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“So it is... I don't think that was racism either, but it was just a kind of ignorance.” – Providers’
Perceptions on Race, Racism and Addressing
Racism through School-based Mental Health
Services

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Abstract**Faculty:** Faculty of Social Sciences**Degree programme:** Master's Programme in Contemporary Societies**Study track:** Sociology**Author:** Ona Needelman**Title:** "So it is... I don't think that was racism either, but it was just a kind of ignorance." – Providers' perceptions on race, racism and addressing racism through School-based mental health support**Level:** Master's Degree**Month and year:** December, 2021**Number of pages:** 76**Keywords:** Racism, white supremacy, mental health, education, critical race theory, anti-racism, critical discourse analysis**Supervisor or supervisors:** Elina Paju**Where deposited:** University of Helsinki**Additional information:****Abstract:**

This study explores how mental health providers at schools recognize, conceptualize and address racism and its impact on persons of colour (POC) students' mental health. The aim was to produce knowledge on what kinds of challenges "white" structures of school-based mental health present for practicing and understanding anti-racism. The main research questions were: 1) *How do mental health professionals in schools view the influence racism has on mental health and well-being of POC pupils?* 2) *How do school mental health professionals make sense of, and deal with, issues of racism faced by POC students and which challenges do they face in doing so?* 3) *How do school mental health professionals conceptualize anti-racism as part of their professional roles?* The main goal for this thesis was to draw attention to and heighten awareness around the new ways in which both organizations and employees must develop and approach anti-racist student welfare services in schools.

Knowledge on racism and mental health from Finland produced by POC writers and activists was utilized, as academic research of this topic in Finland is limited. Academic research on racism in Finnish society and schools, and on racism's impacts on mental health from other countries are introduced in the literature review. The main theory used throughout the research process was critical race theory (CRT), including critical whiteness studies.

Eight voluntary in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted, with five school psychologists and four social workers all working in basic education in the metropolitan area. Three main discourses emerged from conducting critical discourse analysis, which I labelled as follows: Equality and tolerance, personal awareness and belonging. Key findings were that colorblind ideology perpetuates white supremacy, anti-racism mainly relies on individuals' awareness of racism, and reactive strategies surpassed proactive anti-racist practices

Based on the findings, colorblind ideology and reliance on individual awakenings make anti-racism targeting both prejudice and structural racism vulnerable. Recognizing racism challenges all adults with power in schools. Anti-racism will require more activism and collective action within organizations to commit professionals practicing in the field to address racism through their work.

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“The opposite of racist isn't 'not racist.' It is 'anti-racist.' What's the difference? One endorses either the idea of a racial hierarchy as a racist, or racial equality as an anti-racist. One either believes problems are rooted in groups of people, as a racist, or locates the roots of problems in power and policies, as an anti-racist. One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an anti-racist. There is no in-between safe space of 'not racist.’”

– **Ibram X. Kendi (2019), How to Be an Antiracist**

1. Introduction

Finland is no exception to the rest of the “West” regarding historical, structural, institutional, and interpersonal racism, all of which uphold racial inequality in our society. Racism research on its prevalence in Finnish schools has clearly shown that racism is widespread in, although many researchers who have touched upon racism and racial discrimination tend to prefer “ethnicity” to “race” and centralize “multiculturalism”. Avoiding topics of race and racism has historical roots in Finland, which has contributed to ideologies of equality and colorblindness that have kept anti-racist movements initiated by oppressed minorities in Finland from becoming more mainstream up until recent years. National narratives of Finnish exceptionalism and equality have helped sustain the most powerful and dominant form of racism that lies in oppressive structures, including schools, keeping it less visible than your individual examples of overt racism. Even more hidden are the ways institutional racism through policies and practices is perpetuated and protected to promote the interests of the racial status quo.

Racism research that specifically investigates its impact on young people’s mental health has been very limited in Finland. In the United States, UK, and our neighboring country Sweden the topic has been researched for some time already. More research from Finland is needed to better understand and address the impacts of racism on children and young people’s mental health in Finnish schools, especially since for many young people, school is the primary provider of mental health resources.

In this thesis, I complement research on racism and mental health by studying through qualitative interviews, how mental health providers at schools perceive and address the different levels of racism and its impact on communal and individual wellbeing of students. I drew from critical race theory (CRT) from the initial stages of planning the research up until writing the conclusions for potential research opportunities in the future. The central research questions of this thesis were the following: 1) *How do mental health professionals in schools view the influence racism has on mental health and well-being of persons of color (POC) pupils?* 2) *How do school mental health professionals make sense of, and deal with, issues of racism faced by POC students and which challenges do they face in doing so?* 3) *How do school mental health professionals conceptualize anti-racism as part of their professional roles?*

Mental health professionals who work in school systems are a major asset in the school community, as they work directly with students and their families as well as teachers, principals, and other staff on both providing individualized support and improving communal wellbeing through participating in developmental work as experts. In the metropolitan area, each school in basic education has a multidisciplinary student welfare team that include a school social worker and school psychologist who belong to a separate professional network under the Educational Division. As providers of expert knowledge on mental health and wellbeing for the whole school community, school mental health professionals have the power to initiate and promote discussions on social justice topics and be proactive agents of change in schools.

Research has clearly indicated how having a migrant background affects learning outcomes and that both institutional racism and racist attitudes are among the main reasons that students from migrant background fall behind “native Finns” in education (Jauhola & Vehviläinen, 2015; OECD, 2019; Kalalahti, Varjo, Holmberg, Jahnukainen & Kivirauma, 2019). Other major factors that research strongly suggests has an impact on learning outcomes, academic success, and wellbeing, are a sense of belonging and its obverse, social exclusion, both of which, it is claimed, are heavily influenced by systemic racism (Souto, 11; Stovall & McGee, 2015; Atabong, 2017). Some of the ways in which schools perpetuate majority (white) interests, include through the homogenous representation in textbooks, where “white” histories and perspectives are taught, where dominant cultural beliefs and values are maintained and racialization that affects how students are guided, referred to services, supported and disciplined.

Research, activism and narratives on racism and mental health clearly address how experiencing racism can provoke stress responses that resemble post-traumatic stress disorder and cause multiple other negative mental health effects such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (e.g., Priest, Paradies, Trenerry, Truong, Saffron & Kelly, 2013; Moua, 2019). Experiencing racism from teachers and other professionals in education increases the likelihood of having negative attitudes and lower motivation towards school. For other non-white students, navigating racial inequity whilst trying to excel academically may, also have adverse effects on mental health and overall wellbeing and will in turn directly impact academic performance and student. School is a critical environment for intellectual, social, and emotional development and a place where the process of racial identity development and attempts at belonging take place.

During the summer of 2020, when the footage of the murder of George Floyd by a police officer went global, the Black Lives Matter movement quickly garnered hundreds of thousands of protesters in cities

worldwide including cities in Finland, to voice out loud that racism is a global pandemic and not just an American problem. The previous widely attended protest in Finland “Stop this game” against racism and right-wing extremism had taken place four years earlier, when a young man was killed in public during an altercation where he took a stand against racism. Both political and grassroots people of color (POC) activists have been gaining ground for racial justice in Finland for many years prior to and after the summer of 2020, so much so, that many institutions, organizations, municipalities, and governments had to respond to numerous calls for anti-racist actions.

In the summer of 2020, the city of Helsinki announced that they are going to hold a total of 165 anti-racism workshops during the subsequent two years for providing tools to help teachers in early childhood education, basic education, and secondary education, recognize and address racism wherever it appears. In September 2021, the city of Helsinki announced that it has joined the “I am an anti-racist” campaign organized by the Finnish Ministry of Justice and Ombudsman for Equality, which states how studies show that racism, discrimination, and harassment are more common in Finland than in other European countries. In October 2021, Sanna Marin’s Finnish Government approved a new program based on existing research on racism, “Equal Finland”, aimed at tackling institutional racism and discrimination in Finland, which includes a 52-point action plan and eight key objectives to be implemented from 2021 to 2023.

Investigating how mental health professionals at schools recognize, conceptualize and address racism and its impact on persons of color (POC) mental health is important for producing knowledge on what kinds of challenges the “white” structures of school-based mental health might present for anti-racist practices. More knowledge is also needed for promoting the mental health of POC students and for investigating to what extent POC students’ mental health-related needs for support are accommodated. As a school social worker, I have personally observed that racism receives very little attention in our professional networks. As different organizations such as the Education Division that school-based mental health services are a part of are eagerly participating in campaigns such as “I am an antiracist”, it is necessary to start looking into how white supremacy is maintained and reproduced in the fields we work in and how do we as professionals recognize and understand racism and its effects on our students. Declaring our work as anti-racist in nature does not carry any significance without firstly recognizing and discussing racism and secondly considering what an antiracist approach in school-based mental health services could look like. What could, for example, “I am an antiracist school social worker” or “I am an antiracist school psychologist” mean in practice?

In the hope of shedding some light on different forms of racism in mental health services, Postdoctoral researcher Tuuli Kurki, with support from the Academy of Finland is leading the project, “Racism, mental health and young people of color” (RaMePOC)ⁱ, where she has been cooperating with professionals who provide mental health services to young people of color. My goals for this thesis are twofold: to help draw attention to and heighten awareness around the new ways in which school psychologists and social workers could approach anti-racist mental health in schools and to contribute to the aforementioned research project “RaMePOC”, with which I was involved throughout the research process.

For context, I will first present a review of the literature on racism in Finland, racism in Finnish schools and the effects of racism on mental health. In the literature I also include knowledge on racism and mental health produced by people of color (POC) in Finland that is both grounded in research and lived experiences. The main theoretical framework of this study, critical race theory (CRT), is committed to draw from the experiential knowledge of people of color as data. I continue by introducing the main concepts race, racism, white supremacy and anti-racism, and the main theoretical framework (CRT). In the methodology chapter, I describe in detail how I conducted the interviews, the ethical considerations encountered and how I analyzed the rich qualitative data that I collected. In the analysis chapter, I present the following three main discourses which I located from the coded transcribed interviews: Equality and tolerance, personal awareness and belonging. The analysis chapter is followed by a discussion of the discourse analysis in relation to the central research questions. Finally, I draw some conclusions on what kind of research is of potential relevance in the future and address the limitations this study had for the produced knowledge.

1.2 Researcher positionality

Reflections on my own social locations, personal experiences, personal and professional values, and positions of power is important to include in the introduction for addressing how my positionality influenced the whole research process. I consider my most relevant researcher positions me being a “white” researcher, a mother of two black children, being in an interracial relationship, being a school social worker and being a colleague of the research participants. All personal characteristics, beliefs and political ideologies, experiential knowledge and biases may influence the research. For this research, I will mainly focus on the positioning’s that I considered to have most directly influenced building rapport

with respondents, guiding the interviews, discussing some of the questions together with interviewees and both interpreting and giving meaning to the discourses and drawing conclusions.

First, I lived in a diverse neighborhood growing up and I have witnessed firsthand, many individual examples of racism my friends have encountered over the years. I have always considered myself belonging to the “not a racist” category and as someone who values social justice and human rights. I remember thinking how some people are racists, and some are not. I was raised to always challenge racism when I see it and I’ve learned that I am able and capable of doing so. For me, racism was more about the “other” and “racists”, not about myself and other “not racists”. Up until few years ago, I never considered how racism has not only impacted my friends but shaped my own life as a white person as well. Even though my social environment was diverse, I would remain oblivious to any notion of “whiteness” per se, until later, when I received more, and began to get more educated, and develop my own critical lens.

Being in an interracial relationship and being a mother of two black children in Finland, I have been forced to face my “whiteness” daily, facts that spurred me to begin educating myself, which wasn’t hard given all the free and easily accessible anti-racist education at my fingertips. I will keep my own experience of “whiteness” limited here and shift the focus instead to what the meanings of my “whiteness” carries for this research. That said, I think the “personal awareness” discourse that I located in the interviews I conducted including my own expressions of “personal awareness” discourse is important for the discussion of the limitations for eliminating racism of such a starting point. In my opinion, it is concerning that white allyship in combating racism seems to be strongly connected to personal ties with racism through interracial relationships, for example. Personal growth and individual awareness have their limitations in addressing systemic racism if individuals are not committed by their environment to learn.

As part of the journey of becoming an anti-racist and as a professional working in an environment where racism is strongly present, analyzing one’s individual complicity and “whiteness” is important for the collegial researcher-participant relationship. The questions I ask, the conversations I try to spark during the interview and the purposes I have for doing so are all influenced by both my subject position as a member of the majority group and professional network. I discuss this approach further in the methodology chapter, but in short, my research aim led me to combine active listening with open-ended questions and comments on interviewees’ responses. This required all parties to make observations of the content of our discussion regarding racism, antiracism, and the power we have in our professional

contexts. In some of the interviews, I was consciously aware of all the background research and education I have had about the themes and how this might affect emotional responses brought up in situations, where I may interpret some responses as narrow or ignorant. A respectful attitude towards interviewees who are voluntarily participating is extremely important, especially since all of us have the power to form alliances and initiate calls for transforming our organization and workplaces for addressing racism and the current barriers inherent in doing so.

My personal background and subject positions most definitely connect to what motivated me to research racism the area of school-based mental health. In no way am I trying to conduct value-free research for producing knowledge without an agenda. I want to use my professional position and power to produce knowledge that could be utilized in achieving practical results, initiating more discussions on race and racism in our professional networks, addressing the possibilities mental health workers have in their workplaces for promoting anti-racism and develop better practices for anti-racist mental health work with clients. Especially during this time, when the government has launched a new strategy for eliminating racism and our organization is participating in the “I’m an anti-racist campaign”, upper-level and concrete anti-racist actions are needed and professionals within their organizations need to make suggestions as a collective for achieving upper-level structural changes.

2. Review of the Literature

2.1 Racism in Finland

In this chapter, I discuss racism in Finnish society and research on racism especially in the context of education. I will then continue to discuss anti-racist organizations and movements in Finland, which have gained more momentum especially after the murder of George Floyd, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in Finland and antiracist youth activism. The central research questions of this study derive from the lens of critical race theory (CRT) that racism is ordinary, ingrained into society, difficult to recognize and has to be actively contested on all levels of society. Social justice initiatives and movements are also essential in eliminating racism and transforming the relationship between race, racism and power. (Delgado & Stefansovic, 2011).

In Finland, like many other Nordic countries who are generally praised globally for happiness levels, welfare systems and equality, racism is at one of the highest levels compared to all other EU countries. In fact, in the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights' study "Being Black in the EU" released in 2018, 63 percent of people of African descent in Finland have experienced racially motivated harassment, compared to a group average of 30 percent in the 12 European Union states surveyed (FRA, 2018). Another notable survey *Racism and discrimination – everyday experiences for People of African descent in Finland* was released in 2020 by Finland's Non-discrimination Ombudsman and concluded that discrimination and harassment occur in public, in education, in the labor market, workplaces and public services. 70 % of respondents recalled discrimination and racism in education and almost 30 % had experienced physical violence at school. According to the survey, educational institutions fail to address racism and structural racism is deeply ingrained in the system. (Non-discrimination ombudsman, 2020.)

When researching and discussing racism in Finnish contemporary society, historical roots of racism in Finland and how public discourse around racism typically revolves around migration movements and multiculturalism needs to be addressed. Racism discourse centering around immigration also fails to include racialized minority groups in Finland such as the Sami people, Roma people and non-white Finns born in Finland. Racism is not directly connected to migration movements and nor is it their direct consequence. In Finland and especially after the refugee "crisis" in 2016, immigration has been a highly politicized and polarizing topic. Immigration seems to have become the center of public discourses surrounding racism, which completely neglects the racist and racializing practices, perceptions and representations that have already been present in Finnish society and daily life for centuries. (Keskinen, Seikkula, Mkwesha & Aghayeva, 2021.)

2.2 Finland's racial past, present, and Finnish exceptionalism

Scholarship in the Nordic countries on colonial histories, the development of national identities based on cultural homogeneity, the long histories and racialization of longstanding ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples and histories of migration has steadily increased during the 20th century (e.g., Keskinen, 2019). Emerging scholarship on Finland's racial history is important for locating how it shapes racial hierarchies in the present and how racial oppression is reproduced in different ways according to changing national narratives that also shape society. For example, the narrative (which is a myth), that frames the national identity of the Finns as both a culturally and racially homogenous people frames

national identity can dangerously legitimize racism today (Tervonen, 2017). The myth of “homogeneity” and “Finnishness” as something naturally existing has also framed racism discourse as a product of waves of immigration to Finland, not as something attached to nation building and political nationalism.

In addition to discussing Finland’s position among other Nordic countries in the colonial power structures and inclusion in notions of Eurocentric modernity and the processes involved, it is also important to recognize the colonial and racial history of Finns and Finland as a territory (Keskinen, 2019). Racist and assimilatory state actions upon the Sami and Roma people in Finland continue to affect these subordinated groups and the racism right up to the present day (Keskinen et al., 2021). Indigenous scholars in Finland such as Rauna Kuokkanen (2015, 2020) has written excellent analyses on Finland’s nation building processes that have included and still include the racializing processes of indigenous people considered racially and culturally inferior. These racialization processes are not a part of history lessons in Finnish schools.

Finnish exceptionalism

Important scholarly work that has focused on the Nordic countries’ colonial past and in particular the influence that past has had on the formation of national identities in the Nordic region is very significant for contemporary anti-racist movements. Calling out structural racism requires looking at how and what kind of racism notions of “exceptionalism” produces, because the structural inequalities and racism derived from the colonial period become recreated, transformed and projected onto different racialized groups in the present day. (Loftsdottir & Jensen, 2012; Keskinen, Rastas & Tuori, 2009.) In researcher Alemanji Aminkeng Atabong’s (2016:25) words, “exceptionalism acts as a barrier to address issues of racism for both the racializing and the racialized, as the racialized are condemned to second-class citizenship”. A key mission of anti-racist work is to recognize and dismantle barriers that allow racism to breed freely.

Racism researcher Anna Rastas (2005, 2007, 2012) in her ethnographic studies and studies on textual representations on racism and Finnish discourse concerning the “N- word” suggests using “Finnish exceptionalism” in research for its descriptive potential. By describing how selective historical interpretations and involvements in racializing processes are constructed and used strategically for “selective amnesias” and excusing the exclusion of those not part of true “Finnishness” through national discourse, we realize how “exceptionalism” discourse prevents us from recognizing racist ideologies connected with nationalism as well (Rastas 2012:91).

Looking at the roots of Finnish (and Nordic) national narratives producing particular self-images, in addition to highlighting the differences compared to the rest of Europe, it is also interesting to look at the pit between “Nordic exceptionalism” and racism in the United States through the lens of anti-racism. Transnational social justice movements such as Black Lives Matter have activated politicians and policy makers on a national and municipal level in Finland to combat racism (and for some politicians, to combat anti-racism as well). Racial incidents especially from the US, and shared on social media are distributed globally, have the effect of mobilizing communities beyond borders. It is very likely that Finnish children learn more about the history of racism in the US than the colonization of the indigenous Sami people and racial practices inflicted upon them. The reason I highlight the cultural power of the US here is to reflect on how global anti racist movements could transform into national and local interventions, which investigate the more subtle but powerful forms of racism, such as white supremacy, “colorblindness” and structural racism in Finland.

Contemporary racisms in Finland

Currently, as suggested in the figures presented earlier on surveys conducted on racism, people of color (POC) and individuals experience targeted racism in Finland on an ongoing and daily basis. Politicians in Finland have also been able to express overtly racist and racializing speech publicly without any repercussions, there has been ethnic profiling and racism among Finnish police and racist language is still relatively common in the daily lives of Finns (Keskinen, Aminkeng Atabong, Himanen, Kivijärvi, Osazee, Pöyhölä & Rousku, 2018).

An important feature characterizing present day racism in the Nordic countries is the claim of racism not having existed due to the “imagined” non-involvement of the Nordic countries in colonialism, which creates similar forms of “post-racism” discourse found in the US, where racism is said to have been conquered in the past and no longer exist (Loftsdottir, 2021:42). Racism is commonly (but falsely) understood in Finland as a relatively new phenomenon that has “come” here through increased migration in the 1990’s despite Finland’s history of racism regarding its minority groups (Puuronen, 2011), which connects to our current challenges in recognizing and addressing different forms of racism. The term “race” is also not used in Finland due to its negative historical connotation, especially from World War 2, reference to biological racism and ambiguous meaning (Rastas, 2007). Many scholars researching racism in Finland have pointed out how the absence of the term “race” can lead to silencing racism and experiences of racialization (Puuronen, 2011; Rastas, 2007; Keskinen, 2019), since the invented construction “race” is still very real in society in its detrimental impact on people’s lives.

In the place of “race” in relevant discourses and policies on racism “culture” or “ethnicity” are typically used. “Immigrant” nowadays seems to be the most popular term used as a racialized category referring to non-white people (Puuronen, 2011), which marks immigrants as a problem especially now as populism and nationalism is increasing. In present day Finland and many other countries in Europe, populists’ anti-immigration rhetoric and nationalism based on “whiteness”, migration “crises”, eurocentrism, and racist exceptionalism (Loftsdottir, 2021:46), has emboldened and mobilized racists during the past decade. Polarization on immigration (where racism is denied and discourse is labelled as nationalism or common sense) has sparked more racism targeting racialized Finns’, as being responsible for the “economic burden” and so-called integration of “foreigners” and “economic” asylum seekers (Keskinen, 2016). Those who do not support these manifestations of racism may fit more easily under the “not racists” banner. “New racisms” then, where white supremacy is less visible but a powerful force, freely continue to operate.

Since last year and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, advocacy for anti-racism has broadened from NGO’s to for example a current nation-wide “I am antiracist” campaign funded by The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (2021). The campaign seems to follow in the footsteps of previous mainstream antiracism campaigns where individual responsibility in intervening when witnessing racist conduct is highlighted (Seikkula, 2019). As many cities, institutions and organizations are also participating in this campaign, it will be interesting to follow whether and how anti-racist policies, acts and strategies will be further developed.

Like in North America, and the rest of the “West”, it seems like “new racisms” such as colorblind racism and ideology, and cultural racism in particular, dominates in Finland regardless of different histories, regional differences and the obvious racist conduct that also persists (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). However, even though racism research in Finland is still insufficient and antiracism here is “new” (at least in the eyes of the majority, even though people from the Roma community have been combating racism for decades), global social change movements and anti-racist initiatives building power will hopefully speed up implementing anti-racist actions in society and its institutions.

2.3 Racism research in Finland

Racism discourse is relatively new in Finland compared to most “Western” countries and racism research only began in the 1990’s, even though racism in Finland is historically deeply rooted. In 2015, a first ever antiracist research network in Finland was created by researchers from multiple Finnish universities. The network “connects researchers interested in processes of racialization, (anti-)racism and they intersect with differences and inequalities related to ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality and generation”. (Raster.fi.)

During the past few years, there have been more movements initiated by persons of color (POC) activists and writers in Finland for more racism research, which considers the diverse pool of not only recently migrated Finns and immigrants, but also non-white Finns born in Finland whose lives racism has always impacted. “Multicultural schools” and “multicultural environments” have usually been chosen as the research field when investigating racism in education, which leaves a gap in research on white spaces and how racism operates and impacts racialized persons in dominantly white environments.

Racism researchers, POC activists and writers have also highlighted the gap in racism research in schools that would place a large focus on racialization processes and racial hierarchies. More research is needed for developing anti-racist education and support on a structural level, research gaps this study will also compliment. (Seikkula, 2015; Aminkeng Atabong 2016,2017.) Anti-racist activism has also begun to spawn more research interest in structural racism in education, such as racism in counselling and special education (e.g., Souto 2020).

In Finland, studies I found concerning research on how discrimination and/or racism influences the mental health and wellbeing of racialized children were scarce and mostly on immigrants in Finland. The reason I write “discrimination and/or racism” is that most studies seem to center on perceived discrimination and its effects on wellbeing, where “discrimination” entails disability, ethnicity, religion, sexuality etc. Racism research in Finnish school seem to be mostly contextualized within immigration and different ethnic groups (e.g., Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, Jaakkola & Reuter, 2006; Souto, 2011; Wikström, Haikkola & Laatikainen, 2014.). Topics have tended to mostly center around integration, multiculturalism, identity development, belonging and group relations. Research on racism explicitly regarding its effects on wellbeing has been limited in Finland.

Next, I will introduce a few studies that do raise interesting questions relating to racism, wellbeing and support. In their article “Discrimination, harassment and racism in Finnish lower secondary schools” Zacheus et al., (2016) examined 9th graders’ experiences in relation to discrimination, harassment, and racism in Finnish schools with a high number of students with an “immigrant background. The results highlighted how experiences of otherness were strongest among those with a “first-generation immigrant background” and how there was a clear link between discrimination and dislike of school. Half of students born in Finland with an “immigrant background” did not identify as Finnish. (Zacheus et al.,2018.) The most interesting takeaways from this study was the question of to what extent does racism impact students’ sense of belonging and wellbeing and which groups are racialized and which are not by researchers. Comparing young peoples’ racial experiences of immigrant and Finnish origins might exclude experiences of for example, black Finnish people, Sami people and Roma people.

The findings of the study revealed how youth who had experienced racism felt they needed to downplay and minimize their experiences. Racism was also perceived differently by white “majority” Finns and those with an “immigrant background”. For example, racist humor was not considered as “racism” by the white Finnish students. This “unrecognized” or apparent unintended racism was reported to influence the wellbeing and daily lives of those dealing with racism. (Zacheus et al., 2018.) These findings indicate that prevailing discourses related to racism that dismiss and/or do not recognize different forms of racism or downplay racism as a problem can act as a huge barrier for children and young people, when it comes to sharing their experiences.

Minna Säävälä (2012) has examined how school welfare personnel, native language teachers, and migrant parents conceptualize the wellbeing of migrant children in Finland. Similar to this thesis, Säävälä focused on the relationship between discursive statements and social relations through investigating what factors in social reality uphold these conceptualizations or make them possible (Säävälä, 2012:34).

School welfare professionals had different views than migrant parents on the risk factors and resources of school wellbeing of migrant children, where school welfare professionals did not view discrimination, negative attitudes or bullying as a particular problem contrary to how migrant parents saw these factors. Säävälä found in her research that it was difficult for school personnel to recognize the power imbalance and discrimination between children from the majority and minority groups. Surprisingly among all interviewee groups, the most opposing views on wellbeing factors were between school mental health practitioners (psychologists and social workers) and parents. Parents viewed wellbeing as being based foremost on equity, whilst the welfare professionals viewed cultural difference as a factor

in emotional wellbeing skills “migrant children” have compared to the skills majority Finns have. (Säävälä, 2012:46.)

Anna Rastas’ (2007) dissertation *Rasismi lasten ja nuorten arjessa – Transnationaalit juuret ja monikulttuuristuva Suomi (Racism in the everyday lives of children young people – Transnational roots and multicultural Finland)* was extremely relevant for the central research questions of this study, because of the constructed focus group that Rastas calls “people with transnational roots”. POC youth includes both recently migrated immigrants, Finns with an immigrant background, refugees, non-white Finns, indigenous Finns etc. Especially in education, where racism is typically framed through cultural differences and prejudice, I found Rastas’ study to capture those racial experiences that cannot be explained by cultural differences. The topic of people of color (POC) who have grown up in Finland as Finnish citizens and who have socialized with Finnish culture and still have their “Finnishness” and belonging constantly questioned by society has been raised by many POC activists and writers in Finland. (Rastas 2007:180-185.)

For finding practices and strategies for developing anti-racist mental health support further, investigating racial encounters and negotiating racializing categorizations through the subjects’ perspective reveal how limited the coping strategies for children especially in school are (Rastas 2007:155). The meaning making and strategies racialized children employ in different racializing encounters may help in producing counter-discourses and strategies for opposing racist practices through giving more attention to the deficits in school environments that leave children confronting racism alone without any supportive collectivities. It is also important to ask, what role does school based mental health carry in the process, as POC activists and mental health practitioners have begun to raise more awareness in Finland on the diverse effects racism can have on mental health, in which Finland is very much behind (see eg. Moua, 2019; Mahadura & Özberkan, 2018; Eid & Moua, 2019).

Countering racism as an individual does require “extra effort” and engaging in race-related situations, whether one wants it or not. Also, children and young people have diverse support systems, where some find more protective factors such as transnational ties and race representation in one’s environment versus others navigating white spaces with less support. From a mental health and wellbeing perspective, having to negotiate belonging constantly and navigating white spaces as racialized other can lead to conditions such as stress, fatigue, anxiousness, and trauma (McGee & Stovall, 2015). This also points to the gap in racism research in Finland in predominantly white spaces, as

research from education tends to focus on “multicultural schools” and schools with the most diverse demographic of students.

2.4 Racism and Mental Health

So far, academic research on racism and mental health and the knowledge of mental health support that understands how racism can cause mental and physical symptoms has been limited in Finland in comparison to countries such as the US, UK, Australia, and Sweden. Despite the scarcity of academic research on racism and mental health in Finland, activism for the past years on racism, mental health and POC communities has taken place in Finland. POC mental health experts and POC activists have started sharing information and their knowledge for promoting social change. Different anti-racist organizations and collectives formed by POC are also raising awareness and sharing resources on racism and mental health, through social media collectives and collaborations such as @mixedfinns, @ruskeattytotmedia, @ghdhelsinki and @soco helsinki.

Michaela Moua, a solution-based therapist and expert on racism and mental health, has been educating people, especially persons of color (POC), on post-traumatic stress disorder that can also be caused by long-term exposure to racism, othering, and marginalization, and other mental health-related symptoms caused by racism including shame, depression, low self-esteem, anxiety and social fears. Moua has also criticized the lack of knowledge and tools mental health services and professionals possess for supporting POC clients with mental health issues that are connected to racism and the lack of knowledge of professionals in general of racism’s effects on mental health. (See e.g., Tolonen, 24.9.2019; Kaukinen & Moua, 19.3.2020; Koljonen, 5.3.2020.) Leif Hagert, a Roma activist, has also written and spoken about the trauma and fear the Roma community, who have faced racism in Finland for decades and are still very strongly discriminated against, have to survive with and how racism affects the mental health of Roma youth especially (Hagert, 10.9.2018; Mahadura&Özberkan, 22.11.2018).

Academic research on racism and mental health has been a growing area of research in especially the US, the UK and Australia. Consistent relationships between racism and race-based discrimination and negative child, adolescent and adult mental health wellbeing outcomes have been shown in various studies in different countries (Priest et al., 2013; Williams, 2013; Griffith, Jones & Stewart, 2019 ;Rastas, 2007 etc.) The results research has yielded of racism’s impact on young people’s mental wellbeing,

determinants of mental health care use for racial and ethnic minority youth and disparities in providing adequate mental health care services highlight the urgent need for further investigating racism and whiteness of mental health services. Next, I will introduce some academic studies I found most relevant for the research questions of this study and especially for utilizing critical race theory in investigating the consequences of racism on mental health.

Studies from different countries and large literature reviews consistently reveal the relationship between racism and negative wellbeing and mental health outcomes for children, young people and adults (Priest et al., 2013; Paradies, 2006; Williams & Mohammed, 2013; Williams, 2018; Pachter & Coll, 2009; Berry, Londoño, Tobón, & Njoroge, 2021). For shortly providing an overview of research findings on connections between reported racism, mental health and wellbeing, I draw from an international systematic review of 121 epidemiological studies that examine relationships between “reported racial discrimination and child and youth health” by Naomi Priest, Yin Paradies, Brigid Trener, Mandy Truong, Saffron Karlsen and Yvonne Kelly (2013). Their review revealed consistent positive relationships between racism and negative mental health outcomes such as anxiety, depression and psychological distress as well as negative relationships between racism and positive mental health outcomes, such as high self-esteem and self-worth (Priest et al., 2013:122). Self-esteem was both a key factor as a mediator of negative mental health outcomes and as a protective outcome itself, with factors such as ethnic and cultural identity, internalized racism, ethnic/racial affirmation and sense of belonging mediating self-esteem. (Priest et al., 2013:122.) Strong evidence showing how perceived racism affects mental health clearly calls for more research in this area that investigates various racism-related factors in different contexts that contribute to racial and ethnic mental health disparities.

Worth mentioning here is an article *Perceived Ethnic/Racial Discrimination among Fifth-Grade Students and Its Association with Mental Health*, because this study sought to describe the prevalence, characteristics, and mental health problems of children who experience perceived racial/ethnic discrimination (Coker, Elliott, Kanouse, Grunbaum, Schwebel, Gilliland, Tortolero, Peskin, & Schuster, 2009). Unsurprisingly, findings showed that racism is not an unordinary experience among fifth graders and although associations were found between racism and four different mental health problems, the strongest and most consistent association between across non-white racialized groups was between perceived racism and depressive symptoms. Particular attention to discrimination should be given when evaluating children for mental health disorders and since most children who experience racism,

experience it at school, these discussions on evaluation should entail intensive collaboration with schools. (Coker et al., 2009:884.)

A significant challenge when investigating the effects of racism on wellbeing is taking into account how all different forms of racism (structural, interpersonal and internalized racism) may influence individuals and communities simultaneously. Especially internalized racism, which might go unrecognized by those experiencing it and structural racism that might go unchallenged, be taken for granted or be guarded heavily by majority racial status quo may not be fully captured in studies (Priest et al., 2013:116). Research also suggests that racism is more likely to be downplayed and underreported by those who have experienced it than vice versa (Kaiser&Major, 2006; Rastas, 2007).

Research on racism and mental health does suggest that certain protective factors and skills such as sharing experiences safely, processing feelings, having a strong sense of racial and/or cultural identity and having communality can help people cope with the negative effects of racism. The costs for the individual, for example their wellbeing or mental health, whose belonging is constantly under question and who has to have a toolkit of strategies to navigate and negotiate these situations tend to remain on the outskirts of research. (Mossakowski, 2003.)

William Smith (2007) has introduced a concept “racial battle fatigue” for describing the stress associated with being black in predominantly white educational environments. Ebony McGee and David Stovall (2015) in their article *Reimagining Critical Race Theory in Education: Mental Health, Healing, and the Pathway to a Liberatory Praxis* explore the role mental health can play in mediating educational consequences in predominantly white environments. Their work emphasizes how the complex layer of racism creates a context in which POC students may encompass resilience and grit whilst simultaneously acting as a rationale to possibly dismiss long-term mental health outcomes.

We know that racism does affect mental health. I have met white colleagues working at predominantly white schools saying, that racism does not exist there, which makes one think of what kinds of experiences the few POC students have in these environments. Among the interviewees for this study some professionals also drew from their experiences of constantly navigating racialized encounters and microaggressions, emphasizing in the interviews how the process of healing from racial battle fatigue and institutional racism requires significant internal commitment from the individual.

Discourse on resilience and grit, in Finnish “Sisu”, is an asset, but it also important to question as Stovall and McGee (2015) do, to what degree are these traits healthy and is it sustainable to ask marginalized

students to become even more resilient. Should we rather or simultaneously direct efforts towards anti-racism and not assume any student should compromise their mental and physical health through having to use traditional coping skills for racism on top of working hard in school? Traits such as grit and resilience are valuable in stressful situations that have the potential to negatively affect all students and their wellbeing but having to manage racism is not something that should be accepted as a necessity for being a successful student. Mental health activism during the past recent years in Finland is also combating the notion that people of color (POC) should have to, as individuals, learn coping skills instead of society focusing on eliminating racism.

3. Theoretical framework

In Finland, so-called “New racism” that refers to more subtle and covert forms found in contemporary “post-racial” society, has not been widely theorized and as previous chapters present, racism research has been limited apart from a few scholars that have careers in researching Finnish racism. Although I draw most of the theoretical framework for this study from scholars whose careers have been based mostly either in the US or UK, I find their theoretical tools fitting for analyzing racism and anti-racism in Finland. Since Finland lacks a long tradition in anti-racism in comparison to countries such as the US and is still at the very basic level of recognizing systemic racism, I found the theoretical tools derived from critical race theory developed in countries where longer traditions of antiracism exist, excellent for uncovering subtle yet powerful racism discourses in Finland.

3.1 Main concepts

Race and racism

To begin to understand the characteristics of racism, it’s necessary to look at the word “race”. Through the concept of race as a social construct we can perhaps begin to understand how racism has been able to prevail and taken on new contemporary guises, even though the colonial “West” has for decades already agreed that race does not exist. Where research in Finland is concerned, the word “race” has been avoided, because some believe that using it has in fact enabled racial segregation and by

extension, racism (Rastas, 2007). Many racism researchers in Finland have also noted how the absence of race terminology in Finland makes recognizing and talking about racism challenging. Throughout this study, I use the term persons of color (POC) that refers to all individuals and groups racialized as non-white in Finland.

Historically, “race” has been used for the purpose of classifying some groups of people as inferior and some as superior for empowering those classified or considered superior. Race has nothing to do with biology but exists in contemporary society as a man-made “social construct”. This construction, sociologists argue, means that it’s based on human interaction, identity assigned or transferred to groups of people who share similar visible traits or features, and not scientific fact. People do of course look different, but the values that are allocated to difference comes from the culture and society they are socialized into. (Zevallos, 2017.) As a product of colonialism and other domination projects that have followed, the social construction of race that has been underpinned by an ideology that promotes white people as superior has materialized into racial structures on all societal levels.

I draw here from Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s definition of racism, which I expand on more in the next chapter. According to Bonilla-Silva, racism is about practices and behaviors that produce a racial structure, “a network of social relations at social, political, economic, and ideological levels” that shape life out comes and through transformation reproduces systemic advantages and disadvantages for dominant and subordinated groups. Therefore, “racism as a form of social organization places subjects in common social locations”. (Bonilla-Silva 2015:1360.) He therefore calls for racism researchers to shift their focus from the prejudice of individuals to looking at the mechanisms and practices that produce the racial structure and inequality, especially since new forms of racism operate in more subtle and seemingly “non-racial” ways yet continue to produce inequality for racialized groups that affect life chances.

It is important to note that racial categories just like other socially constructed categories such as gender, are fluid and may vary in different nations. Racial categories may also change. Race is constantly responding to culture, time, and place. The difference between race and ethnicity is that ethnicity refers to cultural groups that share bonds through for example language and traditions, whereas race rests on perceptions of physical traits and is a social category imposed from the outside. Racialization therefore is the process where individuals are categorized into racial groups whether or not they recognize this as meaningful. (Zevallos, 2017.) In Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s (2001) words, “Racism produced (and continues to produce) “races” out of peoples who were not so before”.

Although there is a difference between ethnicity and race, many contemporary race scholars include “cultural racism” as a new form of racism that has also increased because of anti-immigration discourse and recent right-winged populism. According to Bonilla-Silva (2018), cultural racism is one of the central frames of so-called contemporary colorblind racism, which I find extremely relevant in Finland especially in the current political climate. In this study, the cultural racism frame came up in all of the interviews either through interviewees referring to “fixed” cultural features that contribute to inequality among groups or highlighting cultural prejudice or cultural differences in education and wellbeing outcomes.

White supremacy

Layla F. Saad (2020) in her excellent book *Me and white supremacy* provides the concepts and tools white people need for understanding and dismantling racism. I borrow Saad’s definition and reasoning for using the term “white supremacy” instead of a less “provocative” term. Saad(2020:14) writes that,

“People often think that white supremacy is a term that is only used to describe far- right extremists and neo- Nazis. However, this idea that white supremacy only applies to the so- called “bad ones” is both incorrect and dangerous, because it reinforces the idea that white supremacy is an ideology that is only upheld by a fringe group of white people. White supremacy is far from fringe. In white-centered societies and communities, it is the dominant paradigm that forms the foundation from which norms, rules, and laws are created. “

White supremacy is another concept referring to systemic racism, but the term “white supremacy” even more clearly defines power hierarchies and oppressive systems, which may make it easier for white people to avoid discussing individual cases of racism and either support or oppose systems of power. In the discussion, I specifically use the term “white supremacy” to emphasize the current barriers and challenges of directing the focus of anti-racism to dismantling racism, rather than maintaining the central focus on personal awareness and interfering with obvious racial discrimination. The latter is of course also essential but discussing the limitations of current understandings of anti-racism via the term “white supremacy” to describe the system of power kept in place is even more crucial through the lens of critical race theory.

While Finland like other Nordic countries that have enjoyed the reputation of having achieved racial equity decades ago, has in fact, its own fair share of structural racism in its own systems and organizations that actually uphold racial hierarchies, which is why I believe white supremacy as a concept is as relevant as ever. It should be noted that with the growth of right-winged populism and anti-immigration discourse in Europe and the US, white supremacy is even present in society today as an attitude and way of thinking. In the context of this study however, I do not expect to come across white supremacy as conscious personal beliefs that would make white people superior. Since we are born in a

society with a “racialized social system” that upholds mechanisms feeding white supremacy, as a white person who has never been racialized, one has the option of never reflecting on whiteness and may even stand against racism by choosing strategies that feel comfortable that focus on “racists” or “racist behavior” for example.

Anti-racism

Fem-R is a feminist and anti-racist civil society organization, which “aims to increase the voices of racialized people in the Finnish society and build equal and safer Finland for all people” (Fem-r.fi). They provide an excellent list of terminology for discussing race and racism and define antiracism as “active actions that oppose racism and strive to eliminate racism in society and in the world”. (Fem-r.fi) Actions encompass a wide range of ideas, policies and practices that counter all forms of racism.

All definitions of anti-racism share the idea that anti-racism is about actions that are meant to counter and eliminate racism. Ibram X. Kendi (2019), author of *How to be an antiracist*, defines an antiracist as someone who expresses an antiracist idea or supports antiracist policies with their actions consistently. When it comes to becoming an anti-racist, he also underscores how an antiracist must examine their biases and whether they are being reinforced by how they interpret things every day.

Aminkeng A. Alemanji, a researcher on antiracism education in Finland, has criticized multiculturalism that targets the “other” and is geared towards immigrants, when anti-racism even as a word is indicative of the existence of racism. According to Atabong (2017:7): “Anti-racism education questions hierarchical racialized structures and their consequences. It seeks to understand, unearth and deconstruct the foundation of racism at a macro level as well as seeks ways to oppose and challenge daily racialized practices wherever and whenever. It is not limited to a mere reaction to issues of racism. It sets out to dismantle structures that (re) produce individual cases of racism”. Anti-racism interventions can therefore, help change discourses, actions and structures that perpetuate white supremacy.

3.2 Critical race theory

Critical race theory first emerged in the United States in the 1970’s, when a number of lawyers, legal scholars and activists started contesting the institutional racism that they began to witness after supposed heavy advances on racial equity during the civil rights era in the 1960’s took place. The term “CRT” was coined to encase sets of methodologies and concepts that pursue racial equity. (Delgado

2017:29.) The transdisciplinary critical race theory (CRT) movement today is a broad collection of activists and scholars engaged in researching and promoting social change and social justice through the lens of transforming the relationship between race, racism, and power.

CRT has been widely adopted by scholars outside legal studies arena in the United States, such as movements formed by Asian Americans, Latinx, LGBTQ, Muslim, and Indigenous scholars. Since CRT has emerged, it has also permeated multiple academic disciplines such as the field of education, social sciences and humanities, political science, health care etc. During the past decade, CRT has also contributed and spawned research centering understandings of race, racism and racialization outside of the United States (see e.g., Breen & Meer, 2019; Moschel, 2011; Helakorpi, 2020; Mulinari, 2017; Seikkula, 2019.) Throughout this thesis I also aim to show that while critical race scholarship is deeply rooted in the United States, the conceptual and analytic tools CRT provides are applicable in racism research in Europe as well.

A key difference between CRT and some other academic disciplines is the activist dimension, as critical race theorists and scholars who use the analytic tools from critical race theory are interested in transforming racial hierarchies, going beyond a mere understanding of societal phenomena. Critical race theory has always been fundamentally committed to social justice seeking to eliminate all forms of oppression. For a researcher who applies critical race theory it is therefore essential to include in the explanation behind conducting the research, how the researcher will apply the produced findings in practical terms that advocate for social justice in their field. As both a social worker and researcher, I want to research racism in my professional field so that I can use the research to necessitate discussions within our professional network on how we perpetuate white supremacy, how must we tackle this issue and what should anti-racist school-based mental health services look like.

3.2.1 Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's "racialized social system approach"

For this study, I draw from the works of sociologist and critical race theorist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2015), whose "racialized social system approach" holds that especially modern democracies claiming to have moved past racism in fact, uphold racial hierarchies and structural racism to preserve white supremacy and the "racial status quo". Bonilla-Silva's (1997) earlier work focuses more on critiquing "the prejudice approach" of racism that was (and still is) quite central in sociology and psychology, that holds a more

“common sense” view on racism. His central theorization is that racialization forms a structure, racialized groups are placed in hierarchies and practices emerge that fit the position of racialized groups in the racial regime. Groups who are at the top of the racial regime uphold views and practices supporting the racial status quo whilst groups at the bottom contest these views.

In his piece *“Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation”*, Bonilla-Silva (1997) begins his theorization of a structural theory of racism that places racism as a part of a larger racial system that shapes actual life chances of racialized individuals and groups. Racism from the viewpoint of racialization means that after a society transforms into becoming racialized, racialization “develops a life of its own” and though it intersects and interacts with class and gender in the social system, it becomes an independent actor in organizing social hierarchies. It is widely agreed between social analysts that race is a social construct but like other social constructs, it too has its own particular impact in society. Racial stratification transforms racism whereby race becomes an independent criterion for inequality. Bonilla-Silva argues that as race-based structures emerge, socially existing “race groups” that develop objective interests arise. Social constructions of race where meanings are attributed to “peoples” create racial categories that become institutionalized, forming a structure and culture that shapes social lives. Wherever social, political, and ideological practices that produces racialized inequality, meaning wherever a racial structure is in place, race as a “social fact” exists. The usefulness of racialization as a theoretical framework for race research requires studying racializing processes in different societies and investigating whether they have specific mechanisms, practices and social relations that produce and reproduce racial inequality at micro and macro levels which determine the racial structure that society embodies. (Bonilla-Silva, 1997:465-476; Bonilla-Silva,2021.)

Even though many critical race theorists’ work, such as Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s, studies the racialized system of the United States, the tools structural theory on race produces for research on race can be applied to all societies that have racialized structures. The main tenets of critical race theory (CRT) are agreed upon by all critical race theorists who study how invented racial difference is perpetuated, transformed and reproduced by societies upholding white supremacy(see e.g., Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2010; Taylor, 2009). In his article in 2015, Bonilla-Silva summarizes the tenets of critical race theory into the following:

1. Racism is ‘embedded in the structure of society’.
2. Racism has a ‘material foundation’.
3. Racism changes and develops over different times.
4. Racism is often ascribed a degree of rationality.

5. Racism has a contemporary basis

For Bonilla-Silva, understanding racism means dismantling the mechanism and practices at the social, economic, ideological, and political levels responsible for the reproduction of racial domination and examining the continuous process of remaking races throughout history. (Bonilla-Silva 2015:75-76.) Especially in contemporary societies that are beginning to declare themselves as “post-racial”, critical race theory reminds us how ‘race’ is still fundamental and relevant in understanding present inequalities and the mechanisms creating and upholding them. Bonilla-Silva’s (1997) calls for understanding racism as a racial ideology of a racialized social system challenges race scholars to develop fluid methodologies for researching contemporary racial phenomena. Bonilla-Silva’s work highlights how racial hierarchies and domination are linked to what national racial narratives we keep on producing and reproducing, hence creating more contemporary circumstances for racism to breed such as more subtle and “kind” racisms like “colorblind” ideology and hidden systemic racism. CRT challenges ideological frameworks such as different cultural approaches to oppression and national narratives of equality and exceptionalism that regardless of the good or bad intention, continue to uphold racial social hierarchies.

3.2.2 Intersectionality

A significant remaining important tenet of critical race theory, which Bonilla-Silva (2015) recognized later as being missing from his earlier work on theorizing race and racism is intersectionality. The term “Intersectionality” was coined by black feminist critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1995) and addresses how multiple forms of oppression based on different social locations such as race, gender, class, and sexuality intersect and interrelate in different contexts over place and time. Crenshaw (1991) in her essay “Mapping the margins” offers a definition of intersectionality that includes structural intersectionality, political intersectionality and representation intersectionality. It is important to understand that theorizing intersectionality has come from applying it to real world problems from the perspective of women of color, and how the afore mentioned social location intersects with other forms of oppression. It has for example been used to analyze how the violence and other forms of oppression women have faced work differently for black and white women.

Intersectionality is widely used as a paradigm for contemporary feminist theory. It refers to a theoretical methodology that analyzes and studies “real world” phenomena of structural, political and

representational intersectionality (Carastasis, 2014:307). Patricia Hill Collins' (2019) noteworthy book "Intersectionality as a critical social theory" invites scholars to understand intersectionality's potential as a critical social theory for analyzing contemporary forms of social inequalities and oppression and for using this knowledge production to drive social change. In her book, Collins delves into intersectionality's critical theoretical perspectives whilst on the one hand, reflecting on its meanings and broad potential and on the other, what barriers the heterogeneity of the concept and "doing intersectionality" without scholars becoming "more self-reflective about intersectionality's objectives, analyses and practices" could arise for intersectionality's journey into a critical social theory.

For researching racism specifically, I agree with many scholars who have argued for maintaining the "centrality" of race in research whilst also including an intersectional lens in analysis. (Preston & Bhopar, 2012; Gillborn, 2015; Taylor, 2009). Intersectionality between different social locations is very complex and without careful analysis of the research question in hand, there are also risks of ending up discussing each social location that experiences inequality ambiguously and trying to include endless amount of different identities equally the purpose of analysis. In the words of Preston and Bhopal (2012:215), "...for some 'race' always calls out for the type of intersectional analysis which obscures it. Intersectional analysis does not mean that we cannot 'speak' to 'race' alone, and we should address its primacy when necessary". Discourses where race was obscured through the tactic of "whataboutery", that is, asking "what about class" and "what about gender" without actually talking about how these locations actually intersect with race or with each other were present in several interviews, which I will discuss in more detail in the analysis chapter.

As a novice white researcher, who is using critical race theory for the first time, I want to be cautious of how I use "intersectionality", especially after reading more recent articles by Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins on how this fast-travelling theory between disciplines has been transformed by some researchers in an attempt to move further away from its original main focus (Collins, 2015; Cho, 2010; Crenshaw, Cho & McCall, 2013; Crenshaw, 2019). In the words of Patricia Hill Collins (2019:291), "When it comes to intersectionality as a critical social theory, asking the wrong questions is a far bigger problem than offering eloquent answers to what seem to be the right questions". I will not attempt to add intersectionality to this study in a mechanical fashion, as that would only transform the study's aim into "listing" barriers to equality or of simply trying to please readers by addressing all forms of oppression and endless identity categories "equally". Instead, I looked at how discourses related to

racism might use a false understanding of intersectionality for looking at different social locations separately and therefore, decentralizing race.

3.2.3 Colorblind racism

One of the central ways Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2018:53) theorizes that white collectives maintain their dominant position in societies with racism having a structural presence is “colorblind” ideology, which engages in “victim blaming”, covert and indirect methods that fit “new racism”, which include certain repetitive methods or central frames white people use to justify racial inequality. These central frames of colorblind ideology act as “set paths” for interpreting information by explaining racial encounters or racial phenomena in a predictable way that hides racial domination (Bonilla-Silva 2018:54). In the next chapter, I discuss Finland’s racial past, which sheds some light on how colorblind ideology fits our national context. In short, colorblindness proclaims that the best way to end racial discrimination is by treating individuals as equally as possible without regards to race, culture or ethnicity, which perpetuates racism by ignoring the lived experiences of racialized groups, by disengaging from conversations on racism and consciously ignoring the disparities that are perpetuated in racialized societies.

The four central frames of color-blind ideology according to Bonilla-Silva (2018) are abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism and minimization of racism. These frames produce different “set paths” for interpreting or framing race-related issues. Abstract liberalism involves ideas from political liberalism that emphasizes individual agency and “equal opportunity” that proclaims force is unnecessary to achieve social policy. Abstract liberalism ignores institutional practices and policies as sources of inequality such as neighborhood segregation and regards each individual as an equal being with equal choices. Naturalization refers to explaining race-related issues as naturally occurring, such as in-group/our-group exclusion and all groups sharing biases and prejudices equally. Cultural racism refers to using culturally based arguments to explain inequalities or positions in society. Research on racism in the Finnish education system and findings from this study strongly highlight the dominance of cultural racism when addressing academic success and life outcomes of minority groups. The minimization of racism, which was also present in the findings of this study, refers to acknowledging there is or maybe is racism, but there are also other things than racism etc. (Bonilla-Silva 2018:57; Crenshaw, 2019)

3.3 Critical Whiteness studies

The field of Whiteness studies can be said to have emerged since the 1990s, although African American authors and have discussed whiteness earlier (see, e.g., Roediger, 1991; Baldwin, 1984). Literature on whiteness studies has grown across disciplines and has mainly examined how whiteness as a socially constructed category like race but as a less acknowledged category operates to maintain white supremacy. Although whiteness studies have faced criticism concerning the risks of the studies reproducing white supremacy and centering “whiteness”, critical race scholars agree that whiteness studies in the contexts of studying “post-racial” societies is essential, since “whiteness” is both central to racism and racialization and simultaneously considered to remain outside “race”.

However, how “whiteness” should be included into researching racism, for what purposes and whether “whiteness studies” should grow as its own field has been a subject many critical race scholars have discussed in their work (see, e.g., Bonilla-Silva & Doane, 2003;). These scholarly works that analyze the well-intentioned motivations of white progressive researchers engaging with “whiteness studies” is important for aspiring researchers’ reflexivity and awareness of researcher positionality. Woody Doane (2003) when analyzing the rapid growth of whiteness studies also points out that perhaps when academic discourses on race have incorporated concerns with researcher positionality, implying that some perspectives are more authentic than others, whiteness studies offered white researchers a venue for claiming authenticity and expertise. Intentions to mobilize social change and challenge color-blind racism through “whiteness” studies may therefore vary and it is important therefore to think of one’s research aims and contribution for challenging racism in practical terms. For this reason, I set out to be as clear as possible in how I situate “whiteness studies” within the framework of critical race theory and use the concept for examining how “whiteness” and color-blind racism reproduce white supremacy (Doane, 2003:7). I should also mention that although most of the interviewees in this study are white, I do not only draw from the interviews in the discussion and conclusion based on the results, but also use the knowledge on mental health and racism produced by POC activists and writers challenging racism in Finland.

A lot of the literature on critical whiteness studies seeks to expose systems that maintain whiteness as invisible, unacknowledged or normative through investigating whiteness as a fluid socially and historically constructed category, which understands that its boundaries have changed to include

different racialized social and ethnic groups during different times (Bonilla-Silva & Doane, 2003;). One can see the fluid boundaries of whiteness in Finland when we look at Finland's history of racism and the history behind our constructed national identity (see, e.g., Keskinen 2013, 2019). By acknowledging the fluid boundaries of whiteness in Finland, I am also specifically thinking of how right-wing populism, "the refugee crisis", anti-immigration discourse and racialization within more subtle "contemporary racisms" affect the broad conceptualizations of racism and racial hierarchies in Finnish schools and support services.

For this study, I engage with two themes in particular in my analysis that resonate consistently from most critical whiteness studies literature. These are the invisibility of whiteness, and white privilege that includes white fragility, which we can locate in the new more subtle forms of "colorblind racism" (DiAngelo, 2018). The purpose of engaging with these themes is explicitly to use the concept "whiteness" as a tool to think about anti-racism in education and mental health through providers' perspectives and document its interpretations. There are many fruitful examples of qualitative studies investigating racism where most or all respondents are white that draw from critical race (and whiteness) studies in order to see how racism may be unintentionally reproduced (Moore, 2008; Picower, 2009; Tinashe, Caputi, Walker, Olcon, MacPhail, Firdaus & Thepsourinthone, 2021). In the context of Finland where the main challenge in battling racism is first recognizing that it exists, and then our lack of conversations about it, and how many large organizations still lack diverse representation due to systemic racism in the labor market, I find critical whiteness studies very relevant in racism research. I aim to place "whiteness" in the context of contemporary racisms such as color-blind racism, while taking care not to reduce racisms to "whiteness", but place whiteness within the parameters of racism studies for the specific purpose of understanding how white supremacy affects all groups.

3.4 CRT and research methodology

As Richard A. Jones (2009) writes: "Because there are many ways of knowing, there are racial, gendered, and class-centered truths that can only speak for themselves. CRT, as an attempt to legitimize the perspectives, lived-realities of differently situated persons, is a *humanism* for not only racial, but also global, justice". CRT's multidisciplinary and collaborative nature make its methodological and analytical tools useful for interdisciplinary engagements with different societal levels, different political institutions and race. Critical race theorists are often described as ""a collection of activists and scholars

interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power " (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Researchers from different fields during the past decades have explored the race equity methodology provides for qualitative and even quantitative research that is committed to clarifying, exposing, and challenging racism.

Since CRT has been and is created by those impacted by racism, outside the frameworks of those institutions that uphold racism, CRT is a radical meta-disciplinary departure from traditional discursive philosophical practices. From different philosophical currents, CRT mainly draws from the genealogical method and its discursive practices, which are rooted in Foucault's works on power and knowledge production. (Gordon, 2019.) As I have to narrow this introduction of CRT and methodologies to those tools that I found most useful for this study, I need to reiterate that CRT draws from both from certain European theorists (Foucault, Gramsci, Derrida) and the American radical tradition (Du Bois, Chavez, Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

As far as describing CRT as a methodology, I should mention some useful CRT tools that have been used in qualitative research in education, which is most relevant for this qualitative study on school-based mental health. In education, researchers use CRT to highlight the role of race and racism in educational institutions and their structures that impact the educational trajectories and life chances of POC. There are thousands of books, articles and book chapters covering the old and new trends of CRT methodologies in education especially from the United States (Decuir-Gunby,2020), so many that providing a literature review of the numerous directions that incorporate CRT with qualitative studies is impossible here.

For this study, I found Solorzanos and Yossos (2002) work on what a critical race methodology in education could look like useful. Especially for studying "post-racial" contexts, CRT challenges dominant, Eurocentric beliefs and national discourses of objectivity, meritocracy, equality and race neutrality (aka colorblindness) that uphold the racial status quo and reproduce white supremacy (Perez Huber, 2008:165). Critical race theory and methodology in education have at least the following five elements that form their basic insights, perspectives and methodology (Solorzano & Yasso, 2002:26) which are:

- 1) The intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination
- 2) The challenge to dominant ideology
- 3) The commitment to social justice.
- 4) The centrality of experiential knowledge
- 5) The transdisciplinary perspective

For Solorzano & Yasso (2002) incorporating these elements in research means foregrounding race and racism in all stages of the research process. This means using a CRT lens from conceptualizing the problem and central research questions to all junctures of data collection and data analysis with the intersectional understanding of how race intersects with other social constructs that link to oppression. A CRT lens is also important for countering research paradigms that frame racism and inequalities through cultural differences or cultural "deficits", which the findings of this study will also show. The absence of any lacking language skills, which is very relevant in Finnish contexts. CRT methodology also highlights the importance of centering the lived experiences and narratives of POC as transformative in contesting white supremacy.

The sociology of mental health typically focuses on epidemiology, etiology, connections and consequences of different mental health outcomes and social constructions of mental health. From a sociological perspective the main interest lies in how society and societal inequalities may shape both the causes and consequences of mental health outcomes for its members. Looking at how the causes of negative and positive mental health outcomes are strongly influenced by social inequality, for example racism, gives attention to disproportionate exposure to stress and exclusion as well as resources and support. In an interesting paper *Critical Race Theory Speaks to the Sociology of Mental Health*, Tony Brown (2003) uses critical race theory to inform the sociology of mental health's approach to studying "race" and mental health by conceptualizing mental health problems that could be impacted by racism through a CRT lens. I found scholarly work on CRT's usefulness for the sociology of mental health extremely relevant, since even educators and researchers who focus on race and racism in education have rarely theorized the mental health outcomes associated with racial stress and "racial battle fatigue", which underlines the sociological importance of the interconnectedness between racism and mental health (Stovall&McGee, 2015) . Findings from this study also suggest the need for more racism research in education that includes mental health outcomes caused by racism is needed.

4. Methodology

During the past decade, sociologists studying race and racism have begun exploring trends of applying CRT in research especially in health and education with the goal of research informing the struggle against racism. In chapter two I discussed critical race theory, which I applied as a methodological

framework for analysis in this study. The main tenets of critical race theory (CRT) and the tools it provides for research, both of which I explained in chapter two guided the whole interview process, from formulating the central research questions to analyzing the data.

I used critical discourse analysis (CDA) in combination with a CRT lens for examining race and racism in school-based mental health by interviewing school psychologists and school social workers in the Autumn of 2021 from different schools in the metropolitan area. I found discourse analysis to be very fitting for the context of this study since school mental health professionals actually use talk and conversation as their main tool professionally. The interviews were conducted in Finnish either online using Teams or in person, recorded with a recording device and then transcribed. In this chapter, my aim is to describe the process of data analysis in detail and then move on to discuss ethical considerations that arose during the research process and finally end by acknowledging the limitations of this study.

4.1 Data collection

My research journey began by first applying for a research permit from the Education Division. After recruiting nine participants, I then conducted 8 in-depth qualitative interviews including one group interview, with five school psychologists and four school social workers all working in basic education from different areas around Helsinki. All participants signed a research contract of informed consent before the interviews and were reminded of their rights as participants on record, including their option to withdraw their participation at any point before or after the research.

I decided to conduct semi-structured in-depth key-informant interviews for two reasons: first, my connections, as a school social worker, to the student welfare services in basic education and second, because I was seeking for both personal and professional views as members of a particular organization (Education Division). In-depth interviews were the best way to answer the research questions of this study, because there are no clear policies or practices in school mental health work on how to address racism with clients and classes and because my aim was to gather rich data beyond surface-level answers. Although our human-rights based profession includes the responsibility of promoting equity and social justice, my experiences and conversations with colleagues and clients suggests more abstract ways how professionals view racism as a phenomenon and how conversations on racism we should be having varies a lot. Our organization is still in the very beginning of developing anti-racist practices,

which should start by professionals reflecting on their own position in the matters of race and racism at in the lives of students and their different environments. Moreover, interviewing with a research agenda allowed me to introduce race and racism as the central topic of discussion and investigate how respondents talk regarding the demands of the questions whilst simultaneously looking at broader discourses around racism they reproduce. In-depth interviews also provide space and time for interesting conflicts, ambiguities, dilemmas, and negotiations to emerge during the conversation.

My aim was to find interviewees from different areas in the metropolitan area and from different professional backgrounds prior to their work in student welfare services and to find an even number of both school psychologists and social workers who typically also work in pairs and may share clients. I sent an invitation to participate to approximately 120 school psychologists and school social workers working in basic education, but at first received only two responses for participation. I then separately emailed workers that worked in different areas in Helsinki, some of whom knew, and managed to gain seven more participants.

The interviews required careful preparations especially since some of the interviewees had expressed that they feel nervous sharing professional and personal ideas on racism, a very multi-dimensional issue. I received valuable tips from co-researchers from the RaMePOC project, and one important tip I spent time on when thinking of the order of the interview questions was asking easy and less opinion-related questions first and gradually making my way to exploring personal and professional views. As a school social worker myself, I felt confident in building rapport with the interviewees and kept reminding them that they may ask me any questions they think of during the interview as well. My goal was to make interviewees feel safe and comfortable and be open-minded, bearing in mind that especially with this topic interviewees are likely not to share their opinions if they feel evaluated or judged.

I conducted two interviews face-to-face and the rest were held online using "Teams". I conducted six interviews by myself, and two were conducted together with researcher Tuuli Kurki, of which one was a group interview with two interviewees. Each interview lasted for approximately an hour and a half, except the group interview, which lasted for two hours.

I made an interview guide in advance, which allowed me to explore interesting themes that might be brought forward by interviewee and leaving space for open discussion as well. However, including predetermined questions for this study as well was important for investigating the central research questions and for addressing the complexity of race and racism in the research design. I also engaged in

answering the questions myself especially in situations where interviewees were ambiguous in their answers, and my comments generally helped spark further engagement from interviewees. I also engaged in the discussions when we talked about questions related to anti-racism and what it could and should look like in the work we do at schools, since I am also a practitioner with views on the directions that our profession should guide us towards. Lastly, I also kept an interview journal after each interview, where I wrote my preliminary thoughts, points of interest and feelings after each interview, a practice which was extremely helpful in the analysis phase since I conducted the interviews within a very short time.

4.2 Coding the data

The main starting point for data analysis was spending a lot of resources on familiarizing myself with the rich qualitative data I had gathered. As soon as each interview was transcribed through an outside provider, I printed out each interview and read through it. I started by marking what I found interesting or what stood out during the first readings. After doing this, I also listened to parts of each interview with the transcribed interview in front of me, and wrote comments on the moods and tones of speakers on the parts where I thought it was relevant or interesting. After the first readings, I decided on a strategy for data analysis. During the coding process, which I explain next, I started by focusing on thematic analysis, and as the main themes started emerging from the interviews, I continued by looking at language more closely and identifying the discourses used to construct the themes.

A challenge with using many small codes and combining them is analytical transparency, which is why communicating all steps in a small qualitative study in detail is important. I will hence try to explain how I coded the transcribed data from start to finish. I started the coding process by coding after the first reads all the paragraphs that I initially found interesting in the interviews by placing thematic codes and coming up with names for these discourses. The literature review and theoretical framework at first directly had impact on what I found interesting and picked up on in the texts, so the first broad themes I coded included “racism” and “mental health” and “anti-racism”. I quickly started noticing additional main themes that were repetitive when I had marked and coded the “interesting” parts in all of the transcribed interviews.

At this point during the thematic analysis, I also began circling or underlining words in all the coded parts that I found relevant for constructing themes. In every paragraph where there were conflicts present in the narrative, I wrote “conflict” with a designated colored marker, because I was especially interested in

locating conflicting arguments or changing narratives in interviewees' (and the interviewer's) speeches. On the front page of each transcribed interview that I had stapled together, I wrote the main themes and discourses I had begun to name based on the language, so that when I had all the front pages of interviews next to each other I could easily compare the main preliminary findings of each interview. I was also able to start recognizing commonalities regarding both the main themes of the interviews and the discourses as well, such as "racialization", "mental health", and "anti-racism".

After coding and marking the interesting parts from the interviews, I started making mind maps that had the main themes which were present in every single interview in the center and began placing different coded themes and discourses around the themes on the mind map. I then combined some of the codes/themes that could be categorized together and renamed these discourses on the mind map. After coding all the parts that caught my attention in the first round, I went through all the unmarked parts and started to look at the not-coded parts that seemed mundane and sought to find important discourses I might have missed. I then began coding these "leftover" paragraphs and in the end, each paragraph in all the transcribed interviews was marked. I then added some of the themes and discourses that were interesting in the second round on the main mind map.

The amount of data I collected exceeded a hundred pages of transcribed data, so a limited number of excerpts had to be chosen to represent the three main discourses I found from the coded data. I selected excerpts in the analysis that demonstrated how language was used to build narratives, construct themes and form arguments in relation to individual and most importantly structural racism and reproducing it. The reason for including lengthy excerpts was to differentiate the discourses and the rationalities of the interviewees. Although this lengthened the analysis, the excerpts were essential for the reader to understand the different discourses, and my interpretations and analysis of them. In the last chapter, I described the interviewing process and mentioned that all interviews were conducted in Finnish, so it is important to note that I translated the excerpts that I used from Finnish to English. Translating as a native English speaker was not difficult but translating speech may influence interpretations of certain words and tones. I coded and analyzed all of the following excerpts in Finnish when I coded all of the interviews, so the interpretations and conclusions I drew from the Finnish text was the very last step of analysis before I translated the excerpts in English. I also decided to not include the professions of the interviewees in the excerpts in order to increase the protection of anonymity.

4.3 Critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) has a lot of common ground with critical race theory (CRT). Theory formation, description, and explanation in discourse analysis, are always socio-politically “situated” and one using CDA also rejects any ideas of “value-free” research or science. Racism research fits the objectives of CDA perfectly, as CDA focuses on the ways discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce, or challenge relations of power and dominance in society. (Van Dijk, 1993:353.) To present how CDA as a method of analysis compliments CRT, I include summarized tenets of CDA by Wodak and Fairclough (1997) below:

1. CDA addresses social problems
2. Power relations are discursive
3. Discourse constitutes society and culture
4. Discourse does ideological work
5. Discourse is historical
6. The link between text and society is mediated
7. Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory
8. Discourse is a form of social action

Van Dijk (2006:252) emphasizes that critical discourse analysis (CDA) requires true multi-disciplinarity and an account of intricate relationships between texts, talk, social opinion, power, society and culture. Analyzing discourses in the interviews therefore requires connecting them to social, political and cultural contexts, and exploring the roles discourse plays in reproducing racism and white supremacy. I will next briefly describe the concrete steps I did to begin the process of CDA and then discuss some tools I used to give meanings and make interpretations of the text.

During the coding process, I circled or underlined words or phrases in paragraphs that I found interesting during the first reading that revealed attitudes towards the topics we were discussing. These included adjectives, adverbs and pronouns such as “we” and “them”, and tones in words and phrases that I highlighted. I also tried to spot evidentialities, biases and assumptions in the text on race, racism and people, which revealed something about the interviewees’ background knowledge or ideologies that they are leaning on. In the very long uninterrupted “speeches” or even monologues of the interviewees, which were quite frequent, I analyzed the structure of the long paragraph on how certain narratives and conflicts within them appeared.

I used Foucault's theory of power/knowledge as thinking tools to analyze how cultural and material practices of mental health professionals who are mostly white (as am I) combine power and knowledge in producing their subjectivities (Foucault & Gordon, 2015). I approached the central research questions through analyzing power relations as "something that circulates within and among the practices of people" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012:56). I borrow Jackson & Mazzei's (2012) central question for their power/knowledge reading which was "How do power/knowledge relations and practices produce the interviewees multiple subjectivities" in the context of anti-racism and addressing racism in their field and from their positions. Within the rich data I sought to locate different manifestations of power/knowledge that link to structural racism in practices within the contexts professionals are located. I am also interested in how these practices take shape and what social effects and even social costs these practices may have on POC pupils.

Ultimately, the central research questions of this study, which explore the positions, views and practices of professionals through a critical race theory (CRT) lens, sought to uncover manifestations of racism that deserve attention. Foucault's ideas on power/knowledge direct the attention more towards the tenets of CRT that "racism is in the very fabric of society on all levels" and is constantly changing in the shapes and mechanisms it manifests, as power also reaches "into the very grain" in individuals and their social locations. Attention in the analysis did not focus on the intentions or origins of the interviewees' views, but directed to what practices and effects their views produce. As Jackson & Mazzei (2012) write, "practices take on significance not for their truth value or inherent meaning, but for the ways in which they disrupt or sustain relations of power and advance knowledge".

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) therefore provided me with answers on how the interviewees conceptualize certain issues and how these interpretations relate to socio-historical contexts. I cannot investigate through CDA what the interviewees think or believe, but I could investigate the views and statements interviewees might try to convey as true, how they negotiate this and what kinds of meanings that hold power in society does their discourse strengthen. As an interdisciplinary approach, CDA's research design and methodological processes can be adaptive and flexible according to what the central research questions need, which also fits this project as the context of the research is situated in many fields as well (education and mental health). There are CDA scholars who have theorized similar, but also different methodologies for conducting a CDA research and analysis (e.g., van Dijk's (1993) socio-cognitive approach, Wodak's (2001) socio-historical approach, Fairclough's (2001) critical approach). Using a Foucauldian discourse analysis that focuses on power-relations and language

reminded me to broaden my focus from what interviewees say and do not say, to actually looking at how dominant discourses on racism that I draw from critical race theory (CRT) are reproduced or disrupted. Lastly, as a researcher, practitioner and a white woman, I maintained explicit awareness of my role in the workplace, as a researcher and in society, which is crucial in for conducting critical discourse analysis.

4.4 Ethical considerations

Conducting this study entailed many ethical considerations that required attention both in the planning phase, during the interviewing process and in the last phases of analyzing the data. First, protecting anonymity was extremely important in this study, especially since the interviewees are colleagues of mine, and some shared personal experiences and observations from their professional environments. All of us also work in the same city under the same organization, so careful consideration of what data can be used and in which contexts informants could become recognizable was essential. For this reason, I chose to refer to “metropolitan area” instead of a city, refer to “them/they” instead of gender pronouns, and leave out the professions of the interviewees. In the analysis, this made elevating POC professional perspectives and knowledge above the rest also challenging because of the small representation of POC professionals in our organization and in the data I collected. For this reason, the literature review was not limited to only academic research, but knowledge produced by activists as well.

Hence, I was not able to include all of the themes that seemed noteworthy in the analysis, but in the discussion section I wrote about further research needed based on the produced knowledge left out in the analysis. However, as I found the interview where the interviewee identified as being a racialized person valuable and carrying a perspective that was strikingly different than most of the white viewpoints, I contacted the interviewee and asked whether I could use more excerpts in the analysis from their interview in comparison to others and they agreed with no hesitation.

Respecting the interviewees both as respondents and colleagues was very important to me in the research process. During some of the interviews where we delved deep into the topic of “cultural racism”, I had a discussion with the interviewees towards the end regarding any bits of the conversation they might not want to be included in the study. I also made it clear to interviewees that they can

contact me after the interview with any additional questions, points or views they would like to add or “correct” afterwards.

On the topic of respecting interviewees, I also thought of how my position as a colleague helped me build good rapport and trust with the interviewees and how this brought up a lot of personal stories in the interviews as well. Some of the interviewees shared a lot of detailed cases and encounters with students and I sometimes wondered whether interviewees are fully aware of all the information they are sharing and decided to limit the student examples and stories in the analysis, because these are not from the students’ perspective. I asked each interviewee at the end of the interview on their thoughts of me using excerpts from their interview in the analysis and one of the interviewees requested whether I could send them any excerpts I intend to use from their interview by e-mail, which I agreed to do.

Another interesting challenge I ran into was contemplating whether participants are fully aware of my research aims behind the central research questions of the study, aims which derived from CRT lens in analysis. I caught myself wondering about what informed consent actually means after each interview. After the first two interviews, I began taking more space during the interview for explaining some of my interpretations and asking more clarifying questions after lengthy monologues. I did consider offering participants a chance to be more involved in the analysis after the interviews somehow but came to the conclusion that this would be too time consuming and might be impossible, since I strictly intended to use critical race theory as a frame for all discourse. One interview did end in a very surprising way, as the interviewee asked me to grade their performance as an interviewee on a scale and asked whether they were difficult to interview and what I thought of their answers. This also happened to be an interview that left me feeling uncomfortable because of racist interpretations of situations that were brought up. I then did “grade” the interview as challenging and explained, that my interpretations will be critical and I am committed to do anti-racist research, so in their answers I can already spot themes that I viewed as upholding racial power relations.

The incident I just brought up is a good bridge to the next most important ethical challenge I experienced during this project, which was anti-racist research methodology. I found practicing anti-racism whilst guiding and moderating the interviews challenging. For this project, recruiting professionals was challenging and because of the power us as mental health professionals at school have, I think that all of the views expressed are very relevant. Our views directly influence how we address racism in our workplace and students are not able to choose whom of us they encounter, investigating all of the interviewees’ mindsets on the topic of racism is of importance. This does not

mean that as a colleague and researcher I should not address racism in the interview situation and explain, for example through research, why certain words, categorizations, and abstract hints are problematic. I spent a lot of time thinking about what being an “anti-racist interviewer” means and did, for example, express opposing views backed by research in instances where racism was denied.

4.5 Limitations

First, I faced some challenges when recruiting the participants and some of the professionals I reached out to responded to my invite saying that the phenomenon I am studying (racism) is not so present in their school and I might want to contact schools where racism is more “topical”. This made me wonder whether these “lost” participants would have been interesting to interview and find out more about how they understand racism and its different manifestations. It would have also been interesting to be able to compare different areas in Helsinki and explore how racism may or may not be visible or invisible in similar ways in “multicultural” schools in comparison to more white and homogenous schools.

I am committed to an ethical approach to conducting research. Therefore, protecting research participants’ identity was a key issue. This had, however, consequences for my analysis. I was not able to compare POC perceptions with white positions, the schools/environments the interviewees were located at, and I was not able to connect answers with the professions and compare whether psychologists and social workers’ views reflected their professional backgrounds in some ways. Also, neighborhood segregation and class were brought up by several interviewees, so it would have been interesting to discuss structural racism and segregation in more depth based on the interviewees’ discussions and their locations. Environmental influence on tolerance was also brought up by several interviewees, which would have been important to delve into more than was possible.

The method I chose for analysis also entails some limitations. A disadvantage of using discourse analysis is its focus on language. Research is not objective and there are no fixed meanings that the researcher can uncover, since everything is open for interpretation. I addressed this by including self-reflection and researcher positionality in the introduction, so that the aims and position of the research would be as transparent as possible. If the study could have been larger, perhaps a mixed methods approach by combining discourse analysis with ethnography or interviewing students would have also made it possible to broaden the research questions to investigate the consequences and impact school-based mental health services have regarding dealing with racism.

Lastly, my initial goal was to include my own professional views and experiences into this study more than what I ended up doing. Analyzing the conversations between the interviewer and the interviewee by including the interviewers' speech in the discourse analysis would have brought more depth into the analysis. In one of the interviews which was the only group interview, the situation where white professionals are talking about racism together would have required further critical analysis that takes into account our positions. However, during the research process I had to conclude that this would expand the project too much, especially since I ended up with so much data from interviews that also ended up lasting longer than I had intended.

5. Analysis

I located three main discourses from the data, which I labelled as follows: Tolerance and Equality, personal awareness and belonging. Tolerance and equality discourse mainly expressed ways tolerance and equality exist and are performed, with the acknowledgment that racism among other things is against equality and tolerance. Personal awareness discourse mainly framed understanding racism and dealing with racism, and being anti-racist, as practices carried out as individuals. Belonging discourse revolved around having a sense of belonging, and the implications lacking or having belonging in the context of racism and its effects on wellbeing may have for individuals and groups.

In the previous chapter, I discussed ethical considerations and limitations of the study, which also influenced the analysis. I was not able to include all the discourses I labelled from the coded data because of prioritizing anonymity. In the discussion chapter, I will also provide some suggestions for future research based on implications some of the findings I was not able to investigate further provided.

5.1 Tolerance & Equality

Tolerance and equality discourse were present in every single interview. Many of the interviewees expressed this discourse by insisting through different ways that equality and tolerance already exist, which operated as a barrier to recognize and address racism. Hence, tolerance and equality discourse

upheld national narratives of Finnish exceptionalism, which acts as the barrier mentioned. Notions of exceptionalism also perpetuate more contemporary forms of racism such as colorblind ideology, that makes racism less overt and more subtle. (Keskinen, 2009; Atabong, 2017.) Several interviewees were reluctant in centering racism in their answers when asked about racism's influence on well-being and how racism should be addressed and instead preferred talking about racism as one form of oppression amongst others that produce inequality. When talking about one's professional roles and responsibilities in the school community on addressing racism, six out of nine interviewees talked about teachers and their roles at school in relation to how students are influenced by racism. In the following excerpt, an interviewee talks about positions of power and how teachers as educators and representatives of communal values such as tolerance and equality are more accountable and influential on race-related issues than peers for example.

Interviewer: Maybe now we could talk about client work a bit more now that these came up. Could you say, that how would you view that racism could impact a students' wellbeing?

Interviewee 1: Well at least I feel like if it were to come from a teacher.. Well actually now I thought of, there is one teacher that I have heard of who is very.. They have very, religious values and they have somehow been exclusionary with their comments towards others and other religions, so I do feel like, the teacher's and student's relationship has maybe to some degree been like, or you should be as accepting as for example, between a parent's and child's kind of.. That regardless of what you are like, I will provide you with an education. And as a teacher like, regardless of what you are like, I will teach you these things in the same way as for anyone else in this class. They are meant to be present to all students and if they discriminate, then that even a teacher, who was supposed to be equal towards everyone, that even they discriminate, then that can probably leave a bigger impact than for example, a friend in school, because not.. Kind of like you assume that you don't have to be friends with everyone, but a teacher should always be an equal teacher for all, then that can mentally be a more heavy experience, if the racism comes from a teacher..

The interviewee raises an important question on the levels of impact different sources of racism may carry for targets of racism. They define equality as treating everyone the same. They highlight the actions of the teachers instead of their prejudices and biases for example and do not suggest that teachers could view everyone the same. Instead, they emphasize that it is how they choose to act regardless of difference they may encounter that is most important in terms of consequences. Teachers represent society as teachers are recruited by a public institution to serve everyone equally, so experiencing racism from someone that you trust due to their position is more fatal than encountering racism from someone who has less power. The interviewee in a sense challenges narratives of Finnish exceptionalism in terms of tolerance and equality by acknowledging that teachers do in fact, notice difference, but it is their responsibility to view equality as foundational for their profession that serves everyone's equal rights to receive an education.

5.1.1 Colorblindness

Colorblind ideology and its different frames were more frequent than approaching equality and tolerance through discussing the prevalence of racism and its different forms. Colorblind discourses appeared in all the interviews, but colorblindness was most evident in seven out of nine interviewees' speech. The main agenda of colorblind ideology is proclaiming that the best way to end racism is by treating individuals as equally as possible without regards to race, culture and ethnicity, which leads to strategies that consciously ignore lived experiences of racialized groups, prioritize intent over impact and disengage from conversations on racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Crenshaw, 2019).

In some of the narratives, the existence of colorblindness was presumed, some interviewees discussed the former and moved back and forth on whether colorblindness applies to the interview questions, whilst some interviewees centered the desirability of colorblind ideology and combined this with equality discourses that referred to exceptionalism. Cultural racism that falls under colorblind racism was the most consistently brought up central frame within colorblind ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2018:57).

In the following interview excerpt, an interviewee was asked to estimate the amount of POC students and then focus on whether the school is more "white". First, the interviewee refers to blackness and celebrates color followed by them describing ways identity is performed in social situations. They also emphasize that those who are noticed by others may be very aware of this in a positive way. The interviewee interprets the microaggressions they describe as positive because the intent of humor is positive and again, emphasizes how different identities are recognizable. The interpretations are from the interviewees perspective, as they start by "I think" and later mentions that they have not thought about the question before. The performing of identities they describe is an example they come up with and give meaning to through the interview question. No negatives are brought up, rather the positives such as the interviewee's positive feelings and positive meanings they assign to student interactions are highlighted.

Interviewer: Do you have an estimate of how many there are in your institution, students who would identify, as non-white?

Interviewee 2: Now I will throw a, I shouldn't go with humor but I heard from one student that I have a black heart, and I was a bit like what, and they said that your like a somali woman, same vibe, I took it as a compliment. I think that those who are seen and heard then, some of them are very aware of their own identity and they can bring it out well, and it's like a positive drive, it can also become good humor among groups then that hey when your black you can say, you can come rap here like this and then someone says that well I can't, and they, oh well you have to know how because you have genes from there, and then someone explains that no they've been in Finland for too

long so they can't, kind of like through humor, but it's a very warm humor. That it's not pointing or negative that, it's somehow recognizable the fact that someone has a different identity. Now the definition came out quite well, I haven't thought about this but it comes here while I talk, yes. And I enjoy it so much, that there are no taboos kind of or I have not bumped into that yet.

Interviewer: But could you estimate how many..

Interviewee 2: Very difficult..

Interviewer: Mainly maybe that does the institution look more "white" or..

Interviewee 2: Well, exactly that, I'm starting to become blind to that, I myself have like a black spot that I don't see colors this is really true people have sometimes asked me that, and I don't always remember. That is actually interesting (laughs). Well let's see when I on the top of my head think about this through vision and my visual sense, well I guess that yea probably, If I use e.g. A native word for white people, is this allowed, then yes, most of the people are that. But yes, there are people from all backgrounds, but it does not stand out, the way I am describing this now that even myself I cannot point towards that. Yea.

The interviewee is aware of how difficult the question is for them to answer and literally explains that they do not see color, although previously they also stated how generally people are aware of presenting their identity. Not only are they blind to color, they consider themselves blind to whiteness as they directly express. They as a white person have the power to choose to both be "raceless" and to not see color, even though they also acknowledge that race exists when speaking of blackness at first. The second question appears to be more difficult to answer, with phrases such as "probably", "I guess" and "is this allowed" suggesting that they are putting in effort to navigate the question. In the end they answer the question by admitting that the majority of students are "native" white people, which seems to refer to "ethnic Finns" (this remains unclear) and then again moving the attention back to diversity and that there is diversity, but diversity does not stand out. Because of the welfare professionals' majority position, they seem to have not paid attention to whiteness at all but present conflicting statements on color as they seem to celebrate it, whilst pointing out that they do not see it. Through the concepts of (the invisibility of) whiteness and white privilege, I interpreted conflicts within narratives such as the previously mentioned example, as unintentionally reproducing racism by normalizing white racial identities as the norm, yet seemingly invisible (DiAngelo, 2018).

In another interview, the interviewee similarly expresses a tendency to avoid talking about color when asked about whether they have used term "person of color" when talking about non-white children. All of the interviews started with questions addressing terminology, as discussing racism requires terms to discuss it with (Atabong, 2017). When interviewee describes talking about color, they seem to interpret the question of using the term POC as asking about color "talk", framing it as an exotic term because they have never thought about talking about a child's color, which supports the afore mentioned

strategy of promoting equality by ignoring race. Next, they continue by highlighting the context of small children, which suggests that talking about small children's color is especially foreign.

Interviewee 6: Well If I begin again it goes easier. So yea color is; that is a very exciting term because I have never even thought of talking about a child's somehow color. Person of color. That's somehow a bit of a foreign approach. That when we are talking about small children then one doesn't really think about that stuff. I have heard a small child say that there is a brown girl once. And then maybe interfered that we don't have the habit of calling someone that way, that you could think about something else if you don't know their name then you could describe them with other terms. Maybe one doesn't use any name for it, but then when children use it then you wonder how to react."

The choice of words such as "foreign" and "exciting" distance the interviewee from talking about color. Again, as a white professional they also have the option of never having thought of talking about race before, which is a privilege POC activists have strongly vocalized to perpetuate white supremacy. When it is mentioned that "when we are talking about small children", it is implied that the "we" are the majority of people or possibly adults, as it remains unclear who is "we". Next, they do talk about hearing a child refer to color, once, and that adults "maybe" interfered in this situation. Again, the "we" is present when they say that "we don't have the habit". Whomever "we" is has the power to determine the appropriate way of speaking and condemns using the word "brown" to describe someone, that can imply for the child who used the word that "brown" is not a good word and using it carries a negative meaning, instead of a positive meaning or neutral meaning. This might also impact the child who is talked about, who witnesses a negative reaction to someone talking about their color, instead of a positive or neutral one, whether the intention of the adult correcting someone's choice of words was good or bad. According to therapist and activist Michaela Moua, this would be an example of a situation where the risk of internalized racism for the brown child who is talked about grows when observing discriminatory messages such as negative reactions to their color, regardless of the intention. In the end, "maybe" is again present in wondering whether one uses any name for it (it presumably referring to color) and what response to give in situations where children use it. In the previous excerpt and this one, both interviewees have not thought about the question they were asked before and suggest that they are not sure on what is the "right" way to talk about non-white persons or whether this is necessary or appropriate at all.

The last excerpt I chose out of colorblind discourses really embodies the power of discourse in meaning-making and conceptions of social inequalities such as racism. Language is a powerful tool in how we frame social problems and hence address them. In this excerpt, the interviewee describes multiculturalism, neighborhood segregation and the impact segregation has for learning outcomes.

Interviewee 5: "...But then when you go to the other end, that there is a wonderful multicultural center where a lot of people benefit, everyone benefits, the whole community is more tolerant, in many ways more tolerant. You learn about languages, cultures, many languages are spoken, people are more from different cultures, that the whole collective social capital increases. And then when you go to the other end that there is a combination of low-income, illiteracy, uneducated people, that daycares are such that there are no Finnish speaking friends, and that language skills is at a level zero to begin with when you go to school, then of course the school's curriculum starts to suffer. So that is not just racism anymore, but if 20 poorly Finnish speaking pupils start together, then they can't learn from each other. Then the pace of teaching or rhythm has to adjust to it, so then factually the taught things have to be narrowed, so then factually the amount of learnt things will be narrower. Then you shouldn't mix racism with the education becoming different in its content. That's not the same education anymore So then those families who escape these schools or don't wish or want to be in one. That is not necessarily racism as racism, but they are aware of how good teachers might have applied elsewhere and so on, that the impacts are so much more complicated than prejudice. And we could maybe fight prejudiced attitudes easier, but not that we have disadvantaged day care groups where teachers say that they don't even have materials.."

The interviewee is clearly describing a structural problem, segregation, and the diverse consequences it has for families, pupils and teachers. A clear structure in the narrative of the speech is visible, as they first present multicultural schools in a positive light and move to describe what the opposite of a positive multicultural school, a negative multicultural school, would look like. The opposite scenarios are a bridge to talk about segregation with the focus point being on poor Finnish language skills, which influence what they are taught, what they learn, in some cases what kinds of teachers they may have etc. The interviewee lists other problems in addition to language skills such as low-income and uneducated people in the context of a multicultural school in the "negative" end. The lack of Finnish language is then highlighted as the main issue, as they start discussing the quality of education.

By stating that "of course the curriculum starts to suffer", it is made clear that the curriculum can't respond to a class of a majority who lack Finnish language skills when starting school, which clearly is against the interest of the children who start school with other languages than Finnish. Then, they state that this is not racism anymore, which is interesting because it is exactly structural racism that is described throughout this excerpt. The problem with the quality of education is attached with segregation, but the "factual" limitations of the curriculum, the good teachers and "those" families who have power to escape are suggested to be natural consequences. As Bonilla-Silva (2015:1360) writes, it is the practices and mechanisms, such as framing consequences of segregation as "common sense", that create the racial structure. The interviewee again protests labeling this phenomenon as racism and later says that prejudiced attitudes are easier to combat, insinuating that they conceptualize racism as prejudice but do not recognize structural racism and actively point out that labelling the problem as racism would somehow minimize the problem. Bonilla-Silva (2018:37) calls one of the central frames of colorblindness "naturalization" that normalizes actions or events such as segregation that may otherwise be interpreted as racially motivated. A "that's the way it is" type of discourse is present here,

as the interviewee implies that things beyond prejudice can not be influenced, adjusting to language specific needs automatically has to result in lower-quality teaching and that the curriculum is how it is. Therefore, it is not surprising that there is seemingly no solution, when structures are naturalized and it is the class of 20 children who have not yet acquired Finnish language skills who influence the curriculum and teachers, instead of the curriculum and teachers having any power to influence pupils' learning.

Another interviewee comments on structural racism directly as we are having a discussion on the topic of power hierarchies. In this case, the interviewee shifts the focus from discussing structural issues back to a discourse of individualism, where each individual acts as an independent subject and interpersonal encounters influence our individual wellbeing and feelings, so it is more relevant to talk about how people choose to behave and influence each other. They speak from a white position and therefore it is quite logical from a critical race theory (CRT) perspective that their individual agency is not influenced by structures, as white supremacy operates through white structures which make white privilege invisible and natural (DiAngelo & Saad, 2020).

I: Yea and sure as we spoke before on what anti-racism could be that you learn to become conscious of your own prejudices but also the power-relations that there is so the theoretical frame through which I want to write this thesis is how these power structure can then-

Interviewee 8: Power structures is a really abstract thing. I don't know if it is power structures that hurts and insults people's mind that much. Usually it is you know that you don't have social support or your excluded in your inner group or somehow working environment or student group or neighborhood that then when there's more strength and resources already, you can think of abstract concepts such as society government legislation politics and structures but I don't think that some miraculous structure would take opportunities from me to understand and appreciate difference and take difference as a normal thing. People as people. If I think someone's weird, I will think this about anyone even you, I can choose that and can I even choose that at all towards a person of color, that feels weird, if we connect and our thoughts are in line.

It is interesting how the interviewee strongly denies that structures could influence individuals from the "top down" and suggests that when an individual is empowered they can begin to think about abstract concepts such as structural inequality. One may ask, what influences individuals and their interpersonal relations if not structures and how the abstract nature of structures is what increases power, as it is difficult for individuals to recognize, think about and conceptualize. Describing a "miraculous" structure suggests the concept is something opposite of naturally in place (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). They do not "think" that structures would take opportunities from "them", which underlines their own position that could not be influenced negatively against their self-interest by structures. They speak of themselves choosing to take difference as a normal thing, which means they as an individual do this, not society.

One of the frames of colorblindness, abstract liberalism, is expressed here by the interviewee through a discourse of individualism that claims we all act independently from one another with the same possibilities (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

The power the interviewee has in choosing different things is a product of structural racism where current racial hierarchies have become naturalized. When they primarily conceptualize discrimination as people hurting other people and groups hurting other groups and not as something systematic at all that produces power hierarchies, they see anti-discrimination as the task of individuals to make anti-discriminatory choices. Prioritizing individual agency which abstract liberalism supports suggests that force is unnecessary for achieving social policy (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). By being "abstract" in nature, structural inequality is free to reproduce itself and transform, when not addressed and recognized. After all, again, it is not social relationships alone which help determine life outcomes. A meritocratic discourse of free choice protects the positions of the majority to act only as individuals who are not racialized or categorized.

5.1.2 Prioritizing intent and diverting from race

Discourses that were a part of equality and tolerance discourse, which rests on exceptionalism, I labelled "prioritizing intent" and "diverting from race", which I located from seven out of nine interviewees in the context of addressing racism, anti-racism and unconscious racism/ignorance. In several of the interviews, this discourse placed more emphasis on intent instead of impact, even though negative impacts of racism especially on individual mental health were acknowledged. These discourses also fit colorblind ideology and the frame of "minimizing racism" (Bonilla-Silva 2018:57). Implementing prioritizing intent and diverting from race either together or separately, resulted in the minimization of racism, which operated as a barrier to address racism.

In the following excerpt, the interviewee talks about teachers engaging with the topic of racism and their motivation to do so. The interviewee acknowledges that there might be "a few bad apples" or some teachers out there who say things without thinking, implying that being a non-racist is more common than being a racist. Anti-racism is conceptualized more as preparing for encountering situations correctly especially when it comes to language, "correct" terminology and avoiding mistakes.

Interviewee 6: Yea and of course there probably is racism, but I also think that our teaching staff are very, I mean here, they are pretty woke on these topics specifically. They have practiced what words we use and always, say if there is a Finnish as a second language teacher included on something, that oh okay this is the work we at this

moment, what we should use here. They have-, of course I can't say that all are but in general I have a feeling that they want to know. They constantly think about how these things are talked about respectfully and correct. Of course there are those who might say things without thinking but I also think that it is more about ignorance than pure racism, at least those where I am-, those situations where I have been.

The interviewee also relies on their own feelings and interpretations of the teaching staff they have collaborated with. The "probable" racism is also minimized by prioritizing the intent of teachers to use respectful and correct language, especially when in the end the impact of those who are ignorant is not brought up. Ignorance is instead compared to pure racism, which I interpret here as intentional racism. Therefore, both the ignorant "non-racists" and the woke "non-racists" are the opposite of intentional pure racism. The interviewee almost refers to their own active role as well when they speak of themselves in present tense and refer to situations they have witnessed. Many POC activists have specifically addressed how it is the unconscious racism white people find hard to admit that is most difficult for anti-racist aims to reach. In the words of author Robin DiAngelo (2018:6), "I believe that white progressives cause the most daily damage to people of color. I define white progressives as people who think they are not racist, or are less racist, or in the "choir", or already get it." By prioritizing intent, the interviewee expresses defensiveness and uses more energy on explaining how well things are going, instead of how things should be going.

Four of the interviewees expressed a "diverting from race" discourse when asked about racism, where interviewees repetitively started addressing other social identities besides race when specifically asked a question about racism. Some of these discourses seemed to try to refer to the concept of intersectionality, though the understanding of intersectionality of interviewees was not clear. Some of these discourses that I interpreted as minimizing racism and labelled as "diverting from race" were interviewees actively shifting from discussing race or answering a race-related question by bringing up other social constructions that produce oppression such as gender, class, and sexuality. Instead of these interviewees pointing out how racialized subjects may face multiple forms of oppression at once that intersect and the ways categorizations are arranged within their contexts (intersectionality), they highlighted and reminded the interviewer that in addition to possibly experiencing racism, students of all "races" and ethnicities face a lot of diverse challenges that need our attention. (cf. Collins, 2019).

In several interviews, the focus was moved away from race even after I specifically directed the conversation back to racism and back to the question I had asked specifically on racism. These interviewees ended up answering the question by promoting an either/or discussion on different social identities in addition to race that may produce social inequality.

Interviewer: I could ask two questions, so why do you think that racism and mental health of young people is important as a topic and secondly, have you recognized or encountered racism in any forms in the lives of the children you work with or at the workplaces you work at

Interviewee 5: Yes. That was a big question. I mean I think that it is in the best interest of all people that racism is talked about, because there are human rights, human equity and respect on all possible criteria, whether it be color, language, gender, sexual orientation or size or weight or, anything that a person can be measured by, if you have glasses or straight pants. So in some way equality discussions benefit every individual, big and small. But is it encountered, yes I am sure that sometimes, but I think that when working with smaller kids the phenomenon is more invisible than if working with school aged children or young people. I think children are naturally quite tolerant and easygoing. And if you work in an environment with kids, then you might not encounter racism that often, if you don't speak to the adults at all. You just talk with kids then you might not know that there is racism. But of course kids start to pick up on attitudes and hearing things fast.

When asked a follow-up question in the same interview on racism and wellbeing, the "diverting from race" discourse was present, yet again.

Interviewer: ... What about in what ways could experiencing racism have impact, or have you ever seen that it could impact some child's wellbeing or development or kind of, developing one's sense of self?

Interviewee 5: Yes I think that we do have all other layers of racism as well, we talk of age racism, gender racism, so I think that they all work in the same way by decreasing a persons faith in their own chances, that there are different glass ceilings. Women are afraid to apply for higher jobs or certain fields, there are things to do with age that when you start becoming middle-aged you already think that can I, am I chosen, will they accept me anymore, or am I too old. Or young people can be discriminated because of lack of experience. But that is of course, they are a bit different forms of racism but if thought of how racism impacts, then if you receive feedback that any quality you have, whether it be family background or religious background or skin or language, culture, a religion would be inferior, then you might not reach for same things as others, if you have internalized the thought that your own whatever quality it would be would be inferior.

In the above excerpt, the interviewee in both answers lists several social identities they come up with to emphasize that inequality consists of many other things in addition to racism before answering the question, then they mention racism shortly and end the answer by either minimizing racism or again, marginalizing racism and listing different social identities that exist. Minimizing racism in this context is making sure using an equality discourse that all social identities separately are equal with each other in producing inequality, which denies structural racial hierarchies in a sense. They do not see intersectionality but assume that white people and non-white people equally share social identities that create inequality, twisting the idea of intersectionality into suggesting that we cannot speak of race alone (Preston & Bhopal, 2012:215). "Equality" discourse is present as well, where all forms of individual discrimination are considered equal and seemingly operating in the same way, insisting that even inequalities should be carefully treated as equal without regards to race. When describing how racism may remain invisible when working with smaller kids and how racism may be present sometimes, the

interviewee suggests that adults "bring" racism into the picture, so without talking to the adults, one might not encounter racism, although they also point out that kids are impacted by adults. Since kids' parents and teachers are all adults and adults influence kids, recognizing racism when working with small kids would then require collaborating and talking with the adults, hence avoiding adults would then be a way to consciously avoid encountering racism.

Not only did the interviewee avoid centering race when discussing racism, other social identities such as gender are referred to as "gender racism" where any discrimination regardless of race based on gender is "gender racism", instead of for example, talking about gendered racism of non-white people (e.g., Collins, 2019). The interviewee talks of women, presumably all women and different age groups, presumably of all races, even though the question specifically asks about racism. This strategy centers whiteness and marginalizes racism in a discussion about racial inequality, instead of maintaining the "centrality" of race whilst also including an intersectional perspective (Gillborn, 2015).

Tolerance and equality discourse were mostly present when interviewees talked about how things should be, instead of how things are. Some interviewees also talked about tolerance and equality as self-evident values that are foundational in society and professional identity. The main challenge tolerance and equality discourse seemed to consistently present in terms of anti-racism was colorblind ideology, which produced discourse that marginalized, minimized, and even denied racism. (Crenshaw, 2019). Refusal of noticing race, perhaps due to white fragility from avoiding being too color conscious (DiAngelo, 2018), and acknowledging that we do not share the same lived racial realities, allows ignorance regarding racism to prevail.

5.2 Personal awareness

Discourses that I labelled "personal awareness" were found in every single interview and included themes such as recognizing personal prejudices and identifying conscious and unconscious biases, reflexivity, personal and professional growth, educating oneself and the meanings of experiential knowledge. Whilst some personal awareness discourses included acknowledging that structural racism exists, several interviewees avoided discussing structural racism and placed more emphasis on individual agency. Some of the interviewees talked a lot about personal experiences as part of their growth process connected to forming knowledge on racism while others tried to narrow their talk to

professional experiences and know-how. Personal awareness discourse also included interviewees presenting their views on conceptualizing and addressing racism.

The most consistent discourse of personal awareness took place when interviewees discussed their motivations for educating themselves on racism, finding the topic of racism important and/or describing why they participated in this study. Eight of the interviewees talked about values important to them in a similar manner when discussing what motivated them to participate in this study or what has influenced their perceptions on racism and anti-racism. Interviewees also talked about how their experiences have shaped their understandings of equality and issues of racism.

Eight out of nine interviewees referred to individual agency and personal interest in different ways when talking about their roles in acting against inequality. For example, in the following excerpt, an interviewee describes what influences their views on racism by describing their personality and values.

Interviewee 9: So like what things affect how I think about racism? Like that?

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee 9: Ok. Well there's a lot of course. Well probably even just in my personality that this kind of sense of justice and, somehow equality of all people are such core values for me so then racism is a pretty clear phenomena of injustice and inequality so through that already it guides me to wanting to find out and be interested in it.

Four interviewees talked about personal values in a similar manner. In helping professions such as social work and psychology, justice and equality are assumed to be core values of the profession. It was interesting that when talking about values, some interviewees emphasized personal values and others talked about equality values more from a professional perspective. Within personal awareness discourse, I labelled two consistent discourses "Implicit bias and human nature" and "personal experience", all of which had in common the focus on individual self-reflection.

5.2.1 Implicit bias and human nature

Discourses of bias and/or human nature regarding recognizing racism or addressing racism were present in every interview. Questions of personal awareness being connected to bias mostly called for a proactive approach and reflective work for making sense of and dealing with racism. For becoming an anti-racist, examining biases and how they influence one's views and interpretations is essential (Kendi, 2019). In some of these interviews, discourses of human nature when discussing racism appeared as well, which naturalized racism and entailed a colorblind/equality discourse also, suggesting that

everyone faces exactly the same challenges that we are biologically wired to produce. It is one thing to acknowledge that prejudice is part of human nature, but another to normalize discrimination based on prejudice as such, which is a practice that produces a racial structure (Bonilla-Silva, 2015).

In the following excerpt, the interviewee presents an adamant discourse of human nature, where they understand tolerance as synonymous to colorblindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Crenshaw, 2019). They also discuss inclusion and exclusion as human nature and as individual or interpersonal processes instead of anything structural (cf. Keskinen et al., 2021). When talking about inclusion and exclusion as a white Finnish person, it is interesting that they decide to share an example from Italy and speak about the mafia, a group with a “negative” reputation in the eyes of many, rather than reflecting on any group the interviewee themselves identify with and exclusionary practices they might identify with. They speak of human nature and yet exclude themselves by giving an example of the “other”.

Interviewer: Yea or maybe it is that racism is the problem and that it's the racism..

Interviewee 8: Yes this is what happened to them.

Interviewer: .. Should be eliminated.

Interviewee 8: This happened to them because people are like this, people are like this a bit leaning towards exclusion or that there is an inner circle and the inner circle is favored. In Italy there is the mafia so the mafia favors its inner circle and others can be conned and they feel big emotions and holiness and loyalty toward their own family circle and others can be treated badly and then there are these local communities where tourists can be conned but then they are, your own inner circle is not conned and humans have this character that they are willing to do anything even bad things for their inner circle's benefit. These things I could talk about to students and classes if there are capabilities to contemplate all these kinds of phenomena. That it doesn't help in my opinion that – A goal like that is unrealistic that I would be willing to tolerate and understand or not notice anything differen- It wouldn't then mean toleran- but that I wouldn't pay attention at all and notice difference so that is probably not neuro biologically possible.

Interviewer: Yea so I probably-

Interviewee 8: But how to live with that and how to deal with it, do you think that others are so bad at it at dealing with difference and I am sharing advice and teaching. That is quite an arrogant attitude.

At first, the interviewee counters the notion that racism is a cause by immediately talking about what people, presumably all people since “people” isn't clarified, are like. They talk about how people interact with one another and how strong affectivity towards one's “inner circle” justifies bad actions towards others. Power would then lie with the majority and their inner circle. When they speak of local communities where tourists may be conned, they seem to imply that locals naturally would go against tourists, outsiders. Through using an example from another country far from their own, the interviewee seems to position themselves more in the possibly “conned tourists” position instead of someone who

would do bad things for their own inner circle. The interviewee also interrupts me, and delivers their answer almost in one long sentence with a faster pace, which I interpreted as an emotional response when they conclude how ignoring difference is unrealistic (DiAngelo, 2018). This suggests they interpreted my comment on racism as insinuating that people should not notice difference. This is also the first part where they use "I" and speak from their own point of view instead of "people". The interviewee speaks of willingness to tolerate, suggesting that in fact, there is a choice to lean towards or away from being tolerant. In the last sentence, they then confront me on whether it is appropriate for someone to educate other people on dealing with difference. This connects to their notion of willingness to tolerate before, as they seem to lean towards accepting people as individual humans who make their own choices, which are influenced by natural causes. Trying to influence others is portrayed as undesirable unless it is educating others on how human nature causes exclusion. When the white interviewee says that it is unrealistic that they would be willing to notice difference combined with the talk of in-group and out-group relationships before, they are saying that people working against "their" groups best interest is nearly impossible, implying that everyone equally inflicts power on others and are equally mistreated. This suggests the disbelief in structural racism as a system of power that upholds hierarchies in society, but rather groups equally and continuously negotiating power and having equal agency to do so, insinuating that reverse racism would be possible. I found the concept "white fragility" coined by DiAngelo (2018) referring to defensive reactions a white person has when they engage in conversation about racism descriptive here. Arguing against white supremacy is possible because of white privilege that allows the interviewee to assume the universality of their experiences.

In a different interview, another psychologist talks about implicit bias and personal awareness with more emphasis on individual agency, although they also include talk about human nature. The difference is that they take a proactive approach and frame biases as a problem that need to be dealt with, rather than an "it is what it is" type of approach. The interviewee suggests that implicit biases can be recognized through proactive reflexivity and facing situations where one's own prejudices may influence the interaction with another person.

Interviewee 9: Yea. I think about more of it that way that that's why it's important to be aware of the fact that you can never fully rid yourself of them so that you know that you can never do enough to, kind of, becoming aware of them or reducing them or dismantling them. Even though you would work your whole life towards not having racist prejudices they still are there, so then you have to just continue the work for there to be less and less of them. So you can have less of them, you can develop and you do get better in it but you can never become perfect or ready. That's how I think about it.

In the above excerpt, the interviewee highlights the fact that anti-racism requires long-term commitment, and one cannot take a break from reflecting on white supremacy, because they are so deeply ingrained in the self. It is therefore important to realize the limited influence individual personal growth and individual transformations have on transforming structures that maintain white supremacy (Bonilla-Silva, 2012). The interviewee suggests that individuals can recognize their own prejudices and that individuals can work on themselves. What is missing is tracking down where do racist prejudices come from and whose interests are they promoting. Only one of the interviewees contextualized racial prejudices within socio-historical locations or attached any of their prejudices identified with national narratives, although one interviewee did connect prejudice towards Russian people to Finnish history in passing (Keskinen, 2009).

Another interviewee not only talks about recognizing racism and individual agency, but also addresses how racism is more detrimental than other discriminatory practices because it attacks one's ethnicity and identity. Downplaying racism is fatal as it attacks something a person can't change. They connect racism with ethnicity and identity, so it is also unclear whether they understand race as a social construct, or whether they refer to racism as ethnic discrimination by the majority with a homogenous ethnic background. As I discussed in an earlier chapter, this is also a powerful myth in Finland promoting the false idea of an original homogenous people and Finnishness (Tervonen, 2017). The focus on ethnicity may also stem from understanding racism as a product of migration (Puuronen, 2011). The interviewee does mention the importance of understanding as a professional one's own ethnicity and position as well, which could refer to the client or their racialized position in society, such as a white position of power. The limitations brought by positionality are also addressed. As the interviewee in a similar manner as the previous interviewee talks about individual efforts to increase personal awareness and recognize personal racism, they continue with an example of a bias they have recognized that has to do with cultural racism/linguistic racism. Cultural racism that emphasized lack of Finnish language skills was in fact, strongly present in four out of all interviews.

Interviewer: Yea this can also be your, there are no right or wrong answers.

Interviewee 7: I somehow view that it would take a basic foundation of having to recognize what there is, what kinds of forms of racism there can be in mental health work and those that I just, that it probably would mean that an employee would have to pretty awake and okay with what is their own ethnicity and own position and also about some points of danger of what risks there are when downplaying someone's, others experiences and that can happen in other things than racism but maybe in questions of racism it is just a more fatal point of danger. I mean that if a young adult like I know someone who has had difficulties with their daily rhythm and there are some things there and a psychiatric nurse in a health care center had just said that is your problem really that serious and when it really was for them, maybe even the biggest problem at that moment, caused a lot of harm and guilt and so a kind of dismissing and downplaying in these things kind of even in smaller and more trivial things

so if you do it with things like racism, ethnicity and identity then I think that is way more fatal. But that would require a lot of knowledge, self-reflexivity, recognizing your own prejudices from an employee. I mean you can't even try to break or go around prejudices if you don't recognize them first and that is, I mean what kinds of my own prejudices have I- I mean one thing every now and then if I have to, let's say set up a psychological evaluation with a student whom I know of that the parents might not speak Finnish that well, the student is a so called S2-student, person of color or something of that sort then the contact request is left hanging for a while because then like, how do I write it and can I contact them like this, so some things work a lot easier so it requires quite a lot and once again in mental health work, if some contact requests are left hanging only because of, do I have the courage, when there might not be perfect Finnish speakers or it won't be understood than it is, it is a practical difficulty also, and I think that it is a practical difficulty that produces inequality at its worst. How would I sum up well, anti-racist mental health work so recognizing your prejudices, knowledge, understanding and I also view that all the possible questionnaires and structured interview templates we have that it wouldn't be a bad idea if there were something that would take into consideration experiences of racism, racial discrimination like to take it into consideration because it would help an employee also to recognize them like hey there can also be something like this and they really can impact or influence.

The interviewee conceptualizes their prejudice they have recognized that has to do with language as an individual prejudice derived from "practical" challenges combined with prejudice. They talk about racializing and categorizing a client based on assumed language skills of their family and even connect this process to individual courage. This process might also have very real consequences for the services the student will receive, as these contact requests may be left hanging and addressed later than easier and more "practical" requests from the perspective of the professional. Research on racism and mental health has also uncovered racial disparities in receiving mental health support (Coker et al.,2009; Priest et al.,2012). The consequence of conceptualizing this previously described example as individual prejudice rather than systemic racism reproduces white supremacy by attaching the practical challenges with language and presumed ethnicity rather than white structures which promote, support, and normalize practices favoring majority interests. (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). The experience of a professional that their workload would significantly increase by contacting non-white families, which could either be based on their experiences or what they assume, is understood as a personal barrier to overcome which also connects to prejudice.

Another angle one could take here is asking whether the interviewee is more concerned with making "a mistake" in the eyes of the family and not being understood like they would want to than the possible workload. However, as the interviewee talks about practicality twice, it is unclear whether they think individuals decide what is practical for them based on prejudice or whether this really is a practical difficulty for all professionals because white structures emphasize the significance of language. The freedom of the professional to choose the order in which they answer requests is also a policy upheld by structural racism, so transforming individual attitudes would not be able to eliminate the inequality produced by these "practical" difficulties supported by these policies. Lastly, discrimination based on

Finnish language skills is very broad and concrete in Finnish society, most drastically in the labor market (Keskinen, 2016). The notion that one must speak good Finnish for earning their position here has been accepted without much criticism and normalized as a natural way of thinking, which is connected to nationalism, anti-immigration discourses and myths of Finnishness (Tervonen, 2017; Keskinen, 2019). It is most likely not just a personal bias when one discriminates "unintentionally" based on language. This national narrative of learning Finnish language in order to be active in Finnish society feeds the "racialized system" where contemporary racism needs to be not-so-obvious and justified by national interests.

5.2.2 Personal experience

Included in discourses of personal awareness were also discourses of personal experience. Seven of the interviewees talked about personal experience connected to racism through friends or loved ones who they have empathized with, eight out of nine interviewees talked about how lacking personal experiential knowledge of racism may limit their understanding of racialization and one of the interviewees directly referred to their own experiences of racialization on multiple occasions. Three out of nine interviewees talked a lot about their emotions, especially frustrations towards racism persisting despite living in a contemporary society.

In the following excerpt, one interviewee with personal experience of racialization connects their frustration with racism in present day with our location in history and society. They speak about time and understand the concept of time as moving forward and advancing changes. Although they talk about their personal emotions, the interviewee underlines that they are frustrated for the whole community. Lastly, they also refer to regional difference pointing out that diversity should logically decrease racism in a local community.

Interviewer: Yes, a kind of discriminatory treatment or.. By the way do you have, now that you described some situations where this has been brought up with a student, so what kind of feelings or thoughts have been brought up in you in the situation when, someone has brought up something like that?

Interviewee 1: Well, very bad. For me I just.. Yea well, both personal experiences have reached the surface, because I have experienced similar comments. But then I also just feel very, bad. I mean we have such a big age difference with the child, that in present day people should (laughs), that your frustrated towards this community that how can it be that, kids in that age group still, don't somehow, include someone for a reason like that.

Because it is so normal already today not to be a completely white-skinned Finnish person, so how is it that you would be caught by surprise that, or somehow that what (laughs). That how can it be. So that is frustrating for this community, or somehow it is frustrating that, things don't progress, even though so many years have passed from my childhood that these same racist comments should have disappeared by now. But that they experience it too I feel bad.

I: Have you been surprised about that you have even been faced with these things?

Interviewee 1: Well yea. I have. And especially in the metropolitan area, because somehow here it is still, I don't.. Maybe I would understand if, in northern parts this would still be more new, but.. I wouldn't assume that in the metropolitan area in some hobbies that, some child would have to experience discrimination based on their skin color

The interviewee's own experiences that they are also dealing with when supporting students seem to be strengthened by the fact that they are also experiencing frustration and surprises they haven't prepared for, since diversity has increased since they were younger. In the end when they talk about less diverse regions with less frustration and even understanding, because ignorance would be due to lack of exposure, they specifically address the metropolitan area which has been diverse long enough for ridding itself of racial discrimination. This understanding connects with Finnish national narratives of diversity as something new to Finland and diversity being a cure for racism, which the interviewee is now unveiling to be untrue (Keskinen et al.,2021). They have also constructed Finnishness as a construct that is now de-racialized because of diversity and address how normal it is "already" for everyone to claim Finnishness, describing progression in ideology that should have trickled down from the macro-level to the micro-level already. They even laugh on occasion in disbelief that this is happening, and that people have held on to their ignorance and whiteness despite of diversity.

In another interview, a white interviewee discusses lack of experiential knowledge and her position as a white woman as a possible limitation for recognizing racism, but also as an incentive for acquiring a personal style to narrate someone's racial experiences and support them to reflect on how their racialized experiences may impact their wellbeing. Bullying, which is a widely discussed and researched topic in our field, is brought up by the interviewer as a self-evident factor for a healthy self-image. The interviewee then continues to reflect on their own understandings and lack of understanding on internalized racism. They observe that whilst emotional skills can be taught up to a certain point, we can't teach how to interpret and use these skills because of our individual resources we must process these things.

Interviewer: Yea it feels like it is a lot clearer when we talk about how these bullying experiences can affect your self-esteem at the moment. So I am not sure do I talk about -, have I talked about as clearly on how these experiences of racism impact (laughs).

Interviewee 3: Yea. And then I also think about is it even anywhere. When I think about it that way, that if we talk about for example teaching emotional skills, then you can't basically take anyone further than what you are able to do. You can't, if we think about emotional skills and regulating emotions and recognizing emotions, then you can't

somehow teach it at all further than what knowledge you carry about them. So then I think about these experiences of racism also that that was a good example of how much it is talked about how bullying impacts your way to be in different situations and for example that you have prej-, how you predict situations that what is going on and am I going to manage here and am I enough and am I good enough. But then we don't talk about that or maybe narrate that enough, that are there for example experiences of racism or discrimination, that can influence these situations. But then can I as a white woman somehow then in any way take up the conversation from the right angle and somehow recognize these points enough. And how could you learn to recognize these points in a way that I can't know anything about these experiences, because I can't experience racism. But that is it somehow, that you could learn a style, that you could somehow bring these up in a way that the young person would themselves wake up and think that can something like this be an influence in the background.

The interviewee is having some difficulty expressing their point and uses a lot of words such as "somehow" and "maybe" and even shifts their point they're about to make in one instance. They seem unsure of how much they can say without experiential knowledge and seek to keep their point speculative and non-factual, as they cannot speak from experience. They rather try to reflect on the topic from a professional perspective and discuss emotional skills and supporting students from the position of someone who does this. Lack of tools to both recognize and talk about racism are brought up. When they talk about how one could learn to recognize racism "in a way" that is transparent by acknowledging them not having experiential knowledge, it seems as they want a solution that would reduce the risk of saying something wrong and finding a path to be as "correct" as possible, which would also prevent them from dealing with facing failure and white fragility (DiAngelo, 2018). The "safe" way they suggest or ponder on is finding a way to narrate someone's experience they share with a style that empowers them to make these connections between racism and their emotions. Talking about racism for the interviewee seems to be a very difficult task from their position because of prioritizing intent of navigating the discussion correctly and with appropriate abilities, although in the end they also entertain the idea of cultivating one's ability through learning a conversational style that works.

To sum up the influence personal awareness discourse carries for anti-racism, recognizing biases and self-reflection are important steps towards getting closer to anti-racism, but it is also essential to recognize that structural racism exists (Atabong, 2017). One should bear in mind that racialized clients' life chances are strongly influenced by structural racism, which might include policies that are naturalized in a way that we are unable to recognize these policies as subjects for social change (Bonilla-Silva, 2021). In addition to recognizing personal biases, conversations within the field are essential so that professionals in certain fields can locate possible patterns in the personal biases that are brought up and talked about together, since these biases might now have transformed into biases of a field and not only individual professionals anymore. Another challenge providers' might face is what actions to carry out instead of remaining silent and complicit after one recognizes their biases and how biases might influence their client

interactions and lenses which they use to interpret situations. Thirdly, lack of experiential knowledge was frequently brought up as a barrier to recognize and/or address racism in a correct way whilst having experiential knowledge also strongly influenced how a provider may empathize when facing race-related issues, something that has been raised frequently by POC activists on mental health support as well. It would have been interesting to talk more about how white interviewees conceptualized “correctness” and whether the fear of addressing race-related issues incorrectly leads to avoidance or silence in some situations. Also, more and more POC youth and activists share their experiential knowledge for free as discussed in the literature review, so it would be important to see how white providers may or may not utilize the available experiential knowledge on racialization for educating themselves more, as educating oneself was also frequently brought up as being important for anti-racism.

5.3 Belonging

The final main discourse that I labelled belonging was present in every single interview. Belonging discourse centered mainly around having a sense of belonging. Themes such as inclusion, support and representation were consistently brought up within belonging discourses, all of which expressed ways belonging is constructed and its effects on wellbeing. Some interviewees also addressed politics of belonging, which was present within discourses of tolerance, equality, and personal awareness as well. By politics of belonging, I mean practices and actions aimed at constructing belonging in particular ways to racial groups, that are simultaneously themselves being constructed by these same practices and actions in particular ways (Yuval-Davis, 2011). All three discourses also express how racism impacts both non-white people and white people in particular ways.

5.3.1 Inclusion and support

Belonging discourse dealt with inclusion from multiple angles. When talking about wellbeing all interviewees talked about having a sense of belonging and the state of being included, which was emphasized as a powerful protective factor against internalizing racism and being excluded and has been found to be significant for self-esteem in research as well (Priest et al., 2013). Some interviewees also discussed the process of inclusion itself in more detail and how factors such as Finnish language skills, identification with others and grouping influence the process.

Inclusion was also talked about when referring to including or accommodating people who have been excluded. In the following excerpt, an interviewee describes challenges they might face when dealing with race-related issues. They describe how lack of inclusion might create misunderstandings, barriers for empathizing with others and how different positions and perceptions affect someone navigating these situations. The perception of the majority is also emphasized over perceptions of a minority member as the interviewee describes certain practices as “normal” practices and normal is determined by the majority, though there is also a conflict since the interviewee acknowledges that they might not always recognize racism or understand what it is.

Interviewer: Yea answered very well. Actually, I could skip a few questions and go back to what kind of challenges do you perceive there could be when supporting a student or solving a situation is intertwined with racism somehow? Or are there any challenges?

Interviewee 9: Well of course there are. Now I just will not say that this would have happened already but I’m just thinking what there could be. Well the first thing that comes to mind is, if we’d imagine that the case would be between a teacher and student then of course the different views between these two on the situations, that the other one could think that there was no racism here and the other one could think that there has been then it is already a challenge, how to get them to see the situation from the other one’s point of view. Then I also think that sometimes it can be that, well I view that it’s also difficult like this when I’m usually or my role might be in these situations a medi.. or not like a mediator but someone in between so sometimes it could also be that practices I don’t for example view as racist but as something applicable for every student then, a POC family for example could experience that you’re still treating, that it would be special treatment and then it’s a challenge to convey that this is a normal practice and applies to everyone. So those can sometimes be difficult to convey and also what is the Finnish school in comparison to school contexts in other countries, these challenges. I have also thought about a personal challenge that because I have never experienced racism then I can’t, what I find challenging is that I don’t know how it feels for example or don’t even properly know what it is so that is also a challenge for me. What else? Well I also think that because our school has so many of these, well POC students then it might be that the school staff forms a perception that then racism can’t be possible when we are a multicultural pack so it wouldn’t be possible that we would have.. So that view would have to be dismantled in my opinion because no change can be advanced if the thought is that change is not needed or the problem doesn’t even exist. So I think these kinds of challenges have to do with that.

In the above excerpt, the interviewee reflects on their role between teachers and students as an expert mediator that both parties might seek verification for their interpretations on situations that are open for multiple interpretations. In some cases, the interviewee’s interpretation of a situation could have significant influence on outcomes. The interviewee underlines how conveying their view in some situations to families with different experience is challenging. Some of the other interviews in which interviewees talked about how using “the race card” upsets teachers, and how some situations are misinterpreted by students as racial raised interesting questions of how can white professionals such as teachers or welfare professionals regain lost trust from people of color (POC) who have experienced racism which continues to influence their interpretations of situations? Especially if both white fragility on one side, and racial trauma influencing interpretations of situations on another side, are both at play

(DiAngelo,2018; Kaukinen&Moua, 2020). They also mention how the “Finnish” school could be understood from the “other” point of view differently. Another important question this interviewee raised was the risk of white staff assuming that diversity is synonymous with equality or anti-racism, which might add fuel to the challenge of recognizing racism (Atabong,2017; Crenshaw,2019).

In another interview, inclusion was talked about from the perspective of knowledge, ignorance, intent and experiential knowledge as the interviewee reflected on personal experience and overcoming experiences of exclusion. Discourse of both inclusion and tolerance are strongly present. The interviewee also talks about responsibility of all individuals and groups in achieving tolerance and inclusivity. They recognize the majority population possesses the power of accepting difference, but they also recognize that addressing the lack of tolerance in the past and moving forward requires the excluded persons to show willingness to accept ignorance as an explanatory factor, forgive and move forward.

Interviewee 1: Acceptance from the other side. Accepting different.. And them, the majority population can be educated, to acc.. accept difference, and to normalize difference among them. But then, also this POC- population gives, you ask them to be forgiving and for the understanding that there is not knowledge. And that they.. Or somehow, that you’d try, to somehow.. Because, yea, yea like I said that it is a good thing that there is peer support and that you seek the company of people who are like you but we you never get rid of this problem unless they are willing to forgive and try again to collaborate. Than to just accept, that yea I was not accepted there, so I am in my own place now. You need everyone to try again.

Interviewer: By the way I thought that about your own, talking about do you think that for you it has also been..

Interviewee 1: Yea. It was. Yes.

Interviewer: Does this also come from what you just said that these come from your own experience and knowledge..

Interviewee 1: Yes. And like when I have forgiven...

In the excerpt above, the interviewee broadens the topic of experiencing racism to receiving support and discusses how moving from, “giving up” on the idea of inclusion and finding spaces that are accepting to solving the problems related to prejudice and tolerance together would help everyone. Although they talk about the majority having the power to accept difference, the POC population they speak of also has if not power, a responsibility to forgive if the majority takes an active role after receiving education or educating themselves. It has to be someone’s responsibility to ensure that the majority population is educated, because they can be educated, and the oppressed population has the role of accepting efforts to change the current situation. The question then is about the conflict where a force and not individuals are responsible for becoming ignorant and being without knowledge and a force is also the solution, because knowledge must be provided for the ignorant population. The

interviewee here is addressing how racism shapes the life of white people as well, who are also unwillingly socialized into a racist society (Bonilla-Silva, 2021). This is an interesting question in present day, since sharing knowledge has rapidly transformed during the past decade and all knowledge is now accessible, so it remains an interesting question whether the responsibility to initiate collaborating with groups that you are not a part of leans more towards the minority groups or the majority groups. As the interviewee describes, the role of the oppressed population should be to forgive and not ask to be accepted. When the role of having to ask to be accepted, especially in predominantly white environments, is assigned to persons of color (POC), the risk of negative effects on mental health increases (Smith, 2007; McGee & Stovall, 2015).

Support was brought up by many interviewees through discussions on the importance of peer support when facing challenges, seeking for support, and belonging to groups and being accepted in the groups one is a part of. Some of the interviewees emphasized the value of peer groups for students' wellbeing and the role educators and welfare professionals at school have in successful grouping of students. Research on racism and mental health has also suggested that communality and peer support helps cope with negative effects of racism (e.g., Mossakowski, 2003). The role and responsibility of adults instead of attributing responsibility on students regards to anti-racism and belonging was discussed by seven interviewees, which would also be interesting to research further as this is what should happen according to welfare professionals, but what actually happens is in many cases something else. In the following interview excerpt, an interviewee gives a speech on the power of groups and their meanings.

Interviewee 2: I strongly believe in the force of peer groups I believe in all things that, when a person realizes and experiences that they are not alone with something or I am not the only one, even if the thing what be something horrible, then, and wrong, and then, disgusting or anything, I could compare this to victim support that why peer groups exist, is when you can share and someone really understands what you are talking about, that ok we can't all have experienced similar things through our profession and we can still help and empathize, but I still feel that young people especially their own age group, damn that is the best healing, that it kind of, but it requires then, how the adult can help when the groups are directed, that it stays like, the process like there is a beginning, middle part and ending that it has closure, that the thing is discussed there and it's safe to discuss, but also that there is the closure, if we are at school or when we are going from there then we know that the thing will stay there, or we can continue safely the next time, but you don't have to carry it, when you leave out the door alone. Group belonging, belonging to something is, damn it is so important to talk about this, I think teachers need to be talked to about this, because we talk about those groupings and teachers think that it's a onetime thing and let's do this just like that and now they are doing something and playing and singing and that's that, so it is about a lot deeper things than just the one grouping in a classes matter but exactly this, that will I be accepted as I am. This is it, this has been my mission, but, there is not a lot of audience (laughs), you always have to take the place, know how to sneak in the right moment. You can influence students yes, but adults are more challenging.

The welfare professional in the way that they are giving a speech seems to personally be very invested in advocating for the importance of grouping processes that adults are responsible for supporting. They

talk about how grouping might be undermined by some educators who might not fully understand or be aware of its value and mentions collaboration between different adults as a bigger challenge than collaborating with and/or between students. The interviewee seems to refer to small group counselling or organized peer groups that adults are responsible for planning and carrying out, which they view as a tool for providing students with healing and support.

Another interviewee talks about belonging from a personal perspective and how sometimes grouping might even happen because of discrimination. Perceptions of difference, sameness and acceptance are connected to how the environment accepts difference and how the environment discriminates. The interviewee gives an example of individuals who have different immigrant backgrounds that form a group based on feeling sameness and accepted even though the group is diverse. Relating to others and feeling sameness here is because everyone was discriminated which ties their experiences together, so belongingness has a negative source even though people are also brought together.

Interviewee 1: Well no I never felt like I belonged. That never came. But it was just that when, you were older and made friends who were also from somewhere else, then you got this belongingness.. and somehow what, we all.. that it somehow ties you together when, in Finland someone else also.. Or somehow that when you often hear that immigrant background children all play, or somehow that they are just amongst each other. But I understand (laughs) that they want to be because, they are accepted. Or if there is an immigrant-group who come from, children come from different countries, that it's not like certain nationalities join together but just like, a diverse bunch but all are..

Interviewer: So naturally you would seek to be there.

Interviewee 1: Yea, like naturally you would seek to be in a group where you feel like you are the same as others. And accepted. Which is sad, because that is why you have sought each other's company because (laughs), you are discriminated elsewhere so then we are, the discriminated ones venture out and not like "hey, you are really nice" (laughs), "that is why I am seeking to be here", so that is sad that for a negative reason you end up being together or grouped together.

The interviewee even hesitates when naming these "othering" processes and what they refer to when talking about the "other". Experiencing othering and discrimination can increase empathy towards others who have a similar position in the same environment. Resilience and grit, traits I interpreted the interviewee as also describing when talking about how they have had to navigate exclusion, should also be questioned as to what degree these traits are healthy and should these be demanded from marginalized students based on discrimination (McGee & Stovall, 2015). However, even though seeking the company of people who are in similar situations is referred to as something natural, discrimination is not a natural process. Discrimination creates distance between the minoritized groups and the majority group, which can result in the minoritized groups becoming closer with one another for this reason.

5.3.2 Representation

Another theme that was consistently on display in many of the interviews connected to belonging was representation. By representation, I mean the ways non-white individuals and groups are represented in the school community and what meanings does representation have for areas of wellbeing.

Eight interviewees brought up that their “race” (racialized non-white/white) may influence POC students’ help-seeking, and some talked about in more detail how their position may affect how students feel heard or understood and how this requires proactive efforts from the professionals. As a negative consequence on mental health, five interviewees talked about how lack of representation amongst students where the body of students is very homogenous may increase the risk to internalized racism, which could decrease self-esteem and future aspirations (cf. Mossakowski, 2013). Some of the excerpts that I discussed as “tolerance and equality” discourse earlier also touched upon negative consequences lacking belonging might yield (cf. Priest et al., 2013; Paradies, 2006).

In the next excerpt, an interviewee talks about how “losing” diversity and going back to being a white school has resulted in more open racism such as using the n-word, because before students have held each other accountable for displaying racism and now without many POC students, adults have a bigger role in addressing racism in the school. They talk about a situation where a black student has come to seek help from the interviewee by asking whether it is the responsible of adults to interfere with racism and the interviewee has asked the student, what is the students’ view on what should happen. It is interesting how the interviewee talks about how being the only black student in a white group means that the student may not have peer support and a sense of belonging in the group and has had to seek help from the white interviewee, yet the interviewee assigns the responsibility back to the student after acknowledging they lack support. In the end, the interviewee underlines their big role in addressing these issues without emphasizing what the role the student must take in talking about these issues to an adult means and how big it is.

Interviewee 3: This has been for me that I still don’t know what I think about this and how I feel about it, but now that the majority of our POC young people have left and we now have a pretty white school, the n-word has started to become more frequent. And it is thrown around with a lower threshold without understanding at all and that for them it’s just a word and they don’t really, they don’t understand why I’m so vocal about it and why I’m so strict about it. And then I had a, we have a student from that group, who is black themselves. And once they came here at my door and asked that “aren’t teachers supposed to address this?” Or somehow. And then I said to them that “I interfere every time I hear it so what do you mean?” And they said that “well not all adults do that”. And then I asked them themselves that “well what do you think about people saying the n-word around you as a joke?” Then they were kind of like “well I don’t mind because I know it’s a joke”. And then I was like “Yea but you..” Then we had a conversation about it on like, that for example last year, that would have not been ok here. And the student knows who was not ok with it and they are friends with them, they are just a year younger. So then I

have.. This is just my interpretation, but I strongly felt like, that because the student has no one in the group, who would be like on their side, who would say something that there is not that community or peer support, so they succumb to it. And then they come here in secret from their friends to ask me if this is ok. Then I have to from him, I mean from me, a white person, I have to ask him that well what do you as a black person think about this that is it. So the role is quite big and students know it. And I do observe it here.

At first, the interviewee interestingly points out as a fact that the n-word is used by students because they are ignorant and only think of it as a word (Rastas, 2007). The interviewee also asks the student their opinion on people using it as a joke, so it is the welfare professional who narrates others using the n-word as a joke for the student. Whether students in middle school, which is the context, are ignorant on the meaning of the word since it was not used much the year before when more POC students were at the school seems questionable. The black student then tells the interviewee that they don't mind it because they know it is a joke after they have been told by the adult who they approached that it is used as a joke. The reactive role the interviewee describes at first where they are strict in addressing the n-word anytime they hear it, does not seem to translate to the interaction they describe, where the student seems to be seeking answers and validation from the welfare professional. The student is also not showing a particular desire to reflect on their own thoughts before getting validation from the welfare professional, since they have sought advice in secret and point out that "aren't" teachers responsible for interfering.

The intent of the interviewee might be being aware of not to speak for someone and make sure the students' point of view is heard and comes from them. However, the action they take is also conflicting when they assume it is not easy for this student to seek help in secret and brush something that clearly bothers them with humor and yet the interviewee does not openly address the racism from their own professional point of view. The student is seemingly looking for support from a representative of adults in the school, since they most likely would have not come to talk to them if they were not bothered by racism. As an adult and a professional, the interviewee could provide knowledge from their own perspective, which would validate the students experience of racism. The interviewee seems to focus on being careful because of their white position not to speak on something they can't directly relate with, even though they speak of feeling bad that the student must "give in" as the only black person in the group. They even emphasize how wrong it is that a black student should have to seek validation for their experience of racism from a white person, but they still choose based on the story they share here not to narrate the students experience and give the student their perspective first, which is what the student was asking from them. The situation the interviewee described shows the difference between

being a “not racist” and an “antiracist” and difference between a reactive and proactive approach (Kendi, 2019; Atabong, 2017). The good intention of perhaps empowering the black student by assigning them to voice what they think about the situation first may result in a negative impact, where the black student does not receive the validation and support that they sought.

The example above was from middle school. In another interview where the welfare professional worked with younger children, the topic of how teachers may be “rattled” by a class with only one “representative” of certain categories that the educator has in mind came up. Both the interviewee and the teacher they refer to seem uncertain of what they are facing or trying to understand. The interviewee has difficulty understanding, why this topic was brought up to them and they seem unsure of how to navigate the conversation with the teacher. The interviewee also interprets the teacher being confused about the mere fact that they had an adopted black child in a white group.

Interviewee 6: ... We had this big area so there was one group during my first work year, where they had no worries about anything and everything was great, but then the teacher pointed at one child and said to me “but we do have that one”. And then I asked that sorry what, and they answered that well this person. I was like oh you mean this girl in the front. And they said yea, that girl, I mean they are black, don’t I understand that they are black so that is the thing. They had no concern about anything like learning, behavior, interaction, social situations, nothing about emotional life. She was adopted and black. And the teacher thought this was somehow confusing and something that should be brought up with student welfare, because everyone else in the group was white and then there was this one girl who was black. So it is -, I don’t think that was racism either, but it was just a kind of ignorance. Somehow, they had never had a black child in the group before.

Firstly, the interviewee seems to feel strongly that the teacher consulted welfare professionals with no reason at all, but in the end, they still prioritize intent over possible impact and don’t want to name what they described as racism. They name what happened as ignorance, which would suggest that this teacher sought knowledge on the group they had. Even though this teacher did not consult on a specific issue, it is the interviewee, who simultaneously sees ignorance but does not seem to recognize the tools needed to address the situation. It is also unclear whether the interviewee feels comfortable or uncomfortable in narrating this situation out loud for example for the teacher by voicing out loud that clearly the teacher recognizes that they have a group with only one black child for the first time. If the teacher is in fact ignorant, they might need guidance on how to ensure that the space is safe and comfortable for everyone, how to ensure that everyone achieves belongingness in the group, how to recognize and address their own biases and what information such as research on the wellbeing of adoptees should this teacher seek out (cf. Rastas, 2007; Säävälä, 2012).

The last example from another interview was an interesting conversation on role models and representation regards to wellbeing took place. I first talked about being able to identify with people

who look like oneself and people, such as artists, who speak on issues such as anti-racism. The interviewee counters this by pointing out how POC students may perceive lack of representation within professional fields that students come across daily and how fields may produce mainly white professionals that offer support and guidance for students. Celebrities or artists are not as relatable as a teacher or psychologist who we encounter in our daily lives and aspiring to be an artist as a young person might be a less common goal than wanting to succeed academically and be a teacher, for example.

Interviewer: But yea probably as you have also spoken a lot to students about the importance of having role models that for children there are, a lot of these, artists and others that speak on these topics.

Interviewee 1: But that is also pretty limited that, what kind of role models there are.. Well they are then, that if you're not at Beyonce's level then you're not.. (laughs) Or where are all the teachers in permanent positions.. Or like those, who you see everywhere here.

Interviewer: Yea like people from daily life

Interviewee 1: Yea like there at the office...

Interviewer: Actually not that you..

Interviewee 1: .. Yea is there a lot of representation really. That it is the "ethnic Finns" who now help these (laughs)...

Interviewer: yea like these helping professions exactly, that's true..

Interviewee 1: Yea. We there is not like "hey I was in your position but, I have now studied and advanced to..". Somehow that they.. the path is open to them as well, that they can also be someone working in that position.

The interviewee also refers to power hierarchies as they talk about how someone with less power may be influenced by receiving support from only white people. They even laugh when talking about the interaction where white people are almost always the ones occupying the helping professions and are the ones to help "these other" people who may or may not have a strong sense of belonging to begin with. School is an environment so influential in everyone's life that especially lack of representation for certain groups may hinder children's ability to see themselves as future educators or as welfare professionals. Being "the only one" and not having options to seek help from adults who students can identify with is a theme that many POC activists and writers on mental health have actively raised.

Discourses on belonging strongly emphasized the significant impact belonging has on well-being and mental health, which is supported by research as well (e.g., Priest et al., 2013; Mossakowski, 2003). All interviewees who discussed belonging and wellbeing touched upon the extent to which people feel accepted, identity work, aspirations, social connectedness, and receiving/having support. Findings from this study yielded similar results as the research discussed in the literature review that consistently

showed how sense of belonging significantly influences mental health. Racism produces multiple barriers to belonging by making its victims feel unsafe and excluded, especially in white environments where there is a lack of peer support and POC students even need certain coping skills to deal with racism (McGee & Stovall, 2015).

6. Discussion & Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to produce knowledge on the challenges mental health professionals face and perceive to exist in terms of understanding and dealing with racism through their profession. Investigating providers' perspectives through the lens of critical race theory (CRT) suggested ways in which providers may intentionally or unintentionally help racism persist in education and mental health support. This chapter includes a discussion of key findings related to the literature on racism in Finland, racism's impact on mental health and critical race theory. Included is also a discussion on anti-racist school-based mental health and current challenges that deserve attention for transforming anti-racism from campaigns into practice. In the end of this chapter, I end by discussing what directions findings of this study suggest for future research. This chapter therefore seeks to help answer the following research questions, which I presented in the introduction:

1) How do mental health professionals at school view the influence racism has on mental health and well-being of POC pupils? 2) How do school mental health professionals make sense of, and deal with, issues of racism faced by POC students and which challenges do they face in doing so? 3) How do school mental health professionals conceptualize anti-racism as part of their professional roles.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews answered the open-ended research questions using a CRT lens by analyzing the meanings and contexts of speech, which not only provided answers to the research questions, but also challenged current mainstream approaches to promoting tolerance and equality in Finland (Seikkula, 2019; Keskinen et al., 2021). The data provided most answers for the second question, mainly because this was the most open-ended question and produced a lot of interactive dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee. Questions one and three also yielded answers, but interestingly many interviewees found describing an anti-racist psychologist or social worker challenging and expressed uncertainty when discussing the influence racism has on mental health because of their

white position and/or perceived lack of knowledge. Next, I will discuss the key findings related to each research question in order, followed by a discussion on the findings from this research. Lastly, I draw conclusions on this study's implications for future research on racism and mental health in schools.

6.1 Key findings

All school psychologists and social workers were in agreement with the fact that racism does affect mental health, but there were vast differences between the welfare professionals as to how concerned they were about racism's effects on mental health. The most consistently discussed effects racism has on the mental health and wellbeing of POC pupils were exclusion, lacking a sense of belonging and internalized racism. Belonging was viewed as an important factor behind both individual and communal well-being. It was also raised as an important protective factor for individuals and groups, whilst lack of belonging in turn decreases well-being and creates exclusion (Mossakowski, 2003). These findings were consistent with research on racism and mental health that has heightened self-esteem as both a positive and negative mediating factor in terms of negative mental health outcomes, whilst self-esteem is mediated by both belonging and internalized racism (Priest et al., 2013). In contrast to research and knowledge produced by POC activism that bases on lived experiences, interviewees did not bring up mental health outcomes such as depression and anxiety (cf. Coker et al., 2009; Priest et al., 2013; Tolonen, 2019).

The second research question on providers' perceptions on race, racism, addressing racism including its challenges produced findings that complimented the literature review even more so than I expected (Säävälä, 2012; Jahnukainen et al.; Souto, 2011). The frequency of expressions of colorblind ideology was both expected and surprising, since all interviewees did participate voluntarily and knowing that the explicit focus of the research is racism and mental health support. Yet, many of the interviewees found maintaining the focus on racism in our discussions difficult, even when answering questions specifically about racism. The interviewees who expressed personal ties with the topic of racism had less difficulty focusing on racism and mental health than those who did not express personal ties or experience with race-related issues. Most interviewees perceived racism as prejudice and stuck to discussing individual and interpersonal racism. Some interviewees even underscored that they were not talking about racism, when in fact they were describing inequalities produced by structural racism.

One of the main challenges for addressing racism was that anti-racist professional approaches or roles seemed to be very dependent on individual awareness and perceptions on racism, and less connected to institutional structures, policies or organizational commitments. This carries impactful consequences on students, since the abilities of mental health support providers to recognize racism, have discussions about racism with students and provide support for racism through action as well as counselling heavily rely on individual competencies and choices of individuals to deal with biases, self-reflect and educate oneself. Providers mostly relied on counselling strategies that they are used to employing and seemed uncertain on how to bring up and ask about experiences of racism from students, how to map whether racism has influenced students' wellbeing and how to, or should they provide knowledge for students on racism and mental health. These challenges have been echoed by POC activists who have been raising the question of the lack of knowledge on racism and mental health among white mental health professionals.

School psychologists also conceptualized anti-racism in different ways, so no cohesive strategies or understandings were found by combining the findings. Some of the interviewees understood antiracism as automatically included in equality and tolerance values and several interviewees framed equality and tolerance through colorblind ideology, which challenges anti-racism in the field (Atabong, 2017). Some interviewees focused on personal journeys of anti-racism fueled by personal experience and racialization of family members or close friends, which motivated them to be more antiracist. A few interviewees also mentioned addressing institutional racism, and three interviewees did bring up how changing the spaces and environments rather than individuals and groups should receive more attention in their working environments. Many interviewees talked about lacking knowledge, tools and collectivity within their field and work locations, which also challenged them in becoming anti-racist professionals.

A proactive approach that is essential for anti-racism would require professionals to actively recognize different racisms that affect the lives of their clients and reflect constantly on their own position and biases for understanding how their own views influence their actions practices (Kendi, 2019). Findings indicated that most professionals expressed reflexivity as foundational in their professional identity and many of the interviewees talked about identifying personal biases and prejudices as part of the process of recognizing racism. Engaging in this requires deep thought on how our life experiences have shaped our perceptions of race and racism, so that we can learn to be sensitive to how we interpret the information we absorb that may confirm our biases or prejudices that we have recognized.

6.2 Discussion

Critical race theory (CRT) uncovers and explains different ways in which race is constructed across macro- and micro levels and transforms across places and time to sustain white supremacy (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). From a sociological perspective, looking at how mental health providers with power and as members of a public institution conceptualize racism and mental health requires investigating not only individual competence, but most of all how social structure influence's mental health. Every student has a lawful right to access and use student welfare services, which are organized by the city. Every student should have the right to receive support equally and mental health professionals should be committed to promoting social justice and equality by both their organization and personal values.

Identifying certain practices and norms that were present in the data direct the attention to how white supremacy may be replicated by mental health services at school. Firstly, the lack of collective understandings of racism and its significant interconnectedness with mental health and help-seeking can only truly be tackled from the "top down", even though professionals as individuals also have some power (and the responsibility) to promote anti-racism, not act as a bystander, and advocate for social change and social justice.

Findings from this study suggesting that it is more common to conceptualize racism as a problem of individuals and groups who are ignorant or blatantly racist than as a structural problem highlight how contemporary racism such as colorblindness reproduces white supremacy (Bonilla-Silva, 2021). The prevalence of cultural racism that neglects racism as the cause of racial inequality may be connected to Finnish national narratives that perceive racism as a product of immigration and the growth of anti-immigration discourse and populism during the past years (Puuronen, 2011; Keskinen et al., 2021).

Why was it, for example, that some providers might feel ill equipped to work with students and families who "lack" Finnish language? Instead of this being an issue of practicality or cultural difference, discrimination based on language in Finland is systematic and covers many fields including education and mental health (Non-discrimination Ombudsman, 2020). Attributing lack of language skills to lack of integration, cultural background or neighborhood segregation without narrating these phenomena as structural racism places the agency to learn language within the individuals or racialized groups. Mental health professionals who recognize biases within themselves and choose to be silent on discrimination based on language are complicit in producing inequality, and could describe themselves as "not racists", instead of "anti-racists" (Atabong, 2017). Most importantly though, the normalized narrative that

Finnish language skills (should) result in better life outcomes prevents anyone from questioning, whether having structures where Finnish language skills are foundational even though it is known that migration is not slowing down and children will have different language backgrounds in education is in fact, perpetuating white supremacy (e.g., Kalalahti et al., 2019). Findings from this study suggested that for example in education, the curriculum is burdened because of poor language skills, which is why the quality of education varies according to language background, attributing the inequality of education to skills of students and families instead of the curriculum responsible for providing these skills. In the interviews when discussing language, some interviewees in fact expressed cultural racism, where they talked about how lifestyles of certain cultures influence children learning Finnish for explaining the inequality in academic success (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). This completely disregards the possibility that the curriculum itself is unable to answer the current needs of the children relying on the foundation of their education. Findings from this study that revealed expressions of cultural racism from welfare professionals have been found in other studies as well (e.g., Säävälä, 2012).

National narratives of equality, equality plans in institutions and promoting tolerance are not the same as anti-racism. The findings suggested that race may be added to the list differences that may produce inequality with an emphasis that race is an “equal” inequality with all the other inequalities white people may also face, which marginalizes the systemic racialization that is deeply embedded in society (Preston & Bhopal, 2012). Without centralizing racism even in discussions about racism specifically, the concept of anti-racism is reduced to reacting and interfering with discrimination that is witnessed instead of embarking on a process of eliminating racism and targeting structural racism that has been proven and acknowledged to exist. The focus of mainstream anti-racism currently seems to be identifying and eliminating racial prejudices (Seikkula, 2019), which is an important focus but will not be enough to target structural racism such as language discrimination I mentioned before that has been transformed from prejudice into something normalized and naturalized in society.

Regarding impacts racism has on mental health, many of the interviewees talked about their observations on negative impacts without the substantial anti-racist actions that are necessary. Almost all interviewees talked about dialogical approaches that emphasize active listening and respecting the knowledge the client produces through their lived experiences. Since racism is caused by injustice that is beyond the students’ control and simultaneously is something that can be fought against, achieving dialogue and trust of students carries limited meaning without proactive anti-racist action from the

providers receiving this information (Tolonen, 2019; Kaukinen&Moua, 2020). Relying on solely traditional counselling methods such as active listening, evaluations, referrals etc. instead of challenging the status quo within mental health services through action in schools perpetuates white supremacy. Even though organizations such certain cities are participating in the national “I am an antiracist campaign”, the title appeals to individuals proclaiming they are antiracist. Proclaiming to be an antiracist professional (such as “I am an antiracist school psychologist”) that represents an organization could deliver a clearer message that yes, as an antiracist psychologist I am accountable for describing to anyone that asks, what antiracist practices do I carry out both in the organization I am a part of and through individual services I provide, as a psychologist. Welfare professionals such as school psychologists and social workers have a lot of freedom as to what phenomena they choose to focus on professionally regards to communal wellbeing. After the interviews were conducted, I thought about whether holding providers accountable in being anti-racist through some policies might also be necessary into committing all welfare professionals to advocate for social justice and make this as visible as possible for all potential clients.

In the interviews, many professionals brought up how lack of experiential knowledge on racism also affects their abilities at times to recognize racism, address it and provide support for victims. I found interesting that some of the interviewees appeared to be concerned about navigating the topic of racism “correctly”, meaning that they seemed to prioritize avoiding mistakes over addressing an important topic they feel uncertain of, but have the power to address. Mental health professionals at school face and deal with many different challenges where they lack personal experiential knowledge and either provide support themselves or help refer clients to the right services, which they might still feel more comfortable addressing than racism. For white professionals, the topic of racism might feel uncomfortable in a conversation such as the interviews where racism is at the center because of “white fragility” and avoiding “white racial stress”, which refer to some strategies employed by some interviewees such as diverting from the topic of race created language that minimized racism, regardless of this being intentional or unintentional (DiAngelo, 2018). Discourses I labelled as “prioritizing intent” are also important to bring up here, because through the lens of critical race theory focusing more on an intention of individual actions or policies and practices with far less emphasis on daily impacts inflicted on non-white people maintains white supremacy (Bonilla-Silva, 2021). Narratives of the victims remain secondary or hidden and the perceived intentions of those with more power, for example mental health professionals or teachers receive more thought and speculation.

A challenge especially white professionals face when dealing with the issue of racism is being a member of society, in which racial hierarchies have been naturalized and a white frame of reference is deeply embedded. White professionals are taught to recognize the “other” and to be aware of how race matters in the lives of non-white people, but not how racism also shapes the lives of white people (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Alemanji, 2017). The only interviewee who discussed privilege was an interviewee who had experienced racism themselves. This interviewee talked about how Finnish language skills was a protective shield in experiencing less racism than expected on occasion and being a significant factor in being included. Language as a factor mildly protecting from racism has also been found in studies on racism in Finnish schools (Zacheus et al., 2019; Souto, 2011). Although white professionals were very aware of their limitations in fully understanding racism and some emphasized the work that they are responsible to do for developing anti-racism, most of them did not talk about their privileged position and meanings of their own “race”. An understanding where racism only influences the “other” and the group on the top of the racial hierarchy in society is “race-less” perpetuates white supremacy by excluding themselves from the problem (Bonilla-Silva, 2021).

Racism researchers in Finland have been vocal in public discussions on Finland’s biggest challenge still being recognizing racism, which prevents having discussions about race and racism (Keskinen et al., 2021). Many factors affect how individuals recognize different racisms, but when we look at different institutions such as schools and what are their systematic efforts in collecting data on racial experiences and help-seeking patterns of differently racialized individuals and groups, the challenge in initiating conversations on racism is clear. Schools are responsible for collecting and reporting data that exposes outcomes affecting well-being and it is necessary that racism would also be asked about for schools having to address ongoing racial phenomena. For example, many of the interviewees found it difficult to evaluate how many POC students do they approximately work with and on the question whether they have noticed racism in their schools, many described their answer on the lines of, “maybe of course there is some racism but”. If systematic data collection on racism would happen, it would be easier to have conversations in the school community about the racism that is happening there.

6.3 Implications for future research

First, more knowledge and counter narratives require further investigation from the perspective of non-white mental health professionals to uncover more ways white supremacy affects their professional

fields and hence influences lives of clients. Activism has produced a lot of knowledge during the past recent years on how racism influences lives of persons of color (POC) students and their mental health in Finland. Protecting anonymity combined with how homogenous the network of mental health professionals in Helsinki basic education is limited produced knowledge from a POC perspective. Future research in Finland could start by including multiple municipalities and investigate how POC mental professionals at school view addressing racism in schools through their profession, through their positions and as non-white members of the school adult community.

Another important area of research would be investigating how racism is perpetuated in predominantly white schools, where everyday racism is more subtle and even invisible. Currently, mainstream anti-racist campaigns target all neighborhoods and schools in the same way. Diversity is not synonymous to anti-racism and racism exists in “multicultural” schools as well. However, the findings from this study such as colorblind discourses and the fact that most racism research in Finland has concentrated on multicultural contexts (Atabong, 2017) suggest that covert forms of racism might be most freely perpetuated in white environments, which would require further investigation. It should also be noted here that when I sent the invitations to participate in this study, I received a few responses from welfare professionals working in “whiter” schools that although the topic is interesting and important, they do not have a lot to offer for this research because there is not a lot of racism in their schools. In his more recent work, Bonilla-Silva (2021:13) calls for more assessment on how much of people’s racial actions are conscious or unconscious instead of focusing on the “racists” and “seemingly unconscious actions” based on implicit biases, which fails to connect the unconscious and conscious that drives racial actions.

White supremacy is systematic and has continued to exist in contemporary society that condemns overt racism because of how naturalized and habituated, and in most cases unconscious white peoples’ racial actions are (Bonilla-Silva,2021; Saad,2020). Even in the interviews of this study, intent was prioritized far more than impact of racism on people of color (POC). Different areas may require different types of anti-racist interventions according to how white supremacy is maintained. The limitations of this study prevented me from analyzing the schools that the interviewees spoke of further in terms of how whiteness shapes these contexts, but the discourses I was not able to analyze did hint towards significant challenges regarding racism at school, belonging and well-being of POC students and staff in predominantly white schools. An important question that needs to be further analyzed is whether maintaining the key focus on eliminating prejudice is effective enough for eliminating institutional racism and whether “mainstream” antiracism is targeting the latter.

The findings on the interviewees' own biases and prejudices that they reflected on and brought up as a point of discussion on how it is extremely important for professionals to recognize their biases also points to more future research needed on whiteness and providers' perceptions. Recognizing individual biases and addressing them is an important step for becoming an anti-racist, but there are also patterns that can be recognized between biases individuals talk about that have transform from individual biases to normalized interpretations in a certain field or a certain profession that perpetuates white supremacy. If a field itself, such as psychology or social work, can understand its biases and how they affect "traditional" practices and solutions, a wider range of anti-racist practices and solutions can be developed to combat existing normative ways that uphold the racial status quo.

An area of urgency in Finland is researching whiteness in university studies of for example psychology and social work that prepare future mental health professionals at school. Representation among university teachers, research methodologies, topics on racism and its impact on well-being and help-seeking, and social justice actions as part of professional identities are areas of necessary further research. More knowledge on how whiteness shapes professionals' own education they receive could lead to innovating concrete action towards developing anti-racist mental health work. Examples could be defining what a mental health professional needs to achieve and possess for being an anti-racist provider and how could they officially indicate the personal work they have done to acknowledge how racism has shaped their positions for clients and their employers. As the literature review shows, there is a lot of knowledge out there produced by POC activists and writers in Finland and academic research from other countries, if a professional would be interested in educating themselves more on racism and how it impacts mental health. Relying on personal interest of professionals cannot guarantee adequate support for everyone. Education on racism and anti-racism would need to be provided during university studies before working life and as professionals enter working life, anti-racist trainings and professional practices given by organizations would build upon existing basic knowledge on racism.

Lastly, it would be important to investigate counselling and the interaction further between mental health professionals at school and students from a social justice perspective. Both the perspectives and experiences of students and providers need to be researched further, especially since it is assumed that these professions fundamentally advocate for social justice. I have emphasized throughout this discussion that eliminating structural racism needs to be the ultimate goal. However, as a school social worker myself who engages in deep conversations with students about areas of well-being, I recognize

that the providers can have a significant impact through dialogue with clients on social justice issues as well. It would be interesting to carry out more research on both the experiences of POC students on receiving mental health support and seeking for help and the ways providers choose to advocate for social justice and address racism in client interactions where their client shows racial prejudice and seemingly has racist views. What strategies should an antiracist psychologist or social worker employ when they encounter racism expressed by a client that they are working with? It is agreed upon that professional ethics of mental health and well-being professionals such as social workers and psychologists include advocating for social justice and standing against structural inequalities that impact life outcomes and areas of well-being of their clients. More research needs to be carried out on how this translates into action and what does professional commitment to social justice mean in practice.

This study will hopefully not only produce more knowledge on the topic of racism and mental health in basic education through the eyes of school-based mental health, but also act as a catalyst for starting and having more conversations about racism within the professional network of school psychologists and social workers. Findings of this study suggest that professional growth in terms of antiracism heavily relies on personal interests, personal awareness, and personal professional goals. Discourses on imagined counter-narratives and empathizing with those whose wellbeing is at risk were limited, since this study was more centered around white interpretations. More academic research that produces counter-narratives on the topics of racism and mental health in Finland is needed, but more importantly all the knowledge that has been produced and shared by POC activists and writers in Finland on racism and mental health that are easily accessible could also be utilized a lot more for educative purposes in school-based mental health services.

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