

Exploring the identity of a group of Assyrian/Syriac young adolescents in Sweden

A mixed-methods study within the discipline
of Psychology of Religion and the research field
of Identity Development

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Abstract

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The overall aim of this study was to explore the identity of a group of Assyrian/Syriac young adolescents (N=74; age: 9-15 yrs.) at two schools in Södertälje, Sweden. Being a sequential mixed-methods study, a quantitative phase preceded a qualitative phase. The following research questions guided the study: In what ways do a group of Assyrian/Syriac young adolescents in Sweden develop their identity? The current study is deductive, applying the theory of identity development and the bio-ecological model. The quantitative phase consisted of questionnaires that were distributed to informants where the Utrecht-Management of Identity Commitments (U-MICS) (the domains of education, best friends and religious faith) and items that inquired about identifications, attitudes toward languages, teachers, and classmates. The qualitative phase used semi-structured interviews with a focus on the experiences of the informants regarding their schools, religion and languages that were used in particular situations. The informants provided scores in all three domains of the U-MICS that indicated strong commitments and in-depth exploration and weak reconsideration of commitments. Teachers at the schools had the potential to affect the quality of education in a positive or negative way. This could result in an influence on the commitments and reconsideration of commitments in the education domain where, depending on the quality of education, the processes could consequently either be strengthened or weakened. Religion was ascribed an importance by the informants and their families. The formation cycle of identity in the religious faith domain was not as strong as the maintenance cycle among the informants. I suggested this as there were several consequences related to the process of reconsidering one's current commitments. These consequences meant that the informants risked differentiating themselves from the family. The informant navigated several social identities by assigning and being assigned similarities and differences to other groups they interacted with. Social identity as an Assyrian/Syriac is, first and foremost, tied to belonging to a family, and secondly to the Assyrian/Syriac group. The connection between family and the Assyrian/Syriac group runs through religion and language.

Keywords: identity development, religion, education, best friends, Assyrians/Syriacs

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¹ I hold my cats, Nobbe and Sockan, responsible for any typos in this thesis as they have had a tendency to defiantly traverse the keyboard with their paws during the final write-up.

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Chapter 1: Introductory Chapter

Introduction

This first chapter introduces the current study where I present key components such as the research problem, the research design and the research questions. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of what this study aims to explore, and in what way. This chapter begins with a section where I present the research problem and the disciplinary framework of the study. Following this section, I turn to the aims, research questions and research methods of the study. Thereafter I present a short background regarding Assyrians/Syriacs and Södertälje. Afterwards follow a short introduction to the research methods and materials as well as the theoretical framework that informs this study. This latter section will include definitions of central concepts and terms. The chapter ends with a section on the limits and the overall disposition of the thesis.

Research Problem

Assyrians/Syriacs² are a religious and ethnic minority that originates from the Middle East, primarily from regions located in Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq (Atto, 2011; Deniz, 2001). Though from different countries, Assyrians/Syriacs from these different regions often share kinship relations, as many had to flee from Turkey to neighboring countries during and after Ottoman rule and as the consequence of genocides (Cetrez et al., 2012). The first Assyrians/Syriacs arrived in Sweden during the late 1960s (Cetrez, 2011). Living as a minority in the Middle East and having experienced consequences due to that position, religion has become a method for Assyrians/Syriacs of contemporary generations to connect with previous generations. Because of the situation in today's Syria and Iraq, the Assyrian/Syriac community is reminded of their existence as an ethnic and religious minority living in a diaspora. Religion, in the countries of origin, was a way of establishing and maintaining a community, i.e., deciding who was and who was not a part of the group (Deniz, 2001). This included differences in ethnicity. As such, religion and ethnicity were described as being interrelated. Researchers such as Deniz sug-

² For a short discussion on the term *Assyrian/Syriac*, see the sub-section Culture in the section Introduction to the Theoretical Framework in this chapter.

gested that the ethnic-religious identity had, however, changed to a more ethnic-national identity as a result of their migration to Western countries. Previous research (e.g., Atto, 2011) has suggested that Sweden and the city of Södertälje hold a special meaning for Assyrians/Syriacs, where there is an opinion within the group that Sweden is a new home. From 2011 onwards, Södertälje had an increase in the number of refugees who arrived due to the ongoing conflict in Syria (Lundin, 2020). This was also the case during the Iraq-invasion in 2007 (ibid). While there are no official statistics, it is possible that the refugees that arrived shared kinship with Assyrians/Syriacs that were already living in Södertälje. In 2011, several schools in Södertälje were met with criticism from the Swedish School Inspectorate (Skolinspektionen) for not being able to ensure quality of education and a sense of safety among the pupils (Skolinspektionen, 2011). Several of these schools were located in districts of Södertälje that had a large population of Assyrian/Syriac inhabitants. Furthermore, previous research (e.g., Parszyk, 2002) has indicated that Assyrian/Syriac parents in Sweden are concerned about the education of their children. This concern has involved fear of Swedish schools being unable to provide an adequate education that can give Assyrian/Syriac young adolescents³ a stable foundation to succeed in Sweden. At the same time, there is a fear that the heritage of religion and language transferred through generations is lost in the process of integrating into Swedish society.

Several researchers have pointed out that forming an identity as a minority is more complicated than for majority populations (e.g., Oshana, 2003; Phinney, 1992) due to the challenge of handling more than one culture during the developmental process. While there has been previous research focused on Assyrians/Syriacs, young adolescents within the group have not received much attention. There is among Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden an on-going dialogue regarding how much the group is prepared to give and take of their own culture in order to continue their integration with the host society on their own terms (Lundgren, 2016, 2017; Pripp, 2001). Assyrian/Syriac young adolescents are at the fore of these discussions and face the aforementioned issues. However, they are seldom approached by researchers on these matters. Because of the aforementioned issues that Assyrian/Syriac young adolescents face, the question arises of what ways this group can develop identity in a social environment (e.g., their city of living, school, teachers, friends, family) that includes their historical experiences and future ambitions.

³ The World Health Organization (WHO) defines adolescents as people between 10 and 19 years of age (World Health Organization, n.d.). Young, or early, adolescents are defined as the age span 10-14 years old (World Health Organization, 2014). I have chosen to use the term young adolescents in this study as the term encompasses the age of the informants.

Disciplinary framework

This study is located within the research field of identity development. I use theories of identity and identity development (e.g., Crocetti et al., 2010; Schwartz, 2001, 2005) in order to explore the identity of the group. However, as this exploration is set around a group that is described as a religious and ethnic minority, religion becomes an important aspect to understand in this exploration of identity. I approach religion as a search for significance that takes place in institutions that are dedicated to facilitate spirituality (Pargament et al., 2013). Thus, the setting within the discipline of Psychology of Religion aids my exploration. Geels and Wikström (2017) state that the discipline of Psychology of Religion is tasked with studying religious experiences and behaviors. Furthermore, several studies within Psychology of Religion focus on the relationship between religion and health⁴ where the constructs *meaning* and *meaning-making* (see for example Park, 2010, 2016) are frequently used (e.g., Cetrez, 2005; Lloyd, 2018; Nahlblom, 2018; Schumann, 2018). While previous research on identity development has investigated associations between identity and measures of well-being and psycho-social functioning (e.g., Crocetti, Scignaro, et al., 2012; Morsunbul et al., 2016) this is an approach that I do not take in the current study. Instead, I focus on the function of religion in relation to identity. I join Psychology of Religion by primarily exploring experiences of religion through a definition of religion that views the latter as a search for significance (Pargament et al., 2005, 2013). However, my focus will not be on health. The focus in this study is on how young adolescents engage in this search for significance in relation to their identity. This is not an anthropological or linguistic study of Assyrians/Syriacs (see Atto, 2011; or Miller, 2019). My focus is set on exploring the identity in relation to the function of certain social environments and phenomena such as religion and language. This exploration is set on a group of Assyrian/Syriac young adolescents in a contemporary setting rather than me focusing on historical factors of how an Assyrian/Syriac identity has come to be, or the role of language and religion has had for this identity. While I do include some background information on the historical experiences of the group, these experiences are not the main focus of this thesis. Furthermore, I employ research methods that gather and analyze empirical material of both a quantitative and qualitative nature in a so-called mixed-methods research design (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2015; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2012). As such, this thesis is a social-scientific study where I answer my research questions by providing a theoretical interpretation of a gathered empirical material.

⁴ I refer here to *health* in a broad sense that can include several dimensions among other physical, psychological and existential ones.

Aim and research questions of the current study

The overall aim of this study is to explore the identity of a group of Assyrian/Syriac young adolescents at two schools in Södertälje. The aim is achieved through a sequential mixed-methods design where I explore through questionnaires how these young adolescents score on measures of identity development, self-image and attitudes toward languages and significant others. A qualitative phase follows that employs group and individual semi-structured interviews in order to further explore the scores provided by the young adolescents on the quantitative measures. The current study is primarily deductive, using theoretical concepts as tools in my exploration of the identity of the young adolescents, followed by a nuancing of these concepts with the help of the empirical material. I do this nuancing primarily in the qualitative phase.

I will now present the study's research questions. These research questions are operationalized in two steps in order to clarify what empirical phenomena I explore with what theoretical concept. In the first step, I divide the question into a number of sub-questions that divide the empirical phenomenon of identity into smaller, more limited phenomena. These questions are referred to as empirical sub-questions as they focus on what empirical phenomenon I am exploring. In the second step, I operationalize these questions into theoretical sub-questions that I will use to direct and structure my analysis. These questions include the theoretical concepts I intend to use as tools in my analysis. I present these questions at the end of Chapter 3: The Theoretical Framework, after I have outlined the theories that I employ in this study.

1. In what ways do a group of Assyrian/Syriac young adolescents in Sweden develop their identity?
 - 1.1. In what ways do the young adolescents engage with their group identifications?
 - 1.2. In what ways do the young adolescents engage with their education and their best friends in relation to their identity?
 - 1.3. In what ways do the young adolescents engage with their religion in relation to their identity?
2. In what way can the exploration of identity among a group of Assyrian/Syriac young adolescents contribute to the research field of identity development and the discipline of Psychology of Religion?

A brief introduction to Södertälje and Assyrians/Syriacs

The city of Södertälje is a part of Greater Stockholm. Through industrial expansion and development during the 20th century, a large part of the population has been made up of migrant groups. These migrant groups were at first mainly Finnish and immigrants from former Yugoslavia. During this period,

new residential areas were constructed: Ronna, Geneta and Hovsjö, among other districts. The city of Södertälje is known for its active cultural and sporting life. There are also several successful companies in Södertälje, including Scania, Astra-Zeneca and Saab. According to Statistics Sweden (Statistiska centralbyrån, n.d.-b), the population of Södertälje (the municipality) was 96,032 at the end of 2017, when I had finished my collection of empirical material. 53 % (50,897) of the inhabitants had a foreign background, which meant that they were born abroad or that they were born in Sweden of two parents who were born abroad. About 39% (37,556) of these were born abroad while 14% were born in Sweden with parents who were born abroad (Statistiska centralbyrån, n.d.-a). As the Swedish census does not collect information on ethnicity it is difficult to estimate how many Assyrians/Syriacs there are in Södertälje and in Sweden. However, as many Assyrians/Syriacs originate from areas in Syria, Turkey and Iraq, it is possible to gain a crude estimate of the size of the population. The two largest sub-groups of those born abroad have their origin in Asia (18,924) and Europe excluding the northern countries but including Turkey (10,231). Countries in Asia include Iraq (8,467) and Syria (7,105). There are 2,303 individuals who originate from Turkey. Other large groups in Södertälje of people born abroad originate from Finland (3,571) and Poland (2,116). Inhabitants with a Swedish background⁵ but with one parent born abroad amounted to 7,829 inhabitants (Statistiska centralbyrån, n.d.-c).

There are several reasons why the Assyrians/Syriacs decided to migrate to Sweden. These reasons include seeking refuge from persecution and the search of opportunity to work (Deniz, 2001). Before migration, the churches (Orthodox, Catholic and other) of the Assyrians/Syriacs played a central role by being representative of the group, a focal point and as keeper as well as a mediator of traditions. These roles were possible as Assyrians/Syriacs had, for a time, lacked any other institutions as a consequence of living as a minority in different countries. As a minority living in the Middle-East, the Assyrians/Syriacs mainly identified themselves as Christians living in a Muslim country. As the Assyrians/Syriacs have migrated to Western countries, such as Sweden, a greater degree of ethnic and national identification has emerged (ibid). As a result, the churches and the role of religion have somewhat diminished. The Assyrians/Syriacs have developed an ethnic identification as well as adapting to an identification that is related to their host country (ibid). This includes values, attitudes, and behaviors related to each identification. Freyne-Lindhagen (1997) and Deniz (2001) describe the migration of the Assyrians/Syriacs, from the Middle-East to a Western country such as Sweden, as a move from a context that was characterized as a collective community to a context that was characterized as an individualistic and high-tech society.

⁵ Swedish background is defined according to Statistics Sweden as a person having been born in Sweden with at least one parent being born in Sweden (Statistiska centralbyrån, n.d.-a).

The early Assyrian/Syriac settlements in Södertälje during the 1970s were few but consisted of large family concentrations (Björklund, 1981). The kinship between the families attracted, in turn, more families to Södertälje. The first Assyrians/Syriacs that settled in Södertälje were mainly from villages in south-east Turkey, mostly from the village of Midyat. In the late 1960s, the Syriac-Orthodox patriarch sent clergymen to Södertälje where, in due time, a congregation was formed. In following years, new families, both from other parts of Sweden and from abroad, moved to Södertälje. In due course, ethnic associations among the Assyrians/Syriacs were founded. These associations were characterized in terms of rivalry between different kin groups. By 1975, Södertälje had also become an alternative for many Assyrians/Syriacs living in other European countries.

Experiences among the Assyrians/Syriacs concerning history and migration varies within the group, depending on where the person has migrated from, e.g., Turkey, Syria, Lebanon or Iraq, and the socio-economic background of the person (Cetrez, 2005). As such, the experiences of the Assyrians/Syriacs, prior to their migration, are different. Some of the Assyrians/Syriacs might have experienced living in an agricultural community whereas others might have lived in a large city in order to complete higher education. At the same time, the process of modernization varies among the Assyrians/Syriacs since the migration process to Sweden has been continuous, which means that the later arrival of Assyrians/Syriacs affects those Assyrians/Syriacs that arrived in Sweden during the 1960s onwards (Cetrez, 2005). While in Sweden, it is still possible for the Assyrians/Syriacs to acquire information about their country of origin. This enables the Assyrians/Syriacs to maintain a consciousness of their religion and ethnic background.

The Assyrians/Syriacs have a long experience of living in a diaspora. The year 1915 holds great meaning, and trauma, for Assyrians/Syriacs as it marks the genocide that many contemporary Assyrians/Syriacs have experienced through generational stories. This experience has been described by researchers as affecting the relationship that the Assyrian/Syriac community has toward the society that they are living in, as well as having a central role in their identity and practices of religion, language and social relations (Cetrez, 2017).

School context

I draw the empirical material for this study from two elementary schools in Södertälje. The first school, Wasaskolan, is situated in the district of Geneta and is a public school. According to a report (Sanandaji, 2014), the district was an area with a high degree of unemployment and a high percentage of pupils with uncompleted grades at the end of elementary school. This school has about 610 pupils enrolled and about 91% (560 pupils) of the pupils are

Assyrians/Syriacs (the principal, personal communication, 2015-10-13). The school puts an emphasis on language and offers education in both Swedish and in English. Apart from the ordinary classes, the school offers an international school in grades 7 to 9 where the teaching is mainly done in English.

The second school, Elafskolan, opened in 2014, and had 105 pupils enrolled at the start of the autumn semester of 2015. Elafskolan is a private school that is owned by the company *Aprendere skolor* (*Aprendere Skolor* » *Lilla Parkskolan*, n.d.⁶) which also owns other schools. The pupils belonged to different ethnic groups ranging from Chaldeans to Assyrians/Syriacs and religious groups, such as Copts, to Syriac Orthodox (personal communication, principal at school, 2015-09-29). A quarter of the pupils consists of the newly arrived, i.e., individuals who have been less than two years in Sweden. The majority of the pupils were previously pupils of one of the other schools in Södertälje. According to the school administrator, the pupils are from various districts of Södertälje that include Hovsjö, Ronna, Geneta, Blombacka and several other districts (school administrator, personal communication, 2018-04-18). The school follows the Swedish School Plan but differentiates itself from other schools by having an Assyrian profile. This profile includes mandatory courses in Syriac while the pupils, depending on their mother tongue, take courses in either Arabic or Suryoyo. In addition to the mandatory language courses, the school has increased teaching in the subjects of Math, Swedish and English.

Research design, methods and material

The regional board of ethics in Uppsala approved the study (diary number of 2016/277). More information on what ethical issues I have encountered through this study can be found in the Methods chapter. In this study, I apply a sequential mixed-methods research design where a quantitative phase precedes a qualitative one (Creswell, 2014; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2015). The purpose of the quantitative phase is, on the one hand, to address potential differences between groups of young adolescents (from here on I refer to the participating young adolescents as *informants*) regarding their scores on identity development. On the other hand, the purpose is also to address potential associations between processes of identity and self-image as well as attitudes toward languages and significant others. The research methods of the quantitative phase are questionnaires that consist of the following measures: the Utrecht-Management of Identity Commitments Scale (U-MICS; Crocetti et al., 2010) which measured identity processes in the domains of education, best

⁶ As of 2020 Elafskolan had changed its' name to Lilla Parkskolan.

friends and religious faith; and questions that inquire about identifications, attitudes toward languages, teachers, classmates and the degree of teasing experienced. I analyze these scores with non-parametric methods.

The purpose of the qualitative phase is to further explore the results of the quantitative phase by applying semi-structured interviews with a group of informants that have filled out the questionnaires. The semi-structured interviews, both group and individual, are initially focused on the scores from the questionnaires. I also inquire about several topics such as self-image; language; education; and religion. Both group and individual interviews are analyzed through various forms of coding and thematic analysis.

The empirical material of this study was gathered from 74 informants, enrolled at the previously mentioned schools, who self-identified as Assyrians/Syriacs; 53 of them were enrolled in Wasaskolan and 21 were enrolled at Elafskolan. Mean age was 11.6 years ($SD=1.7$). There was a majority of boys ($n=45$) in the sample. Sixty informants answered that they were born in Sweden while 14 informants answered that they were not. The latter group was asked how long they had been living in Sweden. Answers ranged from 2 to 11 years at Wasaskolan, with a mean value of 5 ($SD=2.5$). At Elafskolan, answers ranged from 3 to 8.5 years with a mean value of 5.5 years ($SD=2.8$).

My background and pre-understanding

Being of a foreign background myself, as my parents had migrated from Hungary to Sweden during the 1970s, I have experienced situations where I have been divided between an identification as a Hungarian and as a Swede: I was born in Sweden and grew up in an area where my family was one of few families with a migrant background. I spoke Swedish from my earliest memory but my parents and my brothers often spoke in Hungarian while at home, although my brothers and I usually spoke Swedish with one another. I was not able to speak in Hungarian, although I understood day-to-day talk. This was met with criticism from my older relatives in Hungary and was brought up during our visits. My identification as a Hungarian was tied into our family life, where at times we ate Hungarian food and watched media from Hungary. It was also tied into forms of teasing that I encountered from friends and peers at school. My identification as a Swede revolved around living my entire life in Sweden, having friends that were primarily Swedish and speaking Swedish, which I considered as my first language. Living with various identifications and being split between the two has aroused my interest in issues related to identity. This interest has revolved around how people are influenced by their social environment as well as their historical background.

My first experience with identity among Assyrians/Syriacs was when I wrote my masters' thesis, which was about the aforementioned phenomenon. Since then, before I started my education as a PhD student, I was involved in an evaluation of a project that was directed toward highlighting honor-related issues among Assyrians/Syriacs in the greater metropolitan area of Stockholm. This was in 2014. During this evaluation, I came across how members of the groups identified themselves as Assyrians/Syriacs and how this identification was done in accordance with history, family and tradition. This was also during a period where the Swedish schools, especially in Södertälje, had attracted criticism for their lack of quality (Skolinspektionen, 2011). During this evaluation, I heard of Elafskolan, which had just started. Because of the Assyrian profile of the school and the focus on identity, I found it interesting to see whether the informants at the school viewed themselves differently from their peers at other schools.

Introduction to the Theoretical Framework and Definitions

In order to explore in what ways Assyrian/Syriac young adolescents develop their identity in a social environment (e.g., their city of living, school, teachers, friends, family) that includes historical experiences and future ambitions, I employ theories of development as tools for interpreting the empirical material: identity development (Crocetti et al., 2010; Erikson & Erikson, 2004), and the bio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1981) with its various systems of development. Erik H. Erikson's theory about identity development provides a perspective on development that stretches throughout an individual's life where certain tasks are to be resolved in relation to a society's ethos (Erikson & Erikson, 2004; Kroger, 1990, 2018). However, the said theory has been further developed, due to among other reasons criticism being raised toward stage theories and developmental psychology (e.g., Greene & Hogan, 2005), where the emphasis has gone to a greater degree from stages and statuses to processes of identity development (Crocetti, et al., 2010). The primary theory that I use as a tool to explore identity is identity development (ibid) and identity levels (Schwartz, 2001, 2005), while I use the bio-ecological model as a complement in order to explore the interaction between the identity of the informants and the social environments that they are a part of. More specifically, I use the theory of identity development when I explore in what way the personal identity, as a level of identity, is maintained and formed, through the identity processes of commitments, in-depth exploration and reconsideration of commitments, in the domains of education, best friend, and religious faith. When I move on to explore how the informants express their group identification, I use the theory of social identity (Tajfel, 2010) as another level of identity. I start to bring in the bio-ecological model in order to highlight the

interaction between the personal and social identities, and the social environments the informants are a part of. At this point, the theories of identity development and the bio-ecological model are used together to explore the interaction between the identity and the social environments of the informants. The two theories provide a framework for interpreting that the reciprocal interaction between the pupil's identity and social environments such as school and groups such as parents and teachers. It is in this reciprocal relation that identity development takes place. I will now introduce the definitions of central theoretical concepts that I apply in this thesis. These definitions are expanded and elaborated on in the Theory chapter.

Identity

I define identity as a synthesis of several levels of self-conception (Erikson & Erikson, 2004; Schwartz in McLean & Syed, 2015; Schwartz, 2001; Schwartz et al., 2006, 2015). At the most fundamental level, ego identity is postulated as ego synthesis and continuity of personal character. Ego-identity involves the basic and fundamental beliefs of the self. At the second level, between the intersection of self and context, personal identity refers to a set of goals, values and beliefs that identifies the individual as a unique individual who is set apart from others. At the third level, social identity refers to a subjective meaning that the individual assigns to a group membership, and the degree of solidarity that the individual feels toward a group. Usually, when I am referring to social identity, I will use the terms group belonging, identifications and social identity interchangeably. Ethnicity is a form of a social identity that refers to an aspect of a social relation between groups of people that view themselves as distinct, culturally, from other groups (Jackson & Hogg, 2012). The aspect of self-identification of the group is central to this definition. Ethnicity, as well as social identity, is dynamic, which means that the self-identification of groups and individuals is subject to change in relation to processes of political, economic and historical natures (Deniz, 2001).

Identity development is defined as the task of achieving continuity between childhood identifications and the expectations on the individual brought about by society as well as by the individual him- or herself (Erikson & Erikson, 2004). In this thesis, I measure development of identity by the identity cycles of maintaining and forming identity. The maintenance cycle consists of the processes, commitments and in-depth exploration measured by the Utrecht-Management of Identity Commitments (U-MICS; Crocetti et al., 2010). The formation cycle consists of the processes of in-depth exploration and reconsideration of commitments. Commitments refer to goals, values and beliefs that the individual finds important. In-depth exploration is the process of explored existing commitments. If the commitments were determined to be unsatisfying, they would be replaced by new commitments through the process of reconsideration. Education and best friends are, in relation to the theory of

identity development, measured through the U-MICS with the subscales of education and best friends. Religion is in relation to the theory of identity development measured through the U-MICS with the subscale of religious faith.

Religion

Religion as an empirical phenomenon in this study is represented by what the informants believe in; how they identify themselves as Christians; practices that they engage in; and places where the informants engage in religion. To interpret religion theoretically, I use a definition that captures the functions of these aspects. I define religion in accordance with the definition that Pargament et al (2013, p. 15) present:

[W]e define religion as “the search for significance that occurs within the context of established institutions [and traditions]⁷ that are designed to facilitate spirituality.” The term search refers once again to the ongoing journey of discovery, conservation, and transformation. In this case, however, the destination of the search is “significance”: a term that encompasses a full range of potential goals, including those that are psychological (e.g., anxiety reduction, meaning, impulse control), social (e.g., belonging, identity, dominance), and physical (e.g., longevity, evolutionary adaptation, death) as well as those that are spiritual.

I use the said definition in order to explore how the identity of the Assyrian/Syriac young adolescents in this study is tied into religion; i.e., a particular search for significance that takes place in a context of established institutions and traditions that are designed to facilitate spirituality. With this definition as my point of departure, I explore religion in two primary ways. In the questionnaires, I primarily explore religion through the religious faith domain as it is formulated by the U-MICS. As such, I approach religion as a domain where identity development takes place. As I move on to the interviews of the qualitative phase, my point of departure is from the religious faith domain in the U-MICS when, for an instance, I ask the informants to elaborate on their scores from the questionnaires. However, despite the name of the domain, *religious faith*, the exploration in the interviews is not limited to religious faith per se in order to capture the empirical phenomenon that is religion in this study. As such, my exploration includes other aspects of religion such as practices (e.g., praying), beliefs, belonging and places (e.g., church). I do note, however, that in relation to my chosen definition, places where the informants engage in the search for significance, i.e., religion, is not confined to church. These other places include the home of the informants and school.

⁷ My inclusion based on what the authors write on p. 15: “Religion occurs within the larger context of established institutions and traditions that have as their primary goal, the facilitation of spirituality.”

In this study, I am more focused on what function religion has and not necessarily what sets religion apart from other phenomena. Spirituality and the sacred are important for the latter. As such, I assume that when I am asking the participating Assyrian/Syriac young adolescents about religion, I am assuming that they are referring to practices, beliefs and places that are in some way related to what they consider to be sacred. For the time being I will not further elaborate on this issue in relation to the informants. Instead, I save this discussion for Chapter 3.

The bio-ecological model and systems of development

The bio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1981) is primarily used in the analysis for interpreting what influence social environments and groups such as school, teachers, friends and parents might have for the identity of the informants. The model proposes that the development of a human being takes place in a set of systems of development where the human being and the systems themselves are nested within each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). These systems are referred to as a set of nested structures. As such, the systems and the individual are in an interaction with one another. Based on their closeness to the developing human being, these systems are divided according to the following categories: micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chronosystems. Microsystems are in direct interaction with the developing person and are usually referred to as parents, school and friends. Mesosystem refers to the interaction between microsystems, e.g., parents discussing their children's education with the teachers of the latter. Exosystems involve one or more systems where at least one system is not in a direct interaction with the developing person, e.g., the city that an individual lives in. Macrosystem refers to the codified rules and laws. Culture and laws of a country are usually referred to as examples of this system. The chronosystem refers to change and stability in time.

Culture

While I do not directly use *culture* as a concept to interpret the empirical material, I do acknowledge its importance in order to situate the identity in a social context. The definition of culture that I use in the exploration of identity originates from the definition that Matsumoto (2006, pp. 34-36) proposes. Matsumoto states that the concept first and foremost is an abstraction used to understand similarities within and differences between groups of people. The concept as such does not only describe behavior but it also proscribes a normative use of those behaviors. Matsumoto divides the concept of culture into two parts. The first part refers to a cultural worldview. A cultural worldview refers to a belief system about one's culture. These worldviews are consensual ideologies regarding one's culture and they influence the construction of the self. Matsumoto states that these worldviews help the individual to address his or her needs for affiliation and uniqueness. Cultural worldviews refer to the

thinking and talking about culture. The second part of culture refers to cultural practice that involves the discrete, observable, objective and behavioral aspects of activities that an individual engages in relation to a culture (Matsumoto, 2006). These activities are adaptations of individuals to certain situations and the doing of culture is through these practices. Matsumoto states that these activities occur because human beings have to address their social motives and biological needs in the specific contexts where they live. Human beings need to adapt their behaviors to these contexts.

Culture is also represented in artefacts (e.g., food, clothing, architecture), roles, and institutions (Marsella & Yamada, 2010; Rudmin, 2009). When a person is in contact or interacts with another culture, it is through another person, group, object or institution with a different cultural worldview or practice. According to Matsumoto (2006), no individual knows the entirety of their culture. Within culture, Rudmin (2009) states, there are also variations between different subgroups, e.g., gender, age groups, social classes and so on. The cultural worldview is characterized by continuity and stability (Marsella, 2005). It is transferred from one generation to another while at the same time it is both susceptible and resistant to change. The content of a worldview from one culture can be mixed with content from a system from another culture (Marsella & Yamada, 2010). The content of a worldview is also customizable for innovative solutions.

In relation to this study, culture is, as Matsumoto (2006) suggested, the adaptations that the informants need to make in order to adapt to certain situations. These situations are the social environments that I refer to as the systems of development according to the bio-ecological model. Worldviews are the belief systems that influence how the informants view themselves (e.g., self-identifications, criteria group memberships) in accordance with these environments.

I use the term *Assyrian/Syriac* as I find it corresponds most closely with the Swedish term *assyrier/syrian*, which is often the official term used by officials when addressing the group. Often in this thesis, I will refer to the Assyrian/Syriac as *one* group with certain values, beliefs, history and experiences that tie members of that group together. This is similar to what Matsumoto (2006) argued regarding culture being an abstraction used in order to understand similarities and differences between groups. This is a choice and an assumption that I have made for practical reasons in relation to the main research question of exploring the identity among the informants. The reason for this is to acknowledge that in order for me to explore the identity of the informants, as a theoretical construct, it requires me to relate to several social environments with which the informants are interacting. Thus, the term *Assyrians/Syriacs* becomes an analytical category much like that of *Swedish* is in order to

explore how the informants interact with people around them and when discussing what criteria they and others assign to certain group memberships. This is not to say that these groups are the only ones of which the informants perceive themselves to be members. Neither do I mean that all the informants approach them in the same way. Instead, these categories act as points of departure in the data collection and in the analysis. However, I would like to emphasize that the term Assyrian/Syriac encompasses several groups that are not necessarily limited to the terms *Assyrians* and *Syriacs*. Social identities are dynamic, which means that the meanings that the members of the groups assign to these identities are open to negotiation and are susceptible to change. This is why I find it difficult to use the concept of culture as a tool to directly explore the identity of the informants as set in several social environments. On the one hand, it is a crude and rough tool that blurs differences between individuals; on the other hand it provides a necessary reduction of a complex phenomenon. My middle way here has been to use the bio-ecological model in order to be more specific in how the social environments affects the identity development of the informants. Consequently, my use of the term Assyrian/Syriac indicates to what depth I intend to dive within the group itself when it comes to language, customs and traditions. When I present quotes from interviews with the informants, I will use what group labels they used themselves and present the English term in parentheses. However, while the term Assyrian (*assyrier* in Swedish) is less complicated to translate from Swedish to English, the term *syrian* in Swedish is more complicated. I have decided to use the term Syriac as I believe that it is closest to the Swedish term. When I refer to the informants in general I will use the terms Assyrian/Syriac. I will use the term Suryoyo in parentheses when informants refer to a language in Swedish such as *assyrisk* or *syrianska*. Similar to Cetrez (2005), I use the term Suryoyo as an emic term for a common language among Assyrians/Syriacs. My choice to use the term is also reliant on associations that previous research have indicated between measures of Suryoyo and a self-image as Assyrian/Syriac (Dudas, 2014).

Language

I approach language from a functional point of view where I view ethnic language as a symbol of tradition, heritage and ethnicity (Phinney et al., 2001). In relation to social identity, language functions as a criterion for distinguishing between the in-group and out-group (Vedder & Virta, 2005). As such, language has a significance in bonding between a person and a larger group. If a language is given high significance by a group, it is likely that it is also a defining part of their social identity. In relation to culture, I view language as a cultural practice that helps the individual to adapt to the situations that the person faces during his or her life. In the questionnaires, I ask the informants to provide scores to statements that measure their attitudes toward Suryoyo and any other language that they might consider their mother tongue as well

as Swedish. I also ask the informants what of their parents' languages they are able to use. In the interviews, I expand on their scores by asking the informants to elaborate on their attitudes and to describe in what situations they use a certain language. In the analysis, I will primarily approach language in relation to social identity as a criterion for in-groups and out-groups.

Limits of this study

Because this is a cross-sectional study, I cannot draw any conclusions that stretch beyond the time period when this study was conducted. As such, my conclusions will be limited to the time point when I conducted this study. Theoretically, I am not exploring the entire identity of the informants but rather how the development of identity takes place in a selection of life domains. Furthermore, this study is focused on a few selected social identities. The scope of this thesis is primarily limited to social identities as Swedish and as Assyrian/Syriac. My main intention of bringing this up is to state that the exploration in this study regarding the identity levels is in no way exhaustive. Instead, the exploration provides a glimpse at the complexity of their identity. I recognize there are several social identities that can be explored in order to understand the interaction that the informants have with social environments. It is not my intention to present a case that claims these are the only two group belongings the informants are combining. However, I believe that it would be difficult to capture the entire identity of the informants, including all of the social identities that the informants are combining and handling. Therefore, my chosen approach might mean that other belongings (e.g., such as Western Assyrian and Chaldean) were not acknowledged, for example when informants referred to what language they spoke at home or how they viewed themselves. The lack of probing during such instances could have led to the loss of valuable insights into what meaning is ascribed to being an Assyrian/Syriac. Thus, the two terms Assyrian/Syriac and Swedish could limit the discussion with the informants regarding their social identities. The informants were however able to write down their belongings in the questionnaires. According to these answers the informants, except for a few, wrote down Assyrian or Syriac or a combination of these along with Swedish. Exceptions could for example refer to being a Christian. In addition to these limits, my use of the bio-ecological model is not exhaustive as I focus on particular persons and environments that the informants interact with and visit. This focus is also based on how the informants perceive their interaction in contrast to a focus that captures both the perception of the informants and their parents, which I discuss in further detail in chapter 3.

Disposition of the thesis

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 provides a contextual background of the Assyrian/Syriac group with a particular focus on Assyrians/Syriacs who live in Södertälje and includes a discussion of previous research conducted on Assyrians/Syriacs in general. Chapter 3 then follows, where I outline the theoretical framework and the theories that I use as tools in order to answer the research questions. This chapter includes an overview of how identity development has been approached in previous research with a focus on minorities. I have chosen to divide previous research between two chapters in order to provide sufficient room for the complexity that characterizes Assyrian/Syriac identity, to which previous research has pointed. In Chapter 4, Methods, the focus is on how I go about collecting my empirical material and how I intend to analyze it. Following the Methods chapter are three chapters that each deal with an aspect of the results and the analysis, where I attempt to answer the research questions. The first of these, Chapter 5, is titled: *Navigating multiple social identities*. Here, I take a look at the ways family and other significant others play a role in the informants' lives and their development of identity; as well as at the ways language and religion play a role in the aforementioned process. Chapter 6 is titled: *Maintaining and forming identity through education and best friends*. Here I focus on how the informants engage with their education and best friends in relation to their identity. Chapter 7, the third results- and analysis chapter, is titled: *Maintaining and forming identity through religion*. I focus here on how the informants engage with religion in relation to their identity. The Discussion chapter, Chapter 8, that follows is where I reflect on the findings of the current study in relation to previous research while I will also reflect on the theoretical concepts that I have used. I will also reflect on the methodological aspects of the current study. These reflections are aimed at addressing what contribution the exploration of identity among the Assyrian/Syriac young adolescents might have for the field of identity development and the discipline of Psychology of Religion. In the final chapter, I summarize the study.

Chapter 2: Assyrians/Syriacs in Södertälje

Introduction

The purpose of the chapter is, on the one hand, to provide an understanding of the context within which this study is taking place; on the other hand, it is to highlight findings that previous research has proposed regarding identity among Assyrians/Syriacs. Thus, I will present information on Assyrians/Syriacs, for example some of the holidays that are celebrated and the languages that are spoken among members of the group. I will also review conclusions of previous research focused on Assyrians/Syriacs. Some of these previous studies that I will describe are presented in fuller detail compared to other studies because of their particular importance to this thesis as they deal with similar topics as my study.

While I will be continuously using the term Assyrians/Syriacs in this chapter when referring to the conclusions by previous research, the studies that I am referring to usually use a variety of terms to refer to the group or groups in question. Examples of such terms can be Assyrians; Syriacs; Suryoye; and Syrian Orthodox. I will provide the authors' terms in parentheses when it is different from the term Assyrian/Syriac. The frame of this research review will be constituted by key words in the research questions. As such, the research review will focus on the identity, in a broad sense, of Assyrian/Syriacs in relation to religion, language and various groups and social environments. This focus on identity will cover several different conceptions of the term that includes theoretical constructs such as ego-identity and ethnic identity. I will start by presenting research that is focused on Assyrians/Syriacs that is not limited to Södertälje or Sweden. As I move on, I start to focus more on how Assyrians/Syriacs have established a home in Södertälje and what characterizes these social environments where they are now inhabitants.

I begin by describing the overall procedure of the reviews. This will outline the search engines, or databases, the key words that were applied, any criterion applied to the results, i.e., full-text availability, peer-reviewed, discipline and so on. Thereafter, I continue with presenting key findings of the research studies that I have found relevant for the current study. While I present most of the results of previous studies in text, statistical results are, however, presented in detail in footnotes. The chapter ends with a summary and a condensation of the research results found with the reviews.

Procedure of review

The research reviews were constituted by several search procedures that were conducted during the course of the project, from 2015 to 2020, in order to find research conducted on the Assyrian/Syriac group. These procedures either used PsychINFO as a database or the search engine Summon⁸ provided by the Uppsala university library. In the initial reviews, I prioritized studies that were conducted in Sweden and that had a behavioral scientific focus, i.e., psychological or sociological. For example, a search for articles in 2015 with the search word Assyrians generated 31,914 hits. This search was refined by limiting the results available as full-texts, peer-reviewed articles, and that the articles were published within the discipline of psychology. This limited the search to 137 hits. When doing a similar search in PsychINFO with the exact same criteria, the search resulted in 7 hits. Similar searches with the same criteria were conducted by combining search words such as Assyrians and religion or Assyrians/Syriacs and Sweden. Usually, the same studies would show up in the results of the different searches, except when I included Sweden as a search word; a search that only generated 3 hits. The abstracts of the retrieved studies were read and a selection of the studies were chosen for further reading and review. The research review was limited to sources that were in either English or Swedish, due to my language competence. As the research regarding Assyrians/Syriacs was sparse, no limitations were placed on what years the research had been conducted or published. Previous research was also reviewed through snowballing, e.g., references from one study leading to other studies. The research that I am presenting here in this chapter are examples of what research has been conducted before. My intention is not to present a full overview of all research regarding Assyrians/Syriacs; instead, I want to provide an insight to what research has been done on Assyrians/Syriacs in regard to their identity.

Family and heritage

I begin this review by illustrating some results of what previous research has pointed out regarding Assyrians/Syriacs, family relations and heritage. Collie et al., (2010) (in the field of cross-cultural research) explored how young Assyrian/Syriac (the authors use the term Assyrian) women in New Zealand managed and negotiated identity dilemmas, by applying participatory action research-inspired ethnographic work. A total of 60 young Assyrian/Syriac women (ages 16-25) were included along with 72 Assyrian/Syriac adults (53 women and 19 men). The data were collected through focus group interviews

⁸ Summon is a search engine that searches through all of the databases, libraries and journals that are available to the university library at Uppsala University.

and semi-structured interviews. The interviews covered three topics: perceptions of school; future aspirations and expectations; and family relationships. Informal conversations helped to build relationships with the participants and to gain an understanding of everyday experiences. The data were analyzed by a thematic analysis in order to organize and interpret the gathered data. Emergent themes were: 1) Iraq as a beautiful place of happy memories ... and fear and hardship, 2) New Zealand as a place of opportunities ... and discrimination, 3) New Zealand as a threat to the continuity of Assyrian culture. The results showed that the participants felt complex feelings of their attachment to New Zealand, Iraq, and the Assyrian/Syriac community. The participants attempted to attain optimal inclusion with these groups with the help of mindful identity negotiation. It is suggested by the authors, that double identification was impossible to achieve, which meant that the participants' simultaneous inclusions in each of the groups were not secure. Collie et al. state that the acculturation orientation may be better oriented toward a focus on process-oriented acculturation that is able to account for negotiated and contested developmental trajectories, in comparison to developmental end-states, e.g., integration or competence. The authors suggest that the participants engage in mindful identity negotiation. This means that the participants validated their relationships with their family, the members of the Assyrian/Syriac community, and their peers at school, while at the same time engaging in conversations with the researcher. Furthermore, the young women offered a flexible discourse of their historical experiences from Iraq while employing strategies to support agenda-driven memories, rather than fixed social memories, when dealing with their national/ethnic identity. The strategy was a so-called social creative strategy that strengthened and redefined the young women's identification with a stigmatized group or to change commitment to other groups in order to maintain a positive self-concept when faced with discrimination.

A study conducted by Sundvall (2011) brings forth descriptions of expectations and roles within Assyrian/Syriac families in Sweden in regard to mental health issues. However, I believe her approach to family relations among a group of Assyrians/Syriacs sheds light on issues of being torn between various settings and groups. Sundvall presents themes from a qualitative study that applied interviews as research methods with Assyrian/Syriac patients and informants regarding how mental health issues, e.g., psychosis, are handled within the family and the families' interaction with Swedish health care. The interviews seemed to suggest that the patients and the informants would prefer to talk first to their families (family of origin as well as current family, distinction made by the author) if they themselves were to encounter symptoms of psychosis. Not being able to do so would generate disappointment among the informants and the patients. In the interviews, the family was attributed by the informants a never-ending responsibility toward its members, e.g., parents' responsibility toward their adult children. It was believed to be a great failure if the family was unable to fulfill their responsibility toward a member

that was ill. Fulfilling this responsibility could differ between parents and siblings, where the former would be more inclined to uphold it than the latter group. This is attributed to the Swedish lifestyle and the high demands of work and family life. Not being able to uphold the responsibility would generate bad consciousness among the children in the family. Being the oldest son could also have an impact of how to handle the psychosis and whether or not to inform the family. As the oldest son, he had a special responsibility, which made him unable to show himself as weak. This role as the oldest son could also provide other obligations toward family members, for example in legal matters. Sundvall states that the fact that the family in the first instance was where one turned to could also be understood as indicating that it was with the family that the family members felt that they were able to discuss such issues. However, being in contact with the mental health services and receiving treatment resulted in an increased degree of freedom from particular norms. One of the interviewed patients illustrated this by stating that she felt she had the ability to move away from home without being married.

Garis (Garis Guttman, 2005) describes how the parenting styles changed among Assyrian/Syriac parents as they lived in Sweden. The parents were notified early on, during the 1970s, that physical punishment was illegal, but they were not offered any alternative methods for raising their children. Those parents who used physical punishment felt frustration as they now lacked methods to raise their children while the parents were afraid of losing them as a legal consequence of physical punishment. Some of the parents felt that it was difficult to maintain respect and authority among their children. The parents could also feel that their methods of bringing up their children were being questioned by the schools. Since Swedish law assigns a duty to teachers to report to the authorities when physical punishment is used, the teachers were put in a difficult situation with the parents. This situation was characterized by suspicion and tension between the parents and the school. Also, Garis describes a discrepancy between schools in different countries. Garis describes how the first generation of Assyrians/Syriacs, parents as well as pupils, experienced a difference between the educational system in Sweden and the educational system in Turkey, where the former system gave greater independence to the pupils and more room for individual development. The teacher in Sweden had a less authoritative role compared to teachers in Turkey.

Freyne-Lindhagen (1997) conducted a grounded-theory study that was focused on Assyrian/Syriac (the author uses the term Swedish term *syrian* or *syrianska*) womens' experience and interaction with Swedish society. More specifically, the study was focused on identity, cultural encounters and Assyrian/Syriac organizations in the city of Örebro. Freyne-Lindhagen employed interviews and observations as research methods. Seven interviews were conducted with the Assyrian/Syriac women while also using interviews with key

persons. Based on the results of the study, Freyne-Lindhagen argues that Assyrian/Syriac women in different generations undergo a change in their identity, especially when it comes to their relationship to their families, their religion and their roles within the culture. Furthermore, the author states that the lives of the women revolve around religion as a system of belief and the church as an ethnic arena. Freyne-Lindhagen states that her observations indicate a process of change where the women are traditionalists and innovators where they create a multitude of strategies in relation to the church and the Swedish society (p. 225).

Woźmak-Bobińska (2019) aimed to explore whether migration affected the bonds between family generations of Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden. The researcher set out to explore the experiences and attitudes toward intergenerational relationships as well as the experiences, obligations and behaviors toward both younger and older family generations. In order to achieve this, the researcher based her analysis on a survey among Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden (n= 224; mean age 30.5 yrs) and semi-structured interviews (n=40). The study concluded that there was a lack of intergenerational conflict among Assyrian/Syriac families due to migration and changing values and attitudes between generations. Family members of said families tended to buy flats in the same neighborhood as other family members; they often visited each other; and celebrated weddings and funerals together. However, according to Woźmak-Bobińska, the existing ambivalence between generations among Assyrians/Syriacs is largely due to the fear of assimilation that is present in the older generations. This fear revolved around a loss of a cultural identity, language, traditions and religion. The ambivalence was prevalent when a younger Assyrian/Syriac was marrying or dating someone outside the community. However, younger generations create complex and hybrid identities (e.g., combinations of Swedish and Assyrian/Syriac identifications) which, according to the researcher, move beyond the dichotomy of assimilation or resistance. Here, education has been a vital part in enabling this process.

In an earlier study, Woźniak-Bobińska (2018) also studied the role of weddings rituals for reinforcing a communal identity among Assyrians/Syriacs. She analyzed video-tapes of Assyrian/Syriac weddings in Sweden and conducted 40 semi-structured interviews with Assyrian/Syriacs in Stockholm and Södertälje where she asked the interviewees about marriage rituals among other topics. In her article, the researcher argues that marriage helps Assyrians/Syriacs to maintain boundaries between themselves and Swedes. This is partly achieved by young Assyrians/Syriacs marrying within the community, which is also preferred by their families. Furthermore, the differentiation is maintained religiously where the actual wedding rituals use the Syriac-Orthodox liturgy, which is different from the Swedish protestant liturgy. There are also social differences, according to the author, where certain traditions, un-

known to Swedes, and aesthetics accompany these rituals. However, the researcher also points out that these wedding rituals are being reinvented through an adaptation to Swedish society, where stag and hen parties, honeymoons and even speeches from what is referred to as Swedish wedding parties are used. The families of young couples getting married influence the procedure leading up to the wedding ceremony and the actual ceremony itself. According to the researcher, the older generation, borrowing a term from Giddens (in Beck et al., 1994), acts as guardians of tradition. Although the meaning of this role has changed during Assyrians/Syriacs' existence in Sweden, the parents still have a consultative role.

To summarize this section of the chapter, the previous research that I brought up has highlighted that the family among Assyrians/Syriacs seems to influence how individual, usually younger, Assyrians/Syriacs approach and decide on their cultural heritage. At the same time, there seems to be some room for navigation for how these individual approach said heritage while balancing their roles within their families and the responsibilities that come with these roles. Also, fear of losing a heritage and a felt responsibility seems to be present among younger generations of Assyrians/Syriacs.

The 'Name' Conflict

One of the issues related to identity that has arisen within the group in Sweden is the one referred to as the Name Conflict (*Namnkonflikten*). This issue clearly illustrates that the Assyrian/Syriac is engaged in a negotiation of their identity as a group. I will here provide an illustration of what arguments there are in this conflict as some of these can be seen in my empirical material. As such, this illustration will not be a comprehensive overview of how this conflict came about. In 1976, the Assyrian Society in Sweden was split and *Syrianska föreningen* (eng, the Syriac Society) was established. Rommel (2011) states that this marked the beginning of the so-called name conflict (*namnkonflikten* in Swedish) in the community regarding whether the group would refer to themselves as Assyrians or Syriacs (Syrianer). Several parallel institutions have since been created, e.g., national youth organizations and two football teams (Assyriska FF and Syrianska FC, see Andersson, 2009; and Rommel, 2011). Several Assyrians/Syriacs found it difficult to accept being called Assyrians (Assyrier) which, according to Rommel was a name used primarily by a secular elite within the diaspora of Assyrians/Syriacs and the Swedish authorities. The term Assyrians was a challenge, or problematic according to critics, mainly for two reasons. First, it referred back to the historical Assyrian empire and second, the label was believed to neglect the Christian Suryoye traditions that related to the Syriac Orthodox Church. Rommel argues that one aspect of the name conflict is the disagreement among Assyrians/Syriacs about how to recount the history of the Suryoyo. For the Syriacs (syrianer),

emphasizing that Suryoyo is an Aramaic language, that the history of the people is primarily the history of the Syriac Orthodox Church was a way to maintain the Aramean cultural heritage during the centuries of Muslim rule in the Middle East. Assyrians, in contrast, refer to the time of the Assyrian kingdom as being the golden age of Suryoyo. The role of Christianity is viewed by the Assyrians as a dividing one, where it is believed that the church split the previously united Assyrians into four smaller religious communities. Similarly, Cetrez (2005) states that the *Assyrian* label is used by those who wish to bring different groups from the Mesopotamian cultures together. These groups included adherents of different churches as well as, in some cases, non-Christian groups. In general, the use of the label Assyrian has an ethno-national connotation. In Sweden it is mainly the followers of the Syriac-Orthodox church and the followers of the Assyrian Orthodox and Catholics churches that use the label Assyrian. The label *Aramean* is used to mark the historical origin of believers adhering to the Syriac Orthodox Church in contrast to the Assyrian origin. As with the Assyrian label, the Aramean label has an ethnic-national connotation but, in contrast with the aforementioned label, the Aramean label is limited to followers of Christian traditions. *Suroyo* (*Suroye* in plural) is another label that is used in the Syriac language (Cetrez, 2005). The label denotes an ethnic and a religious belonging. A similar term is *Suryoyo*, or *Suryoye* in plural, which has the same meaning. A term that is constructed in the Swedish language is the term *Syrian*, or *Syrianer* in the plural. This term is used by Syriac Orthodox believers who wish to distance themselves from those that use the Assyrian label. Yet another term is *Syriac*. This label is the English term for the followers of the Syriac Orthodox Church. Cetrez also notes that there is an increasing tendency to combine different labels. Cetrez highlights that some of the labels have been used before the group's emigration from the Middle East but that the differentiation of the labels has intensified after the emigration. A reason for the increased intensity of the differentiation, according to Cetrez, may be the process of secularization in Western countries. The process of secularization created a strict differentiation between the private (religion) and the public (kinship), leading to the separation of religion and kinship. According to Deniz (2001) the main issue consists of how the group describes, in a process of modernization, their pre-Christian heritage, where the choice is between a link to Assyrian ancestors or to Aramean ones.

Religion

I will now turn to illustrating what previous research has concluded regarding religion among Assyrians/Syriacs. This will be primarily from a functional perspective where I describe the function of religion according to previously conducted studies.

The Syriac-Orthodox Church

I begin by providing a short description of what practices and holidays are celebrated within the Syriac-Orthodox Church as several of the participating informants in this study indicated that they went to the church for Mass and other activities. While some of the informants attended other churches (e.g., Assyrian Church of the East, Chaldean Catholic Church), I limit this section to the Syriac-Orthodox Church as it is the largest church among Assyrians/Syriacs in Södertälje. I will not delve into the history of the church. There are two Syriac-Orthodox archdioceses in Södertälje, i.e., S:t Jacob and S:t Afrem. The latter is located in the district of Geneta (Arentzen, 2015, p. 345). The religious life in the Syriac-Orthodox Church includes celebrating Christian holidays such as Christmas, Easter, and so on, but it also includes six large Maria-holidays that are divided equally during spring and autumn. Fast is held every Wednesday and Friday as well as a larger fast for every season of the year. There is also the Nineve-fast which is held three days from the ten months before Easter in order to fast in memory of Jonah's work in Nineve. There is a strong choir tradition where female choirs existed as early as during the late antiquity. Regarding youth organizations, Arentzen (p. 351) states that youth from organizations such as SOKU⁹ and SOUF¹⁰ travel to Tur Abdin in Southeast Turkey as tourists and visit their ancestral home towns. For the Syriac-Orthodox Church in particular (pp. 108-114), it is believed that the liturgical language and the church itself has a direct link, historically and culturally, with early Christianity. To be active in the Church is a way for Assyrians/Syriacs to be in contact with their culture, according to Arentzen. As such, the church becomes something much more than a place for religious experiences as the church, according to Arentzen, has helped Assyrians/Syriacs to find their home in countries such as Sweden.

The role of religion

Cetrez (2011) (in the field of Psychology of Religion) conducted a mixed-methods study with the intention of highlighting the role of religiosity in the process of acculturation among a sample of three generations of Assyrians/Syriacs (the author uses the term Assyrians) (n = 219, females 122, males 97; ages ranging from 19 to 88), living in a Swedish city. The results showed that generation rather than gender indicates a difference in measures of religiosity. Furthermore, the results also showed that there was a significant difference¹¹ between the first generation (elderly people) and other generations

⁹ Syrisk Ortodoxa Kyrkans Ungdomsförbund

¹⁰ Syrisk Ortodoxa Ungdomsförbundet

¹¹ A significant difference ($p = 0.001$) was indicated between the first generation and the other generations on the mean score of *feeling religious*. First generations scored a mean value of 3.70 (SD = 0.50) in comparison to the second which presented a mean score of 2.94 (SD = 0.83) while the third generation had a mean score of 2.96 (SD = 0.71).

(adult and youth) on the mean score of feeling religious, where the first generation felt the most religious. The first generation also differed significantly¹² in relation to the other generations regarding mean scores for going to church, where the first generation reported the greatest frequency in visiting church. Comparisons between generations about the degree of religious fasting showed that among all the generations the first generation engaged the most in religious fasting. This was indicated to be a significant difference¹³ in relation to the second generation but not in relation to the third. There was a significant difference¹⁴ among males and females where females scored higher on fasting than males. In the qualitative phase, the conducted interviews were analyzed by a template analysis, guided by elaborated themes, or categories, gained from the theoretical approach of acculturation that was applied in the study. Those themes were: religious values and practices; systems of meaning; cultural rituals and symbols; and significant others. 12 participants from the third generation, 6 females and 6 males (mean age 20.2), were interviewed. These 12 participants were chosen because of their strong scores on ethnic and religious affiliation. The majority of the interviewed participants showed that religion had been a positive part of their childhood. Apparently, there was a close link between religion and culture at home. Significant others, e.g., family, friends, and priests, had a positive influence on the participants' religiosity. However, there appeared to be issues of trust among the participants toward the Syriac Orthodox Church, in which 11 interview participants were members. With the help of the applied interviews, the researcher explored the meaning systems of the participants. Apparently, in adulthood, other systems of meaning have become a central part while the religious meaning system has declined. Some of the individuals, however, left the religious meaning system without replacing it, thus leading to, along with acculturative stress, serious health concerns.

Religion and cultural identification

In her dissertation, Oshana (in the field of research methodology) (2004) conducted a mixed-methods study where the goal was to explore the cultural identification, linguistic competence, and religious participation and how these

¹² A significant difference ($p = 0.001$) was indicated between the first generation and the other generations regarding mean scores for *going to church*. The first generation scored a mean score of 3.53 (SD = 0.64) and the second generation had a mean score of 2.83 (SD = 0.80) while the third generation presented a mean score of 2.61 (SD = 0.87).

¹³ A significant difference ($p = 0.005$) was indicated between the first and the second generation but not in relation to the third generation in regard to *degree of religious fasting*. The second generation provided a mean score of 2.4 (SD = 1.10). The first generation scored a mean score of 3.39 (SD = 1.04) and the third generation scored a mean score 2.54 (SD = 0.98).

¹⁴ A significant difference ($p = 0.005$) was indicated among males and females in *degree of religious fasting* where females scored a mean score of 2.90 (SD = 1.03) in comparison to males who scored a mean score of 2.50 (SD = 1.12).

constructs influenced the adolescents' ego identity among a group of Assyrians/Syriacs (the author uses the term Assyrian-Americans) from Chicago. The quantitative phase used a sample of 101 first- and second-generation Assyrian/Syriacs: 37 males, 64 females; ages ranging from 15-20, mean age 17.1 years. Participants completed two self-report surveys: the Extended Objective Measure of Ego-Identity Status (EOM-EIS-2) and the Mediating Constructs of Identity Status (MC-IS). The results of the quantitative phase indicated a statistically significant relationship between cultural identification and identity status. Those participants who identified themselves more as American than Assyrian/Syriac showed a statistically significant association to moratorium, i.e., in crisis and/or exploration¹⁵, and diffusion, i.e., lack of commitments and/or exploration.¹⁶ No statistically significant relationship was found between identity status and linguistic competency and/or religious participation. The results from the EOM-EIS-2 showed that about one third of the Assyrian/Syriac adolescents had undergone little or no exploration of alternatives to occupational, religious, political and philosophical life-styles, values, goals, and standards. Rather, they remained firmly committed to childhood-based values. A quarter of the adolescents were in a crisis, meaning they were unable to make commitments, or that already-existing commitments were vaguely formed. The remaining adolescents were in various stages of developing an ideological identity. Furthermore, ethnic heritage, as a social contextual variable, was found to influence identity development. The author concludes that this may be due to an attempt by the adolescent to balance two different cultures, i.e., Assyrian/Syriac and American. Moreover, according to the author, the results may indicate that the exploration of identity, interpersonally and ideologically, is not desirable for these Assyrian/Syriac adolescents since the ideological and the social roles are defined according to the participants' ethnicity. Commitments without exploration may nurture a greater social recognition within the Assyrian/Syriac community and impart a sense of well-being. The results from the MC-IS showed that the adolescents identified themselves as extremely Assyrian ($M=3.19$, $SD = .87$) and moderately American ($M=2.64$, $SD = .95$). For those adolescents who reported conflicts between the Assyrian/Syriac and American sides of their lives, most of the conflicts were situated around the adolescents' parents, and issues of dating or friendship with non-Assyrians. However, some of the conflicts were also due to physical appearance. The qualitative phase consisted of case studies with three adolescents, 2 females, ages 15 and 20; and 1 male, age 19. In-depth interviews were used with questions that were focused on family background, gender identity, immigration, language, culture, religion, friends, dating, and marriage. Data from the qualitative phase were analyzed through grounded theory. This meant coding for expressions of ideas that would reflect any of Marcia's (1966) four modes of reacting to identity crisis, and coding according to

¹⁵ ($r = -.24$, $p = .008$, $n = 97$)

¹⁶ ($r = -.18$, $p = .035$, $n = 98$)

emerging patterns from factors of linguistic competence, religious participation, and cultural identification. The results from the qualitative phase showed that language maintenance and religious participation were important to the adolescents' ego identity by enabling the participants to develop relationships with friends and to experience a sense of community when engaging in religious practices at church.

The studies in this section emphasized that religion in the form of practices has a role in relation to the identity of Assyrians/Syriacs. This role however can vary between generations of Assyrians/Syriacs where younger members might have a different relation to religion than older members due to experiencing other circumstances in their lives by for example attending higher education in their host countries where the task of balancing several cultures becomes necessary

Persecutions and adaptations

This section sheds some light on which historical events still remain relevant among Assyrians/Syriacs and how members of the group have adapted to new social environments as a result of migration. I have mentioned in previous sections that Assyrians/Syriacs have lived as a minority in various countries for some time. This has generated particular experiences in relation to other minority and majority groups that they have lived with side by side. Persecution is one such experience that has had, and still has, an influence on Assyrians/Syriacs. Usually this type of experience often refers to the Year of the Sword, or Sayfo, that the group experienced in 1915. Sayfo took place during the late Ottoman Empire and it was focused on Christian minorities, e.g., Assyrians/Syriacs, Armenians and Greeks (Guant et al., 2017; Travis, 2018). In his study, Cetrez (2017) conducted interviews among thirty individuals who had heard stories about Sayfo from their parents and from older generations. The results show that the self-image of the individuals is characterized by a victim mentality and that the individuals themselves have been treated unfairly. The results also showed that fear and distrust are two central characteristics among the individuals when they describe their life situation in the light of Sayfo and the stories that have been transferred between generations. The fear is often expressed in terms of anxiety that history will repeat itself and that there is a risk of another genocide.

Furthermore in regard to adaptation, the Assyrians/Syriacs interviewed by Atto (2011) conceptualize Sweden as heaven. It is a concept that reflects the positive aspects of the Swedish society as a result of a liberal Swedish policy regarding immigration and the achievements of the Assyrian/Syriac community. "Sweden as heaven" emphasizes the facilities that are provided; the experienced freedom; and the stability. According to Atto, the Assyrians/Syriacs

compare their achievements to other immigrant groups in Sweden. The elite within the group ascribe the success of the Assyrian/Syriac group to their hard work and their positive and open attitude toward Swedish society. In addition, the historical experience of living as a minority and the development of a collective way of life as a community are believed to have helped them in their settlement in Sweden. There is a belief in the community, according to Atto, that they have integrated well. Here, Atto explains that being integrated, according to the group, refers to adaptation, or acculturation. Acculturation, as the modification of one culture as the result of being in contact with another culture, has been a dominant feature in how Assyrians/Syriacs have adapted in Sweden. In contrast to assimilation, this adaptation is based on the idea that it is possible to maintain a specific distinct identity while at the same time functioning well in Swedish society. Traditions, it is argued by Atto, are believed by the group to have helped them maintain a way of life that is in accordance with what they find important in their culture. Representatives of the group or concerned parents attempt to promote an idea of living by the best traditions of both the Assyrian/Syriac and the Swedish culture while also distancing themselves from negative parts of both cultures. As such, there seems to be, according to Atto, a belief from specific parts of the group that it is possible to negotiate culture as a rational process: “to capture and manage to one’s own satisfaction” (p. 245). One example of this is where elite members of the group took active participation in Swedish national holidays such as Midsummer (Midsommar) and Santa Lucia. Accordingly, Santa Lucia festivities have begun to be organized in several Syriac Orthodox Churches.

Deniz (2001) (in the area of sociology) also investigated Assyrians/Syriacs (the author uses the term *assyrier* in Swedish), who had immigrated to Sweden and adapted to a new context while, in the process, maintaining and transforming their identity. Deniz did this by constructing a theoretical model that integrated different concepts of ethnic identity. Two assumptions underlined the theoretical model: 1) ethnic identity was maintained and transformed by human agents; and 2) the process of maintaining and transforming took place in specific historical and social conditions. These conditions both helped and restrained the processes. Deniz directed the focus toward the following discourses: 1) the myth of ethnic election; 2) ethnohistory; and 3) principles for selective cultural borrowing. The following social practices were also investigated: 1) practices embodied in social organizations; 2) use of unique language; 3) ritual performances; 4) geographical and social segregation; 5) endogamy; 6) the structure of occupations; 7) economic status; and 8) the organization of clubs. By utilizing biographical data, interviews with individuals from two generations, participant observation, and analysis of written material, the results showed that ethno-religious identities in the Middle-East were transformed to a more ethno-national-based identity. The migration to Sweden stressed and deepened this process of transformation.

The research in this section provides examples of how Assyrians/Syriacs adapt to circumstances in their new home countries. The studies also illustrate that this adaptation is done in accordance with experiences of persecution and local conditions of existence that were experienced before and during migration. These experiences seem to still be present among the group members.

Language

Language among Assyrians/Syriacs has been identified by previous research (e.g., Magnusson & Stroud, 2012) as an ability for providing an identity. I start this section by presenting the languages that are spoken within the group. Atto (2011) states that Assyrians/Syriacs (Syriacs) are often bi-lingual, which in turn reflects the mix of backgrounds within the group. Assyrians/Syriacs speak Suryoyo depending on their language competence (see also Miller, 2019, for a discussion regarding the language terms Aramaic, Suryoyo, Turoyo and Surayt, among others), which they see as their mother tongue, and, depending on their area of emigration, they also speak languages such Arabic, Turkish, and/or Kurdish. In addition to these languages, they also speak newly acquired languages in the diaspora, e.g., Swedish. The liturgical language, however, has continued to be Syriac with some congregations consisting mainly of people who were raised with Arabic, Turkish or Kurdish, thus meaning that the sermons as well as parts of the liturgy are in one of these languages as well. Syriac is also considered to be the national language of the group, according to Atto. Furthermore, the liturgical language of the Syriac-Orthodox church is perceived to be a dialect of the language that Jesus spoke (Arentzen, 2015, p. 346).

Magnusson and Stroud (2012) (in the area of linguistics) conducted a study among an Assyrian/Syriac (the authors use the term Assyrian-Syrian) group in Sweden by using narratives that were collected by semi-structured interviews and participant observations from a previous longitudinal study initiated in 2003. The study of Magnusson and Stroud suggested that highly fluent multi-lingual individuals provide strategic data on notions regarding native-likeness and near-native-likeness that are important to understand in relation to the acquisition and the use of language. The narrative accounts of the Assyrian/Syriac group were analyzed regarding the metalinguistic reflexivity in situations when Assyrians/Syriacs were classified as nonstandard speakers, i.e., near-natives or learners. The authors suggest that the judgments of native-likeness were accomplished in an interactional manner, i.e., the categorizations were made on the basis of certain linguistic features relative to certain linguistic markets. Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden are historically highly multi-lingual, encompassing different oral languages for use at home and for immediate socialization. The languages that the population is able to use are Suryoyo, Turkish, Arabic, and Swedish. According to the authors, the group

engages in multilingual practices, such as speaking differently depending on whom they are speaking with, i.e., Swedes and immigrants. As an example, the authors described how an Assyrian/Syriac at work switched between a more professional version of Swedish when talking to native Swedes and a version that applied more slang when talking to immigrants. The authors described how the majority population of Swedes perceived members, especially young Assyrian/Syriac, usually stereotyped and stigmatized due to reasons of ethnic and linguistic nature. The authors concluded that language, i.e., articulation and talking, is a means of providing an identity. Those who used correct Swedish were constructed as Swedes while those who were not able, or who did not use this version, were constructed with other social meanings such as *blatte* (a sometimes offensive term in Swedish that refers to a person perceived to have a different ethnic background than the majority population in a society).

Previous research has also highlighted the concern of members of the Assyrian/Syriac group toward maintaining and adequately learning a language throughout generations. For example, Parszyk (2002) (within the field of pedagogy) conducted a longitudinal qualitative study case of eight Assyrians/Syriacs. The focus of this study was, among other issues, the language competence and education of the informants. Parzyk followed the group through kindergarten and elementary school. In this study, Parzsyk described an uneasiness among Assyrian/Syriac families in Södertälje regarding the children's future in a segregated society. This uneasiness was also present within the church, according to Parzsyk. The congregation had been worried about the educational situation of the Assyrian/Syriac children. There was a wish for a school from the families and the congregation where the possibilities for the children to be integrated into society would increase. The dilemma of the school seemed to be the difficulty of providing adequate teaching in the children's mother tongue. Parzyk stated that the process of learning a language also involved a process of learning norms, values and traditions of a particular group. Furthermore, the process of developing a language had to do with the social situation where practical and attitudinal reasons can limit the learning of a language. Parzyk related this notion of language to her study that revealed that her informants had seldom interacted with Swedish peers and had seldom visited these peers at their homes.

Miller (2019), in the discipline of anthropology, used Bakhtin's theoretical concept of *chronotope* to describe the temporal and geographical symbolism of the linguistic culture of Assyrians/Syriacs (Miller refers to the group as Syrian Orthodox or Suryoye). Accordingly, there are various conflicting worldviews regarding the origin of Assyrians/Syriacs and the correct or appropriate term for their language. Miller refers to the language Suryoyo (Suryoyo Aramaic, including both Turoyo and Kthobonoyo accordingly) as a *chronotopic trail* of homelands. This goes from ancient Mesopotamia to

Södertälje in Sweden. I find this conclusion valuable as it points to the perceived importance of the language for an identification as a group and the complex inherent meaning that is assigned to the language and debated about. Miller also describes the fear that is present within the community of losing the language. This fear revolved around the youth of Assyrian/Syriacs not being able to actively maintain the language.

Based on the studies that I have reviewed in this section, language among Assyrians/Syriacs holds an important role and meaning which in turn emphasizes a maintenance of the language in order for it to be passed on through the generations. Language also helps Assyrians/Syriacs to adapt to new situations and circumstances where language competences can provide them with a means to an identity.

Assyrians/Syriacs and social environments in Södertälje

In this part of the chapter, I turn my attention to Assyrians/Syriacs and some of the social environments that are in Södertälje. More specifically, this section focuses on schools in Södertälje and the criticism that has been directed toward them as school is a primary environment for the informants in the current study. I then turn toward what previous research has concluded regarding how Assyrians/Syriacs have established a new home for themselves in Södertälje and what characterizes these established social environments.

Schools in Södertälje

Before the time period of this study, the schools in Södertälje had been criticized by the Swedish School Inspectorate (2011-05-04). The critique concerned inadequate teaching, unacceptable working conditions at several schools and a lack of a sense of security. The Swedish School Inspectorate also mentions the numbers of refugees in Södertälje and that the refugees settled in mainly four areas in the city, meaning that the local schools in large refugee catchment areas in the city of Södertälje, were faced with the responsibility of creating an equal education for all pupils located within the city. Furthermore, the Swedish School Inspectorate emphasized that language needed to be put in context in order for the pupils to be able to create meaning and understanding. The inspectorate argued that language development needed to permeate all parts of the education. While several of these issues have been dealt with by the local authorities, other points of criticism were raised (Skolinspektionen, 2015). Elafskolan started in 2014 with no complaints but, with time, the Swedish School Inspectorate highlighted several areas that had received criticism from the authority (Skolinspektionen, 2016, 2018a, 2019). Despite this criticism of schools in Södertälje, it is difficult to

find studies that focus on the Assyrian/Syriac group in the city and their interaction with the educational systems (cf. Sharif, 2017).

Assyrians/Syriacs in Södertälje

Jennifer Mack (2017) provides a contextual description of Assyrians/Syriacs in Södertälje (Mack uses the term Syriac(s) when referring to the group). The Syriac-Orthodox Church in Geneta (a city district of Södertälje), St Afrem, was finished in 1983. This event came to initiate a change of events that has radically changed the district of Södertälje, spatially and socially. In Geneta, where there was originally a plan for parks or common places, a Million Programme¹⁷ (miljonprogramspanering) there is now a large church, commercial stores, a football arena, places for exercise and other unplanned uses. This was not what was planned for Geneta. Instead, the building projects of the Assyrians/Syriacs have all been accomplished with official plans and building permits. This has gradually changed the physical form of Södertälje and Mack refers to it as a city building from the bottom-up. In Södertälje and Geneta, a new Assyrian/Syriac city has been built with official approval (though at times reluctantly).

By moving to a district that was located at the city borders, the Assyrians/Syriacs could develop a new social structure without drawing negative attention to themselves. Mack refers to Suryoyo SAT Television, the TV channel that broadcasts to 83 countries, as an example of this. Despite demands by Telge Bostäder (the municipal company that owns the plaza of Geneta and several apartment blocks in the district) to limit the competition to stores located at the central plaza, new community centers and stores, e.g., furniture stores, catering, have opened in the area. Accordingly, these are owned by St Afrem and some Assyrian/Syriac families. Some of the furniture stores import the majority of their furniture from the Middle East. Stores that are focused on catering offer what is necessary for Assyrian/Syrian weddings and christenings. The football arena was built in 2005 when the local football team Assyriska FF reached the allsvenskan (Swedish premier league in football). Mack states that, at that time, football fans would be greeted by a priest outside of St Afrem or by elderly women who sat at picnic tables outside their houses, while there were celebrations in the area after the matches played in the arena. Mack states that Geneta is no longer a district on the borders of Södertälje, it is the center of an Assyrian/Syriac/Swedish city.

At the beginning of the 1980s, the Assyrians/Syriacs in Södertälje had become more established with their own companies, children and an economic and

¹⁷ This is a term referring to various political policies regarding housing in Sweden during the 1960s-1970s. During this period, several suburban areas were built in Swedish cities that in contemporary times are referred to as part of the Million Programme (Jörnmark, n.d.).

social life within the majority Swedish society. They started to leave the Million Programme areas and bought lots in Lina Hage (a city district of Södertälje). There they realized that they could have a house that could be custom-designed. Mack (2017) states that the Assyrians/Syriacs have used their wealth to re-create the suburb to something other than the homogenous Million Programme or areas with standardized individual houses that characterize other parts of Södertälje. Additionally, Mack argues that the group has had the opportunity to draw up boundaries around their neighborhood with the spatial logic of closeness that they brought with them when they migrated to Sweden. Mack explains this by referring to when Assyrians/Syriacs were living as a minority in the south-east of Turkey with their own villages, as a survival strategy and as a social hub for the family and relatives. In Lina Hage, they were able to recreate the sense of security that they had from the villages. According to Mack, the inhabitants describe how their houses have created a deeper emotional and physical bond to Sweden. This settler society, through its churches and community centers and using limestone from Turkey for the houses in Lina Hage, has demonstrated the intention of settling. Mack states that if Sweden's goals are to build in accordance with equality and harmony, then Lina Hage could be considered to be extreme segregation. However, as Mack argues, those who live there are not recently arrived refugees. The inhabitants have made a fully intentional journey through social classes that is clearly expressed in Lina Hage. To illustrate this change is important to Assyrians/Syriacs as it expresses the wish to live together with other Assyrians/Syriacs, which in turn sends a clear message of economic success and social distinction. Mack states that the wager of the Assyrians/Syriacs was great when they migrated to Sweden. Without a home country or a passport, if they could not establish themselves in Sweden, they would have no nation-state to return to. The current situation in Syria and Iraq makes the prospect of return seem more and more impossible. They have therefore demonstrated that Assyrians/Syriacs are prepared to invest in a future in Sweden. Their created spaces are not temporary but rather part of a long-term future. The Assyrians/Syriacs are creating new symbolic buildings (churches, houses for living, banqueting halls, community centers, schools and malls) in places that were not meant as social spaces. These building projects, however, have not been met without resistance. There were attempts to stop the church of St Afrem being built in the 1980s, much like the protests against the building of mosques in other cities in Sweden and in Europe. A more recent example was the protest from majority Swedes when the Assyrian elementary school Elafskolan opened in a renovated building in the central part of Södertälje in 2014. The chairmen of the municipality at the time was, according to Mack, critical about a private school that, it was believed, would strengthen the segregation.

Cetrez (2005) states that one pattern of living among the Assyrians/Syriacs (Cetrez uses the term *Suroyo*) in Södertälje is to live close to relatives, the ethnic association and the church. Atto (2011, pp. 234-247) describes several

elements of the Assyrian/Syriac society (*knushyo Suryoyo*¹⁸) in Södertälje. Södertälje is starting to be called New Midyad (after a town in Turkey where several Assyrian/Syrian families have their origin). Assyrians/Syriacs from other villages in Tur ‘Abdin (Turkey) moved to other towns in Sweden, e.g., Västerås, Örebro, Gothenburg and Märsta (a suburb of Stockholm). Relatives that had recently arrived in Sweden would settle where other family members had already settled. Several Assyrians/Syriacs from Syria and Lebanon settled in the districts of Hovsjö and Geneta in Södertälje. Atto also states that in 2009, a large number of the inhabitants in these districts were refugees from Iraq while other Assyrians/Syriacs had moved to other districts in Södertälje or outside the city where they have bought houses. The *knushyo* in Södertälje during the 1970s had several advantages for the Assyrians/Syriacs who settled in the city. Besides meeting several people that they already knew from the towns and villages of Turkey and other countries, they also met other Assyrian/Syrians (Suryoye) from parts of the world that they had never before been in touch with. Atto states that a consequence of living as a collective has been that a form of social control has been kept intact. Accordingly, some Assyrians/Syriacs have decided to settle outside Södertälje to avoid this form of control. The social control which could be referred to as the collective image of the group is reflected on the individual members of the group. Atto explains this by referring to the fact that it was common, at least in the 1970s, among Assyrians/Syriacs to identify each other by asking from what village they originated or whose son or daughter one was. Asking the village of origin was particularly common among Assyrians/Syriacs from Tur ‘Abdin. Atto (2011) states that the Assyrian/Syriac society in Södertälje has been the framework from which members of the group have made use of the opportunities presented to them by the authorities in Sweden. Atto describes the collective way of life and the strong family connections as having assumed an educational function, where knowledge has been transferred and transformed. Through these processes, the community has developed as well as the group’s adaptation to the new societies where members of the group have settled. Through the satellite TV channels Suroyo TV and Suryoyo Sat, networks between Assyrians/Syriacs worldwide have been made possible.

Because of recent demographic changes in Södertälje, the city has developed different meanings for different groups (Atto, 2011). Accordingly, media and authorities refer to the city, or more specifically districts within the city, e.g., Hovsjö and Ronna, as segregated where the Assyrians/Syriacs living there are viewed as problematic. Assyrians/Syriacs themselves perceive their presence in these districts as being a part of a community. Atto provides examples of individuals who state that they feel at home with many Assyrians/Syriacs in the area. Atto states that the feeling of being integrated is different for the

¹⁸ In the glossary provided by Atto (2011, p. 518), *knushyo* refers to meeting, society and community.

people who live in districts like Ronna in comparison to others who live outside districts that are not populated by a majority of Assyrians/Syriacs. When the classification of segregated is used by the authorities, it is in a negative sense that implies a negative development in the group and in these districts. Atto refers to the 2005 incident in the district of Ronna, where police and inhabitants of the district clashed over what seemed to be a misunderstanding. The result of this incident, and the overwhelming police force deployed in the districts, was several weeks of debate regarding the ghettoization of Södertälje, as well as a negative image in Swedish media of Assyrians/Syriacs. According to Atto, in a report in 2005 following the incident in Ronna, the municipality of Södertälje presented a view that problematizes immigrants and Assyrians/Syriacs as being a burden on the city. The discourse employed by authorities regarding segregation as being problematic implies that immigrants should remain invisible and assimilate. If they do not, they are considered problematic. Atto also argues that the media has played an important role in voicing this discourse.

However, despite the various discourses of immigrants in Södertälje, a positive discourse has risen among Assyrians/Syriacs regarding their presence in the city. According to Atto (2011), the groups have come to perceive Södertälje as their new home, their New Midyad. Atto relates this to what the group developed in Syria, where those who migrated there from Turkey after Sayfo took pride in their accomplishments in the form of schools, cultural clubs, music, economy and a political organization ADO (Assyrian Democratic Organization). As such, Assyrians/Syriacs do not believe that living in high concentrations in certain districts of Södertälje as problematic, nor that this presents an obstacle to adapting and functioning well in Swedish society. Atto states that the solidarity that has been developed through the strength of the collective to their new space of settlement has helped to avoid isolation and feelings of not being at home because of living in a neighborhood with a majority that they did not perceive as belonging to. Living as an ethnic enclave with strong group ties between Assyrians/Syriacs in different parts of Europe has enabled an increased self-confidence and an upward mobility with a proactive position in society.

Atto (2011) states that the greatest achievement of the Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden has been the creation of a new home. This creation has been accompanied with an entrepreneurship that began with opening small businesses in the form of tailoring, catering firms and kiosks. Today, these businesses are being sold to other immigrant groups. These businesses often involved various family members. As such, it was possible for them to lower their costs through financial support of family members. Atto explains that the family network has also acted as a backup in any risks that were taken. In order to understand the characteristics of the entrepreneurship of the Assyrians/Syriacs, one could take a look at their experience of living as a minority in the Middle East. There,

the socio-political structure system did not, according to Atto, work in their favor. The entrepreneurial experience that was gained in Sweden as well as the increase in university graduates among the younger generations has generated more professional organizations and bigger businesses. Several Assyrians/Syriacs have also begun careers in politics in Sweden and have even been members of a Swedish government cabinet. When Atto had published her dissertation, several Assyrians/Syriacs had managed to become Members of Parliament in the 2010 elections, while other Assyrian/Syrian politicians were elected to the municipal and county councils. In Södertälje, there were also several Assyrian/Syriac members on the council. Atto states that the engagement in politics by Assyrian/Syriacs has made them more visible in Swedish politics while also enabling the members of the group to negotiate their socio-political rights in the Middle East independently of their clergy. The recognition of Sayfo by the Swedish parliament as a genocide could be argued to be seen as a milestone of the Assyrian/Syrian political engagement in Sweden.

Summary of Previous Research regarding Assyrians/Syriacs

In this chapter I have highlighted findings that previous research has considered important for the identity of Assyrians/Syriacs. These studies point out that the identity of Assyrians/Syriacs is complex, whatever it is defined as: ego-identity or a social identity; where it is constituted by various elements, e.g., language and religion, and set in relation to such groups as one's family and where one lives. Identity was however rarely considered among Assyrians/Syriacs younger than fifteen years of age. Thus, there exists a gap in previous research regarding how this particular age group approaches issues related to their identity. Furthermore, most of the studies that were reviewed applied a qualitative approach. A few of the reviewed studies had a quantitative approach where comparisons between subgroups of the Assyrian/Syriac group, e.g., generations and/or gender, were conducted. Fewer were studies that applied both a qualitative and a quantitative approach in so-called mixed-methods studies. It should also be noted that several of the studies that I brought up were focused on Assyrians/Syriacs in Södertälje. This is also the focus of my study. This sets a form of particularity to the results reviewed and also my study where the conclusions I arrive at needs to take this into consideration when I refer to Assyrians/Syriacs. The review I have conducted points toward the necessity of an exploration of how the informants engage with language, religion and the group within their social environments in order to more fully understand how younger Assyrians/Syriacs develop their identity. This will be my point of departure as I move on to the next chapter, where I describe the theoretical framework. As I summarize what previous research has concluded, I refer back to the headings that have structured this chapter.

Adaption to historical experiences and contemporary existences

It is difficult to find studies that focus on Assyrians/Syriacs and their interaction with the education systems and what consequences this interaction might have for their identity. As young adolescents spend a lot of time at school, this is worth exploring. Similarly, little research has been conducted on the importance of friends for identity among Assyrian/Syriac young adolescents. This also includes the possible impact for identity development of teasing and acts of discrimination. The sense of a historical loss among Assyrians/Syriacs and their experience of living as a religious minority (e.g., Sayfo, confiscation of land, property) (Atto, 2011; Cetrez, 2017; Gaunt, Atto, & Barthoma, 2017) are evoked through ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Syria where there are perceptions of Christianity and Christians being threatened. While most of the informants were born in Sweden, they may still have had parents or grandparents who experienced foreign educational systems abroad. As such, experiences of previous educational systems, such as those in Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran for example, have had an impact on how Assyrians/Syriacs relate to educational systems in Sweden. This, in turn, is tied into experiences of migrating, moving from one context to another where the sense of belonging related to the previous country of residence might still reside within the individual. Ideas of what constitutes a good education may be influenced by notions that were predominant in other countries where the Assyrians/Syriacs had lived. These experiences might not always be of a negative nature. The education received in these countries carried some quality that the Swedish educational system lacks.

Family and heritage

The aforementioned experiences of persecution are transmitted from generation to generation among Assyrians/Syriacs and could be a reason for being skeptical about majority groups, even though they have chosen migration to other countries (Cetrez, 2017). Issues regarding choices of integration and assimilation for Assyrians/Syriacs are set in relation to such historical experiences. I would instead emphasize that the informants and their experiences in this study will need to be approached with this notion that they can view themselves as a part of previous generations that have experienced events and situations that result in stability and change over time. The family of the informants presumably also affects the interaction between school and informants. For example, what attitudes the parents have toward a certain school and education might impact what school these young adolescents end up going to. Among Assyrians/Syriacs there is an awareness of trauma experienced by previous generations. This trauma has tended to generate a victim mentality and fear as well distrust toward other groups (Cetrez, 2017). Family roles and expectations related to these roles affect how Assyrians/Syriacs deal with vari-

ous issues in Swedish society (Sundvall, 2011). However, how young adolescents face and deal with these issues is less clear as the majority of the conducted research on these subjects has been focused on adult or young adult Assyrians/Syriacs.

Language

Language is referred to by previous research as a means to provide an identity (Magnusson & Stroud, 2012). This might be the reason why there is a concern among Assyrian/Syriac parents about maintaining and teaching their children a language (Parszyk, 2002). Furthermore, language affects the interaction with other people and use of different dialects of a language, e.g., Swedish, can affect how Assyrians/Syriacs are characterized (Magnusson & Stroud, 2012). Apart from being interrelated with identity, language is also described as having an effect on the ability to interact in certain instances in Swedish society (Sundvall, 2011). Negative connotations of mental health issues within a language made it difficult to communicate and verbalize experiences related to these issues. These aforementioned studies have primarily been focused on young adults and adults. Thus, it is less clear from previous research how younger Assyrians/Syriacs approach the issues of maintaining and transferring a language. Furthermore, it is unclear what characterizes a possible link between identity and language for the said group.

Religion

Religion, primarily as a practice such as attending church or engaging in Lent, is pointed out by previous research to be an integral part of the lives of Assyrians/Syriacs. Previous research has suggested that the degree of these practices is different between genders (Freyne-Lindhagen, 1997; Cetrez, 2011) and between generations (Cetrez, 2011). Though it is left unclear to what degree a similar difference or importance can be seen among younger Assyrians/Syriacs (e.g., young adolescents). As previous research has mainly focused on older age groups it is less clear how young adolescents among Assyrians/Syriacs approach religion in relation to their identity.

Chapter 3: The Theoretical Framework

Introduction

In this chapter, I will outline what theories I use to interpret my empirical material. How I operationalize the theories with my research methods are presented in Methods chapter. I start this chapter by presenting the theoretical framework and its included theories, and how I have adapted these theories to the current study. After this initial presentation, I will introduce the theories and concepts that make up the framework. I start with the concept of religion by expanding on the definition that I presented in the first chapter. This expansion revolves around a short discussion where I reflect on my definitions of these phenomena and their applicability in relation to the informants and their identity development. I then move to introduce and describe the theory identity development according to Erik H. Erikson (Erikson & Erikson, 2004) with a particular focus on identity. This section will also include further adaptations of the theory and the concept of the identity (Crocetti et al., 2010; Schwartz, 2001). The section ends with what I bring from the theory and how I adapt it to this study. What follows thereafter is a section that describes the theory regarding Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model. Here I focus on the various systems of the bio-ecological model. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the theories and theoretical adaptations as well as how I use the framework to operationalize my research questions.

The Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is a compilation of theories that I use as tools in order to explore the ways a group of Assyrian/Syriac young adolescents develop their identity. As I pointed out at the end of Chapter 2, the exploration of identity has to account for how the informants engage with language, religion and groups of people in their social environments. Identity has to be approached through both the intrapersonal and the interpersonal. Thus, I choose to combine the theory of identity development that is more focused on identity as an intrapersonal phenomenon with the theory of social identity and the bio-ecological model, which are more set on viewing identity as an interpersonal phenomenon. Together, these theories are my tools to interpret my empirical material. The combination of theories is also a result of me acknowledging

that each theory having been developed in different contexts and with populations other than the one I am focusing on. As such, no individual theory itself can provide an adequate interpretation of the informants' experiences.

The primary theory in this exploration is identity development. Secondary theories are the bio-ecological model and social identity. With the combination of theories in this framework, I am suggesting that identity development and identity with its various levels (personal and social) are situated in the systems of the bio-ecological model. This is similar to what Erikson suggested that identity development occurred in relation to a society's ethos. For example, the personal (identity processes) and social identity is affected by what happens at school, at home and at church (here understood as microsystems within the bio-ecological model). The interaction between pupil and teachers might affect the degree of commitment in the education domain. Furthermore, the social identity as an Assyrian/Syriac and as a Swede is approached in accordance with historical and contemporary experiences that the informants themselves or their relatives have experienced (Cetrez, 2017). Some of these experiences refer to Assyrians/Syriacs being perceived as being persecuted. As such, the family of the informants might emphasize the importance of being Christian: attending Church; learning and speaking a language. This can in turn lead to the pupil maintaining the search for significance that is religion by prioritizing a social identity as an Assyrian/Syriac, which is accompanied by a set of criteria that involves religion and language (Vedder & Virta, 2005).

The exploration of the ways the informants develop their identity is conducted in several steps. First, I start by exploring through the theory of identity development how the development of identity occurs in relation to religion, education and best friends. To do this, I use the concepts of identity maintenance and formation cycles that describe how individuals engage in processes of commitment, exploration and reconsideration of commitments in certain life domains during their identity development (Crocetti, 2017; Crocetti et al., 2010). This exploration is more focused on identity development as an intrapersonal process on a personal identity level. The three explored life domains, education, best friends and religion (referred to as the domain of religious faith in the Utrecht-Management of Identity Commitments Scale), are important to the informants for the following reasons. Education and best friends are domains where the informants are starting to become more independent in relation to their family (Broberg et al., 2015; Brown & Chu, 2012; Lannegrand-Willems & Bosma, 2006). The domain of education refers to the school that they are enrolled in and what they learn there. As this is a major task for their age, i.e., attending elementary school and completing their grades, education is an important domain to investigate (Erikson & Erikson, 2004). The domain of best friends refers to what commitments the pupil has in relation to his or her best friends. It is a central task for this age group to

develop meaningful social bonds outside the family in order to more independently continue into late adolescence and adulthood (Erikson & Erikson, 2004; Reis & Youniss, 2004; Yip et al., 2010). The domain of religious faith is an operationalization of how I define religion. However, religion in this study is not confined to the domain of religious faith. Religion, in relation to identity, as a search for significance is located both on the social identity level and the personal identity level. This is because religion involve beliefs, values and goals that the individual can have; a personal character that sets him or her apart from others. At the same time, religion can involve an identification with a group as well as beliefs, values and practices that the individual shares with others. This could for example include being a part of a religious tradition, such as Christianity; and identifying oneself as a Christian.

As such, in the second step, I turn to exploring in what ways language and religion act as criteria for social identities (Tajfel, 2010). Here my focus on the exploration of identity turns more toward an interpersonal phenomenon. I use here the theory of social identity to explore how languages used by the informants act in setting criteria for certain social identities. I use the concepts of in-group (i.e., the group that one believes oneself to belong to) and out-group (i.e., other groups than the in-group) to refer to those groups that the informants say they do belong to and those they do not, as well as the criteria they and others set up for these groups.

In each step, I also explore in what way systems of development might influence the social identities the informants are assigned by others or are assigned by themselves, and what identity cycles are encouraged by their social environments. Social environments refer to places (e.g., church, home, school) and groups of people (e.g., teachers, family/parents, friends) that interact with the informants. In order to interpret the influence of groups and places that make the social environments that are of importance to the informants, I will mainly be focusing on micro- and mesosystems within the bio-ecological model. As I referred to in Chapter 1, regarding culture, I find it difficult to use the concept as a tool to directly explore the identity of the informants. Instead, I use the bio-ecological model in order to be more specific in how the social environments affect the identity development of the informants. I will nonetheless discuss culture in Chapter 8 in relation to my findings. For now, however, I assume theoretically, that culture as a worldview (Matsumoto, 2006) influences, and is influenced by, the construction of the self in all of the systems in the bio-ecological model, from the pupil to the macro-system. As such, it is a part of the social identity of the pupil, which is assigned by others or him- or herself. Cultural practices (ibid) are adaptations made by the informants to the various systems that they are a part of and interacting with directly as well as indirectly. Following that social identity is linked to cultural practices means, accordingly, that the identity enables identifications with specific aspects of the various systems.

Religion

I define religion as a search for significance that takes place in a context of established institutions and traditions that are designed to facilitate spirituality (Pargament, et al., 2013). Thus, in this study, I explore how the informants maintain and form their identity in relation to this search for significance. Religion, as such, becomes a source that can provide significance to the informants by them forming and maintaining identity within this life domain. What differentiates religion, especially forms of more traditional religion, from the other domains in identity development is that the search for significance occurs within established institutions and traditions that are designed to facilitate spirituality. Spirituality is defined as the search for the sacred. Sacred refers to concepts of God and higher powers as well as other aspects of life that are perceived to be manifestations of the divine or that are imbued with divine-like qualities. Such qualities are transcendence, immanence, boundlessness and ultimacy (Pargament, et al., 2013).

Religion among Assyrians/Syriacs is at times described as a common denominator where the church has acted as a representative and meeting place for the group (e.g., Cetrez, 2005; Atto, 2011). Thus, it is fruitful to approach it as a relational phenomenon that stands in relation to someone else, for example their parents. This is not to say that the informants are unfinished products, or adults in the making (see critique against developmental psychology in, for example, Greene & Hogan, 2005). Instead, I want to emphasize that the informants are interacting with several persons that assert an influence on how they engage with their religion. The parents are in some way authorities to the informants, being adults who have a primary role in their upbringing (Erikson & Erikson, 2004). The parents have transferred this search for significance to their children (e.g., Hardy et al., 2011) by introducing them to rituals such as prayers or attending Mass or other celebrations or festivities, as well as reading to them stories from the Bible or sending the children to Sunday school. Because religion has been intertwined with what it means to be Assyrian/Syriac (e.g., Deniz, 2001), and with experiences of living as a religious minority that has been persecuted for religious reasons, adhering to those beliefs and that identification becomes important in order to maintain an Assyrian/Syriac identification throughout the family lineage. It turns into a responsibility to previous generations (Deniz & Perdikaris, 2000). The experiences of the informants are, however, presumably, different in relation to their parents, or other generations of Assyrians/Syriacs, regarding school, Södertälje, and so on. As such, how the parents might engage with religion might not be suited for the informants and their experiences, which is why there might be attempts by the informants to adapt this search for significance while still maintaining their religion and their identification as Christians.

With these issues in mind, I explore how the informants engage with their religion in two ways. In the questionnaires, I primarily explore religion through the religious faith domain as formulated by the Utrecht-Management of Identity Commitments Scale (U-MICS). Thus, I approach religion as a domain where identity development takes place. As I move on to the interviews, I ask the informants to elaborate on their scores on the U-MICS in this domain. This exploration in the interviews is, however, not limited to religious faith per se. Instead, the exploration includes other aspects of religion such as practices, beliefs, belongings and places.

Identity levels

My approach to identity development in this thesis draws its inspiration from Erikson and later adaptations of Erik H. Erikson's theory of identity development (e.g., Crocetti et al., 2010; Kroger, 2018; Schwartz, 2001). Similarly, I draw on the writings of Schwartz and other researchers (McLean & Syed, 2015; Schwartz, 2005; Schwartz et al., 2006) regarding the various levels of identity. The definitions of personal and social identity that Schwartz proposes draw inspiration from Erik H. Erikson (Erikson & Erikson, 2004) as well as Turner and Tajfel (Tajfel, 2010). In accordance with Schwartz, I define identity as the synthesis of personal, social and cultural self-conceptions. The identity-levels, it could be argued, correspond to how deeply they are embedded in an individual where the social identity is at a level that is more attuned with the social situations and contexts of which the individual is a part. The ego-identity should be understood as a function that ties together the various levels (Erikson & Erikson, 2004) rather than an identity that defines who a person is as an individual (personal identity) or what group he or she belongs to (social identity). While I will not use ego-identity as a tool, I will define it as it is important for understanding the identity levels.

At the most fundamental level, ego identity is postulated as ego synthesis and continuity of personal character. Ego-identity involves one's basic and fundamental beliefs. Sometimes these beliefs are unconscious and might involve intrapsychic conflicts that have been internalized from one's parents. Ego-identity is stated by Erikson to be consistent and resistant to change, as it is a composite of fundamental beliefs. At the second level, between the intersection of self and context, personal identity refers to a set of goals, values and beliefs that the individual shows to the world. The personal identity emphasizes the individual as someone particular set apart from others. At the third, i.e., contextual, level, social identity is viewed as a sense of a solidarity with a group's ideals. This is a consolidation of elements, e.g., language, religion, behaviors, practices, that have been included in the individual's sense of self from groups to which he or she belongs. Aspects of the self, such as native, or ethnic, language, country of origin and racial background would, according to

Schwartz (2001), come under the concept of social identity. Social identity indicates a subjective meaning that the individual assigns to a group membership, and the degree of solidarity that the individual feels toward a group (Schwartz in McLean & Syed, 2015). The social identity involves self-identified ideals, mores (customs and conventions of a group or community), and labels (Schwartz, Montgomery, et al., 2006). However, the social identity also involves the degree of an individual's identification with a group (i.e., the group that one believes oneself to belong to) and to distance oneself from out-groups (i.e., other groups than the in-group). Schwartz, Montgomery and Briones (2006) state that Erikson focused on the interface between person and context, while later theoretical developments of Eriksonian¹⁹ theories of identity have clarified that personal and social identity is developed through a negotiation between the individual and member of the social context. Erikson argued, according to the Schwartz et al., that in times of tremendous change, people tended to cling to ideas, preferences and fears that bolstered their sense of the uniqueness of their own group. When in contact with individuals from other groups, the need might arise to identify with the ideals of one's in-group in order to differentiate oneself at a group level. Schwartz, Montgomery and Briones (2006) argue that personal and social identity may in some cases be intertwined with each other. This occurs when aspects of the personal identity coincide with ideals of a particular social or cultural group that the individual belongs to.

Identity development

The task of developing an identity is a task of achieving continuity between childhood, adult life and the expectations on the individual brought about by society as well as by the individual him- or herself. Erik H. Erikson (Erikson & Erikson, 2004) stated that the process of developing an identity continued throughout the individual's entire life but that the process culminated during adolescence. Schwartz (2001) states that Erikson believed that children are separated from adolescents and adults by the presence of self-selected identity elements. As such, the end of childhood is marked by the consolidation of identity markers. The challenge of adolescence was to establish an identity where individuals would experience an identity crisis. This development followed an epigenetic principle, i.e., that the psychological development of the individual followed a predetermined pathway where the challenge of each stage was helped by successfully completing the challenges of previous stages. The interplay between the individual and other people, in particular friends and parents, are of importance for the development of an identity, which is also emphasized by the bio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner,

¹⁹ Theories of identity and identity development that are more or less influenced by how Erik H. Erikson conceptualized identity development.

1981). The developmental process is linked to the culture of a society or a group and the historical period of which the individual is a product.

Commitments, in-depth exploration and reconsideration of commitments

Marcia (1966) built upon Erikson's notion of the dimensions of exploration and commitment in identity development. Exploration can be defined as behavior focused on problem-solving behaviors aimed at gathering information about oneself and their environment in order to make a decision about a choice in life. Exploration is the process where the individual sorts through several alternatives. Commitments refer to goals, values and beliefs that the individual finds important. It is also the process of choosing one or more of the alternatives that are explored and following them. According to Schwartz (2001; 2005), Marcia argued that commitments could be seen as an adoption of ideals by the individual to imbue him or her with a sense of fidelity, or a feeling of purpose and continuity. In turn, this could alleviate the uncertainty and disorientation that might be experienced as a result of identity confusion. However, identity is believed to operate differently across the domains and within the domains which means, I believe, that processes of exploration and commitments has to be considered in relation to what domain they take place in.

The Utrecht-Management of Identity Commitments Scale (U-MICS) (Crocetti, Schwartz, Fermani & Meeus, 2010) measures identity development as a process. This measurement builds upon the theoretical workings of Erikson (Erikson & Erikson, 2004) and Marcia (Marcia, 1966). The instrument, U-MICS, measures two different types of components, or type of domains: *ideological* (domains such as education, and religious faith) and *interpersonal* (domains such as best friends). In this study, the following domains were measured: education and religious faith (within the ideological component) and best friends (within the interpersonal component). Furthermore, the instrument focuses on three processes: 1) commitment; 2) in-depth exploration; and 3) reconsideration of commitment in the domains. Commitments and exploration are similar to what Marcia proposed. The current commitments are stabilized through the process of reconsideration. If the current commitments are kept, they will, as a result, be developed through further exploration. However, if the commitment were determined to be unsatisfactory, they would be replaced by new commitments through the process of reconsideration.

Meeus (Crocetti et al., 2011, p. 9) assumes that individuals approach adolescence with a set of commitments in both the ideological and the interpersonal identity domains. As such, individuals can explore their present commitments in depth and decide whether the commitments match their goals and potentials. Crocetti (2017, p. 146) states that adolescents evaluate and question their

preliminary commitments in ideological and interpersonal identity domains based on their childhood identifications. Two cycles capture this dynamic. The identity formation cycle is constituted by the interaction between commitment and reconsideration of commitments. In the formation cycle, individuals compare their current commitments with alternatives and revise them if the commitments would be found to be not satisfying. The identity maintenance cycle is constituted by the interaction between commitment and in-depth exploration. Here, adolescents validate the commitments they hold at the current moment while they also reflect on their meaning, investing in them in order to maintain them and make sure that they fit their general talents and potentials. Should the exploration lead to uncertainty about the commitments, the adolescents may return to the aforementioned cycle of identity formation. Schwartz, Montgomery and Briones (2006) argued that some degree of identity confusion is adaptive, as a person with too much certainty about his or her identity may be closed-minded and rigid. An adaptive identity is in a continuous process of revision during the lifespan; it is not completed during adolescence.

The processes in identity development of commitments, exploration and reconsideration deserve some additional comments. The processes may vary in strength depending on the domain through which they are investigated. Some of the processes in certain domains could touch on sensitive subjects, such as the process of reconsidering commitment in religion when religion is important to a group that the individual belongs to. This highlights the possibility that the processes are influenced by the social environments that the individual is a part of, or what meaning is assigned to various domains and processes. Likewise, having strong commitments in a domain might also be a result of the social environment prioritizing such commitments. Thus, to certain groups, based on their ideals, specific processes in particular identity domains might be affected, based on what a larger group finds important to uphold. Accordingly, some of the processes of identity development might not be relevant for some individuals or groups. This relates to the earlier notion that the personal identity is located between the social and the personal where a domain can permeate both the personal and the social identity-level. As such, identity cannot be solely approached intra-personally but has to also include an inter-personal dimension. Thus, I move on to what previous research has concluded regarding identity development and minorities.

Identity development among minorities

I now turn my attention to what previous research has concluded regarding identity development and various minorities. This section provides an overview of what factors seem to influence and what characterizes the aforementioned processes of identity development of minorities. More specifically, I

highlight the role of parents and the interaction between various forms, or levels, of identity. Later, in Chapter 8, I use these conclusions to compare with my findings.

Oshana (2004) states in her dissertation that, for members of ethnic minorities, the process of developing an identity is more complicated in comparison to members of majority populations. Because exploration is one of the key processes of developing an identity, discrimination due to being ascribed, or by assigning oneself to, a different group membership than the majority can be an issue that may complicate the task of developing an identity, discouraging involvement with other groups and peers outside of the individual's in-group. Following Oshana's (2004) argument, experiencing discrimination might result in the informant in this study avoiding exploration of certain identity domains, i.e., reporting low scores in the exploration process. As such, any discrimination experienced might not only generate consequences for a Swedish or an Assyrian/Syriac identification but also for more general processes in different identity domains for the informants in this study. As referred to by Crocetti, Fermani, Pojaghi and Meeus (2011), adolescents with migrant backgrounds (who can be assigned a minority position in a society) might face additional difficulties in forming an identity in comparison to peers from majority groups. The U-MICS has been applied in several studies with both children and youth from different ethnic backgrounds (Crocetti et al., 2008, 2010, 2011; Crocetti, Schwartz, et al., 2012). This previous research has indicated that, depending on the background of the adolescent (e.g., migrant background), certain processes are stronger in the education and best friends' domain. For example, Crocetti, Fermani, Pojaghi and Meeus (2011) conducted a study that compared the identity formation using U-MICS among different groups of adolescents ($n=509$) from families that were Italian ($n=261$, mean age = 13.4), mixed ($n=100$, mean age 13.87) and migrant ($n=148$, mean age 13.7). The domains that were investigated in the study were education and friendship (best friend). Adolescents from migrant families indicated having higher levels of reconsideration of commitments ($m=2.87$) than their peers from the other families (mixed= 2.53 ; Italian= 2.54). Similarly, adolescents from migrant families were found to be represented in the searching moratorium identity status²⁰. Also, previous research on identity status has shown

²⁰ While I am not using identity statuses in this study, I will provide a short overview of what they entail. Identity statuses were from the start an operationalization by Marcia (1966) of Erikson's theory of identity development (Crocetti, Schwartz, Fermani, Klimstra & Meeus, 2012). By combining high and low levels of exploration and commitments four so called identity statuses could be derived. In short, these statuses were: achievement (strong commitments and strong exploration); foreclosure (strong commitments but low exploration); moratorium (strong exploration but low commitments); and diffusion (low exploration and low commitments). These identity statuses were expanded by adding an additional status through the addition of the process of reconsidering commitments (Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckz, and Meeus, 2008). This additional status was searching moratorium (high on all processes including reconsideration of commitments).

differences between adolescents belonging to ethnic minorities and the majority (Crocetti et al, 2008). In this case, where the research was conducted in the Netherlands, there was a difference between the groups where youth from the ethnic minorities were more inclined to be in the two moratorium statuses (moratorium, ethnic minorities vs. Dutch peers: 30.3% vs. 19.6%) (searching moratorium, ethnic minorities vs. Dutch peers: 20.7% vs. 7.1%) whereas the Dutch peers were more inclined toward early closure and diffusion (early closure, Dutch peers vs. ethnic minorities: 35.7% vs. 23.4%) (diffusion, Dutch peers vs. ethnic minorities: 28% vs. 13.5%). While these results are not by themselves addressing issues of potential discrimination, it seems as if the process of developing an identity, at least in the domains of education and best friends, is different for minority youth in comparison to their majority peers.

However, while minorities might face challenges in developing their identity, they might also be protected against difficulties in this process such as discrimination. Tatum (2004) states that ethnic minority youth seek out peers with the same ethnic background in the absence of peers with other ethnicities. This facilitates the development of a functional sense of self, and peers of a similar ethnic group become a part of this process. Discrimination, it is suggested, might be experienced less in groups that have strong racial or ethnic identities, as they are more likely to have peers with the same ethnic or racial background. In contrast to this, minorities with a strong ethnic identity might be more perceptive and react to discrimination as their ethnic identity provides a lens through which discrimination becomes more apparent. Previous research has also shown that spending more time with peers of the same ethnicity has been found to be predictive of ethnic identity (Phinney, Romero, Nava & Huang, 2001). Furthermore, parental socialization has been found to be associated with an increased ethnic language proficiency that in turn was related to higher levels of ethnic identity. As such, the behaviors of parents can have an indirect effect on adolescent ethnic identity through the maintenance of the use of ethnic language.

Crocetti, Rubini, and Meeus (2008) investigated the potential associations between processes of identity development and relationships between parent and youth as well as to self-concept measures among ethnic minorities. For example, Crocetti, Rubini, and Meeus presented the correlations between the processes of commitments, exploration and reconsideration and measures regarding self and personality, psychosocial problems and parent-adolescent relations among a group of ethnic minority adolescents. Among some of the correlations for the ethnic minority subsample was a positive, statistically significant correlation between commitment and self-concept clarity. Regarding psychosocial problems, the process of commitment was found to correlate negatively and statistically significantly with depression. For parent-adolescent measures, the process of reconsideration of commitments was found to correlate negatively and significantly with paternal trust. However, the authors

conclude that most of the differences between the subsamples in the study did not differ to any greater extent as they did not reach the level of small effect size (p. 218). Still, it is interesting to see the negative correlation between the process of reconsideration of commitments and paternal trust, as it might indicate that commitments that are reconsidered in certain domains might be associated with a decreased trust toward one's parents. This is especially so if the parents are associated with the commitments that are reconsidered.

Furthermore, regarding the role of parents for identity development, Sabatier (2008) examined the cultural identity of adolescents from five ethnic groups (n=365) in France. The research analyzed the influence on identity of socialization of peers, the perception of discrimination, aspects of parent-adolescent relationship and the perception by adolescents of their relationships with parents. The results of the study showed that adolescents' perception of their relationship with their parents, followed by parental enculturation and perceived discrimination, provided the highest explanation of variance in ethnic and national affirmations. More specifically, the perception among adolescents of family relationships acted as the main predictor of cultural identity. Similarly, attachment to the parental culture was a strong predictor of exploring and affirming ethnic identity.

While I believe that the social aspects of development of identity are necessary to take into consideration, and certain ethnic and racial identity models emphasize important issues (for a review of models, see Umaña-Taylor, 2015), I believe that there is a risk of being limited by using such a model that is explicitly set on the development of an ethnic, racial and/or cultural identity as certain issues (e.g., majority and minority relations, language, religion and discrimination) might be emphasized while others gain less attention (e.g., education and best friends). I would suggest using the levels of identity as proposed by Schwartz (2001; 2006) in order to emphasize that the identity and the development of it involves both intra-personal and inter-personal processes. There are also other caveats about these models that make them less suitable for use in this study. First, the instruments that come with some of these models are not available in Swedish. Second, the instruments and/or the theories have been developed with different groups, e.g., ethnic and age groups, and in different cultural contexts than those of the current group under investigation. Third, some of the instruments have items that might be difficult to understand for certain groups of informants such as young adolescents (e.g., double barreled items²¹, see Rudmin, 2006).

²¹ Items, or questions, in a questionnaire that inquire about more than one construct/issue/phenomenon/variable in a single question. This can confuse the respondent and/or impair the interpretation of the response (Olson, 2008).

Young adolescents and identity

Some clarification is required before I continue. Until now I have referred to the informants and their identity. Meeus (Crocetti et al., 2017; Meeus et al., 2010) stated that children enter adolescence with a set of commitments in various identity domains. These commitments are, through time, explored and strengthened or reconsidered and exchanged for other commitments. That being noted, the informants have an identity in the sense that they have commitments in several domains while also having several self-identifications that they adhere to, explore and reconsider before entering adolescence.

The intertwinement of what is referred to as personal identity and social identity has not gone unnoticed in previous research. Crocetti et al., (2018) present findings that argue for a more complex view of social identity that goes beyond in-groups and out-groups. Accordingly, individuals are able to recognize that groups they belong to overlap with one another. Furthermore, Crocetti et al., (2018) suggest that personal and social identity are strongly intertwined in an attempt by the self to adapt to the many demands of the social contexts in which individuals interact. As such, the authors argue that future study is needed to explore how multiple identity components satisfy different needs and motives of humans as well as how these components are able to increase personal well-being and improve intergroup relationships. In an attempt to investigate the interplay between personal and social identity, Albarello et al., (2018) conducted a longitudinal study with a group of adolescents. The purpose was to examine the association between personal identity processes within the domains of education and best friends while also investigating to what degree social identifications with classmates and friends were associated over time. The results of the study indicated that 1) the ways in which adolescents develop their identity in the different domains become more intertwined over time; 2) identifications with friends and classmates are interconnected. The authors argue that personal identity processes can be intertwined with social identifications in a way that commitment and in-depth exploration might be associated both positively and negatively with the process of reconsidering commitments. I believe that the conclusion by Crocetti et al., (2018), regarding the intertwinement of the personal and the social identity in order to adapt to the many demands of the social contexts of which the informants are a part, is in line with how I approach social identity and personal identity as well as their interaction with one another.

My use of theories of identity levels and development

Now I will outline how I intend to use the theories of identity and identity development. On the personal identity-level, I will explore the informants'

commitments, explorations and reconsideration of commitments in three domains: education, best friends and religious faith. This exploration will partly be done through the Utrecht-Management of Identity Commitments Scale (U-MICS) but also by follow-up questions asked of the informants regarding their scores on the instrument. The reason for situating these processes at this level of identity is because they are focused on the informants and their own commitments in the domains of education, best friends and religious faith. The processes involve beliefs, values and goals that the informants have. As Schwartz, Briones and Montgomery (2006) argue, the personal identity might be intertwined with the social identity. Thus, it might be that certain social identities have values, beliefs and goals that are also present on the personal identity-level. Identifying oneself as a Christian and having commitment in a corresponding religious faith domain might be such an example. The difference between a social and a personal identity is that their own achievements (grades in school), explorations (exploring issues in the Bible) or reconsiderations (doubt in certain beliefs) set the informants apart as individuals. Furthermore, while social identity is viewing oneself as a Christian and/or as an Assyrian/Syriac, the personal identity is one's own take on these group memberships, e.g., affirming certain religious beliefs, tailoring these to one's own experience but refuting other beliefs.

On the social identity-level, I will explore the informants' identification as social identities as Swedes and as Assyrians/Syriacs as well as being Christian. This exploration will include what criteria the informants set for being a member of these groups as well as what identifications they ascribe to themselves and what identifications they are assigned to by others. I use concepts such as in-group and out-group to differentiate between what groups the pupils express a belonging to. However, I take Crocetti et al., (2018) recommendation into consideration and acknowledge that social identity is complex and are not limited to strict in-groups and out-groups.

Erikson referred to identity development taking place in relation to a society's ethos, the guiding principles that characterizes a community (Erikson & Erikson, 2004). The relationship between society and the individual is a constructive one according to Kroger and Marcia (2011). This means that society and the individual forms a unity where a mutual regulation takes place. The social institutions (e.g., schools) are pre-conditions for the development of the individual while the individual produces the help in development that society provides through adult members. This, in turn, is guided by institutions and traditions. In order to explore what affect the social environment has on the informants and their development of identity, I turn to Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1981).

Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model

The bio-ecological model is a so-called system theory of development that suggests that the individual is affected by systems, at various levels, that he or she is situated in. The systems of the bio-ecological model are referred to as a set of nested structures (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, in Damon & Lerner (2006) p. 814). The systems involve factors assigned to both heritage and nurture as well as relations and their internal context (Havnesköld & Risholm Mothander, 2009 pp. 13-29). The systems in themselves interact with other systems at the same or at different levels. The developing individual is nested within several systems of the bio-ecological model. At the center of the model is the child, or the individual. From here on, I will use the term informant when referring to the child or the individual as this will be the informant of my study. The informant is situated in various so-called microsystems. Microsystems are defined as:

[A] pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by a the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social and symbolic features that invite, permit, or inhibit engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, activity in, the immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris in Damon & Lerner, 2006, p. 814).

Some examples of microsystems are their parents, teachers, friends, and classmates. These microsystems interact with each other. This interaction is referred to as mesosystems and the outcomes of these interactions affect the microsystems. Mesosystems are defined as “the relationship existing between two or more settings; in short, it is a system of two or more microsystems” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, in Damon & Lerner, 2006, p. 817). An example of a type of mesosystem could be the influence of parents on what school their child should be enrolled in. Following the mesosystem, is the exosystem(s) that includes the local society, where the various microsystems are located. The local society can be anything from a district in a larger city to a larger city with several districts. As Bronfenbrenner explains:

The exosystems comprise the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings, at least one of which does not contain the developing person, but in which events occur that indirectly influence processes within the immediate setting in which the developing person lives (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, in Damon & Lerner, 2006, p. 818).

An example of an exosystem could be the parenting style in a peer's family (see example by Bronfenbrenner & Morris in Damon & Lerner, 2006, p. 818). While the developing individual is not directly experiencing this parenting style, the individual does interact with his or her peer. As such, this is an indi-

rect influence on the individual. Beyond the meso- and exosystem is the macrosystem where a codified ethos in the form of laws and culture is located. Bronfenbrenner (Fish & Syed, 2018p. 393) defined macrosystems as “consistencies of the microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem that exist within a given subculture or culture, with an emphasis on lifestyles, beliefs, ideologies, customs, and opportunity structures.” Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner & Morris in Damon & Lerner, 2006) later also added time as an aspect to the model and referred to it as the chronosystem. This system involves trends seen over time (Fish & Syed, 2018, p. 390). The chronosystem involves time that consists of stability and change at two levels: a) how individual lives change over the course of life; b) historical and cohort shifts that occur across generations.

Using the bio-ecological model together with identity development

I now turn to illustrate how I bring together the theories. Identity, with its levels, is influenced by the systems that the informant is interacting with, directly and indirectly. What happens in any of the systems of the bio-ecological model will also influence identity. The identity, with its various levels, enables identifications throughout the systems of the bio-ecological model; the process of identity development would thus be affected by all of the systems. Situating identity development in such a context sets the case that it is a complicated process, not least for Assyrians/Syriacs, who are a minority. The social identity can be influenced by various systems of the bio-ecological model. However, I believe that there is a fluid boundary between the various levels of identity and the systems of the bio-ecological model. A pupil could for example identify him- or herself as a Swedish citizen because he or she is living in the state of Sweden and following the rules and laws that are present within the state. Another social identity could be that of a Christian that is part of a Christian community. These social identities could as such be more related to a macrosystem (rules and laws of a country) or a microsystem (‘our family is Christian’). In relation to an exosystem, it could be that the pupil has a social identity as an inhabitant of Södertälje or one of the districts in the city, or as a person living in a suburban area. Another social identity could also be specifically of an Assyrian/Syriac living in Södertälje. In a microsystem, the social identities that are present within the individuals could be that of a family member, e.g., the oldest sibling, a son, a daughter, or a pupil, a friend and so on. In the chronosystem, the social identity revolves around a link to the past of the heritage that Assyrians/Syriacs maintain and transfer, which include among other things experiences of Sayfo, knowledge in language and traditions, including various rituals. However, it also involves future projections of oneself, for example where one sees oneself in the future. There are risks to some of

these social identities. Being assigned or assigning oneself with a social identity as an Assyrian/Syriac might be met with racism and stereotyping. Issues of racism and stereotyping might be present from several out-groups as well as from other Assyrians/Syriacs.

The personal level of identity comes primarily to the fore at the level of the individual and that of the microsystems. Here beliefs, values and goals are situated. These are of the kind that sets the individual apart from others. There is a reciprocal influence between the systems in the model. As such, simply because I relate the personal identity at the microsystem does not mean that it has no impact on a social identity that is related to any of the other systems. For example, having commitment to a religion (e.g., gaining self-confidence and a sense of security from religion) can be tied into a social identity as a Christian.

Operationalization of the research questions

I return now to the research questions in order to operationalize the theoretical framework by assigning theoretical analytical questions to each sub-question. These questions include the various concepts that I presented in the framework. The main research question is: *In what ways do a group of Assyrian/Syriac young adolescents in Sweden develop their identity?*

The first sub-question explores: *In what ways do the young adolescents engage with their group identifications?* For this question, I explore what criteria the informants assign to their group identifications as an Assyrian/Syriac and as a Swede. The term *engage* encompasses how the informants interact with and view other groups in relation to their identity. Furthermore, I also turn my attention to the reasons for the informants to assign themselves certain identifications. I also explore what identifications are assigned to the informants by other persons that the informants interact with. Here, I put a particular focus on how religion and language are used as criterion for these identifications. In order to interpret these results, I use the theory of social identity in order to explore in what ways languages and religion can be criteria for a social identity. These explorations are primarily dealt with in Chapter 5: Navigating multiple social identities. The theoretical analytical questions are:

- In what ways **are** languages and religion criteria for social identities?
- In what ways do family and other significant others relate to the criteria for social identities?

The second sub-question is: *In what ways do the young adolescents engage with their education and best friends in relation to their identity?* For this

question, I will explore in what ways the informants engage with their school, teachers, classmates and friends. The results derived from this question are interpreted with the help of the identity maintenance and formation cycles as well as the systems of development. The identity cycles provide an interpretation to how the informants, through identity processes, develop their identity in relation to their friends and education. The systems of development offer a framework for interpreting the effects of the social environment, in the form of groups such as their family and places such as school, on the identity development in the best friends and education domains. This is primarily addressed in Chapter 6: Maintaining and forming identity through education and best friends. As such, the first sub-question is divided into the following theoretical analytical questions:

- In what ways do the identity maintenance and formation cycles occur in the domains of education and best friends in the personal identity of the young adolescents?
- How can systems of development influence the identity of the young adolescents in the education and best friends domain?

The third sub question asks: *In what ways do the young adolescents engage with their religion in relation to their identity?* This question involves the practices the informants engage with and in what ways they relate themselves to their religion. I use the identity cycles to interpret how the informants engage in various identity processes in their development of identity in relation to religion. Furthermore, I use systems of development as tools in order to explore the influence of groups such as the informants' family and places such as church and school on how the informants develop their identity in relation to their religion. These explorations will primarily be approached in Chapter 7: Maintaining and forming identity through religion. The theoretical analytical questions are the following:

- In what ways do the identity maintenance and formation cycles occur in relation to religion in the personal identity of the young adolescents?
- How can systems of development with regard to religion influence the identity of the young adolescents?

Operationalization of research questions

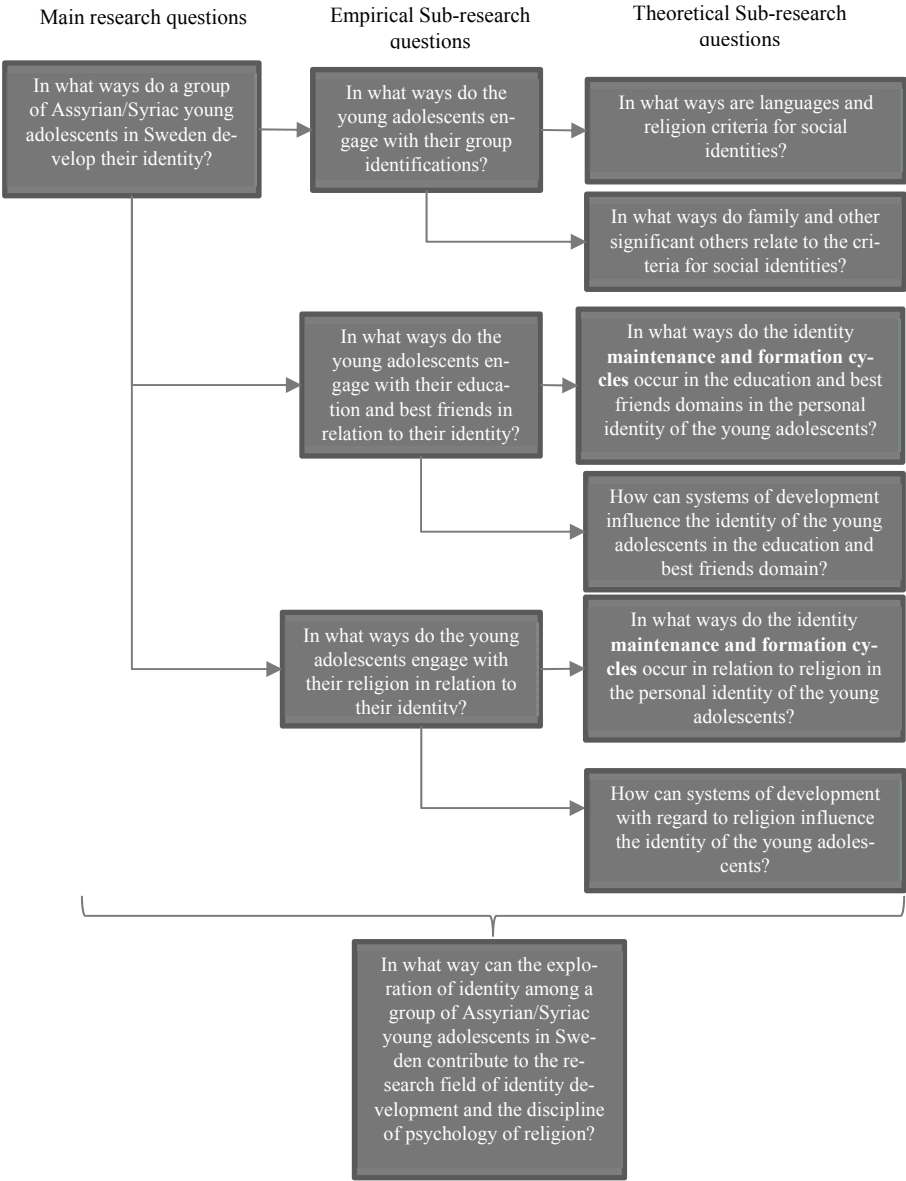


Figure 1 Operationalization of research questions

Conclusion regarding the theoretical framework

I will now provide some concluding remarks of my chosen theories in regard to the issue of normativity in development, and the limits of the theoretical framework in relation to the focus of this study.

Normativity in development

There are some issues that I wish to highlight before continuing to the next chapter. While both identity development and the bio-ecological model focus on development, they differ from each other in the degree of normativity and the degree of linearity. Normativity refers here to the theory of identity development as proposed by Erikson that aims toward achieving an identity, or ego-synchronicity. The opposite of ego-synchronicity is ego-diffusion that describes a confusion in identity (Crocetti et al., 2012). According to the theory, achieving an identity is better than the alternative. However, that does not mean that all adolescents are successful in this task or that all adolescents develop their identity under similar circumstances (Beyers & Çok, 2008). To explain such differences, Erikson pointed toward the role of the context surrounding the individual in the process of developing an identity, where social factors could act as a support (e.g., encouragement and support from family and society in large) but also as a barrier (e.g., poor educational opportunities, political restrictions). Beyers and Çok suggest that by including the bio-ecological model, as proposed by Bronfenbrenner, researchers could account for the role of context in developing an identity. The bio-ecological model makes no assumption of what is a good development (except for notions of stability and increased complexity, although these are not criteria per se for a *good* development but rather for development in general) or what development should result in upon completion (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, in Damon & Lerner, 2006, p. 796). Instead, such issues are left to be investigated with the model as a framework. This also ties into the issue of linearity, where Erikson points out a more-or-less fixed path throughout life. However, the processes of commitments, exploration and reconsideration of commitments offer a more open approach to identity development. In contrast to identity development, the bio-ecological model does not set out such a path. Instead, development is divided according to a set of systems in which the pupil is located. I acknowledge these differences between theories. I believe that they complement each other where the bio-ecological model emphasizes development as being nested in various social environments and with groups of people, while identity development emphasizes development of identity as a set of processes that provides an interpretation of how individuals commit, explore and reconsider current commitments in various life domains.

Limits of the theoretical framework

I believe I with the help of the theoretical framework can interpret the empirical material with tools such as levels of identity (e.g., social and personal). Furthermore, I believe that the framework can provide suggestions for how the phenomenon that is explored can be understood as identity development, with the caveat that it is a limited account confined to a point in time and a certain situation in a selection of identity domains and levels of identity. The framework and consequently the questions that I ask the informants also enable one to interpret various experiences of issues related to developing an identity. While not directly observed in the collection of data and material, the systems of the bio-ecological model can be used for interpretation through specific variables and questions. I explore particular roles, patterns and activities as aspects of systems of development rather than trying to explore entire systems. The application of the model is thus limited to the experiences of the informants. What I cannot interpret with this framework is the reciprocal interaction between the pupil and the environment, e.g., teachers, parents. While this reciprocal interaction is a key idea in the bio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, in Damon & Lerner, 2006) my study only focus on the experiences of such interactions from the informants' perspective. Similarly, I cannot interpret a change in development, as this is a cross-sectional study and not a longitudinal one. Lastly, in these various systems that comprise the bio-ecological model, it might be easy to forget that it is a reciprocal interaction between the child and the systems. As such, it is not only the systems that are influencing the individual but the individual is influencing and affecting the systems that he or she is in interaction with, directly and indirectly.

Chapter 4: Methods

Introduction

In this chapter I will present the sequential mixed-methods design I have applied where the quantitative phase precedes the qualitative one. This chapter will also include how I measure my chosen theoretical concepts. I start out by outlining the research design and continue thereafter to the quantitative phase and then the qualitative phase of the study. The quantitative phase will be focused on how I drew my sample for this phase and the properties of the questionnaires that I distributed to the informants. The next section that focuses on the qualitative phase, where I outline the type of semi-structured interviews I conducted and how I transcribed and analyzed the collected material. Thereafter follows a section dedicated to my interaction with the informants and a discussion regarding ethical concerns. I end by summarizing the research design and what research methods I apply for collecting and analyzing the gathered empirical material.

The Research Design

In this section, I start out by describing the epistemological stand-point that this study rests on before I move on to the actual research design.

Epistemology

My epistemological stand-point in this thesis is critical realism (Danermark et al., 2019). This means that I acknowledge that there exists an external world that is independent of human consciousness and an internal world that is constituted by socially influenced knowledge of reality (p. 7). In relation to empirical realism, or logical positivism, critical realism criticizes the ability to reduce reality to what can be perceived by our senses (p. 9). Accordingly, this reduction limits our account of reality to what can simply be experienced by our sense. However, critical realism asserts that we are unable to account for reality through our senses only. In relation to social constructivism, critical realism asserts that it is possible to gain knowledge of existing structures and mechanisms although not in a direct manner but through the use of theories (p. 11). It should be noted however, as do Danermark et al., that there are various forms of social constructionism where some are more harmonized

with critical realism than other forms. These two points of how critical realism differs from the aforementioned epistemologies are aligned with the reason for me choosing critical realism: the affirmation that reality cannot be reduced to be perceived by our senses only and the possibility of gaining knowledge of reality using theories and methods.

Using critical realism as a point of departure means that my knowledge about reality is fallible. However, I am able to use theoretical and methodological tools in order to inform me about an external world (p. 13). I use a theory of identity development and the bio-ecological model as tools in my exploration of how the pupils developed their identity. I acknowledge that the phenomena that I interpret as processes of identity exist despite which theory I use in order to explore them. My chosen tools can be more or less suitable for exploring identity as the tools are reliant, to use the terms of critical realism, upon an internal world that is constituted by socially influenced knowledge. I acknowledge that there are difficulties in using theoretical concepts, especially in the form of psychometric instruments, that have been developed in other settings as, to the informants of this study, these are constructs that might be foreign. I still believe that with the help of these constructs, I am able to provide an interpretation of a process that the informants undergo as there is an overlap between the internal worlds of the informants, the theoretical constructs and myself. This overlap enables a communication between the informants and myself during the interviews. However, the phenomena under investigation cannot be captured in their entirety by these theoretical tools, despite the overlap, because of the different internal worlds. Thus, the exploration that I conduct captures only a part of the phenomena. Because of these caveats, I see a requirement to apply a research design that applies both quantitative and qualitative methods in order to adequately address the research questions.

A sequential mixed-methods study

The combination of methods in this study has strengthened the answers to the research questions by enabling results from one method to be corroborated and nuanced with the help of the results from the other. This study since the start has always been a mixed-methods design with a sequential strategy of inquiry where quantitative methods preceded qualitative ones (Creswell, 2014; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2015). However, the scope of the study has changed as the research process progressed. The initial ambition was to acquire a larger sample of informants at each school included in the project in order to conduct extensive comparisons between groups of informants. However, as the sampling proved to be more difficult than initially envisaged and, as a result, the sample proved to be smaller than anticipated, certain methods were changed while a focus on possible comparisons between groups of informants were discarded for a focus toward the entire sample as a whole. This

is also the case regarding what theories I have used where, for example, the bio-ecological model was not present in the study when I collected my empirical material.





Sampling and Sample

My sampling frame consisted of two schools in Södertälje where Assyrian/Syriac young adolescents were pupils. In the quantitative phase, I limited my sampling according to a set of variables, i.e., school, self-image as Assyrian/Syriac and grade (i.e., fourth to ninth grade) according to a strategic sampling template (Trost, 2012). For the qualitative phase, the group interviews with the informants drew on a convenience sample (Bernard, 2006), i.e., those informants who had participated in the quantitative phase and were willing to participate in an interview were interviewed regarding their scores from the questionnaires. The sample for the individual interviews were drawn based on a criterion sample, i.e., respondents' scores on U-MICS used in the questionnaires determined the selection of interviewees for the individual interviews (Sandelowski, 2000). More specifically, the informants were chosen based on their deviant scores on the U-MICS, i.e., purposive sampling (Campbell et al., 2020), that were either high or low regarding mean values on education, best friends and religious faith as well as their ability to elaborate on their scores. I picked informants based on these criteria in order to acquire a heterogenic sample that could highlight different aspects of identity development. Informants who scored differently in relation to their peers and who had elaborated on their scores were included in the individual interviews.

Seventy-four informants filled out the questionnaires. 53 of them were enrolled in Wasaskolan while 21 informants were enrolled at Elafskolan. The age range for the informants was 9 years to 15 years. There was a majority of boys in the sample and also from each school. 60 informants answered that they were born in Sweden while 14 informants answered that they were not. The latter group was asked for how long they had been living in Sweden. Answers ranged from 2 to 11 years at Wasaskolan with a mean value of 5 (SD=2.5). At Elafskolan answers ranged from 3 to 8.5 years with a mean value of 5.5 years (SD=2.8).

In table 1, I present the sample of the study divided according to the various phases and research methods. I include the entire study in the table in order to highlight the sequential nature of the research design. Similarly, as a bridge between the quantitative and the qualitative phase, all of the informants that I interviewed in the individual interviews had participated in the group interviews. The arrows in the table illustrates this sequential process between phases and methods.

Table 1 Sample of the current study

QUANTITATIVE PHASE (N=74)		
	Wasaskolan	Elafskolan
Distributed letters of consent	170	41
Number of informants that filled out Questionnaires	n=53	n=21
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <div> QUALITATIVE PHASE (N=45) </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> </div>		
Number of informants in Semi-structured Group interviews	n=30	n=6
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <div></div> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> </div>		
Number of informants in Semi-structured Individual interviews ²²	n=5	n=4

General procedure for conducting the study

The actual data-collection procedure started at Wasaskolan at the end of September 2016. The procedure began by presenting the research procedure of the study to the teachers as well as to the principal at the school. Following this meeting, and during the following weeks, I informed classes from the fourth grade to the ninth grade about the study and asked if they would be interested in participating. Pupils who showed an interest and who identified themselves as being either Assyrian or Syriac (*syrian* in Swedish) were given a letter of consent and information to take home to their parents for consent to participate. This letter was to be returned, signed by their parents, to their teachers a couple of days after the pupils had received it in their classrooms. The teachers would then leave the signed letters in a specific box that I had left at the school. The returned letters of consent were then used by me to create groups of pupils who would participate in the structured interviews. This same procedure was conducted at Elafskolan.

The letters of consent were designed so that they focused on, among other issues, the Law of Personal Records (Personuppgiftslagen, PUL). The letter of consent also clearly stated that the research principal was Uppsala Univer-

²² For composition of individual interviews in terms of sex and age, see Appendix H.

sity. Furthermore, the letters fulfilled the criteria of information, consent, confidentiality and usage (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). The letters included information regarding the overall design of the research project, the purpose of the study, the research methods that were used, the possible consequences and risks by participating in the study, who to contact regarding the project, non-mandatory participation and the right to terminate their participation. Also, the participants were informed about being anonymous when presenting the results of the study and that the collected material would be kept in a safe place, i.e., at Uppsala University in an encrypted flash drive. The participants were informed that only authorized personnel were able to access the collected material. This information was repeated in conjunction with the interviews. Consent to participation was sought from the parents and the pupils (Swedish Research Council, 2018).

The questionnaires were distributed and filled out during periods when the informants were at school. The school as an environment and the teachers' presence at the schools could provide a sense of security to the informants by being in a familiar setting. Informants who did not understand Swedish were not included in the study, as the instrument was not available in an Arabic or a Suryoyo version. Comprehensibility of the questionnaire items and the information letter were tested before the actual research project began. A group of pupils at one of the schools participated in this testing with the permission of the principal at the school and the consent of the pupils. During these tests, terms and words as well as answering options that were difficult to understand were pointed out by the pupils. Based on the results of the tests, changes and correction were made to the letter of information and the questionnaire items. In the case of terms difficult to understand regarding the items of the instrument, i.e., U-MICS, I created explanations regarding the meaning of the terms. Example of difficult terms were 'optimistic' and 'reflecting.'

During the actual study, I met the informants in small groups (max 5-6 informants in each) when they would answer the questionnaires. This enabled me to support individual informants in answering the items if they had any questions. The informants, regardless of their age, were keen on asking questions regarding the definition of the terms found in the questionnaire. While this emphasizes the importance of me being present when the questionnaires were filled out, it also shows that the informants were engaged with the questions and their meaning. Some of the informants expressed some difficulty in understanding the reversed items²³ regarding attitudes to languages. During

²³ Some of the questions in a questionnaire (items) can be reversed where the wording is changed to indicate the opposite, often as a negation, of other associated items in a scale. For example: the two items "It is easy to speak in my mother tongue" and "It is difficult to speak in my mother tongue" are reversed to one another. The reason for using reversed items is to avoid response bias where an informant ticks off response boxes without reflecting on the meaning of the items (Schriesheim & Hill, 1981; Weijters & Baumgartner, 2012).

the follow-up interviews, both in a group and individually, the informants were asked to elaborate on their scores and the meaning of the items as well as any discrepancies from the scores on the items in the questionnaires.

When filling out the questionnaires, differences emerged between the informants regarding how quickly they read and completed the items in the questionnaire. Sometimes they read the questions out aloud or quietly by themselves. I would usually read the questions out loud if I was not specifically asked by the informants to let them read on their own. While I believe that I have had an impact on how the informants have understood the questions, e.g., by providing definitions of concepts, I do not believe that it would have been more advantageous to have the informants answer the questions at home or by themselves at school. Being present enabled a more transparent look at the process of collecting the data and allowed me to reflect on the study and the results.

Acquiring informed consent

Before I go on and describe the questionnaires in more detail, I want to make some comments on the task of acquiring informed consent. The several stages of the procedure to acquire consent to participate generated several challenges. One of these challenges referred to the actual act of returning the letters signed by the parents. As shown in table 1, the number of returned letters was fewer than the number distributed. Also, the letters were returned on a non-regular basis. The teachers at the schools were asked and reminded on several occasions by me and by the principals of the schools to remind the pupils to return the letters. During my visits to the schools, I met pupils who had kept their letters in their lockers or had misplaced their letter of consent. I was also approached by pupils who asked me when the study would begin as they had not heard anything from me since the information meeting in the classes. As it turned out, according to the pupils, they had already returned their signed letters of consent to their teachers but the teachers had not returned these to me. When these teachers were approached by me regarding any letters that had not been returned, they sometimes reacted with uncertainty about whether or not they had received any letters or by sometimes providing me with the returned letters.

Needless to say, it was difficult to acquire written informed consent from the parents in order to let the pupils participate in the study. The teachers at the schools expressed a similar difficulty in trying to acquire written consent from parents. In order to try to overcome this difficulty I made phone calls to several of the parents with children at the schools. This generated some consent for additional informants to be able to participate in the study. However, what was

apparent when making these phone calls was the low language competence in Swedish among some of the parents. These phone calls were recorded. As of late November 2017, I noticed that of the 103 parents I called, I had difficulty communicating in Swedish with 23. In some cases, friends or children of the parents that were able to speak Swedish had to translate for me and the parents. This fact brings up the question of how much of the information that I provided about the study the parents understood when I asked for the consent to interview their children. This difficulty could perhaps also explain why so few of the parents or pupils returned a form with written consent in the initial process of acquiring informed consent through letters distributed to the pupils. There were also a few cases of misunderstandings in the recruitment process. At one time when I approached a pupil in order to fill out a questionnaire, the pupil was surprised as she thought that she was not supposed to participate in the study. In other cases it could also be that the parents had provided their informed consent for the pupils to participate in the study but that the pupil did not want to participate and vice versa.

Questionnaires

In this section, I will describe what measures made up the questionnaires. This section also involves some paragraphs on the choice of using either parametric or non-parametric methods as well as how to handle outliers in the sample. An English translation of the questionnaire and the Swedish version of the questions can be found in Appendix A.

Processes of identity development

Processes of identity development including the cycles of identity are in this study measured with the instrument Utrecht-Management of Identity Commitments Scale (U-MICS) (Crocetti, Schwartz, Fermani and Meeus, 2010). The U-MICS has, prior to this study, been used in Sweden (Schumann, 2018)²⁴ and it has been used with both majority and minority populations in other countries (e.g., Crocetti, Fermani, Pojaghi, & Meeus, 2011). For this study, I used the U-MICS to measure identity development in relation to religion in the so called religious faith domain. This sub-scale had not been used prior to this study. As such, in order to use this sub-scale, I used the Swedish version available of the sub-scales for education and best friends domains where I changed the statements to include the wording *religious faith*. This was done in consultation with Crocetti (personal communication in 2015 and 2019). In

²⁴ In 2014, the U-MICS was translated into Swedish by Professor in Psychology of Religion Valerie DeMarinis and PhD candidate Åsa Schuman and back-translated to English (Schumann, 2018). This translation included the dimensions education and best friends. Cronbach's alpha showed good reliability with a result of .86 and .92 for commitments, .77 and .80 for in-depth exploration of commitments, and .87 as well as .88 for reconsideration of commitments.

order to translate the term religious faith to Swedish and back to English, I consulted with two independent persons outside of the study and the Doctoral Seminar in Psychology of Religion. The closest term in Swedish to religious faith was considered to be *tro*. While it would be possible to use the Swedish term *religiös tro* in order to emphasize the religious character of faith, I believed this translation to be somewhat over-the-top and consequently the term *tro* would be sufficient. However, the Swedish term *tro* can refer to both faith and belief, which makes the meaning of the term broader than the English term *faith*. As such, when I asked the informants to elaborate on their scores from the U-MICS in regard to the religious faith domain, their answers were broader and transcended what was encompassed in the term *faith*. This is partly the reason why I chose to use the broader term religion when I answer my research questions in order to not limit the shared experiences of the informants to what can be referred to as faith in English.

Crocetti, Schwartz, Fermani and Meeus (2010) propose that identity development be measured as a process. This measurement builds upon the theoretical workings of Erikson (Erikson & Erikson, 2004) and Marcia (Marcia, 1966) regarding identity development. The instrument is built upon the three processes: 1) commitment; 2) in-depth exploration; and 3) reconsideration of commitment. Each of these processes are located in a particular domain. In this study, I focused on the domains of education, best friends, and religious faith. Five items²⁵ each measure commitments and in-depth exploration while reconsideration of commitments is measured by three items. As such, the identity processes in a specific domain are measured by 13 items in total. Each item is worded as a statement that the respondent considers how true it is for them. The items are scored on a scale from 1 to 5 where a 1 reads as completely untrue and a 5 reads as completely true. The mean scores for each process were calculated by adding together the individual scores for each item that measured a process and then dividing the total score with the number of items for each process.

Social Identity

In order to measure social identity, I explored the informants' identification as Swedes and as Assyrians/Syriacs by using two separate items where each item was formulated as a statement. The scores for both items ranged from 1 to 4, where the score alternatives were read as *disagree in total* (1 - stämmer inte alls) to *agree in total* (4 - stämmer helt och hållet). The choice of using separate items followed the recommendations for bilinear measurement as proposed by Rudmin (2009) in order to avoid confounding results or confused respondents.

²⁵ Items refer to questions in a questionnaire. Usually, several items that inquire about similar topics constitute a scale, e.g., the U-MICS.

Attitudes of the informants

The attitudes of the informants toward their teachers, classmates and languages were assessed by using six items for each group and language. Of these six items, three were reversed in order to avoid acquiescence bias. Each item was scored on a 4-point Likert-scale where scores ranged from not at all true (1) to completely true (4). The scores of these items were added up and divided by the total number of items for each area. The questions regarding language were derived from previous research regarding Assyrians/Syriacs (e.g., Oshana, 2004) and followed the recommendations of bilinear measurement as proposed by among others Birman et al., (2014) and Rudmin (2009). These measures were intended as an add-on to the U-MICS in the sense that they expanded on the dimensions. For example, attitudes toward teachers and classmates could be associated with the domain of education while languages could be associated with the domain of religious faith as well as the self-image as either as a Swede or an Assyrian/Syriac. Items related to attitudes toward various languages, i.e., mother tongue, Suryoyo and Swedish, focused on the importance of being able to speak the language, the difficulty in speaking the language and whether or not the informant felt anything special when he or she used the language. An example of an item could be *It is important to me to be able to speak in Suryoyo*. The items measuring attitudes toward teachers and classmates were inspired by questions used by the Swedish School Inspectorate (Skolinspektionen, 2018b) when evaluating informants' attitudes toward their school. Regarding the measurement of attitudes toward teachers and classmates, an example of an item could be *I am comfortable with my teachers*. Other aspects measured were if the teachers were interesting and if they were fair toward the informants. Attitudes toward classmates had a similar construction.

Analyzing the scores from the questionnaires – non-parametric methods

As the majority of the measures measuring identity development showed indications of non-normality and since parametric statistical methods assume that the scores on measures are distributed normally, I have chosen to primarily use non-parametric methods. While there are arguments to be made to still use parametric methods despite the lack of normality²⁶, I decided to use non-parametric methods. These methods do not make assumptions of a normal distribution of scores among the sample. As such, these methods are more robust (Siegel & Castellan, 1988). Furthermore, in certain population distributions, the non-parametric method might be more powerful than parametric

²⁶ Some parametric methods are robust enough to handle a non-normal distribution of scores (see Pallant, 2010, Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Other researchers argue for a transformation of scores (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). However, transforming the scores could make it more difficult to interpret the result.

methods, especially when the distribution in the population is not known. I would suggest that this is the case for Assyrians/Syriacs where the Swedish census does not take into consideration ethnicity or religious affiliation for example.

Also, part of my choice to use non-parametric methods was also due to the low sample size of my study. I found it appropriate to conduct certain statistical analyses as my ambition was not to generalize based on the quantitative data, which is further warranted by my choice to use non-parametric methods. Instead, I used non-parametric methods to effectively handle data from several informants and to use certain methods to provide indications of particular patterns and differences among the sample of informants. Because of the low sample size, I have chosen to also include effect sizes as a measure to determine the significance of the produced results (e.g., Tomczak & Tomczak, 2014). Due to the technicalities, the sizes of the tables and the often low to medium effect sizes, these results are presented in Appendices. Coefficients of determination are presented in Appendix D while the effect sizes for various tests are presented in Appendix E. P-values for statistical significance are included in tables for correlation but I do not reiterate these values when reporting the results in text.

While univariate outliers were detected in the sample on some of the measures in the quantitative phase, I did not take any measures to address their presence. This was partly due to the fact that their scores did not affect the mean value in any greater sense after investigating the trimmed mean. I tried to include the informants that had produced those scores in the individual interviews in order to gain a greater heterogeneity in this sample so that I could more fully explore identity. All of these informants were however not available to be interviewed as they had indicated that they were not interested in participating. Transformation of the scores was not conducted as I believed it would hamper the interpretability of the results (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2014).

I applied both frequencies and descriptive statistics to explore the scores of the included measures in the questionnaires. The Mann-Whitney U Test was applied to test for differences between groups of informants, based on what school they were enrolled in and their gender as well as whether they were born in Sweden or not (Pallant, 2010, pp. 227-230, Corder & Foreman, 2014, pp. 69-96). The Kruskal-Wallis Test was used to test for differences between age groups (i.e., the sample was divided into three age groups) among the informants (Pallant, 2010, pp. 232-235; Siegel & Castellan, 1988, pp. 206-216). I used Spearman's rho as a method to check for correlations between measures on the U-MICS, attitudes toward languages and attitudes toward teachers and classmates (Pallant, 2010, p. 128; Siegel & Castellan, 1988, pp. 235-244).

Group and individual semi-structured interviews

In the qualitative phase, I use semi-structured interviews both in group and individually with informants. There are suggestions on how to conduct interviews with younger age groups (e.g., Doverborg & Pramling Samuelsson, 2000; Greene & Hogan, 2005; Mårtens, 2015) which I considered before starting the qualitative phase. One of these was to conduct the interviews at the schools, not only for a sense of safety as referred to in other sections, but also as a concrete location in relation to topics in the interviews regarding the school the informants went to and the education they received there. However, this could at the same time bring difficulties when I asked questions of, for example, the church they went to or how they act when they were at home. It also meant ensuring that the pupil had enough time to tell his or her story. While this was easier to ensure in the individual study, the informants and I made sure that each and everyone in the group interview had enough room to tell his or her story. Furthermore, certain researchers (e.g., (Doverborg & Pramling Samuelsson, 2000; Kvale et al., 2014) stress a particular type of interaction between the interviewer and the child or youth. In line with these recommendations, I tried not to stress the informants during the filling out of the questionnaires or interviews but let them take the time they required. This involved letting the informants elaborate on topics that were, at the time, not always believed to be relevant to the study. Thus, some flexibility was required in the data collection.

Interview questions and transcribing the interviews

Conducting the semi-structured interviews was done in two phases. The interview guides for the group and individual interviews can be found in their full, translated into English and the Swedish version, in Appendix B and C. The group interviews explored the results of the quantitative phase with groups of informants. By exploring the results. I am referring to following up the scores from the questionnaires. The group interviews were suitable for exploring common notions among the informants, e.g., the meaning of being an Assyrian/Syriac, the importance of language and religion. The interview questions that were applied in the group interviews revolved around four topics: 1) self-image; 2) language; 3) education; and 4) religion. Self-image and language were focused on how the informants viewed themselves and how they motivated their images as well as why they used a certain language in a particular situation. I usually started by asking the informants to elaborate on their scores from the questionnaires. These elaborations were quickly broadened as the informants explained why they had put down the score that they did. Theoretically, questions regarding these two topics were attuned to social identity. The topics of education and religion were focused on the social context at schools, i.e., the informants' relationships to their peers and teachers, and on their religious beliefs and the importance of being a Christian according to the

informants themselves. These two topics were theoretically closer to personal identity and the processes of identity development that the informants provided a score for in the quantitative phase. The second part of the qualitative phase revolved around interviews with individual informants where I probed further into the results of the quantitative phase and the experiences that were shared during the group interviews. The individual interviews were suitable for exploring personal characteristics, choices and commitments. Furthermore, the questions in these interviews were more focused on experiences of language usage in different environments and in relation to various groups.

I transcribed each interview verbatim while excluding pauses and such. The interviews and their transcriptions were in Swedish. These transcriptions were thereafter inputted into Nvivo (v.11). However, when presenting quotes in the results- and analysis chapters, I would translate these excerpts from Swedish to English while also editing the quotes to be more of a formal speech in order to increase the readability. During this process, I would often go back to the original quotes that were in Swedish and unedited (except from being transcribed) and compare the various versions in order to ensure consistency.

When deciding what quotes to present as illustrations of arguments that I would make in the results- and analysis chapters, I would apply the following criteria (not presented here according to a hierarchy). The quote would need to illustrate the argument that I would make. However, it would also be required to provide a certain amount of description that could enable it to stand on its own, i.e., some context should be included in the quote. In order to avoid cherry-picking or generalization from one quote to the entire sample, I would clarify and sometimes provide counter-examples that provided nuances to these quotes. I also tried to find a balance between quotes that originated from individual and group interviews as well as from informants, depending on their school, gender and age. Due to the characteristics of the sample, some of these factors were more difficult to achieve a balance than others, e.g., more boys participated in the study, and there were more informants participating that were enrolled in the lower grades. Each quote that I present is assigned a particular code that can be found at the end of text excerpt in parentheses. The quotes vary in length where some of them involve several aspects and nuances that warrant additional codes to be applied. However, when I have chosen to include such a quote, often from group interviews where there is an on-going discussion between informants, I do so as to illustrate an argument that I am making related to the said code and quote. This is not to say that no other interpretation or codes could be applied to the text excerpt. Instead, I have chosen to illustrate a particular aspect of the interview.

During the process of writing up the results not all of the gathered empirical material was included. In addition to this, I also created several other themes from the qualitative material and conducted statistical analyses whose results

were not presented in the final version of this thesis. Partly this is to do with the initial focus of the study being much broader than it was at the write-up. It also has to do with changes to theories that make up the theoretical framework. This matters as this study has more-or-less always been deductive where the theories have had an influence in what questions or items I would use when collecting my data.

Analyzing the Qualitative Material

This section deals with both the coding (Saldaña, 2013) of the qualitative material and the method of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Both methods are included in this section as I believe that they both represent ways to analyze the qualitative material with different emphases and on different analytical levels. I used various methods of coding to break-down the transcribed interviews and to place parts of the material into various categories that were in line with the theoretical framework. The thematic analysis was then used to build up themes from these separate parts of the material in order to acquire larger, more overarching experiences that could provide answers to the research questions.

Coding

Before conducting the individual interviews, the group interviews were coded according to a holistic influenced coding method (Saldaña, 2013). This meant that I coded larger chunks of texts according to the questions that were asked across all of the interviews. By doing so, I was able to organize the data according to the questions that were asked, e.g., to be able to summarize all answers to a particular question across all the interviews. Each informant was also represented as a case in Nvivo with his or her basic information regarding school, age, gender and whether the informant was born in Sweden or not. Thereafter, the interviews were coded in a second turn where a more theoretical deductive approach was used. Here, codes were created from the theoretical framework and applied to the interviews. In a third turn, the codes were checked for consistency. This was done in parallel to writing up the results from the qualitative phase. The amount of text that was assigned to a code varied from a few words to a longer discussion between informants in a group interview. The analytical process is illustrated in figure 2.

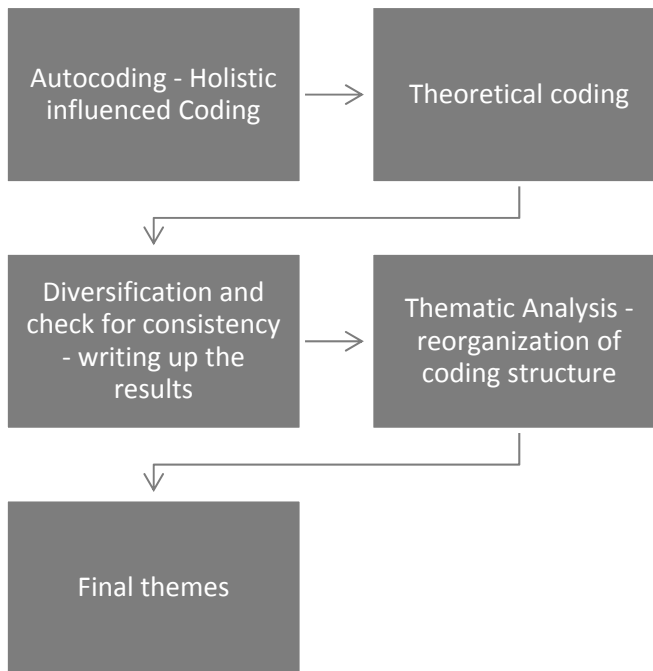


Figure 2 Illustration of the analytical process

The coding list that I used was deductively created from the theoretical framework. By deductively, I mean that the themes and categories were created from the theories while the codes were created from the material. A list of selected codes is presented in Appendix F. The coding list is represented according to the theories of this study. I have pointed out that while the themes were created from the theoretical model, they were still required to resonate with the collected data and material. As such, I also looked at the entire coding structure when I created the themes. For the coding, I used holistic, attribute, value, and evaluation coding to explore the informants' attitudes toward their school, their friends and their religion (Saldaña, 2013). Holistic coding was used as a first coding method to capture large parts of content that I could return to with more specific coding methods such as value, evaluation and hypothesis coding. I applied attribute coding to collect basic information such as age, gender, generation and how long the informants have spent in their current school. Value coding was used to emphasize the informants' beliefs, values and attitudes regarding their school, their best friends and their religious faith but also regarding their spoken languages. Similar to value coding, evaluation codes referred to the significance that the informants ascribed to their best friends, school and religious faith.

In order to check the internal consistency of the coding, the main advisor and I strived for inter-coder reliability by going through the coding and the defini-

tions of the codes, categories and themes. Usually this would be done by sharing the digital project file that contained all of the transcribed interviews and all of the coded excerpts of these. As such, the advisor could follow my process and examine how I applied codes in relation to their definitions as well as other excerpts of the interviews that had been coded with the same code. Similarly, the advisor could examine how the codes related to the entire theme that each code was a part of. The advisor would leave comments in the project file regarding the interpretation of text excerpts, which I could then address. For example, when I coded excerpts of the interviews regarding the practices of the informants, I had missed that one of the informants was referring to participating in a Mass when she stated she felt a need to visit church every 40th day. This was however pointed out by the main advisor when reading my coding excerpts.

Thematic Analysis

Due to the mixed-methods design that I applied here, the quantitative results very much influenced the direction and inquiry of the qualitative analysis. Thus, as a way to highlight their relationship, I present them under the common heading of a qualitative theme. I used a thematic analysis-inspired method to analyze the qualitative material. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 79), thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting themes and patterns within data. When I had coded the interviews, I sorted the codes into different potential themes. As I already had theories that were represented in the qualitative material as themes, this phase was more of a development of these pre-existing themes. The themes were often large and vague in relation to what their focus was in relation to the material. For example, a theme could be *Being a pupil* or even *Identity development*. With time, I ended up with concentrating each of the final themes to be focused on, for example, a specific function or process of identity development in a particular domain. Doing so enabled me to narrow down the content and present what Braun and Clarke (2006) refers to as a *story* of a particular theme. Also, it brought a theme closer to what the researchers (2018, p. 108) refer to as a *theme*, i.e., a central organizing concept that the research wants to tell about the data.

The interaction between me and the informants

In this section, I would like to describe my interaction with the informants in order to illustrate what issues I experienced. My intention is to provide some transparency to the research process. When writing up the results of this thesis, I have continuously viewed my informants as primarily young adolescents as well as pupils. I have, much like it is discussed by previous research (e.g., Gubrium et al., 2012; Wengraf, 2001), assumed that there was a power balance between me and the informants to be taken into consideration. My reason for

assuming this was due to me being the researcher and the adult in relation to the informants. For example, I felt before testing the instrument for the first time that it risked not being suitable for the informants due to how the items were worded and how young some of the informants were. However, the informants were able to answer and discuss the items during the testing of the questionnaire and in the interviews that followed. This is part of my view of the informants as young adolescents that have a different vocabulary from myself as a researcher and, consequently, different understandings of some of the items and the interview questions. Further, I approached the informants as susceptible to being influenced by others, especially by adults due to power relations (Doverborg & Pramling Samuelsson, 2000; Mårtens, 2015). However, the informants in this study were able to correct me and to critically question my concepts or questions on numerous occasions. This was primarily done by disagreeing with my posed question or scenario and instead providing their own scenario or example. Furthermore, regarding my view of the informants as young adolescents, when going through the transcripts from the interviews, I observed at times that I gave verbal encouragement to the informants when they shared their experiences. This was especially the case when I was interviewing the younger informants. As I read the transcripts and came across these examples of encouragement, I wondered whether or not I would have made the same statements if I had interviewed an adult.

I have throughout this study believed that the power balance was tipped in my favor, as I was the adult and the researcher while the interviewee was a child or a youth. However, as I was interviewing young adolescents that assumedly possessed knowledge regarding various practices and beliefs that I, in turn, was trying to acquire information about, there was also a power balance in favor of the interviewees, as they could decide what they wanted to share with me and in what way. In addition to this, I was in an environment, i.e., their school, which was more common for the informants than it was for me. As such, I adapted, for example, to the school curriculum when conducting my interviews. My ambition when I started to collect my data and material was to affect the ordinary activity at the schools in the least possible way. This meant that I would create a schedule in dialogue with the principals, when possible, and I asked the principals at both of the schools to inform the teachers of when I would come by and fill out the questionnaire or interview the informants. This did not always work as the teachers were sometimes surprised when I visited.

I reflected on my interaction with the informants when they asked me questions beyond the interview situations, about general things regarding school or in issues between informants, where I was asked to intervene and resolve conflicts. I chose to not intervene and, instead, referred the informants to their teachers. At the time, I was not sure about my role and my authority to act in such situations. I believe however that the informants saw me as an adult with

authority to act in certain situations. I kept to my role as a researcher in hopes of remaining distanced, objective and focused.

As a result of the interaction between myself and the informants, there can be forms of acquiescence bias present in the results from the questionnaires and the interviews. Seeing that the cultural heritage, including religion, is important to the informants and the larger Assyrian/Syriac group would perhaps lead to the informants being more inclined to answer in a favorable way in order to adapt to the rest of the group. Bernard (2006, pp. 241-243) states that there can be a social desirability effect when a third party is present during an interview. In the current study, the third party would refer to the other informants that participated in the interview or whoever by chance passed by when, for example, the interview took place in a glass-walled room. However, there are examples from the different group interviews where the informants would openly disagree with each other about issues, such as the importance of religion or language for one's group identification as an Assyrian/Syriac. Perhaps there is a greater social desirability among the informants toward adults than to peers of their own age. In either case, I checked for this influence by asking follow-up questions in future interviews and also by asking the informants when they had completed filling out the questionnaire to explain and provide examples of terms that occurred in the interview questions and the items, which they were able to do.

Ethical Concerns

In this section, I will highlight and discuss what risks I identified about the possibility of the informants experiencing any type of harm. The current study was submitted to and approved by the regional ethical board of research (diary number of 2016/277). One of the points of departure for this study was that no harm should come to the informants. I reflected on this continuously during the study and I have tried to balance gains with what risks there might be to the informants. At the schools, I made sure that there were resources (e.g., school psychologist, school nurse and counselor) available to help in cases of distress among the informants, though no such case was brought to my attention.

Anonymization and distance to the empirical material

To avoid the informants being identified, procedures were taken to anonymize the participants of the study. However, because I anonymized the informants, I saw no risk in including the actual names of the schools. I believed that neither individual informants nor teachers could be identified by presenting the names of the schools. My choice was based on the unique setting of the

schools, which would be left out if I did not present at least some contextual information. In addition to the ambition to anonymize the participants, I took the decision to only present information about the participants that was of importance to the study. Thus, unnecessary information that could risk the anonymity of the participants was excluded. Some of the informants, especially the younger informants, did not understand why their real names would not be included in the thesis. At times, some of them would insist on me including them. Furthermore, because the characteristics of the sample, e.g., limited and small, as well as the context of this study, there are circumstances where the risks of identifying any of the informants are increased. Because of this, I found that the measures taken to anonymize the informants were necessary, at least as a measure taken to minimize the risks of participating.

Unforeseeable consequences

One of the risks that was identified was to situate the informants in a debate regarding integration, segregation and migration that were beyond the scope of this study. The debate regarding these issues has been active since I applied for the PhD-position in 2014 and it continued when I was finishing this thesis (see for example debate about Södertälje and districts in the city as outlined in Chapter 2). Related to this is the possibility of presenting a negative image of Södertälje in this study, the districts and the schools. Such an image could be used for ends that were not intended with this thesis. This is especially so about the degree of the self-image as either Swedish or as Assyrian/Syriac (which is present in the Results chapter). As I believe that the context is important in order to explore the identity of the informants, the loss of leaving out information about the context had the risk of diminishing the ability to explore the situation that the informants were in. Furthermore, a possible gain might be to nuance the problematic image that has characterized the districts of Södertälje and their inhabitants.

This issue is also related to how the informants might have perceived what the study was about and the purpose of it. While I introduced the study as being about how the informants viewed themselves as Assyrian/Syriacs, it is somewhat different than explaining that the thesis and its results might be used in debates about segregation and migration. Similarly, the informants said that the scope of the thesis covered a long period, i.e., the thesis being written in a 4-year period, in comparison to an article that would be published in a local newspaper. I bring this up because I believe that it illustrates the difficulties in understanding the time scope of the thesis and what consequences this might have had for acknowledging what risks there existed in participating.

Terms of referral

It is also possible that what I identified as risks, the informants viewed as self-evident. For example, it was self-evident that they viewed themselves as Assyrians/Syriacs or that they were fed up with their school or that they did not fully believe in their religion. In fact, from the beginning of this study I have found it uncomfortable to assign or assume a certain identification or belonging of the informants. This might seem somewhat paradoxical as this study is focused on exploring the identity of the informants. On several occasions I did feel hesitant to refer to them as Assyrians/Syriacs in order to avoid any misrepresentations from my side. At times, I felt that I experienced this as a greater issue than the informants or the teachers did. I felt this hesitancy especially when I would introduce the study for the pupils at the two schools. Since this was my first meeting with potential informants I was unsure of how they would react. In future encounters with informants, during the questionnaires and interviews, I found that they used the term Assyrian/Syriac or any other related term freely.

Furthermore, during the interviews I took part of experiences of teasing among the informants. By naming these experiences as teasing, and not discrimination, it was not my intention to downplay any offences that the informants might have experienced. Teasing (*retas* in Swedish) was often the term I used in the interview when asking the informants about their experiences of negative forms of interaction with peers or others. In order not to distance farther from the material, I kept using the term when writing up the results. Furthermore, it was difficult to determine the systematic nature of these actions in order to consider them to be acts of discrimination. It is also difficult to discern to what degree the informants are being restricted from places or activities as result of their experiences of teasing. Because of that, I have primarily referred to these acts as teasing rather than discrimination. However, I also use terms such as criticism or malicious teasing when the nature of the situation seems to call for it.

Young adolescents as reliable informants

My perception that I am doing research with young adolescents has generated passive assumptions which I brought with me in my interaction with the informants. It has also influenced my perception of younger adolescents' ability to provide reliable data and material. This notion of children and adolescents being a liability in research is not new and it has been addressed by other researchers. For example, Hogan (in Greene & Hogan, 2005) refutes the claim that younger age groups lack credibility by referring to research that has indicated the opposite (e.g., Ceci & Bruck, 1993; Steward & Steward, 1996). In fact, when it comes to research on development, Hogan argues that there is a lack of research that investigates the children's own behaviors and feelings. I

have had a continuous reflection on how the informants have interpreted my questions that I have used as tools in my exploration of the identity of the informants. Thus, it is not a question of whether the participating young adolescents are reliable or not. Instead, it is a question whether the tools I have used have been adequate in capturing and providing interpretations of their experiences. Furthermore, this also involves the interpretation that I conducted of the material and whether I assigned the experiences as their own or more in line with what their parents believed. Although in my analysis I do assert that the family of the informants and other significant others are important to their identity I have based my assertion on what the informants have shared with me in the questionnaires and the interviews. More specifically, the answers to the research questions are based on the empirical material that I have collected from a group of young adolescents. As such, I believe that it is the informants' own experiences that have constituted the empirical material in this study.

Chapter 5: Navigating multiple social identities

Introduction

This chapter is the first of three chapters where I answer my research questions. In this chapter, I start by answering the empirical sub-question: in what ways do the young adolescents engage with their group identifications? In order to answer this question, I explore how the informants relate their identifications to their families and how they elaborate on the role of language and religion to their identity. This will also involve what criteria the informants set up for their identifications as Swedish and as Assyrian/Syriac. Concerning language, I will focus on how the informants are encouraged to speak a certain language. In regard to their identifications, I shed some light on how teasing is used as reactions to the identifications of the informants. After I have answered these questions, I move on to interpret the results from a theoretical perspective by focusing on what ways language and religion act in setting criteria for social identities and in what ways family and other significant others relate to the criteria for social identities. In this chapter I will provide initial threads in order to understand the results and analysis of the coming chapters. As such, I will refer to religion to some degree in this chapter but I will deal with it in more detail in chapter 7.

Group belonging and Degree of self-identifications

I begin by exploring the informants' scores on the questionnaires. The informants were asked in the questionnaire to put down what group they believed that they belonged to. This was an open-ended item where the informants were allowed to put down any group(s) that they wished. Twenty-five informants put down only that they belonged to Syriacs (syrianer) while 9 informants wrote Assyrians. The rest of the informants wrote several combinations of groups. These combinations involved either both Syriacs and Assyrians or Swedish and Syriac or Assyrian. In some individual cases, informants put down that they belonged with their friends in contrast to writing a specific ethnic group. One informant put down that he or she was a Christian from Iraq while another informant wrote that he or she was Swedish. However, sixty-

one informant had not included a Swedish identification while 13 informants had included one.

Furthermore, I explored the indications of associations between self-images as either Assyrian/Syriac or Swedish as well as attitudes toward Suryoyo that is presented in Table 5²⁷ in chapter 7. Table 5 also reported the mean scores and standard deviation for the informants' self-identification as Swedish and as Assyrian/Syriac²⁸. The scores indicated that the informants agreed to a greater degree with the statement that they saw themselves as Assyrians/Syriacs in comparison to the statement that they saw themselves as Swedish. The reported correlations indicated that more positive attitudes toward Suryoyo were associated with stronger agreement with the statement that the informants viewed themselves as Assyrians/Syriacs. A negative association was found between scores on attitudes toward Suryoyo and scores on the statement that the informant viewed themselves as Swedish.

Family belonging

In this section, I explore what role the informants' family and other significant others have for the informants and their self-image as Assyrian/Syriac and Swedish. The content here are primarily focused on what the informants express tie themselves to groups such as their families and what they perceive as Assyrian/Syriac or Swedish groups.

Family connections

One of the reasons for viewing oneself as a member of an Assyrian/Syriac group was the origin of one's family, or more specifically, one's parents. The informants also referred to laws, or rules that they follow, and languages that they used at home as reasons for their identifications. It seems that for some of the informants, being an Assyrian/Syriac is associated with what they do together with their families in various places, e.g., common rules that they follow or practices (religious or language practices). To illustrate this connection that the informants made of their identification and their family, I turn my attention to a discussion between informants regarding the food they ate at

²⁷ Correlations from table 5: self-image Swedish*self-image Assyrian/Syriac ($\rho=-.31$, $p=.007$); self-image Swedish*attitudes Suryoyo ($\rho=-.27$, $p=.03$); self-image Assyrian/Syriac*attitudes Suryoyo ($\rho=.58$, $p=.000$).

²⁸ The scores for both items ranged from 1 to 4, where the score alternatives were read as *disagree in total* (1 - stämmer inte alls) to *agree in total* (4 - stämmer helt och hållet). When responding to a statement that said *I see myself as Swedish*, the pupils reported a mean value of 1.7 with a standard deviation of .8. When faced with the same statement but whether the pupils saw themselves as Assyria/Syriac, the pupils reported a mean value of 3.6 with a standard deviation of .8.

home. In this discussion, the informants bring up, besides from what food they eat at home, what language they speak at home, dialects, where they were born and even furnishing. One of these informants stated that he saw himself as a Swede because he was born in the country, he was able to use the language with his family and he also ate Swedish food. The other informant stated that he did not see himself as a Swede because he and his family talked *syrianska* (Suryoyo) and they almost never ate Swedish food at home.

Me: Do you see yourself as a Swede?

RP²⁹ 1: Yes, maybe half-Swedish because I have been living here for seven years so I feel that I have become a part of Sweden (kommit in i Sverige) so that I am able to feel Swedish.

RP 2: I feel as a Swede because I was born here, I speak Swedish with my family. I also eat Swedish dishes so I feel completely Swedish.

Me: RP 3, what about you?

RP 3: I do not feel Swedish because we speak *syrianska* (Suryoyo) at home we never eat anything [Swedish], I do not feel as much Swedish, though I do feel more Syriac/Assyrian³⁰ in comparison.

RP 4: Sometimes you usually know if someone is a Swede. They almost have this dialect but our teacher, my neighbor, I know that she is a Swede, I see it on her, she has a Swedish [...], and her house

RP 2: and her furnishing. I just feel that it is a particular furnishing for Swedes. [...] They enjoy a lot of plants, flowers and such. (code: *family practices at home*, group interview II, Wasaskolan)

While the place of birth could be seen by the informants as an indicator of what group a person belonged to, it could also act as a boundary. For example, an informant stated that he did not see himself as a ‘*real*’ Swede because he was not born in Sweden. As such, he differentiated himself from those who were born in Sweden and as a consequence those who were *real* Swedes.

Language expectations and encouragements

Some of the informants made a connection between the language they spoke and the group they belonged to: speaking *syrianska* (Suryoyo) makes the informant a Syriac/Assyrian. This is not only due to the language but also to other factors such as what food the informants ate and even house furnishing.

²⁹ RP=respondent; Me=Researcher.

³⁰ The informant used this combination (syrian/assyrier) himself but in the reversed order than the term Assyrian/Syriac.

However, because language was mentioned by several informants as a reason for viewing oneself as Swedish and/or Assyrian/Syriac, I want to delve further into this. The content here relates to the previous section regarding family connections as I approach language in regard to what expectations from their families the informants had for using a particular language. Expectations on the informants from, for example their parents, to learn and be able to speak a certain language might affect how they assign themselves or are assigned certain identifications. During the interviews, the informants and I came across the topic of expectations (to speak a certain language, to engage in particular activities) that others had on the informants, e.g., from family or relatives. Sometimes it was difficult to live up to these expectations. For example, some of the informants described that there was a difficulty in using Suryoyo (*syrianska*³¹, in Swedish). One of the informants stated that she was able to speak the language but not to write in it. In relation to this, I asked the informants whether their parents were disappointed in them for not being able to use the language. One of the informants stated that her parents had wanted her, for a duration of time, to only speak in Suryoyo in order to be able to communicate with her grandparents. An example of this is illustrated in the quote below where an informant describes how he was told by his parents to only speak in Suryoyo for a whole week. During this time, he was not allowed to speak in Swedish.

Me: Are your parents disappointed in you for not being able to [read and write in Suryoyo]?

RP: My parents want me to speak *syrianska* (Suryoyo). A long time ago, they said to me to speak *syrianska* (Suryoyo) for a whole week in order for me not to speak any Swedish at all. That felt very difficult and she [her mother] wanted me to learn how to write because every time when my grandmother comes home to us, she is only able to speak in *syrianska* (Suryoyo) and no Swedish. (code: *expectations*, group interview IV, Wasaskolan)

Expectations to learn a language are closely tied into being encouraged to use one or several languages. The informants described their parents as encouraging them to use particular languages in certain contexts and situations. This is not necessarily tied into a specific language such as Suryoyo or Swedish; it can be an encouragement directed toward languages in general because, according to the informants, it was believed by their parents that being able to

³¹ There is an issue of translation in regard to what language the informants are referring to. They used the Swedish term *syrianska* which could refer to either Suryoyo or Syriac. The quote presented here is taken from an interview where the informants are referring to *syrianska* as being used at church to recollect stories about Jesus while the informants themselves state that they have problems writing and reading the language but not in speaking it. They also refer to *syrianska* as used in more ordinary day-to-day situations like asking for directions to a particular place. However, because the informants are referring to day-to-day situations and that they are capable of speaking the language, I am assuming that it is to Suryoyo that they are referring.

speak multiple languages was an important skill. The encouragement to speak Swedish was not only from the parents but also from the teachers at the schools. Usually the informants described how they were encouraged to speak a certain language at home or at church. This language was often Suryoyo. The encouragement to speak a certain language was recollected by the informants as being more frequent when they were younger. However, several of the informants that were interviewed also stated that it was up to them to choose what language they would use, regardless of the place they would be in. According to the informants, they adapted their choice of language according to the circumstances and who they were talking with.

The desire to maintain a language was also present among the informants themselves. One informant stated that she would encourage her own children to learn *syrianska* (Suryoyo). She explained that she would probably teach her children *syrianska* (Suryoyo) before she taught them Swedish. I asked her to elaborate on this and she answered that she believed that parents, in general, thought that it was easy to forget or lose *syrianska* (Suryoyo) since it was not frequently spoken. She continued by stating that at school you would automatically be speaking Swedish and thus it was necessary to strengthen *syrianska* (Suryoyo) lest they would forget it.

Me: Do you think that you will teach (Suryoyo) to your children?

RP: Yes, of course. It is really important. I think I would teach them *syrianska* (Suryoyo) before I would teach them Swedish.

Me: Okay, is that so? I have also heard from other pupils that I have interviewed that they learned *syrianska* (Suryoyo) first.

RP: Because I believe that a lot of parents are trying to focus on it (the language) because it is so easy to lose *syrianska* (Suryoyo) when it is not used so much. Therefore, I believe that they are trying to teach you when you are young because when you start school you will be automatically speaking Swedish. That is how they (the parents) think. (code: *encouraging language use*, individual interview III, Elafskolan).

According to the informants, their parents seemed, to take an active part in the informants learning Suryoyo. This learning could happen early on in a informant's life when the parents would talk to them in Suryoyo. While there seemed to be an emphasis on learning the language, some of the informants stated that they never heard explicitly that their parents had referred to the language as an important heritage of the Assyrian/Syriac group. Nor had they explicitly heard that the language was something that the informant was supposed to hold on to and transfer to other generations. Still, the informants acknowledged the importance of the language.

This encouragement from the parents was not only directed toward the informants. One informant described how her father had encouraged her teachers at kindergarten to hire a Swedish teacher or to only speak Swedish with her so she could learn the language. The informant also stated that all her teachers at kindergarten were Assyrian/Syriacs. This example contrasts with what I have previously been illustrating in that, here, it was Swedish that was emphasized by the parents and not Suryoyo.

Feelings of belonging

In this section, I continue to focus on the elaborations by the informants for belief in belonging to one or more groups. The content here is similar to what I presented in the section *Family connections* but here I nuance this somewhat by illustrating the complexity to how the informants viewed themselves. The acknowledgement of being both an Assyrian/Syriac and a Swede was different among the informants. Some of them stated that they belonged to both groups while others stated that they were only Assyrian/Syriac and not Swedish. While I will shed some light on this here, I will return to this in more detail later on in the chapter. The first example is from an informant whose explanation was short and concise. She states that she is a syrian (Syriac) because she feels as such. Furthermore, she uses the term *we* as if she was part of a group. This feeling of being a syrian (Syriac) is described as a pleasant one. Similar accounts were found among other informants where the reasons for belonging to a group were not always stated clearly. Instead, the reasons referred to a feeling. This feeling could also include what the informant did not want to feel. For example, the aforementioned informant does not want to feel as a Swede. Here, it seems as if there is a contradiction in being a Swede and a syrian (Syriac) because she does not want to feel Swedish as she wants to continue to feel syrian (Syriac).

Me: There was a question that was yes, I see myself as an Assyrian/Syriac, do you remember that question? You got to answer by checking an option from 1 to 4. I believe you all checked pretty high on that question. How so?

RP: Because we all feel very much as *syrianer* (Syriacs) and we like *syrianer* (Syriacs) [...]. We like *syrianer* (Syriacs) a lot and they are, we think they are really nice and kind (or Christian). [...] I do not want to feel like a Swede, I do not enjoy feeling like Swedes. We are *syrianer* (Syriacs) that want to continue as such. It is better. (Code: *connotation*, group interview I, Wasaskolan)

In another example, an informant explained her belonging, similarly to other informants, by referring to what she ate and what kind of food she enjoyed. She stated that she viewed herself as a Swedish because she knew the language and because she had Swedish citizenship. She was syrian (Syriac) because her family was *syrian* (Syriac) and because she was able to speak the language. She also referred to her religion as a reason for her identification. Interestingly,

while I inquired about the informant herself, she started by referring to ‘we’ which I am assuming refers to herself and her family.

I: But what were your thoughts, because you said that you were fifty-fifty Swedish and *syrian* (Syriac)? What is this Swedishness that you feel that you have? [...].

RP: What I said about the food and such. We eat Swedish food too like we eat *syriansk* (Syriac) food. I eat Turkish food too. Also my dad is from Turkey though he is *syrian* (Syriac) too. So yes, that is why I feel that I am Swedish and *syrian* (Syriac) because I can speak Swedish and I am a Swedish citizen, I live in Sweden. I believe I am *syrian* (Syriac) because my whole family is *syrian* (Syriac) and I can speak *syrianska* (Suryoyo). I was also brought up in a *syriansk* (Syriac) family. (code: *connotation*, group interview VII, Wasaskolan)

Situational dependency

I will now focus more on the situational dependency related to what language the informants used and how they viewed themselves which several of the informants referred to in earlier sections. The informants stated that the language they would use or how they would behave in regard to what behavior was or was not allowed (e.g., swearing) was dependent on the situation. This was also relevant for the informants in how they differentiated between their identifications. For example, an informant described that being abroad and meeting other people from other countries made him feel more as a Swede than when he was in Sweden. In the latter case, he felt more an Assyrian/Syriac. Another referred to Södertälje as a particular environment. She gave an example of being in a shop where Assyrians/Syriacs are working and they knew your language. She also referred to the football teams in town. The informant stated that because there were a lot of Assyrians/Syriacs in Södertälje, it became something that a lot of people seemed to have in common. The use of language by others was something that was mentioned by several of the informants as something that activated a sense of belonging. If other people used Suryoyo, one informant expressed that the situation felt safe. Below, I present a quote that illustrates the dependency on the social environment that an identification seems to have.

I: There was also a question about whether you saw yourself as Swedes.

RP: I was born in Sweden; I am a Swedish citizen. I believe that I am Swedish for most parts, fifty percent because I am born in Sweden but I also believe that the environment affects you. I live in Södertälje, I have always lived there so you think more of yourself as a *syrian* (Syriac). [...] (code: *Södertälje as an Exosystem*, group interview III, Elafskolan)

[...]

RP: But I understand what she [another informant] means, I am not saying that we exaggerate but we do talk about it a lot. Perhaps because we are more *syrianer* (Syriacs) here. If you go to a store where there are employees who are *syrianer* (Syriacs) or who know your language *syrianska* (Suryoyo), Arabic, so that is why I believe that they talk about it more. We also have the football [the football teams *Assyriska* and *Syrianska*] that is really close to use so I believe therefore that is why we talk about it so much in Södertälje.

I: Because there are so many Syriacs/Assyrians here it becomes a common denominator?

RP: Exactly. (code: *Södertälje as an Exosystem*, group interview III, Elafskolan)

Identity criteria

I will now turn my attention to the perceived reasons for what sets the informants apart from certain groups in order to explore how the informants engage with their group identifications. This section will focus on perceived differences between groups. These differences are constituted through identifications that the informants express for themselves or are assigned to by others. What constitutes the differences are the criteria that the informants or others assign to group identifications, such as Assyrians/Syriacs or as Swedes. This section will present both criteria that is agreed upon and criteria disagreed upon among the informants. These criteria will primarily revolve around religion and language as these were the main topics of the interviews.

Criteria for being an Assyrian/Syriac

I start by taking a look at the criteria that the informants assigned to being an Assyrian/Syriac. This section also includes the discussion that at times could start between the informants regarding these criteria. I have chosen to highlight some of these as I believe that they shed light on potential boundaries of group memberships and the dynamic meaning of these. Some of the informants answered that it would be difficult to be an Assyrian/Syriac without having a religion. However, it was possible to be a member of the group without being able to speak Suryoyo. This latter point is reflected in that the informants viewed themselves as Assyrians/Syriacs but not all were able to speak the language. One of the informants elaborated on a perceived link between religion and language. This connection was constituted by the idea that the language he spoke, Suryoyo, was the language of Christ. Another informant elaborated similarly on why being Christian was important to be an Assyrian/Syriac. By being Christian you could take part to a greater degree in the traditions that were associated with the Assyrian/Syriac group. This was not entirely agreed upon among all of the informants. A discussion between informants in one of

the group interviews referred to what criteria were applicable to being an Assyrian/Syriac. These criteria, or even the meaning of being Assyrian/Syriac, were not agreed upon among the informants. The criteria that were discussed referred to being a Christian where three of the informants in the group interview seemed to agree that this was necessary in order to be an Assyrian/Syriac. One informant, however, disagreed with the others by stating that it did not matter what religion you belonged to. In the same discussion, I asked the informants whether it was not enough to be able to speak the language in order for one to be a member of the group. Again, there was a disagreement, where one of the informants stated that the language was everything while two other informants replied that being able to speak the language was simply not enough. When I asked what constituted the rest of the criteria, the informant who had disagreed with the other informants regarding the necessity of being a Christian stated that learning to be an Assyrian/Syriac and learning the traditions were part of the criteria.

Other informants found it difficult to answer whether it was possible to be an Assyrian/Syriac without being a Christian. One informant answered that she might be influenced by her parents' belief that if you were not a Christian there was no point to being an Assyrian/Syriac. The informant believed that you could believe in some though not every belief of her religion and still be an Assyrian/Syriac. In this particular example, the informant stated that she adhered to certain parts, e.g., beliefs, of her religion but not to other parts, in comparison with her family. The other informant in the same group interview disagreed with this and emphasized the importance of being Christian in order to be an Assyrian/Syriac.

Similarly, an informant stated that she did not believe so much in God but she emphasized that she was still an Assyrian/Syriac. Another pair of interviewed informants stated that their parents would be angry with them if they were not to believe in God. This resulted in the informants not discussing such issues with their parents. One informant developed his thoughts on this issue. He stated that it would be difficult during childhood to be an Assyrian/Syriac without believing because this was a large part of your upbringing. The informant expressed, however, that as you get older, you tend to make more independent decisions. He continued by referring to what remained within the group since their migration from the Middle East. This was their language (Suryoyo) and their religion. Apart from this, there is not that much left of their heritage. The informant stated that being able to speak the language was partly what made one an Assyrian/Syriac but that is not everything; faith was the greatest part.

Criteria for being a Swede

I continue my exploration of how the informants engaged with their group identifications by exploring what criteria the informants assigned to being a Swede. Going through one of the interviews, I observed that the informants referred to Swedes as *them* and not as *us*. This is also consistent with how some of the informants described their criteria for being a Swede where these criteria are mentioned as something (a dialect or a behavior that the informants themselves lack or are approached) as being foreign to them. In other cases, however, the informants approached these characteristics as being self-evident: being born and living in the country, abiding by the laws in the country, speaking Swedish or being a Christian. Other criteria referred to more biological factors, such as having parents that were Swedish. In one case, an informant stated that as an Assyrian/Syriac you simply did not have a Swedish origin by not having Swedish blood in your veins. Because of this, you were a temporary Swede.

Here is a quote from an informant who elaborates on what criteria comprise being a Swede. One of these is that he and the syrianska (Syriac) people have tried to integrate into the country, which has resulted in them speaking the Swedish language and following the laws of the country. The informant points out that Sweden is their new country. In addition to this, the informant states that the syrianska (Syriac) people are integrating into Sweden and that is what makes them more Swedish. I believe that the informant was here comparing Assyrian/Syriacs with other immigrant groups. At the same time, the informant states that he has tried to integrate into Sweden.

Me: There was a similar question about if you viewed yourself as a Swede, what did you answer?

RP: I am a Swedish citizen but I view myself somewhat as a Swede but mostly as a *syrian* (Syriac). [...] I have tried to integrate into the country. The *syrianska* (Syriac) people do just that and that is what makes us more as Swedes because we live in this country, it is the language that we speak and the laws that we are obliged to follow. This is our new country if you put it like that. Where you live is also what you are. (code: *criteria Swedish identity*, group interview VIII, Wasaskolan)

The way a person talked could also be an indication, according to the informants, whether or not a person was a Swede. This referred to a particular dialect in Swedish. There were also feelings connected to speaking in Swedish. For example, one of the informants in the current study stated that she felt uncomfortable when using formal Swedish. Instead, she was more comfortable with using *Rinkebysvenska*. The informant stated that it felt better and more fun using *Rinkebysvenska* but when she was in a dialogue with me as a Swede or during Swedish classes, she used a more formal Swedish although she felt a

bit uncomfortable doing so. While Swedish could have a more formal meaning associated with it, Suryoyo or Arabic could be used in music creation by some of the informants or in making jokes as the rhythm or words in the languages were better suited for these purposes.

The informants also noted that Swedish surnames had certain characteristics such as these usually ended in –son, e.g., Eriksson or Johansson. Other informants highlighted the ability to use and to understand the Swedish language while also behaving like a Swede as criteria for being considered as a Swede. When I asked the informants what it meant to behave like a Swede, one informant responded that it involved learning the Swedish religion and to have more of a “*Sweden-spirit*” (Sverige-anda) at home and with oneself. This kind of spirit included having flags, certain pictures and eating certain dishes that were considered to be Swedish, e.g., spaghetti Bolognese. Similarly, another informant stated that if he were to become a Swede, he would need to talk and behave like a Swede. Accordingly, the informant was able to distinguish how Swedes in particular behave. He acknowledged that he would be required to adopt this type of behavior in order to be considered a Swede. The informant also referred to *becoming* a Swede, which could possibly indicate that the informant was not considering himself to be a Swede at the moment. This type of argument from the informant indicates that being a Swede is a choice as long as you fulfill certain criteria.

Engaging with several group identifications

There were informants who viewed themselves as both Swedish and Assyrian/Syriac and those who only viewed themselves as Assyrians/Syriacs. I begin by turning my attention to informants who did not see an issue in being both. One of these informants stated that he had an Assyrian/Syriac origin but that he also was a Swedish citizen. He was able to be a Swede not only because of being a citizen but because he was also able to use both of the languages, i.e., Swedish and Suryoyo. However, these identifications could also depend on the situation that he or she was in. An informant provided an example from his previous school where there were more Swedes among his peers than at his current school. Because of this, he felt himself as a Swede to a greater degree than he did in his current school, where there was a greater number of Assyrians/Syriacs. Still, he was hesitant to say that he was a Swede as he did not want to cover up the fact that he was a syrian (Syriac). Here, I have referred to this as a dichotomy where there seems to be an issue of having the two identifications according to the informants themselves. The quote that I present below illustrates this dichotomy that seems to be present among some of the informants.

Me: How come you answered as you did [on the statement about your self-image as Swedish]?

RP 1: I think I answered that I disagreed completely with the statement. [...] I do not want to, I am a *syrian* (Syriac) and I do not want to say that I am Swedish because I am *syrian* (Syriac) and I do not want to cover that up. I am *syrian* (Syriac) and I feel *syrian* (Syriac) in every possible way.

Me: You feel that you would cover up that you are a syrian (Syriac) if you were also a Swede?

RP 1: Yes, I do not see myself as a Swede, I speak a little Swedish, I may not be as a Swede. I do not follow the same laws as a Swede does.

Me: But how do you mean that it would cover up that you are a *syrian* (Syriac) or that you are an Assyrian?

RP 1: If I would see myself as a Swede and say that I am Swedish then everybody will think that I am Swedish. I want to say to others what I am.

Me: It is not possible to be both?

RP 1: No.

RP 2: For me it works being a Swede. I am a Swedish citizen with an Assyrian origin and I speak Assyrian (Suryoyo) at home or a bit of Swedish but I feel as an Assyrian. (code: *dichotomy*, group interview I, Elafskolan)

While the informant stated that he does not follow the same laws as Swedes do, I believe that he is here referring to rules or practices that the informants believe characterize the behavior of Swedes rather than judicial laws. As the informant elaborated on in the quote, he explained his position by referring to how people would judge your group belonging by what you say, e.g., if you said that you were a Swede, others would view you accordingly. Besides from verbal statements, some of the informants referred to their physical appearances and that this could be a marker of their identifications or at least what group other people perceived them belong to. For example, one of the informants referred to his physical appearance and the way he talked, which made others perceive him as a Swede.

Teasing as a reaction to a social identity

Assigning oneself or being assigned to a group identification could also result in various forms of teasing or being teased. I categorized experiences of teasing in two categories: within-group tease and between-group tease. Within-group teasing refers to teasing that originates from people the informants refer to as other Assyrians/Syriacs. Between-group teasing refers to teasing from people that the informants refer to as non-Assyrians/Syriacs. The reason for this categorization of teasing is practical in order to explore if there is a difference in the teasing depending on where it originates from and if so, what

characterizes these differences. This aids my effort to explore how the informants engage with their group identifications as these examples of teasing indicate, I believe, that differences are set up through teasing and feelings of being left out in relation to others.

Regarding within-group teasing, one informant experienced a situation where he was teased for cheering for a certain football team. The rivalry among the local football teams in Södertälje seems to be present among Assyrians/Syriacs as young as when they are enrolled in kindergarten based on stories from the informants. Similar experiences were reported by other informants. In one case, this referred to an informant cheering for the local football team of Syrianska and not Assyrisk. His peers told him that they thought that it was silly that he was a fan. He concluded by saying in the interview that he had watched a couple of games with Assyrisk and had found that they were the better team. So, from now on, he supported Assyrisk.

When I asked the informants whether they had been teased because they were Swedish, some of the informants replied that they had not. I inquired about this as I was curious if they had experienced any reactions from their families or other Assyrians/Syriacs in regard to their identifications. One of the reasons for not having experienced this was because the informants did not perceive themselves as Swedes. Other informants reported that because everybody else knew that the informants were not Swedes, they had never been teased for being as such. While not referring to teasing, one informant recollected situations at her previous school where she could at times experience being left out when she was with people she perceived to be Swedes. The reason for this was because she felt that she was outside of the group due to her being the only Assyrian/Syriac in the group. Other informants recalled that they had been teased for being a Swede because they had acted as one. Peers that the informant referred to as foreigners could at times do this teasing. This teasing originated also from family members. One informant described that at home he was encouraged by his father to only speak Assyrian/Syriac (*västassyriska* in Swedish). When the informant spoke Swedish at home he would be asked by his relatives if he was a Swede, to which he would reply that indeed he was. He elaborated that his identity was Assyrian/Syriac (*västassyrisk*) but he was a Swede that knew how to speak in Swedish and in Assyrian/Syriac. My interpretation here is that he acknowledged this duality despite the questions from his family.

Between-group tease could refer to teasing due to the informants' religious affiliation, i.e., being Christian. One such example was where some of the informants referred to being teased by Muslims. This teasing seemed to be more severe and as such I refer to it as malicious teasing. It involved making

fun of beliefs or symbols associated with Christianity. One informant described how another pupil had her cross been taken away from her by a peer and was told how ugly it was. Other informants recalled how they had been victims of foul language or had been called racists when they had gotten in fights with people that they referred to as Swedes or other nationalities, i.e., Poles. An informant recalled how he had read negative opinions, sometimes racist, that were posted on Facebook about immigrants, including Assyrians/Syriacs. This was in a group where the majority of the members were Swedes, according to the informant. The informant stated that he felt bad reading how the people in the group referred to or talked about Assyrians/Syriacs. One informant recalled a situation where she encountered people that she referred to as racists. She was on the train with her friends and talked in Rinkeby Swedish³². She overheard how other passengers talked about Assyrians/Syriacs. She could tell that they were looking at her and her friends. These people did this while they said things about Södertälje, her place as she referred to it (her part of the city I presume), while also talking about her and her friends in front of them. The informant stated that she got fed up with it and yelled at the passengers. In general, when it comes to teasing, she stated that she usually did not think about it but, around elderly Swedes, she could feel a bit uncomfortable because it felt sometimes as they did not like her. Another situation that she recalled was when she was on the bus with her friends and all of a sudden they were called blackheads (*svartskallar* in Swedish) by another passenger. She and her friends stood up for each other during that situation. They could not understand why a person would call them that for no obvious reason. The informant also mentioned that at times she would get looks from Swedes and others. She described these looks as the person being irritated or suspicious toward her. She also stated that it might not always be Swedes that give you looks or use foul language at you.

While not directly related to acts of teasing, there were accounts among the informants of feeling uncomfortable in certain situations. Accordingly, certain places were perceived by the informant to be limited in who is allowed to be there, according to the informant. One informant recollected situations where she could feel uncomfortable in relation to Swedes. This could refer to concerts, buses and stores. Sometimes she felt uncomfortable going to particular grocery stores because she knew there were a lot of Swedes working there and they were often rude to her. She did not know if they were rude to her because she was young or because she was an Assyrian/Syriac but she would rather go to a local grocery store where she lived (Hovsjö centrum) where she knew the employees there would not mind as they are like her. This is worth highlighting since the informant referred to the store as *ours*. My interpretation is that the informant referred to the store as *ours* was because the employees were

³² A version of Swedish associated with suburban areas of larger Swedish cities with multiple uses of foreign words that are incorporated as slang.

Assyrian/Syriac just as she was. Furthermore, the employees at the store were also like her, meaning that they do not react to her in a negative way as the employees did at Coop. Also, the informant assigns a positive meaning to the district of Hovsjö, where she is more comfortable than at the district, or location, where Coop (grocery store) is located. It seems from the interviews with the informants the teasing within the group is described in a lighter manner in comparison to teasing that occurs between groups which, in turn, seems to be described as more malicious in nature.

Summarizing theme – Navigating multiple social identities – creating similarities and differences

Before moving on to the analysis, I will summarize the important observations that I have done so far. The overall meaning of being Swedish or Assyrian/Syriac are dynamic. Some of the criteria for being Swedish were self-evident while others were foreign to the informants. In some instances, the informants were afraid of covering up what group they belonged to. For example, stating that one was a Swede could be perceived as an obstacle to being viewed as an Assyrian/Syriac. This obstacle is perhaps associated with teasing for being or acting as a Swede in speaking Swedish with family members or having a particular dialect. This teasing illustrates how certain identifications, with particular meanings, are being assigned to the informants. Because these meanings are expressed through teasing, they are seldom described as positive even though the informants might refer to the teasing as a form of joking between friends and peers. There were also forms of teasing that were more malicious in nature. This teasing was directed towards the religion and ethnicity of the informants and their peers.

While religion and the language can act as factors of belonging, enabling a group membership, they also act as boundaries to those that do not possess these attributes. However, language encouragement can be a method of including an informant or strengthening an identification with a group such as the Assyrian/Syriac group. Language can also act as a trigger for a sense of belonging. Hearing Suryoyo in a particular situation, e.g., visiting a store or meeting a teacher who could speak the language, could activate this sense of belonging. This could create a sense of safety making certain places such as a grocery store in one's neighborhood preferred over other places.

Interpreting the theme

As I will now interpret the results of the empirical questions, I will primarily use the theory of social identity. The theoretical analytical questions I aim to

answer here are: 1) *In what ways are languages and religion criteria for social identities*; and 2) *in what ways do family and other significant others relate to the criteria for social identities*? While I focus in the first question on the ways language and religion set criteria for social identities, I will, in the second question, focus on in what ways family and significant others relate to the criteria that the informants set up for their social identities. In order to answer these questions, I will, besides from the results presented in this chapter, also refer to information that I presented in chapter 2 regarding Assyrians/Syriacs and Södertälje. In addition to this, I will also refer to results from chapters 6 and 7 when I draw some of my conclusions in this chapter.

Religion, language and family as criteria for social identities

As I am assuming that language is associated with a social identity (Tajfel, 2010; Vedder & Virta, 2005), the parents of the informants might be emphasizing a certain social identity based on the language that they are expecting the informants to use. However, this emphasis varies depending on what situation or with whom the informant is talking. Furthermore, the in-group does not refer necessarily to an ethnic group. Instead, this in-group could primarily refer to the family, where being able to use a language becomes a measure of the ability to communicate with other family members and relatives. The sense of belonging might indirectly be tied with the Assyrian/Syriac group, as their families and friends are also members of this group, and more directly linked with their families as the informants are presumably interacting more closely with their families and friends than other Assyrians/Syriacs. As such, encouragement to speak Suryoyo could be a method used by the parents of indirectly including the informant in the Assyrian/Syriac group. Similarly, the informants stated that being able to use Suryoyo was partly due to them being able to communicate with other family members. At the same time, the informants expressed a sense of responsibility toward maintaining a religion (see chapter 7) and a language. If religion and the language are believed by the informants to be important aspects of the group, and if the informant adopted a social identity as an Assyrian/Syriac, then religion and language would need to be incorporated in their identity in order to acquire affirmation from other group members that the informant was indeed an Assyrian/Syriac and a family member. I found it noteworthy that one informant had already decided to teach her children Suryoyo before teaching them Swedish. From a theoretical standpoint, this could be a means of ensuring that her children would be able to communicate with other family members and thus become members of the in-group. Such plans might result in an attempt to include future generations to a larger Assyrian/Syriac group if the language was considered a criterion for being a member of the group.

Language also acted as a trigger for the sense of belonging for the informants (Vedder & Virta, 2005). Hearing Suryoyo could activate their social identity

as Assyrians/Syriacs. This could help to interpret why some of the informants felt more comfortable while visiting a grocery store in their own district where they lived, and consequently where other Assyrians/Syriacs worked, instead of going to a store where there were more Swedes working. The informant could experience that the store in their own district was more associated to their own in-group of Assyrians/Syriacs than the store with Swedes in it. Similarly, as I point out in Chapter 7, symbols of their religion could act as triggers for their sense of belonging as the informants described how they made the sign of the cross when passing by a graveyard, hearing the bells of a church, or when seeing an ambulance passing by. The latter might not be a symbol of their religion but it is related to the informant praying for the one being transported by the ambulance. This sense of belonging is related to the practice of making the sign of the cross (see chapter 7), while for language it is related to the act of using the language that the informants associate to their in-group.

The informants adapt however to their situation and their experiences and adopt other languages such as Rinkebysvenska in order to get by in their everyday lives (Matsumoto, 2006). These new languages acquire new meaning and are preferred in relation to other languages that lack a specific context for use for the informants. The quantitative results showed, however, that there was a positive correlation between scores on an agreement to the statement of a stronger self-image as an Assyrian/Syriac and scores for a positive attitude toward Suryoyo. Also, several of the informants stated in the interviews that they used the language on various occasions possibly because they had peers, friends and significant others that they communicate with using Suryoyo. This could perhaps be attributed to Södertälje and that there is a large group of Assyrians/Syriacs living in the city and its districts that enables Suryoyo to have a particular use that transcends the various systems, e.g., microsystems such as school, family and friends, that the informants are interacting with. For example, the informants can communicate in Suryoyo both at home and at school. Suryoyo, however, despite its relevance and usage, is met with competition from other languages that can be used by the informants in order to get by in day-to-day situations.

I would suggest that language is a method of belonging to the family by enabling a communication with certain family members. The language that was used could turn into an indirect indication from the parents to which group the informant should prefer, depending on whether the language was associated with a group. However, this would seem to be a secondary, indirect motive as the primary reason is for the pupil to be able to communicate with a family member. Because language acts as a form of interaction, choosing not to engage in language classes could thus lead to parental disappointment as it has consequences for the informant's ability to communicate with members of the family.

Handling social identities in relation to social environments

Whether or not a criterion for a particular social identity is self-evident might depend on whether the informant has incorporated a social identity that emphasizes these particular aspects of being a Swede. Some criteria for being Swedish seem to be less foreign to the informants. This could refer to being born in Sweden, being a Swedish citizen and speaking the Swedish language. Other criteria were however perceived to be more foreign to the informants. The informants would for example describe Swedes as different from themselves due to their religious beliefs, their ways of behaving, their furnishing at home or the food they ate.

My interpretation is that a social identity is not only decided by the informants themselves but it is also dependent on what social identity others assign to the informants (Tajfel, 2010). Thus, it becomes important to signal to others what group one is a member of. There is a risk, however, of being teased or criticized whether or not the informant assigns the social identity to him- or herself or is assigned the identity by others. It seemed as if there was a fear, among some of the informants, of covering up one's group belonging by, for example, stating that one was a Swede, as this could hinder others from viewing the informant as an Assyrian/Syriac. I believe this resonates with what I brought up regarding a responsibility of maintaining a heritage consisting of language and religion. Language and religion were associated with being a member of the family and a member of the Assyrian/Syriac group. While not all of the informants expressed a similar fear, the fear of losing these aspects of an identification might create a sensitivity to other identifications. As such, these identifications are experienced as foreign and not compatible with one's current social identity. These fears can also be choices of positioning oneself closer to one's family and also what is perceived to be an Assyrian/Syriac group and as a consequence farther away from a perceived Swedish group. I refer to this as an act of positioning as this emphasizes it as a choice.

Acts of teasing caused by reactions of others to their belonging to the Assyrian/Syriac group may add to this assigning of attributes or characteristics of their group belongings (Tajfel, 2010). This can be directly (the occasion on the train) or indirectly (the group on Facebook) directed at the informants. These acts can be a method of determining the criteria assigned to a group membership where the informants can be teased for being Swedes or not while at the same being assigned negative connotations for other group belongings. At the same time, several of the informants mentioned that they had not been teased for being Swedes because everyone knew that they were not Swedish. This could reflect what Tatum (2004) suggested that discrimination might be less experienced in groups that have strong ethnic identities as members of these groups are more likely to have peers with a similar identity. According to the informants of my study, everyone in their environment took it for

granted that the informants were Assyrians/Syriacs so teasing for being a Swede became irrelevant. At the same time, Tatum also suggests that groups with a strong ethnic identity might be more perceptive to discrimination as their identity provides a lens through which discrimination, and teasing, becomes more apparent. Similarly, there were informants who stated that they had been teased for acting like a Swede by for example family members when they would speak Swedish while they were at home. Teasing is as such present among the informants but in various ways and for various reasons. The reactions to being teased for behaving as Swedes could tie into this expressed fear of covering up one's group belonging. It also sheds light on the possibility that the notion of being a Swede is a negative one, or foreign. This suggestion might be more applicable to the younger informants who expressed themselves more firmly in their belonging to the Assyrian/Syriac group. This is in contrast to those older informants who were more nuanced in their elaborations on their belonging to both a Swedish and an Assyrian/Syriac albeit in different ways. These informants were perhaps aware to a greater degree than their younger peers in ways it was possible to be a Swede while also being an Assyrian/Syriac. The act of teasing someone for being a Swede might be an act of trying to maintain or determine the correct meaning of what it means to be an Assyrian/Syriac. Here, a sense of belonging to a Swedish group is not compatible as it involves aspects (e.g., food, furnishing, religious belief, traditions) that are foreign to some of the informants. This was illustrated in a previously illustrated discussion by some of the informants regarding the criteria for being an Assyrian/Syriac where there was a disagreement on what traditions it was necessary to celebrate. The discussion shows that whether it be an Assyrian/Syriac or a Swedish social identity, the criteria for these identities are reflected on by the informants.

Summary of chapter

To summarize the current chapter, I return to the research questions that I set out at the beginning of the chapter to answer: in what ways do the young adolescents engage with their group identifications? The answers to this question was interpreted with theoretical tools with help from the following questions: 1) *In what ways do languages and religion act in setting criteria for social identities?* and 2) *in what ways do family and other significant others relate to the criteria for social identities?*

I highlighted how the informants assigned similarities and differences between themselves and others in relation to their social identities. I also shed light on how similarities and differences were assigned to the informants by other people that they were interacting with. The self-assigned similarities in relation to the Assyrian/Syriac are, first, referring to one's family, and, second, to a larger Assyrian/Syriac group. The informants explained that they were

Assyrian/Syriac through their families, especially their parents. The family and the Assyrian/Syriac group were interconnected to one another through religion and language by sharing beliefs, a social identity, and practices. I will deal with this in regard to religion in more detail in chapter 7.

By assigning similarities the informant could relate him- or herself to a group. This referred to assigning criteria that defined who was a member of the in-group while also defining who was not and subsequently who belonged to the out-group. These criteria were however not agreed upon among the informants which demonstrated that these memberships were dynamic in that their meaning was continuously being negotiated. This was the case for membership in both a Swedish and an Assyrian/Syriac group. Teasing for being perceived to be a part of group indicated that certain group memberships had negative connotations assigned to them. It also showed that certain identifications were not promoted by the informants because of a fear of covering up one's actual social identity, i.e., Assyrian/Syriac.

Chapter 6: Maintaining and forming identity through education and best friends

Introduction

In this chapter, I will start by focusing on answering the empirical sub-question: *In what ways do the young adolescents engage with their education and best friends in relation to their identity?* I start by examining the scores and correlations from the measures of identity development with the education and best friends sub-scales. These scores and correlations are presented in Table 3 (for a larger correlation table that includes measures on identity processes within the religious faith domain and self-images as Assyrian/Syriac and Swedish, see Appendix I). From these scores, I continue by presenting the results of a test conducted in order to see whether there are any differences in scores on the said measures between groups of informant. Thereafter I move on to the qualitative material, where I explore how the informant engaged with their education and best friends. More specifically, this exploration revolves around how the informant engaged with their teachers, classmates, and friends as well as certain social environments in Södertälje. Thereafter, I move on to focus on the theoretical questions in order to interpret how the identity cycles occurred in the domains of education and best friends as well as the influence of teachers, stability and change at school on the informant and their identity development.

Engaging with education and best friends

Exploring correlates and differences in processes of identity development in the education and best friends domains

I start by presenting the Cronbach's alpha coefficient and inter-item correlations mean for the items that measured identity processes in the domains of education and best friends, attitudes toward Suryoyo, and attitudes toward teachers and classmates. Some of the measures reported a mean value of Cronbach's alpha and inter-item correlations that was below an accepted level. According to Pallant (2010, p. 100) Cronbach's alpha coefficient at .7 is acceptable but values above .8 are preferable. Since the subscale U-MICS

Education in-depth exploration was part of a larger scale, I decided to still use it in the analyses despite its low internal validity.

Table 2 Cronbach's alpha coefficient and inter-item correlation means

Measures	Cronbach's Alpha	Inter-Item Correlations Mean
U-MICS Education Commitments (Items Nr 1-5)	.70	.32
U-MICS Education In-Depth Exploration (Items Nr 6-10)	.58	.22
U-MICS Education Reconsideration of Commitments (Nr Items 11-13)	.81	.59
U-MICS Best Friends Commitments (Items Nr 1-5)	.81	.47
U-MICS Best Friends In-Depth Exploration (Items Nr 6-10)	.71	.34
U-MICS Best Friends Reconsideration of Commitments (Nr Items 11-13)	.90	.74
Attitudes toward teachers	.88	.57
Attitudes toward classmates	.83	.44
Degree of attitudes toward Suryoyo	.73	.31

In Table 3, I report the mean scores, standard deviation and correlations from the U-MICS on processes of identity development in the domains of education and best friends as well as measures of attitudes toward teachers and classmates. These associations between scores indicate that the scores on the processes of commitments and exploration for the aforementioned domains were associated with scores on attitudes toward certain groups and the language Suryoyo that the informants interacted with and used. However, I wish to return to this association in the qualitative material before I draw any final conclusions.

The informants indicated through their scores that they had commitments and that they were at the same time conducting an in-depth exploration of their commitments. The informant scored low for reconsideration of commitments, which in turn could be interpreted as the informant not reconsidering their commitments to any greater degree. Scores on the processes within the education and best friends domains were primarily associated in a positive way with one another. Similarly, scores from the informant on attitudes toward teachers and classmates were positively associated with scores on the U-MICS in the said domains. Furthermore, the scores on attitudes toward Suryoyo were indicated to be associated with scores on processes within the domain of best friends. This association was primarily positive.

In order to further explore how the informant engaged with their education and best friends, I conducted a Mann-Whitney U Test. This tested whether there was a difference in scores on the educational domain sub-scale of development-MICS between informants with regard to what school they were enrolled in.³³ The test revealed a difference in scores on commitments in the U-MICS domain of education between Wasaskolan (Md = 4.40, n=53) and Elafskolan (Md=4.00, n=21).³⁴ An effect size of $r=.32$ was calculated.³⁵ As such, informants at Wasaskolan reported a higher median score than informants at Elafskolan, suggesting that the informants at Wasaskolan have stronger commitments in the education domain than their peers at Elafskolan.

Friends, Teachers and Classmates

I now turn my focus to the qualitative material in order to further explore how the informants engaged with their education and best friends in relation to their identity. With *education* I am here referring to school as an environment that includes groups of people such as teachers and classmates. This section will focus on what the informants found important in their interaction with their friends, teachers and classmates. I attempt here to illustrate the perceived reasons for the informants' aforementioned scores. This will also involve how the informants described their school environment. For this presentation, I will continuously refer to which school the informants were enrolled in as the environments at the schools were different from one another.

School

I start by taking a look at the attitudes that the informants expressed about their schools. Several informants at Elafskolan stated that their current school differed in various ways from previous schools that they had been enrolled in. The informants expressed that being in a school with peers and teachers that shared a similar ethnicity was both a positive and a negative experience. The positive experiences were that the school felt like a family and the teachers were easy to get along with. One informant elaborated on this by describing her feeling that among the pupils at the current school, in general, was more relaxed in terms of physical appearances, e.g., what clothes she wore at school

³³ I also tested for differences between sex and ages. There was no significant difference in the said domain between boys and girls. The effect sizes for differences between boys and girls regarding processes in the education and best friends domains are reported in Appendix E. In order to test if there was a difference across three age groups (Gp1 ≤ 10 yrs, n=25; Gp2 11-12 yrs, n=28; Gp3 +13 yrs, n=21), I conducted a Kruskal-Wallis Test. The test revealed no significant difference between the said groups. However, the interpretation of the results of the said test needs to be done with some caution as the low number of pupils in each age group makes it unreliable. Regarding the best friends domain, I found no significant differences between pupils at the two schools.

³⁴ $U=324$, $z=-2.814$, $p=.005$, $r=.32$.

³⁵ According to Cohen (1988), this represents a medium effect size; r -value of .1=small effect; .3=medium effect, and .5=large effect.

or whether or not to put on makeup. The informant stated that such relaxedness in other schools would lead to other pupils looking down on you. The negative experiences, however, were that there was also a perceived lack of diversity that resulted in too few opportunities to practice Swedish. While several of the informants did use Swedish with each other at the school, this was described as a different Swedish than what was taught in school. The informant said that this latter, more formal Swedish that was taught at school was important to learn and practice for their future.

As shown in Table 3, the mean value for reconsideration of commitments in the education domain was 2.17 (SD=1.0) which indicated that there were some instances of reconsideration. Overall, it seemed from the interviews that classmates were valued by the interviewed informants in their choice of whether or not to stay in a particular school. This would tie into the indicated positive correlations between scores on processes in the education domain and scores on attitudes toward classmates. One informant at Wasaskolan expressed in a group interview that he had thought about moving to Elafskolan. The reasons for changing schools had been that, at Elafskolan, the informant and the teachers shared several languages. He also stated that he knew the teachers at the school. However, he had decided to stay at Wasaskolan since, according to him, he had good teachers and a lot of friends there. Here it seems as if language is an aspect to take into consideration when deciding what school to be enrolled in, as well as teachers and friends. It is however not only up to the informants themselves what school they are enrolled in. In a group interview with informants at Wasaskolan, one of the informants described the attitudes of his parents about the choice of school. The informant explained why he changed schools a while ago. According to him, his parents sought a more Swedish school, where the Swedish language was used to a greater degree than in his previous school. However, changing schools did not resolve this issue. In Wasaskolan, there was a tendency described by the informants to use Arabic or Suryoyo with each other in certain situations such as in the corridor or during breaks.

Me: Have you ever thought about changing school?

RP: I changed school for a while but it was just for a short duration. It was not because of me, or it might have been, it was because of my younger siblings that were about to start school. My parents wanted more of a Swedish school where the Swedish language would be used more frequently. We do not speak Arabic, or *syrianska* (Suryoyo) in the classrooms. Sometimes you talk with one another like that.

Me Here at [Wasaskolan]?

RP: Yes or it depends. In the corridor or during breaks. So we decided to go for a more Swedish school but it only got worse. There were, from other countries, newly arrived from Africa or other parts of Asia. There was no Swedish there, you became a bit of an outcast. I have not asked about the reason but there were not that many more Swedes there than there were here. It was a bit of the same situation. The school was also a bit further off so we came back here. (Code: *rationale for changing or not changing*, - group interview VIII at Wasaskolan)³⁶

Language, i.e., the ambition to speak more Swedish, is indicated in the quote as one of the reasons for him and his siblings to change school. This decision originates, it seems, from his parents although the informant refers to it as a joint decision. The quote highlights that the informant is influenced by the attitudes and choices of his parents. Interestingly, the informant states that he or she felt like an outcast because there was no Swedish spoken at the new school. Here it seems, according to my interpretation, that there is a group identification tied into the language spoken at school and that the pupil felt as an outcast when not hearing the said language. The final decision seemed, however, to fall on the distance to the school.

The lack of motivation experienced by some of the informants at Elafskolan could also be a relevant issue when reflecting on whether or not to change school. Some of the informants at Elafskolan expressed that there was a low level of requirement at their school. One informant explained this by referring to his expectations of the school he was enrolled in. Because of the particular ethnic profile that the school had, he had expected it to be stricter and more disciplined. He explained this by referring to schools in Turkey as examples of what he thought that the current school would be like. He also believed this because the teachers at the school were Assyrians (informant's term). However, he felt that the teachers did not care about the future of their pupils. The informant makes here the implicit connection that he believed that the school would make higher demands of its pupils because of its profile. The informant also brings up the educational background of the teacher, stating that he believed that teachers without a formal education would not be able to teach at this school. I find this worth highlighting as it indicates that the informant started the school with certain expectations. Also, the informant compares the school with others schools in countries that he refers to as their home countries, despite he himself being born in Sweden.

Me: On these last questions (referring to items on the U-MICS), they were about whether or not you had thought about changing school. You provided a somewhat high score on these questions.

³⁶ For composition of group interviews in terms of sex and class enrollment, see Appendix G.

RP: The criteria are not that high. I expected more of this school before I started here. I thought that it would be more demanding. Because these [teachers] are Assyrians and because in our countries, Turkey, it is more strict. And because it has an Assyrian profile it should have been more strict, but it was not.

Me: But in what way is it not strict?

RP: I thought it would be more similar to our home countries where if you did not have an education you would not be able to work here. It should have been that they would think more about our future but now, it feels like they are not doing it. (Code: *rationale for change or not to change*, Individual Interview II at Elafskolan)

Another informant at Elafskolan stated that she did not like her current school because of the physical environment. She argued that the school did not feel like an ordinary school because of the lack of ordinary classrooms or a school yard. This was also mentioned by another informant at the same school. However, the informant said she liked her peers and the teachers at the school and, regarding the physical environment, she stated that she enjoyed the atmosphere because it felt safe.

I turn my attention now to the behaviors of the informants during their time at school to further explore how the pupils engaged with their education. I approach these experiences of how the informants perceive that they act at school in comparison to other settings, e.g., church or home. I believe that characteristics of a social environment are highlighted through the aforementioned comparisons. The social environment at school seems to be different from other places by allowing a greater degree of freedom for the informants in how they believe that they can act (e.g., swearing). There is also a sense that other adults such as teachers see certain interests and behaviors among the informants that would go unnoticed in other settings.

Me: Do you believe that you can act differently here at school in comparison to when you are at home or at church?

RP: I can act differently, yes, because at church there are specific rules. For example, you cannot swear. Of course, you cannot do it in school either but there [at church] it is a bit clearer because we also think about Jesus a bit more. It is not nice if we do it at church. Here at school there are those that do not care, they just do it. (Code: *behavior at school*; Individual interview III, Wasaskolan)

An informant enrolled in Elafskolan stated that he felt he could behave differently at school in comparison to home. He had friends at school, which enabled him to communicate in a way that he found to be more fun while the teachers did not bother as much about what you did as your parents would

have. Another informant also expressed that she felt that she behaved differently at school, though not necessarily because of the current school that she was enrolled in. According to her, this was because it had an ethnic profile and that felt “normal”. Yet, it did not feel normal when she had Swedish class or a Swedish teacher. In these mentioned instances, she had to apply herself to a greater degree in relation to other classes. This ties into similar subjects I brought up earlier about the attitudes the informants expressed regarding their schools. In contrast to other informants, an informant expressed that there was no difference between how he acted at home and how he acted at school. The only difference between the two was what language he used. At school he used Swedish to a greater degree than at home, where Arabic was more used. However, this same informant also affirmed a difference between school and church, where the latter was calmer than school since you were not allowed to be as physically active (e.g., running and jumping around) as you were at school.

In contrast to the above, an informant said that he was able to behave differently at school since he could be more open about the different activities that he enjoyed in his spare time. At home, his parents could question or criticize him for engaging in those activities as being a waste of time. According to the informant, his parents did not understand him. Below I present a quote where he provides an example of the difference between him and his parents with the help of his fidget spinner.

Me: In what way do you believe that there is a difference (between home and school)?

RP: Look, I’ll give an example. You see this? This is a fidget spinner. If I show it to my parents they would not know what it is. They see a piece of plastic; I would show them that it can spin but they would not care. They show no interest. I say to them that it helps against stress. They answer by saying that it is bullshit. Now, if I bring one of these to school, everyone is interested. Everyone asks if they can spin a bit and, for example, it has gone viral all over the world. The parents, they have not noticed it. While all the pupils in class have one in front of the teacher and the teacher herself has seen it and wants to try it. So at school, they show more interest than they do at home. (code: *behavior at school*, individual interview II at Wasaskolan)

What is interesting about this quote is the contrast that the informant describes between his parents and his peers as well as teachers at school regarding the interest in his fidget spinner. Accordingly, his teachers could affirm his interest while his parents did not.

Another informant at Wasaskolan provided an example of how it was different at school in comparison to at church. These differences were very much attributed, according to my interpretation, to what rules that were assigned to a

place. She said that it was forbidden both at school and at church to fight with anyone but if she got really mad at someone when she was at school she could start a fight. At church, however, she would not start a fight even though she was angry because she would only think about Jesus. When compared to being at home, the informant stated that at school she needed to be alert, while at home she could be more relaxed. Other interviewed informants stated that they felt freer at school than at home. The reason for this feeling was being able to be open with his friends. As such, I interpret these reasons to be more associated with what people the informants interacted with and how they perceived them. One informant gave an example of him being able to tell secrets and talk about private issues with his friends that he was not able to talk about at home. There was also an experienced difference in discipline, where a informant could avoid doing his homework while at home. At school he needed to pay attention to his teachers. However, an informant stated that he felt that he could lie to his teachers but not to his parents as he did want to make his parents upset.

Teachers

As indicated in previous section, who the informants interact with and their perception of these people, can influence how the informants in turn perceived different social environment. One such example is the feeling of frustration toward teachers and the school itself. The focus here will primarily be on the teachers of the informants. The teachers at the school are part of the school's social environment. At the same time, they act as central actors in being able to motivate the informants in their education. Thus, I turn to the attitudes that the informants expressed toward their teachers. When I asked the informants what their thoughts were about their teachers, they usually responded by referring to their teachers in a positive manner. Some of the aspects that were brought up by the informants referred to their teachers as nice, just, interesting and fun. A group of the informants described their teachers as being helpful, i.e., they helped the informants with tasks in classes. During an individual interview with an informant at Elafskolan, a feeling of frustration was brought up. The informant described the general situation where the teachers were not listening or paying heed to the criticism that the informants brought to their attention about the behavior of another teacher. The informant was clear that he was disappointed in the teachers at the school, and in the school itself. Here, it seems as if the negative attitudes toward the teachers also spill over to the attitudes toward the school as a whole. In regard to the correlations presented in Table 3, this relates to the indicated association between scores on processes within the education domain and scores on attitudes toward teachers. The analysis indicated that higher scores on positive attitudes toward one's teachers was associated with higher scores on commitments in the education domain. This was also the same pattern for weaker scores on the two measures. In another individual interview, but with an informant at Wasaskolan, a different experience was described. That informant shared with me an experience of

how a teacher at the school motivated him by pushing him forward despite the fact that he himself had no interest in taking classes in German. The teacher knew he had had a rough start and put a lot of pressure on him because she wanted him to succeed.

In order to further explore in what ways the informants engaged with their education, I asked the informants how they perceived their teachers' group belonging. The differing voices among the informants indicate that the perceived group belongingness of teachers might, or might not, be an aspect of how the informants engage with their teachers. An informant described what it means to have a teacher from the same people as the informant himself. He expressed a bond of some kind between the informants and the teacher where the latter knew what they as a group had gone through. Another informant in the interview adds that these teachers know how their people, i.e., Assyrians/Syriacs, behave.

Me: Do you notice a difference between those (teachers) who for example are from Syria, Lebanon or those who are from other areas?

RP 1: For example, when we have a teacher from our own people, you are able to be more open toward that teacher. You cannot say everything exactly, but the teacher has good examples of what we have gone through. We have the same people, the same parents. Almost all parents of *syrianer* (Syriacs) and Assyrians have the same...

RP 2: They know how our people behave, let's put it like that.

Me: They know certain things that for example Swedish teachers do not?

RP 1: Yes. (code: *ethnic belonging of teachers*, group interview VI, Wasaskolan)

In another group interview, three informants expressed how it felt when they had a teacher they perceived to be Assyrian/Syriac. They described how they felt it in their bodies that the teacher would be kind toward them and be a good teacher. One informant elaborated on this and stated that Assyrians/Syriacs were kind toward each other and that the teachers knew that the students were also Assyrians/Syriacs. The informants continued by stating that the teachers who were Assyrian/Syriac had a way of understanding the Assyrian/Syriac pupils that were different from their other teacher who did not share ethnicity with the pupils. One informant described this as a secret language. The informants provided an example of a debate between pupils in the class where the teacher could help students in the argument by sharing their own knowledge of the issue that was being discussed. This informant likened his teachers to mothers who helped and looked after the pupils.

The informants also assigned attributes to teachers that they perceived as Swedish. However, these perceptions were different among the informants. An informant stated that Swedish teachers were more patient than Assyrian/Syriac teachers and that it was easier to talk with them. These attributes of their teachers were brought up when I asked what meaning the informants attributed to the ethnicities of their teachers. In another group interview, informants reflected on any perceived differences between teachers based on their ethnicity. One informant stated that Swedish teachers were harsher or more severe than their Assyrian/Syriac teachers were. Other interviewed informants expressed similar opinions about Swedish teachers being harsher. In comparison, Assyrian/Syriac teachers joked a lot, according to some of the informants. However, in some of the interviews, the informants stated that there were no differences between their teachers due to their ethnicity.

Classmates and friends

Similar to teachers, classmates are a part of the social environment of a school. As such, in order to further explore how the informants engaged with their education and best friends, I turn my attention on the group belongings of their classmates. Because of the informants assigning certain aspects of their teachers based on their perceived group belonging, I found that it would be interesting to see if it would be similar with their classmates. The informants stated that their classes were mostly, if not entirely, made up of pupils that shared a ethnicity similar to their own. The informants spoke of their classes as a form of community that could involve protection in certain situations, e.g., fights with others. One informant at Wasaskolan stated that he felt at home in his class as the majority of his peers talked in Suryoyo. For the whole sample, however, it seemed that the younger informants expressed a strong classroom cohesion. The informants who were older (i.e., enrolled in upper secondary school) were modest in this regard. This did not necessarily mean that the older informants experienced a lower degree of cohesion in their classes but rather that they did not emphasize it in the interviews in a manner similar to their younger peers. In another interview, I asked the informants what they felt about their class. They corresponded that they liked their class and that there was a mix of various cultures. When I inquired about what cultures that were present, they responded by stating that their class had Christians, Muslims and an atheist. Interestingly, the informants were in the interview referring to religious denominations as cultures.

In order to explore how the informants engaged with their friends, I asked the informants to reflect on why they thought that a particular person was their friend. Overall, they expressed a certain bond that they shared with their best friend that enabled a trust where secrets or information on private matters could be shared. Furthermore, the informants engaged with their friends in a way that enabled a discovery of new things. It seems that finding out new things about one's friend is, not surprisingly, associated with the relationship

that the informants had with this person. One of the informants told me that her best friend was caring of her and that they understood each other. Another informant stated it was a form of trust that he had toward his best friend that enabled him to share private matters with only him. For a third interviewed informant it was just that his friends knew what he enjoyed. For some of the informants, however, they had indicated on the exploration scale for the best friends domain that they engaged in little exploration. When following up these scores, one informant stated that he did not find out new things about his friend, as he already knew him or her well. In contrast to the above, two other informants who had provided high scores on the subscale elaborated on why they would try to find out certain issues about their friends. One of these informants stated that it depended on the friend and if that person was open to sharing about issues that he or she dealt with. It could also depend on the nature of the issue itself and the magnitude of it. The second informant stated that if her friend was not feeling well, she could see it in an instance. As such, she would inquire about how her friend felt.

Similar to my questions about teachers and classmates, I asked the informants if they had friends that they viewed as Assyrians/Syriacs and/or Swedish. Some of the informants stated that they did not have any friends at the moment that they viewed as Swedish. For the time being, their friends were mostly Assyrians/Syriacs. One informant stated similarly that he did not really know anybody that was a *complete* Swede, i.e., having two Swedish parents, and did not know anybody at his current school that had a Swedish parent. This clarity regarding what group one's friends belonged to was not expressed by all of the informants. For example, in an individual interview, an informant did not really know what group his other friends belonged to. Some of them were Swedes while others were not. One of the informants elaborated on the importance of having friends from different backgrounds. She stated, in relation to this, that this was necessary in order to develop as a person:

Me: You two (informants) both said that you have friends from other cultures, what happens when you are with them?

RP: I do also have friends that are not just *syrianer* (Syriacs). I understand that you need to have, in order for me to develop as a person, you cannot only have friends that are *syrianer* (Syriacs). I believe I already know the traditions that have taught me a thing or two. (code: *friends as a microsystem*, group interview III, Elafskolan).

I also asked the informants where they would interact with their friends in order to explore in what social environments they engaged with their friends. Some of the places that the informants mentioned were at each other's homes, the gym, or at church. One informant stated that he had Swedish friends but that he did not usually engage with them. When I asked him to elaborate on

this, he answered that his neighbors were predominantly Assyrians/Syriacs and that he felt that he wanted to engage with Assyrians/Syriacs. I asked him if it was easier to engage with Assyrians/Syriacs since he had earlier in the interview expressed that it felt good to be in a school with Assyrians/Syriacs and that it was easier to talk to teachers that he assigned to the same group as himself. His answer was that it was easier to understand them and the jokes they told. The answer that the informant provided might point to what I brought up in previous sections that some of the informants might perceive a certain relationship to teachers and friends that are Assyrians/Syriacs. When it came to friends that the informants perceived as Swedes, some of the informants stated that they only had a few or no Swedish friends. They outlined that there was no particular place where they would meet Swedes. Some of the informants referred to their school and stated that there were not that many Swedes enrolled in their school. One informant stated that, while she had Swedish friends and that she usually met up with them, she did not live close to Swedes. Another informant stated that she did not often engage with Swedes and she was also shocked to see a larger group of Swedes in Södertälje. This, according to the informant, was because of her experiences of racism.

Summarizing the theme – Engaging with education and best friends

I will now summarize the findings that I have pointed out. I will then take a step back from the findings and move closer to the theoretical framework to interpret the material further. In this theme, I have provided examples of how the informants engaged with their school and their friends in relation to how they viewed themselves. At school, informants could be motivated by their teachers. The role of the teachers, according to the informants, was important as teachers had a central role in the quality that informants perceived their education at school had. This would tie into the positive correlation between attitudes toward teachers and commitments in the education domain. An experienced lack of quality in the education could have the opposite effect and lead to thoughts about changing school. In certain cases, the informants assigned certain attributes to the teachers they perceived as Assyrians/Syriacs or as Swedes. In the case of teachers that were perceived as Assyrians/Syriacs, this perception seemed to enable an interaction where, for example, shared languages and experiences could be used to aid the interaction between teacher and informant.

The informants also provided examples of what characterized their relationships with their friends and classmates. One such example was that the friends could be keepers of secrets in whom the informants could confide. If the informants had a fight with their friends or if their current relationships were believed to be unsatisfactory, e.g., a lack of a shared interest, it could lead to

the informants turning to other friends or not attempting to discover new things about them. The cohesion, the perceived group belonging, of one's classmates could be perceived by some of the informants as a form of protection while other informants did not express any particularity regarding their classmates. The informants did not seem to engage with their friends whether such were perceived as Assyrians/Syriacs or as Swedes in any particular social environment. Several of the informants stated that they did not very often engage with Swedes due to their having no or few Swedish friends or that their school had few pupils that they perceived as Swedes.

School was also described by the informants as an environment that had certain rules and opportunities attached to it in relation to other places such the home of the informants and the church they visited. For example, certain interests of the informants can be validated at the school by his or her teachers while school can also be an environment that is experienced as safe and approving.

Interpreting the theme

I now turn to answering the theoretical sub-questions: 1) *In what ways do the identity maintenance and formation cycles occur in the education and best friends domains in the personal identity of the young adolescents?* and 2) *How can systems of development influence the identity of the young adolescents in the education and best friends domain?* I start by providing an interpretation of how the informants engage with their education and friends can be understood as identity cycles in the education and best friends domains. More specifically, I interpret what the informants find important with their teachers, friends and classmates as well as how they characterize their school environment from a perspective of maintaining and forming identity in so called identity cycles. Thereafter, in order to deepen this interpretation, I turn to how teachers, friends as well as stability and change, all understood as systems of development, influence the aforementioned identity cycles in the said domains.

The identity maintenance and formation cycles in the education and best friends domains

The education domain

In order to interpret how the identity cycles occur in the education and best friends domains, I start by focusing on the scores from the U-MICS (Crogetti et al., 2010). The informants provided scores in the education and the best friends domains which I interpreted as that the majority of the informants had confidence in the commitments they had adopted. At the same time, they were also in a process of exploring these commitments. This exploration involved gathering additional information and being in dialogue with others about one's

current commitments. Together, these two processes of commitments and exploration of commitments indicated that the informants maintained their identity (Crocetti, 2017). Maintaining or forming the identity in the education domain seemed to be associated with whether or not the informants felt that they were motivated in school. The identity would be maintained in that the commitments in the education domain would be strengthened by feeling motivated in their education. Experiences based on a perceived lack of quality in their education could result in weaker commitments and a stronger process of reconsideration of commitments. This could raise thoughts of changing to another school as the informants work and achievement at school was hampered. I should note however that this interpretation needs to be taken with a grain of salt as the quality of education could also refer to particular subjects though, in this case, it was referring to the school as a whole (Klimstra et al., 2010).

The difference between schools in regard to the strength of commitment in the education domain can be explained by taking a look at how the education domain and teachers seem to be related. The teachers can for example be invested in the education of the informants by providing motivation to their pupils, which could improve the quality of the education. If the opposite would be perceived by the informants, it could generate an experienced lack of quality in their education, which some of the informants at Elafskolan expressed. According to the informants, this lack of quality was attributed to some of the teachers as well as a perceived general lack of care for the pupils at the school. Consequently, these informants stated that they did not feel any motivation at school. These informants outlined how the teachers did not make an effort at teaching and motivating their pupils, as well as not demanding enough of them. Some of the informants also stated that they could not trust the teachers, i.e., they could not share sensitive issues or experiences. My interpretation is that the teachers influence how the informants approach the identity cycles in the education domain. Furthermore, the perception of the teacher turns negative as the informant lacks motivation. Thus there is a risk of failing tasks that require motivation to see them through, or because the teachers are not experienced by the informants as engaging enough in their interaction. I would thus suggest that failing tasks and not feeling motivated are associated with weaker commitments and a reconsideration, in the education domain as the current commitments are unsatisfactory. In contrast to this, an informant at Wasaskolan shared a story of receiving positive affirmation from a teacher about his language skills in English. The informant was happy to hear this. Positive affirmation from a teacher might be associated to a greater motivation for the informant to improve his skills in a particular subject. This could be associated with stronger commitments in the education domain by building confidence in particular subjects. In fact, the U-MICS do inquire about the confidence that an individual gains from his or her commitments in a particular domain. While there were negative experiences of interaction with teachers at Elafskolan, the informants at the school did state that there was an atmosphere at the

school which made them feel comfortable and relaxed, and that there was a sense of being one big family. These feelings might have contributed to balance the strength of commitments in the education domain with the experienced lack of quality in the education. As such, it seems that it is not only the interaction between informants and teachers that affect how the informants approach their identity processes. It also seems as if the environment itself, consisting of several groups of people including teachers, friends and classmates, has an influence on said processes. One informant even stated that she did not like her current school because of the physical environment where the school lacked ordinary classrooms and a proper school yard.

The best friends domain

The informants reported scores on the U-MICS that I interpreted as strong processes of commitment and exploration in the best friends domain. Processes of reconsideration of current commitments were weak. Accordingly, the informants seem to have friends who provide them with beneficial attributes, self-confidence for example. At the same time, the informants were also in a process of exploring their friends. These friends were described with positive meanings, such as being a keeper of secrets. Such experiences would indicate that in the best friends domains the informants were maintaining their identity (Crocetti, 2017). The informants are engaging with their friends on a regular basis is how the identity maintenance cycle occurs in this domain. The quotes that I presented in previous sections illustrated that there was a sense of development gained from friends among some of the informants where, for example, different traditions could be learned through one's friends. This could be an indication of maintaining one's identity through a process of exploration where friends that have a different background than oneself might facilitate this process by providing new experiences to the informant through an introduction to new traditions or customs (ibid). These experiences might in turn lead to the relationship being considered by the informant as fruitful and worth maintaining.

However, based on the interviews with the informants, I would suggest that there are possibilities for fluctuation in the strength of the various identity processes. Day-to-day happenings might affect the informants and their relationships with their friends, as well as other significant others. Presumably this should also affect what scores on the U-MICS the informants would produce (cf. Klimstra et al., 2010). I believe that it is important to keep in mind that the relationships, and thus also the identity processes, are not rigid but, rather, dynamic and that they are affected by the situations and interactions that the informants have with other people. For example, one informant stated that it was simply not possible to be happy with a friend all of the time.

Systems of development and the education and best friends domains

Now I move on to interpret *how systems of development can influence the identity of the young adolescents in the education and best friends domain*. My point of departure here is that teachers, classmates, parents and friends can be interpreted as microsystems that the informants interact with, while stability and change at school are part of the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1981; Damon & Lerner, 2006). The uniqueness of school and friends is set by their peers and teachers at school by a show of mutual interest with the informant. This is not to say that other environments or groups are not unique. Here at school, however, particular interests of the informants are seen and acknowledged.

Because the systems of the bio-ecological model are nested in each other and because of the interaction of systems with one another, this linkage has consequences for the other systems in the model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1981). The microsystems that involve the school, classmates, friends and teachers were also in an interaction with other systems. One such effect could be the particularity with which some of the informants characterized Södertälje, here understood as an exosystem. This particularity meant, among other things, that having a social identity as an Assyrian/Syriac was something that the informants had in common with several other people that they interacted with (Tajfel, 2010). The informants assigned positive meanings to teachers that they categorized, or to whom they assigned a social identity, as Assyrians/Syriacs. Some of these assigned meanings involved a certain relationship that included a common knowledge regarding a similar background growing up and living as Assyrians/Syriacs. This could possibly aid the interaction between teachers and informants during classes or at school in general. It also involved more practical skills, such as the ability to communicate in languages other than Swedish. It is possible that this common bond is a form of macrosystem (codified ethics, rules and laws) that the informants and teachers share with one another thus enabling more forms of interaction between systems, e.g., sharing experiences of being an Assyrian/Syriac, than if such a macrosystem did not exist (Bronfenbrenner 1977, 1981; Fish & Syed, 2018).

Systems of development, i.e., friends, teachers, and parents, influence the identity cycles in the education and best friends domain by being invested in the lives of the informants. For example, the goals of the informants for future careers and education were not only an issue for themselves but also for their family and for their teachers. Parents were described as being concerned for them to acquire a decent education that could help them apply for better jobs. Teachers helped the informants prepare for upcoming tests, informed about various schools and programs as well as about completing their grades.

Friends provided relationships that among other things could bring new experiences to the informants and be peers with whom the informants could share secrets.

Teachers have an important role for the informants and their identity development, as they interact with the informants on a regular basis. When I am referring to teachers here, I am assuming from the interviews that they are not just given one class only on a particular occasion (e.g., standing in during some other teacher's sick leave). Similarly, classmates are also part of a continuous interaction with the informants and engage with tasks that increase in complexity and which are meant to be solved by the informants in the class. Scoring positive on measures that are measuring attitudes toward classmates and teachers could thus be an indication of these groups helping the informants to maintain commitments within the education domain (Crocetti, 2017). This is an example of the processes of identity development being nested within the systems of the bio-ecological model where the commitments in the education domain are linked to teachers and classmates. Furthermore, the experiences in the interviews and the association between aforementioned scores indicate that school, as a microsystem, is in interaction with other microsystems, e.g., friends or home. Together these constitute mesosystems that the informants are aware of, reflect on and take into consideration when making a decision about what school they want to enroll in (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1981). Here the informants, sometimes together with their parents, take into consideration the distance to the school, what language is spoken and what friends are enrolled at the school. The identity development as such seems to be related not just to the microsystems but also to the mesosystems, i.e., the interaction between school, teachers and friends that are enrolled at the same school. The informants assigned various meanings to their teachers depending on what social identity they perceived their teachers to have (Tajfel, 2010). Furthermore, depending on the meaning of this perception, the social identity of the teachers might have different impacts on the informants. In some cases, the social identity could aid the interaction while in other cases it seems not to matter. The perceptions of the social identity of one's teachers sheds light on an aspect of the interaction that the informants, with their identity cycles, have with one of their microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1981; Crocetti, 2017; Tajfel, 2010). I would also suggest that this highlights that the personal identity and the identity cycles in the various domains are located at the intersection between the social and the personal levels of identity. More specifically, processes of identity development in various life domains are influenced by social identities of people with which the informants interact with where what language is spoken can aid the interaction (Vedder & Virta, 2005).

Lastly, I turn to the chronosystem in the bio-ecological model in an attempt to explore how stability and change in terms of developing significant relationships at school influence the identity of the informants (Fish & Syed, 2018).

The chronosystem refers to stability and change through time at both an individual level and a group level. The informants from Wasaskolan had been enrolled longer in their current school than their peers at Elafskolan. Thus they had had more time to develop significant relationships with classmates, friends and teachers at the school than informants at Elafskolan. I would suggest that such significant relationships do correspond with stronger commitments in the education and best friends domains. However, several informants at both of the schools had changed school more than once during their time in elementary school. This change of school results in a change in the lives of the informants where they have to start creating stability when starting at a new school. Such measures taken to create stability involves developing relationships with significant others, classmates and teachers for example. In terms of identity cycles, this would correspond to an identity formation cycle where commitments are reconsidered in a domain (Crocetti, 2017). A change of school does not necessarily result in a new start to relations with classmates or friends as some of the informants stated that they had changed schools because they already had several friends at their new school. It is also possible that a change in commitments in the best friends domain also affect the degree of commitments in the education domain because the informants had friends at their current school. I suggest this due to the aforementioned positive correlation between the two domains and my suggestion that there is an association between the processes of identity development and the people that the informants interact with.

Summary of chapter

In this chapter, I illustrated how the informants engaged with their education and friends in relation to their identity. I suggested that their engagement consisted of their relations and interactions with their teachers, friends and classmates. The quantitative results indicated that there was a positive association between scores on processes within the education domain and best friends domain as well as scores on attitudes toward teachers and classmates. A difference was indicated regarding commitments in the education domain between informants at Wasaskolan and Elafskolan. I suggested that the reason for this difference was the perceived lack of quality in the education that informants at Elafskolan experience. This was tied into their interaction with the teachers at the school. Because they experienced a lesser degree of satisfaction with their commitments in their education at the school, they were more aligned toward a formation cycle of their identity in this domain where they would reflect on starting a new school. At the same time, the informants at Elafskolan expressed that they felt like a family due to the atmosphere at the school. Informants at Wasaskolan, however, expressed a more positive interaction with their teachers and with their school in general. Thus, these informants reported stronger commitment and weaker reconsideration in the education domain.

This indicated that the informants were more aligned toward a maintenance cycle.

I highlighted the importance of several individuals, groups and places for the identity of the informants. I interpreted these individuals, groups and places as various systems of the bio-ecological model. The educational and best friends domain were intertwined as they shared parts of the systems (e.g., classmates being both a part of the classes at school and as friends of other informants). Microsystems referred to teachers and classmates as well as friends enrolled in the same school and class as the informants. Teachers had the potential of affecting the quality of education in a positive or negative way at the schools. This could result in an impact on the commitments and reconsideration of commitments in the education domain where, depending on the quality of education, the said processes could either be strengthened or weakened. The informants interacted with their friends regularly by meeting up at school or after school. They also provided the informants with support, e.g., being able to keep secrets. I brought in the chronosystem in the analysis in order to emphasize change and stability, in terms of developing relationships for the informants at their school where more time spent at school could possibly aid the task of developing more significant relationships to teachers, classmates and friends.

Chapter 7: Maintaining and forming identity through religion

Introduction

In this chapter, I will start by focusing on answering the empirical sub-question: *In what ways do the pupils engage with their religion in relation to their identity?* I define religion as “the search for significance that occurs within the context of established institutions and traditions that are designed to facilitate spirituality.” (Pargament et al., 2013). With this definition as my point of departure, I explore religion in two primary ways in this chapter. I begin with the questionnaires where I primarily will explore religion through the religious faith domain as it is formulated by U-MICS. As such, I approach religion as a domain where identity development takes place. As I move on to the interviews, my point of departure is from the elaborations provided by the informants on their answers to the religious faith domain area in the U-MICS. However, the exploration of religion in the interviews is not limited to religious faith. My exploration includes aspects of religion such as practices, beliefs, belonging and places as I attempt to answer the question of in what ways the pupils engage with their religion in relation to their identity. Later in the chapter, I turn to the theoretical questions in order to interpret the results by focusing on the way the identity cycles occur in relation to religion and in what ways the systems of development with regard to religion influence identity.

Religious group belonging and processes of commitments, exploration and reconsideration

I start by presenting the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient and inter-item correlations mean for the items that measured identity processes in the religious faith domain and attitudes toward the informants’ mother tongue and the Swedish language. The items that make up the measures of degree of attitudes toward the mother tongue and Swedish were not used since they provided a low Cronbrach’s Alpha.

Table 4 Cronbach's alpha coefficient and inter-item correlations mean

Measures	Cronbach's Alpha	Inter-Item Correlations Mean
Degree of attitudes toward mother tongue	.43	.19
Degree of attitudes toward Swedish	.14	.02
U-MICS Religious Faith Commitments (Items Nr 1-5)	.91	.67
U-MICS Religious Faith In-Depth Exploration (Items Nr 6-10)	.73	.39
U-MICS Religious Faith Reconsideration of Commitments (Nr Items 11-13)	.79	.60

In an attempt to explore how the informants engaged with religion in relation to their identity, I asked the informants in the questionnaire what they thought about when they thought of their faith (*tro* in Swedish). The majority of the informants put down Christianity, God, Jesus or a combination of these. One informant put down "Christianity but not 100%." The mean scores³⁷ for the religious faith subscale on the U-MICS was interpreted by me as the informants having strong commitments in the domain while at the same time conducting an in-depth exploration of these commitments. In other words, this indicated an identity maintenance cycle. The scores for reconsideration of commitments were low which indicated that the informants were not reconsidering their commitments and thus not engaging in an identity formation cycle.

In Table 5, I present associations between scores on measures of processes of identity development and scores on measures of self-image as Swedish/Assyrian/Syriac as well as attitudes toward Suryoyo. The pattern I want to illustrate here are the various associations that are indicated between scores on measures of identity development in the religious faith domain and scores on attitudes toward Suryoyo and self-images as Swedish and Assyrian/Syriac. I found that higher scores on commitments in the religious faith domain were associated with higher scores on exploration as well as lower scores on reconsideration of commitments. Furthermore, higher scores on attitudes toward Suryoyo were associated with higher scores on the agreement with the statement that the informants viewed themselves as an Assyrian/Syriac. Higher

³⁷ Rfaith commitments: Mean (M)=4.7, Standard deviation (SD)=.5; Rfaith exploration: M=3.7, SD=.8; Rfaith reconsideration: M=1.1, SD=.3. A high mean score in each respective subscale indicates that the informants are more aligned toward having strong commitment, in-depth exploration or reconsideration of commitment.

scores on attitudes toward Suryoyo was also associated with higher scores on commitment in the religious faith domain. However, higher scores on positive attitudes toward Suryoyo were negatively associated with higher scores on the statement of viewing oneself as Swedish. In relation to the religious faith domain, viewing oneself as Swedish was indicated to be associated with lower scores on commitments in the domain. Further, stronger agreement with the statement of viewing oneself as Swedish was indicated to be associated with higher scores on reconsideration of commitments in the domain. However, viewing oneself as an Assyrian/Syriac was associated with stronger commitments. Furthermore, stronger agreement with the statement of viewing oneself as Swedish was associated with a weaker agreement with the statement of viewing oneself as an Assyrian/Syriac.

Table 5 Correlations between measures of commitments, exploration and reconsideration within the religious faith domain as well as attitudes toward Suryoyo and self-image Swedish/Assyrian/Syriac

		Rfaith commitments	Rfaith exploration	Rfaith reconsideration	Attitudes Suryoyo	Self-image Swedish	Self-image Assyrian/Syriac
Spearman's rho	Rfaith commitments	M=4,7 SD=0,5	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	,439** 0,000 74	,413** 0,001 64	-,340** 0,003 74	,291* 0,012 74
	Rfaith exploration	M=3,7 SD=0,8	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	-0,058 0,625 74	0,154 0,226 64	-0,051 0,666 74	-0,115 0,330 74
	Rfaith reconsideration	M=1,1 SD=0,3	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N		-0,209 0,097 64	,279* 0,016 74	-0,148 0,208 74
Attitudes Suryoyo		M=2,98 SD=0,72	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N			-,272* 0,030 64	,588** 0,000 64
	Self-image Swedish	M=1,7 SD=0,8	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N				-,310** 0,007 74
	Self-image Assyrian/Syriac	M=3,6 SD=0,8	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N				

**, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*, Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The scores from six informants on the process of reconsideration of commitments in the religious faith domain were indicated as outliers. Because the whole sample answered rather consistently on this measure, these informants stood out as outliers. The trimmed mean indicated that the scores of these outliers were not affecting the mean to any great degree. Three of the informants that were classified as outliers had a slightly higher mean score ($M=1.33$ compared to $M=1.0$ of the entire sample). Two other informants scored a mean score of 2 while one informant scored a mean value of 3. Unfortunately, none of these informants participated in the qualitative interviews so it was not possible to explore their scores. However, there were informants who scored low on the measure of reconsideration but who expressed themselves as somewhat distanced to certain beliefs that the informant shared with his or her family. This could be a nuance of reconsidering one's commitments in the religious faith domain that was not captured by the U-MICS. I will return to this later in the chapter.

Belonging to and practicing religion

I will go through a selection of examples of how the informants engaged with religion in relation to their identity. These examples are referred to as through a sense of belonging and through practices and places.

Through a sense of belonging

I begin by sharing some light on why the informants felt that religion was important to them. Here, I will approach this through what I refer to as a sense of belonging where the informants identify themselves with a religion. This could be a belonging to a religion through a sense of belonging with one's family. The informants would often state that they belonged to Christianity or a particular church. In the latter case, I would refer to it as a form of church linkage where the informant made an explicit connection between his or her ethnic identification, i.e., Syriac, and that of the church and the priest who was also Syriac. These two forms of belonging are represented in the following quotes.

Me: Do you remember that there was a question about your religion, what you thought about your religion, do you remember what you answered?

RP 1: Yes, I am Christian. [...] I want to be my religion and I am faithful. (code: religious belonging, group interview III, Wasaskolan)

[...]

Me: There was a question about 'I view myself as an Assyrian/Syriac'. Do you remember? You got to put down a score ranging from 1 to 4. I think you all scored pretty high. How come?

RP 2: We are *syrianer* (Syriacs), we belong to a *syriansk* (Syriac) church and our priest is *syrian* (Syriac). (code: *church linkage*, group interview I, Wasaskolan)

For the first quote, I asked an informant and her peers to recollect what they had put down as an answer in the questionnaires to what they thought of when they thought of their religious faith. The informant answered that she was Christian, that she was a believer in the Bible and that she wanted to "be her religion" and be faithful to her religion. The second quote illustrates the link between the church that the informant attends and a group that he assigns to himself. The informant refers to himself and others as Syriacs and that they attend a Syriac church where their priest is also Syriac. The informants also referred to their parents as a factor that affected to which group one belonged. One informant elaborated on why he did not view himself as a Swede despite being able to speak the language. Similar to the other informant referred to above, this informant makes a link between his group identifications and the church that he visits. He states that if he went to the Swedish Church he would see himself as half Swede, half Syriac. He also refers to his parents as a factor at play.

Me: Why do you not view yourself as a Swede even though you are able to speak the language?

RP: I have a lot of relatives and cousins who are able to speak in Swedish. We usually go together to church because if I would go to the Swedish church then I would view myself as 50/50 Swedish and syrian (Syriac). For example, if my mother was Swedish then I would view myself as a Swedish and as a syrian (Syriac) but both of my parents are syrianer (Syriacs). I see myself as a syrian (Syriac). (code: *church linkage*, group interview VII, Wasaskolan)

Other informants at both of the schools made similar connections between their religion: as a form of belonging, and their ethnic identifications. For example, one informant referred to visiting two churches because her parents had different ethnicities. This connection between parents and their children is illustrated in another example where an informant mentions that his mother's decreased frequency of visiting church affected his own frequency of visits. A sense of belonging was also visible when the informants elaborated on their beliefs in the interviews. There would also be instances where individual informants would explain that *their* (a group's) beliefs were Orthodox Christian. By referring to a larger group, whether this was the constellation of the group interview or Assyrians/Syriacs in general, the informants related themselves to a group that they perceived that they shared a similar belonging.

Through practices and places

I turn my attention now to how certain practices and places can act as ways for the informants to engage with their religion. Practices often refer here to praying or attending Mass as well as making the sign of the cross. Places refer in most cases to church. I will start this presentation with practices. I put also a particular focus on those the informants engage with in practices related to their religion, and the language that is used in these situations. My choice to bring in language here is partly due to the observed association between commitments in the religious faith domain and the attitudes toward Suryoyo. It is also partly due to that language and religion was often referred by the informants as important to their self-image as Assyrian/Syriac. This focus situates religion of the informants in particular situations, which helps to explore how they engage with religion. The informants would pray when they went out through the entrance to their home or when they saw an ambulance pass by. Prayers were done with their families during dinner or on their own, for example when they went to bed. However, how praying was described differed among the informants. For some of the informants, praying was described more as a routine while for other informants it was described as a conversation with God. The informants used Suryoyo or Arabic when praying at home. Some of the informants explained that they had learned specific prayers in these particular languages and that they did not know any prayer in Swedish. Praying at home was done on occasions such as before going to bed or before dinner. Other practices that were mentioned by the informants were singing psalms, which included singing in a choir, during Mass. Fasting was mentioned but there were some difficulties in this for the informants as the school did not serve food that was considered to be acceptable to eat during the period.

When it comes to places that were related to religion, the informants stated that they usually visited church at least once every week. The purpose of these visits could be to attend Mass or to attend Bible school, language classes or lectures on various topics. One informant stated that it was a necessity for her to attend church. Not doing so resulted in a feeling of having missed out on something. For some of the informants, these visits were less regular. Church as such seems to be not just where they engage in practices related to religion, it is also a place that offers other activities such as attending regular classes to learn a language. Visiting church was not as self-evident to all informants. There were several reasons expressed by informants for not attending church. When it referred to Mass, they stated that it was too early in the morning. Other activities such as taking language classes (in Suryoyo) often took place after school which resulted in longer days. These classes could also coincide with other activities outside of church such as sports, which some of the informants prioritized instead. These informants said that they were tired of attending these classes and consequently stopped. In order to further understand

in what way the informants engaged with religion at church, I would like to shed some light on how the informants expressed their perception of church as a special place. The following quote illustrates that there seems to be particular rules tied to the church as a location where the informant and his peers would not use curse-words while they were inside the building. However, after leaving church the peers of the informant would start using curse-words. This is similar to what I brought up in previous chapter regarding the particularity of their school and their home.

Me: Are you able to be different here at school in comparison to when you are at church?

RP : Yeah, there is a difference. But if we are doing something with church like yesterday, we were not at church but when we are, everybody says that you are not allowed to swear but when we are not in church it is a different situation. Yesterday, we were with youth from church, and then when we were outside of church, all you could hear were curse-words. It is like you become a different person. I did not swear, not to protect myself or anything but, I heard others who did do it. I felt tense when I heard others say curse-words. (code: *behavior at church*, individual interview II, Elafskolan).

This could be an indication of the informant's views of church and the behaviors that are expected of him when he is in church. Part of how the informants engage with religion seems to be influenced by their parents and other adults. Other informants also said that they did not swear at church. One informant elaborated on this and said that there are times when you are expected to act in a particular way. This was by showing respect in relation to adults in particular. While these occasions depended on the situation, e.g., what would happen and where she was as well as with whom, this could be during visits to church. Another informant stated that when he was at church, he tried to be nice and not to swear as his parents could get angry with him. This was contrasted to school, where the informant stated that he did swear more often as there were no grown-ups present, at least not in a similar way as being at church. This informant also stated that he usually got bored at church, which sometimes made him play with his mobile phone. One of the reasons for getting bored was not being able to understand the language that was spoken during Mass. This informant states that he acts in a certain way due to the reactions of his parents. There did not seem to be a specific reason ascribed to the place itself for acting in a certain way but, rather, to the people with whom the informant was.

I believe that my questions regarding comparisons between places, e.g., church and school, helped the informants to contrast the characteristics of various social environments. While I am not conducting any comparison between, for example, church and school in the type of clothes the informants were wearing, it is still worthwhile observing that the informants responded

that they did not wear clothes that were too casual or shabby. I believe that this relates to church as a particular place similar to what the informants stated earlier about not swearing at church. Some of the informants stated that they did not go in worn-out clothes or clothes that were too casual, while another informant described it as not going to church in their jogging pants. Furthermore, to explore what set church apart from other places, I asked the informants what language they used. An informant provided an example that they spoke Swedish. Another informant stated that, at church, she tried to only use Suryoyo. However, this depended on to whom she was talking. She stated that when talking to peers or cousins of the same age as her, she tended to use Swedish as she believed that they were more comfortable with using that language.

When it comes to how being at church differed from being at home, one of the informants expressed that he was more open at church than at home and with his parents. He explained that when the priest acted as a teacher and he was more understanding. The relation that the informant describes with the priest seems to play an important role. I asked the informant to elaborate on this openness with which he described the priest. He explained this by referring to his parents as being uninterested and that he had stopped talking about his interests with them. But going to church and school, he would talk about his interests and that the people there would be interested. This informant also mentioned that apart from praying at church, there were also lectures, group sessions and outdoor activities, like camping, that he attended. One informant stated that he was calm at church. When he was younger, he used to be more active in church and run around a lot. Now, however, he stated that you were not supposed to do so and he takes it more seriously. He elaborated that, at church, you are supposed to be quiet and calm and to listen to what the priest has to say. Usually, he did not visit church apart from Mass or for prayers. Here the meaning that the informant assigns to how he is supposed to be when he is in church is noteworthy. This is similar to another informant that I referred to who also described that there are certain ways you are expected to behave, depending on the situation and who you are interacting with at church. However, as seen in some cases, church is not only limited to engaging in religious practices. Church is also a meeting place for the informants and their families. Some of the informants at both schools described how after Mass they would sit down together with their parents and have cup of coffee or, on some occasions, with their friends. Usually they would state that they were not engaged in the discussions going on and instead, they would engage with other adolescents that were at church.

I now turn my attention to when and where the informants thought of their religion. These examples here illustrate among other things that thoughts of religion are not confined to church. The informants mentioned several occasions where they thought of their religion. This could be when the church bell

rang, when lighting a candle or when an ambulance passed by. There were informants who stated that they thought of their religion when they were doing tests at school. Other occasions were when they were sad or when they were at sports practices. Still, while these are occasions located outside of the church, the situations are framed as beyond the ordinary, i.e., when scoring a goal in soccer. These quotes by the informants situate them being religious in other places than at church, for example at school, as the informants are going home, or at sports practices.

I: [...] Are there any other occasions where you are you doing something and thinking of your religion?

RP 1: When I am playing soccer, when I am scoring.

RP 2: When you have a match to play, you think of it [one's religion].

RP 1: For example, when I score, I do like this [illustrates a sign of the cross toward the sky], for example Messi usually does like that.

RP 3: Before you enter the game.

RP 2: It can help, it helps the game. (code: *when and where religious belief*, group interview VII, Wasaskolan)

Also, when and where the informants thought of their religion seemed to be associated for some of the informants with certain symbols, such as a cross, church bells, graveyards, the church, candles, and so on. The symbols seemed to be important for the informants as they helped the informants turn their attention toward their religion. Furthermore, one informant used various metaphors in his description of his religion. His description focuses on religion in relation to church. He starts off by stating that you have to be pure in heart in order to visit church. He goes on to refer to symbols like the cross and that he makes the sign of the cross without really thinking about it. The informant also sheds light on what meaning the informant ascribes to going to church as well as the requirements of doing so. Visiting church to this informant does not seem to be described as an ordinary task but, rather, as an action that requires a certain commitment. The following quote originates from a discussion among informants in a group interview where I asked if they had ever thought about believing in something else than their current religion. Thus, the meaning of going to church that I refer to above from one of the informants is also an explanation for believing in one's current religion.

RP: According to our religion, if you go to church then you have to be nice. You do not need to go to Church if I am going to be bad. Because, if you want to go to church you have to be nice. [...] You have to be pure of heart. You are supposed to go to church and think of your religion and of Jesus when you are

doing the sign of the Cross. (code: *religious symbols*, group interview I, Wasaskolan)

Engaging with religion through practices did seem to generate a sense of protection according to some of the informants. This protection could, according to one informant, be from certain feelings, e.g., disappointment, and from particular attitudes, such as being pessimistic. Another informant stated that he felt protected by praying, talking to God or by reading the Bible. The protection that the informant gained provided him with a sense of calm and freedom from nightmares when sleeping; being protected by praying or reading the Bible resulted in having better dreams, he said. The sense of protection seems to emanate from a belief and practices that the informant engages with.

Me: And then there were some questions (on the U-MICS) regarding your religion. The five first questions were about that you felt safe because of your religion. You agreed with those statements, was that correct?

RP: When I pray, talk to God or read the Bible, I feel protected, I feel safe. Sometimes before I go to sleep, I forget to pray or talk to God and I get nightmares. I do not know why and I do not know if it happens to everyone. Usually I will get up, pray and go back to sleep. I feel protected then and I dream better dreams. I do not know if it's just me or something strange. It is just that way with me. (Code: *protection*, from Individual Interview IV, Elafskolan)

Exploring religion

In this section, I continue to explore how the informants engage with their religion by discovering new things about their religion through a sense of curiosity and through family and school.

Through curiosity

Through curiosity revolves around actions taken by the informants to explore their religion through a sense of curiosity toward their religion. This involved reading the Bible and applying one's reading to various issues that the informants found interesting. According to the informants, there were various reasons for learning new things about their religion. One informant expressed an interest in comparing the beliefs of other religions with those of her own. Such an interest could, according to the informant, lead to a greater degree of independence in her own beliefs. According to the informant, she was looking for connections between various religions and she pointed out as an example that Islam, and not just Christianity, had writings about Jesus. In another example, an informant described how she turned to the Bible when exploring issues regarding gender.

Me: Do you usually look up things in the Bible? Do you have an example that you recently looked up?

RP: Yes, I look up a lot about gender and such. I usually also look it up there.

I: What do you mean by gender?

RP: Well, like, women and man, I found out that you are supposed to treat them as equal. And then regarding homosexuality, it says that you are supposed to respect them [homosexuals] despite what they do and you may never judge anyone. They are free because God provided us with a free world to do exactly what we want to do. We have two ways to go, either we trust him or we do what we want to do and it is that what makes it our own choice to make. (Code: *curiosity in belief*, from Individual Interview IV, Elafskolan)

The informant also explored what the Bible had to say about family issues. The Bible is described as a source for the informant to interpret issues that she comes into contact with in her life. Other informants referred to church as a place where they could learn new things about their religion. What these informants learned at these moments ranged from particular songs to things about the religion itself, e.g., stories from the Bible. Noteworthy, however, is that the act of exploring risked being hindered by a lack of language competence among the informants regarding the various activities that they engaged in at church. Those activities usually referred to Mass and the language used on these occasions. The informants could however be assisted by their parents in translating and explaining words or sentences that were used during Mass. Some of the informants said that they went to a Swedish church. Doing so enabled these informants to understand more of what was being said as Mass would be in Swedish. Apart from Mass, some of the interviewed informants stated that they took part in Bible school. During these Bible schools, the informants met with friends and were taught about beliefs in their religion. One informant explained that they were taught complicated things that were difficult to learn on your own. For some of the informants, as Bible school were after ordinary school it resulted in the informants feeling tired. In comparison to the informant quoted earlier, these examples of experiencing new things are not done individually by the informants but, rather, they are conducted in a larger group with other informants and with teachers at church. As such, this experience is more interpersonal in nature. The informants also mentioned that they learned new things about the beliefs of their religion by watching movies at home with their families depicting stories from the Bible or by listening to the radio, more specifically Christian radio shows. There were instances, however, where the informants stated that there was nothing new to learn about their religion as they had already learned new things by, for example, watching movies or reading. I believed that this brings nuances to the previous sections regarding what and how the informants learned new things about their religion. For example, some of the informants told me that they did not really

reflect on what they read about in the Bible or what they observed during Mass.

I: The questions numbered six to ten (in U-MICS) that revolved around whether you discovered new things about your religious faith. You put down a score of two meaning that it was not so true for you.

RP: No, I usually do not care to find out that much. I believe and it is ordinary (vardag), but I do not usually, when I go to church, I might learn what they are saying but I do not usually figure out where, how and when and what happened and such.

I: Okay, so you just go to church and listen to what they say? Is it like a routine going to church?

RP: Yes, every Sunday. (code: *lack of reflection*, individual interview I, Elafskolan)

Through school and family

Because religion was not confined to church, I would like to turn my attention to the informants learning new things about their religion that took place outside of church. This refers to school or the family. School as a place was interesting as the informants stated that there was a discrepancy between what they learned at school about their religion and what they learned from their families. Because some of the informants did not understand what was being said during Mass, these stories from their relatives seemed to play a more important part as a method for them to learn new things about their religion. The informants recollected a story about one pupil who had shared his story in class about how Christianity and Islam had come to be. According to the informants, this particular pupil was punished by getting lowered grades by the teacher in class as his version did not correspond with the one that the teacher shared. From the interview, it seemed as if the sense morale of this experience that the informants shared was a form of injustice. Here a discrepancy was illustrated between the stories of various religions that the informants bring with them from outside of school to what they are taught during religious education. This discrepancy can be a way of learning new things about one's religion. Other informants also referred to similar comparisons but between other school subjects and religion. This referred to what the natural sciences said about Big Bang and evolution on the one hand and on the other hand what the Bible said in Genesis. When comparing these, one informant had reflections regarding her own beliefs and what according to her was "correct" and what was "wrong." In this particular case, the informant thought that the beliefs of her religion were wrong. I will return to this in coming sections.

Summarizing theme – Maintaining identity in relation to religion

I have illustrated how the informants engaged with their religion in relation to identity through a sense of belonging to one's family and church as well as by engaging in practices and places that were related to religion. I also described how informants engaged with their religion by learning new things about their religion. This learning was both intra-personal (e.g., a sense of curiosity) and inter-personal (e.g., school and family). I have also shed light on the relationship that the informants have toward religion through certain places. For example, the informants describe their behavior at church as being influenced by the setting and with who they interacted with as they believe they behave differently there in comparison to other places – not swearing, being quiet, not running around and so on. The church as such seems to be a special place where respect toward certain rules in behavior, for example, are required. Certain behaviors are discouraged while others are encouraged. Furthermore, apart from being a place to engage in religious practices, church is connected to some of the informants and their identification as Assyrians/Syriacs.

Reconsidering religion

In this section, I continue to explore the informants' engagement with religion but from a perspective of consequences related to changing religion and quitting practices or beliefs related to one's religion. This theme has its point of departure from the scores that the informants provided about the process of reconsidering their commitments in the religious faith domain. The informants indicated through their scores on the U-MICS that the process of reconsideration of commitments in the religious faith domain was low ($M=1.1$). Thus, there was no or little indication that there was an ongoing identity formation cycle among the informants based on the scores from the U-MICS.

Revising commitments

I start out by exploring possible reasons among the informants for believing in something other than their current religion. When the informants were asked whether they had at some time thought about believing in something else, the majority of the informants at both schools answered no. The informants would often state that their religion was right for them or compare their religion to others and state that their religion was better in various ways, e.g., it being fairer. Another reason was that some of the informants stated that they did not know much about other religious traditions, which would make a comparison difficult.

The majority of the informants answered that they did not question their religion. However, some of the informants did state that they did not believe in

certain parts of the Bible. More specifically, this referred to Genesis where two informants compared this part of the Bible with the natural sciences and the theory of Big Bang that they were taught at school. This did not necessarily imply that they believed to a lesser degree than their peers. Instead, certain beliefs were not believed in.

Based on the experiences of the informants, it seems as if the parents are trying to safeguard one set of religious beliefs while some of the informants are configuring, and changing, some of their own beliefs. Religion is expressed in the interviews as something important to the informants. At the same time, certain beliefs seem to be disaffirmed while others are affirmed. It is difficult to ascertain the beliefs of the parents and how widespread the discrepancies were between the informants and their parents. However, the experiences of some of the informants regarding these differences are worthwhile mentioning as they help to explain the consequences the informants are facing in their engagement with their religion. Because some of the informants are noticing that their different beliefs might be met with reactions from their family, they adapt accordingly, as for example not talking about one's beliefs in front of one's parents. Questioning one's religion could, accordingly, generate reactions from the parents of the informants. I believe that this reaction highlights an aspect of how the informants engage with religion as well as the role of the parents for the informants and their religion. This aspect seems to be an awareness among the informants of the importance of religion in relation to a larger social environment that includes their families. One informant explained that she had to be careful or cautious in regard to when and where she could express her opinion that she did not believe in certain religious beliefs. This cautiousness was called for due to the contrast between her beliefs and the beliefs of others, which included her parents. The reason according to the informant why she needed to be careful was the risk of a backlash from her parents. This reaction could involve criticism. She kept her beliefs to herself as she was afraid that her parents would criticize her.

I: But you seem to question some parts [of your religion]

RP: You can question some parts.

I: Exactly, are you allowed to talk about it?

RP: I did it once but I regret doing so since my parents criticized me. They said that I believe more in science than I do in religion.

I: And they considered that to be wrong?

RP: Well according to them, yes, because they believe religion is the most important thing. [...]. It is very important [...] so I cannot say my honest opinion about it. I am very afraid that they will criticize me. They ask me if I do not

believe in that God made man and the world. I reply no and then my mother starts teasing me just because I said once that we were apes long ago. Then she starts saying that I have read that an ape became a man. She starts to criticize me, teasing me. That is why I cannot say so much about this while I am home. I keep mostly to myself.

I: Is it difficult?

RP: No, I do not think so but sometimes it might happen that I say something without thinking but what happens then is that they will say something about their believing that religion is very [important], that they have a very strong belief. But I believe too, just not as strong as they do because there is so much damn evidence that it was not God that created the world or whether he existed or if Jesus existed or anything else that the prophets said. It sounds a bit weird that he created the world. (code: *consequences of doubt religious belief*³⁸ - group Interview IV, Wasaskolan)

What I find interesting here is the position that the informant takes in relation to her family where she is simultaneously part of the family and differentiates herself as an individual. She is part of the family by sharing similar beliefs, and she highlights herself as an individual by distancing herself from some of those beliefs. The navigating that she describes in the above quote could be a method of dealing with those two roles. Furthermore, the informant also situates this issue at her home where she is accordingly not able to express her beliefs. This illustrates that there seems to be a situational aspect to her awareness of where she can voice her beliefs. Another similar example was from an informant who had expressed doubt about his religion to his mother. The mother had reacted to this by becoming sad. As a result, she started to read from the Bible to him. This seems to have led him to reconsider his beliefs. Now, he says, he does not want to let go of his religious beliefs again. Both of these accounts show two different ways of handling these issues. One informant chooses to keep her beliefs though they differ from those of her parents; another informant chooses to reaffirm his beliefs after the reactions of his mother. It is also worth mentioning that there is a difference in how the parents reacted: one chose to criticize and the other chose to educate.

What is at stake

The content here focuses on what is at stake when the informants discuss any change in the religion they belong to. This ties into what I have brought up in

³⁸ This code is an example of where I have coded larger chunks of text under one single code. While there are nuances in this quote that can be coded with smaller, more detailed codes, I have chosen to present the entire quote under one code to provide an overview of the experiences of an informant. I believe that this captures the larger picture of why the informant finds it difficult to express her doubts.

previous chapters regarding a sense of belonging. A connection between religion and family is illustrated in this section as something that is at stake. Religion here, then, refers to both beliefs and a community to which the informant adheres. Some of the informants referred to not believing in something else, or being something else, because their relatives and family were Christians. The informants were supposed to be Christians as well. In one particular case, an informant stated that if he stopped believing in the beliefs of his religion, he would not be able to keep his family name. Such an act as to stop believing in one's religion could be classified, according to the informant, as an act that ruins several generations in the family who, in turn, have all been Christians.

Me: Have you considered changing [your] religion?

RP: No, never. I will never change religion. I will keep my religion. [...] You do not want to ruin family generations. I want to be Christian, that is mine [...]. Because everyone has been Christian, everyone, I do not want to be the one that ruins things. If I would stop believing, I would not be able to bear my family name. (code: *consequences of doubt religious belief*, - group Interviews I, Elafskolan)

These stakes could take other forms as well. Some of the informants referred to the decreasing number of Christians and an experienced responsibility toward a Christian community. Similarly, the informants referred to the importance of passing on their religion to coming generations similar to what the informants stated in previous chapters regarding language. This seems to be in a context where Christianity, and Christians, are believed by the informants to be threatened through various persecutions. Several of the informants referred to the situation in Syria and ISIS as examples of the current situation for Christians in the Middle East. For some of the informants who had relatives in Syria, this could be a pressing matter.

I: But have you never thought about changing (religion)?

All of the interviewees: No.

I: How come?

RP 1: I want to expand Christianity.

RP 2: I like my religion.

RP 3: I was born with this religion; my mother and father are Christians. My whole family has to continue Christianity.

RP 4: Because I never want to change because my whole family is what I am. Who am I to change just because someone else is?

RP 2: Because the religion helps me.

RP 4: I am supposed to be what my family is.

RP 2: It follows in the family.

[...]

RP 4 (19): I mean, my family is what I am and I follow my parents. Why should I be something else just because we have followed them.

RP 2: Our religion runs through the entire family tree, throughout all of life.

RP 1: Not only that, for example, I feel that Christianity is diminished every day because there are many wars where Christianity is.

RP 3: Thousands of people are killed.

[...]

RP 4: If I would change, why should I if my entire family is? Why should I be the only one who changes, you understand? That would be pretty tough. (Code: *Responsibility*³⁹ - Group Interview II, Wasaskolan)

The quoted informants seem to adhere to the responsibility of continuing their religion as a heritage. From the quote above, I would assume that this also can be tied into a sense of belonging that the informant expresses toward their family. Thus, any thoughts of changing religion would mean, at least at the moment, that the informants would diminish their relation or bond to their families. As the informants live with their families, their options to explore other options on religion on their own could thus be limited to other settings, such as school, if there are certain consequences to the exploration. This is reflected in the answers that some of the informants provided where religion, in terms of a community, that the informants wanted to be a part of did not seem to be a choice to be made by the informants alone. Here, it is interesting to observe that one of the informants in the quote refers to that his family is what he is and he follows his parents. Similarly, another informant referred to that he was born with his religion and that his family has to continue with Christianity. I would suggest that these references highlight the necessity to consider identity and religion in relation to the informants' families. This does not necessarily undermine the commitments that the informants have to their religion. Most of the informants expressed themselves as if they have made choices and they seemed to be able to argue for their choices.

³⁹ This is another example of a code where I have coded larger parts of an interview in order to capture a larger discussion among several informants regarding the consequences of changing religion.

These perceptions of changing religion were also related to practices related to religion and family roles. An informant described a scenario where her parents would be disappointed in her for quitting certain practices. A decision to not continue these practices might be sensitive as they are in some way related to religion (e.g., engaged in at church). This informant said that her parents had been disappointed in her for quitting choir practice at church. This disappointment was related to her being the oldest sibling in the family and, as such, she was expected to be a role model to her younger siblings. The expectations from her parents were that she would learn a lot while engaging with the choir. Interestingly, the informant elaborated on this when I asked about what the informant thought about when thinking about being an Assyrian/Syriac. While I have not included the following in the quote below, the informant referred to her relatives and their beliefs when she reflecting on why her family was Assyrian/Syriac. Another expectation from the parents was that the informant should have strong religious beliefs. The reason for quitting was that choir practice took place after school several days a week and the informant also stated that the teachers at choir practice were harsh, which made the practice itself not much fun.

Me: When do you usually think about being an Assyrian/Syriac? [...] What are you thoughts at those moments?

RP (2): [...] It has happened that I went to the choir during Sunday school but I quit. It felt like they (the parents of the informant) were disappointed in me because they expected me to learn a lot and participate in the choir. I think they got disappointed in me when I quit. It was not just on Sundays, it was Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays so I did not keep up with school. It was two hours long and I had to be there so I thought that it was tough. And I did not find it any fun as the teachers were really harsh. (Code: *disappointment*, from Group interview IV, Wasaskolan)

Summarizing theme – Reconsidering religion

The theme reconsidering religion explored consequences related to changing religion and/or quitting practices or beliefs related to one's religion. While the informants scored low on the subscale of reconsideration of commitments in the domain of religious faith of U-MICS, the qualitative interviews did highlight nuances of these scores. These nuances consisted of belonging to a religion but certain beliefs within the religion were subject to reflection and questioning. It is these types of reflections and questions that were met with reactions from the family. The relationship that the informants have with their family and their religion seems to be interconnected where being Christians was one such shared aspect. As one informant stated; he was what his family was. This intertwinement makes it difficult to reconsider one's religion. Such a choice could be perceived by the informants as leaving their family.

Interpreting the theme

In this section of the chapter, I turn to answering the theoretical questions: 1) *In what ways do the identity maintenance and formation cycles occur in relation to religion in the personal identity of the young adolescents?* and 2) *how can the systems of development with regard to religion influence the identity of the young adolescents?* My tools to interpret the described experiences of the informants will be identity on both a personal and a social identity level. As such, I will interpret how the informants interact with certain groups (e.g., family and religious community) as a method of maintaining their identity. Because my definition of religion sets the phenomenon as a search for significance that takes place in a context of institutions and traditions, religion has to be approached in the social environments that the informants are interacting with. I do this with the bio-ecological tool as my theoretical tool.

The identity cycles in relation to religion

The identity cycle of maintaining identity in relation to religion was associated to particular places and practices (Crocetti, 2017). In these places and during these practices the informant came across symbols (e.g., a church, a cross) that they reacted to. I suggested that their behavior at church was influenced by the setting where they perceived they behaved differently in comparison to other places: not swearing, being quiet, and not running around, and so on. These behaviors at church tied into the perception among the informants that the church was a place that had a set of rules (e.g., not running, being quiet) that set it apart from other places. When acting according to these perceptions that surround these places and practices, the informants were also acting in accordance with an identification as a Christian and an Assyrian/Syriac. This identification enabled these perceptions. As such, the commitments in religion were maintained both through the aforementioned social identities and acting on these identities in certain practices that were related to being a Christian and an Assyrian/Syriac (Tajfel, 2010). Prayer was a method to maintain their commitments by continuing practices and beliefs that the informants had acquired through their upbringing. The commitments in religion were also maintained by various forms of exploration. As an example, the belief in the bible made it a suitable source to explore issues that the informants encountered, for example, how issues of gender and sexuality are approached in the Bible. The practices that made up the informants' religion was referred to as being a part of their daily lives. Similarly, praying together with one's family or on certain occasions during the day were mostly described as daily routines. As the social identity as an Assyrian/Syriac was related to religion, where being Christian was a criteria for being a member of the group, this identity becomes ordinary by being part of these routines. At the same time, the social identity as an Assyrian/Syriac was also special and worthy of maintaining and transferring

to future generations due to its connection with religion and previous generations. This ties into what I suggested earlier that in order to be considered an Assyrian/Syriac and a family member, language and religion, especially as an identification, was required to be adopted.

I would like to emphasize that how the identity cycles are approached by the informants should be considered in relation to their age (Crocetti, 2011, 2017). It has to be considered that due to their age the informants might not have engaged in a reconsideration of their current commitments because engaging in a formation cycle in the said domain is not relevant at the moment. Because of their age, and the reactions of the parents, it might be that certain beliefs might be challenged more openly while other beliefs and practices are maintained and not questioned in a similar open manner as doing so can generate consequences for the informants. As such, the relation that the informants had to religion was not without complication. As some of the informants stated in the interviews, there were occasions where the informants' own religious beliefs came into conflict with the religious beliefs of their parents. On occasion, this resulted in actions taken by the parents to remedy the divergences, usually by ways of criticizing these divergent beliefs or teaching the "correct" beliefs. While this can be doubt that the informants might experience toward their religious beliefs, I believe it is also as a matter of adapting their beliefs to the circumstances that characterize their lives (Matsumoto, 2006). The informants are interacting differently with social environments in comparison with their parents. For example, being enrolled at school, they are met with such theories as Big Bang and evolution, which contradict the tale of Genesis in the Bible. When such theories are shared with the parents, the parents can react in a number of ways, as mentioned above.

The parents were described by the informants as an authority on several issues, including religion. In some of these issues, the informants seem to respect the authority of the parents to a greater degree than in others, as in the case with the informant who felt that he did not receive any validation from his parents for his interest in the fidget spinner (see Chapter 6, sub-section: School). Presumably, based on how the informants described their practices, it was the parents that had introduced practices like praying using a particular language, by taking the informants to Mass and by reading stories from the Bible. The informants were aware of the importance of keeping their religion as they knew that it traced through previous generations while acting as a connection to a historical heritage and memory that they are set to maintain and pass on. There is a reciprocal relation here where the informants through various aspects of religion, such as practices, maintain a social identity while that identity, in turn, helps the informants to maintain their commitments in religion (Crocetti, 2017). Reconsidering commitments in religion could be perceived by the informants to threaten a link to a history and a heritage (Crocetti, 2010). This link suggests that a lot is perceived to be on the line should an informant

reconsider their religion or practices and beliefs related to religion. Such a reconsideration of religion, as a search and a source for significance (Pargament et al., 2013), might not just affect the informant's search but also the search of their parents and family. Thus, in order to be able to reconsider some parts of their religion without facing consequences from their parents, certain strategies are required. One such strategy could be to not discuss beliefs with family members or to explore one's religion outside of the family, at school through various classes, or at church with a priest. As such, at home, intra-personal forms of exploration of identity might be premiered in this setting in contrast to more inter-personal forms of exploration (Crocetti, 2010). Reconsidering one's commitments in illustrates among the informants that religion as a search for significance involves a form of sense of belonging. This search for significance and social identity could provide the informants with a feeling of purpose and continuity which is a similar notion to what Marcia proposed in regard to having commitments in a certain life domain (Schwartz, 2001). However, this social identity can also generate obstacles for diverting from that same identity as it is interconnected with certain groups that are of importance to the informants, not least, one's family. However, the informant can determine what occasions and in what situations they share or voice those beliefs that diverge from the in-group that the informant belongs to, like the family.

As such, a social identity could be a hindrance to revise commitments in the domain while also being a method of maintaining the commitments (Crocetti, 2017; Tajfel, 2010). However, it might not be just a question of either maintaining or revising the commitments in a domain; rather, it can be two simultaneous processes especially when reconsideration of commitments refers to a practice or belief and not religion as an overall search for significance. At a glance, it is unclear whether the identity cycles refer to more comprehensive cycles that encompass all commitments in a certain domain, or if these cycles are fragmented, where certain commitments are reconsidered while others are not. Because the informants elaborated on the act of reconsidering, or questioning, certain religious beliefs while still believing in other beliefs, I would suggest that the cycles are fragmented and dynamic: dynamic in the sense that this is an ongoing process where parts of the commitments are being explored and reconsidered continuously while others are not. I believe that this also ties into when I suggested earlier that there might be fluctuation in the identity processes from day to day, depending on whether, for example, the informant had a fight with a friend. The cycles can be fragmented because the reconsideration process can be focused on a particular practice or belief. As such, certain beliefs would make up the commitments in the domain, and finding that these beliefs lacked validity might subsequently be a part of a process of reconsidering the commitments that are found to be unsatisfactory. A reconsideration of commitments does not equal a conversion to another religion. Furthermore, the process might lead to a reaffirmation of current commitments.

Religion as a bridge between the personal and the social identity

I now turn my attention to illustrating how religion affected the personal and social identity of the informants in order to explore how certain perceptions enable a maintenance and formation of identity (Crocetti, 2017; Schwartz, 2001, 2005). My intention here is to illustrate that the commitments that the informants have in their religion are also tied into what groups the informants perceives themselves to be a part of. As such, the search for significance that is religion is not just something that the informant engages in on their own (Pargament et al., 2013). The link between church and a social identity as an Assyrian/Syriac is such a link between informant and a religious community. For example, the associations that I pointed out in Table 5 indicated that there might exist some form of relatedness between scores on measures that theoretically are located on a personal identity level (identity processes), at least for the religious faith domain, and measures that are located on a social identity level (self-image as Swedish/Assyrian/Syriac). The commitments that the informants have with their religion is maintained not only by engaging with the religion but also by keeping with the group that the informant associates their religion with, for example, the family or a larger Assyrian/Syriac group.

How the informants engaged with religion illustrated an overlap between the personal and social identity. The act of adopting an identification with a religion connects one's commitments in religion to a particular group with which one develops a social identity. For example, one informant illustrated this by referring to himself as a Syriacs that went to a Syriac church with a Syriac priest. More specifically, if religious beliefs were to be located more toward a personal identity level; then identifications and engagement in practices as well as traditions could act as a bridge between the personal- and the social levels of identity (Schwartz, 2001, 2005). The practice of praying, for example, is then a method to engage with one's beliefs but also with a group, as was the case when the informants would recollect how they would pray together with their families in their homes. Attending Mass at church would likewise provide a way to engage with one's religion in relation to a group that is larger than the family, i.e., the Assyrian/Syriac group. This bridge between the personal and the social identity consisted of beliefs, values and goals from Christianity that constituted commitments to their religion and enabled the informant to adopt a social identity with to the larger community of Christians as well as Assyrians/Syriacs. Religion in the form of practices such as praying in Suryoyo could strengthen this relatedness between religion and being Assyrian/Syriac, where language, also described as a criterion for being a member of the group, was used together with religious practices. Such practices could also form links to historical events of maintaining a tradition, e.g., engaging in religious practices that have long been with the group. Furthermore, during an interpersonal exploration of one's commitments in religion, an exploration of a social identity could also occur (Crocetti, 2010; Tajfel,

2010). This exploration involved a social identity that was aligned toward the church and the teaching there. The informant that described his self-image as a Syriac because he went to a Syriac church is an illustration of this. In contrast, the informant that explored issues on her own by reading the bible is more of an intrapersonal exploration that is located more toward a personal identity level. However, on a social identity level, religion was not only a determiner of the in-group but also of the out-group (Tajfel, 2010). The informants would on occasion refer to other groups at school or in society by the religious group they belonged to and thus differentiating themselves from others based on this.

Interacting with religion in the systems of development

In order to further explore how the informants engage with religion, I turn to the bio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1981). As such, I try to explore in what ways systems of development in regard to religion influence the personal and social identity of the informants (Schwartz, 2001, 2005). The informants emphasize the importance of being a Christian and for future generations of Assyrians/Syriacs to also be Christians. I interpret this as an attempt to continue the linkage between history and contemporary times. This illustrates how historical and contemporary events can influence the identity development of the informants through the chronosystem. Events that took place in history, such as Sayfo, still hold meaning for the informants today who have had previous generations in their family experience those events. As such, my interpretation is that identifying oneself as a Christian and an Assyrian/Syriac is done in accordance with historical and contemporary events, where, for example, Christians and Assyrians/Syriacs are perceived to be persecuted.

The expectation among the informants of passing on religion from one generation to another can very well be a consequence of religion being part of a heritage that is believed to be integral to the identification with the family and the Assyrian/Syriac group. Religion, more specifically beliefs and practices passed down among family members, acted as a link between the history of the Assyrian/Syriac group and that of the informant. Theoretically, this refers to a link between the social identity of being Christian and the chronosystem of the bio-ecological model (Fish & Syed, 2018; Tajfel, 2010). This was both an issue of stability through time on an individual level and on a group level by providing an origin or heritage to connect with. Informants could refer to ancestors having been Christians and that this lineage continued throughout their family and on to the informant. The relationship that the informants had toward their religion seems to be colored by what role religion had for the group in history, through memories of historical experiences, and in contemporary times by the situation in the Middle East for Christians and other religious minorities. It also made it possible for the informants to draw a lineage

between themselves and their relatives who had lived and migrated from the Middle East to Sweden. Continuing this lineage was apparent in how some of the informants described how they are expected to pass on their religion, or that they need to be careful about questioning their religion in front of their parents or other significant persons.

Religion becomes situated within the microsystem when religious practices are engaged in together with one's family (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1981). When this interaction is performed in a particular language, that language in itself also becomes related to religion. As the informants engage in their religion, e.g., beliefs, prayers or stories from the Bible, through their parents and other significant others, they also become initiated to places and occasions that are associated with religion. Learning certain practices of one's religion such as prayers is presumably done in Suryoyo or any other language that is associated with the family as the informants recollected that they only knew prayers in Suryoyo or Arabic. As such, religion is transmitted in a language that is associated with a particular group, be this the family or a larger Assyrian/Syriac group. Several of the informants stated that their parents encouraged them to speak a certain language such as Suryoyo when they were at home, and to learn religious beliefs and engage with various activities at church. Because of this encouragement, the informants are being included in a group, — first and foremost the family and, second, with the larger Assyrian/Syriac group including Christians (Vedder & Virta, 2005). These groups become some of their in-groups. Because of this, the reactions of their parents regarding religion and language have weight for the informants. This would also emphasize where the informants are in their development, where they still have dependence on their parents and where they are just starting to form a more independent relation to various domains of their identity development, such as their religion. It is not my intention here to paint the picture of the informants lacking agency or independence from their parents. I would rather emphasize that certain domains of identity development are more important to the informants and their families together than other domains. At the same time, this dependency is contrasted by stories from the informants regarding a consciousness of beliefs different from those of their parents and that they are consciously navigating these in order to avoid a confrontation with their parents.

Due to constant interactions in the systems of development, religion, as a search for significance, changes between the parents and the informants (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1981; Pargament et al., 2013). Certain beliefs are changed, discarded or incorporated as a result. The risk of not engaging in this change might make some of the informants feel that religion as a search for significance loses its appeal and instead becomes an obstacle in the process of developing an identity. Some notions, e.g., Big Bang, which are presented and discussed at school might require being adopted, at least at face value, in order

for the informants to successfully complete their tasks in this particular microsystem. Such adoptions can create discrepancies and possibly even conflicts between microsystems as well as between personal and social levels of identities if these adoptions are more than at face value (Schwartz, 2001, 2005). This is also an example of a reciprocal influence, where the informant is not only reacting to the microsystems but the microsystems themselves, e.g., parents, are reacting to the informant and his or her differing beliefs. As the informants are interacting with other microsystems, they are also faced with other beliefs, places and situations that can contradict aspects of their religion. When such beliefs are expressed by the informants in front of their parents, the reactions of the latter might be to take action in order to safeguard beliefs or practices that are religious. Some of the informants understood these actions but did not discard their beliefs about the validity of evolution or Big Bang. Instead they incorporated these with their religious beliefs where these were located side by side with one another.

Summary of chapter

In this chapter, I set out to answer the empirical research question: *In what ways do the young adolescents engage with their religion in relation to their identity?* The answer to this question was then interpreted through two theoretical research questions: 1) *In what ways do the identity maintenance and formation cycles occur in relation to religion in the personal identity of the young adolescents?* and 2) *how can the systems of development with regard to religion influence the identity of the young adolescents?*

I suggested that religion, i.e., beliefs, practices and identifications as a Christian, were for the informants closely tied into what it means to be an Assyrian/Syriac as well as being part of their families. Because religion was ascribed a certain importance by the informants, the identity cycles of maintenance and formation that take place in relation religion are affected accordingly. The formation cycle of identity in relation to religion was not as strong as the maintenance cycle among the informants. I suggested this as there are several consequences to the process of reconsidering one's current commitments. These consequences meant that the informants risked differentiating themselves involuntarily from the family and removing the created similarities that the informant and others had assigned to the informant him- or herself. In order to reconsider commitments, certain strategies were required to be adopted, such as not bringing up divergent beliefs in discussion with one's parents. The maintenance of the identity was achieved by a sense of belonging to one's family and to other Assyrian/Syriacs as well as through certain places (e.g., church) and practices (e.g., praying) associated with one's religion. Maintenance through exploration was conducted by curiosity and through religious education at school and through one's family. This exploration was

both inter-personal (religious education and family) and intra-personal (curiosity). The informants would explore various issues that they encountered in their lives by looking up stories in the Bible and interpreting the issues based on these stories. Religious education at school provided insight for the informants in other religious traditions. Exploration through family involved watching movies with a religious theme and thus learning additional insights about Christianity.

I used religion as an example of how there was an interaction between the informants and various social environments. This entailed situating religion in the microsystem, with the parents of the informants as well as with the church and the clergy. Religion could also be found in the chronosystem. On an individual level, the relationship of the informants toward religion could change as events and situations take place that have an impact on, for example, the importance of a Christian identification (e.g., the civil war in Syria). With the chronosystem as a concept, I highlighted that religion, as shared beliefs and practices with their families and other Assyrians/Syriacs, was for the informants a connection to previous generations.

Summing up – answering the main research question

Before moving on to the Discussion chapter, I will sum up the last three chapters by returning to and answering the main research question: *In what ways do a group of Assyrian/Syriac young adolescents in Sweden develop their identity?*

The theory of identity development and the model of bio-ecological development helped me to interpret how the informants engaged with their religion, education and best friends. I approached these phenomena as life domains that were part of identity development. In relation to the education domain, teachers had the potential of affecting the quality of education in a positive or negative way at the schools. The quality of education could, in turn, either strengthen or weaken processes of commitments and reconsideration of commitments in the education domain. Friends of the informants could offer support, for example, by being persons that the informants could confide in – to keep secrets, to receive emotional support at distressing times, or to show an interest in the informants. Depending on the interaction the informant had with their friends, the processes within this domain could vary. For example, if the informant had a fight with their friends, the process of commitment could be weakened. Thus, identity development seemed to be susceptible to fluctuations based on everyday events. Language and a shared social identity could aid the interaction between the informant and his or her teachers. Furthermore, school was perceived as a particular place that had certain rules assigned to it

and a sense of safety. People that the informants interacted with on a regular basis could be interpreted as systems of development. For example, parents and teachers could be interpreted as microsystems that were invested in the lives of the informants regarding their education at school and other interests. This had consequences for what school the informants were thinking of going to, how they perceived the quality of their education and so on.

I explored religion as a domain of identity development. As such, I assumed that the informants engaged in identity maintenance and formation cycles in relation to religion. Commitments in the religious faith domain on U-MICS were indicated to be strong among the informants, according to the mean scores in the processes of commitment and exploration. At the same time, the informants did not indicate any current process of reconsidering their current commitments in the domain. Through the qualitative analysis, I suggested that religious beliefs, practices and an identification as a Christian were closely tied into what it meant to be a part of the family and, in the long run, an Assyrian/Syriac group. Because religion is believed by the informants and others such as their family to be of such an importance, the process of reconsideration is not allowed or promoted by either the family or the informants themselves. Thus, engaging in a formation cycle of identity was difficult as processes of reconsideration would be met with attempts by others to strengthen the current commitments that the informants had in their religion. This required certain strategies to be adopted in order to facilitate this process. The meaning assigned to religion could also be interpreted with the help of the chronosystem where religion has been part of a heritage that has been transferred to the informant and his or her family through previous generations. In some sense, the practices, beliefs and belonging that religion enabled, as a search for significance, brought stability to the informants.

I approached identity with an emphasis on identity levels in order to highlight the interaction between the informant and their social environments. On a personal identity level, I focused on the processes of identity development within the aforementioned life domains. On a social identity level, I focused on how the informants first and foremost assigned similarities and differences to groups that they interacted with: relating oneself to one's family and heritage, and assigning criteria that included oneself and excluded others from certain social identities. Secondly, this also involved how other people assigned similarities and differences to the informants, by arguing for certain criteria for group memberships, or by teasing and using racial slurs. Assigning similarities tied the informant to a group and assigned them a social identity, whether it was the informant or anyone else who assigned the similarities. This meant assigning criteria that defined who was a member of the in-group while also defining who was not. The criteria and the meaning of these, however, were dynamic in that their meaning were being negotiated, which the informants themselves exemplified in how they defined these criteria.

Chapter 8: Discussion

Introduction

In this chapter I reflect on the study with the second main research question as a point of departure: *In what way can the exploration of identity among a group of Assyrian/Syriac young adolescents in Sweden contribute to the research field of identity development and the discipline of Psychology of Religion?* The chapter begins with my reflections on the current study's findings in relation to previous research. I continue thereafter to reflect on the theoretical concepts used and the research methods that I have applied. The chapter ends with a summary of what this study has contributed to Psychology of Religion and the research field of identity development.

Reflection on the current study's findings in relation to previous research

Situating the results of the study in time and in context

The results of this study should be considered in relation to the implications of context and time when comparing the results with other studies about Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden. For example, when comparing the results of my study and the results of others, there were changes in the social environments that surround Assyrians/Syriacs in Södertälje. For example, in 2011 when Cetrez published his article, the conflict in Syria had just begun (Gritten et al., 2016). During the data collection and gathering of material for this study in 2016-2018 the situation in Syria was in full force, which might have had an impact on those Assyrians/Syriacs that participated and their attitudes toward their religion and language. This could also be said regarding the difference in my study and that of Deniz (2001). From the time of Deniz finishing his thesis in the late 1990s, there had been the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the ongoing conflict in Syria, which had resulted in an increased migration to Södertälje from these countries (Lundin, 2020). Because of what was going on in Syria, the informants could draw links to Sayfo and the history of Assyrians/Syriacs that their relatives had experienced. Religion seems to be a central focal point here as it is mentioned in the interviews by informants as a reason used for past and present persecutions. Furthermore, there is a sense of

responsibility among the informants that is tied into historical experiences of ancestors and previous generations. This difference between studies, for example, in the importance of religion in one's identification as an Assyrian/Syriac could be explained by such events. Cetrez (2017) also concluded that there was an awareness among Assyrians/Syriacs of the trauma experienced by previous generations. Several of the informants in my study referred to the history of their families before they had migrated to Sweden during their discussions of their ethnic identification and their attitudes toward it. Their attitudes toward their religion seemed also to be affected by their history, e.g., not being able to bear the same surname as the rest of the family if the informant decided to convert to another religion as Christianity ran through the family generations. This was because religion had passed down from generation to generation as told by the informants in the interviews. Deciding for another religion would thus break this lineage and distance the informant from the rest of the family.

Furthermore, it is possible that a self-identification as an Assyrian/Syriac is strengthened among the informants in relation to other groups by engaging in various religious practices. Identifying oneself as a Christian can be a way to differentiate oneself from groups such as Muslims and other immigrant groups, e.g., members of these groups have different religious beliefs and practices in relation to Christians and Assyrians/Syriacs. If there is a wish to differentiate oneself from other groups, engaging in such practices can be prioritized. Not engaging can risk diminishing differences from other groups and toning down the uniqueness ascribed to one's own group. The increased migration from various countries in the Middle East (Lundin, 2020) to Sweden can strengthen these identifications as there might be a wish among already settled Assyrians/Syriacs to emphasize that they are more integrated into Swedish society than other immigrant groups. I would suggest that this is similar to what Cetrez (2005) argued regarding Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden being affected by new generations migrating to the country.

Maintaining and forming identity

The contribution that this study provided for the field of identity development was partly constituted by the material regarding how the participating young adolescents developed their identity in relation to their education, best friends and religion. As I pointed out at the beginning of the thesis, these groups of Assyrians/Syriacs were rarely approached by researchers. I have also highlighted the importance of religion as a search for significance for identity development. Future research should include religion as a domain to investigate identity development and identity levels.

The scores from the majority of the informants indicated that they had strong commitments and exploration of commitments⁴⁰ as well as a weak reconsideration of commitments in each of the three domains. These results are interesting since previous research (Crocetti et al., 2008) has shown that ethnic minorities in the Netherlands were more inclined to be in any of the two moratorium statuses⁴¹ in comparison to their Dutch peers. Dutch youth were in contrast to ethnic minority youth more inclined toward early closure and diffusion⁴². What is characteristic for individuals that are in any of the two moratorium statuses is a low degree of commitments, exploration, but high degrees of reconsideration, (moratorium) or they have a high degree of all three processes (searching moratorium). By combining at face value the scores of commitments and in-depth exploration of the informants in this study, my interpretation of the scores indicated that the informants were in an achievement-status (high degree of commitment and exploration while a low degree of reconsideration of commitments).

What is further interesting is that Oshana reported that her results indicated that about one third of the Assyrian-American adolescents in her study had undergone no or limited exploration of alternatives to occupation, religious, political or philosophical life-styles, values, goals and standards. Instead, they remained strongly committed to their childhood-based values. Now, I interpret the exploration of alternatives in Oshana's study as similar to the process of reconsideration of commitments in the U-MICS. Thus, I believe that there is a similarity in that there is a group of informants in Oshana's study that have not reconsidered their commitments or explored alternatives to them. The difference between the studies is that the majority of the informants in my study reported no reconsideration of commitments while only a minority of informants in Oshana's study reported a similar process. Perhaps this can be partly attributed to differences in migration policies in Sweden and the United States with a different emphasis on integration and assimilation (Bourhis et al., 1997). Depending on what policies are in effect, this might influence how the informants engage with their identity development and interact with their social environments. As the informants of this study reported a low mean value on self-image as Swedish, which in turn was associated with reporting a higher score on commitments in the religious faith domain, these two levels of identity seem to be inversely related. However, there was a positive association between reconsideration of commitments in the religious faith domain and self-image as Swedish. During the interviews, the informants mainly assigned language as a criterion for being considered a Swede, while religion was not

⁴⁰ Commitments refer to goals, values and beliefs that the individual finds important. Exploration is the process where the individual sorts through several alternatives. See chapter 3.

⁴¹ Moratorium (strong exploration but low commitments) and searching moratorium (high on all processes including reconsideration of commitments). See footnote in chapter 3, p. 68.

⁴² (Early) foreclosure (strong commitments but low exploration) and diffusion (low exploration and low commitments). See footnote in chapter 3, p. 68.

explicitly mentioned as a criterion for being a Swede. Religion, or more specifically being a Christian, was only referred to as a criterion in relation to being considered an Assyrian/Syriac. As such, I believe this as well as the indicated associations between processes of identity development and the said identifications to be in line with what Crocetti et al., (2018) suggested, that personal and social identity are intertwined. This also ties into what Crocetti, Rubini and Meeus (2008) concluded regarding their ethnic minority subsample where commitments in a life domain were found to correlate with self-concept clarity. However, I want to emphasize that this intertwining is conditional in the sense that the social identity has to correspond or connect to a particular domain in the personal identity.

I have suggested in this study that there are differences between the informants and their parents in regard to how they engage with religion. Cetrez (2011) pointed out that older generations of Assyrians/Syriacs, where a majority were born in Turkey, Syria and Lebanon, indicated greater degrees of religiosity than younger generations, where a majority were born in Sweden or had arrived in Sweden at an early age. This was attributed to younger generations being in a process of change in relation to older generations. This change includes the relation to religion. In the current study, I highlighted this primarily by the consequences of reconsidering one's commitments in religion as I believe these consequences illustrate an aspect of the relationship that the informants have with their parents. Furthermore, Cetrez (2011) stated that among the interviewed adult Assyrians/Syriacs, religion had declined in importance in contrast to their childhood, when religion had played an important role. The informants in this study emphasized that their religion was important to them. Given their young age, and the reactions of their parents, it is possible that religion was also important to their parents, at least in relation to their children. This could perhaps also be an indication that religion has a role in relation to the social identity as an Assyrian/Syriac where religion acts as a common denominator between generations.

Similar to Albarello, Crocetti and Rubini (2018), the current study found a positive association between processes of identity development in the education and best friends domains as well as attitudes toward classmates and teachers. While some of the indicated associations were low, the qualitative interviews provided depth to how these processes and attitudes were associated with one another. Here, teachers could affect the process of commitments in the education domain by motivating the informants in their education. This indicates that there is an interaction between the personal identity and important persons in the social environments at school. Some of the results that this study produced resonated with similar associations found outside of the study. For example, informants at Elafskolan scored lower on commitments in the education domain than their peers at Wasaskolan. This could be an indication of these informants being less satisfied with their current school in

comparison to their peers at Wasaskolan. In addition to this, during the interviews, the informants at Elafskolan expressed criticism of their school and teachers. Inspections conducted by the Swedish School Inspectorate at Elafskolan came to conclusions that highlighted deficiencies in planning for a sense of safety among the informants. The agency demanded that the school would take actions in order to reprimand the deficiencies that were highlighted in their inspections (Skolinspektionen, 2018a). Thus, I believe that the deficiencies identified by the Inspectorate resonates with what the informants reported in the questionnaires and what they said during the interviews regarding their attitudes toward their current school.

The role of family and language for the informants

A sense of responsibility

The results of the current study did not observe a difference between males and females in any aspect of religion as Cetrez (2011) did on measures of religiosity. The female informants of the current study did not express in the interviews a greater degree of religious practices or religious belief than their male peers. The lack of difference between genders could perhaps be attributed to the young age of the informants. Previous research, such as that of Freyne-Lindhagen (1997), had an older sample where other social roles might be relevant for the informants, e.g., maintainers of tradition. Such roles might not have been introduced yet to the informants of my study, although, some of the informants did refer to their roles in their families, for example, being the oldest sibling meant also to be a role model to younger siblings. It is unclear however to what degree this can be attributed to gender. This is not to say that gender issues were not relevant to the informants of this study. For example, one informant expressed that she looked up issues of gender in the Bible. While I found this interesting as an example of using the Bible to explore one's commitments in a religion, I did not explore it further or look up similar issues with other informants. Furthermore, there is more than twenty-year gap between my study and the study of Freyne-Lindhagen. There might have been changes in values and gender roles for Assyrians/Syriacs during this period. Whatever changes there might have been, I would recommend future research to include a gender perspective on identity development when conducting research with young adolescents among Assyrians/Syriacs and other minorities.

The informants did express a sense of responsibility to their families and the Assyrian/Syriac group. By voicing that responsibility toward one's family and relatives regarding religion, the informant can be viewed as involved in a common effort that other Assyrians/Syriacs are engaged in that brings members of the group together. This finding is important to point out — that these young

adolescents express such a responsibility and awareness as it helps, for example, to interpret the scores on the U-MICS in regard to religion. The attitude of the informants toward the larger Assyrian/Syriac group was expressed as positive. This also encompassed a positive attitude toward Suryoyo and their religion. Both were described as worth maintaining for the sake of their family and coming generations. This was most notable in cases where informants expressed a responsibility to carry on their religion for coming generations. Stories that were shared in the interviews about Christians being persecuted in the light of the situation in Syria and in Iraq could also be an issue that brought together the informants, which relates to what I suggested regarding the time and context of the current study.

Language as a criterion and a method for social identities

The current study contributed to the field of identity development and the discipline of Psychology of Religion by bringing insight on the role language had for the development of identity among this age group and how language could be tied into their religion. Similar to Magnusson and Stroud (2012), who concluded that language was a means to provide an identity, I concluded that for some of the informants, being able to use Suryoyo was a criterion for being considered an Assyrian/Syriac. Language could also act as a trigger for a social identity where for example hearing Suryoyo in a certain situation could activate the informants' social identity as Assyrians/Syriacs helping them to relate to whoever they were interacting with in said situation. Furthermore, I explored the attitudes that the informants had toward various languages and what meaning they attributed to a language in relation to a certain identification. The meaning that the informants attributed to Suryoyo was of historical and cultural heritage that was transferred from one generation to another. Here, some of the informants expressed that there was a responsibility felt among themselves to learn the language and to pass it on to future generations. The language also held practical usages, such as enabling the informants to communicate with others such as relatives who might have lacked sufficient competence in Swedish to be able to communicate in it.

In the analysis, I suggested that language helped the informants to adapt to different situations. This had implications for identity development where the informants would be able to explore contexts that were relevant for different domains. Similarly, language could also enable an inclusion to in-groups. In relation to previous research, Woźmak-Bobińska (2019) concluded that the fear of assimilation that was present among older generations revolved around a loss of a cultural identity, language, traditions and religion. In contrast to the fear expressed by older generations, younger generations of Assyrians/Syriacs created complex and hybrid identities (e.g., combinations of Swedish and Assyrian/Syriac identifications) which, according to the researcher, moved beyond the dichotomy of assimilation or resistance. Here, education had been a

vital part in enabling this process. A similar fear of losing an identity, language, traditions and religion seemed to be present among the informants of the current study. A possible explanation for the informants being encouraged to speak Suryoyo more frequently at a younger age could perhaps be a parental fear of their children losing a common language as they grow up. As soon as the informants started school, they would spend less time at home and come into contact to a greater degree with other languages and a lesser degree to certain languages from their parents and/or other relatives. However, as some of the informants described, they did not always share the same worries as their parents did, which, for example, allowed them to reconsider some of their religious beliefs and practices while maintaining others. However, this was done with a conscious notion that this reconsideration was not always accepted by their parents. While it is not possible for me to know whether the informants had social identities different from their parents, I did suggest that they were in contact with other systems of development which entailed an adaptation that might have differentiated them to some degree from their parents. Furthermore, the presence of double identifications, as was noted in the questionnaire (e.g., Assyrian-Swedish or Syriac-Swedish), could be an indication of the participating informants moving, with the help of what languages they spoke, beyond what Woźmak-Bobińska referred to as a dichotomy between assimilation and resistance.

I believe it is important to also take into consideration, as did Magnusson and Stroud (2012), how language is used in order to understand what meaning is assigned to it. Magnusson and Stroud also noted that the Assyrians/Syriacs in their study were conscious about their language use, e.g., choice of dialect, in relation to whom they were talking to and in what context, and I believe that a similar consciousness was present among the informants of my study. The informants' ability to reflect on these situations and provide explanations to why they would act in a particular way might be an indication of a conscious strategy that the informants use in order to navigate the social environments that they are a part of. This consciousness seems to be present among younger age groups of Assyrians/Syriacs than what previously research had indicated.

Parzyk (2002) argued that the process of learning a language has to do with the social situation where practical and attitudinal reasons can limit the process. I expanded on this notion by exploring what encouragement the informants received primarily from their parents to speak a certain language in a particular situation. At home the informants were encouraged to use a particular language when they were in a dialogue with their parents or other family members. Usually this would be Suryoyo or Arabic. Similarly, when they were at church, they used the languages that enabled them to communicate with others. It seemed that the informants were encouraged to a lesser degree to use a particular language at church or at school in comparison to home. At school the informant would primarily be using Swedish except for a few occasions

during breaks or when sharing something private, where they would use Suryoyo or another language. The encouragement of the parents, according to the informants, could indirectly lead to the informants adapting to certain in-groups by fulfilling the set criteria for the said groups. I believe that this ties into what Phinney, Romero, Hava and Huang (2001) concluded that parental socialization was found to be associated with increased ethnic language skill which in turn was related to stronger degrees of ethnic identity. However, there is room for additional exploration here. Future research should consider using observations as a research method in order to investigate the actual language use rather than relying upon recollections of informants of their language practices.

Family roles and expectations

Sundvall (2011) highlighted in her study that there is an experienced responsibility for members in a family to take care of one another, e.g., in cases of illness. Parents were described as having a greater responsibility in this regard than siblings, although Sundvall highlights that the eldest son could have certain special obligations and responsibility for younger siblings. Such experiences were voiced in the qualitative interviews in this study including one girl who reported that, as she was the eldest child, her parents had some expectations of her. These expectations included for example attending choir practice and acquiring good grades in school. By her quitting choir practice, the parents had expressed a disappointment with the informant as she is supposed to be a role model to her younger siblings. Considering this example, it seems that there were expectations and responsibilities among family members, both in Sundvall's study and in the current study. Taking this comparison further, it might also provide some explanation for the responsibility felt for maintaining one's religion and the link between religion and one's family. As I presented earlier in the results, several informants described that they had a responsibility for maintaining and passing on their religion to coming generations. In addition, some of the informants also said that if they were to give up their religion, they would lose their right to bear the surname of their family.

Atto (2011) referred to a form of social control among Assyrians/Syriacs in that the collective image of the group was reflected on the individual members of the group. This study contributed by providing some nuance to this notion. The responsibility toward one's family and religion that the informants described could perhaps be part of such social control where the ways the informants act in relation to a heritage and tradition reflects back on their families. That could explain why some of the informants stated that they would loosen their connection to their families if they changed religion. Interestingly, Atto also refers to the collective way of life and the strong family connections as having assumed an educational function that transfers and transforms knowledge. This educational function through the family could perhaps be

exemplified in this study by the majority of the informants knowing their prayers in Suryoyo or Arabic as it was the language that they had learned and used at home praying with their families. I also provided examples of how questioning parts of one's religion could be met by educational efforts from the parents or by ridiculing and criticism as a way to dismiss alternative beliefs. While it is difficult to discern the motives of the parents for acting as they did, it is possible that it was done in order, at least in the long run, to maintain a connection between the informants, the family and an Assyrian/Syriac group.

Atto (2011) also refers to some of the districts in Södertälje as being characterized by a sense of community among the Assyrians/Syriacs where individual Assyrians/Syriacs told Atto that they felt at home because of the many Assyrians/Syriacs in the area. Södertälje has been considered by Assyrians/Syriacs as their new home. Similarly, living in an area where most of the inhabitants were Assyrian/Syriac might have had an impact on the informants. This is also related to my suggestion that language can activate a social identity which I suggested was the case for the informant who felt more comfortable in stores located in her neighborhood where the employees "were as her". Some of the informants stated that Södertälje was unique in the sense that there were many Assyrians/Syriacs and it was sometimes difficult to come across people from other cultures. This was described as something both negative and positive, where there was believed to be a lack of other cultures or a sense of safety. It is possible that these social environments, where the majority of the inhabitants are Assyrians/Syriacs, enforces this notion of social control among the informants as the group image is more present here in contrast to other environments where there are fewer members of the group. With this in mind, I would like to reiterate that, when using the concept of processes of identity development, the researcher has to consider the social environment when interpreting the scores on the U-MICS for example.

Reflections on the theoretical concepts used

Identity levels and identity development

The process of reconsideration of commitments in the religious faith domain of the U-MICS was not as relevant as other processes to the informants because of the meaning the informants assigned to religion. This is according to the notion that reconsideration in this domain is equal to a change of religion, which in itself holds a particular meaning to Assyrian/Syriacs due to historical experiences of persecution. Reconsideration of certain beliefs seems to be more acceptable among the informants even though such revisions can be met with resistance from the parents. Arguably, reconsideration of commitments in relation to education or their best friends does not result in similar reactions

from the parents as when the informants might reconsider their commitments in relation to religion. This was apparent in the interviews where the informants seemed to have more experiences of these processes in regard to what school they went to or friends that they had.

I have suggested in this study that the notion of ethnic, or cultural identity could be nuanced in order to avoid reducing an individual to a social identity. This is tied into the identity levels that I used as theoretical tools. Crocetti et al., (2018) argued that the personal and social identity were intertwined due to the self attempting to adapt to the demands of the many social contexts that the individual took part in and interacted with. The current study illustrated this by exploring the processes of identity development in relation to religion and the social identities the informants have as Christians and as Assyrians/Syriacs. As one informant stated: “my family is what I am and I follow my parents”. This calls for situating the identity processes in relation to people that the informants interact with which is why I believe that the use of both personal and social identity as tools is fruitful. Accordingly, this intertwining of identity levels helped to explore informants’ intergroup relationships, i.e., the relationship toward one’s family and possibly also the larger Assyrian/Syriac group. More specifically, a stronger self-image as Assyrian/Syriac was associated with stronger commitments in the religious faith domain on U-MICS, while a stronger agreement with the statement of having a self-image as Swedish was associated with stronger reconsiderations of commitments. This was also indicated in the qualitative interviews where the informants elaborated on how their Assyrian/Syriac identification was intertwined with their religion, where being Christian was often mentioned as a criterion by the informants for being considered an Assyrian/Syriac. Similar results were found by Oshana (2004) who found that a certain identity status correlated with Assyrian and American identifications. However, in contrast to Oshana’s study (2004), I did observe that stronger positive attitudes toward Suryoyo were associated with stronger commitments in the religious faith domain on U-MICS. This is especially notable since the attitudes toward Suryoyo were also associated with the self-image as Assyrian/Syriac; the said self-image also being associated with commitments in the religious faith domain. My theoretical point of departure for language was to conceptualize it from a functional perspective, where I viewed language as a symbol of tradition, heritage and social identity. As such, I viewed language as a criterion for distinguishing between in-group and out-group in regard to the social identities for the informants. My suggestion was that the informants described their ethnic identification as intertwined with their religion and also with Suryoyo.

If a language was associated with a social identity, the informants could use that language to emphasize a particular group membership directly and indirectly. Language acted as a method of adopting various social identities. The informants set out different meanings for the languages that they were able to

speak. For example, Swedish had a more formal meaning attached to it, especially in the classroom, while Suryoyo or Arabic could be used in music creation or joking. Suryoyo could also have a less formal role than Swedish but this could be linked to the occasion or with whom the informant engaged. For example, it could be more formal when engaging with older people (elderly) and less formal when used with peers. As such, the social context that the informant was located in determined the meaning ascribed to a certain language.

In regard to social identity, Crocetti et al., (2018) suggested a more complex view of social identity that went beyond in-groups and out-groups where individuals are able to recognize that the groups they belong to overlap with each other. While I used the terms in-group and out-group frequently in my analysis, I believe that there was a difference in how the informants approached various group memberships. I suggested that older informants were aware to a greater degree than their younger peers of several ways it was possible to for example be a Swede while at the same time being an Assyrian/Syriac. As such, there could be an age difference in regard to the ability to recognize that some groups may overlap with one another. In regard to exploring social identities among Assyrians/Syriacs, future research should explore other aspects than language and religion as the interviews with the informants brought up criteria for being considered a Swede or an Assyrian/Syriac such as behaviors, food, furnishing, and ways of talking.

Culture and religion

Culture

When I started this study, the concept of culture had a more prominent role in the theoretical framework as I used acculturation as a theory (Rudmin, 2010; Rudmin, 2009) to explore how the informants developed their identity. Acculturation-theory (Berry, 2016; Berry, 1997) paints a picture of an individual dealing with two cultures that are more or less clearly delineated from one another. I found this theory difficult to use in my study. It was not possible for me to delineate one culture from another or to determine what a Swedish culture was in contrast to an Assyrian/Syriac culture. I would suggest that because of the dynamic nature of the informants' social identities due to their interaction with several systems of development, I found it difficult to use the concept of culture as a tool to directly explore the identity of the informants. Thus, approaching culture as an identity, e.g., cultural identity that a priori explains the behaviors of a group, was not fruitful. On the one hand, culture as a concept is a crude and rough tool that risks blurring differences between individuals and their identity; on the other hand it provides a necessary reduction of such a complex phenomenon as identity. Instead of using terms such as mono- or multicultural to help my exploration, I used the bio-ecological

model in order to be more specific in how the social environments affects the identity development of the informants. At the same time, I have admittedly referred to social identities as Assyrian/Syriac and Swedish when interpreting the results. I have made assumptions that there is an Assyrian/Syriac group with certain beliefs, practices, values and traditions that are common among the members which the informants relate to. Similarly, I have made the assumption that the informants have a relation to the language Suryoyo because they view themselves as Assyrian/Syriac. Thus, I use culture in a similar manner as noted by Matsumoto (2006), as being an abstraction to understand similarities within and differences between groups of people. These assumptions have also made it possible for me to compare the results of my study with the results of previous research regarding Assyrians/Syriacs. As such, I cannot dismiss the concept of culture entirely.

I would suggest that culture can be conceptualized as the sum of all the interaction that the informants engage in with the various systems of development. More specifically, culture as a concept represents how the informants interact with the systems of development and how they view themselves in relation to these interactions. However, in order to explore these interactions, a system development model such as the bio-ecological model could be used as a framework. Because there are similarities between the informants that participated in this study in how they interacted in their social environments, it is possible to talk about a certain culture among the informants. The definition of culture that I used as my point of departure referred to a cultural worldview (a belief system of one's culture) that influenced the construction of the self (Matsumoto, 2006). These worldviews aided the individual to address his or her needs for affiliation and uniqueness. As such, the social identities the informants developed and adapted could correspond with cultural worldviews that help the individual to address his or her needs for affiliation and uniqueness. The definition also referred to cultural practices (activities engaged in, in relation to a culture). These activities are the adaptations by an individual to situations that they encounter in their life. These adaptations would continue as the informants get older and near adolescence. They would start to encounter other microsystems, the exosystems as well as the macrosystems. The choice of high school is characterized by reflections on future careers and some time is dedicated to this choice, by both the informant and the school, including the teachers. These high schools might be located in other districts, which requires the informant travel frequently, and to a greater extent, to other districts. The composition of pupils at these schools might also be of other ethnic groups, which would be a contrast to the current schools they are enrolled in. Thus, by continuing their education, the informants will come into contact with other parts of the macrosystems that they are situated within: the school curriculum for high school education, and meeting other social identities represented by other pupils at the school. The informants will also be older, which might mean that they will start taking part-time jobs outside

school and will eventually acquire the right to vote, which in itself is part of the codified laws and rules that make up parts of the macrosystems in Sweden. The older the informants get, an increased awareness is gained of what it means to be an Assyrian/Syriac and that physical appearance and language can act as representatives of various group memberships. As such, this would increase the complexity of identity development by introducing additional aspects of identity to take into consideration. This resonates with what Erikson (2004) suggest that during adolescence, one of the tasks of achieving an identity is to enable a synthezation of childhood identifications with the ethos of the society that the individual is situated within, for better and for worse.

Religion as a search for significance among Assyrians/Syriacs

Engaging in religion provided the informants with a sense of significance as they established for themselves a social identity that was aligned with their family and the Assyrian/Syriac group. I conceptualized religion as a search for significance that took place in a context of institutions and traditions that facilitated spirituality. Based on the material gathered for this study, I illustrated how this search for significance as processes within the religious faith domain on U-MICS, practices, beliefs and an identification as a Christian was interlinked with the identification as an Assyrian/Syriac. I emphasized that there were relational aspects to religion among the informants in relation to previous generations, including their family. The informants expressed a sense of responsibility toward maintaining and transmitting their religion to future generations. This in turn generated consequences for identity development processes on a personal identity level where, for example, reconsideration of commitments was not relevant to engage in for most of the informants.

Similar to my suggestion for culture as the sum of all the interactions the informants have with various social environments, religion as a search for significance should be viewed similarly. Previous research described religion among Assyrian/Syriac as being intertwined with an ethnic and national identity (e.g., Deniz, 1999; Atto, 2011). A similar intertwinement was indicated in the results of the current study. Confining religion to religious faith only, as in the case with U-MICS, fails the objective of exploring identity in relation to religion satisfactorily. Furthermore, the definition of religion as a search for significance and terms such as religious faith might have confined the experiences of the informants to a narrow category that is unable to capture the full breadth of how the informants engage with their religion. I chose to problematize this from the start of this study as I have had the tendency to differentiate various identifications, practices and beliefs from religious ones as religion, according to my definition, is related to the search of the sacred (i.e., spirituality). However, as the study moved forward, I have found this differentiation more and more difficult. The definition of religion was reliant upon the definition of spirituality and the sacred. I was more focused on what function religion had for the informants and not necessarily what set religion apart from

other phenomena. The notion of the sacred differentiates religion as a search for significance from other searches of significances that are not sacred. The sacred becomes part of the everyday lives of the informants as what is determined to be sacred becomes attached to other domains, such as their social identity as Assyrians/Syriacs. The use of the sacred as such might be less necessary as it becomes less important to separate religion from other phenomenon as religion permeates other aspects of the informants' lives. This notion is a contribution to the notion of religion as a search for significance where the sacred as a function to differentiate religion from other searches has to be revisited. Furthermore, my chosen definition of religion does not take age into consideration. It is possible that the informants of my study engage in religion as a search for significance that does not necessarily differentiate between a search for significance (religion) and a search for the sacred (spirituality). One such example was of the informants praying in other settings than at church. Similarly, I pointed out in the analysis that how the informants engage with religion might be influenced by their age which in turn ties into their relationship with their parents. Because of this relationship, certain religious beliefs among the informants might be challenged more openly while other beliefs and practices are maintained and not questioned as doing so can generate consequences for the informants within their families.

Religion among Assyrians/Syriacs has been described as a common denominator where the church has acted as a figurehead and meeting place for the group (e.g., Cetrez, 2005; Atto, 2011). However, as I stated earlier, the link to the Assyrian/Syriac identifications should be seen primarily as a link to one's family and secondly as a link to an Assyrian/Syriac group. Thus, religion is fruitful to be approached as a relational phenomenon where the religion of the informants stands in relation to someone else's religion, for example their parents. The parents have transferred this search for significance to their children by introducing them to practices such as prayers or attending Mass or other celebrations or festivities as well as reading to them stories from the Bible or letting the children attend Sunday school. Because religion has been intertwined with what it means to be Assyrian/Syriac (e.g., Deniz, 2001), and with experiences of living as a religious minority that has been persecuted for religious reasons, adhering to those beliefs and that identification becomes important in order to maintain an Assyrian/Syrian identification throughout the family lineage. Thus, it turns into a responsibility to previous generations and their experiences. The experiences of the informants are, however, presumably, different in relation to their parents, or other generations of Assyrians/Syriacs, school, Södertälje, and so on. As such, the religion of the parents might not be suited for the informants and their experiences, which is why there might be attempts by the informants to circumscribe parts of this search for significance while still maintaining other parts of their religion. An important

caveat here however is how the parents transfer their religion varies from informant to informant, where some of the parents might emphasize the importance of religion to a greater degree than others.

Migration, systems of development and identity development

While most of the informants in this study were born in Sweden, I would like to reflect on the possible influence of migration on identity as migration is an experience present in previous generations of Assyrians/Syriacs. Some of the informants referred to Sweden as the new home country for Assyrians/Syriacs. Migrating from one country to another involves changes to the systems of the bio-ecological model. The content of certain systems is exchanged for others as the individual moves from one country to another. This exchange involves moving to a new neighborhood, getting to know new friends, starting a new school, creating relations to classmates and teachers, getting acquainted with a new curriculum, and so on. Even the family of the informant would presumably change as other members of the family are also experiencing changes in those systems that they are interacting with. On a personal identity level, this requires new commitments being established and being explored while the old commitments developed in the previous country become more difficult to maintain. Seen through the chronosystem this involves a change that will need to be turned into stability in the long run.

Identity on a social level presumably adapts to this change in systems. As such, it is possible that a self-image as a Swede is emphasized to a greater extent during the initial years in Sweden as the informant recognizes this to be the in-group that he or she should belong to. However, as time goes by, and the longer the informant stays in Södertälje or attends any of the schools where they are enrolled, the weaker this self-image becomes and the stronger a self-image as an Assyrian/Syrian becomes. The in-group would change from Swedes to Assyrians/Syriacs perhaps because Södertälje is unique in a sense to Assyrians/Syriacs, where among other things an Assyrian/Syrian identification is prioritized. This can be the case not only for the informants but also for other family members who find that this in-group is more viable than a Swedish one, especially if the family is located in any of the districts where there is a strong presence of Assyrians/Syriacs. Other parts of identity, such as the personal identity, might find such a transmission easier in that it is more able to create a coherent synchronicity between various identifications that the informant, or his or her family members, might have. As I have referred to earlier, certain social identities can be chosen in order to differentiate oneself from other groups and to increase the uniqueness of one's own group. At the same time, it is probable that the social identity as Assyrian/Syriac that the informants refer to is new to Assyrians/Syriacs who recently migrated to Sweden and Södertälje.

Change in time is a factor in the chronosystem and for religion for the Assyrian/Syriac group. Because Assyrians/Syriacs have migrated from the Middle East to Sweden, religion has been transferred from one situation to another. Consequently, in the terms of the bio-ecological model, the systems which religion was located in has changed. I believe that this is what Deniz (2001) described regarding the change from an ethno-religious identity to an ethno-national identity as a result of migration. This does not necessarily entail a change over time for the informants themselves as the majority of them were born in Sweden. For the informants, due to their young age, any changes in time related to their religion is closer at hand to contemporary issues such as the civil war in Syria or ISIS. Although it is difficult for me to discuss any changes in time in relation to the informants, I can speculate that being Christian might be an identification that has been emphasized to a greater degree in recent years due to events taking place that are interpreted by Assyrians/Syriacs as threatening to Christians. Emphasizing this social identity is done in order to strengthen that part of the heritage of the group.

Methodological Reflections

I now turn to reflect on the methodological aspects of my study in order to further highlight what contributions this study has generated.

Critical Realism as epistemology

My epistemological stand-point in this thesis has been critical realism (Danermark et al., 2019). I used the theory of identity development and the bio-ecological model as tools in my exploration of how the informants developed their identity. I acknowledged that the phenomena that I have interpreted as processes of identity exist despite which theory I use in order to explore them. This means that my conclusions are not final and that there are other interpretations, with other theories, as valid as my own. My chosen tools can be more or less suitable to explore the said phenomena as the tools are reliant, to use terms of critical realism, on an internal world that is constituted by socially influenced knowledge. Similarly, I acknowledge that the interpretation I have made with my chosen tools, theoretically as well as methodologically, also rely upon an internal world. As such, I have been careful to provide descriptions of the interaction I have had with the informants in order to inform how I have drawn my conclusions. In addition to this, I have been clear that the contribution of this study is the particularity of the results rather than the generalizability.

My choice of critical realism also relates to culture in terms of certain theories being more or less appropriate to apply as tools for interpretation in different

environments. In the terms of Anczyk et al., (2020), I would consider myself somewhere between the stances of a *universalist* (i.e., psychological processes are universal but are expressed differently between cultures) and a *relativist* (i.e., culture is approached as an internal element that influences psychological processes and behaviors). I have acknowledged that there were difficulties in using theoretical concepts, especially in the form of psychometric instruments, that have been developed in other settings as these are constructs that, to the informants of this study and their experiences, might be foreign. While these constructs were able to provide an interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation there were also findings in regard to the U-MICS, more specifically the sub-scale reconsideration of commitments for the religious faith domain, where I highlighted that there were conceptions among the informants that made the said process seem to be less relevant. While my chosen tools are not perfect, they are the tools that I have found available based on the discipline that I belong to and the research field that I am aiming toward.

Mixed-methods as research design

The choice to use a sequential mixed-methods research design proved it could generate several gains. I believe that the design enabled the quantitative results to be explored with the help of qualitative results. This was because the various results that were generated by the research methods were integrated and not kept independent of each other (cf. Morse, 2010). The quantitative data together with the qualitative material, generated results that were able to answer the research questions with a smaller sample size. Findings in the qualitative material were cross-referenced through the quantitative results by enabling the use of analyses of central tendencies (i.e., medians, means and frequencies) and correlations between measures. However, as there are various meanings to what it means to be an Assyrian/Syriac or Swedish, other research designs could also be fruitful, especially those that employed a qualitative phase at the beginning of a study in order to capture the breadth of meanings assigned to social identities or complex phenomena such as religion.

For future research that sets out to explore identity among minorities, I would recommend that these studies employ mixed-methods as a research design in order to draw on the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. However, because of the nature of mixed-methods studies where several methods are combined, it is beneficial for the research to be done by a team of researchers rather than a lone researcher. The possibilities to broaden what material and data are collected would increase as well as possibly avoiding obstacles such as choosing a strategy for sampling that is not adjusted for the research context. Other research methods can also be considered. For example, I had a focus on language and what role it had in relation to setting criteria for various social identities. Here, discourse analysis (e.g., Jørgensen, 2000) could be an alternative approach in order analyze the discourses that are

present in the ways that the informants discuss their identities. Furthermore, observations (e.g., Baker, 2006) should be included when exploring practices or behaviors of the informants, if possible, as it enables a more direct and detailed approach in contrast to the informant recollecting in interviews his or her religious practices. Observations could also be a fruitful method for exploring the potential association between identity and practices. Here, theories of how identity is performed could be a useful tool for interpreting gathered empirical material (e.g., Hall & du Gay, 1996; Rommel, 2011). Also, interviews with parents and other significant others should complement interviews with young adolescents in order to more fully explore the interaction that these groups have with one another. Because the said interaction is presumably different from individual to individual, case studies (e.g., Yin, 2018) could be a fruitful method or research design to use in order to go more in-depth in these interactions and their particularity.

Longitudinal research design

Future research should also apply a longitudinal design if the target of the study is identity development. In accordance with the theoretical framework, development involves change and stability over time. Thus, a longitudinal design would be able to explore how processes of identity development in a particular domain changes or stabilizes. Because my study applied a cross-sectional design, I am less able to tell whether or not the informant has undergone a change in regard to their identity. The results and the conclusions I draw are therefore limited to the particular time period when I collected my material. However, the multiple data collections that occurred at different occasions provided findings that suggested that scores in the U-MICS were susceptible to everyday experiences (e.g., fights with a friend, a decreasing quality in education). This corresponds with research such as that by Klimstra et al., (2010), which indicated that there might be short-term fluctuations on day-to-day basis in the identity development among early adolescents. Besides from arguing for a longitudinal design, I believe that this would also argue for the necessity of taking the context and specific time period into account when considering scores on the U-MICS.

Sampling

Including a researcher perceived to be a member of the in-group, or community representatives, could have generated greater success in recruiting additional participants (Bonevski et al., 2014) as well as obtaining a sample where males and females were more equal to one another in numbers. The informants referred to me on several occasions as a Swede. Because I was perceived to be part of an out-group, this could have had effects on the sampling procedure. In order to minimize such a possible impact, future research should consider

actions to minimize potential differences between the data gatherer (not necessarily the researcher) and the population. One such action could be to include a member of the research team who is considered to be a member of an in-group by speaking a similar language other than Swedish. I do believe that there might be some merit in this as previous research has pointed out that the relationship between authorities and Assyrians/Syriacs is sometimes characterized by caution (e.g., see Atto's (2011) or Mack's (2017) description of Södertälje and Assyrians/Syriacs). In relation to the aforementioned discussion on critical realism and different so-called internal worlds, it is possible that the inclusion of a researcher perceived as a member of the in-group could better transfer the meaning of the study and what it was about to potential informants.

The sampling strategy that I applied met several obstacles in terms of acquiring written consent from the parents. The teachers and administrative personal at one of the schools voiced similar experiences of difficulty in acquiring signed documents from the parents. Future research that focuses on young adolescents who require consent from the parents should consider applying a more direct approach to acquiring informed consent. One such approach could be to make phone calls directly to the parents and ask for their consent for their children to participate in the study. The researcher could thereafter acquire a consent of participation from the informants while they were at school.

Generalizability and particularity

Future research should reflect on ambitions for generalization among minorities since social identities are dynamic and might be difficult to capture, thus impairing abilities to create consistent and coherent analytical categories. Rather than generalizability, I emphasize the particularity of this study. The current study was focused on a particular group of Assyrian/Syriac informants at a given point in time where certain historical and contemporary events are relevant to understanding the identity development of these informants. The sample I drew from the schools consisted of pupils who identified themselves as Assyrian/Syriac. Such a selection creates a purposeful bias as these pupils might be more inclined to answer that they adhere to a particular identification and values, beliefs and practices tied into that identification. Because I approached identity as being constituted by several levels where social identity is one, I believed it to be necessary to include individuals who explicitly viewed themselves as Assyrians/Syriacs. This group should presumably have assigned themselves, or been assigned by others, to such a group membership. In terms of particularity, the schools and Assyrian/Syriac group itself were unique in several ways. Elafskolan had an Assyrian profile and Wasaskolan had a pupil population where 92% of the pupils were Assyrians/Syriacs, according to the staff at the school. Because of these unique settings, it is difficult to generalize to other settings or groups of pupils. Furthermore, because

the Swedish census does not take ethnicity and religion into consideration when collecting various survey data, it is difficult to acquire a comprehensive overview of the Assyrian/Syriac population in Sweden and Södertälje. This provides significant challenges to any ambitions to also make generalizing claims.

Interaction between researcher and research participants

I would recommend future research to reflect on the interaction that occurs between researcher and young adolescents as informants who assign themselves a minority membership. However, I would also recommend future research to consider the role of the young adolescents and research participants as less passive and more active in the research process where they make active choices of what knowledge to share. As referred to by Wengraf (2001), the power relation can be tilted in either direction toward either the researcher or the research participants. The informants may choose to reveal a certain image of themselves in relation to how they perceived me. Here factors such as age, me being a researcher, and perhaps even gender can affect the interaction between the researcher and the informants. Because I was viewed as a member of an out-group, certain characteristics of their social identity might be emphasized while others, more subtle characteristics, are not mentioned. However, gathering data and material from the informants at several points in time could have created a greater sense of trust. Also, conducting the interviews in the school during school hours could have had a similar effect. At the same time, the informants are the keepers of knowledge that I intended to gain access to and explore while the study took place in a context of two schools and a city that were more or less unfamiliar to me. This resulted in me taking measures to adapt myself to the curriculum and the physical place of the school. As such, I was the visitor to an environment that the informants knew better than I did.

Issues of validity and reliability

Strategies to acquire qualitative validity, according to Creswell (2014), refer to clarifying the bias of the researcher, providing rich and thick descriptions of the findings, i.e., quotes from the different types of interviews, and to present negative and/or discrepant information. Besides discussing my bias toward the informants and the field, e.g., my role to the informants besides from being a researcher, I also presented quotes from the qualitative material that were thick with content. In addition to this, I also presented information that differed from the mainstream of content of a particular theme. My ambition was to nuance my own results in order to avoid a simplistic view of the informants and their experiences. However, at times, quotes that were thick were not always available as the informants provided short answers and did not always elaborate on their answers.

In regard to validity, I would like to also reflect on what terms I used in my interaction with the informants. The terms Assyrian and Syriac (syrian in Swedish) produced reactions among some of the pupils at the schools when I introduced the study. Some of the pupils reacted by reciting out loud rhymes about Assyrians or Syriacs that were meant as a form of teasing. Other pupils expressed that it was unfair that the study was limited to Assyrians/Syriacs and not to other groups of people from the Middle East. This unfairness referred to one of the pupils not being able to participate due to my specific focus on Assyrians/Syriacs. Furthermore, when I would read aloud the questions about attitudes toward Suryoyo from the questionnaire, at times some of the informants would react as I spoke the word Suryoyo. When I inquired about what was so funny they said that it felt strange hearing me say Suryoyo. In some of the aforementioned cases it is less clear in what way these terms might have influenced the conclusions that I have produced in this study. It does show however that these terms have certain meanings assigned to them that from the beginning of this study have had an implication on the interaction between me and the informants as well as what conclusions I have made based on the collected empirical material.

I would recommend future research to avoid using reverse items in order to reduce the risk of misunderstanding or confusing the respondent. While there was no indication of the items being difficult to understand during the pre-testing of the questionnaire, the measure regarding attitudes toward Swedish language had a low Cronbach's alpha, indicating a weak internal validity. Similarly, the measure of attitudes toward one's mother tongue had also a weak internal validity. The reasons for this might have been that measures on attitudes toward their mother tongue might be difficult to comprehend at face value as the items do not address a particular language. It might also be the case that the composition of items did not make sense to the informants at a first glance. Although the measures of attitudes toward Suryoyo had strong internal validity, attitudes toward certain language might be more abstract in comparison to measures of attitudes toward certain groups of people.

Contribution to Psychology of Religion and the Research field of Identity Development

This study has provided a contribution to the field of identity development and the discipline of Psychology of Religion of how places, history and contemporary experiences for a minority play a part in influencing the processes of identity development and the intertwinement of the identity levels. As I near the end of this chapter, I will summarize the larger contributions that I have pointed out.

Theoretically, this study contributed to the field of identity development by expanding the theory of identity development and the bio-ecological model. Previous research using these theories was focused on majority populations or comparisons between majority populations and various minorities. The current study provided empirical material with new voices and experiences to the theories of identity development and the bio-ecological model. These new voices and experiences, consisting of a religious and ethnic minority where the focus was on the group itself, helped to explore of how individuals from a minority developed their identity in interaction with teachers, friends and parents. Also, the inclusion of the religious faith domain as a new sub-scale for U-MICS has expanded the areas where U-MICS has been used to assess identity development in an individual's life. However, as this study is focused on a particular ethnic and religious minority, future studies with other groups are required in order to validate the sub-scale. The inclusion of the religious faith domain can also offer a way for future studies in Psychology of Religion to explore identity development in relation to religion. Research on identity development using the U-MICS should continue to include informants in the age-span of 10-15 years from minorities in order to explore the identity of this age group. Such results are not only useful for understanding the developmental challenges of young adolescents, but it also provides nuances to the theory itself as the primary group for investigating this process before has comprised adolescents and young adults (e.g., Dimitrova et al., 2018). Furthermore, the inclusion of identity levels in the form of personal identity and social identity can contribute to understanding how ethnic and religious minorities develop their identity based on their interaction with other groups. The focus on interaction with groups can further help to explore the reasons for an individual to adopt a certain social identity and what aspects of this identity seem to affect identity development.

I would also suggest future studies to consider and go beyond the assumptions that are assigned to an ethnic or cultural identity. The identity is complex and requires being situated in an interaction with several social environments in order to be explored. Similarly, culture as a concept should not be limited to a form of belonging (e.g., cultural identity) that pre-determines a set of behaviors because the culture of a group is described with a set of characteristics. Instead, culture should be approached as the sum of interaction that an individual has with his or her social environments. This contribution is relevant for the Psychology of Religion as well. Future research in the Psychology of Religion that is focused on religion among young adolescents from minorities, religious and/or ethnic, should involve a developmental perspective, e.g., on identity, as a tool to interpret young adolescents' experiences of how they engage with religion. Furthermore, this should include a focus on the relational aspects of this engagement with religion. This aspect could involve the relation between the research informant and significant others, e.g., parents, teachers, friends and others, in order to investigate how relationships affect religion

as a search for significance. Such an endeavor could help to explore differences in approaches to religion based on age. As I pointed out at the beginning of this thesis, I did not approach religion in relation to health in contrast to what many recent international and Scandinavian studies in Psychology of Religion have done (e.g., Lloyd, 2018). My contribution to the discipline is as such a broadening of the approach to religion that explores the phenomenon in relation to identity without tying the conclusions of the study into a discussion of, for example, well-being. Furthermore, in line with Rudmin (2009), this study broadens research on ethnic and religious minorities by not approaching the informants as experiencing a stressful situation due to their history of migration. This is not a critique of previous research. Instead, it as an affirmation of a broadened approach to the function of religion.

As I pointed out in the results and the analysis, the various cycles of identity were shaped by the particular domain they took place in. How the informants engaged with their religion illustrated that religion was not only a search for significance that involved the individual. This search also encompassed a sense of belonging that connected the informants with their families and their perceived history as Assyrians/Syriacs. Thus, the sacred is broader and it is very much encompassed in the daily lives of the informants through for example their social identity as Assyrians/Syriacs. Perhaps this is what broadens the definition of religion to not only include a personal search for significance but also a search that connects their identity to certain groups through a social identity. The informants acknowledged the importance of religion and the sense of belonging that went with it, but they also expressed a distance toward certain beliefs and an awareness of having beliefs that differed from their family. This could generate friction between parents and the informants that resulted in attempts by the parents to remedy this difference.

Methodologically, the mixed-methods design enabled me to produce quantitative results by applying an instrument that had been used in previous research. Thus, I could continue with previous research and generate comparable results. The qualitative phase enabled me to provide a depth to these results, which enabled new voices, and experiences to come to the fore. Future research should continue to use mixed-methods research design in order to combine quantitative and qualitative research methods when exploring identity and the role of religion in identity development. This combination of methods helps to provide a more in-depth exploration of phenomenon such as identity and religion for groups that attracted less focus in research, in this case young adolescents of a minority background.

Chapter 9: Summary

Introduction

In this chapter, I will summarize the thesis according to a number of key components. I start by describing the research problem, the aim and the research questions that have guided the inquiry of the thesis. I continue thereafter to present a short summary of the theoretical framework that I have used to inform the analysis of the collected empirical data and material in order to answer the research questions. Thereafter I move on to describe the research methods that I have employed in order to answer the research questions. What follows thereafter are sections that present the results and the analysis of this study. The chapter ends with a section that focuses on the recommendations that I suggest for future research.

Research Problem

While there has been previous research focused on Assyrians/Syriacs (e.g., Atto, 2011; Cetrez, 2005; 2011; Deniz, 2001; Miller, 2019), young adolescents within the group have not gained much attention. Living as a minority in the Middle East and having experienced consequences due to that position, religion has become a method of contemporary generations of Assyrians/Syriacs to connect with previous generations. Because of the situation that is present in today's Syria and Iraq, members of the Assyrian/Syriac community are reminded of their existence as an ethnic and religious minority living in a diaspora. Religion in their countries of origin was a way of establishing and maintaining a community, i.e., deciding who was and who was not a part of the group (Deniz, 2001). Researchers such as Deniz suggested that the ethnic-religious identity had changed to a more ethnic-national identity as a result of their migration to Western countries. Assyrian/Syriac young adolescents are at the fore of discussions regarding integration and maintenance of cultures. However, they are seldom approached by researchers on these matters. Because of the aforementioned issues that Assyrian/Syriac young adolescents face, the question arises how the process of developing an identity is shaped by religion in a social context that includes historical experiences and future ambitions.

Aim, Research Design and Research Questions

The overall aim of this study was to explore the identity of a group of Assyrian/Syriac young adolescents at two schools in Södertälje. The aim was achieved through a sequential mixed-methods design where I explored through questionnaires how these young adolescents scored on measures of identity development, self-images and attitudes toward languages and significant others. A qualitative phase followed that employed group and individual semi-structured interviews in order to further explore the scores provided on the quantitative measures. The current study was primarily deductive, using theoretical concepts as tools in the exploration of the identity, followed by a nuancing of these concepts with the help of the empirical material. This study had the following research questions.

1. In what ways do a group of Assyrian/Syriac young adolescents in Sweden develop their identity?
 - 1.1. In what ways do the young adolescents engage with their group identifications?
 - 1.2. In what ways do the young adolescents engage with their education and best friends in relation to their identity?
 - 1.3. In what ways do the young adolescents engage with their religion in relation to their identity?
2. In what way can the exploration of identity among a group of Assyrian/Syriac young adolescents contribute to the research field of identity development and the discipline of Psychology of Religion?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework consisted of mainly two theories: first, identity development from an Eriksonian theoretical point of view and developed as a measure by Meeus and Crocetti through the instrument the Utrecht-Management of Identity Commitments Scale (U-MICS) (Crocetti et al., 2010). Second, the systems of development of the bio-ecological model as proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1981). Through these theories I focused on personal and social identity as different levels of identity as well as the processes of identity development: commitments, exploration and reconsideration of the commitments. Together, these processes constitute the identity maintenance cycle (commitments and exploration) as well as the identity formation cycle (commitments and reconsideration). These cycles were investigated in three domains of the U-MICS: religious faith, education and best friends. Regarding the bio-ecological model, I set my focus on a selection of the systems of development. Through the theoretical framework, the research questions were operationalized. The first sub question explored the

ways in which the informants engage with their group identifications. The theoretical analytical questions were the following:

- In what ways are languages and religion criteria for social identities?
- In what ways do family and other significant others relate to the criteria for social identities?

The second sub question revolves around the ways in which the informants engaged with their education and best friends in relation to their identity. The sub question was divided into the following theoretical questions:

- In what ways do the identity maintenance and formation cycles occur in the education and best friends domains in the personal identity of the young adolescents?
- How can systems of development influence the identity of the young adolescents in the education and best friends domain?

The third sub question inquires about the ways in which the informants engage with their religion in relation to their identity. The theoretical analytical questions were the following:

- In what ways do the identity maintenance and formation cycles occur in relation to religion in the personal identity of the young adolescents?
- How can systems of development with regard to religion influence the identity of the young adolescents?

Sample and Methods

The research methods that I employed in this study to answer my research questions were both quantitative and qualitative methods in a sequential mixed-methods research design. In the initial quantitative phase, I used questionnaires that were distributed to informants at two schools in Södertälje. In order for the pupils to be eligible to participate, they would need to be in classes from the fourth grade to the ninth grade. They would be required to view themselves as Assyrians/Syriacs. Those who were interested in participating and fulfilled the sampling criteria received a letter of information and a form that asked for the parents' written consent to let their children participate in the study.

The questionnaires that were distributed were filled in by the informants in groups. The groups were organized according to what class the informant was enrolled in, which meant that they filled out the questionnaires together with any classmates who also had consent to participate in the study. Apart from

including the measure U-MICS in the domains of religious faith, education and best friends, the questionnaires also included measures regarding self-image as Swedish and Assyrian/Syriac as well as items regarding attitudes toward classmates and teachers. Language attitudes were also measured, more specifically attitudes toward the Swedish language, the informants' mother tongues and the language of Suryoyo. The items in the questionnaires and the information letter as well as consent forms were tested prior to an application for an ethics review (diary number of 2016/277) which the study passed. Methods of analyzing the quantitative material were descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and means, tests for comparisons between groups of informants as well as methods for exploring correlations between measures that were included in the questionnaires. All data collection were done at the schools during school hours. The informants were asked after they had filled out the questionnaires whether or not they would be interested in participating in a follow-up interview. Those who indicated an interest were gathered in groups according to which class they were enrolled in. These group interviews were focused on following up scores from the questionnaires where I would ask the informants to elaborate on the reasons for them providing the scores that they had. In the interviews with individual informants I probed further into the results of the quantitative phase and the experiences that were shared during the group interviews. These interviews were suitable for exploring personal characteristics, choices and commitments. The qualitative material was analyzed with various forms of coding (Saldaña, 2013) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), where I created a number of themes from the qualitative interviews.

Results and Analysis

The results and the analysis of this study were presented in three chapters where each chapter focuses on a theme. The first chapter dealt with the theme *navigating multiple social identities* while in the second chapter I turned my attention to the theme *maintaining and forming identity through education and best friends*. In the last chapter, the focal point was the theme *maintaining and forming identity through religion*.

Navigating multiple social identities

The informants navigated several social identities by creating similarities and differences to other groups with which they were interacting. The social identity as an Assyrian/Syriac was first and foremost tied to a belonging to one's family, and secondly to the Assyrian/Syriac group. This connection ran through religion and language. The informant, through their identity, differentiates themselves, creating boundaries from others. This could be done on a

personal identity level, which would refer to emphasizing what made the individual unique in comparison to others. This referred to the processes of identity development within a particular domain, e.g., strengthening one's commitments in the education domain. The commitments that the informant had were on a personal level. These commitments were maintained by the informant developing a sense of belonging to their family. However, as the personal identity is situated at the intersection between the personal and the social, this sense of belonging tied the informant to a group and thus a social identity was involved in the development. As such, on a social identity level, this referred to assigning criteria that defined who was a member of the in-group while also defining who was not and thus, instead, belonged to an out-group. These criteria were however not agreed upon among the informants, which pointed to these memberships as dynamic in that their meanings were continuously being negotiated. This was the case for both memberships in a Swedish and an Assyrian/Syriac group.

Scores on attitudes toward the language Suryoyo correlated positively with scores on commitments in the religious faith domain and with the degree of self-image as an Assyrian/Syriac. The more positive the attitudes toward Suryoyo were, the stronger commitments in the religious faith domain and the stronger self-image as an Assyrian/Syriac. The meaning of being an Assyrian/Syriac varied among the informants although there were notions that were common (e.g., importance of Suryoyo, religion or Christianity, among several of the informants. It could be argued thus that what it meant to be Assyrian/Syriac was negotiated for each informant individually depending on his or her interaction with the systems the informant was interacting with. This meant that each informant engaged with their family, friends, teachers and others regarding the meaning of being Assyrian/Syriac.

Maintaining and forming identity through education and best friends

The theme maintaining and forming identity through education and best friends highlighted that there was a difference in scores on the U-MICS in the education domain between the two schools. Informants at Wasaskolan had higher score on commitments than their peers at Elafskolan. Weaker scores in commitments among informants at Elafskolan could be associated with expressed negative attitudes toward teachers and the school itself. Furthermore, I suggested that the educational and best friends domain were intertwined as they shared parts of the systems of development. In the microsystem, this referred to teachers and classmates as well as friends that were enrolled in the same school and class as the informants. Teachers had the potential of affecting the quality of education in a positive or negative way at the schools. This

could result in an impact on the commitments and reconsideration of commitments in the education domain where, depending on the quality of education, the processes could consequently either be strengthened or weakened. The informants interacted with their friends regularly by meeting up at school or after school. Friends provided the informants with support, e.g., being able to keep secrets. Common languages and social identities could aid the interaction between, for example, informants and their teachers.

Maintaining and forming identity through religion

Because religion is ascribed a certain importance by the informants and their families, the identity cycles of maintenance and formation in the religious faith domain are affected. The formation cycle of identity in the religious faith domain was not as strong as the maintenance cycle among the informants. I suggested this as there were several consequences related to the process of reconsidering one's current commitments in the domain. These consequences meant that the informants risked differentiating themselves from the family. Maintenance of the identity was achieved by creating similarities to one's family and to other Assyrian/Syriacs as well as through certain places (e.g., church) and practices (e.g., praying) associated with one's religion. I suggested that the informants assigned similarities, and were assigned similarities by others, with groups such as their families but also to the Christian community and Assyrians/Syriacs. Maintenance through exploration was conducted by curiosity and through religious education at school and through one's family. This exploration was both inter-personal (religious education and family) and intra-personal (curiosity).

Future Recommendations

I suggested that future research on identity development using the U-MICS should continue to include young adolescents from minorities in order to explore how processes of development are approached and shaped by these groups. Such results are not only useful for understanding the developmental challenges of the aforementioned groups, but it also provides nuances to the identity development of adolescents and young adults. The inclusion of identity levels in the form of personal identity and social identity can contribute to understanding how processes of identity development are approached by minorities. Furthermore, the inclusion of the bio-ecological model provided a frame for situating the identity development in an interaction with several social environments, here understood as systems of development.

Future research in the Psychology of Religion that is focused on religion among young adolescents from ethnic minorities should continue to study the

relational aspect of religion between the informant and other significant others, parents, teachers, friends and others, in order to investigate how it impacts religion as a search for significance. Furthermore, future research should also explore whether a social identity or the family and microsystems that are closer located to the individual developing his or her identity that are affecting the development to a larger degree. In other words, my suggestion is that researchers go beyond what is assigned to a social identity in order to see what experiences and meanings that constitute this identity. Here, theories such as Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model could be applied as a tool interpret how individuals interact with their social environments.

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Appendices

Appendix A: English version of questionnaire: Identity development among Assyrian/Syriac pupils

ID-NUMBER (FILLED OUT BY RESEARCHER):

Education					
Instructions Below there are some statements regarding you and your education. For each statement, check a box for the alternative that corresponds best with your opinion. Education at school refers to what you learn at school. School education refers to your current school. If you find that the possible answers are difficult to separate, try to answer with the help of the numbers under each answer.					
	com- pletely untrue	untrue	some- times true/ some- times not	true	com- pletely true
	1	2	3	4	5
My education gives me security in life					
My education gives me self-confidence					
My education makes me feel sure of myself					
My education gives me security for the future					
My education allows me to face the future with optimism					
I try to find out a lot about my education					
I often reflect on my education					
I make a lot of effort to keep finding out new things about my education					
I often try to find out what other people think about my education					
I often talk with other people about my education					
I often think it would be better to try to find a different education					

I often think that a different education would make my life more interesting					
In fact, I'm looking for a different education					

TEACHERS

2. Now I would like you to tell me what you think about your teachers. You do that by checking the boxes below. For each statement, check the corresponding box. Remember that no none-authorized may take part of your answers.

	Completely untrue (1)	Somewhat untrue (2)	Somewhat true (3)	Completely true (4)
I feel comfortable with my teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My teachers are boring	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My teachers are fair	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am not comfortable with my teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My teachers are Mina are interesting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My teachers are unfair	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Relational identity/friendship					
Instructions: Below there are some statements regarding you and your best friend. With best friend, I do not mean a brother, sister, girl- or boyfriend. For each statement, check a box for the alternative that corresponds best with your opinion. Best friend can be one or several persons.					
	completely untrue	untrue	sometimes true/ sometimes not	true	completely true
	1	2	3	4	5
My best friend gives me security in life					
My best friend gives me self-confidence					
My best friend makes me feel sure of myself					
My best friend gives me security for the future					
My best friend allows me to face the future with optimism					
I try to find out a lot about my best friend					
I often reflect on my best friend					
I make a lot of effort to keep finding out new things about my best friend					
I often try to find out what other people think about my best friend					
I often talk with other people about my best friend					

I often think it would be better to try to find a different best friend					
I often think that a new best friend would make my life more interesting					
In fact, I'm looking for a new best friend					

Classmates

4. Now I would like you to tell me what you think about your classmates. You do that by checking the boxes below. For each statement, check the corresponding box.

	Completely untrue (1)	Somewhat untrue (2)	Somewhat true (3)	Completely true (4)
I am comfortable with my classmates	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My classmates are boring	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My classmates are fair fair	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am not comfortable with my classmates	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My classmates are interesting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My classmates are unfair	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. What or which community do you believe that you are a part of?

6. Have you ever been teased because you are a Swede?

Yes

No

7. Have you ever been teased because you are an Assyrian/Syriac?

Yes

No

8. How do you see yourself?

	Completely untrue (1)	Somewhat untrue (2)	Somewhat true (3)	Completely true (4)
I see myself as a Swede	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
I see myself as an Assyrian/Syriac	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>

9. Now, I would like to know a bit about your religious faith. When you think of your faith, what comes to your mind? If you do not believe in anything, you can skip the next question.

Religious faith					
Instructions Below there are some statements regarding you and your religious faith. For each statement, check a box for the alternative that corresponds best with your opinion. When you are answering the questions, think of what you wrote in the previous question regarding your religious faith.					
	com- pletely untrue	un- true	some- times true/ some- times not	true	com- pletely true
	1	2	3	4	5
My religious faith gives me security in life					
My religious faith gives me self-confidence					
My religious faith makes me feel sure of myself					
My religious faith gives me security for the future					
My religious faith allows me to face the future with optimism					
I try to find out a lot about my religious faith					
I often reflect on my religious faith					
I make a lot of effort to keep finding out new things about my religious faith					
I often try to find out what other people think about my religious faith					
I often talk with other people about my religious faith					
I often think it would be better to try to find a different religious faith					
I often think that a different religious faith would make my life more interesting					
In fact, I'm looking for a different religious faith					

Language

What or which language do your parents usually use when they are talking to you?

11. Dad usually speaks in:

.....

12. Mom usually speaks in:

Do you speak any of your parents' language and if so, which ones? If one of these languages is Swedish, you do not need put this language down.

13. I speak:

14. **Mother Tongue**

The language of your parents is usually referred to as your mother tongue. Sometimes you can have several mother tongues. Now, I would like you to tell me how you feel toward your mother tongue that you are best able to speak in. You do that by checking the boxes below. These questions do not concern Swedish.

	Completely untrue (1)	Somewhat untrue (2)	Somewhat true (3)	Completely true (4)
It is important for me to be able to speak in my mother tongue	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is difficult to speak in my mother tongue	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel something special when I speak in my mother tongue	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is not important for me to be able to speak in my mother tongue	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is easy to speak in my mother tongue	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel nothing special when I speak in my mother tongue	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15. **SURYOYO**

Somewhat simplified it is possible to say that Assyrians/Syriacs have a language that is referred to as Suryoyo. Now, I would like you to tell me how you feel toward Suryoyo. You do that by checking the boxes below. If you answered for Suryoyo in the previous question then you can skip to the next question.

	Completely untrue (1)	Somewhat untrue (2)	Somewhat true (3)	Completely true (4)
It is important for me to be able to speak in Suryoyo	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is difficult to speak in Suryoyo	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel something special when I speak in Suryoyo	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is not important for me to be able to speak in Suryoyo	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is easy to speak in Suryoyo	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel nothing special when I speak in Suryoyo	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

16. Swedish

Now, I would like you tell me how you feel toward Swedish. You do that by checking the boxes below. For each statement, check the corresponding box.

	Completely untrue (1)	Somewhat untrue (2)	Somewhat true (3)	Completely true (4)
It is important for me to be able to speak in Swedish	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is difficult to speak in Swedish	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel something special when I speak in Swedish	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is not important for me to be able to speak in Swedish	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is easy to speak in Swedish	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel nothing special when I speak in Swedish	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

16. Are you a

☐ Boy

☐ Girl

17. How old are you?

18. How many years have you attended your current school?

19. Were you born in Sweden?

☐ Yes

☐ No

20. If you were **not** born in Sweden, how long have you lived here?

Lastly...

21. Would you like to participate in an interview that is about your school, your friends and your religion? You can change your mind at a later time.

☐ Yes

☐ No

22. Would you like to be informed of the results of this study?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Before you hand in the questionnaire, take a look through the questions in order to make sure that all questions have been answered. If there was a question that you did not understand, ask the researcher for help.

THANK YOUR FOR COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRE!

Swedish version of the questionnaire: Identitetsutveckling och integration hos assyriska/syrianska skolelever

ID-NUMMER (IFYLLES AV FORSKAREN):

Utbildning					
1. Nedan finns några påståenden som gäller för dig och din skol-gång. För varje fråga, sätt ett kryss för det påstående som bäst stämmer överens med din åsikt. Med utbildningen i skolan menas det du lär dig skolan. Med skolutbildning menas din skola.					
	Stämmer inte alls	Stämmer inte så bra	Stämmer ibland	Stämmer ganska bra	Stämmer helt och hållet
	1	2	3	4	5
Utbildningen i skolan ger mig trygghet					
Min utbildning ger mig självförtroende					
Utbildningen i skolan gör mig självsäker					
Min utbildning ger mig trygghet inför framtiden					
Utbildningen ger mig förut-sättningar att se optimistiskt på framtiden					
Jag försöker ta reda på mycket om min skolutbildning					
Jag reflekterar ofta över utbildningen i skolan					
Jag anstränger mig mycket för att upptäcka nya saker om min skolutbildning					
Jag försöker ofta ta reda på vad andra människor tycker om min skolutbildning					
Jag pratar ofta med andra människor om min skolutbildning					
Jag tänker ofta att det vore bättre att hitta en annan skolutbildning					
Jag tänker ofta på att en annan skolutbildning skulle göra mitt liv mer intressant					
I verkligheten söker jag efter en annan skolutbildning					

LÄRARE

2. Nu vill jag att du ska berätta vad du tycker om alla dina lärare. Det gör du genom att kryssa i rutorna nedan. För varje påstående, kryssa i en ruta. Kom ihåg att ingen obehörig får veta hur du har svarat.

	Stämmer inte alls (1)	Stämmer inte så bra (2)	Stämmer ganska bra (3)	Stämmer helt och hållet (4)
Jag trivs med mina lärare	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mina lärare är tråkiga	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mina lärare är rättvisa	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Jag trivs inte med mina lärare	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mina lärare är intressanta	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mina lärare är orättvisa	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Bästa vänner					
3. Nedan finns några påståenden om dig och din bästa kamrat. Med "bästis" menas inte syskon eller din kille/ tjej. Bästis kan vara en eller flera personer. Sätt ett kryss för det svar som bäst överensstämmer med din åsikt.					
	Stäm- mer inte alls	Stäm- mer inte så bra	Stäm- mer ibland	Stäm- mer ganska bra	Stäm- mer helt och hållet
	1	2	3	4	5
Min bästis ger mig trygghet i livet					
Min bästis ger mig självförtroende					
Min bästis ger mig en känsla av självsäkerhet					
Min bästis ger mig trygghet inför framtiden					
Min bästis ger mig förutsättningar att se optimistiskt på framtiden					
Jag försöker ta reda på mycket om min bästis					
Jag reflekterar ofta kring min bästis					
Jag anstränger mig mycket för att upptäcka nya saker om min bästis					
Jag försöker ofta ta reda på vad andra människor tycker om min bästis					
Jag pratar ofta med andra människor om min skolutbildning					
Jag tänker ofta att det vore bättre att finna en helt annan bästis					
Jag tänker ofta på att en ny bästis skulle göra mitt liv mer intressant					
I verkligheten söker jag efter en ny bästis					

KLASSKAMRATER I MIN KLASS

4. Nu vill jag att du ska berätta vad du tycker om dina klasskamrater i din klass. Det gör du genom att kryssa i rutorna nedan. För varje påstående, kryssa i en ruta. Kom ihåg att ingen obehörig får veta hur du har svarat.

	Stämmer inte alls(1)	Stämmer inte så bra (2)	Stämmer ganska bra (3)	Stämmer helt och hållet (4)
Jag trivs med mina klasskamrater	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mina klasskamrater är tråkiga	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mina klasskamrater är rättvisa	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Jag trivs inte med mina klasskamrater	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mina klasskamrater är intressanta	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mina klasskamrater är orättvisa	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. Vilken eller vilka folkgrupper tycker du att du själv tillhör?

.....

.....

11. Har du någon gång blivit retad för att du är svensk?

Ja

Nej

12. Har du någon gång blivit retad för att du är assyrier/syrian?

Ja

Nej

13. Hur ser du dig själv?

	Stämmer inte alls (1)	Stämmer inte så bra (2)	Stämmer gan- ska bra (3)	Stämmer helt och hållet (4)
Jag ser mig som svensk	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
Jag ser mig som assyrier/syrian	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>

14. Nu vill jag veta lite om din tro. När du tänker på din tro, vad tänker du på då? Om du inte tror på något svarar du inte på nästa fråga.

Tro					
10. Nedan finns ett antal frågor kring dig och din tro. För varje fråga, sätt ett kryss för det påstående som bäst stämmer överens med din åsikt. När du besvarar följande frågor, tänk på det du skrev i tidigare fråga om din tro.					
	Stämmer inte alls	Stämmer inte så bra	Stämmer ibland	Stämmer ganska bra	Stämmer helt och hållet
	1	2	3	4	5
Min tro ger mig trygghet i livet					
Min tro ger mig självförtroende					
Min tro ger mig en känsla av självsäkerhet					
Min tro ger mig trygghet inför framtiden					
Min tro ger mig förutsättningar att se optimistiskt på framtiden					
Jag försöker ta reda på mycket om min tro					
Jag reflekterar ofta över min tro					
Jag anstränger mig mycket för att upptäcka nya saker om min tro					
Jag försöker ofta ta reda på vad andra människor tycker om min tro					
Jag pratar ofta med andra människor om min tro					
Jag tänker ofta att det vore bättre att hitta en helt annan tro					
Jag tänker ofta på att en annan tro skulle göra mitt liv mer intressant					
I verkligheten söker jag efter en annan tro					

Vilket eller vilka språk brukar dina föräldrar tala med dig?

17. Pappa brukar tala:

.....

18. Mamma brukar tala:

Talar du något av dina föräldrars språk och i så fall vilket eller vilka? Detta gäller **inte** det svenska språket.

19. Jag talar:

20. MODERSMÅL

Dina föräldrars språk brukar man kalla för modersmål. Ibland kan man ha flera modersmål. Nu vill jag att du ska berätta hur du känner för ditt modersmål som du kan prata bäst. Det gör du genom att kryssa i rutorna nedan. Detta gäller **inte** svenska.

	Stämmer inte alls (1)	Stämmer så bra (2)	Stämmer ganska bra (3)	Stämmer helt och hållet (4)
Det är vikigt för mig att kunna prata på mitt modersmål	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Det är svårt att prata på mitt modersmål	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Jag känner något speciellt när jag pratar på mitt modersmål	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Det är inte vikigt för mig att kunna prata på mitt modersmål	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Det är lätt att prata på mitt modersmål	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Jag känner inget särskilt särskilt när jag pratar på mitt modersmål	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

21. **SURYOYO**

Något förenklat kan man säga att assyrier/syrianer har ett språk som heter *suryoyo*. Nu vill jag att du ska berätta hur du känner för suryoyo. Det gör du genom att kryssa i rutorna nedan. Om du svarade för suryoyo i tidigare fråga kan du hoppa över denna fråga.

	Stämmer inte alls (1)	Stämmer så bra (2)	Stämmer ganska bra (3)	Stämmer helt och hållet (4)
Det är viktigt för mig att kunna prata suryoyo	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Det är svårt att prata suryoyo	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Jag känner något speciellt när jag pratar suryoyo	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Det är inte viktigt för mig att prata suryoyo	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Det är lätt att prata suryoyo	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Jag känner inget särskilt särskilt när jag pratar suryoyo	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

22. SVENSKA SPRÅKET

Nu vill jag att du ska berätta hur du känner för det svenska språket. Det gör du genom att kryssa i rutorna nedan. För varje påstående, kryssa i en ruta.

	Stämmer inte alls (1)	Stämmer inte så bra (2)	Stämmer ganska bra (3)	Stämmer helt och hållet (4)
Det är viktigt för mig att kunna prata på svenska	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Det är svårt att prata på svenska	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Jag känner något speciellt när jag pratar på svenska	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Det är inte viktigt för mig att kunna prata på svenska	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Det är lätt att prata på svenska	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Jag känner inget särskilt särskilt när jag pratar på svenska	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

16. Är du...

☐ Kille
☐ Tjej

23. Hur gammal är du?

24. Hur många år har du gått på din nuvarande skola?

25. Är du född i Sverige?

☐

Ja

☐

Nej

26. Om du inte är född i Sverige, hur länge har du bott i Sverige?

Till sist...



27. Skulle du vilja vara med i en till intervju som handlar om din skola, dina vänner och din religion? Du kan ändra dig senare.

☐

Ja

☐

Nej

28. Vill du ta del av vad denna undersökning har kommit fram till när detta presenteras?

☐

Ja

☐

Nej

Innan du lämnar in enkäten, ta en titt så att alla frågor är besvarade. Om det var någon fråga du inte förstod, fråga forskaren som är närvarande för hjälp.

TACK FÖR ATT DU SVARADE PÅ ENKÄTEN!

Appendix B: English version: Qualitative Group Interview Questions

GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – QUALITATIVE PART – 2016-12-05

Thematic question for the pupils: How do pupils experience their school, their friends and their religion? What characterizes these descriptions?

Introductory instructions:

- Inform about the procedure and rights of participation.
- Introduce the recording equipment.
- Check the identification number of the pupil before commencing the interview.
- Ask the pupil to state their identification number when they want to speak.

Dynamic questions for the pupils:

1) Self-image

- a) Tell me why you are/are not an Assyrian/Syriac. Has it always been so?
- b) Tell me why you are/are not a Swede. Has it always been so?
- c) Have you ever been teased for being an Assyrian/Syriac? In what way?
- d) Have you ever been teased for being a Swede? In what way?

2) Language

- a) What language do you usually speak when you are at school? With your friends, classmates and teachers? How come you use this/these particular languages?
- b) What language do you usually speak when you are at home? With your parents, siblings and friends? How come you use this/these particular languages?
- c) What language(s) do you usually speak when you are at church?

3) Education (commitments, exploration and reconsideration)

- a) How would you describe your classmates? Have they always been like that?
- b) Are you comfortable with your classmates?
- c) Are your classmates boring/interesting?
- d) Are your classmates fair/unfair?
- e) How would you describe your teachers? Have they always been like that?
- f) Are you comfortable with your teachers?
- g) Are your teachers boring/interesting?
- h) Are your teachers fair/unfair?
- i) Do discover new things about your classmates? Your teachers?
- j) Have you ever considered of changing schools? Why/Why not? Have you always thought of it in that way?

4) Religion (commitments, exploration and reconsideration)

- a) When you think of your faith, what do you think of? Have you always thought about it in that way?
- b) At what time do you think of your faith? Tell me what you think of at those moments.
- c) Do you discover new things about your faith? Like what?
- d) Have you ever thought about believing in something else? How come? In what way? Have you always thought of it in that way?

Swedish version: Qualitative group interviews

Dynamiska frågor för elever i gruppintervjuer:

1) Självbild

- a) Berätta varför/varför inte du är assyrier/syrian, Har det alltid varit så?
- b) Berätta varför/varför inte du är svensk? Har det alltid varit så?
- c) Har du någon gång blivit retade för att du är assyrier/syrian? På vilket sätt?
- d) Har du någon blivit retad för att du är svensk? På vilket sätt?

2) Språk

- a) Vilket språk brukar du tala i skolan? Med dina vänner, klasskamrater och lärare? Varför just dessa språk?
- b) Vilket språk brukar du tala hemma? Med dina föräldrar? Syskon? Vänner? Varför just dessa språk?
- c) Vilket språk brukar du tala i kyrkan?

3) Utbildning (åtaganden, utforskning och omprövning)

- a) Hur är dina klasskamrater? Har det alltid varit så?
- b) Trivs du med dina klasskamrater?
- c) Är dina klasskamrater tråkiga/intressanta?
- d) Är dina klasskamrater rättvisa/orättvisa?
- e) Hur är dina lärare? Har det alltid varit så?
- f) Trivs du med dina lärare/intressanta?
- g) Är dina lärare tråkiga/intressanta?
- h) Är dina lärare rättvisa/orättvisa?
- i) Upptäcker du nya saker om dina klasskamrater? Lärare?
- j) Har du någonsin tänkt på att byta skola? Varför/Varför inte? Har det alltid varit så?

4) Religion (åtaganden, utforskning och omprövning)

- a) När du tänker på din tro, vad tänker du på då? Har det alltid varit så?
- b) När tänker du på din tro? Berätta vad du tänker då.
- c) Upptäcker du nya saker om din tro? Som vadå?
- d) Har du någonsin tänkt på att tro på något annat? Varför då? På vilket sätt? Har det alltid varit så?

Appendix C: English version: Qualitative Individual Interview Questions

Individual Interview Questions – Qualitative Section 2017-05-30

Thematic question for the pupil: UPDATED RESEARCH QUESTION: How do individual students at the private and the public school approach their commitments, explorations and reconsiderations of education, best friends and religious faith in relation to their enculturation and acculturation?

Initial instructions:

- Inform about procedure and rights of participation.
- Introduce recording equipment.
- Check the identification number of the pupil before commencing the interview.
- Have the current profile at hand during the interview.

Dynamic questions for the student interviews:

1. **Super-Ordinate Decisions (Rudmin, 2010)**
 - a) Tell me what languages that you are able to speak in.
 - b) Tell me what languages that you are able to understand.
 - c) Tell me if you have decided to only speak in one language when you are school. What language is that? At home? At church? On other occasions for example during sports practice.
 - d) Why have you decided to do this? (Or why have you not made such a decision?)
 - e) What languages are you encouraged by your parents (teachers and friends) to speak when you are at school? At home? At church?
 - f) Tell me what language you use when you are praying by yourself or with other people. Why this particular language.
2. **Metacognitive stress (Rudmin, 2010)**
 - a) Tell me if you mix languages when you speak. What languages do you mix.
 - b) Tell me with who, where and when you usually change or mix languages with.
 - c) Tell me how it feels when you can not find the words that you want to say in a certain language.
 - d) Tell me how you think (or resonate) when you are going to speak in Suryoyo or in another language, with a similar meaning ascribed to it, when you are going to talk with a relative.
 - e) Tell me how it feels to learn Suryoyo or a language with a similar meaning ascribed to it.
 - f) Tell me how it feels to talk with people whose language you are not able to speak in? For example with grand-parents that only know Suryoyo or another language with a similar ascribed meaning.
3. **Cultural play (Rudmin, 2010)**
 - a) Tell me about a joke or a proverb that is in Suryoyo or in another language with a similar ascribed meaning.
 - b) Tell me about a joke or a proverb in Swedish.

4. **Unconscious acculturative imitation (Rudmin, 2010)**
 - a) Do you speak differently with your teachers in comparison to when you speak with your friends? What about with your teachers who are Assyrians/Syriacs and teachers who are Swedes? Your parents? Your relatives? With me?
5. **Freedom from norms (Rudmin, 2010)**
 - a) Several pupils have told me that Swedish teachers are more harsh than Assyrian/Syriac teachers. Assyrian/Syriac teachers tell jokes and jest more with pupils who are Assyrians/Syriacs. Tell me if you believe that such is the case, or not, and why.
 - b) Do you believe that you can act differently in school in comparison to when you are at home or when you are at church? Why do you believe that is the case?
6. **Cultural mentors (Rudmin, 2010)**
 - a) Tell me of a person here at that you know cares about you. It does not need to be a friend or a classmate. (Teacher? Friends? Guidance officer?)
 - b) Tell me of a role model that you have. Why is this particular person a role model to you?
 - c) When and where do you hang out with Assyrians/Syriacs?
 - d) When and where do you hang out with Swedes?

Swedish version: Qualitative individual interviews

INTERVJUFRÅGOR - KVALITATIVA DELEN – 2017-05-30⁴⁴

Tematisk fråga för elever: UPDATED RESEARCH QUESTION: How do individual students at the private and the public school approach their commitments, explorations and reconsiderations of education, best friends and religious faith in relation to their enculturation and acculturation?

Inledande instruktioner:

- Informera om procedur och rättigheter.
- Introducera diktafon.
- Stäm av identifikationsnummer hos elever innan intervju sätter igång.
- Ha respektive profil till hands vid intervju med elev

Dynamiska frågor för elev i enskilda intervjuer:

5) Super-Ordinate Decisions (Rudmin, 2010)

- a) Berätta om vilka språk du kan prata.
- b) Berätta om vilka språk du kan förstå.
- c) Berätta om du har bestämt dig för att bara prata ett språk i skolan. Vilket språk då? Hemma? I kyrkan? Andra sammanhang t.ex. på fotbollsträningen?
- d) Varför/varför inte har du bestämt dig detta?
- e) Vilka språk uppmuntras du av dina föräldrar (lärare och vänner) att prata i skolan? Hemma? I kyrkan?
- f) Berätta vilket språk du använder när du ber ensam eller med andra människor. Varför just detta språk?

6) Metakognitive stress (Rudmin, 2010)

- a) Berätta om du blandar språk när du talar. Vilka språk blandar du?
- b) Berätta vem, var och när du oftast byter eller blandar språk med.
- c) Berätta hur känns det när du inte kommer på orden du vill säga på ett språk.
- d) Berätta hur du tänker när du ska tala suryoyo eller ett språk med en liknande betydelse med en släkting?
- e) Berätta hur det känns för dig att lära dig syrianska eller ett annat språk med en liknande betydelse?
- f) Berätta hur det känns att prata med personer som du inte kan tala språket med? T.ex. mor- och farföräldrar som enbart kan suryoyo eller ett annat språk med liknande betydelse.

7) Cultural play (Rudmin, 2010)

- a) Berätta om ett skämt eller ett ordspråk som är på suryoyo eller ett språk med liknande betydelse.
- b) Berätta om ett skämt eller ett ordspråk som är på svenska.

8) Unconscious acculturative imitation (Rudmin, 2010)

⁴⁴ Frågornas innehåll kan förändras beroende på resultaten i den kvantitativa delen.

- a) Pratar du annorlunda med dina lärare än med dina vänner? Lärare som är assyrier/syrianer och lärare som är svenskar? Dina föräldrar? Dina släktingar? Med mig?

9) Freedom from norms (Rudmin, 2010)

- a) Flera elever har berättat att svenska lärare är strängare än assyriska/syrianska lärare. Assyriska/syrianska lärare skämtar och skojar mer med elever som är assyrier/syrianer. Berätta om du tycker eller inte tycker att det är så och varför
- b) Kan du bete dig annorlunda i skolan till skillnad från när du är hemma eller i kyrkan? Varför tror du det är så?

10) Cultural mentors (Rudmin, 2010)

- a) Berätta om en person som du vet bryr sig om dig här i skolan. Det behöver inte vara en jämnårig vän eller klasskamrat. (Lärare? Vänner? SYO-konsulent?)
- b) Berätta om en förebild som du har. Varför är just denna person en förebild för dig?
- c) När och vart umgås du med assyrier/syrianer?
- d) När och vart umgås du med svenskar?

Appendix D: Coefficients of determination

Table 6 Table for coefficients of determination on statistical significant correlations between variables

Measures	Correlation (only significant included)	Coefficient of determination (percentage of variance in variables explained by correlation)
Age		
Age and self-image Swedish	,356	0,1267 (12,7%)
Age and edu commitments	,261	0,068 (6,8%)
Self-image Swedish		
Self-image Swedish and Self-image Assyrian/Syriac	-,310	0,09(9%)
Self-image Swedish and Attitudes Suryoyo	-,272	0,074(7,4%)
Self-image Swedish and rfaith commitments	-,340	0,1156(11,5%)
Self-image Swedish and rfaith reconsideration	,279	0,077(7,7%)
Self-image Assyrian/Syriac		
Self-image Assyrian/Syriac and Attitudes Suryoyoy	,588	0,3457(34,57%)
Self-image Assyrian/Syriac and rfaith commitments	0,291	0,084(8,4%)
Attitudes Suryoyo		
Attitudes Suryoyo and rfaith commitments	0,413	0,170 (17%)
Attitudes Suryoyo and bf commitments	,334	0,111(11,1%)
Attitudes Suryoyo and bf exploration	,251	0,063(6,3%)
Rfaith commitments		
Rfaith commitments and rfaith exploration	,439	0,192(19,2%)
Rfaith commitments and rfaith reconsideration	-,354	0,125(12,5%)
Rfaith exploration		
Rfaith exploration and edu commitments	0,253	0,064(6,4%)
Rfaith exploration and edu exploration	0,502	0,252(25,2%)
Rfaith exploration and bf exploration	,275	0,075(7,5%)
Edu commitments		
Edu commitments and edu exploration	,453	0,205(20,5%)
Edu commitments and edu reconsideration	-,307	0,09(9%)
Edu commitments and bf commitments	,404	0,163(16,3%)

Edu commitments and bf exploration	,355	0,126(12,6%)
Edu commitments and attitudes teachers	,270	0,072(7,2%)
Edu commitments and attitudes classmates	,254	0,06(6%)
Edu exploration		
Edu exploration and bf exploration	0,415	0,172(17,2%)
Edu exploration and attitudes teachers	0,366	0,133(13,3%)
Edu exploration and attitudes classmates	0,231	0,053(5,3%)
Edu reconsideration		
Edu reconsideration and bf reconsideration	0,298	0,088(8,8%)
Edu reconsideration and attitudes toward teachers	-,308	0,094(9,4%)
Edu reconsideration and attitudes toward classmates	-,245	0,06(6%)
Bf commitments		
Bf commitments and bf exploration	0,507	0,257(25,7%)
Bf commitments and bf reconsideration	-,390	0,152(15,2%)
Bf commitments and attitudes toward teachers	,267	0,071(7,1%)
Bf commitments and attitudes toward classmates	,239	0,057(5,7%)
Bf exploration		
Bf exploration and attitudes teachers	,312	0,097(9,7%)
Attitudes teachers		
Attitudes teachers and attitudes classmates	,47	0,22(22%)

Appendix E: Effect sizes for Mann-Whitney Tests and Kruskal-Wallis Tests

Table 7 Table of effect sizes for Mann-Whitney Tests on differences between boys and girls in the edu and bf domains of U-MICS

	Edu commitments		Edu exploration		Edu reconsideration		Bf commitments		Bf exploration		Bf reconsideration	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Median	4,40	4,2	3,8	4,0	2,0	2,3	4,2	3,8	3,4	3,6	1,0	1,3
Effect size (r) ⁴⁵	0,21		0,04		0,05		0,18		0,07		0,06	

Table 8 Table of effect sizes for Kruskal-Wallis Tests on differences between age groups in the edu and bf domains of U-MICS

	Edu commitments			Edu exploration			Edu reconsideration			Bf commitments			Bf exploration			Bf reconsideration		
	<=10 years	11-12 years	13+ years	<=10 years	11-12 years	13+ years	<=10 years	11-12 years	13+ years	<=10 years	11-12 years	13+ years	<=10 years	11-12 years	13+ years	<=10 years	11-12 years	13+ years
Groups																		
Median	4,0	4,4	4,2	3,8	4,0	4,0	2,3	1,6	2,0	4,0	4,0	4,2	3,6	3,3	3,6	1,0	1,0	1,3

⁴⁵ $r = \frac{z}{\sqrt{N}}$ According to Cohen (1988), an r-value of .1=small effect; .3=medium effect, and .5=large effect.

Effect size (η^2_H) ⁴⁶	0,04 (4%)	0,04(4%)	0,03 (3%)	0,03 (3%)	0,05 (5%)	0,05 (5%)
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Table 9 Table of effect sizes for Mann-Whitney Tests on differences between boys and girls in the rfaith domain of U-MICS

	Rfaith commitments		Rfaith exploration		Rfaith reconsideration	
Groups	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Median	5,0	5,0	3,6	3,8	1,0	1,0
Effect size (r)	0,02		0,15		0,03	

Table 10 Table of effect sizes for Mann-Whitney Tests on differences between schools in the rfaith domain of U-MICS

	Rfaith commitments		Rfaith exploration		Rfaith reconsideration	
Groups	School 1	School 2	School 1	School 2	School 1	School 2
Median	5,0	5,0	3,6	3,6	1,0	1,0
Effect size (r)	0,10		0,13		0,03	

⁴⁶ $\eta^2_H = \frac{H-k+1}{\eta^2-k}$ (Tomczak & Tomczak, 2014, p. 24). The eta-squared estimate assumes a value from 0 to 1. When multiplied by 100, it indicates the percentage (in brackets) of variance in the dependent variable that is explained by the independent variable.

Table 11 Table of effect sizes for Kruskal-Wallis Tests on differences between age groups in the rfaith domain of U-MICS

	Rfaith commitments			Rfaith exploration			Rfaith reconsideration		
Groups	<=10 years	11-12 years	13+ years	<=10 years	11-12 years	13+ years	<=10 years	11-12 years	13+ years
Median	5,0	4,9	5,0	3,6	3,6	3,8	1,0	1,0	1,0
Effect size (η^2_H)	0,02 (2%)			0,02 (2%)			0,03 (3%)		

Table 12 Table for effect sizes for Mann-Whitney Tests on differences between pupils who were born in Sweden and pupils who were not on their scores in the edu and bf domains of U-MICS

	Edu commitments		Edu exploration		Edu reconsideration		Bf commitments		Bf exploration		Bf reconsideration	
Groups	Born in Sweden	Not born in Sweden	Born in Sweden	Not born in Sweden	Born in Sweden	Not born in Sweden	Born in Sweden	Not born in Sweden	Born in Sweden	Not born in Sweden	Born in Sweden	Not born in Sweden
Median	4,2	4,6	3,8	4,2	2,0	1,67	4,0	3,7	3,4	3,7	1,0	1,0
Effect size (r) ⁴⁷	0,28		0,22		0,13		0,09		0,22		0,06	

⁴⁷ $r = \frac{z}{\sqrt{N}}$

Table 13 Table for effect sizes for Mann-Whitney Tests on differences between pupils who were born in Sweden and pupils who were not on their scores on the rfaith domain of U-MICS

Groups	Rfaith commitments		Rfaith exploration		Rfaith reconsideration	
	Born in Sweden	Not born in Sweden	Born in Sweden	Not born in Sweden	Born in Sweden	Not born in Sweden
Median	5,0	4,8	3,6	4,1	1,0	1,0
Effect size (r)	0,11		0,20		0,24	

Appendix F: List of codes, number of references and sources

Table 14 List of codes presented in quotes, number of references and sources

Code	Number of sources ⁴⁸	Number of references ⁴⁹
A Swedish Church	1	3
Absence – Reconsideration religious belief	11	15
Attitudes toward school	4	10
Attitudes toward teachers	11	22
Behavior at church	11	19
Behavior at school	8	20
Between-group tease	8	18
Bible School – Sunday School	5	8
Church linkage	4	7
Comparing religion and science	1	1
Connection to Turkey and the Middle-East	7	9
Connotation	6	19
Consequences of converting	1	1
Consequences of doubt religious belief	6	9
Criteria ethnic identity	8	32
Criteria Swedish identity	5	9
Curiosity in belief	5	7
Dichotomy	5	15
Different interests and abilities	3	3
Disappointment	1	1
Doubt religious belief	4	13
Duality	10	28
Encouraging language use	15	39
Ethnic belonging of classmates	5	5
Ethnic belonging of teachers	11	16
Expectations	1	2
Exploring religion at church	6	10
Family origin	10	31
Family practices at home	2	5
Following the parents	3	3

⁴⁸ *Sources* is a term used in Nvivo that refers to the number of interviews that a code was applied in.

⁴⁹ *References* is a term used in Nvivo that refers to the number of times in total that a code was applied.

Frequency of attending Church	12	24
Friends as a microsystem	6	7
Influence of parents	1	3
Lack of curiosity	2	2
Lack of reflection	3	3
Language at church	18	46
Laws	2	2
Monocultural friends	3	4
Movies and radio	2	2
Multicultural classmates	1	3
Multicultural friends	2	2
Necessity for visiting church	1	1
No choice	4	6
Nothing new	1	1
Not attending Church	2	3
Not wanting to think of religious belief	1	1
Passing on religion	2	3
Physical appearance as the Child	2	2
Protection	2	2
Rationale for believing in something else	5	7
Rationale for change or not to change (school)	9	16
Reasons for exploring best friend	5	5
Reading the Bible	7	8
Reflection on best friend	3	8
Reflection on learning	1	4
Religious belonging	5	9
Religious education (at school)	1	2
Religious practice	17	58
Religious symbols	5	9
Responsibility	1	3
Self-perceived distance	2	3
Seyfo	2	2
Sweden as a macrosystem	3	6
Södertälje as an Exosystem	3	5
When and where Assyrians/Syriacs	7	8
When and where religious belief	10	26
When and where Swedes	9	9
Within-group tease	5	10

Appendix G: Composition of sex and class enrollment of pupils in group interviews

Table 15 Composition of sex and class enrollment of pupils in group interviews

	Interview nr.	Number of boys	Number of girls	Age
Wasaskolan				
	I	2	1	10, 10, 10
	II	4	0	11, 10, 11, 11
	III	1	2	10, 10, 10
	IV	1	1	11, 12
	V	1	2	11, 10, 11
	VI	3	0	13, 14, 14
	VII	3	1	11, 12, 12, 12
	VIII	3	0	15, 15, 15
	IX	2	1	10, NA ⁵⁰ , NA
Total		20	8	
Elafskolan				
	I	2	0	12, 12
	II	2	1	13, 13, 14
	III	0	4	14, 14, 15, 15
Total		4	5	

⁵⁰ NA=Not available. Presumably because the informant had resigned his or her participation in the study.

Appendix H: Composition of sex and class enrollment of pupils in individual interviews

Table 16 Composition of sex and class enrollment of pupils in individual interviews

	Interview nr.	Sex	Age
Wasaskolan			
	I	Girl	12
	II	Boy	15
	III	Girl	10
	IV	Boy	12
	V	Boy	11
Elafskolan			
	I	Boy	12
	II	Boy	12
	III	Girl	14
	IV	Girl	14

Appendix I: Larger correlation table

Table 17 Correlations between age, identity processes in the U-MICS, self-images, attitudes toward Suryoyo as well as teachers and classmates

Spearman's rho	Age	Self-image Swedish	Self-image Assyrian/Syriac	Attitudes Suryoyo	Rfaith		Rfaith		Edu		Bf		Attitudes Teachers	Attitudes Classmates
					commitment	exploration	reconsideration	exploration	commitment	reconsideration	commitment	exploration		
Self-image Swedish	M=11.6 SD=1.7	366 0.002	0.042 0.725	0.013 0.917	-0.125 0.287	0.037 0.755	0.144 0.222	0.261 0.025	-0.010 0.933	0.167 0.155	-0.028 0.813	0.017 0.884	0.622 0.939	-0.060 0.099
	Self-image Swedish	74		64	74	74	74	74	74	74	74	74	69	73
	Self-image Assyrian/Syriac		74											69
Attitudes Suryoyo	M=1.7 SD=0.8		-0.310** 0.007	-0.272* 0.030	-0.340** 0.003	-0.051 0.668	-0.051 0.016	-0.011 0.925	-0.045 0.704	-0.008 0.949	-0.090 0.447	-0.010 0.930	0.150 0.822	-0.027 0.219
	Self-image Swedish		74		74	74	74	74	74	74	74	74	69	73
	Self-image Assyrian/Syriac			64										69
Rfaith commitments	M=3.6 SD=0.8		.588** 0.000	.291** 0.000	.291** 0.000	-0.115 0.330	-0.148 0.208	-0.083 0.482	0.011 0.923	0.183 0.119	-0.054 0.648	-0.085 0.472	-0.137 0.789	-0.032 0.282
	Self-image Swedish		74		74	74	74	74	74	74	74	74	69	73
	Self-image Assyrian/Syriac			64										69
Rfaith exploration	M=2.98 SD=0.72			0.413** 0.001	0.131** 0.001	0.154 0.226	-0.209 0.097	0.165 0.193	0.046 0.721	0.334** 0.007	0.251** 0.045	-0.139 0.274	-0.100 0.400	-0.083 0.487
	Self-image Swedish			64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	61	63
	Self-image Assyrian/Syriac													61
Edu commitments	M=4.7 SD=0.5			0.000	0.012	0.030	0.208	0.482	-0.110	0.923	0.119	0.183	-0.054	-0.085
	Self-image Swedish			64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	69	73
	Self-image Assyrian/Syriac													69
Edu exploration	M=3.7 SD=0.8			0.000	0.012	0.030	0.208	0.482	-0.110	0.923	0.119	0.183	-0.054	-0.085
	Self-image Swedish			64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	69	73
	Self-image Assyrian/Syriac													69
Bf commitments	M=1.1 SD=0.3			0.000	0.012	0.030	0.208	0.482	-0.110	0.923	0.119	0.183	-0.054	-0.085
	Self-image Swedish			64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	69	73
	Self-image Assyrian/Syriac													69
Bf exploration	M=4.27 SD=0.485			0.000	0.012	0.030	0.208	0.482	-0.110	0.923	0.119	0.183	-0.054	-0.085
	Self-image Swedish			64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	69	73
	Self-image Assyrian/Syriac													69
Bf reconsideration	M=3.82 SD=0.63			0.000	0.012	0.030	0.208	0.482	-0.110	0.923	0.119	0.183	-0.054	-0.085
	Self-image Swedish			64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	69	73
	Self-image Assyrian/Syriac													69
Attitudes Teachers	M=2.17 SD=1.0			0.000	0.012	0.030	0.208	0.482	-0.110	0.923	0.119	0.183	-0.054	-0.085
	Self-image Swedish			64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	69	73
	Self-image Assyrian/Syriac													69
Attitudes Classmates	M=3.97 SD=0.7			0.000	0.012	0.030	0.208	0.482	-0.110	0.923	0.119	0.183	-0.054	-0.085
	Self-image Swedish			64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	69	73
	Self-image Assyrian/Syriac													69
Attitudes Teachers	M=3.4 SD=0.83			0.000	0.012	0.030	0.208	0.482	-0.110	0.923	0.119	0.183	-0.054	-0.085
	Self-image Swedish			64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	69	73
	Self-image Assyrian/Syriac													69
Attitudes Classmates	M=1.64 SD=1.1			0.000	0.012	0.030	0.208	0.482	-0.110	0.923	0.119	0.183	-0.054	-0.085
	Self-image Swedish			64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	69	73
	Self-image Assyrian/Syriac													69
Attitudes Teachers	M=3.27 SD=0.67			0.000	0.012	0.030	0.208	0.482	-0.110	0.923	0.119	0.183	-0.054	-0.085
	Self-image Swedish			64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	69	73
	Self-image Assyrian/Syriac													69
Attitudes Classmates	M=3.11 SD=0.63			0.000	0.012	0.030	0.208	0.482	-0.110	0.923	0.119	0.183	-0.054	-0.085
	Self-image Swedish			64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	69	73
	Self-image Assyrian/Syriac													69

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Notes. *N*'s range from 64 to 74 due to occasional missing data and not all pupils having a relation to Suryoyo thus skipping the items regarding attitudes toward Suryoyo.
Rfaith. = Religious faith domain in U-MICS. Edu = Education domain in U-MICS. Bf = Best friends domain in U-MICS.
M=mean score; SD=standard deviation

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