

# Understandings of racism in the Equality Plans of the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences

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## **Abstract**

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**Abstract:**

The purpose of this study is to investigate how race and racism are understood in the policy documents called Equality Plans of the Finnish language-based Universities of Applied Sciences. The research questions are 1) what is said about racism and other related concepts in the Equality Plans, and 2) where and in relation to what are they acknowledged? Moreover, the study examines how whiteness and other values of Finnish society are reflected in the Equality Plans and what types of solutions higher educational institutions offer to racism. The analytical reading of the Equality Plans is informed by the theoretical framework that includes perspectives of critical whiteness, intersectional postcolonial feminism, Nordic exceptionalism to racism and colonialism, and feminist and education policy studies that discuss interpretations and practices of equality in educational institutions.

The research material includes Equality Plans in eighteen Finnish language-based Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland. The analysis utilises the tools of the abductive content analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis in identifying the explicit and implicit meanings connected to race and racism.

The results of the study indicate that the understanding of race in Finnish policy documents is vague, and the synonyms such as "ethnicity" are connected to ethnic and racialised minorities. The solutions for racism are abstract and appeal to the attitudes of the university community instead of challenging the structures that maintain and produce racism. According to this study, whiteness remains unrecognised and unquestioned in higher education institutions. Thus, resisting racism and promoting equality and justice requires a systematic and profound analysis of institutional whiteness in higher education structures and practices. The results align with the previous research on policy documents in Finnish education institutions, contributing to the discussion with Universities of Applied Sciences.

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**Tiivistelmä:**

Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on selvittää, miten rotu ja rasismi ymmärretään suomenkielisten ammattikorkeakoulujen tasa-arvo- ja yhdenvertaisuussuunnitelmissa. Tutkimuskysymykset ovat, 1) mitä rasismista ja siihen liittyvistä termeistä sanotaan tasa-arvo- ja yhdenvertaisuussuunnitelmissa ja 2) missä yhteydessä niistä keskustellaan? Tutkimus tarkastelee myös sitä, millaisia ratkaisuja korkeakoulut esittävät rasismien vastustamiseen sekä miten valkoisuus ja muut suomalaisen yhteiskunnan arvot näkyvät tasa-arvo- ja yhdenvertaisuussuunnitelmissa. Tasa-arvo- ja yhdenvertaisuussuunnitelmien tulkintaa ohjaavat näkökulmat kriittisestä valkoisuuden tutkimuksesta, intersektionaalisesta jälkikolonialisesta feminismistä, sekä ns. Nordic exceptionalism -diskurssista, jossa Pohjoismaat nähdään kolonialismista ja rasismista erillisinä yhdenvertaisuuteen perustuvina yhteiskuntina. Koulutuspolitiikan tasa-arvoa koskeva tutkimus kontekstualisoi tutkimusta.

Tutkimusmateriaali koostuu kahdeksantoista suomenkielisen ammattikorkeakoulun tasa-arvo- ja yhdenvertaisuussuunnitelmasta. Aineiston analyysissä sovelsin abduktiivisen sisällönanalyysin ja kriittisen diskurssianalyysin työkaluja. Näiden avulla tarkastelin, millaisia eksplisiittisiä ja implisiittisiä ymmärryksiä rotuun ja rasismiin on liitetty tasa-arvo- ja yhdenvertaisuussuunnitelmissa.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että rodun ymmärrys suomalaisissa tasa-arvoa käsittelevissä asiakirjoissa on epäjohdonmukaista, ja etnisiin ja rodullistettuihin vähemmistöihin viitataan yleensä synonyymeillä, kuten etnisuus. Rasismien vastustamiseen kohdennettavat toimenpiteet jäävät epäselviksi, eikä epätasa-arvoa ylläpitäviä ja tuottavia rakenteita ja käytäntöjä kyseenalaisteta. Valkoisuutta ei tunnusteta tai kyseenalaisteta korkeakouluissa. Rasismien vastustaminen ja tasa-arvon edistäminen vaativat korkeakoulujen rakenteiden ja toimenpiteiden valkoisuuden systemaattista ja perusteellista tutkimusta. Tutkimustulokset ovat linjassa aiempien rasismia ja suomalaisia asiakirjoja käsittelevien tutkimusten kanssa, tuoden keskusteluun mukaan myös ammattikorkeakoulujen tasa-arvo- ja yhdenvertaisuussuunnitelmat.

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## **1. Introduction**

The worldwide reputation of Finland as an egalitarian and homogeneous welfare state has led to the impression that equality has already been achieved. Meanwhile, during the past years, the experiences of unequal treatment of the ethnic and racialised minorities have become more visible in the public discussion. Several studies have questioned the whiteness of Finnish higher education institutions and pointed out the lack of proper vocabulary regarding race-related issues (Duong-Pedica 2018; Hubara 2020; Jäske 2020; Rastas & Poelman 2021; Riitaoja et al. forthcoming). The Report of the Non-Discriminatory Ombudsman has revealed the various forms of racism experienced by people of African descent in Finland (2018). Recently founded student association for ethnic and visible minority students at the University of Helsinki, Students of Colour, seeks to make these racist issues of higher education institutions visible, but also to offer peer support among ethnic minority students. This study adds to the previous research on racism in higher education institutions by examining how the Finnish language-based Universities of Applied Sciences understand race and racism in their policy documents called the Equality Plans and the solutions they offered to oppose racism. The theoretical framework consists of perspectives of critical whiteness, intersectional postcolonial feminism and Nordic exceptionalism to racism and colonialism.

To contextualise my study, I use research on equality policies and interpretations of equality in Finland. Here especially, research on equality policies, practices and measures in educational contents are relevant. It has been suggested that more attention should be paid to how the documents promoting race equality are promoted (Ahmed 2007). In Finland, several laws (e.g., The Constitution of Finland 1999) include the principle of equity of people in society and public institutions. Finland has also ratified several international agreements (UN etc.) concerning the rights and just treatment of people. Regarding educational institutions, two laws (Act on Equality between Women and Men 2014 and Non-Discrimination Act 2014) directly oblige educational institutions to formulate policies and action plans on equality. These policies are called Equality Plans. According to these laws, education institutions should secure equal opportunities for all students in succeeding in their studies. The Equality Plan should include a report on the current state of equality within the educational institution, the necessary measures to promote equality, and an assessment on the fulfilment of the taken measures in the previous plan. (Finnish National Agency for Education 2021)

The Ministry of Education and Culture published a Report on the promotion of gender equality and non-discrimination in higher education institutions in 2020. The results indicate that many Equality Plans were not in force and were lacking some of the sections required by the Act on Equality between Women and Men (2020) The report also noted that the plans were not discussing the challenges within

equality, and only a few of the plans mentioned ethnic origin or racism. Although the plans include at least some actions in promoting equality, they lack concrete ideas on implementing them. Furthermore, the report found out that the plans do not discuss the challenges on equality or specify which groups are in danger of being discriminated. 2020) Raudasoja and Kerkola (2021) have landed on the same results in their research on implementing Equality Plans in vocational training. The study suggested that the educational providers should focus more on providing knowledge regarding the Equality Plans to the whole staff and implement them more in everyday practices.

Because educational institutions are ideal places for producing societal transformation and change (Dei and Calliste 2000), the formulation of equality policies and documents and the solutions provided for harassment and discrimination should include concrete actions. Additionally, acknowledging multiple discrimination and intersectionality is necessary to prevent various cases of discrimination. (Ministry of Justice 2019). The research by Lappalainen and Lahelma (2016) has shown that the curriculum documents in education lack the understanding of intersectionality, and “each dimensions of difference is addressed by itself, without reflections about the possible interlinking of various dimensions of inequality” (ibid. 665). More profound and critical research on how educational providers understand concepts of equality and social justice in their obliged statements (Lappalainen and Lahelma 2016). Furthermore, the Finnish academia must reflect their relation to racism and whiteness and consider the problems of racism in the development of institutional practices (Rastas 2020).

In this study, I elaborate on how the Universities of Applied Sciences consider ethnic and racialised minorities and racism in their Equality Plans. My examination focuses on the levels of actions the Equality Plans are offering to oppose racism. Furthermore, I identify how whiteness and other values of Finnish society are reflected in the Equality Plans. Throughout this study, I use the term non-discrimination to refer to equity, following the terminology of Finnish policy documents. This study has been divided into five parts. The first part contextualises inequality in the Nordic and Finnish educational system. The second part elaborates the central concepts in the discussion on racism and whiteness. The third part introduces the research materials and methods of the analysis. The last two parts are dedicated to the discussion on the findings of this study.

## **2. Discourses of (in)equality in the Nordic countries and Finland**

Finland and the other Nordic countries have often represented themselves as countries of equality and social justice. However, during the past years, a large and growing body of literature has challenged the Nordic exceptionalism (Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2016) regarding the success story of societal equality by providing knowledge about the involvement of these countries in colonialism and historical structures of racism discussing the position and discrimination of ethnic and racialised minorities. (Loftsdóttir & Jensen 2016; Hervik 2019; Keskinen 2019.) The following provides a brief description of the effects of colonialism on the Nordic identities, attitudes towards minority groups, and the development of Finnish equality discourse.

### **2.1 The influences of Nordic exceptionalism to Finnish equality discourses**

Many Nordic scholars have contributed to developing a postcolonial theoretical framework in the Nordic region during the past years (Keskinen, Tuori et al. 2009; Loftsdóttir & Jensen 2016; Keskinen 2019). Postcolonialism seeks to challenge the legacies of colonialism and colonial domination (Loomba 1998). Even though the formal colonial powers and colonies no longer exist, analysis can be utilised to explain human activity in different global processes (Mikander 2017). As discussed earlier in this study, the Nordic identities were affected by colonial thinking, which still is evident in contemporary societies. As Dirks notes: ‘Colonialism has not vanished from former colonial powers, where debates over nationality and multiculturalism mask increasing anxiety over the categories and identities of race, language, culture and morality’ (Dirks 1992: 24). For instance, the Nordic countries have taken part in portraying the non-Westerners in textbooks as inferiors while picturing the Westerners as more rational (Paasi 1998; Isaksson and Jokitalo 2005). According to Mikander (2017: 181), “Education thus provided support for institutions of control over others by constructing such hierarchical relations as normal.” Postcolonial analysis questions the assumed objectivity and neutrality of knowledge and sheds light on hierarchies it produces between people (ibid).

The Nordic countries have enjoyed the reputation of egalitarian and progressive welfare states, far from the greedy imperials in Europe. The Nordic has been pictured as global "good citizens, peace-loving, conflict-resolution orientated" (DeLong 2009:368-369). Nordic exceptionalism (Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2016) seeks to emphasise such image by signifying two different relations between the Nordic and the others: either it can signify the minor involvement of the Nordic in colonialism in relation to other European countries or the unique self-perception of the Nordic in relation to the rest of Europe. Whereas the colonial centres have experienced their share of colonial critique in the past, the Nordic countries have not had to confront theirs. This, according to Mulinari et al. (2009), has

offered the Nordic countries an opportunity to diminish their involvement in colonialism and oppression of their minorities and indigenous people.

Several scholars have approached the involvement of the Nordic countries in colonialism (Mulinari et al. 2009; Loftsdóttir & Jensen 2016; Keskinen 2019). These studies have shown that not only have the Nordic countries gained economically from colonialism but also participated in the creation of Europe as a global centre. Finns were, for instance, involved in Swedish colonies in Delaware, North America. (Rastas 2005; Palmberg 2009.) The involvement of the Nordic countries in colonialism and imperialism have further shaped the identities of the nations with its nationalist and gendered ideologies (Loftsdóttir & Jensen 2016). Hübinette and Lundström (2015) have identified three stages of racism and Swedish hegemonic whiteness and, which signify the development of the nation from “the international epicentre for scientific racism to becoming a global pioneer and beacon for antiracist politics and colour-blindness.” (ibid. 425). The stages examine, how racism has had a central role throughout the Swedish nation-building (Hübinette and Lundström 2015). Irni et al. (2009) have developed a concept of “colonial complicity” to illustrate the participation of the North-European countries in (post)colonial processes. Despite not belonging to the centre of the Western civilising project, the Nordic countries adopted discourses and material benefits from the project. As Irni et al.:

Colonial complicity refers to processes in which (post)colonial imaginaries, practices and products are made to be part of what is understood as the ‘national’ and ‘traditional’ culture of the Nordic countries. (Irni et al. 2009: 17)

Traditionally, the Nordic countries have identified themselves as homogenous nations. Meanwhile, the oppression of the minority and indigenous groups, such as Roma and Sámi, has continued in the Nordic for centuries (Keskinen 2019). In Finland, Sweden, Norway, and in Russia, for instance, acquiring the Sápmi (Sámi land), the eugenics toward Sámi people and the assimilation policies have had severe consequences for the Sámi people (Turtiainen et al. 2020). The oppression and hostile attitudes and practices towards the minority groups have not, however, remained in history but gained more interest due to backlash of the modern welfare states by the global economic crisis and an ideological shift to the right since 2008 (Turtiainen et al. (2020). The rise of populism, anti-immigration politics and the guidance of neoliberal policies have led to a growing social exclusion in the Nordic countries during the past years (Keskinen and Vuori 2012). The increased number of asylum applications in 2015 set new challenges to welfare states, followed by tightened laws and policies regarding asylum granting (Turtiainen et al. 2020).

Hübinette and Tigervall (2009) have argued that in Sweden, the discrimination against ethnic and racialised minorities has often been explained with, for instance, cultural, national, religious and linguistic differences instead of recognising it as racism. There is a strong reluctance in Swedish culture to talk about different appearances, which has led to the dominance of colour-blind discourse in society. (Hübinette and Tigervall 2009) While maintaining claims of colour-blind, post-racial ideology, Nordic countries have expressed more intolerant attitudes toward migrants and ethnic minorities (Hervik 2019). By denying the existence of racism, colour-blind racism locates the race-related issues to be either outside the country, or in the past. In Finnish academia, Rastas and Poelman (2021) have argued that Finnish sociological studies have a “color-blind-spot”, which means that race is absent in the research that does not directly address racism. This absence of race also reflects how the majority of Finns do not consider race to concern them. Addressing race and racism, the normative whiteness of the society should also be discussed.

According to Hervik (2019: 25–26) colour-blind racism “works through either ‘race’, ‘nation’ or both as master narratives evoking ultimate emotions, incompatible values, and non-negotiable entitlement”. Moreover, Frankenberg (1993: 142) has defined colour-blindness to act as “a mode of thinking about race organized around an effort not to ‘see’ or, at any rate, not to acknowledge, race differences”. For instance, the official Swedish policy ideology emphasises the idea of everybody being equal despite their ethnic or cultural background. (Hervik 2019). In Sweden, ethnicity is often connected to groups such as Muslims or Africans, but never to white German or Norwegian immigrants. Thus, without referring to racial differences or appearances explicitly, the concepts of culture or ethnicity are used to refer to non-white people. (Törngren 2019.)

The assumed gender equality has always dominated the discussion on equality in Finland (Lahelma 2012; Brunila 2012), and the equality regarding social class and race, for instance, has gained little attention. However, to promote equality and oppose discrimination, a deeper understanding of the sources of inequality must be attained. Brunila (2012:242) has emphasised the importance of addressing “the performative effect of language and discourse with material effects” in equality work. It is essential to note the power-relations in the equality discourse, where some elements of discourses are emphasised more than others. The formation of Finnish equality is necessary to examine as a part of other significant national projects (Menard 2016), which will be shortly introduced in the following.

Until the 1960s, rural classes and peasant traditions have characterised the building of Finnish national identity (Räsänen 1989; Häkli 1999), which have affected the formation of Finnish equality. Alongside the temperance movement, the values concerning moderation, equity, citizenship, and

work were indispensable to nationalist ideologies (Granberg and Nikula 1995). The idea of Finland as a unified nation was emphasised as a part of nation-building after Finnish independence in 1917 and the Finnish Civil War in 1918. Ethnic, linguistic and sociocultural differences among people were systematically downplayed to create a false impression of the ethnic homogeneity of the nation (Häkkinen and Tervonen 2004). Simultaneously, the break-up of the Soviet Union led to increased immigration to Finland, which also influenced the Finnish immigration policies (Lepola 2000; Lappalainen 2006). The development of the welfare state brought along the supporting measurements for the traditional family unit and gender-equal participation in the labour market (Menard 2016).

According to Kalalahti and Varjo (2012), the central and particular position of equality in the discourse of post-second World War education policy has left the analysis of the concept shallow. The more self-evident aim for equality is viewed in societal development, the more the concept evolves as ambiguous and even controversial (Puohiniemi 2002). Instead of aiming for affinity sameness, equality strives for similar moral and natural rights treatment. When defining moral and natural rights to ideal equality, however, the historically normative valuations affect the definition and might also be opposing. (Kalalahti and Varjo 2012.) In the Finnish education system, for instance, the idea of equal opportunities for participation were integrated into educational institutions in the late 1960s and 1970s following the comprehensive school reform (Ahonen 2003; Arnesen, Mietola Lahelma 2007). However, the ideology and progress of the welfare state project also contributed to the interpretation where social inequalities of gender and especially of social classes were considered as solved. Together with the classical liberal interpretation of equality as sameness, that resulted in a situation where equality was understood as treating the students in the same way. Alongside equality, the concept of inclusion has been a major objective from the 1980s to 1990s, “with an emphasis on pedagogical differentiation and adapted instruction instead of tracking” *ibid.* 100). Finland’s accession to the European Union, in turn, obliged Finland to follow the directions coming from the outside; the definition and objects of equality changed “towards a more practically-oriented and more goal-oriented approach” (Brunila 2012:244). The obligation of equality in policies of the EU focused especially toward women, disregarding the integration of equality into all societal activities and projects (Brunila 2012).

In understanding equality and inequality, the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989) is central. Intersectionality was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 1980s. The concept seeks to understand the overlapping categories of identity to detect and understand the disadvantages and discriminations individuals and groups experience. Individual characteristics (such as race, gender, class and sexuality) do not exist independently but are interconnected and form complex entities that

determine the possibilities of people in society. When it comes to gender inequality, for instance, one should also remember the disadvantaged position of women of colour due to both their gender and race. Although Finland has identified itself as a promising land of gender equality, the understanding of intersectionality has been entirely left out from the equality discourse, presumably due to the failure of recognising class and race inequality within the nation.

### **2.3 The concept of tolerance in equality talk**

The concept of tolerance has been central in Finland in discussing ethnic relations and multiculturalism (Lappalainen 2006; Holm and Londen 2010). The systematic use of tolerance towards other cultures started in the schools in the 1990s (Killen, Tella, and Yli-Renko 1997), continuing its presence until today (Riitaoja 2013). Holm and Londen (2010) have examined how tolerance in Finnish multicultural education does not require the students and teachers to understand or validate cultural differences. The more profound understanding of cultural differences further restricts the students and teachers from reflecting on their own prejudices and stereotypes.

In social sciences, the common tendency among scholars has been to implement the concept of tolerance without analysing its ideological contents and historical roots. Leena Suurpää (2005) has elaborated the vague and ambiguous meaning of tolerance, arguing that the history of tolerance is embedded in three principles; (1) it is a central element in societal order, (2) it can act as a guiding principle in politics, and (3) it is a central value in defining social ties and relationships. Similarly to other societal norms, tolerance has gained an intrinsic value that can define a good human being. As social order also reflects social hierarchies, in the case of ethnic relations, the use of tolerance should be viewed as a power relationship between the majority and the ethnic and racialised minorities. The analysis on the use of tolerance has so far disregarded the perspective of the minorities defined as being tolerated. For instance, in Finnish immigration policies, whose needs are being heard, and who is excluded from the Finnish tolerance (or Finnishness overall). (Suurpää 2005) When tolerance is the value of society, it centres the personal feelings and moral of people and de-centres the discriminatory structures that create social hierarchies. Thus, the general public is expected to tolerate both ends of the conflict and not stand against the injustice. (Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2003)

Another term widely used in the official Finnish statements is “zero-tolerance”. Duong-Pedica (2018) has examined the use of “zero-tolerance” in the Equality Plans of Finnish Universities. The problem with the term zero tolerance is its contradictory meaning: on the one hand, it signals a total rejection of, in this case, discrimination, and on the other, offers no concrete actions to oppose unequal

treatment. Furthermore, Finnish universities have adopted the concept of “zero-tolerance” without questioning its racist origins in the United States. As Duong-Pedica (2018) has argued, “zero-tolerance” serves as an image for universities and saves them the trouble of having to think about concrete actions.

### **3. Institutional racism and whiteness**

In this section, the main concepts relating race and racism are introduced to understand how racism operates. Moreover, a thorough investigation of whiteness is needed to evaluate its severe consequences in creating inequality.

#### **3.1. Race and racism**

Keskinen and Andreassen (2017) understand the concept of race, racialisation and whiteness to be somewhat different but have intersecting meanings. In order to challenge racism and racial discourses and practices, the reassessment of Finnishness and the recognition of multiple manifestations of racism is required (Rastas 2005). Moreover, the assessment of racism must go beyond an individual’s actions and focus on the social institutions where regulations, procedures, and rules, including discriminatory effect, are created and reproduced (Puuronen 2011). Dei and Calliste (2000) have emphasised the importance of not abolishing or minimising race in opposing racial inequality because of its social, political and material consequences.

Alemanji (2016: 7) has defined race as a “socially constructed concept born from the activities of othering based on skin colour, in particular, as well as other social factors like religion, gender and sexuality.” Following the work of Lentin (2015), Alemanji has aligned with the notion of understanding of what race does, rather than what race is. In Finland, race is a gatekeeper, for instance, in accessing professional positions. (Alemanji 2016) Dei and Calliste (2000) note that race as a concept does not indicate inferiority or superiority, but the cognitive, affective and material meanings connected to the concept of race have created racial hierarchies in institutional and social practices. Race is also a political and cultural identity (Rastas and Poelman 2021).

Fanon first introduced the concept of racialisation in the 1960s, but the work of Miles (1989, 1993) on theorising racialisation has gained more attention among scholars. According to Keskinen and Andreassen (2017) racialisation “emphasises racial and/or ethnic subordination caused by societal, political and historical processes, which has constituted racial identities, privileges, and discriminations.” Racialisation and the use of words, especially metaphors, is one way of generating

racial subordination and false racial identities. (Keskinen and Andreassen 2017) Metaphors are, in a way, a subtle but effective way of creating associations between specific characteristics and people. Sami children were 'educated' by the majority to adjust to the Finnish way of life. Furthermore, the Roma children have been taken into child protection faculties (Stark 2018) for various reasons – most likely due to the family having an unacceptable way of life compared to the majority.

Ethnicity is a concept that has often replaced race in the discussion on race-related issues. Andreassen and Ahmed-Andresen (2014) have pointed out that “When ethnicity becomes a substitute for race, it becomes more difficult to talk about racism. But it also becomes more difficult to point to how racial appearances determine interpretations of ethnicity.” (ibid. 28) Everyone has an ethnicity, but in Finland, for instance, verbally, it does not extend to concern ethnic Finns (Andreassen and Ahmed-Andresen 2014).

The terminology regarding race-related issues is constantly changing. In Finnish public discourse, the concept of race has often been connected to the racial doctrine, and thus, many hesitate its usage. Previously, ethnic and racialised minorities have also adopted negative attitudes towards racial classifications (Rastas and Poelman 2021). Recently, the concept of “racialised” has become more common in the Finnish discourse, partly due to its dissociation from the concepts related to old racial doctrine (ibid. 5). Moreover, it seems to consider better the circumstances of the region in the racial discourse. However, the concept of “racialised” might disregard the position of whiteness among the racialised, enabling it to continue the reproduction of unequal structures. (Rastas and Poelman 2021)

Similarly, the definition of racism is vague and changes depending on the context; for instance, feminist and postcolonial research have raised the issues of gender, physicality and political dimensions of the research. Nevertheless, all definitions highlight the process of differentiation. As Rastas suggests (2005), racism should be understood in its changing societal and historical contexts and connected to the ambient political and economic conditions. Racism can occur both in the structures of societal institutions and in everyday life among individuals. Although racism can also be unintentional, all its forms produce racializing discourses and practices which have both symbolic and material consequences. (ibid.)

The concept of structural racism denies racism to be only a psychological or cultural feature of individuals or groups among whom the overt racism becomes visible. Additionally, the concept of hidden racism was connected to the operation of structural racism. (Puuronen 2011.) Institutional racism in universities can be defined as the educational system's “collective failure” to treat all the students equally despite their culture, colour or ethnic origin. It manifests in actions that disadvantage

ethnic and racialised minority students, such as racist stereotyping and prejudice. Unlike everyday interpersonal racism, institutional racism is much more hidden and subtle and, thus, more difficult to dismantle. (Mizra 2018.)

Several scholars and students (Rastas and Poelman 2021; Hubara 2020, Riitaoja et al. Accepted/In press) have recently emphasised the need for higher education institutions to participate in dismantling racism. Rastas (2020) has noted that despite the increased interest in research on racism during the last ten years, the universities have not managed to discuss the different manifestations of racism in higher education systems. The so-called "white spaces" are reformed due to the recent demographic changes and the rapid internationalisation of the universities. Moreover, the global demand for decolonising academia and the need for anti-racist practices in higher education systems have also become a matter of public knowledge. Finnish academia must reflect their relation to racism and consider the problems of racism in the development of institutional practices. Racism manifests in the educational institutions through education and research, as well as in the formation of social relations, for instance as white normativity, reproduction of racist pictures and the underestimation of racism. Moreover, the global demand for decolonising academia and the need for anti-racist practices in higher education systems have also become a matter of public knowledge. (Rastas 2020)

### **3.1. Whiteness in institutional level**

Systemic racism continues to structure society, where ethnic and racialised minorities are marginalised and whites are privileged (Leonardo 2002). Leonardo (2002) has distinguished Whiteness from white people, where as "white people" signify a socially constructed identity, "Whiteness" is understood as a racial discourse. Material practices and institutions support whiteness, and white people benefit and are privileged by whiteness. Avoiding to name racism, minimizing racist legacy and unwillingness to be identified with a racial group or experience are some everyday strategies of Whiteness. (Frankenberg 1993) "Whiteness is the attempt to homogenize diverse white ethnics into a single category (much like it attempts with people of color) for purposes of racial domination (32)" As W.E.B. Du Bois (1989) has argued, very few if any, areas on the globe are left untouched by white dominance. Whiteness assumes to have ownership over everything; "the earth, property, production, the creations of people, people themselves, time -" (Freire 1993, 58). In order to understand race as a producer and a product of differences, education must critically approach white supremacy (Mills 1997). As Ahmed (2007b: 152) has argued: "whiteness is an orientation that puts certain things within reach.". Habituating a white body gains access to places and to different things. The one who is inhabiting a white body does not recognise it, since the privileges are so

internalised and unquestioned. Encountering other bodies or objects does not make white people 'stressed' (Ahmed 2007b:153), because Whiteness is seen as neutral, a starting point where other bodies orientate around.

Keskinen (2019) has examined how Finland has sought their recognition for acknowledged as white, and thus, superiors on European, Nordic and national levels. During the 19th and early 20th, populations in Nordic regions were racially divided and hierarchized. In this division, the Nordic race (Broberg and Tydén 2003) was privileged to belong to Danes, Swedes and Norwegians, whereas Finns, the Sámi and the Roma were lower in the hierarchy. Sweden conducted several racial tests, such as skull measurements, to prove Finns to be a separate and lower race from the Nordic race (Keskinen 2019). Moreover, during the eighteenth century, several studies abroad classified Finns to be inherited from Mongols and belonged to the Fenno-Ugric population. To be accepted as white, Finland needed to distinguish the Sámi and the Roma from Finnishness. (Kilpeläinen 1985.) What followed was systematic and violent oppression of the Finnish minorities, which has continued until today. The suppression and discrimination of the Sami and Roma by the racial state actions was exercised especially after Finland gained independence. Between 1920 and 1940, the new theory about the East Baltic race was conducted, which lead to Finns being counted as white Europeans. (Keskinen 2019.)

Rastas (2005) has defined "Finnish exceptionalism" as "Differentiating Finland and Finnish people from other nations and the moral superiority included in this discourse" (ibid. 89). Finnish exceptionalism constructs and maintains the differences between "us" and "others", and the superiority which not only positions "us" above "others" but also allows "us" to maintain power to define the order of things and to "be the way we want to be in our home" (Rastas 2005: 100). The use of n-word in Finland has disregarded the experiences of ethnic and racialised minorities of finding it racist. Instead, many of white Finns have been defending the use of the n-word, since they have never considered it to include racist meanings. (Rastas 2005.) Maintaining "national self-image of innocence" (Rastas 2005; Gullestad 2004) and denying the racist past of Finland prevents the discussion and practices to move forward to anti-racism (Rastas 2005).

Leinonen (2012) has examined how white Americans living in Finland are not perceived as immigrants by the majority but to be welcomed promoters of internationality. The unproblematic immigrants are most often the white Westerners, who are seen as migrating for "right" reasons (employment, marriage, studies). Such immigrants rarely gain publicity, unlike the ones who differ from the majority with their physical appearance. (Leinonen 2012.) Despite being born in Finland or being adopted to a Finnish family, individuals belonging to ethnic and racialised families are

characterised as immigrants by the public. Their belonging to Finnishness has been contested (Ruohio 2009).

Castagno (2019) has critically evaluated whiteness at an institutional level, especially in the procedures of the education system. The central argument is that the “niceness” and “good intentions” of the educators, administrators, and policy makers seek allegiance to whiteness and prevents the education system from developing into a more just institution. Silencing and the unwillingness to discuss race and racism are justified by appealing to politeness. Moreover, the problems are often understood and addressed at an individual level, directing the attention away from the undermining systemic challenges.

### **3.2 Multiculturalist and anti-racist responses to educational inequalities**

Holm and Londen (2010) have argued that the problem with multicultural education in Finnish schools has been that it is mainly directed to students with immigrant background. The idea of multicultural education has been to offer knowledge to the students with immigrant background about their cultural background. In contrast, the use of such education for students belonging to the Finnish majority has been disregarded. Moreover, the multicultural education in Finland disregards the various ethnic and racialised minorities and indigenous students, limiting the understanding of multiculturalism to be a phenomenon arriving to Finland from the outside and not as an inherited part of Finnishness. (Holm & Londen 2010.)

Tuori (2007) has examined how in Finland, it is the responsibility of the individual migrants to lead the way to the multicultural community, instead of paying attention to the gendered and racialised structures and ideologies constituting the Finnish society. The idea of Finland as a "good society", individuality and gender equality direct the ideology of multicultural Finland, where the migrants are taught to unlearn their "supposedly more patriarchal gender order" (ibid. 32). The idea of multiculturalism adds something to Finnishness instead of challenging it (Tuori 2007).

According to Bhattacharyya et al. (2020), anti-racism has its traditions in resistance and response to fascism. The colour-blind society is based on the assumption that the issues of racism have been solved and equality achieved. Instead of acknowledging the effects of ongoing state racism, the “Abstract Liberalism Frame” (ibid. 11) rest their arguments on individual achievements. The rise of populist parties and white nationalism has enabled state racism to become more acceptable but also enhanced the rhetorics of everyday dehumanisation: of ethnic and racialised minorities (Bhattacharyya et al. 2020).

Recently, anti-racism has been preferred over multiculturalism because it focuses on the unequal distribution of power and aims at exposing policies and organisational systems that enable and produce racism (Alemanji and Mafi 2018). The challenges of antiracism education in Finland have been investigated in the study by Alemanji and Mafi (2018), who have used the case of KYTKE (Workshop on Tolerance Through Interpersonal Actions or Activities), a set of workshops organised for high school students to oppose racism by NGO called Walter. One of the central challenges with implementing anti-racism is the denial of the existence of racism in Finland overall. KYTKE was identified as problematic because it tended to individualise racism instead of recognising its institutional dimension, the power-relations within, and the historicity of racialisation. Even though the “nature of Finnishness creates otherness” (Alemanji and Mafi 2018: 196), Finnish institutions and policies continue to diminish the problem of racism, which can be explained with, for instance, the idea of Finnish exceptionalism and neo-racism (ibid.).

#### **4. Research materials and methods**

In this chapter, I introduce the material of my study, namely policy documents called Equality Plans in the Finnish language-based Universities of Applied Sciences. I also describe the steps of my analysis and the lenses I have used for analytical reading of the Plans.

##### **4.1 Research material: Equality Plans and accessibility to them**

The research materials of this study consist of Equality Plans in 18 Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland. There are altogether 21 Finnish language-based Universities of Applied Sciences, of which 18 are included in this study. Most documents were available online. Some of the documents I got after requesting them by email from the university administration. However, three Equality Plans were not available for this study. Two Universities of Applied Sciences did not yet have an updated version of their Equality Plans, and I could not attain the old versions online. One university that did not have the document available online did not reply to my email, and thus, the document is not included in this study. Most of the Equality Plans are for both the staff and the students. Three of the Universities of Applied Sciences have separate Equality Plans for the staff and students, from which I managed to attain three for staff and two for students. Thus I had all-together 20 Equality Plans. The lengths of the Equality Plans vary from three to 34 pages, the average length being 14 pages. Most of the Equality Plans are up to date. Five are either valid until 2019 or 2020, but no updated version is yet available.

An important aspect of equality as enacted is how easily the information about equality policies, support structures and activities are accessible for the students and the educators. Accessibility to the information also indicates whether the Equality Plan is meant to be an administrative document or a policy put in practice. Accessibility also indicates whether the Plans with the themes of equality and discrimination are merely done out of duty or meant to be implemented in the everyday actions of the higher education institutions (Ahmed 2007). The access to information about the Equality Plan and instructions in case of discrimination and harassment is also a central point in equality work, as it signals how dedicated the institutions to opposing discrimination. Having anti-discriminating policies, concrete practices and procedures in case of discrimination send a message to the university community and potential minority students and teachers about the lived values of the university.

I tested the accessibility to the Equality Plans by exploring the websites of the 18 Finnish language-based Universities of Applied Sciences. By searching the words and string of letters connected to words *equality (tasa-arvo)*, *equality plans (tasa-arvo- ja yhdenvertaisuussuunnitelma)* *non-discrimination (yhdenvertaisuus)*, *discrimination (syrjintä)*, *harassment (häirintä)* and *harassment liaison (häirintäyhdyshenkilö)*, I wanted to find out how easy it is for a student to find the Equality Plan and instructions or support in the case of discrimination and harassment on the public website of the university.

One University of Applied Sciences did not have an option for search on their website. Eight out of the 18 Finnish language-based Universities of Applied Sciences did not offer any relating information to the issues. The Equality Plans and the instructions in cases of discrimination and harassment could be found only on the website of three educational institutions (JAMK, OAMK, TAMK). Six of the higher educational institutions offered their Equality Plans when searching for *equality (tasa-arvo)*, *equality plan (tasa-arvo- ja yhdenvertaisuussuunnitelma)* and *non-discrimination (yhdenvertaisuussuus)*. Five universities offered guidance in case of harassment or the contact information of the harassment liaison when searched with *discrimination (syrjintä)*, and seven when searched with *harassment (häirintä)* and *harassment liaison (häirintäyhdyshenkilö)*

There were, however, differences among the university websites in how much you needed to navigate through different links before reaching the information. For instance, on one website, the first link offered after the searching with *discrimination (syrjintä)* was to *The rules of procedure of the higher education institution (Korkeakoulun järjestyssäännöt)*, which offered a list of ten points, first being *Safety in higher education institution (Turvallinen korkeakoulu)*. The text under one point declared bullying and discrimination to be prohibited, following with the information that the instructions in the cases of discrimination can be found from the Equality Plan and the *occupational safety and*

*health guidelines (työsuojelun toimintaohjeet)*. However, there is no link to either of these. The same thing happened on other university websites. Testing of accessibility also showed that in many universities, student associations were assigned to be responsible for guidance in cases of discrimination and harassment. Such information was often offered on the website for new students with a link for the student association website. While this shows the involvement of the student organisations in dealing with the issues, it also raises the question of whether the teaching staff or administration has any official role and responsibility in the process.

#### **4.2 Methods of analysis: reading the Equality Plans through the lenses of critical whiteness, intersectional postcolonial feminism and Nordic exceptionalism**

My analytical reading of the Equality Plans is informed by my theoretical framework that includes perspectives of critical whiteness, intersectional postcolonial feminism, Nordic exceptionalism to racism and colonialism, and feminist and education policy studies that discuss interpretations and practices of equality in educational institutions.

The benefits of postcolonial feminism in social sciences education lie within its ability to reveal the legacy and history of the power relations in European colonialism and connect it to today's material and discursive global hierarchies (Rizvi, Lingard and Lavia 2006). In education, special attention should be paid to understand how inequalities and violence are still constructed by knowledge production (Andreotti 2011). Mikander (2017:184) has introduced a set of questions to disrupt the idea of the existence of neutral knowledge in social science:

“From what perspective are the events described? Whose voice is being heard? What is portrayed as natural or commonsensical? What practices are considered neutral or sensible? When events are described, what information is included and what is not?”

Such questions are also considered when examining the knowledge production in the Equality Plans.

The analysis followed a similar take as Riitaoja et. al (forthcoming), which combined explicit and implicit references to migrancy and diversity in abductive content analysis. In the first stage of analysis, the focus was on investigating what is said about racism and other related concepts and where and in relation to what it is said. Which concept has been omitted from the Equality Plans? To map this, I used keywords related to race and racism and string of letters connected to words, such as *ethnic (etninen)*, *minority (vähemmistö)*, *immigrant (maahanmuuttaja)*, *foreign (ulkomaalainen)*, *origin (alkuperä)* *descent (syntyperä)*, *citizenship (kansalaisuus)*, and *nationality (kansallisuus)*.

Then, I searched for words related to diversity: *multiculturalism (monikulttuurisuus)*, *international (kansainvälisyys)*, *culture (kulttuuri)*, and *diversity (moninaisuus and monimuotoisuus)*. Lastly, I focused on equality and discrimination: *racism (rasismi)*, *ethnic discrimination (etninen syrjintä)*, *discrimination (syrjintä)*, *harassment (häirintä)*, and *tolerance (suvaitsevaisuus)*.

Tavory and Timmermans (2014:2) have discussed the development of “double story” in qualitative research, where the understanding of the topic in question is formulated by connecting the empirical observations to the theoretical propositions. In abductive content analysis, these two sources of information amplify each other, acting as “a creative inferential process” (ibid. 5). Rather than considering the analysis process as a step-by-step procedure, the focus shifts between observation and theory. Similarly, in this study, the theoretical framework was informing the analysis of the Equality Plans; meanwhile, observations of the research material were complementing the theory. The aim was to see how educational providers understood race and racism in the Equality Plans and what sort of solutions they offered to oppose race-based discrimination. Moreover, I examined whether the intersectionality, interconnectedness of different individual characteristics was acknowledged in the Equality Plans. The aim was also to understand how well integrated race-related content into the plans was. When discussing, for instance, a person’s individual characteristics as a source of inequality and discrimination, was race included?

In the second stage of the analysis, I have employed discourse analytical strategies in understanding the implicit meanings connected to race and racism in the Equality Plans. The analytical tools implemented in the “What’s the problem represented to be” approach by Bacchi (2009) informed this stage of analysis. I examined whether the understandings connected to race and racism included hidden meanings or presumptions constructed by the normative Finnishness and/or whiteness. Nokkala and Saarinen (2018: 13) have defined discourse analysis as “an eclectic body of theoretical and methodological approaches that, broadly defined, analyse language use and its socially constructive nature in society.”. The language of the Equality Plans of the Universities of Applied Sciences does not solely describe reality but constructs how we conceptualise and understand social reality. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a practical tool in analysing higher education practice and policy, which is why its principles are also utilised in this study. CDA views the texts to reproduce, construct, and transform social structures, which is why the analysis of higher education documents may reveal the ways in which social domination and control are negotiated, exercised, and resisted in society. The process of CDA often has three dimensions: (1) the text with its linguistic features, (2) the interpretation of how the text is produced and consumed in discursive practices, and

(3) the social context of these discursive practices. (Nokkala and Saarinen 2018.) These dimensions have also guided the analysis of the Equality Plans.

Like any other analytical approach, discourse analysis has its problems, one of them being its theoretical nature. The analyst may fall to over-interpret the language and distance themselves too much from the physical, social reality. (Nokkala and Saarinen 2018) A somewhat contradictory issue in the discourse analytical approach is under-analysis: the analysis may be prejudiced, one-sided with isolated quotes and lack a proper summary of the data (Antaki, Billig, Edwards & Potter 2004). CDA, on the other hand, has drawn some criticism due to its interest in contentious and “political” issues and its prospectively ideologically motivated research data and settings (Titscher et al. 2000: 163).

The approach of Bacchi (2009) focuses on how the problem is understood and represented in government policies and policy proposals. The importance of understanding the implementations of different policies comes from their purpose of governing us. Policies are formed within the national or international context, reflecting the countries' cultural and historical ideologies. (Shore and Wright 1997) The term policy is often understood as an action that is directed at something that needs to be ‘fixed’. This problem can be either explicitly or implicitly amplified. It is important to note that policies often refer to a problem implicitly and suggest something to be changed. Moreover, despite being understood primarily as good practices, policies might include cultural assumptions and silences towards certain notions. According to Osborne (1997), understanding governing processes is essential to see how policies and policy proposals problematize specific issues. The way these issues are approached or ‘solved’ depends on how they have been understood in the first place.

Bacchi (2009) presents six questions that should be considered when assessing specific policies or policy proposals, beginning with the title of the approach; “what’s the problem represented to be?”. I.e., what is sought to be changed, and how the problem is understood. The remaining of questions focus on assumptions or presuppositions behind the ‘problem’, the effects of the certain representations of the ‘problem’, the silences around the ‘problem’, and the ways such representation could be questioned. These questions will also be asked when examining how equality is understood in the Equality Plans and whose equality is claimed to be promoted by the education providers. The focus will be on where the problem is located; is it in the attitudes, interpersonal communication, values and norms of institutional structures and practices, knowledge, or material things?

In addition, analysing how racism is integrated into the Equality Plans and what level of actions are taken to change the situation, I used the tools of multicultural education formed by Banks (2020).

Initially, the levels of integration are used in multicultural curriculum reform, but I find them recoverable when examining the Equality Plans. The four levels for multicultural curriculum reform are from the lowest to the highest (1) the contributions approach, (2) the additive approach, (3) the transformation approach, and (4) the social action approach. (Banks 2020) The first two levels do not change the mainstream curriculum but rather add information about the ethnic groups. The first level, the contributions approach, adds multicultural content to the mainstream curriculum without offering an understanding of ethnic communities. The curriculum offers a book, a unit, or a course regarding ethnic groups in the additive approach. Similarly to the first level, the perspective is still on the mainstream and Eurocentric historians, scientists, writers and artists.

On the third level, the transformation approach, "the fundamental goals, structure, and perspectives of the curriculum are changed" (Banks 2020:146). This level teaches students to view different issues and contents from multiple ethnic perspectives, and thus, understand the society as a whole, and not just from the mainstream viewpoint. The last level, the social action approach, takes a step further from the transformation approach and aims at empowering the students by educating them to be socially critical and active. Furthermore, it offers the students tools to participate in social change and close the gap between social realities and our ideals for a more equal and democratic society. As Banks (2020:146-147) notes,

The key curriculum issue in multicultural curriculum reform is not the addition of a long list of ethnic groups, heroes, and contributions but the infusion of various perspectives, frames of references, and content from different groups that will extend students' understanding of the nature, development, and complexity of society.

Similarly, this study will examine how race and racism are approached in the Equality Plans and how well integrated race-related content is in the equality policy.

### **4.3 Ethical considerations and positioning**

It is not possible for a researcher to make neutral and detached observations of social reality (Haraway 1988), and thus, reflecting the positionality of the researcher is a necessary part of the qualitative research process. As Mikander has pointed out, "—everyone has a set of cultural, ideological glasses through which to observe the world." (2017:162). My background as a white, Finnish, female university student affects how I collect and interpret the data regarding this study. Moreover, when it comes to evaluating Finnishness, race, and racism, my positioning influences my ability to detect the

hidden or invisible meanings behind them. However, during the research process, I intend to be aware of my position and privileges as much as possible.

This study cannot be generalised to all Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland since I could not attain the remaining three Equality Plans and because the Swedish language based higher education institutions are not included in the study. When it comes to evaluating the accessibility of the information about equality and discrimination in the higher educational institutions, I can only assess it from the point of view of an outsider; I am not familiar with how accessible is the information for the students at these Universities of Applied Sciences. However, easy access to the information in case of discrimination and harassment should be guaranteed by the Universities of Applied Sciences to promote equality and signify their willingness to address inequality.

## **5. Findings**

In this chapter, I discuss the results of my analysis under the three themes related to my research questions. The themes are: the explicit and implicit talk about race and racism, locating the problem: reasons of racism, and solutions: tolerance or concrete actions?

### **5.1 The explicit and implicit talk about race and racism**

My first research task was to find out how the Equality Plans explicitly and implicitly talks about race and racism. For this purpose, I first went through all the Plans and searched with keywords that are related to and were explicitly race and racism, such as *ethnicity (etnisyy)*, *ethnic origin (etninen alkuperä)*, *origin (alkuperä)*, *diversity (moninaisuus and monimuotoisuus)*, *discrimination (syrjintä)* and *harassment (häirintä)*. To find implicit meanings to race and racism, I read through all the Equality Plans. Furthermore, by focusing on the implicit meanings connected to race and racism, I could assess whether they included hidden meanings or presumptions (Bacchi 2009) constructed by the normative Finnishness and/or whiteness. The implicit reading of the Equality Plans, in turn, revealed more related keywords to race and racism, which I used in the explicit word search.

Similarly to the findings of Hubara (2020) regarding the literature in social work education, the result of the explicit word search is that the words race and racism gain minor attention in the Equality Plans. Only three of the Equality Plans explicitly mention race and racism. Instead of using the term racism, Plans preferred general terms like bullying, discrimination, and harassment. The most common words used to describe race are *ethnicity (etnisyy)*, *ethnic background (etninen tausta)*, *ethnic origin (etninen alkuperä)*, or *origin (alkuperä)*. Most of the Equality Plans mention the direct

quote from the Non-Discrimination Act that includes either the word *ethnic origin* or *origin*, which result in them being among the most common words when referring to race. In several Equality Plans, the direct quote from the Non-Discrimination Act is the only part where ethnic origin or origin was referred to. However, gender equality, and the measurements implemented to promote it, are acknowledged more precisely.

The results indicate that the concept of race, racism, or racialisation have not landed in the discourses of the Equality Plans. Instead, race is often discussed indirectly under terms like ethnicity or origin, where the connection to race remains vague. This can be problematic, especially if the underlying meaning of ethnicity and origin as a difference to whiteness remains unpacked.

Many Equality Plans talk about diversity (*moninaisuus* or *monimuotoisuus* in Finnish) when they refer to the individual characteristics related to discrimination and inequality. However, the meaning of diversity is not always explained. Thus, it is not clear whether race is included. As Ahmed (2012) has examined, the vague definition of diversity furthers its use in multiple contexts. Altogether, diversity was mentioned in the Equality Plans three times more than, for instance, ethnicity. On the contrary, four Equality Plans did not mention it at all. The diversity of the students and the staff are in some Equality Plans described as an enrichment: a value that added to the presumably “normal”:

Diversity is seen as a resource that enriches the work community, to which different people bring complementary skills. Diversity increases innovativeness and the capacity of the work community to reform. (original text in Finnish: *Monimuotoisuutta pidetään työyhteisöä rikastuttavana resurssina, johon erilaiset ihmiset tuovat täydentävää osaamista. Monimuotoisuus lisää innovatiivisuutta ja uudistumiskykyä työyhteisössä, Savonia*)

Such a discourse talks about diversity but is mute about power issues and inequalities related to diversity (Riitaoja et al. 2017). Furthermore, diversity is understood in relation to the sameness or “normal” white, middle-class, secular Lutheran and heterosexual Finnish majority (Riitaoja 2013). Only one Equality Plan explicitly acknowledged “Finnish citizens with foreign background and national minorities, such as the Sámi and Roma” (*ulkomaalaiset Suomen kansalaiset sekä kotimaiset vähemmistöt, kuten saamenkieliset ja romanit, LUT*).

Because the Act on Equality between Women and Men and Non-Discrimination Act are the two primary laws obliging higher education institutions to formulate Equality Plans, they have a substantial impact on how the overall content of the plans is constructed. Many of the Equality Plans are divided into different sections, usually according to some of the sources of inequality and

discrimination related to individual characteristics mentioned in the Non-Discrimination Act. Thus, the Equality Plans did not manage to integrate the race-related matters into all the sections. In some of the plans, diversity was connected to the internationalisation of higher education institutions. The following example under the title of “(Ethnic)Origin, nationality, language” (“(Etninen) Alkuperä, kansalaisuus, kieli”), stated as follows:

Following the internationalisation of the higher education institution and its international education many different languages, nationalities and students with different ethnic backgrounds meet in the campus area (original text in Finnish: Korkeakoulun kansainvälistymisen ja kansainvälisten koulutusten myötä kampuksella kohtaavat monet eri kielet, kansallisuudet sekä eri etnisen tausta omaavat opiskelijat.)

Here, the variety of languages, nationalities, and ethnic backgrounds is considered an outcome of the internationalisation of higher education. Multiculturalism is often treated as a positive resource to the community (Karelia), and internationalisation is seen as a desirable value. As several scholars have examined, Finnishness is not understood as a part of multiculturalism but has become the other end (Lepola 2000, Huttunen et al. 2005; Antikainen 2010; Riitaoja 2013). Different cultures “added their individual colour to the higher education community”, KAMK). Thus, the multicultural discourse includes an implicit meaning which refers to Finnishness and Finnish society as homogeneous.

Overall, the Equality Plans are often constructed to concern two different forms of equality and discrimination: gender-based and the rest. Only a few of the Equality Plans introduced the concept of multiple discrimination, which aims to capture many forms of discrimination that one can experience. However, despite introducing the concept of multiple discrimination, none of the Equality Plans succeeded in discussing different forms of discrimination together through the Plan. As the Ministry of Justice Finland (2019) has stated, multiple discrimination should be identified better to prevent various cases of discrimination. This is necessary because 25 percent of ethnic and racialised minorities have experienced discrimination based on two or more reasons. (Ministry of Justice Finland 2019; (FRA 2017b). One of the Equality Plans that acknowledged the existence of multiple discrimination at the beginning of the plan, however, had not included race as one of the individual characteristics in their survey for students about their experiences of equality (OAMK).

In one of the Equality Plans, race was defined as a difference from the majority:

Ethnicity means a group, differs from the majority by their traditions, race, religion, language or other characteristics. (original text in Finnish: Etnisyydellä tarkoitetaan

valtaväestöstä perinteidensä, rotunsa, uskontonsa, kielensä tai muiden seikkojen perusteella poikkeavaa ryhmää, HUMAKO)

Here, ethnicity is considered as a character of the “Others” while the majority, in this case, white Finnishness, is not seen as an ethnicity. Ethnic, then gets its meaning in relation to Finnishness, which is seen as neutral (Irni 2009).

Interestingly, in two Equality Plans the only time race was mentioned was when the results of the surveys, either for the staff or students, were introduced. The first of these two plans stated that “discrimination based on ethnicity or nationality has not been experienced” (“etnisestä alkuperästä tai kansalaisuudesta johtuvaa syrjintää ei ole koettu”, HUMAK). The second Equality Plan only regarded race when stating that “-- special treatment was not encouraged to be underlined due to student’s disparity, foreign background or belonging to a minority” (“-- erityiskohtelua ei toivottu korostettavankaan opiskelijan erilaisuuden, ulkomaalaistaustan tai vähemmistöön kuulumisen takia” OAMK).

## **5.2 Locating the problem: Reasons of racism**

In this sub-chapter, I discuss the reasons for racism discussed in the Equality Plans are. My analytical reading is informed by Bacchi’s (2009) “what’s the problem represented to be?”. What does the discussion on the problematic and the proposed actions say about the sources and reasons for racism?

In the Equality Plans, the biggest problem threatening equality in race-related discrimination is the attitudes of the students and staff and the different habits of other cultures. On a more general level, the discriminatory structures of the educational institution are recognised in many of the Equality Plans. However, the inter-personal aspects of discrimination and harassment are addressed more thoroughly. Higher education institutions’ admissions, study material, teaching, communications, electronic systems, events and learning spaces are recognised as venues for potential discrimination.

The importance of open communication is highlighted in all the Equality Plans. One university state: “Open and positive atmosphere and interaction support an equal culture of practice”. (“Avoin ja positiivinen ilmapiiri ja vuorovaikutus tukevat yhdenvertaista toimintakulttuuria”, Savonia). This indicates that many of the problems of discrimination and inequality are considered misunderstandings due to bad communication. Such approach obscured discrimination and racism as institutional and systematic matter that is also connected to knowledge and beliefs and values and norms of institutional structures and processes.

Another communication issue is located between the people speaking different languages. One of the Equality Plans that understand internationalisation as a reason for the increased number of ethnic and racialised student and staff at their campus noted that “the lack of a shared language can lead to misunderstandings in the interaction” (“yhteisen kielen puuttuminen voi aiheuttaa vuorovaikutuksessa väärinymmärryksiä”, Centria). Thus, discrimination and harassment may be a consequence of a language barrier, and the fault of the discrimination is placed in the interaction between the individuals or groups. For example, in equality planning workshops for students by one of the Universities of Applied Sciences (Metropolia) the students raised their concern on discriminating manners of speaking, for instance, in teaching situations. They emphasised the importance of focusing on “how one speaks in the higher education community, and how language may direct one’s thinking and have an effect on the attitudes” (“miten korkeakouluyhteisössä puhutaan ja miten puheella ja kielenkäytöllä on mahdollisuus ohjata ajattelua ja vaikuttaa asenteisiin” Metropolia).

In some of the Equality Plans, the reason for ethnic discrimination is located in different cultural backgrounds of the community members. Thus, as Jönsson (2013) elaborates, there is a tendency by the majority to understand the cultures of the marginalised people as a reason for their problems. By exploring the Equality Plans, it is evident that in some of the cases, the problems are seen in the different cultures of the students and staff. One Equality Plan stated, for instance, that “In international environment people come from different cultural background where the approved types of practices vary” (“Kansainvälisessä ympäristössä ihmiset tulevat erilaisista kulttuureista ja kulttuureissa hyväksytyt toimintatavat ovat erilaisia” Centria). Instead of directing the attention towards the Finnish culture that creates discrimination and questioning our own attitudes, the problem is understood as situating outside “us”.

The same the Equality Plans stated the following: “Together we create an atmosphere, where people tolerate both the culture of Finland and the other countries (Centria)” (“Luodaan ilmapiiriä, jossa ihmiset ymmärtävät ja suvaitsevat Suomen ja muiden maiden kulttuureja”). By suggesting the majority tolerate and respect "Other" cultures, the higher education community are neither expected to understand others nor critically assess their own prejudices and stereotypes toward people "deviant" from them (Holm & Londen 2010). Similarly to the observations of Duong-Pedica (2020?) concerning Finnish universities, some Equality Plans use the concept of zero-tolerance when stating their measurements against discrimination. The prohibition of discrimination and harassment is also regarded as a solution of the Universities of Applied Sciences.

As the previous example shows, the problem is not only understood as the intolerance of Finns towards other cultures but the other way around as well. The understanding of race as a group deviating from the majority, which I introduced in the previous section, sees such deviance as a problem. In other words, despite one being different from others, they should not be discriminated. Moreover, the concept of the atmosphere becomes central; all the Equality plans highlight the importance of a good atmosphere in the promotion of equality.

One of the Equality Plans acknowledged the problem of eurocentrism in their higher education institution. However, the educational institution located the issue in the art field instead of recognising the problem to cover all the teaching and material (Turun AMK). The Equality Plan in question was also the only one recognising the need for antiracist practices in preventing conscious and subconscious discrimination.

Instead of focusing on the discriminatory practices and structures embedded in the educational institutions, the Equality Plans understood one of the issues causing discrimination to be the lack of knowledge regarding equality and equity. The problems were primarily located in the interaction between the individuals, mostly as misunderstandings or language barriers. Moreover, most of the Equality Plans considered that the information regarding the cases of harassment and discrimination should be more accessible.

### **5.3 Solutions: tolerance or concrete action?**

In this section, I examine what solutions do the Equality Plans suggest for the prevention of discrimination and harassment. The interest is especially on whether the higher education institutions focus more on talk and policies or concrete action and whether the level of action is targeted on individuals or the institution.

The general aim expressed in the Equality Plans is to offer all students equal opportunities to study and graduate on time. Most of the Equality Plans aimed at acknowledging the individual needs regarding learning difficulties, disability, or cultural and language background. When it comes to defining solutions, the Equality Plans prefer to discuss the promotion of equality rather than the opposition of discrimination and harassment. Despite acknowledging the centrality of the structures in the causing of discrimination, the solutions and measurements remain mainly on the individual level. However, the Equality Plans express willingness towards educating the students and staff to prevent and act in the cases of discrimination and harassment. The measurements for promoting equality most often aim at

Developing interactive courses of action that value diversity and support equal encounters and interaction. (original text in Finnish: Monimuotoisuutta arvostavaa ja keskustelevaa toimintakulttuuria kehitetään sekä tuetaan tasa-arvoista kohtaamista ja vuorovaikutusta, Karelia).

The discourse in the Equality Plans lies heavily on niceness, referring to the good intentions of the education providers. Niceness can make it difficult to see the structural issues beneath and to assess the structures creating subordination and differentiation critically. (Castagno 2019.) The silence around racism and ethnic discrimination may implicate an allegiance to whiteness among the higher education community. By highlighting the respect towards other cultures and continuously repeating that discrimination and harassment are not allowed in the educational institution, the actors may seek to refrain from challenging the ongoing procedures. (Castagno 2019.) Thus, in this framework, the central solution for the Equality Plans is to encourage the staff and students to value the diversity of people and emphasise that “everyone is responsible for a good atmosphere” (“Kaikki kantavat vastuunsa hyvästä ilmapiiristä”, KAMK).

Generally, the Equality Plans introduce their aims for promoting equality and then solutions for achieving the objects. For instance, the aim of one Equality Plan is “to not accept discriminatory language in any forms” (“Ei hyväksytä syrjivää puhetta missään muodossa.”), and the solution for that is “to encourage the work community for appreciative behaviour.” (Kannustetaan työyhteisöä arvostavaan käytökseen.”, Metropolia) When it came to communication, another Equality Plan (Polamk) suggest the staff and students pay attention to their language and eliminate expressions and presumptions that violate equality and equity. It appears that the higher education institution in question is aware of the potentially discriminatory prejudices and attitudes of the community, but instead of having a constructive conversation about them, ask them to be hidden.

One of the common solutions for promoting equality regarding ethnic and racialised minorities is to improve administrative communication in English. For instance, in one Equality Plan, there is a section on ethnic origin, nationality and language, and the aim is to ensure appropriately the flow of information and opportunities to participate in English. The solution is “instructions also in English, the materials in staff events in English either completely or as much as possible.” (“Ohjeet myös englanniksi, henkilöstötilaisuuksien esitysmateriaalit myös englanniksi kokonaan tai osittain mahdollisuuksien mukaan”, SeAMK). This targets one of the communicative but also institutional and administrative sources of inequality, lack of access to participate in other languages than Finnish.

Some higher education institutions acknowledge that to act against discrimination, they need to “--recognise and eliminate practices and structures that reproduce and maintain inequality” (“—tunnistaa ja poistaa käytäntöjä ja rakenteita, jotka tuottavat ja ylläpitävät eriarvoisuutta”, Diak). The same University of Applied Sciences is the only one that planned on cooperating with minority and disability organisations. One of the Equality Plans understands the process of unlearning as one of the ways to promote equality within the educational institution. (Metropolia) However, this process is not elaborated more in the rest of the plan. Another Equality Plan acknowledges that the staff should be better informed about anti-racism practices to improve their contents of the instruction.

Almost all the Equality Plans include instructions on how to act in case of discrimination and harassment, naming the job title of the person responsible for handling the situation. Such a practice improves accessibility and can encourage students and the staff to report discrimination. However, one Equality Plan suggests the victim of harassment or discrimination discuss the situation first with the discriminator, and if the situation did not solve, contact the staff of the higher education institution. In this case, the responsibility to deal with discrimination is left to the discriminated person only.

## **6. Conclusions and discussion**

The present research aimed to examine how the Equality Plans of the Finnish-language based Universities of Applied Sciences understood race and racism and what solutions were offered in opposing racism. The results indicate that the concept of race, racism, or racialisation have not landed in the discourses of the Equality Plans. Race is discussed in the documents with different synonyms and periphrasis, such as ethnicity and ethnic origin. The sources and reasons for racism are identified as attitudes of the students and staff and different habits of other cultures. Moreover, the many problems of discrimination and inequality are considered as misunderstandings due to bad communication. The solutions for racism mainly remained on the individual level, relying on the positive and acceptive atmosphere of the higher education community.

The results align with the previous studies stating that the discussion on race in Finnish policy documents remains vague and is often connected to “Others” (Hubara 2020; Rastas and Poelman 2021; Riitaoja et al. forthcoming). Moreover, as the previous studies on equality policies in Finnish educational institutions (Lappalainen and Lahelma 2016; OPH 2020; Raudasoja and Kerkola 2021) have concluded, the solutions for opposing racism are abstract, and the documents lack the understanding of intersectionality. When addressing the Equality Plans, the question of whether the

problem of inequality is in the lack of equality or in the practices that create inequality becomes central. This study indicates that the traditional values of gender equality, tolerance and the unity and homogeneity of the higher education community influence the understanding of the problems laying behind inequality. Whiteness remains unrecognised and unquestioned in higher education institutions. Furthermore, the ethnic and racialised minorities were often, in a problematic way, acknowledged as different from the white majority. Multiculturalism was viewed as enrichment to the “normal” ((Lepola 2000, Huttunen et al. 2005; Antikainen 2010; Riitaoja 2013). By using the concept of diversity, higher educational institutions could avoid approaching the issues related to race directly. The silence around race could indicate that whiteness is not considered a race, and thus, it is not essential to mention. By diminishing one of the sources of inequality and discrimination related to individual characteristics, the understanding of intersectionality and multiple discrimination remain unattainable.

Most of the Equality Plans of Finnish language-based Universities of Applied Sciences seem to follow the same pattern: citing the Act on Equality Between Women and Men and the Non-Discriminatory Act, primarily acknowledging gender equality, secondarily the other discriminated groups, and implementing vague solutions to promote equality. Mostly, the Equality Plans fail to acknowledge, for instance, Finnish citizens with foreign background, non-white Finns, and national minorities. Despite recognising essential concepts such as anti-racism, multiple discrimination and the Eurocentricity of Finnish education, the solutions to oppose discrimination and harassment and dismantle racism remain non-existent and dysfunctional at their best.

Many of the Equality Plans highlighted the equal accessibility to higher education and discussed solutions to promote it, such as the accessibility to the physical learning environment and the study materials. However, when I tested the accessibility of the Equality Plans and the instructions in the case of discrimination and harassment, many of the Universities of Applied Sciences did not offer the information on their website when searching for it through word search. If an educational institution wishes to be thoroughly inclusive and react efficiently to harassment and discrimination, they should pay more attention to how accessible the information is concerning equality.

Furthermore, in some Equality Plans, mediation is introduced as the first-hand solution to solve cases of discrimination. The person discriminated against is primarily encouraged to deal with the person discriminating them, and only secondly to contact the university administration. Such a practice pulls all the burden from the shoulder of the victim of discrimination. In addition, it has been widely

questioned (Honkasalo et al hesarissa lähisuhdeväkivallän sovittelun ongelmallisuudesta) whether using mediation in cases of physical and mental violence – that racial discrimination is about – is ethical or productive. For example, mediation programs in schools widely ignore the unequal power relations or the knowledge framework behind resulting in othering and discrimination (Juva 2019). At the university level, being, for instance, a student or a university professor, how likely is it that the student advances from the mediation tangibly? For the same reason of power imbalances, it is questionable whether the responsibility of equality measures and actions in cases of discrimination should be given to the student unions. Moreover, if the students did their own separate Equality Plan, how likely is it to widely influence university structures?

For future research, it would be interesting to compare the Finnish and English versions of Equality Plans. Since the Finnish versions of Equality Plans of the Universities of Applied Sciences hardly mention race and offer more information in English as a solution for the discrimination of ethnic and racialised minorities, perhaps the Equality Plans in English could acknowledge race better. This study states that the perspectives of critical whiteness and intersectionality should become more prominent part of the evaluations and formulations of the Equality Plans in order to find more effective ways to oppose racism and promote equality and equity.

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