Difference and Social Cohesion

A Study of Different Identities’ Effect on Societal Cohesiveness

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1. Introduction: a threat from within

In Sweden and many other countries in the west today we see a disturbing development towards increasing polarization. A more divided society where contact and communication between groups with different backgrounds and experiences and possibilities diminish. Groups become more distant from each other when it comes to opinions, values and lifestyles, and the understanding for others way of thinking and how they choose to live their lives is reduced. It means that social cohesion risk to deteriorate.¹

The quote comes from a speech made by Alice Bah Kuhnke, the Swedish Minister of Culture and Democracy in January 2017, and its disheartening tone seems to reflect an increasingly pessimistic feeling towards society expressed in many countries around the world today (Regeringskansliet 2017). Greater polarization seems to mark politics in the twenty-tens. Two political shocks, namely the election of Donald Trump and Brexit, have been especially prominent. However, these events only represent two out of many outcomes of infected ideological debates in recent years where fundamental ideas, values and norms stand at the frontlines of conflict. Violence and terrorism saw increased immigration to many European countries followed by the rise of stronger anti-immigrant sentiments. Movements like Pegida and the English Defense League, alongside political parties such as Front National and Alternativ für Deutchland mobilize around a perceived cultural threat that especially Islam is thought to have on modern societies. Other movements like Black Lives Matter in the United States and Feministiskt Initiativ in Sweden organize themselves by appealing to specific issues relating to discrimination based on respectively, ethnicity and gender. In Scotland and Catalonia secessionist groups seek independence to better take care of their nation’s interests.

While you can argue that societies always have been marked by plurality, most people living in developed countries today would agree that society at least implies some sort of bond. Still it is worth noting that this larger sense of community was formulated as late as in the 19th century with the growth of nationalism seeking to unify people that were thought to be the same (Hobsbawm 1992, 11–13). Starting with the civil rights movement in the 1960s however, an increased focus in western democracies has been put on recognizing difference

¹ Author’s translation.
to promote equality within society.\footnote{See for instance Ingelhart and Welzel (2009, 128) on modernization theory and emancipative value change.} Challenging and redefining established truths has meant that women’s and gay rights have been improved. But the method to distinguish one group from the rest of society has also created numerous examples of counter movements, with increased conflict and distrust as a result. Paradoxically, as societies become more inclusive in some areas, the acceptance of difference also seem to decrease.

Understanding how human political behavior works to guarantee both legitimacy and stability within democracies has been one of the most important questions for political scientists after the Second World War. With the increased interest in diversity and shifting political behavior from mobilization in ideological parties towards nonpartisan political participation in protests and campaigns in most democracies today (Dalton 2008, 92), it is important for researchers to understand what effect these new internal lines of conflict have on modern society.

1.1 Problem

Lots of research during the last two decades focus on explaining the increased polarization. The rise of nationalism after the cold war, the success of both left and right-wing populism, less interest in political participation and decline in general trust all seem to indicate that society is becoming more fragmented in the same time as support for democracy as a political system is in decline. Since around 2006 the democratic expansion in the world has stopped and the average level of freedom somewhat decreased (Diamond 2015, 142). When surveyed, even in the most consolidated democracies support for the system seem to become more diffuse, with less people deeming it “essential” for people to live in a democracy and more answering that democracy is a bad way of running the country (Foa and Mounk 2016, 7–9).

One of the more salient theories on why societies are polarizing, especially in the west, is the increased importance of identity-based politics, which according to its critics creates new fragmenting conflict-lines intersecting the traditional class-based conflicts which dominated 20th century politics. Mark Lilla writes in his provocative book The Once and Future Liberal that identity politics gives: “way to a pseudo-politics of self-regard and increasingly narrow and exclusionary self-definition […]. The main result has been to turn young people back onto themselves, rather than turning them outward toward the wider
world.” (2017, 10). According to Lilla this centralism towards the self makes people less willing to adhere to the over-all common good policies, making it more difficult for different groups to cooperate with each other. The trend can be observed by the decline in membership of political parties as well as in the increased fluidity of the voters. For Lilla the clearest example of how identity politics harms society is the progressive’s (liberals) non-ability to form big popular movement to win elections (2017, 11–12).

The increased interest in questions concerning the status of gender, ethnicity and sexuality slowly altered many countries into becoming more inclusive, but it has also seen strong counter-reactions. The Anti-abortion movement in the United States, “La Manif pour tous” in France and the strength of anti-immigrant parties and isolationist rhetoric all over the west are all recent examples of movements opposing change. As Mounk points out: “once upon a time, the homogeneity of their citizens – or at least a steep racial hierarchy – was a big part of what held liberal democracies together. Now, citizens have to learn how to live in much more equal and diverse democracy.” (2018, 181).

Cultural difference has often been used to explain social cohesion. However, there is not always empirical support that difference leads to instability. There are some long-lasting examples of culturally diverse societies being stable democracies such as Belgium, Switzerland and the Netherlands. These countries function due to political elites making efforts in overbridging these cleavages and have therefore been described as consociational democracies (Lijphart 1969, 211–12). Other more recent examples include India, South Africa and Botswana which all arguably have managed to consolidate democracy on a stable level.3

Greater cultural differences as well the increased interest in diversity has made it difficult for states to ignore identity related issues. In Russia (gay rights) and Poland (abortion) attempts to restrict group rights to protect traditional values have received heavy international critique. Seeing identity is a right, political thinkers like Kymlicka has formulated the antithesis to Lilla. Defending liberal multiculturalism, he argues that it is the only legitimate form of democracy (2002, 362). According to his view it is the failure to recognize difference as a part of the over-all national identity that leads to conflicts and weakening support for democracy, making identity politics a means of reducing societal tensions and to build social cohesion (Ibid, 367).

3 In the Indian and South African case, conditions have worsened during the last years.
Identity is one of the cornerstones in understanding human behavior, it categorizes people in groups with different interests and works as a motivator for political mobilization and can explain the formation of opinions, trust and societal norms. But as we can see, identity politics is both portrayed as a disruptive force which reduces the social tie and as a means of guaranteeing social stability by securing basic rights. The conflicting views of what effects perceived group differences have on society is accentuated in some of the most flaming political questions of today such as immigration, cultural threat and discrimination. Understanding the effects of identity on societal cohesiveness is therefore essential both in explaining today’s political climate as well as its long-term effects on societal stability.

This study uses the Swedish society for investigating the effects of perceived group difference. One reasons being practical, but Sweden is also an interesting case. Historically a socially stable country with a largely homogenous population, with relative low economic inequality together with high levels of generalized (Rothstein and Homberg 2016, 80), we should have a hard time finding difference. But in recent years Sweden has been at the forefront of battling gender equality and with a demographically shifting population due to relatively high immigration since the 1990s. Looking at Swedish politics today, the impact of campaigns like ‘Fatta’ and the support for the anti-immigration party Sverigedemokraterna, there seems to be strong political mobilization along identity related conflict lines, making it a highly likely case for finding effects of group difference.

1.2 Question

Using data from a 2015 national survey from the Swedish SOM-institute this study investigates the link between people’s perception of different group identities and tries to describe its effects on the over-all sense of societal cohesion.

The goal is to understand if people’s discernment of other identities affects their emotional sense of belonging to the Swedish community. By using data from a national survey, I hope to find empirical evidence of the relation by answering the question does people’s perception of group difference affect their sense of societal cohesiveness?

While perception of group difference is the main explanatory variable in this study, its effects will be tested in an advanced model in relation to other factors to isolate the relation. In the following theory section, focus will therefore be to conceptualize both perceived group difference as well as the explained variable societal cohesiveness.
Although some studies have looked at societal cohesion and group identities. As far as I am concerned, no study on trust and identity has put it in relation to the “natural” dimension of disagreement that exist between different group identities or to describe its effect on social stability. This study hopes to contribute to the existing literature of social cohesion by testing it in relation to people’s perceptions, and more practically by assessing if the politics of today risk having long-term effects on social stability.

1.3 Limitations

Measuring people’s attitudes is a very difficult task and will always require asking people about their opinion. This study is based on already existing data from a national survey, which means that there is both advantages and limitations to its design. One of the biggest advantages is the ability to draw generalized conclusions about the Swedish population (my chosen case), given that sample and questions are representative enough, but on the other hand I am restricted in the sense that it is the available data that will affect the general direction of this study.

While societal cohesiveness can be understood in many ways, this study will concentrate on the things that can be measured in a survey, that is people’s opinions rather than their habits or interactions between groups. I will not look at questions about intergroup trust, the attitudes or norms which the person deems important nor how respondents identify themselves (which certainly might affect people’s attitudes towards other groups), instead the focus will be to look at experienced difference from the individual’s perspective.

This focus on the individual comes from an interest in studying how ideas shape our reality. Since I use one set of data measured during the same period this study will not be able to study the effects of difference on social cohesion over time.

The ability to draw general conclusions, and how accurately I can measure the effects will be discussed further in the method section of this essay. I still mean that the study will contribute to the existing literature on the effects of group identities in society.

1.4 Previous research

The existing research on social cohesiveness concentrate on the term social capital, understood as a means of facilitating social interactions between people, with political scientists focusing on the relation between social capital and democracy. Related research on trust and social identity has revealed that there is a strong link between in-group identity
and generalized trust, and that people tend to trust people within one’s own group more than people from other groups (Xin, Xin, and Lin 2016, 428).

Social capital has often been criticized because of its broad definition, with some critics claiming that social interactions and democracy just are positive correlates, and that the relation disappears when you test for socio-economic variables (Portes and Vickstrom 2011, 476). However, it has been hard to dismiss the role of social networks completely. For instance, Peffley and Rohschneider have found that citizens who use civil liberties (i.e. engage in democratic activism) develop a higher level of tolerance towards others (2003, 253). When it comes to intergroup cohesion, social capital still plays an important role in bridging over different networks. One of the most influential researcher on social capital, Robert Putnam, has shown that at least in the short run ethnic diversity tends to lead to more isolation of groups which reduce social solidarity, trust and social capital overall (Putnam 2007, 137). Similarly, others have concluded that greater social distance leads to different treatment of people (Alba and Nee 2003, 32), (Hooghe 2007, 709) and (Enos 2014, 3702).

Different identities have often been studied in relation to immigration, with evidence having been found that immigrants are often seen as a cultural threat (Mangum and Block 2018, 13–14) and that that the perceived threat also explain anti-immigrant voting (Muhagan and Paxton 2006, 341). Voci (2006, 265) further has found evidence that group identification leads to a bias towards in-group members, but his results also indicate that the effects only were reliable when groups felt their interest being threatened.

Moreover, people studying the workings of identity has found that individuals usually hold between four to seven important identities at the same time (such as nationality, ethnicity, sexuality, religious beliefs, ideology and social class) (Xin, Xin, and Lin 2016, 428). Multiple intersecting identities have also been found to reduce the bias by creating more social interactions between groups and promoting less radical opinions (Roccas and Brewer 2002, 102). The relationship has also been tested empirically by Xin, Xin and Lin who found that more complex identities leads to more trust and less polarization (2016, 438).

After this short expose over the existing literature we can conclude that diversity seem to play an important role in creating conflicts between groups, and that intergroup favoritism leads to less contact amongst different groups. While social capital tries to measure the interactions and overlapping networks, it is difficult to use for explaining social cohesion. Researchers agree that diversity or inequality (explained either by socio economical or
identity models) leads to less contact and in some context to direct political actions. Still, 
focus have often been either to explain the formation of political interest or to try and link 
it to political action. With the existing literature supporting the premise that identity, trust 
and the sense of community all are linked, the exact relationship is yet to be described. 
With that conclusion, the next section will serve to synthesize the different theories into 
one cohesive explanation on identity and its effect on social cohesion.

2. Theoretical framework

The following section presents an overview of the theories on social cohesion and 
difference that are used in this study. Much of the focus has been put on understanding 
how to interpret perceived group difference and sense of societal cohesiveness as well as the relationship 
together. The chapter is divided into sections. First, the understanding of cohesiveness 
in this study is presented. Second, the main explanatory factor group difference is described. 
Third, the control variables I use to test the relation in the advanced model are introduced. 
In the end of the chapter I summarize the findings to present a full description about the relationship.

2.1 Societal cohesiveness

Researchers have been interested in social cohesion for a long time, being described as early 
as Rosseau in The Social Contract (1762): “if the clashing of particular interest made the 
establishment of societies necessary, the agreement of these very interests made it possible. 
The common element in these different interests is what forms the social tie; and, were 
there no point of agreement between them all, no society could exist.” (2002, 18).

The term social capital was popularized by Putnam to describe the different elements that 
binds people and groups together. To Putnam social capital should be understood as an 
asset people possess which has a value in the sense that it can be used to create stronger 
ties between people (Putnam 2007, 137). Through different forms of network citizens can 
organize opposition, to spread information and to train people in collective decision 
making which is an important asset for healthy societies (Paxton 2002, 254). More precisely 
social capital is defined as: “the network of all associations, activities or relations that bind 
people together as a community via certain norms and psychological capacities, notably 
trust” (Farr 2004, 9). Trust in this sense is understood as the enabler and maintainer of 
interactions between individuals and institutions (Koniordos 2004, 74).
The *sense of societal cohesiveness* is here just one aspect of social capital. Although it cannot capture all elements of which societal interactions work, it can be understood as the feeling that people share common beliefs like attitudes, norms and values in a specific context, which in this study is the Swedish society, as well as their general level of trust towards others. From this perspective the *sense of societal cohesiveness* is a resource which in the end helps people to interact with each other. The more people sense like they share a set of norms and values, and the more they feel they can trust others, the easier societal cohabitation will be.

Given its multiple dimensions social capital can be analyzed on different levels, both on individual- and community level. This duality can be very attractive to scientists because it can be aggregated into one complete explanation, but the broad definition can also lead to confusion therefore it is important when analyzing social capital not to use evidence found on one level to confirm ideas on another (Smart 2008, 410–11).

Since my interest is to study the effects of people’s attitudes it will only focus on social capital in the form of the *psychological capacities* which binds people together. I have used Grootaert and Van Bastelaers definition of cognitive social capital as “subjective and intangible elements such as generally accepted attitudes and norms of behavior, shared values, reciprocity and trust” (Grootaert and Van Bastelaer 2002, 3) in order to precise what aspects of social capital we are interested in.

### 2.2 Perceived group difference

The study of different group identities has been developed into its own theory called Social Identity Theory (from now on referred to as SIT). Introduced in the 1970s by amongst others Henri Tajfel, SIT sets out to explain how self-perceived group identification affect social perceptions and attitudes (Greene 1999, 393). Social identity is defined by Tajfel as “that part of an individual’s self concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to the membership” (Ibid, 394). The theory holds that individuals wants to maximize the differences between the in-group (to whom he or she belongs) and the out-group, and that this division leads to favoritism towards one’s own group (Greene 2004, 137).
So far, SIT can help us understand how people by identifying with a certain group, automatically create a distinction between people and that this identification affects a person’s perceptions, but we are yet to discover what effects identity is thought to have on behavior.

To do so, we must understand identity’s role in framing and mobilizing people in relation to perceived common interests that maximize intergroup-difference. Interest can be understood both in material and immaterial terms. Social identity has been especially influential in explaining the emergence of “new social movements”, such as protest around peace, environmental questions, regionalism, homosexuality and feminism that seek to change dominant normative and cultural codes, issues which could not be as easily explained by models based on social class, (Jasper and Poletta 2001, 286). From the SIT perspective a rational way for these new moments to gain recognition for their distinct identities and to mobilize support, is to enact their collective identities as strategies of protest (naturally creating conflict within society) (Ibid, 294). As social identification automatically leads to in-group favoritism, it also strengthens the belief that members of other groups should conform its values and behavior, especially if the in-group perceives itself to be in competitions with or being threatened by the out-group (Muhagan and Paxton 2006, 343-344). Identity is in this understanding naturally coming at odds with society, in need of some conflict or protest in which the movement can define its identity.

Group conflicts have most often been explained by a material competition for goods or other benefits (Marxism) which lead to mobilization to protect the groups resources. SIT expands that threat to immaterial goods. It is enough for a group to psychologically feel its self-esteem being threatened by another group or by members of its own group to cause conflict (Fearon and Laitin 1996, 717). The role of threats against one’s own group have further developed by Gurr through the concept of relative deprivation which holds that discontent about unjust deprivation is the primary force of political action (Gurr 1993, 167). Relative deprivation occurs when an individual experience that the group to which the individual identifies with is disadvantaged relative to another group, regardless of the personal experience (Murer 2012, 571). As Widmalm notes, relative deprivation can explain why polarization can occur without the situation changing in materialistic or structural terms, the key being when groups compare their situations (2002, 23). He further concludes
that identity, if regarded as a socio-political construction no matter in the form of ethnicity or class can be used as tools for political mobilization, but neither can predict political conflicts (Ibid, 126–27).

Apart from perceived common interest sociologist have pointed out that individuals share other bonds that make solidarity behavior a reasonable expectation through friendship, kinship, organizational membership, informal support networks or shared relations with outsiders (cf. to the understanding of social capital above). People thus have a bigger initiative in helping one’s group and is likely to still contribute even if the impact is only marginal (Jasper and Poletta 2001, 289). SIT can also be used to identify special strong framing techniques used to mobilize people by exaggerating in-group homogeneity and intergroup differences (Mols 2012, 331).

Social identification is not based on any formal group membership just self-perceived memberships within a group (Greene 2004, 137). Collective identities are therefore always shifting, with the success in framing of interests as the principal agent of successfully mobilizing people (Jasper and Poletta, 2001, 297). Murer summarizes the multidimensional and fluid aspects of identity (2012, 564):

All individuals have attachments to larger group identities, each contributing to the over-arching self-depiction of individual identity. Geographical orientation, from neighborhood to nation, provides one form of identity; likewise, sexual orientation and political orientations contribute to a sense of identity. Race, gender, religion, language, class, even football allegiances all contribute to aspects of individual identities and represent the frames for larger collective identities.

The many different configurations and intensities in which one identity then can be perceived makes the relationship even more difficult to know which identities and factors might be at play.

Returning to the question, we can conclude that perceived group difference could be observed in many different forms which makes studying its effects complicated. What we usually mean with identity movements are minority groups seeking recognition in the form of increased status on the basis on certain characteristics such as gender, ethnicity and sexuality although any distinguished group could be characterized as such. The reason why some identities are more pronounced depends on the values they challenge. While identity primarily serves for us to identify with others, identification automatically creates the perception of the other. The focus on recognition moves away the source of conflict from
cultural difference and towards intergroup boundaries as the primordial process in which groups are defined (Murer 2012, 565). The understanding of perceived group differences in this study will be in a minimalistic way as the level of shared emotional connection between the groups in society.

With our understanding of identity so far, Lilla’s suggestion that difference leads to less social understanding and less common ground on which people can handle collective action problems, seems to get some theoretical support. But before the final discussion about the relation, we need to see what other factors might affect social cohesiveness.

2.3 Control variables

The classical model for explaining political behavior is in terms of the individual’s resources (time, money and skills) and was developed by Almond and Verba in the 1960s. The two strongest variables explaining political behavior being income and education (Leighley 1995, 181). Education has been found to have a strong positive effect on individual level social trust, working as a socialization agent and creating networks. Others have emphasized that economic and social resources make people less vulnerable to risks when interacting with other groups (Oskarsson et al. 2017, 518). Similarly, education have been shown to give way for more tolerance towards others, intersecting class structures and promoting a more open mindset. It has been the focus on numerous studies after the Second World War (Gaasholt and Togeby 1995, 266–67).

Other factors such as gender’s effects on social attitudes have mixed results. Gender inequality causes different treatment and opportunities for people based on their gender which might affect attitudes between the sexes. Actual empirical results are indecisive however, with some studies showing that women are more trusting than men, whilst others have found the reverse relationship. Another factor which might create gender differences is the fact that women are more likely to participate in civil society through memberships in organizations and by using their right to vote (Schoon et al. 2010, 145).

Political scientists have long been aware of the change in attitudes and in behavior between different generations. While the trend has been observed for a long time, scientist disagree about its effects. Younger generations have gradually been less interested in traditional forms of political participation such as voting and joining political parties, instead using...
nonconventional methods of participation such as joining new social movements and through protests and boycotts (Foa and Mounk 2016, 11). Foa and Mounk similarly found that the support for democracy as a political system is more diffuse among younger generations (2016, 9).

After this brief discussion we have found that other variables that might be at play include socio-economic factors such as income and education, as well as other background factors such as age and gender. In addition to the existing literature, the author also hypothesize that citizenship might be an important factor in this study since its goal is to measure the sense of community within the Swedish society.

2.4 The effects of intergroup differences

The brief out-look on the existing literature of social identity’s role within society shows the complexity in which inter-group relations must be understood. The social context affects people’s perceptions about reality, which then structure society in a way that shapes our values, attitudes and trust. From the understanding of identity presented earlier, we might be inclined to support Lilla and traditional republicans’ claim that difference then has deteriorating effects on over-arching societal cohesion because it reduces possibilities for groups to compromise. But to equate the existence of different identities with social instability is too drastic, after all group conflicts are unusual.

Using the same basis of understanding on social identity Fearsor and Laitin have developed a model which explains intergroup cooperation. Their theory holds that in-groups often have a relatively dense social network and low-cost access to information about other members, whilst information about members of another group is more difficult due to less developed networks. The consequence is that group members who exploit the trust (defect from the norm or standard) can be identified and sanctioned with relative ease, whilst it is much harder with out-group members. As Fearsor and Laitin conclude: “If you know nothing more than the person facing you is a Serb, then you cannot condition your behavior on how the person acted in the past, but only on the fact that the other person is Serb. Moreover, “the Serb” may have no individual reputation to worry about protecting in interactions with non-Serbs” (1996, 719).

The asymmetry of information described in the quote above creates a prisoner’s dilemma for people in a social matching game (when they meet other people they can cooperate or
defect) which is played several times. With this in mind Wilson has shown that it is more beneficial for groups to cooperate over the cleavages (2015, 457). By developing the theory into containing an arbitrary number of groups with arbitrary sizes he has further developed the model with the most important conclusion that the smaller the group the harder it will be for that group to enforce intragroup punishment since they will have most interactions with other groups members (i.e. making it easier for people to defect) and thus creating bigger amounts of mistrust (Wilson 2015, 462).

It is when the theory is generalized to an arbitrary number of dimensions to form groups that it becomes useful for this study. Social identity here is understood as a multilayered phenomenon where people can identify as members of several groups in the same time. Individual’s identities are therefore cross-cutting different intergroup cleavages which increases both contact and leads to less polarization. Although Wilson proves this mathematically, the important conclusion is rather intuitive. As the number of dimensions increases, the net gain of defection becomes increasingly smaller because of the more intersecting networks (Wilson, 2015, 463).

With the multilayered understanding the role of identity shifts. Although identity implicates difference, the goal of identity can still be to be included in a thicker more general identity such as the case with minorities seeking recognition within a state. The processes in which over-arching identities either conflict or combine with each other is a discussion outside of this paper.

Based on the theoretical discussion about identity and social cohesion above, the relation is summarized in figure 1. As presented, identity is thought to affect societal cohesiveness indirectly. Identity is formed by social interaction in relation to others as and it will shape the exchange with others (having stronger interactions with in-group members) which in return shape values, attitudes and generalized trust which in turn affects the over-all sense of societal cohesiveness.

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4 Cf. with Lijphart consociational democracy (1969, 211–12)
While it is possible to argue that societal cohesiveness also could affect identity, it is more reasonable to presume that self-identification affects cohesiveness in the way the model describes, as our understanding of the world derives from the self-concept. With that distinction I am finally ready to formulate a hypothesis to test the relationship:

H₁: Perceptions about group differences generates societal cohesion.

Further, I formulate a second hypothesis to describe the relationship, relating to the effects of difference. Although difference can generate a cohesive society, it is dependent on how big the difference between the groups are, with greater difference being negative for overall cohesion.

H₂: Greater shared emotional connection with other groups in society increases societal cohesion.

With the two hypotheses formulated, it is time to conclude the theoretical discussion to form a model to test the relationship in.

3. Research design

Since this study is interested in measuring the effects of people’s attitudes in the Swedish society at large, a quantitative method is the best approach. Using statistical methods, we can generalize the results from a small sample to a much larger population (Teorell and Svensson 2007, 126). To test my hypotheses, I need to set up a model which measures how people experience difference between groups in society as well as operationalize societal cohesiveness in a way that captures its complex meaning.

The variables in the model are measured by using survey questions from the Sverige V 2015 survey to perform a multivariate analysis to test the relationship, as well as to control for
other factors. Isolating the effect is one of the great advantages of using statistical method and it will allow my conclusions to be even stronger since we manage to control for multiple effects at the same time. The main questions about the respondents’ emotional connection towards other societal groups was first included in the survey in 2014 and data have been collected ever since. I am using the data from the 2015 report which is the most current set of data that is accessible through Svensk Nationell Datatjänst.

3.1 The 2015 SOM-survey

The data used in this analysis was collected from the 2015 SOM-institute national survey. SOM stands for Society, Opinion and Media. Since 1986 they have surveyed the Swedish populations opinions about society and media. The institute is managed by Gothenburg University (Vernersdotter 2016, 433). The SOM-surveys are often used to measure opinions within the Swedish population. The questions in the survey are constructed by researcher affiliated with the institute for special projects. The 2015 data was made accessible for other researcher on March 31th 2017 which made it the latest data available when this project started (Göteborgs universitet 2015b, 1) In 2015 the SOM-institute conducted five parallel surveys all targeted towards people living in Sweden between the ages of 16 to 85 (Ibid). The basis of this analysis are the answers from the fifth survey (from now on referred to as SOM-V) and consisted of thirteen pages with a total of 62 questions. The respondents of the five surveys were all drawn using simple random sampling of a total of 17 000 individuals from the Swedish Tax Agency and then randomly distributed into five categories of 3400 people per survey. The questionnaires were sent out via post with the ability for people to answer online (however only available with the second survey). The first survey was sent out in September with reminders sent out via post, through phone calls and via text messages (Vernersdotter 2016, 439).

The SOM-V survey had 1739 responses and 1489 unit nonresponses (no answer) which gave the survey 54 percent response rate (Vernersdotter 2016, 445). According to the SOM-institute’s own analysis the response-rate differ between men and women (on average about 5 percent lower response-rate among men since 2000), the biggest differences in response rate however is between generations, where young people are much less willing to respond. In SOM-V there was also a somewhat bigger difference in response-rates between regions (Ibid, 447–48). When comparing if the missing responses affect the over-all results, with their relative size in the population shows that it is mainly the questions about media that get disproportionate due to the nonresponses (Ibid, 450). To make sure that the
missingness from young people did not affect the results, an analysis of the generational distributions was performed outside of this paper (results can be found in the appendix).

3.2 Measuring people’s perceptions

Formulating good questions is essential when constructing surveys. Unclear or ambiguous questions will leave room for interpretation both for the respondent and make the researchers job difficult when trying to analyze the results. As discussed in the previous chapter, the explanatory variable of interest is perceived group difference, which might be interpreted in many ways. In this study, I measure difference in a minimalistic way as a shared emotional connection to people of other groups in society i.e. if people feel some sort of social tie towards them. The shared emotional connection is here to be understood as the lower emotional connection indicated, the greater experienced difference is. In this sense it serves us as a good indicator of capturing the perceived difference. The explanatory variable in this study is operationalized using question 26 of SOM-V which asks: “I vilken utsträckning känner du samhörighet med följande grupper i det svenska samhället?” (To what extent do you feel a sense of community with the following groups in Swedish society?) (Göteborgs universitet 2015a, 6). The groups in which people were asked to answer if they felt connected to were: people with another economy, ethnicity, culture, education, sexuality, other political opinions, lifestyle or another religion. The answers were measured on an ordinal scale using a four-level dimensions values ranging from I feel no connection, I do not feel that much of a connection, I feel some connection and I feel a lot of connection, the replies were then coded from 1 - no connection to 4 - a lot of connection. The many different groups-dimensions included in the survey gives a good distribution of different identities that might be important in the debate, with the exception of gender which instead is measured as a control factor.

To capture the outcome of the explained variable sense of societal cohesiveness, is harder. There is no single question that targets my definition “subjective and intangible elements such as generally accepted attitudes and norms of behavior, shared values, reciprocity and trust” (Grootaert and Van Bastelaer, 2002, 3). Since it encompasses several different elements such as shared attitudes and trust which all combined forms the sense of cohesiveness I must find a way of simultaneously analyzing the effects of the different dimensions.

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5 All translations from the questionnaire into English have been done by the author
6 In Swedish ”Ganska stor samhörighet”
To do so I use two different questions that combined captures the sense of social cohesiveness. The first variable is trust, measured by using question 25 which asks the respondent if one can trust people in general “Enligt din mening, I vilken utsträckning går det att lita på människor i allmänhet?” (Göteborgs universitet 2015a, 6). The respondent indicates his or her answer on a scale from 0 - you cannot trust people in general to 10 - you can trust people in general. Although, you can argue that just asking people’s opinion whether they trust people or not, might lead to problems due to bias and that it cannot differentiate if the respondent trusts some more than others it is still a common method for measuring trust. I still expect the variable to be useful in this study, although the problems are worth noting. Since this study just wants to see if there is a relationship between perceived group difference and trust, not to explain the relation, it won’t cause a significant problem for the results.

The survey lacks any direct questions about attitudes and norms that could be used to capture those dimensions, but it includes a question about the Swedish society, question 27, formulated as a statement if the respondent feels like a part of the Swedish society “Jag känner mig som en del av det svenska samhället” (Göteborgs universitet 2015a, 6). Just like with question 26, the answers were indicated on a rank order scale from: I do not agree (1), I hardly agree (2), I somewhat agree (3) to I totally agree (4). Although I am unable to capture the elements which Swedish society might include, it must be closely related to shared values and general norms of behavior, which makes it a thicker proxy for those aspects. My operationalization would have been more reliable if we had additional direct questions relating to attitudes and norms, but the question above is still acceptable to use to capture the general effects in the Swedish context. Since the question targets the Swedish society directly, which is my main interest, it is in this study considered to be a good enough variable to capture our understanding of cohesiveness.

Both feeling like a part of Swedish society and trust each captures a separate dimension of societal cohesiveness which are useful to us. In the analysis the relationship between both variables are first tested separately in my models, but to make the final conclusions clearer, the two variables are also combined in an index called cohesiveness.

Creating indexes can be very useful, especially when trying to capture several complex elements. Usually indexes are used by combining several questions that indicate the same thing, but it can also be used to try and capture multidimensional variables (Esaiasson et al. 2012, 386). Cohesiveness was computed by summarizing the results on both questions and weighting the answers to give equal effect on the result (i.e. the values in trust were recoded
to a 1 – 4 scale). The reason why both questions were given equal weight is because I lack any theoretical arguments that the effects of one of them should have stronger effect. The new scale then ranges from 1 – no sense of societal cohesiveness to 8 – a lot of societal cohesiveness.

The two variables were tested using Pearson’s R test which gave the following result:

Data: part_society and trust_recoded
\( t = 13.132, \, df = 1664, \, p\text{-value} < 2.2e-16 \) alternative hypothesis: true correlation is not equal to 0
95 percent confidence interval: 0.2622693 0.3493189
sample estimates: cor. 0.3064346

Based on the results we see that there is a slight positive correlation of 0.31 percent explained variation (significant on 95 percent-level) indicating that the two variables are positively related, although not that strongly (Pearson’s ranging from -1 – absolute negative correlation to 1 – absolute positive correlation). As I theorize that both variables are affected by perceived difference some correlation is to be expected. Since I want the two variables to capture different dimensions, the low correlation is good, indicating that they indeed show different things. Finally, since the two variables are combined in a larger scale I increase the validity compared to studying elements separately. Admittedly my operationalization would have benefitted even further from adding more variables, but since I do not have access to more data it is still important to note that the model still captures the essential components which are theorized to make up social cohesiveness.

To control for the effects of group difference, the model will use data on the respondents’ education measured by a constructed variable based on the responses in question 60 (Göteborgs universitet 2015a, 12). It is constructed as 1 – low (for people with maximum primary school education), 2 – medium-low (for people with maximum upper secondary school education or equivalent), 3 – medium-high (for post-upper secondary school education but not university education) and finally 4 – high (for people with at least one university degree). Income is measured in the yearly income of each household on a scale from 1 – 100 000 SEK or less/year to 12 – more than 1 100 000/year. Each category represents a 100 000 difference (question 62) (Göteborgs universitet 2015a, 13). Age is based on the data provided in the file, based on the respondents’ birth year. Gender is a dummy variable, available in the data file, but it has been recoded from so that Man 2 → 0. Citizen is based on question 52 which asks if the respondent is a: 1 – Swedish citizen, 2 – Citizen in another country or 3 – Citizen in both Sweden and another country (Göteborgs universitet 2015a, 11). The variable is constructed from variable F139 in the data file and recoded to a dummy so that 1 means a Swedish citizen and 0 means not a Swedish citizen.
3.3 Critical discussion about the design

The biggest critique towards this study is the usage of a preexisting survey to measure this phenomenon. As we have seen some of the variables, most notably the index on cohesiveness, would have been more reliable if more variables could have been included, and although it still captures the essential, it is still evident that the results would have been stronger if the questionnaire was constructed with this study in mind.

Several of the questions are based on a subjective ordinal ranking scale where the answers are indicated by the fact that they either are bigger or smaller in relation to something else. In the models used in the analysis the variables will however be treated as interval scale variables to use more advanced statistical methods. The ordinal scale makes my results less reliable it forces the results to be interpreted carefully. Although a common method, approximations on ordinal scale level usually needs to contain at least 5 levels in order to estimate the relation good enough, most of my variables are still good enough approximations (Teorell and Svensson 2007, 111). Since society only is measured on a four-point scale, it fails the criteria which makes its result less reliable, but in the final regression it is used in combination with trust giving my index more variation. Since this study only attempts to find out if the attitudes correlate and not how great the effect of group difference are on societal cohesiveness, I judge we still can use the variables to draw reliable conclusions in the final results. When both the dimensions are combined into the index capturing several dimensions it still increases the validity compared to using one of the questions to capture cohesiveness.

As indicated in the previous section, the quality of the question is essential for the reliability of this study. Although I expect the risk for people to understand the questions incorrectly to be quite low, there is no objective scale on which people can judge their sense of affinity, trust or sense of community. If the study were to be repeated it is therefore not sure that the person would answer in the same way not necessarily because he or she judges things differently, but because the grading is done on arbitrarily scales. This “human error” term can usually be handled though by a larger sample size since equally as many are expected to underestimate their response as the amount of people that overexaggerate. Since the replies are polar opposites on a small scale (ranging from strongly negative to strongly positive) I expect the amount of people that would risk filling in the wrong answer to be very low. Since it is a standardized answer survey the risk of incorrectly coding the answers or to replicate the regressions would not cause any problems.
When it comes to the validity of this study it is a bit more complicated. The operationalization cannot (nor does it claim) fully measure social capital, but just rather a small portion of it. This is something that the author is aware of and although I judge the questions in the survey to measure different specific aspect, the different available dimensions are combined to capture sense of societal cohesiveness. If I had constructed the survey myself then more direct aspects could have been included, but it would not have been possible for me to complete a survey on the same scale within this study. As argued above the variables used are still good enough for me to feel like I can test the relation, but with more variables included in the explained variable my results would be pronounced with even greater confidence.

One of the indicators might cause some concern and that is lifestyle, which is hard to interpret what it means. The uncertainty may in that specific case have led to some strange results discussed in the next chapter.

One potential problem when using survey data is the risk of unit nonresponses, if these occur due to some underlying factor it might lead to systematical distortions which will affect the over-all result (Vernersdotter 2016, 450). Like many actors trying to use Gallup polls to sample data, the amount of people willing to respond has been decreasing for the SOM-institute ever since the beginning (Ibid, 444). When weighing the results of the different groups in the survey to match the general population and comparing them to the survey results, the SOM-institute concluded in their report that the reliability is affected in some questions due to missingness in responses from young people, but the biggest effects are found in the questions surveying media habits (Ibid, 450). SOM-V had 54 percent women answering (compared to being 50 percent of the population), with a statistical loss especially within the age group between 16-29 years old and when it came to different regions Stockholm was slightly underrepresented (Ibid, 451–53). While the results over-all are good, the slight underrepresentation from the Stockholm region (which is more diverse) and the missing data from younger people might affect the results somewhat, especially the effects of the age variable should be interpreted somewhat carefully. To make sure that the results are not distorted due to missingness I performed two graphical analyses on age to control that its effects did not distort the final results (see the appendix).

4. Analysis
The following section presents the results from the survey followed by a discussion relating the findings to other studies, as well to its more general implications. Initially society and trust are analyzed separately both in “simple” models only testing the for perceived difference and trust, followed by more advanced models and finally the combined model of cohesiveness.

4.1 Results from the advanced models

Table 1 shows my four theorized regressions, model (1) and model (3) only contains the indicators for perceived difference between different groups in society, while the control variables have been included in model (2) and model (4). The first two models show the effects on society, while the latter shows the effects on trust.

Starting with the simpler models we see mixed results. In model (1) there is a significant positive correlation between people that feel an emotional connection with groups with another economy, with different political beliefs, another religion and with another level of education than one-self. The variable politics is only significant on an alpha level of 10 percent. Four of the categories ethnicity, culture, lifestyle and sexuality are not statistically significant i.e. they cannot be said to affect the over-all sense of belonging in the Swedish society. Interestingly, three of the non-significant categories, culture, lifestyle and sexuality show a negative relationship with community, i.e. contrary to what the theory suggests, but since we do not have a significant result, I cannot draw any real conclusions from the findings.

Both the dependent and independent variables are measured on a four-level scale where a higher number indicates that the person feels more like a part of the Swedish society. Although we should be careful in drawing any single conclusions about society, looking at the results of model (1) we find some support for my hypothesis that the stronger emotional connection you have to other groups in society, the more you feel likely you are to feel like a part of Swedish society. Therefore, the initial analysis of society only serves to aid our understanding of the results in model (5).

Model (3) describes the relationship between the same variables on perceived group difference in relation to general trust in other people. Once again, we can find some evidence towards there being a relation between the variables. For trust we find that you tend to trust other people more if you feel a connection to people with another economy and education than yourself, but this time a connection with people from another culture also shows a small effect (90 percent significance-level). The rest of the variables show no clear
effect, and just as in the previous model two variables show negative (but non-significant) results contrary to my initial theory.

The initial simple models show that there exists some sort of connection between perceived group difference on society and trust, there is still some uncertainties regarding the actual effects, and the exact relationship between trust and belonging to society. Therefore, I add a range of control variables in model (2) and (4) to see if the relationship remains intact.

When adding control variables to the first model we can see that some things change in model (2). First, the effects (coefficients) of all but one of the variables diminish. For religion, politics and education, it means that they no longer can explain people’s sense of belonging to the Swedish society. The effect for groups with different economy remains. The relationship for culture has also changed so that it now shows a positive effect, although the result is not significant. The negative relationship for lifestyle and sexuality also remains, and for sexuality the negative relationship has increased but not enough for it to be significant which makes it impossible to interpret the results further.

Among the new control variables all show effect apart from gender. Contrary to what was suggested in the theory section, model (2) does not give any support for there to be any difference between the sexes when it comes to the feeling of being a part of society. The other variables age and household income are positively correlated to the independent variable.

Based on the analysis from the SOM-institute we know that the especially young people between 16-29 were underrepresented in the survey data, which means that the positive effect of age is a bit more uncertain. It is possible that young people are less prone to answer these kinds of surveys because they feel less connected to the over-all society, and therefore the effects should be even higher, or they are positive but just were not interested in replying, in that case the effect in the model is overestimated. My graphical analysis of the distributions between different generations did not show any distortion, therefore I conclude that the results from age in model (2) were not distorted due to missingness.

Continuing the analysis, we see as predicted the citizenship dummy also shows that people that are Swedish citizens, as theorized are more likely to feel like they are a part of the Swedish society.
Table 1: Multivariate models on differences effect on society and trust

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variables</th>
<th>Society</th>
<th>Trust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other group: economy</td>
<td>0,102525***</td>
<td>0,0859294***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0,03)</td>
<td>(0,029)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other group: ethnicity</td>
<td>0,020311</td>
<td>0,0129519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0,036)</td>
<td>(0,037)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other group: culture</td>
<td>-0,033956</td>
<td>0,0007946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0,035)</td>
<td>(0,036)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other group: lifestyle</td>
<td>-0,030718</td>
<td>-0,0222269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0,028)</td>
<td>(0,029)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other group: politics</td>
<td>0,048122*</td>
<td>0,044884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0,029)</td>
<td>(0,029)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other group: religion</td>
<td>0,062313*</td>
<td>0,044397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0,03)</td>
<td>(0,03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other group: sexuality</td>
<td>-0,009061</td>
<td>-0,0172078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0,023)</td>
<td>(0,024)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other group: education</td>
<td>0,080541*</td>
<td>0,0539952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0,034)</td>
<td>(0,034)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0,0044497***</td>
<td>0,031741***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0,001)</td>
<td>(0,003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen</td>
<td>0,2361166**</td>
<td>0,282141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0,087)</td>
<td>(0,303)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0,0570271***</td>
<td>0,251429***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0,016)</td>
<td>(0,057)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household income</td>
<td>0,0340640***</td>
<td>0,122888***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0,006)</td>
<td>(0,02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-0,0065972</td>
<td>0,104645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0,031)</td>
<td>(0,11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>3,00814***</td>
<td>2,3105968***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0,074)</td>
<td>(0,13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual standard error</td>
<td>0,5948</td>
<td>0,5792</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing values</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0,0571</td>
<td>0,1118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>0,0522</td>
<td>0,1037</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Ordinary least square regressions. The models show coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Significance
*** p < 0,001, ** p < 0,01, * p < 0,05, ● p < 0,1

Summarizing the finding of model (2) compared model (1), some of the effects that indicated that group difference leads to less sense of being a part of Swedish society disappeared when I controlled for other variables. But the effects do not disappear altogether; group difference between people with different economical background is still significant (c.f. Rothstein and Holmberg 2016, 85). Although there is still some support for the theory that greater perceived difference leads to a lesser sense of belonging to community, the conflict
rather seems to be over the more traditional socio-economical conflict lines than by the identity-based conflicts. Comparing the two models with each other we see that model (2) gives us a somewhat better fit, with a smaller residual standard error and a higher coefficient of determination (predication of the dependent variable).

If we compare model (3) and model (4) we see some effects on the results. When controlling for age, citizenship, education, household income and gender the initial relations remain i.e. the variables in model (3) can still predict the level of trust to a certain extent. Just like in model (3), the effects of the original variables diminish a bit except for culture and ethnicity which increases compared to model (3). With the diminishing effect, the significance level of education decreases, but remains significant on 95 percent. The most interesting result is that the effect for culture increases. Comparing model (3) and model (4) we found trust also is affected by socio-economic factors such as education and economy (also supported by Rothstein and Holmgren 2016, 84), showing that material resources like security, income and education also affect people’s willingness to open themselves up to other groups.

The gender dummy finds no evidence that there exists any difference between men and women when it comes to generalized trust. The most interesting result is that the effect for culture increases. Similarly, the effects of the control variables are significant, showing that age, education-level, household income all seem to influence trust.

To make sure that the age variable once again does not bias the results I compare the levels of trust between the different generations. Although the results indicate that we might have a slight underestimation of the effect of age in model (4) it is very small. I therefore judge that my model has still managed to capture most of the positive trend between age and trust.

Although Holmberg and Rothstein find that trust generally is lower amongst immigrants, this study finds no evidence that trust is linked to citizenship (Rothstein and Holmberg 2016, 85). The gender dummy finds no evidence that there exists any difference between men and women when it comes to generalized trust.

Once again most of the group variables are shown to have no significant effect on trust, and most effects seem to be linked to traditional factors with economy and education being able to explain the effects on trust.

Interestingly though, the effects of perceived group difference are stronger than the hard values in the form of education and household income (cf. with Gurr). With trust there is a strong positive relation to culture, which at least give Lilla some support in the claim that different identities have some effects on societal cohesiveness. As expected the advanced model (4) would capture these effects better.

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7 Comparing model (3) and model (4) we found trust also is affected by socio-economic factors such as education and economy (also supported by Rothstein and Holmgren 2016, 84), showing that material resources like security, income and education also affect people’s willingness to open themselves up to other groups.

8 Please note that Holmberg and Rothstein looked at where people were born whilst this study has looked at citizenship.
gives us a better fit, with a smaller residual standard error and higher levels of explained variation than model (3).

Comparing the results from model (2) and model (4) is a bit difficult. There is a slight positive correlation between the two, the result in the table indicate that the explanatory variables seem to interact and affect both society and trust in a similar way, but to answer the question about sense of societal cohesiveness, I want to be able to compare the results directly. As previously stated, the results in model (2) are also a bit too unreliable. By combining the two into one index-variable called cohesiveness I can study the effects on both variables combined in model (5) to get a more reliable result.

As with all the previous models we see that emotional connection to groups with another economy has the strongest effect (except for citizen) on societal cohesiveness together with education. The effect for culture is significant, showing that apart from the traditional socio-economical categories, identity seem to play some role in affecting societal cohesiveness, although the effect is only significant on 90 percent significance-level. The effect of lifestyle is the only category which remains negative (which is consistent with the previous models).

Otherwise the control variables indicate the same effects as previous models for age, education and income. Citizen is significant (no doubt the effect of the dependent variable being constructed by the society variable). The effect of gender is still non-existent.

Looking at the entire model we see that it explains more of the variation (and indeed there is more dimension for variation to follow) bringing the total amount of explained variation of a bit over up 20 percent which is the highest in any of the models. One could discuss if the explained variation is good or not. What previous research suggests, and what also seems to be the case in this study, is that accounting for all the configurations which are at play in society at large is very difficult. With that in mind, I still feel that since the model can isolate the effects of people’s perception when controlling for other factors to explain some of the variation makes the model useful.

Lifestyle have persistently been negatively associated to the indicators. While there is no theoretical support explaining why the variable is acting odd, a possible explanation is that the term lifestyle used in the survey is too vague, and that people have interpreted it in different ways. Since the effect is small and not significant the negative effect is not something which will be developed further within this essay.
The results of model (5) show that there is a strong relationship between perceived group difference and societal cohesiveness, based on the results from model (5), I can confirm the first hypothesis that people’s perceptions about group difference affects societal cohesion. Indeed, when controlling for other factors which also have shown to have some effect, we see that people’s perceptions have the much stronger effects compared to the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variables</th>
<th>Cohesiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other group: economy</td>
<td>0.2468***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.056)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other group: ethnicity</td>
<td>0.065472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other group: culture</td>
<td>0.119666*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.068)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other group: lifestyle</td>
<td>-0.031521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.055)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other group: politics</td>
<td>0.072485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.056)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other group: religion</td>
<td>0.01583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.058)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other group: sexuality</td>
<td>0.022222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.046)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other group: education</td>
<td>0.159837*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.065)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.017213***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen</td>
<td>0.345381*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.166)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.15576***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.031)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household income</td>
<td>0.083124***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.034948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>(0.248)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Residual standard error</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Missing values</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.2212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>0.2141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Ordinary least square regressions. The models show coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Significance *** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05, * p < 0.1
material explanatory factors such as *income* and *education* (although the results might be due to the scale).

Similarly, all the significant results show that there is a positive relationship between a greater shared emotional connection (indicating less difference between the group) and greater societal cohesiveness, with that in mind I can also confirm the second hypothesis that more connection with other groups leads to societal cohesiveness at large.

### 4.2 The effects of people’s perceptions

With the models showing that people’s perceptions have a strong effect in explaining societal cohesiveness, the question is what the findings means for society in general? The interest in people’s perception initially came from looking at the contemporary political climate where questions about different identities (relating to ethnicity, culture, gender and sexuality) and their role in society are amongst the most dividing issues. It is therefore surprising that many of or the variables showed no effect on societal cohesion. Instead, the strongest effect of group difference was related to the traditional class-identity indicators economy and education.

Based on the results, there is quite little support that identity (at least in some meanings) is a great divider in the Swedish society. Instead the model indicate that class is essential, findings that are consistent with Rothstein and Holmgren’s conclusion about the formation of trust in Swedish society and it further strengthens their verdict by showing that class also affects social cohesiveness in general (2016, 79). Although strong polarization along identity related conflict lines, results suggest that Swedish politics and society still is mobilized along the traditional socio-economic class structure, whilst other sorts of identities are less pronounced.

The use of “identity” when discussing group difference in this case lead to some confusion since it often is used to describe the non-economic identities. However, class-identity in this study cannot be said to work in any different way than for instance identity based on ethnicity or culture when it comes to perceptions of group difference.

Since people often hold different identities at the same time the different effects can be understood as some frames being more effective in the current Swedish context than
others. As indicated by Jasper and Poletta, political mobilization works “when successful, frames make a compelling case for the “injustice” of the condition and the likely effectiveness of collective “agency” in changing that condition” (2001, 291). The results seem to suggest that neither sexuality nor religion motivates people into opposition of the Swedish identity. Instead people seem neutral when it comes to these groups that have no results, probably because there is no strong frame that their identity opposes the general over-arching identity. Even if the groups are not perceived as opposing society, the results can be interpreted as that they do not automatically strengthen cohesion i.e. identities have to actively be framed to oppose or to over bridge other identities.

I cannot answer the question why the effects are less pronounced for sexuality and religion than for economy and education. To do so I would have to do an in-dept study of the content in the current political debate and different groups framings of conflicts of interests.

Apart from the socio-economic variables, the study finds some support that culture is relevant within the Swedish context with it being closely related to trust. As presented earlier cultural threat has been able to explain anti-immigrant sentiment and is usually related to higher immigration. During the fall of 2015 when the survey was conducted, the arrival of mainly Syrian refugees fleeing the civil war and the terror sect ISIS was at its highest, with about 80 000 people arriving within a few months (Migrationsverket, 2018). Since the influx of refugees peaked during this period it is possible that the arrivals might have affected the responses somewhat. According to Verner sdotter most of the respondents had sent in their replies in September-October (2016, 442) which means that most answers had come in before the biggest public discussion had started, the result being that I cannot exclude that culture was at play even before the biggest debate had started. Considering the closeness in time it is reasonable to assume that the biggest reactions both in opinion and politics towards immigration came much later (the closing of the borders, shift in immigration policies came first in 2016). It would therefore be interesting to follow up the results on culture by repeating the same analysis on data collected in the following years to see if the effect has increased due to the shift in the political climate. The only real conclusion that I can draw from the findings of culture is that indeed other forms of difference than socio-economic one’s can affect social cohesion in some contexts.

Both theory and this study suggest that identity needs to be interpreted within its specific context to be useful. The results can therefore not debunk Lilla’s thesis that identity-related
differences might be at play in the American (or other) contexts. In fact, based on the American political system as well as the demographic composition of the society, religious beliefs, economic inequality as well as its complicated history with racial discrimination it is very possible that things like ethnicity, sexuality and religion plays a much bigger role in the American system. We can however formulate some critique towards Lilla’s theory in the sense that identity politics does not automatically lead to less cohesion. In an interview in Respons in January this year, Lilla warned that political trends in Europe and Sweden pointed towards similar outcomes as the American 2016 presidential election (Heumann, 2018), something which the results do not confirm.

What this study finds that relates to Lilla however, is that emotional connection towards others has a direct effect on societal cohesion at large. No matter if the difference is based on culture, education or religion, the fact that people’s perception of difference plays a much more important role than economic factors is a very important finding to the continuous discussion about societal cohesiveness. Given the influence that Lilla and other critics of identity politics have received, the results should serve as a warning however, not to jump to conclusions over the naturally harmful nature of identity politics.

Difference might very well have deteriorating effects on society if groups feel like distance towards others is too large, because it will affect group interactions, trust, norms and over all attitudes. If we relate the findings back to SIT and its goal to form clear categories in which to divide people in, there seems to be a significant risk in it leading to polarization. But the results can also support identity politics as a means of creating stability through recognition of different identities within a greater national or societal context, so the conclusion must be that difference does not automatically have to be harmful. In his analysis on the role of ethnicity versus class in political conflicts Widmalm concludes that identity no matter in what form serves as an important tool for mobilization (2002, 127). With that in mind, it is reasonable to assume that identity can be used in the same way to either strengthen or to deteriorate cohesiveness.

It might be that the immigration caused temporary effects to be especially pronounced during the time when the survey was being carried out. Understanding the ideological battle as a reaction to societal change, the battle might lead to recognition of difference which then would strengthen emotional connection and societal cohesiveness in the long run.

One final aspect worth mentioning is the fact that although I clearly have found a strong correlation between societal cohesiveness and group difference, this study assumes that it
is groups identity that leads to social cohesion, rather than the opposite. Although it has been argued that the hypothesis is reasonable, I have not fully been able to verify the causality within the quantitative design.

The findings give two main conclusions to the ongoing debate. First, there is no evidence to support that the idea that new identity movements are more deteriorating or harmful than the more traditional lines of conflict such as class. Since class still shows just a strong correlation with cohesion, the increased polarization due to difference seems more to be an ideological shift towards new dimensions in the political debate (cf. Ingelhart and Welzel 2009, 128). It is possible that the effects of group difference based on for instance ethnicity will increase if the debate continues over time, but it might also fall back into the socio-economic factors given certain context. Since some studies show that inequality increases in many societies, the influence of “identity” in the political debate might very well shift back towards the more traditional mobilization lines (cf. Piketty 2015). The process of reshaping over-arching identities to more inclusive definitions of citizenship is already in action, and while the Swedish debate seems to put some focus on culture at the moment, this fight over inclusion is not different from that of previous groups such as women or ethnic and sexual minorities.

Second, since this study finds that the perceived difference has stronger effects than inequality in material terms. The findings are important in relation to Lilla’s main argument that society must work actively towards having a functioning common ground for societies to remain stable within democratic states. If not, then identity politics is harmful to democracy in the sense that it reduces people’s chances to perform collective decision making which is the basis of legitimacy for the democratic system. Hirschman have made a valuable contribution in explaining how the legitimacy of a state is conditioned on the availability of the avenues of exit and voice to express discontent. If the avenues are not available then citizens take to more radical forms of expressing discontent (protest voting or far more radical alternatives) (Widmalm 2002, 97–98). In order to uphold stability, political discussions continuing into the twenty-twenties should therefore make sure to enable the people to continue to express discontent but making sure that a basic understanding and respect remains strong.
5. Conclusion

This paper has had the ambition to answer the question does people’s perception of group difference affect their sense of societal cohesiveness? Using survey data from a Swedish 2015 study conducted by the SOM-institute this study looks at people living in Sweden’s perceptions of different group identities to see which elements come at play in forming an over-all sense of societal cohesion.

This study combines theories on social capital in relation to group identities to create an advanced model to test the data in. The analysis confirmed that people’s discernment of other groups indeed affects the level of societal cohesiveness, and that respondents who felt a stronger emotional connection towards groups with another economy, education and culture were more likely to feel like a part of the Swedish society and to be more trusting of others. The effects of culture were mainly shown to be related to trust but were still significant on a 90 percent significance level in the cohesiveness index. Although, an in-depth study of the current Swedish political debate needs to be done to understand why difference follow these lines, one explanation could be that Swedish society still emphasize status mainly in economic terms, making other forms of mobilization less potent.

The results showed that social cohesiveness in the Swedish context had no effect for group differences relating to religion, sexuality, ethnicity and lifestyle. Although the results cannot be generalized to situations in other countries, the findings are valid for Swedish society due to the large and representative sample. The Swedish case is interesting because it suggests that an increased focus on identity in the political debate have not affected social cohesion in a more general sense.

While the results do not reject the notion that group identity can affect social cohesion, they still prevent us from giving Lilla’s thesis full support, because it shows that class-identity has the same effects as other forms of identity and that it still is important in some contexts. The results open up for questions on how people’s perception affects cohesion in other counties. It also begs the question if the level of social cohesiveness in Sweden differs from other countries and within contexts where other differences are more pronounced? If one were to continue research within this field, other studies would benefit from an inclusion of questions concerning values, norms and attitudes to strengthen the validity in social cohesiveness, as well as if more questions about the respondent’s self-
identification were included to give more precise answers about different identities effects on attitudes and norms.

The biggest contributions from the findings is the fact that greater perceived difference between groups leads to a lesser sense of belonging to society even when controlling for other factors. The results contribute to the understanding in the way that it allows us to go beyond the specific differences that are at play within a certain context in favor for the over-all effects on society. In doing so it can clarify the diffusion that occurs when identity politics gets put up against the traditional socio-economic factors by proving that their effects on society are the same, no matter what idea the group-identity is based around. Alternative identities can therefore not be said to be worse for society than traditional class politics. Blaming identity politics for the increased polarization in society is therefore to jump to conclusions. Even though Sweden which in 2015 can be said to have been a country where the debate over identity indeed was ongoing, the result cannot find support that other forms of identity related issues affected the results.

The results also suggest that, since perceived difference affects societal cohesion, it is dangerous if differences within a society becomes too wide. A conclusion that then should be used when continuing the future political debate. In this aspect, Lilla’s argument that we still need to feel an over-arching sense of belonging still is convincing.
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Appendix: Control for age bias in the explained variables

Figure 1: Sense of belonging to society by generation

- **generation = 16-29**
- **generation = 30-49**
- **generation = 50-75**
- **generation = 76-85**
Figure 2: Trust towards other people by generation

- **generation = 16-29**
- **generation = 30-49**
- **generation = 50-75**
- **generation = 76-85**