.

7.2.1 No impact on identity

Two respondents claimed that society did not affect the way they identified. The reason behind the statement could be linked to that both respondents, the self-identified Swedish/Colombian woman and the self-identified Swedish/Syriac woman, felt that they were strongly a part of the Swedish society and the Swedish culture. They both expressed that they grew up among Swedish friends and that they felt closer attached to the Swedish context than any other.

The self-identified Swedish/Colombian woman had encountered disadvantages and discrimination in the Swedish society. She still felt, however, very strongly that no one ever should have the ability to impact another person's identity and claimed that this was the main reason to why society did not impact her. The self-identified Swedish/Syriac woman instead, expressed herself like this:

No, I do not think that it (society) affects... no, not that much. I have not experienced that much, like... that I have been treated in a bad way or anything like that based upon people asking me where I am from because I have somewhat of a 'foreign look'. So, for me it has not had a big impact. [...] I think it has do with where you are from, exactly how foreign you appear to be, too.

In her case, she drew the connection between the experience of not facing any discrimination in society to why society did not impact her view on identity. She did however, underline that she believed that the further away an individual was from the "Swedish ideal" appearance-wise, the possibility of facing discrimination and not being viewed as Swedish by others increased.

7.2.2 Impact on identity

The remaining six respondents claimed that society affected them in some way when it came to their identity. Several of them discussed about how other (Swedish) people do not view them as Swedish, which had an impact on how they view themselves. They said that others do not expect them to be Swedish or that they do not think that their appearance is “typical Swedish-looking”. For some, this gave a greater feeling of identifying as non-Swedish and for some it created confusion or annoyance. The self-identified Swedish/Eritrean woman also talked about how she feels that society divides people based upon appearance and background:

I believe that society has a big impact too. It is very divided when you talk about Swedish people and Swedes with immigrant background. So, you get placed into different groups, even though you were born here and went to school here.

Some of the respondents compared the impact of society to different kind of demands and expectations that they felt were pushed onto them. The self-identified Swedish/Egyptian/Eritrean woman spoke about how society unfortunately affected her and that it was important for her to remind herself about her own goals and dreams, instead of thinking about society's expectations and prejudices against her. The self-identified Bosnian woman spoke about a similar subject, a constant feeling of pressure and demands from the society:

It (the society) puts more demands on us. Because it feels like we do not get the same reward for an equal amount of work. [...] because of the way people view you, you have to do more to prove that you are good enough, you know.

She also brought up Zlatan Ibrahimović as an example to the point she wanted to get across, and talked about how he has the same background as her and that he was not considered a Swede until he did something that the Swedish people considered to be valuable for Sweden. She felt that this is a general issue regarding immigrants in Sweden and that this also impacts her view on identity.

7.3 “Swedishness”

In this section, the focus is about the respondent’s reflections on “Swedishness” and how they are affected by this. By analysing the reflections done by the respondents regarding this aspect it was possible to see a pattern, were most of them had thoughts about what it meant to be Swedish for them, and at the same time comparing their own opinion to what they believe the

Swedish people perceive as “Swedishness”. The reflections were based on the following subcategories: appearance, country of birth and language skills.

7.3.1 Appearance

The aspect of appearance was also discussed in depth by all the respondents, where most of them had reflections about how this aspect is one of the most important factors when talking about identity. The respondents expressed that when meeting new people, in this case Swedes, among the first questions they get is “where are you *really* from” which is often based on skin, hair and/or eye color. This was something that affected most of the respondents, where some of them said that because there is a standard of how a Swede looks like, e.g. white, blonde and blue-eyed, they could not identify as one of them. For example, the self-identified Burundian woman who has lived in Sweden for about 12 years, said that a Swedish citizenship should be the only criteria needed to be able to identify as Swedish. However, she expressed her challenge as a woman of color:

[...] For example, if you are dark-skinned then there is a much higher risk that you will not be seen as Swedish. Although you have a Swedish passport, you are born in Sweden and then you have everything you really should... But it is not like that for everyone.

Although this is the most common example, some respondents expressed that their personal criteria should not define another person’s “Swedishness” and affect how they identify themselves. The self-identified Swedish/Egyptian/Eritrean woman expressed that being Swedish is a part of an individual’s identity and, at the same time, it also is about having responsibilities as a citizen and obligations to society. However, just as the example above, she agreed that appearance often plays a bigger role than it should when it comes down to PoC.

7.3.2 Country of birth and language skills

The self-identified Swedish/Colombian woman expressed that country of birth plays a big role, according to her. She explained that her mother who has been a Swedish citizen for more than 30 years is not seen as a Swedish, compared to herself even though she is only 22 years old. She reflected that the reason behind is that she was born in Sweden and has been raised with Swedish values and traditions, which makes it easier for her compared to her mother’s position. Also, she expressed that language is important because it is the mother tongue of an individual and that it contributes to personal development in the society. In other words, growing up in

the country and being able to speak the country's language were the aspects that she considered most important when talking about "Swedishness".

The self-identified Swedish/Eritrean woman reflected about how being born and raised in Sweden should be enough to identify as Swedish no matter what background an individual has. However, she was unsure about what criteria people who migrate to the country need to fulfil, and said that it was difficult to think about what a person needs to do to become Swedish. In addition to this, an example from the self-identified Swedish/Syriac woman is that being born in Sweden is what makes her feel Swedish, since she does not have any other country to feel a sense of belonging. This is due to historical events, such as the Assyrian-Chaldean-Syriac diaspora.

Furthermore, she explained that aside country of birth, language is also an important aspect. However, she reflected about her grandparents and their language skills – although they cannot speak fluent Swedish, she still considered that they can be identified as Swedish. In her own words:

[...] I think, to be Swedish is about like, you live in the country, you know the language and so on. But then I think of my grandparents, it is obvious that they know a little Swedish but they are not so fluent in it. I still think they are Swedish, although they feel a bit more foreign than me.

7.3.3 Perceived opinions of the Swedish people

After discussing the respondents' personal thoughts, their views and reflections about what they thought the Swedish people consider "Swedish" was also discussed. The self-identified Swedish/Eritrean woman expressed that in the Swedish society, the standard Swede is often a blonde, blue-eyed person, which did not match her thoughts about what makes a person Swedish. She explained that growing up in Sweden and being familiar with the culture and values are the only things that should matter, not appearance. Similarly, the Swedish/Syriac woman expressed that appearance is something that society focuses mostly on, despite other qualities in an individual. Questioning where a person comes from and their background is common among people with immigrant background, especially for PoC.

On the other hand, some of the respondents discussed that it is not possible to generalise about the Swedish people's thoughts on what being Swedish means. They explained that society's

opinions are divided, considering how some aspects in the Swedish society have changed since the migration wave from 2015. The self-identified Swedish/Colombian woman expressed concern about this:

[...] There are people who can be very radical with their thoughts, and they may feel that I have no right to call myself Swedish [...] But there are also those who are very open [...] as well as accepting and trying to understand other cultures and so on [...] but unfortunately there are those who are very opposed to it and think that someone who does not have a Swedish background or Swedish parents should not be able to see themselves as Swedes, which I think is very sad.

The self-identified Swedish/Ghanaian/Mozambican woman considered that identity is an individual choice. She reflected about how some people may have similar opinions to her about identifying as Swedish, e.g. if a person feels like identifying as Swedish, then they should be able to. However, she pointed out that other people may feel that a person who is not the typical “Swede with Swedish parents and ancestors”, they will not be seen as Swedish. She thinks that it is difficult to say that there is a standard mindset about how Swedes feel about “how to be Swedish”.

7.4 Experiences and challenges in everyday life

The respondents had the opportunity to voluntarily share experiences or concerns regarding their everyday life. Based upon their stories and thoughts, five subcategories were formed: school related experiences, opportunities, being "weird" or facing preconceptions, exotication and racism, as well as positive attitude.

7.4.1 School related experiences

Since all the respondents were currently students at university, several of them had school-related experiences, both from an early age and until the present day. The self-identified Burundian woman shared her experience of meeting with a school guidance counsellor prior to making her program choice for upper secondary school. When expressing that she had thoughts about choosing natural science, the counsellor looked doubtful and then talked about how difficult that program was and if the student was sure about choosing that one. The self-identified Burundian woman felt confused to why she got questioned instead of encouraged. Furthermore, the self-identified Ethiopian woman also shared experiences she had encountered with school personnel:

[...] Some teachers do not think that you can speak Swedish that well, because they judge you based upon appearance. [...] Like, I am not defined by how I look or where I am from [...]

Another respondent talked about the difficulties of being a Muslim student at university. She talked about how aspects such as partying was something she did not do, due to religious reasons, but that she still tries to be a part of the social life. However, she felt that by not being involved with the partying, one gets somewhat isolated.

7.4.2 Opportunities

Several respondents expressed thoughts about their opportunities as women of color in the Swedish society. The feeling of not having that same opportunities as “Swedish” students were expressed in angst. This was connected to the respondents feeling that societal structures contributed to Swedish people seeing those with immigrant background as lazy or less intelligent and thus leaving them with less opportunities. This also left them with a concern for the future regarding job opportunities. The self-identified Swedish/Eritrean woman shared her concerns:

I feel like I have not encountered any problems yet. But I know that once you get into the career platform it gets... Like, you talk about that there is difference between men and women. But then there is an extra... If you have an immigrant background then there is another disadvantage.

Here, she expresses the concern of both being a woman and having an immigrant background when applying for jobs, since both aspects are considered disadvantages. Another respondent shared how she chose to join a Muslim organization to get her voice heard and to improve her rights in society, hence hoping to improve her opportunities.

7.4.3 Being "weird" or facing preconceptions

The respondents expressed a feeling of being "weird" or different due to their appearance, their cultural or religious practices. This feeling, was for some, very strong during childhood and affected them negatively growing up. Some felt "weird" due to their appearance compared to their classmates and some felt "weird" due to being accused or questioned for not eating pork or not celebrating Christmas.

Other respondents shared more recent problems, such as preconceptions among people that all immigrants live in "immigrant areas". These people who believe this hence, link a person's appearance and background to what socioeconomic status they believe that person possesses.

Another respondent, a self-identified Swedish/Ghanaian/Mozambican woman, who grew up most of her life in Mozambique and Kenya, now faced a lot of preconceptions regarding where she grew up and about her experiences. She expressed it like this:

[...] Sometimes there are some attitudes regarding people with an immigrant background or regarding women, and stuff like that. That people say things and you have to, eh... correct them a little. If we think about Africa in general, then there is... a lot of people have an idea of Africa in general and they do not consider the fact that there are a lot of different countries. So, then people have this attitude towards you, that they 'know' about my life experiences and that they 'know' about Africa, when really, they do not. [...]

She then continues to talk about her experiences as a "mixed" woman and how she hopes that being mixed will become something normal and something beautiful, instead of it being regarded as "ugly" as she believes people have considered it earlier.

The self-identified Swedish/Syriac woman had different experiences compared to most of the respondents. She expressed a feeling of only encountering positive experiences in the Swedish society. She talked about not facing discrimination or people treating her bad. In fact, she said that when going to job interviews she often receives a positive reaction and gets complimented for her ability to speak Swedish.

7.4.4 Exotification and racism

Most of the respondents chose to share experiences of exotification and racism that they had encountered in the Swedish society. Some stories differed from each other and some of the respondents had similar experiences. The self-identified Burundian woman shares some of her experiences as a woman of color in Sweden:

[...] I had a colleague who was talking about [...] some girls, or boys? I do not know because I was not listening that carefully. But then she said 'eh, but they were, like really dark! They were almost too dark. But you, you are like, a little bit of light and nice looking, but they were really dark!' Okay, is that the opposite of nice looking, or what? [...] and then one time I was walking down town, there was this man, he was really mad. I do not know why, but he was really mad. Then he shouted, 'Damn wog'... I had barely seen him, but when I looked up, he was looking at me, oh... so, it touched a sore point.

When discussing further about the incident with her colleague, she talked about how people think that they are complementing her by saying these things, when in reality, they are not.

Moreover, another respondent could relate to the situation regarding facing racism on the streets. When walking across the street outside of a Swedish airport, she could feel several people staring at her, observing her every move. She felt that they were not just looking, but they were watching her in a wrong way, like they were suspicious of her. She said that the incident hurt her and that she feared that this behaviour could continue.

A common subject among several respondents was the subject of hair. The respondents talked about how many people would use ignorant comments regarding their hair or that people often felt free to touch them without permission. The self-identified Swedish/Ghanaian/Mozambican woman expressed her feelings on the matter:

[...] both when I have braids or when I have like, my hair out and an afro, then there are often people who touch it (my hair). It is cool if my friends do it, but when strangers on the street do it, it is just not a nice feeling. [...]

Another respondent talked about how people are unaware and do not understand the meaning of their actions when they act like this. She explained that she usually does not get mad, but that she understands those who do react harshly. She further emphasised that immigrant people are not toys that a person can just feel and touch because they want to. She instead encourages people to ask questions to get a deeper understanding regarding the issue.

Other respondents talked about stereotypes that lead to exotification. For example, the conception that a person is a good dancer, solely based upon appearance. The self-identified Swedish/Colombian woman also shared the experience of being exotified by, in this case, men and hearing things such as "Latinas are easy" hence, linking her ethnic background to her sexuality.

By being both a woman and having an immigrant background, the respondents expressed difficulty when trying to identify the source of discrimination at times. The self-identified Swedish/Eritrean woman said:

[...] if something happens to me, I do not think 'oh it is because I am an immigrant', but I see it for what it is. Maybe it was because, maybe I was wrong. Maybe I did not do good enough. [...] So, I do not know if this is a good or a bad thing. Maybe I am ignoring it (the problem). Maybe it is not good in the long run.

7.4.5 Positive attitude

The respondents also discussed the importance of keeping a positive attitude and a positive mindset. Many felt that by thinking negatively, they would encounter negative experiences. They also did not want other people to affect them to the point where they would have a negative mindset, because this would only affect their own life and happiness. The self-identified Swedish/Egyptian/Eritrean woman talked about how she always is trying to draw attention to the conversation and getting to know each other, when meeting new people, before the other person even has the chance to think negatively or make preconceptions of her based upon her appearance. She shared her thoughts on the matter:

*[...] I am an optimistic person. If I want something, then I am going to succeed on my own. And I have never given people the chance to throw their prejudices against me and that I should feel sad about it. [...]
Personally, I prefer not to think about these negative things that happen. It feels like it is going to put a stop for what I am trying to achieve and on my progress. [...]*

8. Analysis and conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine young women with immigrant background, their perceptions about their own identities as well as feelings of belonging in the Swedish society. Furthermore, the analysis includes the reflections regarding the challenges they face. These identity perceptions, sense of belonging in the Swedish society and reflections about their personal challenges are then analysed using the theoretical framework of intersectionality. In addition, these aspects are linked to the previous research about immigrant women, and societal structures in Sweden. The conclusion aims to highlight the most important findings of the analysis and summarize the answers of the research questions. Finally, suggestions for future research are presented.

8.1 Intersectional analysis

The analysis of the study is conducted by linking the subcategories identified in the results, focusing mainly on the intersectional framework. Moreover, the previous research about immigrant women and the societal structures in Sweden are featured to give a broader perspective regarding the respondent's reflections about their identity related experiences.

Within the subcategory of family and culture, the women reflected about how in some cases, parents choose to raise their kids with the culture of the country they live in. This can be

explained because the older generation is assumed to have a harder time feeling a sense of belonging to the Swedish culture, and thus they may choose to make it easier for the upcoming generations by increasing the contact with the host country's values and traditions. An example for this was found in the results of the subcategory country of birth and language, where one of the women reflected about that despite of her mother living in the country for more than 30 years, she was not seen as "Swedish" as the respondent herself. As Eliassi & Minoo (2014) observed in their study, it is common for the older generation to have trouble building a new identity in the host country, which could be caused by the strong attachment to their home country experiences.

It was also possible to see a pattern about the family's impact on the respondent's identities, when growing up with an extra culture beside the Swedish. The observations made by Eliassi & Minoo about the young and older generation could be identified in this section as well. Some of the respondents also expressed feelings of being stuck in-between cultures, explaining that lacking experience from their parent's home country was one of the biggest factors that contributed to their identity ambivalence. This was also examined in the article about women born to one foreign (black) parent and one Swedish (white) parent by Sawyer (2008), where the "mixed" women were in-between worlds, not being perceived as Swedish, and at the same time not being able to identify with the African community since they only had experiences of growing up in a Swedish society.

Some women talked about social environment and how childhood memories in Sweden affected their personality and identity. Many of them felt that having Swedish friends and acquaintances contributed to having a more "Swedish-like" lifestyle. They argued, however, that different aspects of their identity emerged depending on the social situation. For example, having a Swedish-like personality with Swedish people, and having another one with their family/friends of immigrant background. Similarly, the behaviour of immigrant women observed in the study by Gupta & Sullivan (2013) was that they found themselves trying to balance out the cultural/ethnic identities that they possess, which was a challenge for them. Even if it is not the case for every woman, the results showed that some of them felt that it was difficult to portray only one side of their identity. This explains the reason why some women in this study choose to behave differently depending on what social situation they encountered.

When doing an intersectional analysis, it is of importance to reflect about the cause of discrimination. Therefore, it is of value to analyse societal structures that could be causing and maintaining the discrimination of a certain group, in this case – young women with immigrant background in Sweden.

The subcategory regarding school related experiences, where some respondents expressed feelings of being questioned or judged by school personnel, can be better understood through the document provided by the Swedish government (SOU 2005: 56). This document emphasized that, even though the Swedish school has spoken intentions about working through common values, immigrant children often get viewed as intellectually below the average Swede. This way of thinking was, according to the document, a perception coming from the majority of society, which also has the heaviest vote on how the school works. Meaning, that because these thoughts are existent on a societal level, it affects the schools and the school personnel's thinking and valuing of the children. Hence, girls with immigrant background, like the respondents, risk getting treated differently and inferior to their peers with a Swedish background.

In the subcategory discussing opportunities, a concern regarding working life in the future is brought up. The concern is based upon the feeling of having two different disadvantages when stepping into the career field – being a woman, as well as having an immigrant background. The governmental document, as mentioned above, also discusses working life. In the document it is stated that the current wage gap affects all women negatively. But when it comes to immigrant women, studies have shown that they also have a worse working environment compared to the average Swedish woman in regards of physical and psychological aspects. Intersectionality involves the belief of having multiple identities and the possibility of being discriminated against for multiple reasons. Often within the working field, women with immigrant backgrounds are at risk of facing several forms of discrimination based on their multiple identities.

The Swedish people's opinion regarding "Swedishness" was discussed by the respondents, where they also talked about facing negative attitudes. From the observations in the study about youth's ethnic related experiences by Gyberg et.al (2018), a problem found in this study was also the homogenization of some of these women because of their immigrant background. An example that most of the women experienced was that first-time encounters with strangers

meant having to be prepared to be asked the question “where are you *really* from” or facing negative attitudes, even though most of them were born and raised in Sweden. The women expressed that meanwhile some may be open and positive, many are negative and have radical opinions about immigrants. Regarding Akbari’s (2011) discussion about the reasons behind xenophobia, it is explained that immigrants tend to get blamed for socioeconomic difficulties in the society and in some cases, because of the cultural clashes. At the same time, people may take this as an opportunity to increase negative attitudes, stereotypes and discrimination toward those with immigrant background.

All the women reflected about appearance and how it affects their identity. As named in the last paragraph, questioning where they are *really* from encouraged their thoughts about how there is a standard created by society about how a Swede looks like, and thus having a hard time identifying as one of them. In this study, dark-skinned women expressed the risk of not being seen as Swedish just because of the color of their skin. The same opinions were observed in Gyberg et.al’s study coming from the women of color. From an intersectional perspective, it is possible to assume that women of color have a higher risk of experiencing discrimination, which has been the subject of discussion within feminist theories and thus is not a new phenomenon, but it is still a current societal problem. Taking an example from another of the observations by the Swedish government and researchers, they also believe that, “white” women, and women with immigrant background face different forms of oppression in Sweden. This means that the economic, social and political disadvantages that women of color perceive cannot relate to “white” women, since there is a contrast between these two. Within intersectionality, this aspect is important to show the contrast between different types of women and thus avoiding the homogenization of them as a group.

When discussing being "weird" or facing preconceptions, one respondent emphasized her frustration of peoples' misconceptions and stereotypical thinking of Africa. This stereotypical thinking could be partly due to the school curriculum. In the government document, it is also mentioned that school books and the way of teaching seems to be Eurocentric and that people from African countries, for example, are regarded as inferior and are being portrayed with stereotypes and discriminatory images. Being shown these stereotypes in school could be an explanation to why several people generalize and view the continent of Africa stereotypically. Another respondent talked about preconceptions of how all immigrants live in immigrant areas, which involves, once again, the aspect of homogenization as Gyberg et.al discussed – in this

case meaning, viewing immigrants as an homogenic group and believing that they possess the same socioeconomic status. The study also mentioned that a white person is more likely to be seen as an individual instead of being associated with an entire group. The self-identified Swedish/Syriac woman expressed that she had not faced any discrimination at all, so far. She also had thoughts regarding that the more foreign you look, the higher the chances of facing discrimination are. Her, being white skinned and lighter than the other respondents, could serve as a part to why she had a solely positive experience in comparison to all the others.

When doing an intersectional analysis, it is also important to identify which group of women that are most affected and vulnerable regarding the issue being discussed. Therefore, there is a need to make distinctions between the respondents and identify what similarities they might share.

When the respondents reflected about the societal structures' impact on their identity, two were not affected and six were. The two respondents who were not affected – the self-identified Swedish/Colombian and the self-identified Swedish/Syriac, both claimed to have strong ties to Swedish people, the Swedish culture and felt part of the Swedish society. Thus, they did not feel that the Swedish people viewed them as particularly different. The respondents who were affected felt that they were being homogenized and that because of the societal structures, the Swedish people did not view them as Swedish. These respondents were either black, had a Muslim background, or in one case – both. As stated in the theoretical framework, black women are a group that can be viewed as multiply disadvantaged in society and hence, could be a reason to why these respondents were particularly affected negatively by society.

Several respondents shared their experiences in the section of exoticification and racism. The self-identified Burundian woman contributed with two different experiences of racism related to skin color. In Gyberg et.al's study, a self-identified Kenyan woman also shared her story of being harassed due to skin color and as already mentioned above, black women often are at high risk of facing disadvantages and discrimination in society. Another common topic among the black respondents were issues regarding hair. They shared stories about receiving ignorant comments or people touching their hair without permission. The same thing is discussed in Sawyer's study, where grown women share stories about growing up in the nineteen hundred's and people touching their hair without them wanting to. This shows that the situation regarding

hair and the belief that a person is free to touch a black woman without permission, is still present in Sweden and has not changed much over the last decades.

Another topic that also solely was expressed by the black respondents was the difficulty to identify the source of discrimination. When a white woman who fits into the societal norm is being discriminated, it is most likely to link the incident to her being discriminated against due to gender. But when having multiple identities, it can be difficult knowing if the perceived discrimination is due to gender, ethnicity, class or other factors, or possibly a mix of them all, as an intersectional framework suggests. Therefore, the more multiple identities a person has, the more factors are to be taken into consideration when trying to identify the source of discrimination.

8.2 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the lives of young women with immigrant background, their perceptions about their own identities and their feelings of belonging in the Swedish society. The analysis showed how these women's identity related experiences can be understood through an intersectional approach. The research questions were answered in the study's results. In the analysis, however, the most crucial aspects regarding the answers of the questions were analysed, to give a deeper understanding about the respondent's reflections and experiences.

This study reveals that several women had feelings about being in-between cultures. At the same time, it was considered a challenge having to adapt their identity depending on the situations they encountered. The women described being homogenized due to their immigrant background and being viewed as non-Swedish, even though they were born and raised in Sweden. In other words, they felt that in some cases they were judged based solely on appearance. They expressed that there is a current social norm in Sweden about how a Swedish person should look like, where some of them mentioned the image of a Swede as a white, blue-eyed person and because of this, the dark-skinned women felt that they were not able to fully identify as Swedish. Another important finding was that this study gave support to the statement found in the intersectional framework about women not being a homogeneous group, and that different women experience different types of oppression.

The analysis revealed that being white often comes with the privilege of not being homogenized and thus not representing a whole group necessarily. When a PoC is “white passing”, meaning having features and an appearance close to the white norm, there is a lesser chance of facing discrimination. The majority of the respondents were affected by the Swedish people’s opinions, where most of these respondents were black. This is a group that has a much higher risk of facing several disadvantages in the society, as identified in several intersectional studies. In other words, the more ways a person is further away from the societal norms, the more disadvantages they risk facing. An example that highlighted this issue was that the view on black women regarding their hair and touching it has not changed over the last decades.

Finally, the study shows that the factors that affected the respondent’s identity were mainly their family and social environment, societal structures such as school, and how other Swedish people viewed them. As mentioned previously, the respondent’s reflections about what it means to be Swedish were primarily linked to appearance. When being asked to reflect about their experiences and challenges in the Swedish society, the aspect of homogenization was brought up where they were negatively impacted by people’s preconceptions and stereotypes due to their immigrant background. Also, it was discovered that societal structures impacted the women’s position in society, which was seen in their encounters at school, and their fears about the future social climate. The experiences and challenges of racism and exotification were mainly expressed by the black respondents. According to this study, this group had the most negative experiences.

It should be noted that this study does not intend to make general assumptions for all women with immigrant background in Sweden, since it only includes a small group of respondents. Instead, the aim is to contribute with bases for future exploration within related research fields.

9. Future research

Based on the results of the study, some suggestions for future research within the research’s subject are be proposed. Firstly, a deeper study containing more respondents with broader ethnic, cultural, occupational and religious diversity could contribute to a more generalizable result. Another suggestion could to focus on Swedish people’s opinion of “Swedishness” where the researchers could examine the opinions of the Swedish people regarding what makes a person Swedish. With the help of this study, it was found and strengthened that women are not a homogeneous group. Thus, it would be interesting to perform an intersectional analysis

focusing on men with immigrant background, their view on identity and their experiences in the Swedish society. By doing this, it is then possible to compare the results between women and men with immigrant backgrounds in Sweden.

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Appendix: Interview guide

1. Could you start by telling more about yourself? Name, age, birth, occupation, parents' origin.
Follow-up question: Have you lived outside Sweden, if so, where and for how long?

2. How do you identify yourself?
Follow-up question: As Swedish, as (e.g. country of origin), a mix of both, or none...
3. What is the reason that you identify yourself as...? Why not as...?
Follow-up question: What factors affect how you identify yourself? For example, country of birth, family, friends, school/workplace, society, social class...
4. What does it mean to you “to be Swedish”?
Follow-up question: Do you think there are certain criteria/characteristics that are needed to be Swedish?
Follow-up question: Does this affect your identity? If so, how?
5. What experiences do you have as a woman with immigrant background in the Swedish society?
Follow-up question: Do you face difficulties in your everyday life? If so, what kind?
6. Have you experienced hate, racism or exotification in your daily-life?
(Answer is optional)
7. Do you want to change/add something that you think is relevant?