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When *Blattar* Succeed - Or Do They?

A Study About Ethnic Identity in a Higher Education Institution

by

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Abstract

Sweden is facing a sociocultural movement through high waves of immigration and it is more important than ever to address issues related to ethnic diversity. This research set out to study diversity from an ethnic lens by exploring and understanding what challenges students with an immigrant background experience in Sweden, and how their ethnic identities are affected by these difficulties. Using a qualitative, hermeneutic and abductive approach we could extract empirical and theoretical findings that supports our study. Our results suggest that these students are assigned a *blatte* identity due to having an immigrant background. This label is contributing to integration difficulties in Sweden as the label is fueled with negative preconceptions reinforced by Swedish society. Being a *blatte* also impacts the students' ethnic identities and they experience a sense of in-betweenness and ethnic belonging to two worlds. Consequently, the participants create a multidimensional identity composed of different ethnic backgrounds and the new composed identity is constructed as a *good blatte* identity. The existing preconceptions about *blattar* is also preventing their *good blatte* identity from reaching full stability and acceptance as this identity can be both positive and negative. Lastly, our study suggests that although *blattar* succeed by integrating in all the right ways, Swedish society prevents complete integration and success.

Keywords: Ethnic Diversity in Sweden, Higher Education, Blatte, Blattar, Förort, Immigration, Integration, Ethnic Identity, Segregation, Relegation, In-betweenness, Liminality

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	8
1.1 Background	8
Diversity in Sweden	8
Immigration and Integration in Sweden	8
1.2 Research Gap	10
Earlier Studies	10
1.3 Purpose and Research Question	11
Purpose	11
1.4 Relevance	12
1.5 Thesis Outline	12
Chapter 2	12
Chapter 3	12
Chapter 4	13
Chapter 5	13
Chapter 6	13
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	14
2.1 Ethnic Diversity in Sweden	14
2.2 Separation in Society	16
Segregation	16
Relegation	18
2.3 Ethnic Identity	19
Identity	20
<i>Blatte</i>	23
In-betweenness	24
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY & METHOD	28
3.1 Methodology	28
Philosophical Grounding	28
Research Design	29
	5

3.2 Method	29
Data Collection	29
Plan of Analysis	34
Language	35
Swedish Words	37
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS	38
4.1 Social Environment	38
Family, Friends and School	39
Summarizing Social Environment	42
4.2 Ethnic Identity	43
Personal Social Responsibility	43
Adaptability	46
Carelessness	52
Summarizing Ethnic Identity	56
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION	57
Am I Swedish or am I <i>Blatte</i> ?	57
Once a <i>Blatte</i> , Always a <i>Blatte</i>	59
In-Betweenness as a <i>Good Blatte</i> Identity	61
I do not care, or do I?	63
Summarizing Discussion and Contribution	64
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION	67
Key Points	67
Suggestions for Further Research	68
Reference List	69

List of Tables

Tables 1.1 Participants	33
-------------------------	----

List of Figures

Figure 1.1 The In-between Identity	62
------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Diversity in Sweden

Diversity is a widely used and discussed topic that can be explained as the state or fact of being different or showing variety. To be more concrete, diversity includes individuals of different national origin, race, gender, religion, socioeconomic stratum etc. (Oxford University Press, 2017). While diversity is a very broad and popular topic in the world, it is in our opinion often demonstrated from a gender perspective in Sweden. Overemphasizing this dimension suggests that the gender lobby is stronger than other topics that fall under the diversity umbrella. One relevant diversity topic to highlight is ethnic diversity. When speaking of ethnic diversity in a Swedish context it is commonly referred to immigrants and individuals that have a different cultural background (Hamde, 2008). To clarify, Swedish Statistics (2016) define first generation immigrants as Swedish citizens born abroad and second generation immigrants as Swedish citizens having two parents born abroad.

Nowadays, it is important to speak of ethnic diversity as contemporary Sweden is facing integration and segregation discussions as sociocultural variations and separation are challenging the Swedish national identity (Lacatus, 2007). In the 2017 Economic Survey of Sweden, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2017) highlights that one of the main challenges Sweden is confronted with involves immigration and integration. For example, in 2015-2016 almost 200,000 people sought asylum in Sweden (Migrationsverket, 2017). Hence, with immigration and ethnic diversity increasing the number of Swedish citizens with a foreign background is also escalating. This sociocultural movement and force of immigration occurring in Sweden will continue in the future and is a contributing factor for our interest to study ethnic diversity.

Immigration and Integration in Sweden

Today, the topic of immigration and integration covers a broad terrain. There are different camps

reflecting what the Swedish population feel and think about immigration and integration. While some argue that immigrants strengthen Swedish society culturally and financially, others argue that integration in Sweden is failing and threatens Swedish traditions (Assarsson, 2015). Either way, the Swedish integration policy aims to give immigrants equal rights, opportunities and obligations (Government Offices of Sweden, 2016), and an interesting aspect reported by Migrant Integration Policy Index is that Sweden is one of the best countries in Europe in integration politics. An example of successful immigration and integration processes in Sweden is provided by Dribe and Lundh (2008) that argue for the effectiveness of Swedish higher education as an integration tool for immigrants in Sweden. Engaging in the educational process enables the adaption to the existing culture, traditions and language in Sweden. However, there are remarkable flaws in Swedish integration politics, and one area affected is in fact education. For instance, some institutions engage in activities to integrate students such as teaching about Swedish culture. Despite this, institutions use discourse that labels immigrant students as ‘ethnic students’ [etniska studenter] and thereby promote exclusion and affecting the students’ identities (Åhlund & Jonsson, 2016).

We believe that it is more relevant than ever to discuss what implications ethnic differentiation has on students with an immigrant background because according to Kornhall (2017) there is an impaired political discussion circulating around the unequal educational society due to questions of this nature being extremely charged and polarized. Our motivation to further understand challenges and what implication it has on ethnic identities among students in a higher education institution stems from personal experiences of belonging to a minority group. As second generation immigrants attending higher education, our ethnic identity has often made us experience feelings of not belonging and displacement. Over the years, we have experienced various social ascriptions that has led us to encounter situations where we have been asked if we are born in Sweden, or why our Swedish is so good. These questions became conversational topics yet reminded us of our non-Swedishness. As Swedish citizens with other national origins, cultural backgrounds and languages, ethnic diversity is something we rarely discuss unless we meet someone who has a similar experience. So, by drawing inspiration from personal experiences we believe it is important to look at what it means to the individual to be ascribed to a social group.

In our opinion, this ascription seems to lead to some sort of separation that does not only create superficial differences between ethnic Swedish students and students with another ethnic background, but challenges the actual integration and adaptation to Swedish society on an identity-level as well. Therefore, this study has further explored ethnic identity among students in a higher education institution.

1.2 Research Gap

Earlier Studies

There are a vast of earlier studies on ethnic diversity in educational settings in the United States and Australia on both students and faculties (Alauddin & Ashman, 2014; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado & Gurin, 2002; Mitchell & Vandergrift, 2014). Previous studies in university settings mainly focus on learning outcomes, processes and performance (Alauddin & Ashman, 2014; Wahl, Williams, Berkos & Disbrow, 2016; Umans, Collin & Tagesson, 2008). Likewise, there is research on what strategies and methods are used to improve the environment for underrepresented students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Thomas, 2014). However, little research has been directed in getting a greater insight to how diversity is made sense of and experienced by the diverse group itself (Zanoni, Janssens, Benschop and Nkomo, 2010).

Although research on students' own experiences and perceptions is not abundant, a recurring theme in these studies is segregation (Acar, Yigit and Aslan, 2016; Alba & Holdaway, 2013; Lacatus, 2007; Mitchell & Vandergrift, 2014). Segregation is often coupled with integration and earlier studies focused on higher education as an integration method when entering the labour market and looked at professional identities (Arnesson & Albinsson, 2012; Dahlstedt & Bevelander, 2010). There are also studies on integration that explore the relationship between ethnic otherness and identity (Acar, Yigit and Aslan, 2016; Runfors, 2016; Lacatus, 2007). Previous research on ethnic identity, integration and education focus on the educational role of integrating students with a foreign background with their host country on social levels, through discourse, and in the labor market (Arnesson & Albinsson, 2012; Dahlstedt & Bevelander, 2010; Åhlund & Jonsson, 2016; Gallagher & Gilmore, 2013). While scholars have discussed both

positive and negative impacts of immigration and integration in Sweden (Assarsson, 2015), previous research suggest that few attempts have been made to study first or second generation immigrants and their ethnic identity construction from a student perspective.

Furthermore, it is argued that higher education is the most advantageous way of integrating to Swedish society (Dribe and Lundh, 2008). Thus, an individual that engage in these activities should have strong relational ties to Swedish culture, norms and traditions. However, we believe this analysis ends too quickly and that there is more to examine in terms of integration experiences among students that have an immigrant background. Therefore, it is in our interest to gain insight in Swedish minority students lives that attend a higher education institution and understand their ethnic identities to further investigate if adaptation to Swedish society on an identity-level has been achieved.

1.3 Purpose and Research Question

Purpose

Our aim is to explore and understand what challenges students with an immigrant background experience and how their ethnic identity is affected in relation to these difficulties. To meet our goal, we will use a sample of students with an immigrant background who are enrolled in a higher education institution. We will specifically look at a highly ranked university in Sweden where the participant group is a distinct minority. Overall, our purpose is to conceptualize a very sensitive and intangible topic and advance both theoretical and practical understanding about ethnic identity construction among a minority group in Sweden. By describing ethnic identities among students in a higher education institution we hope to advance and add understanding what implications the sociocultural movement has, that is presently occurring in Sweden.

Research Question

- What challenges do higher education students from an immigrant background experience in Sweden and how do these difficulties affect their ethnic identities?

1.4 Relevance

Finally, this topic is relevant today and will continue to be in the future as Sweden will most certainly remain a multicultural nation. Therefore, this study becomes of interest for the whole Swedish society; for individuals that have another ethnic background and experience empowerment by raising minority voices, for Swedish integration politics as we offer valuable insight so a sensitive and controversial topic and finally to ethnic Swedish citizens who will find themselves in a multicultural society for many years going forward. We hope to contribute with an authentic and representative image of experiences that a minority group faces that will broaden everybody's understanding. With this study, we attempt to foster an awareness that this is a social issue and we hope that heightened attention will encourage action.

1.5 Thesis Outline

Chapter 2

In this chapter, we will review previous literature and a theoretical background will be presented where concepts related to separation in society and ethnic identity will be examined and conceptualized as an appropriate framework for our study. Specific themes related to segregation and relegation will first explain challenges related to socioeconomic factors. Following that, we will examine themes related to identity and further conceptualize the concept *blatte* and finally identity as a state of in-betweenness.

Chapter 3

Here, our methodological reflections and philosophical approaches will be introduced and how these serve as an appropriate grounding for our study. The methodological section will explain how a qualitative method, hermeneutic approach and abductive approach functions as guidance for which our research is based on. Following that, our method section will introduce data collection of primary and secondary data through focus groups. Next, our plan of analysis will further describe how we identified themes. Lastly, there is a section on language where we critically examine how words can get lost in translation.

Chapter 4

Chapter four will outline our empirical findings and analysis. This section has been divided into two main themes: Social Environment and Ethnic Identity. First, social environment section will present how family, friends and school as social factors are related to the development of challenges. Following that, ethnic identity will be presented through three subthemes: personal social responsibility, adaptability and carelessness. These categories will further introduce us to how the social environment influences participants' ethnic identity construction.

Chapter 5

The empirical section will be followed by a discussion. Here, we will relate our findings to previous literature and discuss what challenges the students experience and what impact these difficulties have on their ethnic identities. This section will be divided into four themes: (1) Am I Swedish or am I *Blatte*? (2) Once a *Blatte*, Always a *Blatte* (3) In-betweenness as a *Good Blatte* Identity and (4) I do not care, or do I? Finally, in this section we will summarize our discussion and reflect on what our study means for future research on ethnic diversity and identity.

Chapter 6

Chapter six will take a starting point in the purpose of this study and will be followed by an outline of our main findings and key points. Last but not least, we propose suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Before we examine direct topics related to challenges and ethnic identity, we will give a brief background about ethnic diversity in Sweden as we believe it is important to present the groundwork that has set up discussions around ethnicity. Following that, to gain and advance understanding about challenges and identity we will draw inspiration from previous literature. Next, we will examine separation in society and specifically look at topics related to segregation and relegation as these theoretical frameworks will allow us to draw associations between students experiences related to socioeconomic factors. After, we will direct our focus to ethnic identity and previous findings on identity, the concept *blatte* and the identity state of in-betweenness. The identified themes will allow us to gain a broader understanding how ethnic identity work is an ongoing process and allow us to draw associations between challenges and how that affects students ethnic identity construction.

2.1 Ethnic Diversity in Sweden

To begin with, the change caused by the increased ethnic diversity is a relatively new phenomenon in Sweden. In the 1960's only four percent of the Swedish citizens were born abroad (Andersson, Östh & Malmberg, 2010). Today, over 1.6 million, which is equivalent to seventeen percent of the people that live in Sweden are born in a different country (Swedish Statistics, 2017). This data suggests that Sweden has made a shift from an ethnic homogeneous nation to a more ethnic diverse nation with a visible minority. The high wave of immigrants did not only bring economic integration problems but has also elevated the interest of ethnic diversity in Sweden as well. This diversity movement was promoted in the 1990's when the Swedish immigration board increased their efforts in integrating individuals with foreign backgrounds (Omanović, 2009). The Swedish government has established a Swedish integration policy that aims at offering social equal opportunities for all and to create a multicultural society (Omanović, 2009). There are explicit actions and restrictions to create equal opportunities and equality in Sweden. For example, the Personal Data Act (SFS 1998:204) aims to protect the personal integrity when processing sensitive personal data of all Swedish citizens such as foreign background. This creates a situation for

Sweden where processing information about ethnicity is illegal (Ministry of Justice, 1998). Another Swedish regulation supporting ethnic equality is the Discrimination Act (SFS 2008:567). The main purpose of the act is to give equal opportunities and rights and to fight discrimination in Sweden (Lawline, 2016). In sum, these constraints contribute to the limited discussions on race and ethnicity in Sweden.

Although explicit actions and restrictions in Sweden has been made to create equal opportunities and rights, we believe it is possible to argue that equality does not necessarily always occur when removing differences. Using this approach, researchers have supported the ineffectiveness of erasing ethnic differences (Bonilla-Silva, 2009; Mitchell & Vandergrift, 2014; Hörnfeldt, Farahani & Rosales, 2012). One example is Bonilla-Silva's (2009) findings on colorblindness, which is a new covert type of racism. This ideology argues for the fact that racial equality is accepted, yet the role that race play in society today is demised. Colorblindness is aligned with the ethical principle that we shall not discriminate and therefore pretend that discrimination does not exist. In the same vein, Mitchell and Vandergrift (2014) note that colorblindness becomes highly problematic as multiculturalism becomes an avoided topic not receiving enough attention. Similarly, Hübinette, Hörnfeldt, Farahani and Rosales (ed. 2012) argue that the abstract nature and misconceptions around the meaning of race and ethnicity have made the topic controversial. So, although the Swedish state strives for ethnic equality through laws and regulations, it is also reinforcing an ignorance and avoidance of conversations related to multiculturalism. Hence, also contributing to the lack of extensive research concerning diversity in terms of race and ethnicity in Sweden.

Furthermore, one specific area that needs additional attention when speaking of ethnic diversity is Swedish education. Most discussions and conversations on ethnic diversity in Sweden have been carried out when political parties in Sweden engage in questions about injustice and equal opportunities. The emphasis in these dialogues usually lays in what challenges minorities face out on the labor market, and how we can challenge discrimination to create equal opportunities (Hamde, 2008). However, while these debates are good there are still some points that are often overlooked. For instance, Elmeroth (2009) argues that an educational environment carries responsibility and is the most vital place for developing a multicultural society as it is a place

where students with different ethnic backgrounds meet. Considering this evidence above, we believe that examining ethnic diversity in Sweden is an area that still lacks sufficient information and exploration. To contribute with advanced understanding, we will direct our focus to ethnic diversity in a Swedish higher education setting and examine student ethnic identities.

2.2 Separation in Society

Andersson et al (2010) suggest that it is relevant and applicable to use research from the United States when studying and understanding ethnic diversity in Sweden, especially studies in educational contexts, which is aligned with the empirical example in our study. Therefore, when framing a deeper understanding about separation in society we will explore studies conducted in the United States that specifically looked at segregation. This section is further complemented with a study conducted in Europe that draws on the theme of relegation that is similar yet different from segregation. The distinct differences between segregation and relegation has thus contributed to a separation of the two and will be further explained.

Segregation

A vast of literature on ethnic diversity and inequality have investigated the importance of segregation. There is also a large amount of studies that describe the division and injustice between blacks and whites in the United States. For instance, in 1969 and 1971, Schelling published several studies on the demographic separation of whites and blacks in the United States. This theoretical framework examines the dynamic of race and ethnicity and its role when attracting individuals of similar characteristics to a certain setting (Schelling 1969;1971). It is important to remember that all societies traditionally are embellished by both racial and ethnic diversity and that these aspects are the most trivial points to social phenomena of conflict and division in society (Bonacich, 2008). The author further comments on the importance of ethnicity and race as:

Accepting the primordialness of ethnicity leads to a certain logic of inquiry. Since ethnic and racial affiliation requires no explanation in itself, one concentrates on its consequences. These may be negative, in the form of prejudice and discrimination against “out-groups.” Or they may be positive, providing people

with a meaningful and rich group life (Bonacich, 2008, p.11).

To rephrase, ethnicity and race can be perceived as some sort of common sense and can contribute to the creation of “them” and/or “we.” In the same vein, Schelling (1969;1971) further illustrates that the separation between rich and poor is highly tied to skin color. An example given in this study is that being white is highly correlated with having a higher income and having a higher income is closely related to residing in more attractive neighborhoods. Contrary, having a darker skin color is correlated to having a lower income and living in less attractive neighborhoods. Bonacich (2008) supports Schelling’s (1969;1971) argument that most of the separation in society is not only based on ethnic belonging but also on class. Bonacich (2008) further explains that both class and ethnic belonging are important as these can help a group create attachments and an “in-group” ethnic bond. Contrary, an “out-group” ethnic bond give rise to feelings of unworthiness and rejection due to people not being like themselves (Bonacich, 2008). Having said that, ethnic belonging and class are closely tied to one another and can create a sense of belonging or exclusion.

Further, Schelling (1969;1971) provides us with a description of basic assumptions in residential choices and organization of separation in society. These assumptions are based on class since certain racial and ethnic belongings connote affluent or/and poor neighborhoods and thereby the choice of school and classmates (Schelling, 1971). In other words, choosing a good neighborhood is often equivalent to choosing a good school and an encouraging educational environment. Next, this framework has been applied on several school segregation studies (Andersson, Östh & Malmberg, 2010; Caetano and Maheshri, 2017; Stoica &, Flache, 2014). Caetano and Maheshri (2017) examined separation between whites and minorities in educational contexts and found certain aspects that parents base their actions on when choosing schools for their children. The authors findings suggest that racial compositions in educational institutions was a crucial factor influencing parents’ decisions (Caetano & Maheshri, 2017). This study contributed in explaining educational institutions high or low volume of minority students based on parents’ preferences and who they prefer their children's peers to be. To conclude, racial composition in educational contexts are often a contributing factor for differentiation and affects patterns of thinking (preferences) and actions (decisions).

Relegation

In another research conducted by Wacquant (2016), the author untangles similar existing and occurring matters of ethnicity and class in Western Europe and the United States through the concept of relegation. Relegation help to explain Western European neighborhoods that are equivalent to what is often referred as ‘ghettos’, ‘no-go areas’ and/or ‘problem districts’ in the United States. Wacquant’s (2016) study further explains that relegation appoint individuals, groups or populations a lower rank, position or location and this activity mainly takes place on a collective level. Moreover, relegation can take place in real life or on an imaginary level and can cautiously be referred to socially constructed areas and build a relation of social, economic and symbolic structures of power (Wacquant, 2016). Importantly, this study found that this state can be described as *urban relegation* in Western Europe, rather than ghettos since these are similar to one extent but not fully. Some similarities are:

Social morphology (population makeup, age mix, family composition, relative unemployment and poverty levels) and representations (the sense of indignity, confinement and blemish felt by their residents) (Wacquant, 2016, p.1080).

Common denominators between ghettos in the United States and *urban relegation* areas in Western Europe are that these territories are classified at the bottom in both symbolic and material hierarchical meanings. Still, there are important differences between ghettos in the United States and *urban relegation* territories in Western Europe such as structure, range and other dissimilarities such as political treatment. One remarkable difference is that ghettos in the United States are “...determined by ethnicity (E), inflected by class (C) with the emergence of the hyperghetto” (Wacquant, 2016, p.1080), while “relegation in the urban periphery of Western Europe is driven by class position, inflected by ethnonational membership and mitigated by state structures and policies” (Wacquant, 2016, p.1080). The latter statement demonstrate that class is a crucial factor for creating *urban relegation* areas. So, there are not ‘European ghettos’ since the differences are significant and the main differences are the racial compositions. Ghettos in the United States are often constructed by mostly African Americans and similar areas in Western

European are made up of many different ethnicities. The current study also found that *urban relegation* is not necessarily based on levels of income or material hardship as a reason for separation. Instead, the population *urban outcasts* is a category helping to find causes, effects and types of polarization from below in urban areas in Western Europe (Wacquant, 2016). Lastly, individuals are highly tied to *urban relegation* areas in Western Europe but are not strictly bound to them because it is possible to move from one class and urban area to another. In fact, these borders are crossed on a continuous basis and can be passed when climbing higher in class structure (Wacquant, 2016). Overall, these studies indicate that there is a need for understanding these borders and the actual effect of *urban relegation* on *urban outcasts*.

The idea that borders are blurred and the possibility of shifting from one urban area to another and thereby class, status and/or ranking is an aspect we noticed needs to be further studied. We are specifically interested in understanding the practical effects on individuals that have crossed these borders and what this urban movement has meant to them. Examining what it means to the individual to find themselves in different social spheres and class struggles associated with finding themselves in different urban areas is interesting and relevant to us. The class society can consequently also affect an individual's identity. Just like class mobility is accessible in Sweden due to blurred lines, we believe that perhaps an individual's association with different groups is not as clear and distinct either. Therefore, in our opinion it is important to examine how a transition is affecting identity and if an individual can break free from being an *urban outcast*.

2.3 Ethnic Identity

Since segregation and relegation affect behavior and thinking, we believe that these aspects play an important role on ethnic identity because an individual is highly susceptible to social influences and shapes an identity accordingly. To further explore how an ethnic identity is shaped, we will examine identity, the concept *blatte* and identity as a state of in-betweenness. Identity will first and foremost introduce us to the complex nature of identity construction and how individuals with an immigrant background encounter identity difficulties. In addition, we will introduce the concept *blatte*, which is a word used by society to describe individuals with an immigrant background. As an extension, in-betweenness will further explain how students with an immigrant background

experience an identity negotiation of belonging to multiple ethnic backgrounds. This notion will be conceptualized through the concept of liminality that will additionally provide understanding to ethnic identity work.

Identity

In a study by Alvesson and Sveningsson (2011) the authors explained identity as the making sense of the self in relation to others. Previous research has also established that identity is a frequently negotiated and challenged process (Alvesson 2004; Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2011; Alvesson 2010). Up to now, identity work seems to be an ongoing change process and we have found numerous investigations that have attempted to describe this process on a deeper level. One scholar argues for the possibility of reconstructing a before and after identity (Fiol, 2002), while another claim that individuals have coexisting identities and that each identity is triggered by certain situations (Beech, 2011). Although these two camps do not fully agree, we believe that identity as a change process leads us to the importance of understanding changes in identity work. Another scholar further explained identity work as:

The concept of identity work refers to people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness (Alvesson, 2010, p.201)

Identity is in other words continuously dealing with changes to calm down a potential identity struggle and distinguish oneself. Alvesson (2010) further writes about the importance of particular events, certain transitions and/or unexpected conflicts that trigger identity work. The data presented in this section highlights the need of a deeper understanding on specific incidents, conversions and/or struggles that individuals with an immigrant background face.

In our view, a specific change process that is continuously managed by individuals with another ethnic background than Swedish is integration. Several reports have argued that integration with the residential country for an immigrant is a complete reconstruction of ethnic identity that is

renegotiated into a new one reflecting the host country's values, behavior, thinking etc. (Brubaker 2001; Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2015; Kivisto 2005; Maxwell, 2017). Correspondingly, mirroring Swedish behavior, thinking and values is the process of integrating to Swedish society. Likewise, Darvishpour and Westin (2015) argue that an individual assign themselves an ethnic identity when acting in accordance to expectations of a certain ethnic group. So, ethnic identity does not only answer pure identity-questions such as: "Who am I and - by implication how should I act?" (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2011, p. 161), but also tackles questions raised when deviating from a dominant culture, race and/or ethnicity and the impact on the self-esteem (Acar, Yigit and Aslanet, 2016). Thus, ethnic identity can create a distinction between an individual and their surrounding while simultaneously create group belonging. For the majority population in Sweden ethnic identity does not become problematic as that is the dominant culture. However, for an individual who experience belonging to a minority group, ethnic identity becomes a complex process as these individuals are continuously confronted with two different cultures and a compromise of these is a central part of the identity work (Darvishpour & Westin, 2015).

Furthermore, Parszyk (1999) points out that Swedish society tend to categorize all immigrants as the same group and thereby treat all individuals in a homogeneous way despite their striking differences. Likewise, Çetrez (2015) claims that the usage of identity labels in Swedish society such as Swedish and immigrants reflect existing power relations and adds meaning to the categorization of individuals with an immigrant background and their self-identification. In addition, individuals born abroad and individuals born in Sweden are treated with the same immigrant label. A key challenge is that this label is passed on from generation to generation and labeling individuals that are born and raised in Sweden becomes highly problematic as this generalization contributes to identity work of greater complexity when individuals are given an immigrant identity that is not aligned with how they view themselves (Çetrez, 2015).

Another case of complex identity work that is directly aligned with our empirical context is how individuals' ethnic identities are affected in educational contexts. In an analysis on challenges that immigrant students face in educational contexts provided by Acar et al (2016), the authors propose that minority students face internal ethnic identity struggles such as false expectations, clashing

duties and other difficulties when adapting and integrating to social and educational environments. Remaking on challenges that ethnic identities face are feelings, thinking, values and behavior that is not aligned with ethnic identity and thereby opposing to self-identity in many cases. An example illustrating an internal ethnic identity struggle is:

...participating in class discussions, carrying books to class, asking teachers for help in the presence of classmates, working hard to excel in school, getting good grades, spending most of the time in libraries, and being punctual in classes (Acar et al, 2016, pp. 107-108).

To be more concrete, these activities are classified as ‘white behavior’ since this study focused on the differences between whites and blacks and acting, thinking and valuing in line with ‘white behavior’ would go against the minority’s ethnic identity. Acar et al (2016) further found that socializing with similar peers in terms of race and ethnicity, in this study ‘black friends’, was a solution for stabilizing an internal ethnic identity struggle. This research suggests that being studious and ambitious in an educational setting is equal to abandoning the ethnic identity for a minority student and a crucial factor for shaping their self-understanding.

In another study the researcher draws a parallel between racial studies of African American’s in the United States and Swedish immigrants in that they are both labelled and categorized with the lowest status position (Runfors, 2016). This investigation further provides us with important information explaining that students with an immigrant background experience categorization practices in Swedish educational environment. Another point given to us in this research was that students perceived themselves as being displaced by the racialized categorization in Swedish context and that social positioning ascriptions are usually material based where different looks were signs of cultural differentiation and non-Swedishness (Runfors, 2016). Similarly, Lacatus (2007) also argues that ethnic minorities in Sweden opposing from pure Swedish markers take on a specific identity, a so called *Blatte*-identity.

Blatte

To further conceptualize, Lacatus (2007) argue that the Swedish concept *blatte* (singular) is often associated with being an immigrant although it cannot be perceived as a synonym. *Blatte* does not only refer to Swedish otherness in terms of culture and social markers but is also an identity marker for individuals that wish to identify with this word. Individuals identifying and referring to themselves and/or others as *blattar* (plural) illustrates the existing ethnic discrimination and segregation experienced in Sweden, however, that is not always the case. Moreover, the concept represents an ethnic category highly linked to a locality and that is for example living in a suburb where most people residing there are immigrants. This area is often referred by the participants in our study as *förort*. Moreover, the concept *blatte* is also seen as a metaphor for a Swedish identity-crisis since the country not long ago faced great immigration waves and have for a long time been filled with an ideology of a mono-ethnic territory (Lacatus, 2007). There is a more specific explanation of a division within *blattar*:

Number one is the normal *blatte*: the crook, hood, thug, gangsta... *Blatte* type number two is intelligent guy that studies for tests and uses nice words, never sneaks onto the subway trains without paying and never writes tags (Khemiri, 2003, p.38).

Furthermore, *blatte* have been used in public and everyday speech in Sweden since World War II and has gained great attention in recent years (Lacatus, 2007). Another description closer to everyday language is:

Blatte-culture is much like African American Street Culture...Some live in ghettos... others are rich and educated. They are the African Americans and Hispanic Americans of Scandinavia (Urban Dictionary, 2010).

This description places the concept in another context when drawing assimilation through images with African Americans and Hispanic Americans. This parallel is supported by The Swedish Slang Dictionary (1969) cited in Lacatus (2007) that published possible meanings of *blatte* are ‘clown’,

‘nigger’ or ‘negro’. Coupling the concept *blatte* with clown, nigger or negro suggest that similar categorization of ethnic otherness of African-Americans in the United States during times of slavery may be taking place in Sweden. Next, the antonym of *blatte* is *Svenne* and an explanation of this concept is limited and is barely discussed in previous studies or in dictionaries. Although there are not many studies explaining *svenne*, we found one study that made this attempt. Lacatus (2007) describe this concept as an ethnic category associated with social dominance and immigrant-superiority. The author further express that *svenne* is not as well-discussed as *blatte*.

Until now, is it clear that the discursive meaning of *blatte* has been examined and in what context the term is commonly used. However, we will further explore the concept *blatte* from an identity perspective as we believe this term influences individuals that fall under this label. Therefore, coupling ethnic identity with *blatte* will offer a new interesting angle to present research on ethnic diversity.

In-betweenness

Due to the above-mentioned literature on ethnic identity, it is in our opinion interesting to further examine continuous changes in identity and investigate earlier literature on identity formation. Earlier research on individuals with multiple ethnic backgrounds have focused on a perceived state of in-betweenness and how individuals experience different ethnic belongings simultaneously (Goldstein-Kyaga and Borgström, 2009; Camino and Krulfeld, 1994) and a concept that can further explain this is liminality (Turner, 1967). In a research conducted by Beech (2011), the author provides us with important information that liminality is an appropriate concept for explaining changes in identity work. The concept of liminality is the phase where an individual's sense of self is disrupted and can therefore be defined as a reconstruction of identity (Beech, 2011). Further, Van Gennep (1960) describe liminality as the transition from one phase to the other through the theory of rites of passage where a transition is characterized by three phases: separation, liminality and aggregation. The first phase is separation and involves detachment from symbolic behavior. The second phase is liminality, which is a transition where the individual passes through a phase of ambiguity where they have detached themselves from the past and yet not adopted attributes of the after. Thirdly, is the phase of aggregation where the individual is in a

stable state and have adopted the new “after” identity with new ethical standards and norms. Although all three phases are of great significance, it appears that liminality is a concept of most interest to our study as we aim to explore and describe how individuals with an immigrant background experience their identity to be in constant flux.

Next, Turner (1967) further conceptualized the liminal phase as a transition of feeling ‘betwixt and between’. Hence, liminality is not only a phase of in-betweenness, but also an isolated place where the individual experience a state of neither being here nor there. Moreover, Turner (1967) proceeds that the liminal period is almost invisible as humans are conditioned to see what is expected to see, and that is being one thing or the other. This process does not allow a clear definition of the experienced state of in-betweenness as this liminal phase is complex and intangible. To put it differently, individuals detach themselves from something and are no longer classified to a specific category, but have still not attached themselves to something new and classified. We interpret Turner’s (1967) discussion on the state of in-betweenness as an ambiguous process where the sensation of different belongings can contribute to identity struggle. Up to now in this literature review, it seems that individuals with an immigrant background that deviate from the majority ethnicity in their host-country experience simultaneous belongings and thereby identify with several categories. We believe that this diffusion contributes to an internal conflict that needs to be further investigated. In the same vein, Camino and Krulfeld (1994) suggest that immigrant adolescents are specifically an interesting group when looking at liminality as they engage in ethnic identity negotiation because they belong to two ethnic backgrounds and thereby have two different statuses.

To further explore this social group, we will specifically draw inspiration from a research that speaks directly to our study and that is Goldstein-Kyaga and Borgström (2009) investigation on the notion of in-betweenness and further explained how individuals operate in the liminal phase. The researchers studied adolescence immigrants who have grown up in a multicultural society and examined what happened with individuals’ identity in times of globalization. The authors of this study argued that globalization gives room for new identities that stretch across several boundaries, are multidimensional and context dependent. Moreover, findings of this research suggest that

individuals refused to identify themselves as either one thing or the other, or even being seen as mixture of both. Instead, the participants spoke of having a third identity that was composed of multiple ethnic backgrounds. The authors further argue that there is a dialectic relationship between continuity and context and an individual's identity formation happens as a dialectic process where they constantly interpret and recreate their identity in different contextual situations, thus also experiencing continuity. This process demonstrates how an individual creates a third type of identity that is both/and and not either/or. Goldstein-Kyaga and Borgström (2009) also argue that due to this dialectic process questions of nationality becomes very complicated as it is not a zero-sum case where an individual's amount of Swedishness becomes less due to having another ethnicity. Instead, the immigrants chose a third identity of cultural variation that was constructed and made up by choosing certain characteristics from each world and then combined it.

Moreover, Borgström and Goldstein-Kyaga (2006) suggest that identity is not fixed but instead a continuous process in constant flux and dictated by cultural and social context. Simultaneously, each person is in charge of who they are and what they stand for and being confronted with different norms and traditions does not necessarily always force an individual to reflect over their identity. However, when an individual is forced to adapt to a certain situation it is more common to start a reflection process. For instance, the same study suggest that individuals go through a transition during adolescence years and experience a feeling of in-betweenness and not belonging to one thing or the other. The authors also raised the question of hiding or enhancing an identity and that young people select certain cultural codes depending on what identity they want to enhance in that context. Thus, if a person is an immigrant or belong to a minority group they consciously tone down their identity due to not wanting to be perceived as deviating from the majority (Borgström & Goldstein-Kyaga, 2006). However, when an individual come to terms with who they are and what they stand for they transition into a cosmopolitan identity where they have a stable third identity and appreciate the freedom of not having to label themselves as Swedish or something else. By having a third identity the individuals can blend in and shift between different cultural context and languages. Likewise, the individuals expressed an openness and tolerance for their own and other people's cultural variation (Goldstein-Kyaga & Borgström, 2009). Finally, Goldstein-Kyaga and Borgström (2009) argue that placing demands on individuals to have one

dimensional identities can instead cause psychological problems. Therefore, it is important to have identities where they define themselves on different levels.

In conclusion, the studies reviewed in this section indicate that being in a state of in-betweenness is not a temporary phase waiting to be resolved by transitioning into a new identity. Instead, there appears to be a functional state of being in the liminal phase where individuals that have another ethnic background can create an identity that allows them to exist in the before and after.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY & METHOD

In this chapter, we will present our methodological reflections and how philosophical approaches serve as an appropriate grounding for our study. This section will explain how a qualitative method, hermeneutic approach and abductive approach functions as guidance for which our research is based on. Following that, the method section will introduce data collection of primary and secondary data through focus groups. Additionally, our plan of analysis will further describe how we identified themes. There is also a section on language where we examine how words can get lost in translation. Finally, this chapter will also outline how our methodology and method comes with certain limitations and we continuously invite a critical perspective.

3.1 Methodology

Philosophical Grounding

Taking a starting point in students experiences and perceptions helped us explore and understand the difficulties ethnic minorities face and how their ethnic identities are shaped. An approach aligned with this departure is the qualitative method. A major advantage of the qualitative method is that it invites an interpretive approach of how subjects perceive and experience its environment (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). These aspects are important when exploring our research question. Many researchers have used a qualitative method in similar research topics (Alauddin & Ashman, 2014; Andersson, Östh & Malmberg, 2010; Umans, Collins & Tagesson, 2008; Veerman, 2015). However, we are aware that measuring human behavior can be rather contradicting because there is an inconsistency when creating objective facts based on a social world. Given these points, the aim of our study is to explore and give a rich description of a social phenomenon and we are aware that conducting this particular study again will most likely not generate the same outcomes, which is one of our strongest arguments for using the qualitative method.

Another aim is to see the identified phenomena in a larger context. One relevant frame of reference is the objective hermeneutic approach. Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) state that “the meaning of

a part can only be understood if it is related to the whole” (p. 92) and this logical reasoning illustrate the hermeneutic circle. We have in this study related the part to the whole by contrasting the sample in this study to a larger social problem that exist in Sweden. Therefore, using the hermeneutic circle is specifically helpful to us as we aim at understanding a minority group in their context. This approach helped us look beyond surface patterns of thinking and feelings and instead allowed us to gain an in-depth insight to underlying patterns, which is important when attempting to understand the participants’ difficulties and ethnic identities.

Research Design

The design of this study is to explore and understand an ethnic diversity phenomena in Sweden. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) argue that an abductive approach has its grounding in empirical basis, which is based on real life observations and experiences. These interpretations functioned as a foundation for our study and were further developed through interactive sessions with subjects, while strengthening it with previous theories and literature. One possible implication in this research process was that we had an initial empirical grounding, hence also a social positioning. Due to this initial position, it is important to acknowledge that it would be rather naive to be fully objective and unbiased in this study as we ourselves in fact qualify as candidates in the participant pool. Likewise, it is also difficult to be objective when research is a social process. Moreover, Schulz (2012) describe that conducting research is a social activity since it is made in a social world. We tried to overcome these social implications by using an abductive approach and thereby invite other interpretations and perspectives when combining earlier literature and theories with empirical facts. This approach also helped us refine and adjust our case through the research process that allowed us to gain a broader understanding of the phenomenon (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009).

3.2 Method

Data Collection

A highly ranked Swedish university was the main research context and the participants relevant for this study were first and second generation immigrant students. Subjects falling within this

spectrum were selected through personal connections and recommendations from other students. We chose to only include students with ethnic heritage outside Scandinavia because we believe that the results contain more essence to our study as countries in Scandinavia are very much similar in terms of culture, language, traditions etc.

Next, we gathered primary data through three semi-structured focus groups of two-three hours each. These group interviews were our main source of data collection and consisted of a total of twelve participants. With attention to focus groups:

...group discussions organized to explore a specific set of issues . . . The group is focused in the sense that it involves some kind of collective activity . . . crucially, focus groups are distinguished from the broader category of group interview by the explicit use of the group interaction as research data (Kitzinger, 1994, p. 103).

To create interactive sessions, we primarily conducted one explorative focus group that was followed up by two additional focus groups. One benefit of using an explorative focus group was to gather relevant data in an effective manner that helped us search for interesting themes when starting this research. This view is strengthened by Galliot and Graham (2016) argument that focus groups in the initial phase is an appropriate way to start investigating a complex phenomenon. This is because participants are more willing to share their interpretations and experiences when surrounded by individuals like themselves. Since sharing thoughts, feelings and behaviors touching on our research topic can be quite sensitive, collecting data through focus groups helped us to find valuable information for our study. To gain relevant and important information for this study we followed Eriksson and Wiedersheim-Paul (2008) suggestions on how to structure interview questions. A recommendation given was to first specify our research questions and problem and then to decompose these questions into relevant, concrete, conversational language, and open ended sub-questions. Another piece of advice given was to ask what-, how-, follow up- and example-searching questions rather than why. Curry (2015) also argue that why-questions can cause defensiveness and questions containing own examples by researchers may prime the participants in focus groups. These aspects have been avoided as much as possible by for instance

adopting passive roles during the sessions and facilitating the discussions rather than being active participants. We did not speak of our own experiences until after the sessions ended to avoid priming the participants and leading answers and responses into a specific direction.

The explorative focus group was followed up by two other sessions where we made slight changes to the questions we asked. These changes were made because our first focus group helped us find interesting themes that we could search for in the secondary data and thereby apply in the following sessions to gain a deeper insight. Although small changes were made in the questions for following groups, the questions remained quite similar and a reason for this was to assure facts. The effectiveness of this technique is strengthened by Kitzinger's (1994) argument that conducting similar focus groups on multiple occasions can help seeing differences in the participants and find similarities between the group sessions. In our study, this process enabled the finding of recurring themes, patterns and other aspects such as separation in society, ethnic identity etc.

Although social interactions are suitable for qualitative studies there are major drawbacks to be aware of. According to Blumh, Harman, Lee and Mitchell (2011) interviewing is the most common technique of gathering data and there are problems that needs to be highlighted. It must be remembered that these group interviews could be seen as a specific context and that these discussions are unique in terms of time and place and that it is not always possible for researchers to control the dynamic in these sessions. By taking a local perspective these sessions are artificially and locally set situations that only verify facts in that specific interaction (Alvesson, 2003). Likewise, the information gathered from this method may be facts in the focus groups, and not on the outside. Despite a local perspective and the high autonomy in these focus groups, we found that the discussions still touched on the same topics, themes and visualized an underlying pattern, which helped us verify the facts gathered through these group sessions to at least one extent.

Furthermore, in a study conducted by Mitchell and Vandergrift (2014) they found that focus groups highlight the experiences and interpretations of the problem when studying diversity in higher education. This method helped the researchers reach deep insights and cognitive patterns through the discourse expressed not only individually but collectively as well (Mitchell & Vandergrift,

2014). Moreover, the interpersonal communication becomes important as it allows the researcher to tap into different narratives and examine shared and common experiences (Kitzinger, 1995). By inviting different perspectives from subjects, we created room for contradictions that helped us find common denominators or differences in their experiences and interpretations. Also, focus groups visualize silence, certain tones and emotions (Mitchell & Vandergrift, 2014) and these aspects were of strong interest to us because they revealed highly important knowledge to our topic. Hence, these findings suggest an applicable method for our study. One critique that questions the conducted focus groups is that we were rather inconsistent when placing individuals in groups. For instance, some students knew each other prior to the focus group while others met for the first time. Due to the sensitivity associated with discussing ethnic diversity we believe that the group construction might have affected the tones and emotions among the participants. For example, we noticed that the discussion and the engagement level was initially much easier in groups where the participants had some pre-existing relationship and were familiar with one another. In an earlier study on a sensitive topic the researcher chose to put participants from pre-existing social groups together because talking about such topic with familiar faces was more natural (Kitzinger, 1994). In this case, a more systematic approach would have been to think of this aspect when putting groups together.

Next, we are aware that this method comes with challenges such as privacy and timidness and/or power structures (Galliot & Graham, 2016), especially when it is difficult to create groups of participants that are familiar with one another prior to the study. In the light of this challenge, we have tried to overcome it by giving the participants an anonymous voice in our study and by giving the participants dictionary names and countries of origin (*see table 1.1 below*).

Focus Group	Name	Origin
1	George	Albania
1	Camila	Chile
1	Alexander	Algeria
1	Sebastian	Italia
2	William	Brazil
2	Philip	Egypt
2	Jacob	India
2	Carolina	Kenya
3	Victoria	Spain
3	Martin	Netherlands
3	Samuel	Russia
3	Olivia	France

Table 1.1 Participants

Table 1.1 illustrates the fictional names and countries and we have chosen to intentionally mislead the reader when choosing from a list of most popular names and coupling these with one random country to strengthen the anonymity of the subjects. Some of the most important reasons for anonymizing the participants is because they are a part of our program and we have personal connections to them. Thus, we want to reduce the possibility of identifying the participants by other members of our program. Likewise, the students also agreed to participate and share their experiences if given an anonymous voice. Also, we have chosen to anonymize the context of this study and instead of referring to the actual university we named the context of our study as Swedish

Business School.

Furthermore, although Kitzinger (1994) argue that four to five people is an ideal number of participants in focus groups and we followed this principle by having four participants in each group (*see table 1.1 above*), there is still one aspect that would have made this study more interesting. We are referring to the fact that participants in this study represent twelve different ethnic backgrounds. A more comprehensive study would invite all different groups as different minorities rather than as a unity, which is an aspect in this research that can be criticized. Earlier studies in Sweden regarding this topic have not treated these origins separately and have seen this group as one sample (Andersson, Östh, Malmberg, 2010; Runfors, 2016; Umans, Collin & Tagesson, 2008). Moreover, as mentioned in the literature review, immigration and integration is a relatively new change in Sweden and thereby in Swedish education. Therefore, another argument is that it is not applicable to separate these groups into sub-groups yet.

Other well-known methods in research is the collection of secondary data. According to Marshall and Rossman (1999) earlier discussions in relevant literature are important for the construction of a logical framework when conducting research. We have therefore gathered insights in our topic in the literature review that consists of a set of articles, books etc., touching on thoughtful theories, concepts and statistics. This information set underlying assumptions in our research questions, demonstrate our knowledge in our topic and help to argue for the gap identified in previous studies (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Plan of Analysis

The focus groups sessions were transcribed and analyzed accordingly to utilize the information given. Identifying themes in exploratory stages helped us describe and explain the experiences and understandings of the participants in the study. Ryan and Bernard (2003) argue for the importance of finding multiple recurring themes when analyzing data material because discovering more themes in the initial phase is more effective as some themes will be more salient than others in later stages. This process enabled us to identify and determine what themes were the most important. Ryan and Bernard (2003) further suggest that a method for coding and processing

empirical material involves cutting and sorting techniques where you identify important quotes and expressions that seem relevant to your study. To identify and address interesting categories for the analysis we used a color coding method. We started by identifying different recurring discussion patterns where each category was represented by a specific color so themes could easily be distinguished from one another. We could identify a wide range of themes by looking at repetitions, differences and similarities, and by cutting and sorting using a color coding method we were able to separate main themes from subthemes. Another method used to analyze our empirical data was mapping out concepts and finding associations between different themes. This process enabled the possibility to see a cohesive picture of experiences and helped structure the empirical material presentation.

Further, it was an appropriate method to narrow our scope of themes after conducting the focus groups when organizing our empirical material from the data collection. However, it is important to mention that the processes of identifying themes, mapping and interpreting data, is influenced by our goal to contribute with identity understanding. The processes of selecting relevant information could be influenced by our own experiences as we have strong personal and relation ties to the identified recurring themes. However, we have tried to remain objective by shifting between empirical material and previous theoretical groundings, concepts and models that are instructing us to look at a phenomenon in a particular way. Thus, we hope that this method has helped us remain objective because the technique of narrowing themes enables the understanding of qualitative data and contributes to the processes of adding knowledge to social science (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

Language

Recurring themes and information have been extracted from conversations that took place during the interactive focus groups. A limitation of using language as a tool for conveying experiences and behavior is the high dependency on the participant's ability to reflect about their experiences and communicating these in social interactions (Polkinghorne, 2005). We are aware that we rely strongly on the subjects' self-reflection and conducting the focus groups in a language that is comfortable for the participants was crucial for this study. Therefore, the interactive sessions were

held in Swedish. As focus groups were held in the language of the specific context there are language problems arising in qualitative data collection methods (Van Nes, Abma, Jonsson and Deeg, 2010). The main weakness of conducting these discussions in Swedish and writing this thesis in English is that meanings may get lost in translation. For example, Van Nes et al (2010) write that interpretations of meanings become highly crucial, especially in later processes. In our case, moving from different languages has probably affected meanings already before conducting focus groups. For instance, the literature review is a starting point in our study and reading about ethnic diversity in other parts of the world have most certainly affected our understanding of how we see at our research problem and topic. Here, the linguistic reference point of our study does not only affect the approach we take when conducting focus groups but also the transportation of this data to our research. One major drawback of this approach is that language does not only become a two-way process, participants' expressions and researchers understanding (Van Nes et al, 2010). Instead, it becomes a four-way process when we pass the phases of (1) understanding meaning of earlier literature in English, (2) conducting focus groups in Swedish, (3) translating Swedish data in empirical section to English and (4) analyzing this information in English. Therefore, this study would have been more credible if the entire process stayed within the English language. A point often overlooked here is that this critical argument has gained little influence (Van Nes et al, 2010).

Several methods for overcoming these challenges are to read, think and talk extensively to develop an ability to analyze in English (Van Nes et al, 2010). In response to that, we have both been studying abroad in the United States and are currently enrolled in an international master's program at Lund University. We believe that these personal experiences have developed sufficient abilities, perhaps not fully but to a useful extent. Another recommendation was to record discussions to create an appropriate translation (Van Nes et al, 2010). All sessions have been recorded and transcribed to help us in later processes to stay aligned to what has been said in these sessions. Another aspect we have considered is to provide the reader with rich descriptions to illustrate the used material and giving the qualitative study a more trustworthy tone (Van Nes et al, 2010). Although quotes of participants are translated, we believe this is an appropriate method for reducing language barriers and that is one main reason for using quotes extensively. We have also tried to take a creative approach on language by using images and metaphors brought by

participants and by ourselves in the empirical findings and discussion sections in this thesis. Further, using symbols is taking a creative stand in language and functions as a tool to help convey meanings and describe experiences on a superficial level (Farquhar & Fitzsimons, 2011), and the use of metaphors and images enable the understanding of complex and ambiguous phenomenon (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011). Moreover, these symbols function as a tool for allowing recognition and thereby help conveying meanings of how we understand identity (Alvesson, 2010). Many researchers argue for the effectiveness of using metaphors and images (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011; Alvesson, 2010 & Farquhar & Fitzsimons, 2011) and we hope these symbols help us open a dialogue with new ideas. Still, we understand that meanings get lost in translation but it may also be true that meanings are found.

Swedish Words

Although focus groups are translated, not all word can pass this process without losing its meaning. Therefore, we have chosen to maintain some original sources such as *blatte*, *förort* and *svenne* (see section 2.3 *Ethnic Identity*) to avoid giving the wrong impression of connotations, tones and meanings of these words. The concepts used in this thesis are recurring words from our data collection of mainly primary sources but also a few secondary sources. Important to highlight is that descriptions through explanations, images and metaphors can help the reader to understand meanings, but not always since these can be rather ambiguous. However, one key problem when attempting to describe *blatte*, *förort* and *svenne* is the context dependency, which contributes to the ambiguity of the concept. We understand that this challenge is hard to overcome and an attempt of providing the reader, especially non-Swedish, with a rich description of these concepts may not be possible. This is perhaps the most serious disadvantage when using words in the original language in this study, but it would most certainly be worse to translate these because the meanings are not always transferable.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter, we aim at understanding the perceived experiences and interpretations among students who are enrolled at Swedish Business School. Our findings and analysis will be presented and outlined in two main themes: (1) Social Environment and (2) Ethnic Identity. Under social environment we will present how family, friends and school as social factors contribute to the development of challenges. Following that, ethnic identity will be present through three subthemes: personal social responsibility, adaptability and carelessness that will advance our understanding how the students ethnic identities are shaped in relation to social factors. Although the two main themes have been categorized and labelled individually, it is important to mention that these themes do not act independently. Instead, social environment and ethnic identity take place simultaneously and should be seen as interrelated events that affect one another. Still, it is necessary to divide them into separate themes to present our empirical material in a cohesive and structured way. Through the participants experiences this empirical section will provide the reader with additional understanding about separation in society and what implications it has on their ethnic identity work.

4.1 Social Environment

To understand challenges, it is important to look beyond the present social context, which leads us to the first main theme: social environment. During the interactive sessions with the students it became noticeable that several challenges that they experience are tied to previous social environmental factors. The striking resemblance among the participants and their experiences despite their different ethnic backgrounds shows that the problem perhaps has strong relational ties to a separated society. To explain challenges, it is appropriate to examine family, friends, and school that have actively had a present role in the participants lives and thus also influenced the shaping of their surroundings to some extent.

Family, Friends and School

A challenge perceived by the participants was to encounter themselves in an appropriate educational environment and/or residential place. Students mentioned that to perform well they had find themselves in an ideal social environment that promotes and encourages good performance already at an early age. An ideal social environment is related to where a family decides to reside as some participants speak of the social communities that immigrant families commonly move to when immigrating to Sweden. These neighborhoods are often referred to as *förort* by the participants. A *förort* is signified by having a high immigrant population rate (*see section 2.3 Ethnic Identity*), hence this environment is not encouraging academic achievement and performance to the same extent.

Children that come from a *förort* do not have the same opportunities. They do not have two parents that have studied on a university level or have a good financial situation. These children from a *förort* have it tougher and not the same opportunities to perform as well in school (William).

The participants' discussion around a *förort* clearly confirms and demonstrates the societal class differences that exist in Sweden as they agree that children of immigrant families that geographically live in a *förort* do not have the same opportunities. Living or studying in a *förort* is perceived as a challenge because individuals have not always found themselves in an ideal environment that are encouraging them to perform well and make good choices. The surrounding the subjects are referring to could for instance be friendship circles where it was common to have other immigrant friends when they lived in a *förort*. One student commented that these areas were not considered as an ideal environment:

Here is the deal, initially in a *förort* parents have a negative view of all adolescence, so my parents always asked me: "Why do you hang out with Mohammed (uncommon name in Sweden) and not Johan and Erik (common Swedish names)? You will have a much better future...and I know that I had two different group of friends, one with Swedes and one with *blattar* and I felt that the group I hung out

with the most was the *blattar*. I felt it could have ended pretty bad. So, the thing is I wanted to get away from that and get a fresh start (William).

Likewise, even the educational environment in a *förort* was not acknowledged as an ideal place if wanting to break away from old bad habits that took place in a *förort*. There appeared to be a great understanding that subjects are highly susceptible to influences from their surrounding and concerns were raised about living and studying in a *förort*.

If I had not changed schools I do not know what would have happened to me. Not that I have bad work ethic or discipline but more because the environment is so determining and at that age you are so sensitive and exposed (Camila).

After it was established that a *förort* is not considered as an ideal place for creating prosperity it was interesting to see a pattern of demographic movement among the participants. For instance, close to all participants reported that at some stage in their life they had relocated and moved from a *förort* to a neighborhood that was populated with mostly ethnic Swedes and in many cases signified with higher class. Thus, also a complete transition in their surrounding as they suddenly noticed the drastic separation and class differences between living in a *förort* and a neighborhood signified with a high ethnic Swedish population. As some participants said:

Initially we lived in a *förort*, and we barely had any students with a Swedish background in our class. Then we moved to an area of higher class where there were only ethnic Swedish students in my class (William).

It was the biggest transition to go from a school in a *förort* to a school where parents suddenly owned banks...it was really upper class...people were super ambitious...So, I entered this environment during high school and I think it has affected me a lot (Carolina).

To further illustrate the distinct separation in environmental conditions one participant spoke of

the *förort* as a quite dangerous place. In fact, this student's move involved a transition away from an environment where they had witnessed criminal life. As one participant said:

I noticed where all these *blattar* in the *förort* ended up. People died where I lived... so I just came to realization that it cannot be like this, I had to leave. So, it was a smart move to leave and completely change (Jacob).

Furthermore, as the students reported to have changed environmental conditions to where they attended schools where individuals came from higher class neighborhoods, they also gained new friendship circles where priorities were different and thus also changed their own behavior. Important to mention is that whether this demographic relocation was a choice of action from parents or the individuals themselves, this choice was an intentional move that would help the subjects to integrate with people that had better priorities and thus create prosperity and a brighter future. By once again tying it back to susceptibility and how their social environment is shaping them. One student mentioned how their behavior and priorities completely changed when he moved from a *förort* and attended a new school predominantly populated with ethnic Swedish students:

...You become as those you hang out with. When I lived in a [*förort*] I was involved in a lot of bad stuff but it was cool there, and if I would have stayed in the [*förort*] I probably would have continued with that. In the *förort*...If you steal something you are cool, if you talk trash you are cool, if you punch someone you are cool and that way you climb the ranking...When I later moved to [a community in Sweden signified by higher class and predominantly populated with ethnic Swedish people] I was the biggest jerk. There it was status if you were good at sports, if you were well-spoken. You become as those you hang out with and a part of that environment...You want to blend in where you come from (George).

Interestingly, most participants could refer to a specific cross point that contributed to a shift in priorities. This shift could for instance be moving away from a *förort* to a new neighborhood where

mostly ethnic Swedes lived, or changing educational environment to schools where the students came from upper class families or simply choosing new friendship circles. Either way, being surrounded by ethnic Swedes was the better environment and alternative to grow up in. To compare student experiences, another participant interestingly reported that there had never been such change in environment at any given time, instead, the participant had always grown up in a Swedish environment with other ethnic Swedes and thereby also been shaped accordingly.

I have grown up with a lot of ethnic Swedish people around me. Even though I have been different compared to my ethnic Swedish friends...I was still shaped very much when I was with my ethnic Swedish friends at that early age (Olivia).

This contrast illustrates the distinct difference between individuals who have an immigrant background who at some point grew up in a *förort* and individuals who always have found themselves in an ethnic Swedish dominant environment. The same need and desire to relocate is not present when an individual initially grows up in an ideal environment because the same challenges are not presented.

Summarizing Social Environment

To summarize social environmental factors, students do not neglect the high relevance of previous social and environmental factors such as demographic location, family, friends and educational context. A frequently used term to describe the importance of the social environment was the word chain that was used to demonstrate separation in society and how one thing is linked to the other. This interrelation has affected what has been and what is yet to come.

Perhaps people do not like to speak of that Sweden is a very segregated society... If you live in a certain neighborhood, then you go to a certain school and there may be more students with another ethnic background...So, it starts further back in the chain (Olivia).

The social environment is a great influencer and it is important to look beyond the present social

context to see what social and environmental factors have played a significant role in the development of challenges. Through the students' experiences, we have been able to illustrate that perhaps separation society is in fact contributing in shaping challenges for some individuals. While at first impression Swedish society seems to be equal, we could further interpret that there are class differences that remain intact and do play a significant role in shaping the environment. Through the students' experiences, we see that neighborhoods are powerful forces in shaping the individuals and that certain social spheres have positive or negative influence on the participants. To conclude, we see a pattern of crossing borders and social spheres in forms of educational contexts, neighborhoods and friendship circles as a tool for overcoming challenges that the participants face.

4.2 Ethnic Identity

In this section, we will speak of ethnic identity as an ongoing construction process and look at how the participants' ethnic identity is shaped by social environmental demands. During our focus groups the concept of ethnic identity was never actively used by the participants. However, we have chosen to label the second major theme ethnic identity because there was an active conversation that involved the students' perceived sense of self in relation to their ethnic background. In hindsight, we believe that not speaking of ethnic identity in direct terms has provided us with valuable information as the students disclosed about their sense of self under their own terms and conditions. Thus, no responses were pushed or forced instead the discussions reflect and authentic representation of their experiences. To further elaborate on ethnic identity, we will in this section explain experiences and interpretations that have been categorized as personal social responsibility, adaptability and carelessness. These three subgroups collectively offer an in depth understanding to the shaping of students' ethnic identities.

Personal Social Responsibility

A metaphor that some participants used to describe themselves and their role in relation to their ethnic background was ambassador. The idea of being an ambassador for a social group stems from the participants perceived experience that they carry personal social responsibility in performing and behaving in correct ways to disprove both negative and positive stereotypes that exist towards certain social groups. As interpreters, we also see the idea of taking responsibility

for another nation as a sign that an individual experience relational ties to a specific background. To be more concrete, it appears that these students experience responsibility for an ethnic group that they to some extent also identify with on a personal and social level.

If I am alone in class, and do bad, then I will be judged and then the whole nation will be judged...then I think about that and want to prove the opposite. [Italy] is not seen as the world's greatest country and many see it very negative and I think about that and want to prove the opposite. So, I keep in mind that I represent [Italy] in all situations. If I steal a bike then people will think that all [Italian] people steal bikes (Sebastian).

I feel that people think that I am super smart just because I am [Kenyan] (Carolina).

The above-mentioned quotes suggest that race and ethnicity is sometimes looked upon in simple categories where racial preconceptions are either negative or positive. While this separation is obvious it becomes problematic as there appears to be no middle ground of not generalizing and being one thing or the other. This idea prompted a discussion that some of the students have experienced cases of generalization. For instance, because of their ethnic background they have encountered situations where they are being categorized and grouped with other individuals of the same ethnicity. Hence, behaviors and actions of group members are being ascribed to all individuals in that group. A participant used a great example to illustrate how this categorization becomes problematic and used the example of having a collective bank account. Regardless how much value has been added to this bank account, if one person that comes from the same ethnic background does something bad, that person alone will not suffer the consequences.

Sometimes I feel that every time an immigrant does something in Sweden, a crime or something like that, then we are all affected and go minus as if we had a shared bank account. Then there is a damn [Albanian] guy that needs to build a company for this bank account to go plus again...we are a team (George).

Instead, individuals that fall within this group collectively suffer because one person's behavior and actions are ascribed to all individuals who have the same ethnic background. Instantly, a whole ethnic group can go from hundred to zero and then another person must outperform and prove otherwise to add new value to the account.

This generalization practice led into a discussion that first and second generation immigrants have a lower status than ethnic Swedish people. Due to their ethnic background, some of the participants expressed feelings of being undermined where they through their actions had to prove themselves and that they had the ability to perform despite the perceived odds against them.

Here at [Swedish Business School] and when I have written exams or during seminars I can think: “Damn maybe I am not on the same level as the ethnic Swedes, maybe I do not fit in here” ...Then there are situations where I have outperformed and showed the ethnic Swedes where the hammer hangs, and then it feels like I belong here...I am *blatte* but I can also perform. I can do it better than [ethnic Swedes] or at the same level (William).

It appears as if there is an inner drive to prove the opposite and it is evident there are still instances where some of the participants have experienced that they have been ascribed labels because of their ethnic background. What stands out to us is that these labels seem to be something that the participants cannot escape from. However, we observed that participants still managed these social ascriptions by developing a desire to prove the opposite.

My whole childhood I have grown up with ethnic Swedes. I have always been the only immigrant and it has always been that I want to show them that: “Damn we *blattar*, we can also be smart and not just criminals” or anything similar to that stamp. I have grown up like that, I want to show that I am damn good (Alexander).

People have preconceptions or think that I am in a certain way. For instance, if I enter a new class and there are 240 people and I am the only dark skin person I feel

that when I enter a room I automatically get a stamp that I am either super smart and that is why I am there, or I get the complete opposite. That is when I feel like I just want to be the best (Camila).

It appears that the labels the participants receive are strongly related to the concept of being a *blatte* and that this label functions as a source of inspiration to prove the opposite and that they do not fully identify with the label they are assigned. Although there are both positive and negative labels ascribed to the participants by their surroundings and themselves, we interpret that the participants occasionally also find pride in being a *blatte*. This striking result was that some of the participants experienced personal social responsibility to represent their ethnic background and an inner drive to prove that they can break away from the existing stereotypes about *blattar*.

Adaptability

To speak of ethnic identity, it is also important to give an in-depth insight to how the students perceived self and understanding of who they are is shaped and constructed in a social context. While daily conversations around identity and questions involving: “Who I am? - What group do I belong to?” was not a common topic, the participants still disclosed about their experiences and situations where they have experiences a sense of in-betweenness and thought of if they are ethnic Swedish or not. The participants further claimed that this hesitation around what they are labeled as was not something that hindered them in any way, nor something they would speak of often. Instead, it would be specific situations where they would be reminded of their non-Swedishness that would trigger thoughts and reflections around who and what they are.

An aspect that would trigger this conflict would be looks and names. Not all participants have revealing looks that they have another ethnic background, but one participant mentioned that regardless how Swedish you feel on the inside, the social environment can still remind an individual of their non-Swedishness.

Sure, we are equally Swedish on paper but what really matters to me is how you are seen outwardly, and then we are not equally Swedish. No one will ask Mattias

(common Swedish name) where he is from, but they will ask me where I am from and I understand that some people do because I do not look Swedish. In a sense, I will never be able to feel fully Swedish because I do not look Swedish (George).

The same student continues:

I am Swedish because I was born here, and I am a Swedish citizen on the paper. I have not immigrated, I was born in Sweden. So, if I am not Swedish, then what am I? I am not [Albanian]...My values are Swedish and I act Swedish, I am Swedish, and that is why I become a Swede with parents that have another background (George).

The above-mentioned quotes give us a slight insight to the conflicting nature of what an individual is and how complex the notion of in-betweenness is. Someone's national belonging is not a simple calculation that can be measured, instead, there are multiple factors that push an individual in one direction or the other. There are tangible factors such as looks and country of birth that together with intangible factors such as values and beliefs that influence students feeling of themselves and who they are.

Furthermore, the discussion around how Swedish the participants really are, was not a problem that they would think of often. Instead, they appreciate the flexibility in finding themselves in-between and not having to label themselves as one thing or the other and they could embrace having another ethnic background. However, the problem of fitting in and adapting to the social environment was not something they could avoid and the problem of having to decide what they are and where they come from would strike them occasionally in certain social situations. One student mentioned:

When I am in [Algeria] I feel Swedish, when I am in Sweden I feel [Algerian]. I do not know where I come from, Swedish-[Algerian]-ish (Alexander).

This state of in-betweenness and feeling of not belonging fully to one thing or the other was not uncommon. Instead, it appeared to be rather common that the students perceived themselves to be a blend of both. Yet, this conflicting nature of what ethnic group the participants belong to contributed to the development of adaptability skills. In fact, to describe themselves some participants used the concept of a chameleon: “You become like a chameleon when you come here [Swedish Business School]” (Philip). A closer inspection of this metaphor that further illustrated how some participants adapt to social contexts is stated below:

I absolutely feel that I am [Russian] but of course I have struggled with that. How much should I adapt because I want to fit in, but I do not want to lose my [Russian]-identity. But I have come up with a method lately, at work I want to adapt completely and want to learn how people in Sweden work...but during my free time I am absolutely [Russian]...So, it is like I have two identities, from eight to five I am Swedish (Samuel).

A participant said she has a filter that she applies when engaging in conversations with certain ethnic Swedish groups of friends and that this filter helps maintain a balanced friendship.

I have noticed that when I am with ethnic Swedes, I think a bit more about what I say and it is a bit unintentional, but I can catch myself not saying something or I filter myself in a different way... So, I must have a filter when I am with ethnic Swedes because I do not have the same point of reference when it comes to things and experiences (Camila).

Likewise, a subject used the words two faces to describe themselves and how he manages social demands to adapt and interact with both ethnic Swedes and individuals that have an immigrant background.

Almost my whole life I have been forced to have two faces because I have hung out with friends in the *förort* and hung out with my ethnic Swedish friends. So, I

am not the same person with my ethnic Swedish friends as with my *blatte* friends... I can speak like a real guy from the *förort*...I know how I should act when I am with them so they do not look down on me. I also know exactly how I should act when I am with ethnic Swedes. So, I have two faces, and it can get a bit hard sometimes (William).

The same student continues and explains how having two faces can contribute to a feeling of confusion:

I try to be real and authentic, so I try not to lie and be somebody else, but still I adapt to my friends here. But I have thought a lot about it. Am I *svenne*-fied or am I *blatte*, who do I belong to? (William).

All these quotes collectively offer an insight to the complex nature of having multiple ethnic backgrounds and the adaptation challenges that follow. Interestingly, most participants report the use methods to manage the feeling of being in-between two worlds, yet, methods such as filters and two faces also indicate tendencies of not complete integration as there is a need to adaptation.

Furthermore, while the participants draw a distinction between themselves and ethnic Swedes they also engaged in a conversation that they are not like other *blattar*. This prompted a discussion that there are two types of *blattar*, the *good blattar* and then the regular *blattar*. The main difference according to the students is that *good blattar* have done something good and ambitious with their life, while regular *blattar* are still stuck in a *förort* and do not engage in activities that create prosperity and a good future. It is important to mention that the participants made this distinction themselves and that they identified with falling in the *good blattar* category. The most interesting aspect of this categorization is that the *good blatte* sub-category can adapt.

I went to a primary school in the *förort* and I changed to a high school in the city. Some of my friends came with me to the school in the city but they did not become Swedish, they kept acting like regular *blattar*, but I became more

Swedish since I hung out with [ethnic Swedes] while my *blatte* friends only hung out with each other (William).

There are two types of *blattar*. In my case I played soccer when I was younger and we had a mixture of *blattar* and ethnic Swedes and I adapted... But then there are regular *blattar* that only hang out in the *förort* and do not have any other interest and only go to school because they must. They stay out late and hang out with other regular *blattar*. They are completely different because they do not adapt (Philip).

The distinction between regular and *good blattar* is not only reinforced by individuals that are labeled as *blattar* but from ethnic Swedes as well.

They talk a lot of trash about *blattar* but then they look at me and say no not you, you are smart (Alexander).

The above-mentioned quotes suggest that the participants made a choice and adapted and integrated with other ethnic Swedes on a social level both at school and in their extracurricular activities. In all cases, participants expressed that regular *blattar* did not adapt and kept themselves isolated from an ethnic Swedish community, while the subjects in this study had not. It seems that this action and choice was a highly important factor for them to adapt and become *good blattar*. This result is somewhat counterintuitive as there appears to be a fine line of balancing Swedish norms and traditions and a pressure of not becoming too Swedish. Hence, students that have an immigrant background face a conflict of pressure from different social groups.

I think you have some pressure to not become too Swedish...and I think that there is pressure of not pretending to be someone or something you are not... Importantly, I can notice the contrast when I meet [regular *blattar*] and they say to me: “Why are you acting all fancy? What the heck are you doing? You are such a *svenne*” (Jacob).

While the participants illustrate that there are some distinct differences between them as *good blattar* and regular *blattar*, we interpret this as another case of not fully belonging to one group or the other when not fully identifying with the immigrant label. Being a *good blatte* pushes them further away from regular *blattar* and closer to the ethnic Swedish markers because they have integrating well to Swedish society and adopted appropriate characteristics. Despite this, there will still always be certain social contexts that are infused with Swedish symbolic meaning that are reinforcing feelings of not belonging there either. The feeling of displacement is a slight reminder of their non-Swedishness and illustrates the cultural differences of growing or not growing up in an ethnic Swedish home despite integrating by socializing with ethnic Swedes. As one individual stated:

What is noticeable, is that sometimes in certain social context, you notice that he is raised in a Swedish family home and I am not...For instance, these Swedish songs that you sing while you drink I have never been introduced to these before, so when we sing these songs, I am completely displaced (George).

While there are big cultural differences when growing up as an ethnic Swede and having an immigrant background, it is related to adaptability, developing skills and methods on how to fit in. Similarity to some participants that adapted when socializing with regular *blattar* to fit in, the participants can also identify situations dominated by Swedish culture and traditions and to act in accordance to the demands in that specific social context.

There are a lot of traditions that I had never heard of, so you play along as if you know what is going on (Martin).

Sometimes when I party with my ethnic Swedish friends and listen to Swedish music I can almost think: "This is not me" but I just go along (William).

While there are some situations where the participants do not feel like they belong in Swedish social context they have with time learned to appreciate and embrace Swedish traditions. Likewise,

participants report that a growing appreciation for having two ethnic backgrounds has risen over time. The blend of having another ethnic background and being Swedish is something the students see as an advantage and strength in relation to pure ethnic Swedes. As one respondent put it:

I have realized over time that I am so much more. I have a better view of the whole world than most others that do not have my background, that only have one nationality. I understand a lot and can speak to anybody. I have a better view of people than they have and I feel that I can speak an extra language that they cannot, and that is actually just positive...I have acceptance for people regardless of background. I have never looked down on people (Jacob).

Although there are challenges associated with having two ethnic backgrounds the identity construction is an ongoing process that can be reinforced in both negative and positive ways. While the students acknowledge the necessity of adapting and becoming as those in their surrounding there is a growing admiration of having another ethnic background.

Overall, adaptability seems to play a very complex role on the participants. On one hand, it enables the individuals to blend in and integrate to Swedish society; on the other hand, pressure of not becoming too Swedish will always remain intact as the participants have another ethnic background. This conflicting nature generates a feeling of in-betweenness and exists as an internal ethnic identity struggle where participants want to embrace both ethnicities. Simultaneously, their surrounding is reminding them that they have not fully integrated as being a *blatte* or an ethnic Swede.

Carelessness

As previously mentioned, the conversational topic concerning who they are, and who they belong to was not something the participants would spend extensive time thinking about. Likewise, although here were some situations of not belonging and social demands requiring adaptation the students showed verbally and emotionally an ignorance and carelessness of the fact that they are different. This carelessness and lack of worry appears to stem from an extensive record and pattern

of being different for a very long time in various situations. It has become a familiar situation to deviate from the normality and therefore some of the participants have become immune to being different. As some participants said:

It feels like I have been in this situation so many times, where I am the only one that deviates a little...to me it has become a part of my everyday life. So, I barely think about it anymore (Camila).

I stopped caring a long time ago. I have grown up in [community in Sweden predominantly populated with ethnic Swedish people] as the only immigrant my whole life, I stopped caring, it does not matter anymore! (Alexander).

Despite the ignorance and carelessness of the fact that participants are different to some degree, there is a subtle reminder coming from both the majority and minority group in the shape of comments and preconceptions. The comments that are being directed occasionally towards the students are grounded in friendly intentions and usually lack of knowledge. Therefore, these comments are brushed of as if nothing ever happened. However, these comments remind them yet again of their non-Swedishness and the preconceptions that exist. For instance, comments have involved a surprise that someone is not fully Swedish because they speak perfect Swedish and act in line with Swedish markers. One student said:

The first semester a classmate said: “What? I thought at least your mom or dad was Swedish?” As if it would be weird that I studied at [Swedish Business School] and speak perfect Swedish...That comment does not just exist within him, it is probably many others that think like that (Olivia).

I have noticed some preconceptions, people do not always say it explicitly, but I have noticed on other levels such as in their facial expressions as if they think: “Oh, you can also be smart and perform. She is actually good” and I think to myself that I am just like you, the only thing that differs is my skin color (Camila).

While some of the participants occasionally encounter comments that remind them of their non-Swedishness, they also reinforce internal thoughts about being different. Sometimes the participants find themselves in social contexts that triggers thoughts and ideas about what other people in their surrounding perhaps might think of them. Our existing doubt that the participants are carefree regarding this matter is reinforced as we found that the subjects show signs of caring by over analyzing situations and creating preconceptions that might not exist. As one student commented:

I think that you imagine yourself being different from others...We think to ourselves that we cannot, that we are less than [ethnic Swedes] ... I think we make it a bit worse than what it actually is (Sebastian).

The students further mention that the topic is a quite sensitive and that it even becomes difficult for them to speak of ideas, experiences and thoughts related to ethnicity because there is lack of conversational engagement from other directions. There are often not enough people who can relate and the participants expressed an appreciation of speaking about this topic. This need is yet again another indication that perhaps the students do care as there is an expressed need to speak of not always belonging to the majority. Another interviewee reported:

I think it is great that you raise these questions because it so easy to focus on gender and the HBTQ-movement, which is great, but experiencing indirect racism, or not racism but like “you damn *blatte*”, and you have felt a bit degraded and no one believes that because you are so Swedish (Olivia).

We see that the participants first emphasize that they do not care about being different, but later show signs of caring through expressed thoughts and ideas. We interpret the following quote as a possible explanation for this contradiction of caring and not caring:

When I think too much about being different it comes across like I complain rather

than me trying to do something about it. What is dangerous here is that paying too much attention on me deviating from others is that I overthink it and it becomes some sort of obstacle because it keeps reminding me that I am different, which is bad. I believe that I must remember that I am different, but not let this get in the way because if I constantly would be thinking: “I am darker than her and I probably do not have the same possibilities.” What good does that do? and how does that help me? (Camila).

Another quote shows strong signs of caring where they have extensively thought about being different and indirect thoughts about what it would be like if they were a part of a majority group and how their surroundings would perceive them. So, imagining what it would be like to belong to a majority in their residential country indicate that there are notions of caring. A subject further expressed:

I think about it every now and then. Sometimes I think: “Damn I do not want to live in Sweden...it would have been nice to live in [Albania] where everybody is like me” ...Because if I behave bad in Sweden people think: “Look at that typical *blatte*”. But if I would be in [Albania], I would just be an individual who is an idiot (George).

This quote indicate that participants do care, to some extent at least, and that this conversation touched upon a serious and hard topic. It is also important to mention that although the topic and discussion was serious and hard to grasp the room and session was infused with humor from all the participants as they despite differences experienced togetherness. This humor is not something that can be captured in words or presented in quotes as it entails intangible factors such as smiles and laughter at specific occasions. However, we believe this aspect should still be highlighted as it plays an important role in our interpretations. As interpreters, we could see humor as a coping method when speaking of a difficult subject. Perhaps the conflict of caring and not caring is easier to resolve when infusing the conversation with humor as it is easy to joke something off. Likewise, humor could also be a method to conceptualize the topic and concepts. Often when speaking of ethnicity and group belonging it is difficult to place feelings and a certain mood into words.

However, concepts such as *blatte*, *svenne* and *förort* functioned as connecting words where close to all participants could relate and all filters and borders were erased because suddenly all the participants became one. So, humor in this sense functioned as a tool where all the participants could experience collectiveness.

Summarizing Ethnic Identity

The theme of ethnic identity shows that the students identity construction is a subtle and constantly ongoing process where the shaping is reinforced by internal and external factors. These factors include for instance acquiring the role as an ambassador and experiencing personal and social responsibility for a whole ethnic group, developing adaptability skills and becoming a chameleon to fit in with both *blattar* and ethnic Swedes and the conflicting nature of caring and not caring. Collectively, these factors contribute to the conflicting nature of in-betweenness where the participants occasionally must stop and think about who they are and what ethnic background they identify with. However, as demonstrated through our participants experiences these conflicts are not zero-sum games where they simply choose to be this or that and/or to care or not care. Instead, it seems to be a complex identity process that cannot always explained and put into words.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study set out to explore and understand what challenges students with an immigrant background experience and what impact these difficulties have on their ethnic identities. One key aspect in this research is that *blatte* became a main concept in our thesis that we further developed in our discussion. The main findings in this study is that although students constructed as *blattar* break out from stereotypes and other strong associations with the *förort* and/or their country of origin and succeed, they are continuously reminded from their surroundings that full success has not been achieved. So, although these students break out from a *förort* and disconnect from all activities and possible associations from a regular *blatte*, it seems impossible for this group to de-identify from this concept as they instead become *good blattar*. The idea that the students become *good blattar* influences their ethnic identities and reinforces a feeling of in-betweenness and belonging to two worlds. The *good blatte* identity becomes a composed identity as they experience multiple ethnic belongings. We further found that a *good blatte* identity is not necessarily stable and accepted by the students due to the preconceptions that still exist about *blattar*. Thus, the *good* does not overcompensate for being a *blatte* and this dissonance is occasionally causing an internal conflict. Furthermore, we found that a possible coping mechanism for facing this difficulty is carelessness. However, we still believe that there is caring on a deeper level as it seems that the aspect of not caring is a highly effective method for calming a potential ethnic identity struggle.

Am I Swedish or am I Blatte?

The findings from this research suggest that students with a foreign background may experience a sense of in-betweenness and not an explicit belonging to one group or the other. There is no proof that all participants experienced this liminal phase. Nonetheless, there was a major sense of not fully belonging anywhere within the group of participants. Although our participants have adapted accordingly to Swedish traditions, values and culture (e.g. speak perfect Swedish, attend Swedish higher education, engage in Swedish social activities), it seems that integrating to an environment that does not fully align with their ethnic identity and in this case their other ethnic background

creates an internal identity struggle.

Somewhat surprisingly, this challenge contributes to frequent renegotiation of minorities ethnic identities and there appears to be a need for taking on two ethnic identities, a *blatte*-identity and a Swedish-identity. We find this surprising because it appears on a superficial level that the participants have fully integrated in all the right ways to Swedish society, still, the other background is more intact than we had thought. Indeed, these different belongings contribute to an experience of a permanent liminal phase and the sensation of living in-between two worlds, Swedish society and their original ethnic heritage. Possibly, this compromise give rise to an ongoing negotiation of figuring out where these individuals belong. Research suggest that ethnic identity becomes a complicated process when an individual is confronted with two cultures simultaneously (Acar et al, 2016; Brubaker 2001; Darvishpour & Westin, 2015; Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2015; Kivisto 2005; Maxwell, 2017). Likewise, prior studies illustrated that identity is an ongoing process since it is continuously challenged and negotiated (Alvesson 2004; Alvesson, 2010; Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2011; Borgström & Goldstein-Kyaga, 2006, 2009). To say the least, there are striking indications that illustrate a constant identity negotiation and the most compelling evidence here is that the participants did not fully take on either a *blatte*-identity or a Swedish-identity. Instead, the subjects expressed their ethnic identity as a mix of both. A possible reason for taking on this in-between ethnic identity is that there would perhaps be an even stronger internal conflict if this group had to completely give up one thing or the other to fully belong to one group. It appears that this ethnic identity struggle is a part of their ongoing identity formation and inviting both a *blatte*-identity and a Swedish-identity is a possible solution for balancing out an ethnic identity-equation and to not experience an identity crash.

Alternatively, our study suggests that choosing only one side is perceived as a loss of their true sense of the self, because giving up their *blatte*-identity is understood as them being naive in front of regular *blattar* as illustrated in William's and Jacob's stories. It appears to be some sort of pressure from the *blatte* environment that is constantly pulling them back in not taking on only a Swedish-identity. Studies suggest that this liminal phase is a complex process as individuals find themselves in a state of in-betweenness (Goldstein-Kyaga & Borgström, 2009; Turner, 1967;

Beech, 2011; Van Gennep, 1960; Camino & Krulfeld, 1994) and creating a third identity of characteristics from both backgrounds implies that the ethnic identity is adapted and adjusted to fit into social and cultural contextual demands (Goldstein-Kyaga and Borgström, 2009). Quite revealing is that the participants in this study introduced us to concepts such as chameleon and ambassador and these metaphors imply that the participants experienced belonging to both ethnic backgrounds. These metaphors illuminate how participants experience the liminal phase of in-betweenness and a constant need for adaptation. While the liminal phase is often seen as a transition it is possible to argue that in the students' case it should be interpreted as a permanent phase and effective method for coping with being both/and. Still, we raise a concern that this result is difficult to measure in exact terms as it is problematic to measure nationality and how strong one ethnic background is in relation to the other.

Once a Blatte, Always a Blatte

The findings of our study further suggest that while the participants appear to create a multidimensional identity of composing both ethnicities, somewhat unexpectedly, it seems that society is not accepting this composition as easily and instead reinforcing their existing differences. This finding is unexpected to us as it seems that Swedish society embraces differences when not labelling individuals, however, there appears to be a silent categorization that does label individuals. Previous research suggests that separation in society is dictated by class, ethnic belonging and race (Schelling, 1969;1971; Bonacich, 2008). Our findings suggest that these aspects may be a contributing factor for separation in Swedish society as well. Important to remember is Wacquant's (2011) argument that there is a difference between segregation in the United States and Western Europe. In our study, we see a *förort* as equal to *urban relegation* areas. Likewise, we do agree that it is possible to exit a *förort* on a superficial level in terms of changing neighborhoods, social spheres and class, which our study has showed. Importantly, our study does not confirm that this disconnection is available on a deeper level. In other words, it is available to detach from a *förort* on a superficial level but not on an identity-level due to labels such as a *blatte* that are strongly connecting individuals to their ethnic background.

An interesting pattern that we observed was that most participants had made a physical transition

from an educational context and/or residential place in a *förort* to a location highly characterized by high class and a predominantly ethnic Swedish population. This transition was illustrated by Carolina's and William's stories, which likely supports the idea provided by Schelling (1969:1971) that choices of educational environment and residential places are based on existing racial compositions. More importantly, we see intentional actions of disconnecting from a *förort*, which in a sense is not odd as there are opportunities available and presented. However, we remain critical that this detachment reaches beyond a superficial level to the point where an individual can transition on an identity level. To rephrase, we question if it is possible to fully and completely exit *urban relegation* areas and de-identify when transitioning into areas characterized with higher class and other racial compositions.

Our findings suggest that it is not likely to completely detach from being an *urban outcast* despite crossing borders and transitioning into new areas. Instead, our participants still seem to experience some sort of label assigned to them as immigrants, in this case *blattar*, regardless what social environment they relocated to. This argument is strengthened by Alexander's and George's stories who both have experienced *blatte*-labelling. It appears that this *blatte*-label functions as some sort of brand and this group does not have any authority to manage this categorization. Interestingly, regardless what our participants have done up until now to integrate, it appears as if no action will fully tip the scale in one direction. It is as if minorities themselves are not able to erase these labels, status symbols or hierarchical meanings because ascriptions will always come back at them somehow.

Instead, this finding is more aligned with other research suggesting that immigrants in Sweden have a low status categorization and an immigrant stamp and that there is a tendency to treat individuals with another ethnic background as a homogenous group (Parszyk, 1999; Runfors, 2016). This literature supports our findings that *blatte*-labels and status symbols cannot be erased since these categorizations are deeply imprinted in Swedish social structures. We think that this generalization creates a difficult situation for a minority individual because the connotation of *blatte* contributes to a common sense of ethnicity and race echoing in Swedish society. This categorization makes it impossible to break away from stereotypes and specific social structures

that these minority individual's themselves cannot change. So, regardless how hard a *blatte* in Sweden tries to fit in or how well they perform, act, think and behave they cannot be fully Swedish outwardly, which is showed in George's story. Interestingly, we found that any signs of non-Swedishness is directly associated with *blattar* and places an individual with an immigrant background immediately at a disadvantage and limits possibilities to break away from being an *urban outcast*.

Alternatively, the idea that *blattar* can achieve an ethnic identity of a *good blatte* is aligned with the division of *blattar* provided by Khemiri (2003) and our study further supports this idea as we found that all participants can in our opinion be classified as *good blattar*. This ethnic identity can on the other hand be accepted by their social environment, but we have noticed that acting as a *good blatte* instead of a regular *blatte* does not actually help minorities to become fully Swedish. Somewhat worrisome, our study shows that *blattar* are surrounded and challenged in their actions and achievements when others interpret their success with doubt. We believe that these hesitations from their surrounding are based on preconceptions around the concept *blatte* and are difficult to break down or change. Collectively, this information helps us understand an immobility that minorities in Sweden face, because a *blatte* will always be a *blatte*.

In-Betweenness as a Good Blatte Identity

Our study demonstrated that the meaning and usage of the concept *blatte* has powerful influences on society and specifically on individuals that fall under this label. Therefore, we believe it is important to further elaborate on what implications this concept has on the participants' identities. Although almost all the participants have crossed *förort*-borders and attempted to break stereotypes on several levels, there appears to be a lack of complete integration on an ethnic identity-level as this group is still somehow seen as a *blatte*. Importantly, we purposefully made the distinction that our participants are labelled as *good blattar* because we believe this could perhaps illustrate signs of a third identity that the participants have developed. To further illustrate this third identity, see *figure 1.1* below:

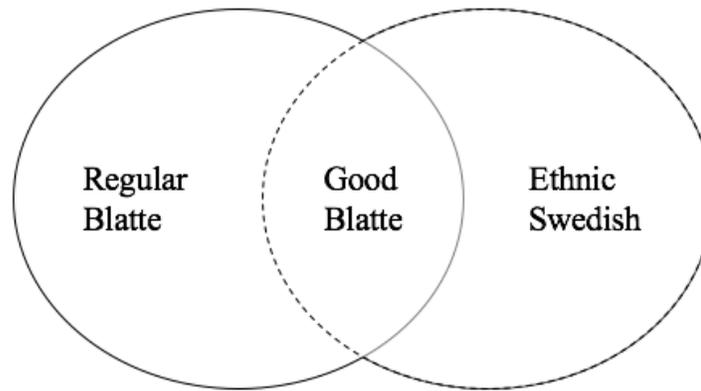


Figure 1.1 The In-between Identity

The two circles represent the two separate ethnic belongings of the individuals in our study. We see tendencies that this group experience strong relational ties to their Swedish ethnicity, while simultaneously a connection to their original ethnic heritage. As a result, the circles overlap and these individuals are found in a state of in-between two ethnic belongings. Previous research has found that individuals developed a third identity and that they experience a stable multidimensional identity when they know who they are and what they stand for (Goldstein-Kyaga and Borgström, 2009). It seems that the participants have in general a strong sense of the self and know what they stand for. So, at a surface level a strong third identity would be salient. However, we believe that the forming of a third identity in our participants in the shape of *good blatte* cannot fully be strong, stable or accepted due to the meaning of *blatte* that is reinforced by society. On one side, a *good blatte* identity is something preferable and in fact the better option when being compared in relation to other regular *blattar* because the *good blatte* identity comes with some positive meaning and is in fact tipping the individuals into the direction of being recognized as ethnic Swedish individuals occasionally. In contrast, the *good blatte* identity does not appear to be as desirable when compared in relation to an ethnic Swede due to the imprinted meaning of *blatte* in society. Thus, it could be a potential reason for the uncomplete ethnic identity integration and intact belonging to the left circle (*see figure 1.1 above*).

I do not care, or do I?

Another reason for questioning the acceptance and stability of a *good blatte* identity is because the participants express to be carefree and not concerned by this permanent in-between phase. Yet, this carelessness is questionable because although there was a verbal expression of carelessness and not spending extensive time and effort reflecting on the fact that they are different, as interpreters we have a hard time to imagine that the participants do not care. Instead, the idea of carelessness appears to be an oversimplified explanation of an ethnic identity struggle that is in fact taking place. We have seen participants demonstrate carelessness in different expressions, while on other occasions speak of experiences that indicate signs of caring and use concepts such as “two faced”, “chameleon” etc. We might look at this as contradictions where participants say one thing but feel, think and/or behave differently. Alternatively, we can also look at this shift as different forms of caring where specific events are causing more or less ethnic identity conflict. We interpret the attempt of not caring as a coping method to create a distance and to avoid being confronted with the fact that this group is different because of their ethnic background.

A second coping method that can be interpreted from the participants experiences and another indication that multiple ethnic belonging is not fully accepted is the adoption of different masks. As individuals, they claim that they do not care and show verbally an ignorance almost suggesting that they have thick skin and are not affected by the *good blatte*-identity. As researchers, we can question this claim and argue against it as we see tendencies of superficial coping methods of managing the differences where they switch mask and adopt an appropriate role. The need for constant adaptation and adjustment of their third identity to fit into multiple contextual settings could be interpreted as an unstable sense of self and potentially even an identity struggle. To avoid being confronted with the conflicting nature that distinct differences exist an easy and functioning outlet becomes to just adopt appropriate masks.

Interestingly, a third coping method illustrates a positive effect that in contrast contributes to a permanent and stable in-betweenness phase and identity work. This coping method shows how the participants carelessness occasionally transitions into an acceptance phase where the participants experience lack of power to change the preconceptions about *blattar*. Thus, they accept a *good*

blatte identity because caring about something that cannot be changed is a waste of resources. It is likely that the carelessness stems from frequent exposure and familiarity with always deviating from the majority. Hence, this coping method symbolizes an acceptance of the normality of deviating from the majority. Perhaps becoming immune contributes to a stable sense of self as the participants can avoid reflections and issues that may give rise to an ethnic identity struggle.

Collectively through experiences and concepts, we believe that the participants have developed a *good blatte* identity due to having two ethnic belongings. Importantly, the composed identity contributes to an intact belonging to being seen a *blatte* due to the imprinted beliefs about *blattar* in Sweden. Preconceptions about *blattar* is also preventing their *good blatte* identity from reaching full stability and acceptance as this ethnic identity can be both positive and negative depending on the contextual situation. Either way, having an immigrant background is not something that can be erased or turned off. Instead, it is just a matter of finding the right coping methods to balance the state of in-betweenness. We found a superficial feeling of carelessness that should not be taken for what it initially appears to be, meaningless and non-impactful. Alternatively, we believe that the idea of carelessness is fueled with deeper meaning that can explain ethnic identity issues experienced by minority individuals in Sweden.

Summarizing Discussion and Contribution

Current studies on ethnic identity has in our opinion proposed a rather simplistic and rational process how individuals with an immigrant background construct their identity when conflicted with multiple ethnic belongings. For example, researchers have found a strong and stable third identity or there are studies that argue for multiple existing identities. While these contribute with one understanding of how ethnic identities are constructed we believe the analysis has ended too quickly, therefore, we provide previous literature on ethnic identity with a different interpretation. In contrast to previous research, our findings suggest that an ethnic identity construction is a complex and ambiguous process that cannot be explained in a simple or rational way. While we do agree that a third identity may be constructed, we question the stability of this identity due to exciting preconceptions against certain ethnicities in Sweden. Thus, we propose an alternative view that to fully understand ethnic identities among individuals with an immigrant background

in Sweden we must examine the powerful influences of society that is affecting individuals' identities in both positive and negative ways. To fully and completely understanding ethnic identities as researchers we much look at what factors influence the identity construction and then draw associations to get a deeper understanding. An example of a factor is the concept *blatte*, which is a commonly used term when speaking of immigrants in Sweden. Previous studies have examined the discursive meaning of *blatte* and in what context it is being used. However, *blatte* has not been studied from an identity perspective and how this concept affects individuals' identity construction. To further advance this understanding we have incorporated how *blatte* as a concept is used to label individuals and consequently how that affects individuals identity. Thereby, we can contribute with additional understanding about ethnic identity and how a concept used and reinforced by society is contributing to a conflicting ethnic identity nature.

Furthermore, this study also contributes to present and future studies on ethnic diversity in that social structures and ethnic identity should not be look upon independently. Instead, we see strong relation ties that one might affect the other. For instance, while previous findings suggest that it is possible to break away from *urban relegation* areas, which would be the social aspect that speaks for a promising and positive interpretation, we draw this analysis one step further. Unlike previous research we draw a contrast to ethnic identities and find that it is possible to break away on a superficial level but ethnic identities are highly affected in a negative way by once being an *urban outcast* living in an *urban relegation*. Therefore, to get a more comprehensive understanding of ethnic diversity and in this case social structures it is important to examine how ethnic identities are constructed in relation to social factors and we believe we have contributed with additional new understanding how these factors affect one another. We also believe we extend advanced understanding to previous studies on ethnic diversity in education, especially since it is argued that Swedish educational system is an effective integration method. Ethnic diversity and integration has previously been measured in relation to academic learning and performance, school diversity initiatives etc. We propose an alternative view that speak against full integration despite attending Swedish higher education, instead, we suggest that these tangible measurements of integration do not provide an accurate representation of how well individuals integrate and experience ethnic belonging. In this case, we have argued that school is not enough and that some borders build up

by society prevent complete integration and these borders will not disappear. We believe this study contributes to the field of ethnic diversity in Sweden and beyond with invaluable information that ethnic identity plays a significant role when studying anything that fall under the ethnic diversity umbrella. More importantly, we have studied experiences and interpretations directly spoken from individuals with an immigrant background, which there still is an insufficient amount of research that do.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to explore and understand what challenges students with an immigrant background experience in Sweden, and how these difficulties affect their ethnic identities. This study was carried out through a case study at a higher education institution where we conducted focus groups with students. By conducting a qualitative research, we could extract empirical and theoretical findings that helped conceptualize and add understanding to our research question. We further hope that our study can contribute to increased understanding of the sociocultural movement in Sweden and what implications it has on individuals with an immigrant background. Finally, this section will outline key points and findings followed by limitations and suggestions for future research.

Key Points

Our study suggests that although these students who are constructed *blattar* succeed by integrating in all the right ways (e.g. attending Swedish higher education, speaking perfect Swedish, following Swedish social codes) the Swedish environment prevents complete integration and success. We argue that although this group could physically achieve the same accomplishments as an ethnic Swede, they could never be measured against one another as their ethnic background will always prevent complete equality. This thesis also show that this permanent belonging of being seen a *blatte* have strong implications on the students' ethnic identities. We suggest that these students have created multidimensional identities that are composed of different ethnic backgrounds. A sense of belonging to their original ethnic heritage and Swedish ethnicity is reinforcing a permanent feeling of in-betweenness where a new *good blatte* identity has been constructed. Consequently, being in a permanent phase of in-betweenness is also helping the individuals in dealing with identity struggles and challenges that they encounter as they can adapt continuously to social and cultural contextual situations due to being *good blattar*. However, signs of carelessness demonstrate that the *good blatte* identity is not always stable or accepted by the students and society.

Suggestions for Further Research

To our knowledge, this research is the first study in Sweden that has explored and attempted to understand how individuals with an immigrant background view themselves, how society views this group, and how misalignments in these two different perceptions directly affect this minority group. However, we have interpreted society's view from the participants experiences and perceptions rather than collecting data directly from a majority group. Hence, it would be interesting to conduct further research where both perspectives are invited. Another concern is that this study only involves a specific age group and it might not be possible to generalize our findings to other age groups. When examining issues related to identity and how it is an ongoing construction is it difficult to assume that interpretations and experiences would be the same when examining older or younger individuals with an immigrant background. Therefore, we suggest that an interesting angle for further research could be to use a wider age span as it would be interesting to look at this as an ongoing change process and assess long-term effects.

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