Disposing of the Narrative:

How Black Women Make Meaning of Gendered Racial Socialization Messages in Finland

Nia Renee Sullivan

Master's thesis in Social Exclusion

Supervisor: Ann-Charlotte Palmgren

Faculty of Arts, Psychology and Theology

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Table of Contents

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Abstract for Master's thesis

Subject: Social Exclusion	
Author: Nia Renee Sullivan	
Title of Thesis: Disposing of the Narrative: How Black Women Make Meaning of Gendered Racial Socialization Messages in Finland	
Supervisor: Ann-Charlotte Palmgren	

Abstract:
In this Master's thesis, I critically engage with the concept of gendered racial socialization and inquire how socialization transmissions influence Black women's experiences and identities in Finland. By accumulating knowledge from five semi-structured interviews, this introspection aims to explore the leverage of gendered racial socialization messages and understand how Black women in Finland make meaning of their experiences. Centering Black women's authentic experience enables this thesis to illuminate how socialization messages informed by socially constructed ideas are circulated in a manner that objectifies Black women and influences their sense of self. The theoretical frameworks of critical race theory and intersectionality guide this research, supplementarily to phenomenological and narrative qualitative research approaches. The theoretical frameworks and research approaches converge to emphasize how the interview participants make meaning from their lived experiences and connect their experiences to societal issues. Notions such as white normativity, microaggressions, internalized racism, and belonging to Finnish society are integral to this research. Furthermore, the interviews establish the significance of cultivating radical self-love and defying the interpersonal consequences of gendered racial socialization messages. The general purpose of this research is to accentuate the authentic experiences of Black women in Finland and present discernment on how inequalities are sustained through gendered racial socialization messages.

Keywords: Black identity, identity development, Finnish identity, belonging, gendered racial socialization, socialization messages, gendered racism, intersectionality, microaggressions, othering, normative whiteness, internalized racism, overcoming

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Disposing of the Narrative: How Black Women Make Meaning of Gendered Racial Socialization Messages in Finland

1.Introduction

The impulse of determining the gender and race of individuals is a normalized convention established on the perceived recognition of physical features and attributes — yet, they are frequently informed by binaries. Similarly, unvalidated presumptions concerning an individual's characteristics may align with prevailing knowledge and limiting premises derived from social and historical norms. Despite general recognition concerning the existence of socially influenced biases and standards that facilitate inequality, limited research scrutinizes how biases exploit gendered racial socialization messages. Specifically, I am inquisitive of how the circulation of biases shapes the experiences and interactions of Black women. Therefore, in this thesis research, I investigate qualitative narratives from Black women in Finland regarding how prominent societal elements serve as sites of socialization that regulate perceptions of Blackness and how Black women's identity is developed and performed in Finland. By employing qualitative data approaches, my analysis aspires to add to existing research concentrating on gendered racial socialization and the interconnected relation to assertive forms of social injustice. To sufficiently learn and dismantle the intricacies of injustices, there must be an attentive cognition of the socialization messages that memorialize marginalization and subjugation.

1.1 Why study socialization?

This research explores how Black women in Finland have navigated the perceived attitudes and expectations associated with the interconnected essences of Blackness and gender. Family messages, social cues, and interactions frequently provide individuals with encounters of societal and cultural standards concerning behaviors considered satisfactory. The implicit and explicit socialization sentiments have consequences (Elliott, 2022), which may materialize in a manner that controls beliefs on race, gender, identity, and expectations (Epstein et al., 2017). For racialized individuals, the additional assignment of learning to navigate society's varying conditions is vital (Elliott, 2022). Despite the increasing analysis and response to systemic and structural racism, insufficient research highlights the effect of racism on identity development (Hipolito-Delgado, 2007) and the distinct experience of internalized racism (Pyke, 2010). For years, Black women have encountered the prevailing norm that whiteness is the measure of characteristics ranging from beauty, culture, and aspirations (Awad et al., 2014; Robinson et al., 2021). Though embodiments of racism have maintained relevance, there is limited analysis of how white hegemony builds socialization messages about race and gender (Elliott, 2022).

Rather than examining societal impact, most research publications on ethnic-racial socialization (ERS) and gender have examined how the adolescents' family, parents, and guardians influence their perspectives on identity through implicit and explicit socialization messages (Brown et al., 2010). Tribble et al. (2019) reports that the prevailing theoretical racial socialization frameworks fail to distinguish the variations of socialization messages individuals receive by factors such as gender. Furthermore, scholars focusing on socialization concentrate primarily on utilizing it as a tool for managing racism and cultivating racial and cultural pride (Tribble et al., 2019). Lesane-Brown (2006) illustrates ethnic-racial socialization [ERS] as explicit verbal and non-verbal messages circulated to adolescents to render impressions regarding norms, values, and perspectives related to racial, individual, and status identities. The prevailing ethnic-racial socialization characterizations and frameworks exclude gender as they primarily center on racial bias. Regardless, analyses indicate that the perceived gender of an individual shapes their interactions and the specific socialization messages they encounter (Carter, 2014). Elliott (2022) and Evans et al. (2022) present gendered racial socialization as the process through which adolescents acquire messages concerning the interconnectedness of their racial and gender identities (and perceived identities). The various gendered experiences an individual encounters can influence racial socialization messages (Hill, 2001). The consequence of gendered racial socialization messages may disseminate Black girls' perceptions of themselves, as socialization messages incorporate emotions that foster confidence or disseminate internalized compliance (Vandiver et al., 2001; Cross, 1995). Therefore, this thesis aspires to accentuate the influential nature of gendered racial socialization by investigating in-depth qualitative interviews where Black women in Finland detail evident gendered racial socialization messages.

1.2 Statement of the problem

In this thesis, I explore how Black women in Finland understand and navigate the social implications and corresponding essences of their Blackness and gender. Through qualitative discussions, I seek to comprehend the eclectic gendered racial socialization transmissions and their consequence on positionality and emotion. Understanding the structures and consequences of gendered racism are tangible components of this research, particularly how they produce emotions of shame which manifests from historical and documented implications regarding racial hierarchies and human value. W.E.B DuBois' (1903) *The Souls Of Black Folk* details the several variants of racism, racial hierarchy, and their invasion in American society which implemented the exclusion of Black people through the color line (Du Bois, 1903). The metaphorical color line prohibits Black people from complete societal access, cultivating a double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903). Du Bois clarifies the internal conflict of *double consciousness* experienced by racialized Black individuals as perceiving personal value through standards ascribed by

the dominant society and invariably engaging with pressures to assimilate (Du Bois, 1903). Racist bias and encounters paired with constructs of society serve as prominent factors of Black identity development (Willis et al., 2021) due to the construct of 'other,' which assumes racialized minorities as different and threatening to European identity (Hervik, 2019). Othering effectuates the divisive notion of 'us' versus 'them', resulting in the exclusion of racialized groups (Hervik, 2019). Thus, it is critical to locate societal elements that reproduce this form of othering — and how it regulates socialization and Black women's identity. This is especially significant when considering how exploitative and negative portrayals of Black women and girls may shape public perception and how Black women and girls navigate society with intersecting marginalized identities (Collins, 1990). This research aims to learn how prominent societal elements serve as sites of socialization that regulate perceptions of Blackness and how Black women's identity is developed and performed in Finland.

In *Eloquent Rage* (2018), Dr. Brittney Cooper examines how existing as a racialized Black woman synthesized with racism, gender oppression, and economic class hierarchies positions Black women at risk of considerable intersecting oppression variants. Professor Melissa Harris-Perry's research, *Sister Citizen* (2011), utilizes the psychological study of the "crooked room" to analyze Black women's tribulations in predominantly white environments, which exposes Black women to a distorted ideology of gendered racism they must navigate. A vital component of Harris-Perry's (2011) text probes into how the emotion of shame influences interactions for Black women as they are excessively depicted by inauthentic presentations of Black female identity. Additionally, in the analysis Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood, Epstein et al. (2017) introduces the presumption that childhood innocence excludes Black girls, as they habitually encounter adultification bias. Girlhood Interrupted refers to the concept of *adultification* as diminishing the regard of childhood as a mediating reality and characteristic in the behavior of Black children (Epstein et al., 2017). Consequently, societies fail to view Black children as children and thus they are not treated as innocent (Epstein et al., 2017). Furthermore, Epstein et al. (2017) revealed that Black girls are regarded as requiring less nurturing, protection, help, and reassurance compared to white peers. Girlhood Interrupted's (2017) data confirms the existence of adultification, illustrating that adults regard Black girls as less innocent and resembling adults while their white peers maintain being perceived through childhood. Unfortunately, the validity of the adultification of Black girls was demonstrated with the traumatic and destructive incident of Child Q, a fifteen-year-old Black girl strip-searched in a London secondary school in 2020 without an appropriate teacher, school staff, or parental notification. Child Q was strip-searched and physically violated, while on her menstrual cycle, following baseless suspicions of cannabis possession (Kayembe, 2022). Child Q was deprived of her childhood innocence and perceived as innately threatening, requiring police intervention rather than

alternative solutions (Kayembe, 2022). Brutality and rigidness toward Black women and girls are persistent as Blackness is perceived as violent, which positions Blackness as a threat.

Constructed sentiments about Black girlhood produces social exclusion and an othering effect, which hinders access and regulates Black expression by associating Blackness or Black femininity to tropes that inform engagement, interpretation, and control of how Black girls interact with society. Analysis by Patricia Hill Collins and Melissa Harris-Perry indicates that Black women and girls must encounter and engage with portrayals and sentiments of how society views them (Collins, 1990; Harris-Perry, 2011). The portrayals of Black women comprise stereotypes such as being emasculating of their partners, habitually loud and assertive, consistently infuriated, hypersexual, and self-sacrificing (Harris-Perry, 2011). Previous research explores the effects of internalizing such sentiments, which are related to negative self-view and psychological consequences (Collins, 1990; Harris-Perry, 2011; Townsend et al., 2010). Altogether, it is clear that Black girls are subject to interactions in which bias is present, requiring them to contend with such biases consistently.

1.3 Research Questions

An increasing number of qualitative analyses have been performed to explore and contextualize structural racism in Finland which provide great insight into the forms of racism and discrimination faced by racialized people in Finland. Nevertheless, research on the crossing effects of gender and race are limited. As a racialized Black woman, I am invested in how identity shapes experience, interactions, exclusion, and inclusiveness in society. This research will center on a range of experiences from five self-identified Black women who grew up in Finland, and their perspectives on forming a Black identity in Finnish society. To provide authentic portrayals of experiences, qualitative research methods are utilized to collect data for this research. Qualitative research enables comprehension and symbolism to human experience, especially when previous research is limited, thus illuminating the realities of marginalized groups (Walker & Myrick, 2006). By collecting data from individual semi-structured interviews, this research depicts circumstances that reproduce narratives regarding the meaning of Blackness. Because this research delves into societal influence on the construction of Blackness, Black identity development will be a notable theme throughout this research. This research will expand upon the following critical research questions:

1. How does racial and gendered socialization in Finland produce narratives regarding the meaning of Blackness?

- Hypothesis one: Being racialized, acknowledging racial bias, and racist encounters contribute to how Black women perceive their identities.

2. How does the internalization of such narratives influence the development and performance of Black women's identities in Finland?

- Hypothesis two: Internalizing dominant narratives about Black identity breeds an internal conflict concerning conducting and expressing oneself.

I assembled a qualitative interview plan designed to encompass phenomenological and narrative research approaches for this study. In perceiving Black as an identity inclusive of individuals with African ancestral origins, I recruited Black women in Finland via social media to partake in this study. The criteria for inclusion required participants to self-identify as Black and to have lived in Finland throughout their adolescent and young adult life. Further, prior to interviewing, participants have approved the purpose of the study and provide consent to a recorded interview. Finally, participants agreed for the collected data to be analyzed and interpreted for my Master's Thesis and the Racism, Mental Health, and Young People of Color project [RaMePOC] which investigates the convergence of racism and mental health in Finland. The participant's identities and identifying features remain confidential. Seven interviews were conducted; however, five interviews remained applicable to this study as the final sample. The Methodology chapter discusses the research design and materials in depth.

1.4 Socialization, social exclusion, and significance

Notably, a great component of this research aims to assist in the understanding of how leverages such as *systemic racism*, defined as inherently racist structures which assign distinct economic, psychological, political, and social outcomes (Bonilla-Silva, 1997), orchestrate ideas on identity, inclusivity, and belonging to Finnish society. In addition to identity, the role of unconscious bias and the normalization of prejudiced thoughts and practices are central elements in this research, as they have a collaborative influence over differential and discriminative actions that construct an othering effect. Consequently, being regarded as other, or outside of valued norms, validates what attributes are perceived as standard, correct, and Finnish. The belief in Nordic exceptionalism, with historical ties to the Nordic race, enables only recognizing Nordic as normal or the standard (Hervik, 2019). Therefore, this belief also regulates who is considered Nordic, and therefore, normal.

Whiteness is a crucial characteristic of belonging within the Nordic regions (Lundström & Teitelbaum, 2017); therefore, Whiteness is upheld as the pinnacle to which other beings are compared (Schclarek-Mulinari & Keskinen, 2020). Groups situated outside Whiteness are constructed as 'other,'

subjecting them to marginalization and social exclusion (Juva, 2019). Hilary Silver describes *social exclusion* as a multidimensional obstruction to social relations, institutions, and belonging. It prevents access, societal participation, and recognition (Silver, 2007). This research illustrates social exclusion as a process deriving from oppressive societal structures that influences social interactions and access (Silver, 2007). Deborah Youdell (2006) connects exclusion and inclusion to normality by explaining how those held outside the norm are excluded in society and encounter consequences of exclusion. In this research, I contend that Black girls and women are continuously excluded, regarded as outside of Finnish norms, and subject to the detrimental manifestations of gendered racism. The circulation of inauthentic depictions of Black femininity interferes with comprehensive social access, influences interactions, and coaxes self-perception when approximating Black value to dominant prototypes.

Rastas (2012) refers to *Finnish exceptionalism* as the idea that Finland was not complicit in colonial practices and, therefore, excused from analyzing and dismantling colonial legacies (such as racism and Eurocentrism) in Finnish societies. Finland receives international recognition for human rights advances, conveying Finland as exceptional compared to other cultures (Alemanji, 2016). Exceptionalism concerns a belief in ethical dominance, which is used to evade critiques regarding the realities of those considered outside of Nordic or European background (Rastas, 2012). Upholding Finnish exceptionalism and innocence has enabled greater society to ignore the mistreatment and exclusion of the indigenous Sámi people, racial, and ethnic minorities, despite this historical injustice being connected to the racial hierarchy in Finland and the construction of race. Social exclusion concerns othering, the act of labeling and treating individuals as socially subordinate, and is detected through spatial exclusion, social relationships, and other factors of society that have a merged effect on different groups of people (Silver, 2007). The several ways that othering is performed directly influences gendered and racial socialization methods, as it shapes ideas around value and access. Finland's ranking as the happiest and most racist country (Yle, 2018) reveals a profoundly embedded issue with structural inequalities, systemic racism, and their effects on racialized identities and cultivating a sense of belonging to Finnish society. Global awareness of Finnish cultural and societal values maintains a firm perception of egalitarian principles, in which respect for human rights is at the core of moral standards. Thus, experience, history, and acknowledgment of the perpetuation of racism in Finnish society are disregarded in public discourse. Nevertheless, the leverage of systemic racism and frequent encounters with racist discrimination influences the lives of historically marginalized groups or those with intersecting marginalized identities in Finland. Although this thesis concentrates on the effect of gendered and racial socialization methods of Black girls and women in Finland; racism, discrimination, and systemic othering hinders the lives and inclusion of multiple groups and identities throughout Finland. This analysis aspires to join existing

efforts to disassemble systems that perpetuate and reinforce racism; and to challenge theories of racelessness and color-blindness in Finland.

1.5 Positionality

In recognizing how race functions in ethnographic research, it is critical that I position myself in this research as a dark skin African-American woman. The depth of my skin complexion is necessary to highlight, as my ventures with colorism have greatly influenced my sense of belonging within and outside of my community. Assessing the ways in which experience, ways of knowing, and relationships with society may influence examination is imperative in achieving reflexive research. Accordingly, the researcher's positionality is vital for considering research consequences and results. Positionality depicts a researcher's standpoint, perspective, and the societal position they assume regarding their research in the social context (Darwin-Holmes, 2020). Knowledge of the researcher's societal positioning concerns ontological sentiments (Darwin-Holmes, 2020), which reflect concepts such as existence, being, becoming, reality (Hofweber, 2012); and epistemological sentiments (Darwin-Holmes, 2020) concerning knowledge. As an African-American woman researcher, my racialized identity, culture, and gender affects my interest in examining the matter of socialization and its consequences on existing in different societies as a Black woman. As an American, my experiences differ from the experiences of a Finnish person; however, the similarities of existing in a racialized body facilitate a sense of connectedness between myself, the subject matter, and the individuals whom I interviewed. Acquaintance with the socialization messages enables a reflection and consciousness towards the everyday lives of Black girls and women, thus creating a sense of empowerment, authority, and freedom. Nevertheless, the space for freedom will remain restricted in a societal context characterized by oppression (Collins, 1990).

My authentic knowledge as an African American woman cultivated my inquisitiveness in gendered racial socialization. Many theories and publications I draw upon are derived from the United States due to limited research conducted within the Finnish and Nordic contexts. Still, this research aims to work in conjunction with existing work and analysis on structural racism in Finland and toward justice work. Due to this connectedness, several themes conveyed throughout the interviews are applicable to my development and experience; thus, emotional labor was completed on my behalf to equip myself to proceed with this analysis efficiently. Encountering the vast consequences of gendered racism and oppression facilitates feelings of subordination. Socialization messages that communicate othering and subordinance are silencing and provoke feelings that interfere with authentic existence. Through collective work and action, I hope that by contextualizing the effects of socialization, the stories of Black

women will be attended to. The pursuits of Black women always have and will consistently contrast with society's expectations.

1.6 Definition of terms

To introduce readers unfamiliar with this thesis' standard literary terms and interconnected concepts, the following definitions guide provides perspicuity into the terms fundamental to this study. Foremost, defining race and gender in the context of this thesis is integral. While considered the product of biological inheritance, *race* refers to a social construct that classifies humans on the basis of comparable material qualities (Akintunde, 1999). Accordingly, *race* categorizes individuals into groups generally viewed as distinct within a given society (Helms, 1995a). *Black* refers to a racialized class specified by political circumstances and skin complexion. Black individuals carry origins from Black racial groups in assorted locations globally. The current thesis respects the interview participant's self-identification as Black. Representing gender is essential to this thesis, yet complex, due to its origins as a social and political construct (Lindqvist et al., 2019) that guides the conception of gender as a binary. In this thesis, *gender* is characterized as the cultural and social norms concerning masculinity and femininity and represents how societies influence expressions and determine categorization (Lindqvist et al., 2019). Therefore, gender performance is based on social, cultural, and political norms. Regarding this thesis, the interview participants self-identified as Black women, and their understandings are shaped by their self-concept and social interactions — which are influenced by how they are perceived publically.

Next, s*ocialization* symbolizes the cultivation of norms through the undertaking of societal standards and influence (Gecas, 2017). Concerning the current thesis, socialization messages are consequential in forming beliefs, knowledge, and identity. *Acculturation* refers to adapting societal norms or another group or culture's attributes resulting from intercultural contact (Berry, 2019). Next, Ibram X. Kendi defines *racism* as the "[...] marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produce and normalize racial inequities" (Kendi, 2019, pp. 17-18). Racism is explained as biased prejudice, intolerance, opposition, or discrimination by an individual or institution against an individual or group based on their perceived racial identity (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). Concerning this thesis, racism eternalizes racial inequality through policies and cultural representations that center on whiteness. Further, *gendered raci*sm aids in dissecting the interconnected leverages of sexism and racism (Essed, 1991). A few manifestations of racism include colorism, othering, and social exclusion. *Colorism* is defined as inequality and discrimination of individuals within (and outside) their racial or ethnic group based on skin complexion (Wilder, 2015) and the priority of physical proximity to whiteness. *Othering* signifies when individuals or groups are assumed to not align with social norms through various sentiments and structures that cultivate and

circulate marginality and inequality based on group identities (Powell & Menendian, 2017). *Social exclusion* is a concept that explores the structural exclusion and societal constraint of individuals, groups, and communities from full or partial participation in the essential aspects and operations of society (Silver, 2007). Social exclusion prohibits societal participation at the monetary, political, and social levels and impedes access to resources and communication (Silver, 2007). Frequently organized prevention of individuals from liberties and prospects facilitates poverty, vulnerability, and an unequal allocation of societal resources (Subedi, 2022). In the following chapter I will present the theoretical framework which guides my research.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Critical Race Theory

Exploring societal contributors to socialization and their impressions on racial identity involves an awareness of how racialized groups are affected by societal histories and attitudes toward race. Thus, this research is situated in intersectionality and Critical Race Theory [CRT] to produce a race-conscious approach to analyzing inequalities and determining the sociocultural factors that influence perceptions of race (Zamudio et al., 2010). CRT is a theoretical method investigating race and racism within dominant societies and institutions, and was fostered in response to the insufficient advancement from racial reform and to analyze the changing relationships between race, racism, and power structures (Delgado & Stefancic, 2005). Derrick Bell, an attorney and civil rights activist, was among the first scholars to advocate for CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2005). The essence of CRT describes that histories and manifestations of racism are highly entrenched in society and functions with leverage within institutions and further aspects of society. Burton et al. (2010) emphasizes that CRT is theoretically utilized to center and create discourse about the socio-economic class divisions; thus, current social approaches preserve classist and racist oppression that advances the white elite while suppressing the interest of minorities. Legal scholars and CRT contributors Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2012) list propositions vastly accepted by scholars concerning CRT. The fundamental tenets of CRT, as stated by Delgado and Stefancic (2012), are as follows:

1) "The social construction of race and the normality of racism tenet" (Duignan, 2023).

CRT acknowledges the notion of race, the division of humans into separate groups based on inherited physical traits, as a social construct rather than an outcome of biology. At the same time, CRT acknowledges that race is influential in society despite biological racial differences being renounced by genetic studies. The conservation of belief in inherent racial distinctions has assisted White hegemony by converging physical attributes with psychological and behavioral biases. Such biases were utilized to explain exploitative activities and injustices towards "inferior" racial groups. Omitting the prevalence of race and racism in society enables a *colorblind perspective* that further marginalizes racialized people by upholding the racial status quo and inhibiting efforts to promote equity (Cunningham & Scarlatto, 2018). The colorblind rhetoric authorizes white people to ignore the historical implications that affect contemporary systems and injustices while enabling white supremacy's preservation. The racist

perspective regards racial inequality as caused by racial inferiority (Kendi, 2019), and limited validation of racism facilitates colorblindness to persist without significant intervention or assessment. Therefore, CRT identifies racism as a societal feature ingrained within systems and institutions that reproduce inequality. Regarding racism as a regular feature of society goes against the colorblind idea that racist incidents are abnormalities; instead, they exist as the outcome of systemic racism.

2) "Interest convergence, differential racialization, intersectionality, and the voice of color tenet" (Duignan, 2023).

According to Delgado & Stefancic (2012), the "interest convergence" tenet, or "material determinism," extends the understandings of racism and advocacy. Racism benefits white communities' welfare through material and physical access, thus limiting greater motivation to dismantle it (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Interest convergence is the concept that civil rights successes are reached solely when majority and minority interests merge. Interest convergence displays that legal and social advancements for racialized communities also benefit and advance the welfare of white communities. Notably, Derrick Bell's (1980) illustrated interest convergence demonstrated in the U.S. Supreme Court's determination in the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education case, which governed that establishing racial segregation in public academies was unconstitutional. Bell contends that this landmark decision transpired due to White suspicion of backlash from Black soldiers who fought in World War II and the Korean War, all while expected to return to the undeniable realities of overt and systemic racism in the United States and also to protect the U.S.'s international reputation (Bell, 1980).

Next, awareness of how the social structures and arrangements marginalize and racialize various communities as a reaction to societal transformations and needs reveals *differential racialization,* which periodically attributes racialized minorities with stereotypes and biases based on the needs of dominant cultures (Frakes, 2020), thus simultaneously revealing the construction of race (Guess, 2006). These adversarial perspectives are often reflected and deemed valid throughout society, media, and interactions. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) elucidate differential racism by suggesting that prevalent ideas and stereotypes of minority groups pivot over time to correspond with social changes. For example, during a particular period, racialized minorities may be characterized as docile and self-serving to white groups; however, once generations shift and race-relationship dynamics are revised, that group of racialized minorities may be regarded as threatening (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Through differential racialization, it is notable how the construction of race and, consequently, racism is subject to change based on the modifying society. Associated with differential racialization are the CRT tenets of

intersectionality and anti-essentialism. A single identifier cannot sufficiently determine an individual's experiences and knowledge; thus, intersectionality and anti-essentialist perspectives concentrate on understanding historical and social implications. Lastly, Duignan (2023) clarifies that the "voice of color" or counter-storytelling conviction provides respect for accounts regarding racism and racialized experiences from racialized people. This tenet argues that racialized and marginalized experiences enable one to articulate their understanding of race and racism competently (Duignan, 2023). The "legal storytelling" movement encourages racialized writers to narrate their experiences of racism and being racialized through their perspective (Duignan, 2023). The "voice of color" tenet cultivates self-expressed perspectives, providing critical wisdom to understand the consequences of institutionalized racism.

By recognizing how colonialism and racism from the past impacts contemporary societies, CRT counters dominant narratives while emphasizing authentic accounts of history and excluded experiences in public discourse. CRT identifies that racism circulates within society and that systemic and structural racism are direct derivatives of exploitation, enslavement, and the subordination of Africans (George, 2021). By implementing CRT in this research, the discourse will illustrate how dominant perceptions of race manifest to influence socialization and preserve *white normativity*, explained by Robin DiAngelo (2018) as holding whiteness as the standard for human value, while positioning individuals outside of whiteness as abnormal and intrinsically other. Further, in utilizing CRT, this research intends to reveal how Black women in Finland characterize themselves to counter prevailing perspectives regarding Black identity. Last, the use of CRT in this research centers on the experiences of the individuals interviewed and those perpetuating racial prejudices in Finland.

2.1.1 The importance of CRT for this research

I specify critical race theory as a fundamental theoretical framework to highlight the analytical and conceptual agencies familiarized by CRT, yet simultaneously linking them to characterizations and consequences of race and racialization in Finland. In particular, CRT facilitates a profound search into chronological implications, which contributes to how race is formed and functions to maintain hierarchies and dominance. Though CRT was devised for legal studies and instituted in the United States, the pivotal component advocates for racial and social justice by analyzing the conceptions of race, enabling CRT to be extended and beneficial for multiple academic domains and analysis in various geographical areas. Throughout the European context, racialization and whiteness are often illustrated by the "invisibilization of race and the narrow legal view of what constitutes racism" (Möschel, 2011, p. 1652). Thus, CRT serves as a connection that may orchestrate insight into underexplored issues regarding the association between race and power. In Finland, the documented exclusion of Sámi and Roma minority groups, and the

contemporary outcomes of exclusion, demonstrate the necessity for a more prominent consciousness of their respective histories and cultures. Matters concerning excluded, marginalized, or racialized groups and experiences require an in-depth exploration into demographic-specific histories and implications that foster the survival of inequality. In this thesis, CRT facilitates exploration into the dynamics that construct common opinions and sustained "truths" regarding race. Familiarity with CRT is valid in this study of gendered racial socialization. The forthcoming chapter, "Literature and context review," explores the chronology of racialization and whiteness in Finland, societal messages to Black women, and the consequences of documented and existing racialization on Black identities in Finland. To conclude, critical race theory in this research enables the employment of analytical stances that consider race as a socially conceived classification operated to oppress racialized groups. CRT emphasizes systemic power imbalances by investigating the implications of racialization and unequal relations to authority. The following section examines intersectionality as a pivotal theory in my research.

2.2 Intersectionality

Knowledge of post-colonialist and intersectional philosophies were integral to this research, as the priority centers on exploring how societal features and narratives inform beliefs on identity and socialization based on the execution of colonial categorizations and perceived differences. Intersectionality is a base of the framework for investigating socialization and the interconnected characteristics of one's individuality and lived experience with power dynamics. Intersectionality, the concept that subjectivity is informed by characters such as race, gender, class, ability, and sexuality, has aided the learning of distinct forms of oppression in civil rights law and social movements and is employed as a dominant theoretical mechanism to combat feminist hierarchy, hegemony, and exclusivity (Nash, 2008; Cooper, 2015).

Intersectionality has roots in the oversight of feminism, anti-racist movements, and research on race and gender to operate as inclusive of the interest of Black women, as race and gender were widely regarded as mutually exclusive realities (Crenshaw, 1989). McCall (2005) indicates that previous study structures of race and gender and interpretations of experience excluded Black women, thus constructing a difficulty in exploring the differences and unique knowledge and dynamics of Black women (McCall, 2005). Individual activists and groups of the 70s, notably the Combahee River Collective -- an organization of Black feminist lesbian socialists, provoked awareness of the absence of inclusivity within feminist and anti-racist movements and the multiplicity of oppressions faced by Black women. The Combahee River Collective expressed that Black women are invaluable and that our liberation is essential. Black women and other communities encounter multiple forms of discrimination, making it complex to capture in

activist movements concentrating solely on a singular dynamic. Crenshaw (1989) expresses the ongoing contradiction of race and gender, stating that Black women are either assumed as overwhelmingly women or Black, constructing an assumed communal understanding within these distinctive groups that consequently undermines the crossing injustices Black women encounter (Crenshaw, 1989).

Feminist activists and theorists in the 1970s developed an awareness that gender was analyzed as an isolated inquiry (McCall, 2005) and solely focused on the interest of white middle-class and educated women. Having identified intersecting systems of oppression, feminist activists became increasingly conscious that an inclusive and intersectional system was needed. Coined by legal scholar Kimberle ́ Crenshaw, intersectionality contradicts the notion that a classification must be regarded in seclusion; instead, attributes are viewed as mutually fortifying (Nash, 2008). Intersectionality emphasizes the multiple interacting layers of marginalized individuals' experiences (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991) and the implications on their lives while offering a perspective of experience and relations to power structures (Crenshaw, 1991). The idea of intersectionality materialized to acknowledge the multiplicity of oppressions and to generate new conceptions for liberation.

When employing an intersectional approach, researchers identify specific social categories and differences. Concerning this study, the intersectional framework views racism and sexism as contributors to forming oppression specific to individuals who embody a marginalized racial and gender identity. For this research target group, intersectionality theory aims to identify the considerable ways that realities of racial and gender oppression influence incidents of socialization messages. In this current thesis, the essence of utilizing an intersectional approach is learning the imbalances that sustain racial inequality in Finland (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2017) and gendered racist exchanges, primarily as socially constructed ideas are implemented in facets of society, representations, and interactions.

Intersectionality as an analytical strategy uses significant individuality characteristics as a theoretical framework to investigate the associations between identities, societal features, and manners of how the subject is constructed (McCall, 2005). Hence, an intersectional strategy evaluates the association between identity features and how they coincide to influence lived experiences and crossing structures of privilege and oppression at interpersonal and systemic levels (Bowleg, 2012). Employing an intersectional approach presents unexplored wisdom that can influence and eradicate several forms of social inequality (Weber & Parra-Medina, 2003) by endeavoring to present how diverse characteristics such as socio-economic class, ability, health circumstances, cultural traditions, and additional identifying characteristics cross to produce outcomes (Davis, 2008).

This thesis employs an intersectional method to explore the interactions of participants' various features. The objective of an intersectional method is to account for the diverse ways in which features of an individual are intertwined to form a distinctive experience. Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2020) highlight the base concepts of implementing intersectionality as an analysis approach: inequality, authority relations (including structural and interpersonal), social and historical context, relationality, justice, and intricacy (Collins & Bilge, 2020). According to Collins and Bilge, the fundamental concepts comprise the basis of intersectionality and guide its use as an analytical tool. Concerning this thesis, I provide special engagement with intersecting power relations and social context to learn how they interact and impact experience through subjectification. The following intersectional inferences, oriented by Collins & Bilge (2020), guide this thesis:

1. Identifying features such as socioeconomic status, gender identity (and perceived gender), racial identity (and perceived race), nationality, sexuality, ethnicity, and ability are symbiotic and simultaneously shape lived experience; thus, the experience should not be examined through a singular classification.

2. Regarding power, individuals' social environment and respective history assist in shaping their authentic experiences and constructing their sentiments. Structures that create inequality are intrinsically correlated to power relations and are subject to change based on geographic site, era, and circumstances.

3. In-depth investigations correlating incidents to comprehensive societal structures demonstrate the maintenance and understanding of domination, which enables a thorough understanding of context-specific social issues.

4. Researchers utilizing an intersectionality approach must engage with reflexivity by evaluating their positionality and relationships to power and society.

5. In its essence, intersectionality is an instrument acquainted with transformative justice that advocates for inclusivity and equality.

Throughout this thesis, I provide special engagement with intersecting power relations, the Finnish context, and Finnish history to learn how they interact and impact experience through subjectification. The intersectionality concepts and inferences provide grounds for implementing intersectionality as an essential analysis theory and approach.

2.2.1 Intersectionality and subjectification

Structures of injustices perform and transform within society, and stereotypes linked to marginalized identities are subject to shift based on perceptions and values within distinct eras of society. In its essence, this thesis analyzes how Black women and girls are subjected on the basis of their intersecting identities and how society affects how they are positioned. Informed by Michel Foucault, Heyes (2010) clarifies subjectification as directing to social processes where a subject observes, interprets, and identifies themselves and how they create meaning within a given society. By subjectification, this thesis concerns discursive knowledge, implementation, and identity performance by Black women. Consequently, subjectification affects how individuals are socialized and normalized in Finnish society. As the structure of race gains meaning from societal leverages, subjectification is necessary to explore, as Black is a construct in itself. Thus, understanding how the Black woman as a subject is formed concerns discursive knowledge, implementation, and performance by Black individuals. In this regard, the intersecting components interact to coax how the individual is subjected within society and how this subjectification evolves based on social shifts.

Feminist poststructuralism theory signifies a diverse paradigm for gender and historical bias by centering various stances and interpretations based on discursive knowledge and construction of identities (Davies & Gannon, 2005). Further, it analyzes varied domains of knowledge production and their relationship to power (Davies & Gannon, 2005). The feminist-poststructuralist understanding of subject formation is that a subject is formed through discursive patterns that define the meanings and symbols for understanding the world (Davies & Gannon, 2005). Judith Butler illustrates a unique insight into subjectification, which aids Foucault's approach to how discursive shifts influence the subject. Butler (1997) identifies mastership and submission as central components in becoming a subject, which coincides rather than emerging separately. Butler's approach to forming a subject enables an acknowledgment of the role of power dynamics in forming one's existence.

Acknowledging that Blackness is socially and culturally constructed, like gender and gendered attributes, enables an understanding of how markers associated with Blackness and womanness, in this regard, are products of discursive patterns within society. Subjectification coincides with societal hierarchies, social positioning, and relationships with others, thus making it a factor to consider for intersectional analysis. With an intersectional analysis, I explore how racialized hierarchies, representations, and power are generated and circulated to influence socialization in Finland. By delving into Finland's record of cultural colonialism and colonial knowledge, I explain how this specific history plays a role in the contemporary issue of race.

3. Literature and Context Review

To adequately learn about racism in a fair and justice-oriented manner, acknowledging the connections between power, colonialism, and racial histories is vital concerning contemporary realities. Colonialism is notably comprehended as power through policy or the practice of acquiring political control over another nation, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically — however, this understanding enables the conception of innocence when examining Finland's relationship and involvement with colonialism. The reluctance toward appropriate acknowledgment and inquiry into Finland's connection with colonialism can be regarded as white innocence. Suvi Keskinen's chapter "Intra-Nordic Differences, Colonial/Racial Histories, and National Narratives: Rewriting Finnish History" (2019) draws upon Gloria Wekker's (2016) notion of white innocence, used to mark the ignorance and denial of participation in global colonial histories and the continued colonialism in the region (Wekker, 2016, as cited in Keskinen, 2019). Legacies of colonialism produce and perpetuate structural authority, which results in perspectives on human value and inferiority. Hypotheses on human inferiority were employed to explain the "necessity" for colonialist acts; however, these impressions linger in contemporary society and influence relations and knowledge. "Coloniality of power," coined by Anibal Quijano (2000), is a concept that interrelates the conventions and legacies of European colonialism in forms of knowledge, power structures, control, and hegemony. Though Finland may not have participated in colonizing other nations, colonialist ideas are ingrained in society and are a constant and prevalent feature that affects everyone.

Coloniality of power restricts knowledge and value to pedestalize whiteness. Finnish history with colonialism and its affinity to whiteness has a lasting impact on race relations today. Investigating whiteness in Finland, the coloniality of power, and exceptionalism facilitates a framework for learning how historical implications influence regular interactions and relationships with society. Further, this knowledge serves as a basis for dismantling such structures that have been enabled to exist without intervention. Understanding the background implications of racism in Finland provides substantial insight for evaluating the society in which Black women and girls are navigating and how perspectives of human importance and hierarchy can influence unconscious and conscious thinking.

The following passage illustrates the background and significance of race in Finland, and the later passages delve into the roles of social messages and identity development. The intricacy of the issues covered centers on the longstanding manifestations of racist injustice and how it impacts society. The text *Finnishness, Whiteness, and Coloniality* (2022) highlighted an essential quote by reporter Ndéla Faye, who made the following comments in a feature for the Finnish broadcasting company YLE:

> The most interesting thing is that in Finland, the debate is
> stuck on the level in which Russia and Sweden have oppressed
> Finland for centuries. Discussions always return to this, but no
> one wants to talk about the role of white Finns as oppressors,
> for instance, in relation to the forced Finnishization of the
> Sámi.

Faye's statement outlines the corresponding and complicated chronology of how white Finnish groups have been subjected as the oppressed and simultaneously evolving as oppressors. To comprehend Finnish history, contemporary reality, and their paradoxes; the concepts of race, racialization, and whiteness are valuable.

3.1 The Finnish context: Race, racialization, and whiteness

Race, racialization, and whiteness are essential concepts in how I analyze racism in Finland for this thesis, as they offer singular yet interconnected implications which are significant for this study. Concerning Finland, whiteness was produced to resist minorities such as Sámi and the Roma (Merivirta et al., 2021), which I will discuss the implications of in detail. Despite the consequences of racial category on human livelihood, it has been established that 'race' is a socially and culturally created classification (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Race, a human-invented category system, was designed to define physical distinctions between people and has habitually been exploited as a tool for oppression and violence. Omi and Winant (1994) examine racial construction as a process of historical implications and cultural significance (Omi & Winant, 1994). The concept of racialization is beneficial in underlining the process of transforming racial categorization and hierarchical rhetoric into societal practices that hold leverage in society. Racialization was familiarized by Frantz Fanon (1952, 1961); however, the concept accumulated expansive interest and evolved in sociology following analysis by Robert Miles in the text *Racism* (1989).

Fanon (1961) discusses how racial dissimilarities were understood historically. In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961)*, Fanon articulates the racialization of thought by detailing the recognition of cultures and the unwillingness of European colonialists to identify and acknowledge the cultures of Africans while endeavoring to conquer and implement European ideals. Robert Miles (1989) explained racialization as "a dialectical process by which meaning is attributed to particular biological features of human beings, as a result of which individuals may be assigned to a general category of persons which reproduces itself biologically. [...] The process of the racialization of human beings entails the racialization of the processes in which they participate and the structures and institutions that result" (Miles, 1989, p. 76, as quoted in

Thompson-Miller, 2018). The advantage of using the concept of racialization to dissect socialization in Finland is that it centers on processes and *how* beliefs of race transform into practices that materialize in the human experience. Keskinen and Andreassen (2017) cite Irene Molina's (2005) illustration of racialization as a process that distinguishes groups and individuals and justifies power based on perceived differences. Thus, demonstrating the role of power and, consequently, inferiority, both interconnected with racialization in society. When considering racialization, power, and inferiority, the role of whiteness should be incorporated, as whiteness is frequently believed to be the pinnacle to which others are compared. Therefore, to investigate racialization and racism, whiteness must be addressed due to being associated with racial hierarchies that institute hegemonic dominance (Hoegaerts et al., 2022).

Normative whiteness is highly complex and often overlooked as a valid element of social reality despite whiteness bearing power within various societies. Racial connotations are intertwined with beliefs of inferiority and superiority, which influence how individuals are perceived and interact. The socially produced notion of whiteness is conveyed as the prototype, normative, and standard racial identity to which racialized identities are compared (Hoegaerts et al., 2022). Whiteness is continuously transforming the boundary of power and privilege (Hoegaerts et al., 2022). In many ways, the inability to acknowledge whiteness as a system enables "innocence" and the inability to correlate whiteness to colonialism. Concerning this thesis, normative whiteness directs to a social system of power comprising numerous features (Hage, 1998) which have been maintained and hold hegemonic authority. Although whiteness benefits individuals who match its definition, it is not limited to complexions or other physiological traits; it is socially created and subject to change based on how power structures relate to one another (Hoegaerts et al., 2020). When considered the norm or standard, white individuals can "[..] afford to take for granted their skin color and position of power" (Loftsdót-tir & Jensen, 2012 as quoted by Hoegaerts et al., 2022).

3.1.1 Finland's relation to whiteness

Chronologies of Imperial and colonial mandates in Finland indicate colonial complicity and affinities with the contemporary Finnish context regarding race and hierarchies (Merivirta et al., 2021). The relationship between Finnishness and whiteness reveals accounts of systemic exclusion and othering of Indigenous communities which catapulted Finns to the European white class. Merivirta et al. (2021) remarks that Finns also circulated colonial knowledge and racial hierarchies in addition to engaging in colonial projects concerning Sápmi and Sámi people. Finnish accounts of categorization, exclusion practices, and perpetuating colonial knowledge are connected with the forms of exclusion and rhetoric that occur in contemporary societies. Similarly, Merivirta et al. (2021) presents that "colonial ways of knowing were

produced, developed, and circulated in European regions that did not have formal colonies," (Merivirta et al., 2021, p.2) yet by consuming, applying, and imitating this knowledge, these regions participated and benefited from establishing Western epistemology and ideas of modernity as hegemonic. "Finns' involvement in colonialism, we argue, took place at home, in every- day situations. Finns circulated, shared, adopted, adapted, and created colonial discourses: texts, scientific studies, objects, imagery, and artifacts" (Merivirta et al., 2021, p. 6). Likewise, exposure to racist ethnographic showcases, stereotypes and adverse imagery through colonial trade resulted in the circulation of colonialist ideas by Finnish businesses that used racist symbols and racialized imagery in the packaging (Merivirta et al., 2021). Through the previous illustrations of colonial complicity, it is clear that colonial knowledge was normalized and disseminated in Finnish society.

Finnish adherence to colonial ideology is connected to their participation in constructing racial hierarchies and the Finnish national identity. Scientific racism and racial classification, oriented by Carl Linnaeus in the eighteenth century, were widely accepted and implemented into the academic disciplines of racial biology and physical anthropology (Keskinen, 2019). In the chapter "Intra Nordic Differences, Colonial Racial Histories, and National Narratives," Suvi Keskinen (2019) documents that racial hypotheses and inquiries regarding the origins of the Finnish race presumed Finns were inferior to the Nordic race, which was exclusive to Swedes, Norwegians, and Danes. Meanwhile, Sámi, Finns, Tatars, and Roma communities were classified lower according to racial hierarchy (Keskinen, 2019). The Finns were categorized as belonging to Mongolian descent in physical anthropology (Merivirta et al., 2021), which subsequently positioned Finnishness outside of whiteness.

Consequently, Finns engaged with colonial ideology on racial hierarchies and sought to distance themselves from groups perceived as racially subordinate. Keskinen (2019) details that the Sámi were labeled inferior and uncivilized in their alleged primitiveness and nomadic way of life. Finns reproduced hierarchical dissimilarities between themselves and the Sámi in pursuit of identifying with European modernity (Keskinen, 2019) and, therefore, systemically othering the Sámi and restricting their freedoms. The Sámi faced countless injustices and human rights violations in Finland due to being labeled inferior. The injustices included forced participation in racial biology research and assimilatory state politics, such as the assimilatory school system, which forced Finnish culture and language on Sámi children who were taken from their families (Keskinen, 2019; Merivirta et al., 2021). Finnish researchers perpetuated the inference that Sámi were primitive people unable to adapt to modern society. Keskinen (2019) writes that this logic reproduces the evolutionary paradigm of cultures at different developmental stages. The belief in inherent racial inferiority also prompted assimilative efforts and othering of the Roma community in

Finland. The "Gypsy Mission" organization, which the Finnish government supported, targeted Roma children and forced assimilatory and repressive practices (Keskinen, 2019, p. 177).

Accounts of racism, colonial complicity, and power relations are fundamental to this thesis as they are interconnected to provide a framework for understanding the present reality of racism and knowledge in Finland. Sustaining ideas of Finnish exceptionalism and innocence have facilitated a general dismissal of the mistreatment and exclusion of the indigenous Sámi people and ethnic minorities despite being connected to Finland's racial hierarchy. The colonization of Sámi lands, the perpetuation of systemic othering, and assimilation policies are imperative to contemporary Finnish societies' power relations and identity development. Understanding of historical implications that influence ideas regarding racialization and power is significant for the forthcoming section, which will centralize focus on contemporary societal messages to Black women, which often take influence from rhetoric perpetuated from the past.

3.2 Societal messages to Black women

The earlier section examines the historical implications of race, racism, and whiteness in Finland. While comprehending the historical narratives that coax society is essential, discovering how this manifests in the forms society uses to socialize Black individuals is equally necessary. Within a society, values are influenced by alignment to norms and systems such as caste, region, social class, or religious group. The objective of socialization is to administer one in learning to conform to societal norms, values, beliefs, philosophies, and behavioral customs. Black women encounter specific interactions and relationships with society established on the convergences of their Blackness and femininity (Collins, 1990; Nash, 2008; Lewis et al., 2016). Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, and an abundance of influential and noteworthy interdisciplinary publications articulate the symbiotic association Black women encounter in their endeavors from gendered racism. Following their work, rather than conferring racism and sexism as singularly occurring injustices, I utilize an intersectionality framework to aid in understanding standard socialization methods that influence Black women's identity. Socialization does not invariably result in conformity to social norms; however, the habitual circumstances of misogynoir, microaggressions, and racism may inflict an adverse view on one's identity and relationship to society.

3.2.1 Experiencing microaggressions

The notion of microaggressions was initially conceptualized by Psychiatrist Chester M. Pierce (1978) to depict the subtle customary racist transgressions, yet received additional developments by D.W Sue et al. (2007). Racial microaggressions are nuanced and routine disdain and abuses, including callous remarks based on racist inferences concerning intellect, culture, crime, and the diminishment and rejection of

racialized knowledge (Lewis et al., 2016; Sue et al., 2007). Sue (2010) enriched racial microaggressions with an intersectional approach by incorporating gender and marginalized features. Qualitative research on microaggressions indicates that people of color encounter racial microaggressions, such as being treated as subordinate, being dismissed, and facing racist stereotypes about behavior and interactions (Sue et al., 2007; Lewis et al., 2016). Lingering microaggressions informed by gendered racism may hinder exchanges and connections (Constantine & Sue, 2007). Additional investigation has discovered that individuals identifying or perceived as Black or Latino can potentially encounter assumptions of corruption and academic inferiority (Lewis et al., 2016). In a qualitative study of microaggressions against African Americans on predominantly white university campuses, Williams et al. (2020) uncovered that Black students documented experiencing being treated as mediocre and inadequate, as well as sentiments of invisibility and hypervisibility. Lewis et al. (2016) note that studies on gendered microaggressions highlight gestures of sexism through deliberate and subtle statements.

3.2.2 Knowledges of gendered racism

The term *gendered racism* represents the coincidental occurrence of racism and sexism (Essed, 1991; Lewis et al., 2016). It is fundamental to this thesis as many Black women encounter gendered racism, which objectifies Black women based on damaging archetypes of Black femininity (Harris-Perry, 2011). Research on Black women's accounts of gendered racism indicates a prevalence of projected stereotypes and silencing. Lewis et al. (2016) divulge various microaggressions messages validated by explicit biases and socially assembled concepts that exploit the dominant archetypes of Black femininity. For instance, in their qualitative analysis, Lewis et al. (2016) encountered that Black women are stereotyped as enraged and lustful, further demonstrated as prevailing stereotypes in additional research (Harris-Perry, 2011; Thomas et al., 2004).

Furthermore, Lewis et al. (2016) indicate that these stereotypes are conveyed to Black women through interpersonal interactions that reflect microaggressions. Qualitative examination in social psychology has emphasized that confronting the convergences of gendered racism consequently affects feelings concerning identity and well-being for Black girls and women. For instance, in research on Black adolescent girls, Stokes et al. (2020) studied the consequences of gendered and racialized socialization messages and their association with depression and identity. Stokes et al. (2020) uncovered a robust relationship between encountering harmful, oppressive messages about Black women and negative feelings about being Black. Concerning Finland, I have not encountered extensive literature and analysis that depicts the experiences Black girls and women face from the convergence of gendered racism.

However, living in Finland as a racialized Black woman and having intimate friendships with Black Finnish women reveals a narrative that needs to be discussed in research and academia.

Nevertheless, additional investigation is required to locate the subtle forms of gendered racism and microaggressions and how this, in return, affects socialization messages. A vital context where microaggressions may be dominant is in educational institutions. Previous studies on racism in Finnish lower-secondary schools uncovered that roughly one-quarter of the respondents said they had been harassed or discriminated against at schools (Zacheaus et al., 2019). Correspondingly, The Being Black in Europe report, published by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in 2018, disclosed that Finland was leading in perceived racial discrimination and racist harassment through both verbal and non-verbal motions (Yle, 2018). This thesis will serve to demonstrate the specific experiences of Black women to incorporate their voices into this conversation.

3.3 Race, ethnic identity development, and internalized racism

The representations of race and notions of ethnicity are frequently utilized conversely. However, they are not substitutable, as the exchangeable use of the terms is credited to a narrow understanding of race and its symbolism. Race is commonly acknowledged as inherent to biological reality despite being a socio-political construct (Tatum, 1997; 2017). When examining the context of race in the US and the ensuing legacies of colonialism, racialization materialized with the surfacing of the trans-Atlantic slave trade during the late 1600s. Race and racialization were utilized to justify Africans' enslavement and inhumane treatment (Hirschman, 2004). Internationally, the division of bodies into innately "superior" and "inferior" races has been foundational to account for injustices, discriminatory policies, and human rights violations. As mentioned in the previous section, these discriminatory structures have shaped assertions on race, value, and whiteness -- and they are exclusively determined by pseudo-science and subjective physical measures (Helms, 1995a). Despite the delusion of racial categorization and the characteristics associated with such categorization, racism is an actual occurrence that impacts the lives of racialized groups and may play a role in identity.

A general illustration of *Ethnic identity* [EI] entails a particular set of cultural significances that distinguish ethnic groups and supports interpretations of diverse groups' values, ideas, and perspectives (Phinney & Alipuria, 1990). Similarly, EI is characterized by the ways a person apprehends, interacts, or identifies with their ethnic group (Phinney & Alipuria, 1990; Phinney, 1996). Familiarity with ethnic identity development helps determine if there are standards specific to members of an ethnic group and

how they are socially constructed. In particular, I am curious how greater society provides implications for ethnicity-associated norms.

Activist, sociologist, and philosopher W.E.B. Du Bois notably accentuated racial identity development as a principal study and extensively examined racial identity (Segre, 2021; Cross, 1994, 1995). When Du Bois first conveyed the Black experience of *double consciousness*, he depicted how separation and disenfranchisement were harmonized into an identity and experience. Du Bois (1898; 1899) considered *the Negro Problem,* an accumulative of social problems that affect people of African descent, as an indicative element of his life and identity. Further, he articulated that personal notions of Blackness were catapulted through his academic ventures (Wendling, 2018). Du Bois regards the Negro Problem objectively and subjectively — both from the perspectives of science and lived experience (Gooding-Williams, 2011; 2017). Gooding-Williams (2011; 2017) notes that Du Bois' reports were the first documented account of individuals bearing ownership of their racial or ethnic identity and later initiated further investigation. According to Cross (1994), engagement with Du Bois's work commenced reflection and inquisitiveness into racial and ethnic identity development by Cross and Thomas in their endeavors to exemplify the evolution of racialized identities for Black communities in the United States. Cross's psychology into becoming Black, or Nigrescence (Cross, 1991; Cross et al., 1991; Cross 1995), racial development deconstruction is fruitful for this study, inspiring the expansion of racial development models. Cross' *Nigrescence* theory considers that individuals racialized as Black are subject to socialization by the dominant culture, consequently reducing their affinity to racial identity (Cross, 1991; Cross et al., 1991; Cross 1995).

Likewise, Janet E. Helms (1995b) explores racialized identities through her respective racial development phases, which correspondingly concentrate on racial identity and internalized racism. Helms (1995b) connects establishing a favorable view of being racialized to addressing and overcoming the internalization of racist rhetoric. By theoretically integrating these models into this study, I aim to provide acquaintance on how society influences socialization and identity and demonstrate the process of overcoming those leverages.

3.3.1 Nigrescence:
The Thomas and Cross Models of Psychological Nigrescence demonstrates prototypes for racial identity evolution crucial to comprehending racial or ethnic identity development (Cross, 1978; Cross, 1995). Black individuals are not born psychologically Black; this mentality and association with one's Blackness arrives through the cycle of racial socialization (Cross, 1991; 1995). The Nigrescence theory states that

racial socialization transpires across life through identity stages established on Black racial salience (Cross, 1995). Sellers et al. (1997) clarified *racial salience* as the degree of racial significance and relevance in an individual's "self-concept" (p. 806). Thus, one evolves as Black in stages. Nigrescence is a five-stage model that bears Black individuals from low racial identity salience to a nurtured inquisitiveness to their Blackness (Cross, 1991; 1995). The psychology of Nigrescence (Cross, 1995) model abstracts the following five-stage theory:

1. Pre-encounter

2. Encounter

3. Immersion-emersion

4. Internalization

5. Internalization-commitment.

Cross's (1995) Nigrescence approach regards *pre-encounter stage* individuals as viewing themselves as race-neutral, as this stage is distinguished by maintaining little to no racial salience. Racial salience specifies the extent to which individuals find race relevant to the view of self-concept (Scottham et al., 2008). This theory stresses self-identification. Anti-Blackness is also prevalent for some people in the pre-encounter stage. Individuals with anti-Black attitudes have perspectives similar to colonial knowledge. In the pre-encounter stage, individuals perceive race as an imposed annoyance they periodically encounter.

According to the Cross and Vandiver et al. (2001) augmented Cross Racial Identity Scale, the pre-encounter stage represents three core essences: *Assimilation, Miseducation,* and *(Racial) Self-Hatred,* in which historical implications and progress are dismissed. A synopsis of the pre-encounter phase, as informed by Cross and Vandiver et al. (2001), is detailed:

• Pre-Encounter Assimilation represents a lack of engagement and identification with Black culture while adhering to dominant or Western ideals and views on racialized stereotypes.

• Pre-Encounter Miseducation illustrates a Black individual who assumes stereotypical rhetoric and portrayals of cultural-historical misinformation while simultaneously compartmentalizing racialized stereotypes and perceptions to deem themselves exceptional.

• Pre-Encounter (Racial) Self-Hatred depicts a Black person who encounters severely pessimistic emotions due to being Black.

Individuals in the pre-encounter stage have been socialized to idolize and assume norms that center whiteness into their worldview (Mahalik et al., 2006). Cross (1995) theorized that an increase in salience

established transformation to the *encounter stage* (phase two) and that the individual underwent an encounter that compelled the realization of the significance of race (Cross, 1971). Cross (1995) indicated that an accumulation of events could provoke this encounter, and it may compel an irritation towards white institutions. The accumulation of recurring encounters and emotions may result as the catalysts for socialization, which brings the emergence of a positive racial identity (Cross, 1991; 1995).

Cross (1995) directs that in the third phase of Nigrescence, *immersion-emersion*, the person endeavors to isolate from white, Eurocentric significances while simultaneously incorporating Black culture into their life. The two identity directions in the immersion-emersion phase are drastic and may result in anti-Eurocentric mannerisms and assertions (Cross, 1995). The individual exemplifies a coexisting dismantling of the old identity and the formation of a new one, welcoming what they regard as Black culture(s) despite limited authentic knowledge and experience (Cross, 1995). In the *emersion* half of this phase, the individual transitions into enhancing their knowledge and affinities to Blackness and interpretations of Blackness.

Internalization is the following phase of Nigrescence, which encompasses how a person forms to embrace and interpret their Blackness in a manner that is natural to the individual (Cross, 1991; 1995). Cross (1991) remarks that from a psychodynamic standpoint, internalization achieves three essential operations (1) to serve as security from the psychological injury that arises from existing in a racist society; (2) to equip the person with a feeling of belonging; (3) to supply a basis for societal and cultural exchanges outside of Blackness. (Cross, 1991). The individual is satisfied and content with their identity, and the significance connected with their Black identity is visible throughout their life (Cross, 1995). The individual comprehends the presence of systemic and structural racism and other interrelated injustices. Last, the conclusive stage of Nigrescence is *internalization-commitment,* which symbolizes a sustained obligation to Black justice and welfare (Cross, 1995). In this phase, people may dedicate extensive time towards the obligation to sustaining and advocating for Black communities (Cross, 1991).

Concerning this thesis, particular phases presented in Cross' Nigrescence theory come together in a theoretical framework applicable to racialized socialization and experiences vital to development. Parham (1989) investigated whether people engage with the Nigrescence stages as an inflexible series, which presented that individuals can encounter stages of Nigrescence multiple times, informing that it is not a linear strategy. The Psychology of the Nigrescence model has undergone modifications to recognize that some individuals may not undergo feelings of self-aversion or advance through the complete model

(Cross, 1995). Correspondingly, Cross' later revisions convey that the Nigrescence cycle is dependent on the individual's experience and progression.

3.3.2 Janet E. Helms' POC Racial Identity Model

Research psychologist Dr. Janet E. Helms formed racial identity development phases for white communities and people of color [POC], demonstrated in her book *A Race is a Nice Thing to Have* (1992). Helms (2003) clarifies racial identity as centered on one's introspection. The respective phases in the Helm's POC Racial Identity Model displays similarities to the Nigrescence model and theory, yet they contrast in many areas. Helms (1992) implies that personal engagement in racial identity development is flexible and influenced by social assumptions. Also, Helms's (1995b) argument that overcoming internalized racism is significant to growth is a relevant distinction. The Helms (1995b) POC Racial Identity Model comprises five phases: (a) conformity, (b) dissonance, (c) immersion/emersion, (d) internalization, and (e) integrative awareness.

Like the initial stage of the Nigrescence model, Helms' *conformity status* is denoted by absolute adherence to norms of the dominant white society and an incognizance of race-related concerns (Helms, 1995), resulting in the minimization of one's racial identity and group. During the *dissonance status*, the individual confronts and questions the significance of race in their interactions and relationship with their society. The individual discovers that their race or gender may avert them from the social and material advantages white people gain, which causes them to feel confused about their societal beliefs and positioning. In the *immersion/emersion status*, an individual places positive symbolism and preference over items related to their racial identity and becomes inquisitive about race-related topics. Next, the *internalization status* signifies a commitment to racial identity and issues correlated to that identity. Eventually, in the *integrative awareness status*, an individual is capable of understanding that they are more than their race or gender, and they can positively identify with their racial group while also acknowledging other aspects of their identity (Helms, 1995).

4. Methodology: Methods and Materials

4.1 Research approach

This thesis employs a qualitative analysis that utilizes both phenomenological and narrative research approaches. The qualitative analysis strives to enrich the understanding of the characteristics and meaning concerning racial and gendered socialization messages. A standard component in qualitative research techniques is accumulating and analyzing data to learn about notions and experiences (Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative research administers priority on lived experience in research, and the qualitative research methods that I used to interpret data are narrative and phenomenological research approaches to attain a more profound acuity into the research participant's lived experiences. In the phenomenological research approach, a phenomenon or circumstance is analyzed, described, and interpreted by participants' lived experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019). The narrative research approach centers on understanding how participants perceive, express, and make sense of their lived experiences (Clandinin, 2006).

4.1.1 Phenomenological and narrative research approaches

To begin, narrative research relies on the interviewed individual's stories to create meaning and concerns analyzing and interpreting accounts to comprehend how the interviewed individuals make sense of their experiences and perceptions (Feldman et al., 2004; Patterson, 2018). The phenomenological examination involves analyzing a phenomenon through individuals' lived experiences (Frechette, 2020). Phenomenology is inquisitive about a person's lived experience, and the interviewed individual may report their experience using an in-depth, narrative format, exhibiting where the two research approaches coincide. In this research, I utilize narrative analysis to understand how the stories are told while using the phenomenology approach to probe into the themes that surface throughout the interviews. Both approaches enable this research to uncover the connection between events and how they affect an individual's experience. Thus, the individual stories are prioritized while maintaining a connection to more significant culture and societal relevance.

Black feminist theoretical frameworks were utilized to focus on the participant's phenomenological knowledge and encounters with gendered and racial socialization. For instance, the intersectionality theory affirms that varied aspects of identity, such as race and gender, shape forms of systemic oppression and everyday experiences. Overall, this research approach was created and completed in a manner that observes participants' experiences with delicacy and concern while simultaneously involving these stories to encourage social change. The ambition of this thesis is to highlight common themes collected from qualitative semi-structured interviews where Black women in Finland share their understandings of gendered racial socialization messages and how they influence one's identity.

4.2 Participants

The sample for the present study was acquired between October 2021-January 2022. Participants were recruited via social media messages and were members of various community initiatives and organizations in Finland. Participants were included in this on the basis of meeting the criteria for participant eligibility, which includes: growing up in Finland, consenting to participate in interviews anonymously, consenting to our conversation being recorded, self-identification as a Black or African woman over the age of 18, and consenting to participate in the Racism Mental Health and Young POC [RaMePOC] research which I am a part. The RaMePOC research project studies the interconnected dynamics of racism and mental health by concentrating on the experiences of young people of color [POC] in Finland. Seven interviews were conducted; however, five remained applicable to this study as the final sample. This alteration was based on shifts in my research purpose to center solely on the experiences of Black-identifying women. Of the final sample, the participants were all from various regions in Finland or grew up in Finland. At the time of the interview, the participants were all based in Helsinki and between the ages of 20-29. The participants represented a range of education, interest, and employment backgrounds.

4.3 Procedure

I organized individual semi-structured interviews with participants, ranging from private in-person or Zoom meetings. Interview length varied per participant, with the average time being one hour. In the days preceding the interviews, I conversed with the participants regarding the thesis ambitions and the objective of the research project RaMePOC. Furthermore, I provided a list of discussion themes. Each interview covered the themes which were provided in advance, and the majority of questions facilitated open-ended responses. Furthermore, I recorded all interviews using my cell phone and they were later transcribed. The time of recording was agreed upon and announced in advance, and the recordings transpired and concluded at a time decided upon by the participants.

Four primary themes were used to gather information on socialization sites and messages in order to understand participants' racial and gender socialization experiences. The primary themes include learning about socialization methods from home, education facilities, society and media, and Finnish identity. Sample questions include (a) Do you feel the need to behave differently, and if so, why? (b) Do you feel a sense of belonging in Finnish society? (c) Have you experienced forms of internalized racism? After gaining consent, the participants' interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. I carefully reviewed the transcripts to specific themes that authentically reflected the interviews. The core themes that are discussed in this thesis were formulated by revisiting the interviews and assessing their association with

established concepts or symbolized concepts of unfamiliarity. Ultimately, the categories were conceptualized into comprehensive themes.

4.4 Semi-structured interviews as a method

This thesis utilized the semi-structured interview [SSI] technique for data collection, which consists of asking questions within a thematic framework (Adams, 2015). As the goal was to explore narratives and themes from interviews, SSI enabled an open-ended conversation, encouraging a natural flow of dialogue, flexibility, and in-depth responses. Adams (2015) declares that SSI exchanges can explore agenda topics which may result in discussing entirely unexpected subjects related to the theme.

In utilizing semi-structured interviewing as a research method, I organized questions in advance to ensure I adequately covered the correct themes while maintaining a conversational style. In using a semi-structured interview method, I aim to achieve dialogue that allows the emphasis of this research to center on Black women's voices by delving deeply into each question. An advantage of incorporating the SSI method into this research is that it enabled a relaxed setting for conversation and gave authority to the participant to emphasize and confer at length topics that were more relevant to their respective stances. The SSI method also cultivated space to probe into responses, when necessary, for further investigation on an issue (Adams, 2015).

Following Adams' (2015) direction for conducting SSI research, I formulated an interview guide to outline planned topics; however, I decided to analyze the data using inductive and deductive approaches. The inductive approach uses empirical evidence to assess and theorize apparent patterns (Bonner et al., 2021). The deductive approach is "theory-driven" and centers on the predetermined theory and hypotheses, then accumulating and interpreting data to test the hypotheses (Bonner et al., 2021). Simultaneously involving both approaches enables a comprehensive understanding of each theme and positions the interview participants as influential and necessary in shaping the research. Overall, the SSI method facilitates a profound exploration into participant reflections, emotions, and inferences; and is particularly important in exploring sensitive matters such as gendered racism.

4.5 Communication and data collection ethics

As this thesis relies on collecting personal and in-depth experiences from participants, it is noteworthy to confer the matter of ethical approach in collecting data and concealing sensitive information such as names and affiliations such as employment and organizations. The disposition of interviewing must be handled sensitively and respectfully regarding data storage, use, and omission. The participants were

briefed during early conversations and before the interview regarding their interview contributions, their right to exclude questions, their right to conclude the interview, and their right to terminate their participation altogether. Ethics concerning the interviews are meaningful due to interviews requiring absolute carefulness regarding ethical practices, and extensive research on interviewing and ethics exist specifically around power systems (Doucet & Mauthner, 2003; 2008). Thus, it is crucial to establish that the participants have command over the information they share, their time, and their conversations. The participants in this thesis exhibited understanding and reassurance regarding their contributions, and we commenced the interviews with fundamental information about themselves to establish the aspects of their lives they felt safe to discuss during the interview. The interviews discuss circumstances from the participant's history that are communicated based on the individual's understanding and may cause agonizing memories to surface. Thus, the importance of participant authority is central. Finally, the convention of confidentiality is supported in this thesis to respect the participant's privacy and to form trust and a supportive rapport with the participants. To sustain ethical measures and integrity, the participants' real names and identifying attributes, such as location, age, and occupation, are omitted from this study.

4.5.1 Researcher and participant similarities and differences

As a dark-skinned Black woman, my identity and, in some regard, equivalence concerning certain experiences and age may have affected the exchanges and the topics raised during the interviews. However, the respondents may have associated my identity regarding my Blackness and womanness as Americanized, thus differing from their experiences and knowledge of existing as a Black woman, specifically in the Finnish context. When consulting this thesis subject and advancement with peers, the issue of relating with the participants due to similar identities and labels is frequently brought up as a concern; nevertheless, an influential point I executed this data collection on is that similar knowledges and experiences fail to correlate to the absolute or partial acquaintance concerning the participants' emotions and how they create meaning (Delgado-Gaitan, 1993). It is critical to comprehend the variations in knowledge and understanding, and to prevent ideas of a general collective world-view. In short, as a singular individual, I cannot and will not represent all Black women. As an African-American woman pursuing an education and academic career in Finland, I have not experienced navigating Finnish society in a similar manner as the interview participants from Finland or grew up in Finland. The five women who generously offered their accounts and events from throughout their lives represent diverse backgrounds ranging from biracial, non-ambiguously Black, second-generation, and relocating to Finland as a small child. Though we have similarities, their experiences differ incredibly from my own.

Nonetheless, having similar experiences enables me to identify with many of their experiences and to honor and validate these stories with safety and trust.

4.6 Establishing themes

Once the interviews were completely transcribed, I analyzed them along with the audio-recordings to check for accuracy. The data was then interpreted to determine their core essences, shared themes, and dissimilarities by attentively reading each transcript by analyzing each line. Both CRT and intersectionality theories were integral in my analysis, as I highlighted illustrations where the convergence of gendered racism and historical implications were apparent, then I affirmed the themes based on overlaps from the interviews. The themes identified as influencing socialization are gendered racial microaggressions based on stereotyping, internalized gendered racism, Finnish normativity and identity, and resistance and overcoming. The themes are intrinsically linked to the phases described in my literature review. To center the participant narratives, the subsequent chapter will detail the surfacing themes from the interviews parallel with the participant quotes. I supply a slight analysis in this chapter; however, the complete analysis will transpire in the final chapter titled "Concluding Discussion." As my research relies on empirical knowledge and regards the voices and reflections of Black women, which are often dismissed, I incorporate their quotes and stories, which vary in length, to encompass their authentic experiences.

5. Analysis and Discussion

My "Analysis and Discussions" chapter concentrates on the interview participants' narratives by centering on their authentic experiences through quotes. In this chapter, I write an undersized discussion parallel to the interview quotes, however; the subsequent chapter, "Concluding Discussion," delivers an elaborate discussion illuminated by the research discoveries. I invite readers to focus on the narratives of the interview participants while reading this chapter. As stated in the previous chapter, respect and carefulness for participant confidentiality and the privacy of identifiable markers are essential. Accordingly, pseudonyms were utilized to conceal participants' real names. Furthermore, details regarding the participant's respective age and the cities or towns they are from (in Finland) were removed. The following table facilitates reading this analysis as it details the participants' pseudonyms and regions.

Pihla	Northern Finland
Jolie	Southern Finland
Hasnaa	Southern Finland
Amina	Western Finland
Zahra	Southern Finland

This thesis aims to answer the research questions, *1) How does racial and gendered socialization in Finland produce narratives regarding the meaning of Blackness? 2) How does internalizing such narratives influence the development and performance of Black women's identities in Finland?* Careful analysis of the interview transcripts exemplifies several themes consistent with the literature review and reverberates Cross' Nigrescence model (Cross, 1991; 1995) and Helms POC Racial Identity Model (Helms, 1995b). The respective phases of Black identity development functioned as a framework for analyzing the gendered racial socialization messages and gendered racism depicted in the interviews. As the participants' sentiments towards gendered racism and their identities transformed, it connected to the Nigrescence model phases, which hypothesize that Black individuals progress toward a positive and confident racial identity over time. The progression and transformation of Black racial identity were not included as an initial focus of this thesis; however, the narratives regarding often overcoming negative gendered racial socialization messages were noteworthy in the interviews and reflected the final stage of the Nigrescence model. Reviewing the eclectic chronologies of the participants facilitated my interpretation of their experiences and their transforming perspectives. The interviews were initiated by the participants examining how they identify and how they interpret that their racial and gender identities

shaped their interactions in varied aspects of society. The interviews later moved into how the participants internalized these messages and how these messages may have influenced their sense of self and of belonging within Finnish society. The topic of overcoming, which relates to the final stage of the Nigrescence model, transpired naturally in the interviews and therefore is significant to include in my analysis. The discoveries from the interviews are categorized into four major themes: 1) socialization messages from microaggressions and projected stereotypes, 2) internalized gendered racism, 3) Finnish normativity and its influence on identity, and 4) resistance and overcoming. By utilizing narrative-style interview quotations, I emphasize how the participant's stories exhibit these themes. I initiate my analysis foremost by examining the first research question: *how does racial and gendered socialization in Finland produce narratives regarding the meaning of Blackness?* To investigate this, I will employ interview data to analyze specific messages regarding the intersection of race and gender that are communicated in Finland, and locate the socialization agents contributing to and perpetuating these messages.

5.1 Microaggressions as socialization messages

> I get the sense that most Finnish people would say that they're not racist, 'cause they're pretty liberal, on the surface, but.. racist ideologies and ideas are really pervasive, and like, they run really deep and most people, sometimes don't even realize that they hold onto, that they even have those ideas embedded in them, and it'll be, yeah, it'll be small comments, either commenting on people's language skills, or I remember personally I had someone comment about how they felt comfortable with me, compared to other black people. -Jolie

In the above quotation, Jolie describes encountering remarks that embody microaggressions. The concept of racial microaggressions was initially conceptualized by Pierce et al. (1978) and subsequently by Sue et al. (2007) to indicate the occurrences of nuanced racist remarks and actions based on racial assumptions. In my interviews, the prevalence of racist microaggressions seems to have materialized as dominant influences in socialization messages. Due to the (sometimes) subtle essence of microaggressions, they are often underestimated and not viewed as having substantial material effects on the messages about Blackness. Microaggressions are not harmless, innocent indiscretions; rather, they connect to structures of oppression that reinforce power structures (Skinner-Dorkenoo et al., 2021) regardless of intent or "consciousness." In this thesis section, I investigate reports of racial and racist microaggressions on the socialization messages directed to Black women.

5.1.1 Socially affirmed stereotypes

Stereotypes in this regard direct to microaggressions that acquire validation through constructed notions that depersonalize Black women and perceive their existence through a narrow lens. Further, microaggressions also examine the concept of objectification and failing to consider an individual's uniqueness outside of explicit stereotypes. Accordingly, this section illustrates gendered racial stereotypes of Black femininity that have surfaced during the five interviews. The stereotypes expressed during the interviews include the impulse of anger, violence and assumptions regarding intellect and abilities. Further, the idea of Black femininity being inherently ugly and excluded from beauty standards was also commonly discussed in the interview, however I have decided to include that in the section on internalized racism.

a) Anticipating violence:

The perceived anticipation for Black women and girls to personify the stereotype of being unrefined, violent, and ghetto mirrors the reoccurring archetype of the "angry Black woman" (Harris-Perry, 2011). The angry Black woman archetype was established in the United States following the enslavement and exploitation of Africans and the consequent social, economic, and political impacts. Black women have become the targets of hostile stereotyping from anti-Black imagery in American culture. Although the angry Black woman stereotype has monopolized Black women's social views, empirical evidence reinforcing the stereotype as valid is nonexistent (Walley-Jean, 2009). The falsehood of the angry Black woman depicts Black women as aggressive, irrational, tyrannical, and vicious (Walley-Jean, 2009). While navigating this lingering stereotype, some participants felt it necessary to alter their behaviors publicly to evade any assumptions of embodying this stereotype.

In the following quotations, Pihla shares incidents of myths regarding Blackness as associated with violence that was present in varied aspects of life, such as work, and distributed in her school. During our interview, Pihla depicted the consequence of racist-fueled messaging regarding the refugee crisis, where Finland accepted an unprecedented number of asylum seekers, and how it affected the security of people of color in her town in Northern Finland. In the following illustrations, Pihla details microaggressions at work and an incident where politicians and refugee specialists were invited to her school to conduct presentations that ultimately emitted damaging stereotypes without teacher intervention.

> [...] I would always feel like my ethnicity or my blackness would be something [people in the north] fear, like something scary, something different. So I would say it would be like if you're like an animal in a cage, they are kind of scared of you. But in the south it's like you're an animal in

a cage but they want to touch you, like there's for their pleasure. So just like working in the retail store in the north, people would be afraid of me. They wouldn't believe that I would be the worker there. They would always first talk to my white coworkers and then me if they have to. But in the south people touch me, like touch me, my skin. Talk about like mother Africa and all that. It's always the same feeling of you're being something different and kind of up to for their consumption or their beliefs to put upon you. - Pihla

I asked that we could get an educator to have this talk about the refugee crisis in our schools so the conversation could get a little bit better and we would have like real information, and not this like fake news that everyone was reading in my school. And even there, they have a big open question part. People were awful [to] this lady that was like a professional to talk [to] us about the refugee crisis. The questions were straight up, like "oh, why do you [Black] guys come here to rape people" it was crazy. And the teachers did not stop this, like this was okay and allowed, and that really shocked me a lot. [...] Other incidents were like when we had politicians come to debate in our school; [...] they always bring up people from Perussuomalaiset (True Finn party) [that] will just say really racist stuff. In my high school, there was actually Finnish as [a] second language class; they had quite, I think I gave you 20 percent or something, so we had quite a lot [of POC] for Finnish standpoint, at least from my city, [Northern Finland], we had quite a lot of black people and minorities, and still they let these people come and just be really, really racist and disrespectful in front of the whole school, and they just had to sit there and it was mandatory to be there and listen to that, and no teachers did anything towards it. And not in any point they did not even express how this is wrong. When you see that and when your teacher is basically your mentor or whatever you're looking up to is allowing this kind of behavior, I think affects the whole school and the talking as well, and then you feel like this kind of talking is okay. And that goes both ways to the white peers, they think they can say these things, and then all the minorities who thought like, oh, this is okay for them to say now, and maybe you feel like everyone else thinks the same too, even though that would be not the case. And they did make me feel kinda betrayed.- Pihla

Pihla's narrative of racist stereotypes being asserted without dispute or intervention from educators was immensely destructive, especially associating Blackness with violence. The fallacy of inherent roughness and corresponding cynical stereotypes enormously affects Black women intrapsychically and interpersonally (Ashley, 2014). The silence from educators can be viewed as a reinforcement of accepted ideas of inherent differences and a power structure that contributes to the preservation of

microaggressions. The maintenance of microaggressions and power structures satisfies ideas around norms and hierarchies in an effort to control narratives regarding "racial characteristics." Later in the interview, Pihla voiced that in her early and middle adolescent years, she felt anxiety about modifying her appearance and behaviors to avoid association with harmful stereotypes, such as violence:

> It created this pressure of me being the advocate for every black person. I would never go to the store without a makeup or with proper clothes or my hair messed up. I would always look my best because I felt like if I look less than that, it will create like bad reputation for everyone in a way. So, yeah, I felt like all this pressure to look my best all the time, kind of like act good too. Like I never got into trouble or anything just because I felt like if I would get into trouble or if I would be a little bit rebellious, the punishment will be worse.- Pihla

Next, Hasnaa depicts how prevailing stereotypes about Black femininity altered her sense of self and expression. A text that inspired this thesis is *Black Feminist Thought* by Patricia Hill Collins, who discusses how oppression includes economic, political, and ideological dimensions. Ideological oppression subjects racialized groups to fraudulent attributes (negative stereotypes) that justify oppression (Collins, 1990; 2002). The historical construct of racist opinion-regulating archetypes of Black femininity influences social interactions and constructs a misrepresentation of Black women (Yates-Richard, 2020), which affects the expression of Blackness (Collins, 1990; 2002). In the quotation below, Hasnaa conveys how prevailing stereotypes exploited her sense of self.

> The stereotypes literally affect your lifeline and your whole life. But yeah. They say it — [...] the stereotype like black people being loud and just being violent. I feel like I was I started silencing myself. I was not as opinionated as I would have loved to be. [...] If I was hanging out with some of my white friends and then I would see my Black friends and they would be all dancing or being loud, I would feel so embarrassed. I'm like oh my. Like in my mind I'm like oh my god. You are playing right into the stereotype and you gonna make these people think that I'm the same. I wanted to be so different from others, and I loved being the chosen black among my white friends. It was like that for a few years. I distanced myself from my culture a lot. 'Cause I just I thought that way I would be able to survive in this country. - Hasnaa

The angry Black woman stereotype has infiltrated numerous cultures, characterizing Black women as more hostile while simultaneously shaping their interactions as the fear of being regarded through this stereotype regulates actions. Hence, both Hasnaa and Pihla's apprehension towards how they are

perceived and identified in the public and amongst peers reflects an expansive phenomenon concerning the problematization of racialized identities and how that, in return, converts demeanors and mannerisms of racialized individuals. Philomena Essed (1991; 2001) has documented "everyday racism" as a threefold framework that incorporates the following into racist practices:

1. The marginalization and othering of racialized individuals.
2. The problematization of racialized identities and characteristics considered inherently other.
3. Repression and hindrance to dismantling racism through dismissal, embarrassment, and attack.

Microaggressions, as a form of everyday racism, communicate that racialized identities and characteristics associated with racialized identities are inherently inadequate, and their nuanced essence produces tribulations in combating them. Therefore, racial microaggressions are the communicated forms of stereotypes considered socially acceptable due to their subtle nature, yet they are a structure of discrimination that conserves white supremacy. The material effects of microaggressions exploit the actions and interactions of Black women like Hasnaa and Pihla out of fear of being associated with negative archetypes and concern for how that connection can affect their livelihoods. The attempt to minimize one's Blackness can also serve as protection from consequences of association with stereotypical tropes.

b) Inferences concerning credentials, intellect, and competence

> [...] I work as a producer [and] people will ask someone white something before they ask me. If I do give some information then they have to double-check to see if it's right. - Hasnaa

As illustrated by Hasnaa's statement, cross checking information or omitting consideration for Black women's expertise corresponds with microaggressions that convey assumed premises on intelligence. This category of microaggression examines the assumed knowledge, status, credentials, and capabilities of Black women. This analysis section aims to encompass intellectual capacities and competencies ascribed based on racial presumptions. A familiar occurrence discovered across all five interviews is counter-stereotypical assumed exceptionalism, where the participants have encountered tokenism or declared as "different" from ideas concerning Black people. Simultaneously, a considerable number of participants discussed experiences with their educational merit or professional dreams and endeavors being censured or met with doubt from peers, teachers, and counselors. Furthermore, several interviews indicate that students are stigmatized as many are mandated to enroll in Finnish as second language courses, despite Finnish proficiency as native speakers.

Examining statements concerning attitudes of intellectual abilities and competencies in this thesis initially emerged from the interview discussions about whether stereotypes existed within educational spaces. As Finland is acknowledged globally for exceptional education, I was inquisitive about whether narratives of assumed stereotypes are present within academic settings. The following assertions are responses to whether stereotypes concerning intellectual excellence were articulated or circulated in social or educational settings; and memories of how they affected feelings concerning success. First, Jolie describes surfaces of characteristic expectations regarding her proficiency and mannerisms.

> Yeah, maybe this is on my mind but I've kind of had experiences where people expected me to just be docile, quiet, submissive, and not just men, even women, and it's like they're surprised when they realize that I have a voice, that I have an opinion, that I'm educated, and that I stand my ground. It's almost like, and it almost feels like it's an insult that I am those things, because they would rather I be quiet, stay in my place, and submit kind of. That's been my experience, so, yes. - Jolie

Next, Hasnaa and Amina share parallel illustrations where school administrators challenged and discouraged their abilities to pursue their preferred study track or specialization. Amina's guidance counselor commented, "even for Finns double degree is hard," alluding to assumed stereotypes regarding race and knowledge capabilities.

> I really wanted to study psychology, but whenever I would ask about it, I was told that it's very difficult and because I haven't been living in Finland long enough and it would be very challenging for me. If your teacher says that and if a principal says that, I mean they know something that I don't know so let me just start looking at something else. So that's how I ended up going [...] studying tourism and something. Something that I have not. I have not used that degree ever since I left that school. - Hasnaa

> I think there were several occasions where I realized that because of my background I was treated in a certain way. [...] I discussed with [the student counselor] that I would like to do a double degree and I think she was [...] a little bit like kind of against it, but she didn't want to say, oh of course I have to support you. She didn't want to say that, but then she said, 'it's going to be really hard' and I'm quoting her now that 'even for Finns double degree is hard'. So that was like oh but how can you say that because you know already my papers are really good and I could easily go with that paper without thinking, but she is looking at my appearance. I could pass it without [them] even realizing that person is not a native Finn. It is just like they have

> really good grades. They can do that but why is it because of the background.
> Why this kind of comparison? - Amina

Last, Pihla expresses the emotional labor and consequences of invariably encountering racist beliefs concerning her intellect. In this specific situation, Pihla was being bullied as the perpetrator abused racist rhetoric regarding intellect, yet no one at the school intervened to help Pihla.

> [...] Nobody said anything. So it's the same feeling I got, like "wow, this is what the people actually think" or they think this is okay. And that, yeah, definitely got me a little bit depressed. And I actually remember that day when that happened, this incident happened, I just left school for the day. I couldn't see people and my peers made me feel disgusted, like I didn't wanna see anyone. - Pihla

Patriarchal and racialized matters conditioned the image of Blackness, which may characterize experiences in academic settings. The incidents encountered by Hasnaa, Jolie, Amina, and Pihla depict a socially constructed hierarchy regarding ability and proficiency. Therefore, understanding how competent professionals and intelligent students endure the simultaneous pressure of their respective domains coupled with the added strain of being stereotyped is worth exploring amid portrayals about underachievement. Nonetheless, one respondent, Zahra, answered differently:

> [...] I never had racial problems with any of the teachers. I never felt, even though it was racial, some racial slurs that I heard when I was young, but I never really felt like, I just felt like it was normal teasing, if that makes sense, 'cause kids they tease each other, and even adults do still nowadays, but there's always this teasing and I never, like it did affect me, how I saw myself and how I imagined myself to grow up, but at the end of the day, for example now I don't feel like those words have affected me in a bad or in a sad way, I feel like I actually got more strength because of that. I feel like I grew up stronger because of these, what happened. -Zahra

Circumstances and consequences of gendered racism exist on a spectrum, and "subtle" discriminatory actions and comments can be challenging to recognize and measure. The challenges of identifying such treatment is due to the ambiguity of microaggressions and their occurrences at the interpersonal level that objectifies and diminishes one's humanness. The second focus of microaggressions concerning intellect and abilities deals with stereotypes regarding Finnish language command.

> I think they wanted to put me and my brother to this Finnish as a second language in school even though it's the most fluent language that I speak. So

there were these kind of suggestions from some teachers, that I would need to, go to this Finnish as a second language even though it's my first language, just 'cause I look different. And this I've heard from many many people, even though their Finnish is perfect, they're being put to this Finnish as a second language just because, in a way they shouldn't be in the Finnish lessons, 'cause they're not Finnish.- Zahra

My sister and brother, they grow up only speaking Finnish [...] for some reason they were put into this Finnish as a second language class, even though for example my sister learned how to read and write when she was five, which is really early in Finland. She still got put into Finnish as a second language course, and even though my stepmother (who is Black) later on asked [for her to be] moved into Finnish class where she belonged, they wouldn't do it. And only when I called as a native Finnish-speaker, and demanded this change or I would like call their supervisors, and I actually called the headmaster of the school, the principal, that this was not okay. Then after that phone call, two days and she was changed. But when my stepmom, she does not speak Finnish as first language, but does definitely speak Finnish fluently, they didn't really do anything. And my sister explained that everyone who looked like her, so basically everyone who is a person of color, was just automatically put into Finnish as a second language classroom, which was really crazy to me, and I know that they do that and there was a big conversation about it naturally in my high school too, like I said 20 percent was people of color, but in the Finnish class there were maybe two other people of color in the Finnish class. And then if you go to Finnish the second language course, it will make it definitely way harder to you get into University. And I know in my high school, too, there were students that maybe they want to be a doctor, but the city counselor would say, oh, you should be a nurse. So that definitely happened in my school too. - Pihla

In these cases, the catalyst for determining whether a student requires placement in Finnish as a second language course is due to the racialization of students of color informed by implicit biases regarding Finnishness. Placement in these courses was not based on the speaker's proficiency or intelligibility but on their proximity to Blackness. This constructs an effect of otherness in Finnish society as those perceived outside of Finnish normativity are regarded as fundamentally different. The concept and process of othering encompass several forms of discrimination while reproducing structures of inequality and marginality (Powell & Menendian, 2017). Finally, the idea of counter-stereotypical assumed exceptionalism, denoting one who fails to demonstrate a commonly believed standardized representation, was also highlighted in the discussion about stereotypes. Zahra and Jolie both express encounters where

microaggressions were present as counter-stereotypes. Both participants experienced being told they're unlike other Black people, revealing the presence of stereotypical thinking.

> I remember them saying that I'm different. We had this conversation about black people with my white Finnish friends, friends at that time, and I remember them saying like, yeah, but you're different, like different to other black people, so there were definitely some stereotypes of people regarding their mindset of different cultures. I don't know if that makes sense. -Zahra

> I remember personally I had someone comment about how they felt comfortable with me, compared to other black people. -Jolie

Subsequently, Hasnaa explains how being "chosen" by white peers represented a perceived misalignment with her culture. Correspondingly, Pihla details receiving compliments for not being "too Black," indicating that restricted proximities to Blackness are preferred.

> I loved being the, chosen black among my white friends. It was like that for a few years. I distanced myself from my culture a lot. 'Cause I just I thought that way I would be able to survive in this country. -Hasnaa

> The amount of times I have been complimented because I'm not too black or too white, but definitely too black was the thing they were trying to say. -Pihla

The reliance on stereotypical consideration is so decisive to the extent that a Black woman perceived as not aligning with those stereotypes is deemed exceptional. If Black women were genuinely unrestricted in expressing themselves in whichever manner felt natural and necessary to them, their attitudes and actions would not need to be related to ideas established by society. Perceiving Black women as the exception of negative projected stereotypes still views them through the lens of stereotypes. It creates a sense of discomfort because, despite individuality, the overbearing assumptions of stereotypes are present within a person's consciousness, making them inescapable.

5.2 Internalized gendered racism: "My blackness was a thing to dismiss or kinda forget"

> I feel like I started silencing myself. I was not as opinionated as I would have loved to be. -Hasnaa

As expressed in Hasnaa's extract, racism may exploit one's sense of self-esteem, which may instruct Black women to view themselves and their varied characteristics of Blackness as inadequate (Willis et al.,

2021), which also coaxes the perspectives of other Black people. Extensive literature and prior empirical examination employing the Nigrescence model have explored racial identity and its relation to varied influences on African American youth (Seaton & Gilbert, 2011). Remarkably, the pre-encounter stage was connected to internalized racism. By centering the second research question *(How does the internalization of such narratives influence the development and performance of Black women's identities in Finland?)*, this section aims to concentrate on experiences of internalized racism. Racism is multilayered, and while facets of racism interact with each other, each facet harbors diverse implications. Jones (2000) illustrated central classes of racism:

- *Personally mediated:* Such as overt racism, racial discrimination, and implicit biases.
- *Institutionalized racism:* Correspondingly understood as systemic racism, *Institutionalized racism* is a structure of racism ingrained in laws and regulations. It embodies political institutions (for example, voting rights), policing, judiciary systems, occupational access, accommodation, schooling, health service quality, and additional facets.
- *Internalized racism:* A condition where racialized individuals internalize subordinate and oppressive rhetoric by the racially subordinated (Pyke, 2010).

The continuum of racism may adversely affect the individual's access and interactions in society, but it can also impair how they view themselves. Jones (2000) defines the concept of internalized racism as a manifestation of systems of marginalization that materialize to corrupt an individual's acumen of racial identity, belonging, and general view of their racial group. Internalized racism is a complex and layered experience that incorporates: accepting damaging stereotypes concerning one's racial identity and group (Pyke, 2010), modifying physical appearance in an endeavor to conform to white standards (Parmer et al., 2004), and trusting in a narrow illustration of history that favors the dominant society (Clarke, 1991). Several participants conveyed stories of internalized racism learned from their interactions in predominantly white spaces, particularly around hair, beauty, and attitudes. Nevertheless, in discussing internalized racism, overcoming and defying the adversities of internalized racism and self-hate was a substantial element. Accounts of internalized racism were overwhelmingly accompanied with stories of resistance; therefore, it is noteworthy to include the apparent dualism in this analysis. In the following excerpts, Jolie and Amina express unremitting intimidation as appearing inauthentic to themselves based on fear of presenting stereotypical behaviors or appearances.

> I kind of had to, yeah, dim myself down a bit so as to not seem, 'cause you know there's a stereotype of the, there's an angry black woman and then we're really loud and really aggressive and really in your face, and there's that, so, and I am pretty loud and I am, not in your face like in an aggressive way, but

I stand out in a sense that, yeah I am loud [laughs], can be loud. So I've tried to, turn, kind of like on a stereo turn my volume down in every sense of the word. But I kind of grew out of that, because we're all talking about being authentic and true to yourself and since I am true to myself, then, I laugh loud, I speak loudly and yeah, I have, I don't know if I'm rambling but [laughs], but yeah. I have tried to be something other than who I really am just to fit in. But no more, so yeah. - Jolie

To be honest yes I did [experience internalized racism] to a certain degree. But then I would always have to chase them away and say ah no. My hair is okay and whatever I look it's okay. They take it or they leave it. So that's what I would have to sometimes.. [hair natural hair in cornrows] Yes. Come on. It's just a hair. And now I'm like oh it's not feminine enough. Some thoughts like that get sometimes came over my mind and I was like who sets these goals. - Amina

The successive quotes from Hasnaa concentrate on internalized racism and colorism within Black spaces and among Black peers. *Colorism* signifies discrimination based on skin complexion, where lighter skin and proximity to whiteness are preferred. Hasnaa questions, with the robust presence of colorism and internalized racism, how can dark-skin girls treasure themselves? Another element of internalized racism that Hasnaa illustrates is the reality of hair manipulation, which occasionally some Black women partake in to conceal their natural hair textures, which inherently do not correspond with whiteness.

[...] You see it [colorism, self-hate] in the dating scenes. You see it in music videos. The few that are there. You see it in commercials. You see it on TV. Yeah. There is a lot. And I think it used to be rough when we were younger where you literally had black men or black boys who were younger back then saying oh I would never date a dark-skinned girl. I'm dark-skinned. Our kid is going to be dark. The jokes are just very violent and then you used to have these people who used to have this fetish for light-skinned babies and I remember some guys used to have pictures of light-skinned babies as their wallpaper. It was really weird. It was a really weird period of time. And then you we were straightening our hair because we wanted to be like straight and then nowadays it's like with wigs we are able to manipulate our hair. I don't think necessarily putting on a wig and wearing curly hair or straight hair necessarily means that you want to. But for example with colourism as much as people love to ramble about self-love and self-worth. Oh you have to love yourself. You are beautiful. If you are constantly told that you are ugly, how are you going to go and just start considering yourself beautiful. - Hasnaa

[...] When I was younger. That time when I did not wanna hang out with my black friends or when I was embarrassed when they would do something

because I thought that I carried the whole black race on my f*cking shoulder and I represented every black person. Yeah. That in those years I had a lot of internalized racism. Like okay if I have an afro I know for sure that no boy is going to come and talk to me so let me just straighten it up or just put on some cute braids and maybe that would actually do the job. Which it never did because you were still dark-skinned so no matter the hairstyle you had, you are still dark-skinned. You might have been told oh you are pretty for a black girl. -Hasnaa

Last, in the following passage concerning internalized racism from Pihla, she points to ventures of attempting to blend into the dominant Finnish society by masking Black characteristics, such as her hair and body, while emphasizing white-Finnish qualities, such as her traditional Finnish accent and name. Nevertheless, Pihla segments a transition into connecting her personal and physical characteristics to her African heritage and realizing that due to limited orientation to her personal culture and Black communities, she was directed to view Blackness in the way it is presented by the dominant society, thus generating internalized racism.

[...] My blackness was such as like, it was a thing to kind of, like, dismiss or kinda forget. [...] Basically, in my mind, it was a good thing. Like, you wanted to erase the difference and you wanted to be like everyone else. There were definitely times when I wanted to just look like everyone else, I didn't want to be looked at. Because another thing is people would [...] think I'm older. I think that's one of the stereotypes. I kind of think people always think I was older than I actually was. So then people thought I was, like, repeating classes. [...] My body matured earlier than my peers. That was something I was kind of conscious about a lot. Yeah [...] I straightened my hair for the longest time. I think hair was a big thing. And then there was a little thing. I was really proud of my name, which I like now, too. But I realized later on that I was so proud of it because it was Finnish, so I could always differentiate myself from other people and become more Finnish, just like saying my name or when I speak Finnish, I didn't have an accent, it was mother tongue that's one thing I was really proud of. It's really weird, and it was really like in a negative way later I kind of realized I was trying to be, I guess, the more Finnish or more white black person. Same was when I was a kid and I had never been to Africa, and that was a big thing because people would say to you that go back to where you came from. So obviously I came from [Northern Finland]. But anyway, one of the arguments for that use of the kid was like, oh, I've never been to Africa, I know nothing about Africa, I've never been there. And that was something I used as my advantage, which is like sad later when I realized, oh, that's really sad to think about that. And definitely weight was one thing too, I don't think it's strictly connected to that. But I think interestingly, that was something I struggled kind of more

and like stuff obviously, things that would be more effective, certain body parts that come bigger. And now that I know about my family, you can see that it comes there, it comes from my blackness, too, like having bigger thighs, all that stuff like that. I didn't have really lot of ties to my blackness. So it's just something that was kind of in a societal way made like bad [...] And even my dad was pretty Finnish and was kind of, I think, hiding his blackness in a way too, trying to blend in. Which created this thing that there was just not information from that part of myself, and there was not black people and other people who are black and my age. - Pihla

The interview participants expressed emotions and anxiety regarding altering their physical appearance and public demeanors to evade connection with adverse stereotypes, such as violence. Internalized racism is a manifestation of racial hierarchies and white hegemony and is embodied by racialized individuals embracing whiteness as the epitome while devaluing Blackness (Jones, 2000). It is an incident of self-degradation that incorporates shame towards attributes that do not align with whiteness (Watts-Jones, 2002). How intensely stereotypes are connected to an individual relies on the extent to which that individual is regarded as a group member (Kurinec & Weaver, 2021). Individuals with characteristics associated with their racial group are frequently associated with stereotypes concerning that group (Walker & Wänke, 2017, as cited by Kurinec & Weaver, 2021). Thus, it is clear to link why Black individuals encounter adverse feelings and desire to disregard their Blackness. The danger of stereotypes is extensive, yet a powerful dimension is the threat of being regarded through the narrow lens of unfavorable stereotypes. The anxiety of presenting in a manner that inadvertently affirms projected stereotypes suppresses individuality. The root of internalized racism is white imperialism which nourishes the apparent normalcy of whiteness which may, directly and indirectly, affect one's sense of self. Jones' (2000) model of racism classifies internalized racism as a stress inducer for African-Americans. Williams and Chung (1999) revealed that the reinforcement of adverse stereotypes by racialized individuals subjects them to depressive signs and elevated levels of psychological despair. Overall, analyses reinforce that internalized racism may influence an individual's well-being and ability to possess a positive racial identity.

5.3 Normative whiteness: "There was no space [for] you being black and Finnish"

[...] so if you don't look a certain way, you can't be a Finnish person. I do feel like I belong in the Finnish society, but at the same time I feel like I don't. So, still in many ways, I feel like an outsider in my own country, my home country. -Zahra

> [...] There was no space [for] you being black and Finnish. And just like, every book, every picture we had with those Finnish people, it was all white, white hair, blue eyes. So education-wise as well, I feel like that was it, that was only thing I saw. -Pihla

In the above excerpts from Zahra and Pihla, it is unmistakable that whiteness is the pinnacle of Finnish identity, which grants the reinforcement and nurturing of whiteness as the standard while underrepresenting minorities in Finland. Research on racism in Finland cautions that racism is analyzed through the familiarity of racism as overt individual acts (Alemanji, 2016); thus, it is significant to include discussions on white normativity in Finland in this investigation. To reject the notion of accepting racism solely as individual deeds, the interview statements of how white normativity is eternalized in Finland are substantial. This section examines the interlinked concepts of racialization and white normativity in Finland, which were prevalent during the interviews. My perspective on whiteness supports the position of whiteness as a social construct, similar to race in general. However, whiteness is not solely associated with skin complexion; instead, it also represents social processes that are fluid and dynamic (Garner, 2007). While white individuals may retain the most systematic level of privileges, groups outside of whiteness may also support whiteness. Whiteness is a status that involves historical privileges and authority. Normative whiteness is entrenched in Finnish culture and national identity, bonded to social power structures that serve and aid individuals perceived as white. The presence of white normativity in Finnish society reveals how hegemonic norms function in society and circulate to reaffirm such norms.

Racialized individuals continually encounter their experience of being a Finnish person questioned, and imagery and indicators of white normativity prevail in Finnish society. The following excerpts detail surfaces of belonging or identifying with Finnishness and how ideas connoting Finnish identities to whiteness affect the women I interviewed. As presented in Anna Rasta's (2012) philosophy, white normativity reflects the outcomes and circulation of racist ideologies and conventions. Thus, I carefully monitor how white normativity is reflected in ideas of belonging or identifying with Finnish society. In the following excerpts from Amina, she illustrates that even as she has grown up in Finland, she is frequently othered in her hometown. However, upon relocating to Helsinki as an adult, she has, for the first time, experienced peers not questioning her Finnish identity and belonging.

> I think I would say that studying with Finns or being with them it's just highlights more that I'm not a Finn. Honestly. And that's crazy in a way because I mean I've lived majority of my life with them. -Amina

I mean in [Western Finland] even sometimes I remember certain occasions where I'll be talking with someone randomly I met and they'll be like 'were you adopted because your Finnish is so good. How did you learn this language so well. Where you really originally from?' and actually in Helsinki that's where the first time I would hear from Finnish people saying that actually I've always considered you as a Finn. But in [Western Finland] not. It's actually the other way around. -Amina

Next, Hasnaa clarifies the limitations to identifying and belonging as a Black woman in Finnish society. In Hasnaa's remarks, she states that hindrances to belonging in Finnish society and identifying as Finnish are due to a reluctance from Finnish people to perceive Black people with openness rather than an inflexible and opposing sentiment.

Belonging would be would mean being accepted fully by the whole society and that is something that I cannot expect from this society. So I don't even wanna chase that but I can belong to my community. I can serve that community. I can have a huge family that makes me feel like I belong because they can actually accept me because they understand me. But the Finnish society, nah. We just had a [...] N-word trending on Twitter for two days. -Hasnaa

I think they refuse to accept it [blackness]. They refuse to see it. They refuse to, they just have this one angle from what from how they see blackness in general and most of the time it's seen as dangerous. As something that does not belong here and will never belong here. And that is not part of the Finnish society. -Hasnaa

Despite being from Finland, the following excerpts from Zahra indicate the presence of white normativity regarding what perceived identities are regarded as Finnish, established on prevailing imagery and physical characteristics of Finnish people, which excludes Finnish minorities. The role of whiteness in Finnish society affects the sense of belonging, circumstances of othering, and influences interactions solely by associating any perceived racial identities outside of white as other.

[...] So many times I've heard, oh, you speak such good Finnish, just 'cause I look different. So for example when I have been going to doctor's appointments in my childhood, then people are surprised that I speak their language. So these type of stereotypes have existed definitely. -Zahra

'Cause usually Finns are described as a blond girl with blue eyes, so, at some point, actually throughout my whole life even until now, it's like I do feel like I'm Finnish, but then there's also the Tanzanian part of me, [...] and that

> makes me feel like a really outsider person in the Finnish perspective every once in a while, 'cause so many times a Finn is being described as a person with light hair, blue eyes and fair skin. And this is not me, this is not a description of myself, so I have a lot of habits that are Finnish habits, Finnish traditions [...] I grew up in Finland, but then, in so many people's eyes, I'm not a Finnish person because I look different. I am a bit more [seen] as Finnish compared to if I was like, fully black, who was born and raised in Finland. Then the same person would (digest my) blackness easier than somebody else's blackness who's darker-skinned. -Zahra

Further, Pihla exhibits how, regardless of being Finnish, perceptions of racial identities contrary to whiteness are automatically grouped. Pihla then clarifies how the Finnish media would identify and report on her in a manner that annihilates her Finnish identity. Pihla has examined earlier in our conversation how powerful bearing a Finnish name and accent is in how she is treated and navigates Finnish society. Nevertheless, Pihla reveals that she encounters interrogating remarks regarding her origin.

> In Finland the problem is people don't really, like actually they don't understand the difference [between a] refugee, immigrant and a person of color, like everything became the same. So we are kinda in the same boat on that, it's just racism increased really a lot.- Pihla

> [...] if I would get into a car crash in Finland and they would report it, they would probably say "ulkomaalaistaustainen," so it would get like "with an immigrant background," we see my public classification, which is like, creates the separation. So it's really hard for new people to understand that there are black people who are Finnish or any people of color who are Finnish, because the language kind of shapes it, as in that you will always be someone with an immigrant background. And there's like, this kind of thing we always talk about with our communities like "when do you stop being an immigrant?" Because if you read through the media, you will always be immigrant when it's something bad or something just static, but when it's like, I don't know, people reading in a sport or something, suddenly then you are Finnish -Pihla

In an unexamined sense, whiteness symbolizes both normativity and subjugation, where communities outside of whiteness are racialized as others. Whiteness constructs chronological and contemporary crises, notable through examining the chronology and racialization of the Sámi, who are regarded as an ethnic minority. A fundamental component of whiteness is connected to colonialism, coloniality of knowledge, and colonial complicity (Merivirta et al., 2022). Though indistinguishable, this connection is frequently regarded as an issue from the past rather than validly holding influence on contemporary society. As Merivirta et al. (2022) comment, Finns were entangled with the coloniality of knowledge and circulated

concepts and imagery, which guided beliefs regarding racialization and othering. Finnish adherence to assembling racial hierarchies validated Finns as belonging to whiteness and European class (Merivirta et al., 2022); thus, Finns accepted European accords concerning colonized people (Merivirta et al., 2022). Whiteness unexamined overlooks such histories and places the problem on systemically and socially othered individuals. The discussions with the interview participants demonstrate how whiteness is held as the standard and pinnacle of Finnish identity, which continuously places proximities to racialized identities as others. Though white normativity transpires subtly, examining the presence and circulation of white normativity in environments and individual reflection, coupled with engaging with challenging such biases will aid in its dismantling.

5.4 Overcoming: "The way I view blackness, [...] to me it is the greatest thing ever."

> The way I view blackness, I just I think to me it is the greatest thing ever. It is a sense of joy. It's a sense of love. I love how loud we are. I love how talented we are. I love how no matter what happens we do not give up. I love that there is this, it's easier here to form these communities because we know there is a few of us here so it's like okay. Let's just stay together. To me blackness is safety. It's just, I personally I view it as just the essence of my whole being. - Hasnaa

Hasnaa's proclamation regarding her adoration of her Black individualism demonstrates a blossoming from previous feelings of self-hate to emotions of overcoming despite the adverse societal depictions of Black femininity, which influence interactions and challenge one's value. Existing in a society that continually marginalizes and invalidates Black women's experiences and emotions is challenging, as such an environment nurtures violence and insecurity. Through societal messages, Black women are oriented to despise themselves. Black feminists have voiced how oppression impairs personal and collective wellness, and call for Black people to love and respect themselves despite encountering anti-Black racism (Guy-Sheftall, 1995). Loving, affirming, and valuing Black womanhood is a radical stance amidst the limitations that society has constructed. In a society that functions under the power of White Supremacy, Black womanhood and Black existence are regarded in a manner that memorializes dominant rhetoric that positions Blackness as inferior. Existing as a Black woman results in the risk of encountering both invisibility and hypervisibility in a society that reduces our humanity. Black feminism(s) embodies and exemplifies frameworks that empower Black women to defy and overcome societal regulations of Black femininity by operating on an ethic that centers Black women's experiences. Following teachings from Black feminism, I acknowledge that in creating authentic societal transformation and freedom, Black women's individual and collective practices of radical self-love, care, and healing foster change and are a

central component of feminism. Forming spaces that promote Black well-being and enhancing society to dismantle systems of oppression will contribute immensely to Black futures and collective freedom. This section highlights ideas of overcoming and conquering socialization messages that harm Black identities.

To begin, Hasnaa shares how, from encountering other Black people and developing relationships with Black women who grew up in more diverse regions of Finland, she began to embrace her authentic ways of expression and existence. Hasnaa transitioned from endeavoring to conceal herself to overcoming fears of standing out or aligning with perceived gendered racial stereotypes. Presently in her field of work, Hasnaa places significance on highlighting Black femininity to encourage Black people and dismantle the familiar narratives that derive Black people from joy.

> For a very long time I did not want to take space. I did not want to be seen or noticed that much. I liked being in the back because but it was impossible. It was really impossible because I was the only black person at the end of the day. So even if I wanted to, it was not possible. So when I moved from that small city and I started hanging out with, I gained these new friends that had been living in Helsinki their whole lives and they were loud as f*ck. They were just there. They were themselves. They didn't care. I was like at first it was scary because I didn't, I was like okay. So how can I become like them but without also losing a sense of myself. Because I also didn't wanna mold myself into something else to deny what I had been through. But yeah it's just I feel like all the experiences have just been shaping me along the way. And at this point where I am right now I'm just, I cannot imagine not taking space. I cannot imagine not being vocal. Not being loud. Not dancing in the streets. Not laughing out loud because I think that is the essence.- Hasnaa

> I always feel a sense of responsibility to protect those black girls. To maybe just maybe with one music video, one image change the perspective of what one girl thinks about themselves. And because I know how few of those opportunities are that I'm gonna get in this country to actually create something. I just I love making everything black. I just, I think it just also comes naturally to me because those are the people that I'm around. Those are the people that I love. So if I'm asked to cast someone, if they don't tell me the race or anything, they just tell me give me a dancer. Give me this. I'm gonna bring a black person. That's just who I am. I just I wish because in this industry well there is more black men who are in charge and I just wish they felt that kind of responsibility as well. -Hasnaa

Likewise, Pihla and Zahra describe their feelings of overcoming, rooted in self-acceptance. Pihla highlights that engaging with resources to educate herself and understand anti-blackness on a broader

scale administered her sense of security. Pihla and Zahra indicate that despite previous efforts to conform and suppress, they will always be regarded as others. Rather than resuming their agony over being othered and consequently conforming to whiteness, both participants expressed interest in prioritizing their confidence and emotional well-being.

> I had to teach myself and educate myself all these things and the connections and where they come from. Because I was brought up in the same white society that everyone else was brought up. I'm really proud of my blackness right now in recognizing the anti-blackness of the society and global. - Pihla
>
> [...] I think, because I was always looked at and I was different, it gave me a certain kind of confidence as well, in a way that it didn't matter how I dressed or how I put my hair or whatever, because I would still be different. So then it didn't matter how different I was because I was always very black. So then I could be like I was really free with my dressing and my fashion and my makeup and stuff like that. So that was, I think, (a nice thing I got) out of it. - Pihla
>
> Just be comfortable in your own skin 'cause there's always gonna be someone who thinks that you are not part of whatever it is that you wanna be a part of. In Finland, people think I'm too dark to be Finnish, I'm too different, also in [father's country of origin], people think I'm too European, too, not necessarily too light-skinned 'cause people look very different there, but they don't consider me to be a local there either. So it's like, you're always on somebody else's land, it feels. -Zahra

Healing as a Black woman in a manner that defies societal strains incorporates engaging with histories of oppression and reports of an inherent difference while not abiding by such standards. Acts of radical Black self-love, Black collective love, and the persistence of Black women function to contest white hegemony and counters whiteness as the norm. Through personal engagement with literature centering on Black womanhood from bell hooks, Audre Lorde, and Brittney Cooper, I contend that radical self-care and self-love are resources for existing while being subjected to racism, sexism, homophobia, and class oppression. Radical self-care is critical in resisting pressures to conform to societal norms and encouraging authenticity (Nicol & Yee, 2017). Practices of radical self-love and self-care nurtures the potential to create and exist in a manner that counters prevailing narratives, representations, and normative hegemonic doctrines.

5.5 Summary

This section analyzed the authentic knowledge of Black women living in several regions of Finland. This thesis investigation and emphasis on the stories of Black women enabled a nuanced exploration into how the interviewed individuals experience race and gender. In addition, exploring internalized racism and self-censorship were also areas stressed in the interviews. The discussed themes demonstrate that for the interviewed individuals, interaction with Finnish society requires the unlearning of socialization messages that one becomes familiar with throughout life, similar to the racial identity models established by Cross (1995) and Helms (1995b). The interviews illustrated that practices such as self-censorship and silencing were forms of rebutting stereotypes before unlearning these socialization messages. The interviewed women shared an expansive range of experiences. Though some experiences were optimistic, such as coming to value their Blackness and gender, it is unmistakable that negative racial and gendered socialization messages altered one's sense of self drastically. The discoveries in this analysis and discussion chapter guide the concluding discussions, limitations, recommendations, and implications for future analysis in the following chapter.

6. Concluding Discussion

6.1 Interpretations of the interviews

I interpret the interview narratives by exploring the research themes in relation to the initial research questions and realities of social exclusion. This thesis investigation sought to learn if racial and gendered socialization messages influence sentiments regarding one's Blackness and gender while simultaneously inquiring whether a connection lives between racism, socialization, and Black identity. It naturally evolved to include conceptions about overcoming, making this work very special and corroborating Cross's (1995) and Helms's (1995b) racial identity development theories. The results extended from this research highlight how socialization messages informed by gendered racism and stereotypes are expressed in interpersonal interactions. The responses and narratives from the interviews emphasize the nuanced structures of gendered racism that Black women encounter in current Finnish society. Precisely, the five Black women who shared their stories conveyed occurrences of recurring stereotypes and invalidations, which influenced their ideas on Finnishness and views of their Blackness. The combination of socialization messages, either informed by stereotypes or opinions about Finnish identity, was utilized in a manner that guided microaggressions and invalidations of Black women's humanness. Johnson-Bailey & Cervero (2008) uncovered that harmful stereotypes targeting Black students created feelings of self-doubt, which appeared evident in my interviews as some participants were reluctant to pursue career or educational goals due to the persistence of stereotypes within school settings, to the extent that they interrogated their legitimacy. The participants expressed feelings of not wanting to be seen through the narrow lens of stereotypical thinking, which was a sentiment so intense that it exploited their thoughts and public actions.

This research demonstrates that Black women's experience in Finland is complex in several ways due to causes out of their control. The themes in this analysis indicate the shared internal and external challenges the interviewed Black women encounter in Finland. Nonetheless, the participants formed intentions out of their experiences in a similar manner, which emerged through acceptance and love towards themselves and their communities. Despite the experiences and societal structures that conveyed unfavorable views about Black women, some of their stories also incorporated statements of being immersed into Black spaces that enabled freedom and love, ultimately leading to overcoming.

The central theme of microaggressions informed by stereotypes is substantial as they occur differently from systemic racism. The interpersonal nature of microaggressions dismisses the individuality of Black women through habitual objectification. The interviews indicate that Black women encountered gendered

racial microaggressions established on anticipations informed by stereotypes. When the participants did not embody such stereotypes, they were deemed exceptional, thus revealing how the stereotypes were present in society regardless of how they presented themselves. The interview results regarding specific stereotypes and negative imagery of Black women reinforce earlier research by Patricia Hill Collins (1990; 2002) and Melissa Harris-Perry (2011), in which both researchers exemplify how circulated stereotypes affect Black livelihoods in a myriad of ways, and may guide to a compromised acuity of Blackness and self-identity.

Concerning the reality that Black women and girls are subjected to a compromised sense of identity due to the consequences of socialization messages, the position of Black identity development is essential to explore in this discussion as it considers racial socialization messages. As the earlier literature review mentioned, the Nigrescence theory (Cross, 1991; 1995) articulates that racial socialization transpires throughout life with identity directions established on varying degrees of Black racial salience. The discoveries from the interviews nourish support for the theories of Nigrescence and Helms' People of Color [POC] Racial Identity Model, as most of the interview narratives align with the phases established throughout both models. Next, I will dissect how the interview results parallel the research questions and hypothesis.

6.1.1 Analyzing research question one

The foremost research question for this thesis questions the following: How does racial and gendered socialization in Finland produce narratives regarding the meaning of Blackness? I hypothesized that being racialized, acknowledging racial bias, and having racist encounters contribute to how Black individuals perceive their Black identity. As presumed in the hypothesis, the consequences of racialization contributed to how the interviewed participants perceived their Blackness in relation to Finnish society. Racial and gendered socialization, or the ways society communicates about race and gender, are instruments that can affirm a positive connection to racial and gendered identity on the basis that the socialization messages are validating. Socialization is noteworthy to monitor as identity-based oppression materializes in a way that exploits access and how individuals are able to interact within society. As Finland was identified as the most racist country in Europe, monitoring the socialization messages circulating in society is exceptionally important and would serve as corrective, justice-oriented work.

Involving intersectionality theory, researchers support that Black girls may benefit from affirming gendered racial socialization, as the messages highlight maintaining both identities (Brown et al., 2017, cited by Stokes et al., 2020). However, the practice of gendered and racial socialization is not often

explored; thus, this research aims to advocate for the voices of Black women in Finland while contending that it is not a total reflection of all Black women's voices in Finland. This investigation aspires to extend the research on racism in Finland by exploring gendered racial socialization and Black women's narratives and emotions about being Black. I consider this current research concern about Black women and girls' feelings as an extension of intersectional feminist engagement with dominant discourses of racism and personhood. As gender and race are both structures of subjugation that separately and concurrently inflict violence, holistically researching their outcomes is fundamental. Nonetheless, ventures of harm from economic class oppression, heterosexism, fatphobia, ableism, and homophobia operate in a manner that further complexes and oppresses individuals and communities and require additional inquiry.

By exploring racial-gendered socialization's direct and indirect ties to emotions and narratives regarding Blackness and being a Black woman, this research underscores the coexisting natures of race, gender, and othering, constructing Black women's experiences as innately distinguishable from both Black men and white women. The interviews document that one's attitudes towards their Black identity, undoubtedly, endure several capacities of acceptance and affirmation as race and racism saturate all facets of Finnish society. Therefore, being racialized and enduring racist encounters contributed to how the participants regarded their Blackness. Similarly to both Cross' (1995) and Helms's (1995b) models, the discussions from interviews reflect the pre-encounter phase (1995) and conformity status (1995b) as the individuals were abiding by the dominant society's principles with a desire to be included in the concept of whiteness. The interviews echoed the goals of assimilation into white society, as discussed by Cross (1991) and Helms (199b5), and the urge to alienate themselves from Black culture and elements. Correspondingly, the interviews reflected both the encounter phase (1995) and dissonance status (1995b), in which all participants expressed interactions that enabled them to sense the significance of racialization and how it jeopardizes access and exchanges. However, given the interview's correlation with both models, the initial reluctance towards Blackness coupled with later (or simultaneously) encountering racist events constituted the participant's beliefs regarding race and racial development.

Nevertheless, several components constitute acquiring a positive assertion of racial identity, and I do not believe that one must encounter racism to ultimately generate a robust sense of Black identity. Encounters of racism and gendered racism surface overtly and systemically; thus, I believe it is feasible that a person may encounter racist structures without acknowledging them, as these structures are entrenched in society and knowledge. Accordingly, discourses concerning racism and gendered racism must fundamentally reimagine unexplored paradigms as an attempt to theoretically and politically contribute to justice.

6.1.2 Analyzing research question two

The conclusive research question asks: How does the internalization of such narratives [regarding Blackness] influence the development and performance of Black women's identities in Finland? I hypothesized that internalizing dominant narratives about Black identity breeds an internal conflict about conducting and expressing oneself. As predicted in the hypothesis, internalized racism, the endorsement of harmful stereotypes about one's racial group, was a prominent feature resulting as an outcome of negative racial gendered socialization messages. Thus, lending validation to both Cross' (1995) and Helm's (1995b) models, which examine how the internalization of racism and racial hierarchical thinking manifest in the lives of racialized individuals. *Internalized racism*, or *internalized racial oppression*, may be clarified as the approval of discriminatory inferences that position one's racial group as subordinate in ability and intellect among other areas compared to the racial majority group (Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000). In the interviews, it was apparent that the internalization of racist narratives generated reactions among participants to distance themselves from Blackness ranging from how they interacted in public, what they considered was possible to accomplish, and how they perceived their bodies and beauty. Black women's bodies, beauty, and features have greatly been depreciated and disavowed internationally in mainstream cultures (Banks, 2000), while European beauty standards have been preserved as the pinnacle. The stories conveyed during the interviews consisted of unease about modifying physical appearances, particularly hair textures, to conform to European standards of beauty or consistently appearing immaculate in public. Awad et al. (2015) highlighted the important role of public perception, remarking that familiar psychological research on beauty and body images has primarily concentrated on white femininity and white women and girls while declaring that Black women and girls appear satisfied and exempt from beauty and body image concerns. However, examining internalized racism's effect on beauty and body image during my interviews reveals that Black women do, in fact, experience insecurity throughout their lives over beauty and body image. In my contemplation on this, given the socially and communally conveyed pressures to permanently straighten my natural hair and avoid being in the sun for too long, I would also report (established from lived experience) that assumptions that Black women are exempt from insecurity regarding beauty and body image are inaccurate.

In reflection on internalized racism's effects on public demeanors and Black beauty, I considered respectability politics and desirability politics as essential in conferring internalized racism. *Respectability politics*, familiarized by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham in the book *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*, is characterized as the hypothesis of conducting in a

manner that reflects the dominant class results in more acceptable treatment and being respected in society (Higginbotham, 1993). Adhering to mannerisms that align with the dominant society's cultures and values has been a consistent method by racialized individuals to avoid discrimination (Higginbotham, 1993). Suppressing desires of appearance, behavior, and simply existing in authenticity to alleviate being perceived through the narrow lens of stereotypes has been discussed to a great extent during the interviews. In this perspective, proximity to whiteness is vital for access in society. The interviewees expressed intents of distancing themselves from Blackness and Black people while desiring to conform to white standards in various forms. The interviews reflect this intent through the overlap of internalized racism and respectability politics, as they manifest to influence thoughts and demeanors. However, as Higginbotham demonstrates, respectability messages live on a generational scale, which has enabled them to circulate in society and saturate ideas on simply existing as a Black woman (Higginbotham, 1993). An additional investigation into communal and lineage forms of gendered racial socialization messages that preserve respectability politics will be fascinating.

Regarding the role of aesthetics in the interviews, I acknowledge that desirability politics is an accommodating term in analyzing the interview data regarding the privileges one receives from appearing desirable or striving to attain attributes of desire in society. Author and social organizer Da'Shaun Harrison's definition of desirability politics is notably valuable, stating, "I define *desirability politics* as the methodology through which the sovereignty of those deemed (conventionally) attractive/beautiful/arousing is determined. Put another way, the politics of desire labels that which determine who gains and holds both social and structural power through the affairs of sensuality often predicated on anti-Blackness, anti-fatness, (trans)misogyny, cissexism, queer-antagonism, and all other structural violence" (Harrison, 2019). Furthermore, YouTube creator Teanna, from Fab Socialism, comments in her 2020 video, *"Eh, pretty privilege isn't substantial, but desirability politics is"* [video] a practical understanding of why desirability politics is an adequate interpretation compared to the common term, pretty privilege. Teanna (2020) states that desirability is more compelling than a pretty privilege as the latter derives from something more subjective. In contrast, desirability politics offers anti-Blackness, anti-fatness, and ability to understand who is deemed desirable. Attraction is subjective, whereas aligning with desirability requires an examination of characteristics that inherently defy whiteness. The interviews reflect that at varied moments in the participant's lives, many battled a lure to conform to European standards of beauty while realizing that regardless of endeavor to these standards or proximity to whiteness, their Blackness would always remain. Within Finnish society, desirability is distinguishable from striving for social validation and selection; rather, desirability politics are thoroughly political that play a role in structural power (Harrison, 2019).

6.1.3) Perpetuating social exclusion through microaggressions

The narratives from the interviews reveal that gendered racial socialization messages are transmitted through deliberate or unintentional microaggressions, which convey adversary and disparaging insults. The chronologies explain how the habitually articulated and displayed messages influence internalized racism and perspectives of belonging in Finnish society. Though individuals who disseminate microaggressive statements may be oblivious to engrossing in such acts, gendered and racial microaggressions sustain and circulate social exclusion. Embodying intersectional characteristics often subjects the individual to encountering eclectic discrimination arrangements, such as microaggressions. Microaggressions materialize as microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations (Sue, 2010), which position the recipient of microaggressions as other and subjects them to social exclusion. Social exclusion is a process initially oriented to expand understanding of poverty by examining interactions and relations with society; yet, it inquires about the displacement and othering from society and its relation to features such as access (Fangen, 2010). Fangen (2010) emphasizes the varied acquaintance of exclusion, such as being marked as other and existing outside of networks such as employment, education, and various social settings.

Comprehending social exclusion as a presence in the interview participants' experiences requires a sense of social exclusion that explores the complexities of access and inclusion in social networks. All interview participants participate in social networks such as employment and attaining various levels of education. Nevertheless, their access to these networks encloses obstacles due to invalidating biases communicated with microaggressions. For example, the research participants expressed having access to education, yet faced biases regarding their Finnish language skills and stigma regarding conduct and intellect. Furthermore, instances of being deterred from their preferred scholarly programs by school officials also hindered their access to educational pursuits. Finally, employment bias and pressures to modify public demeanors and appearance are enacted to interfere with how the interview participants access social networks such as higher education and employment. Analyzing the variations and nuances of inclusion and exclusion with an intersectional lens reveals the significance of exploring background implications contributing to social exclusion. Systemic and structural racism operates to produce and maintain policies and practices that sustain an enduring unjust treatment of racialized communities. However, microaggressions, informed by sexism, racist speculations, and history, disseminate harmful ideas circulating the reality of exclusion and producing emotions of exclusion. The presumption and circulation of racist microaggressions reinforce ideas established from coloniality, as they are inherently connected and are embedded in an enduring design of authority and influence. Analyzing and addressing the

developments of colonialism may assist in understanding and dismantling contemporary forms of social exclusion.

6.2 Limitations and recommendations

The results from this investigation must be assessed while holding concern for the limitations. This introspection into racial and gendered socialization converged with accounts from lived understanding aids to ongoing efforts to dismantle systemic and structural racism in Finland while accentuating the voices of Black women. Nevertheless, despite this research ambition, there remain limitations that I would like to examine. Foremost, the age range of the participants was limited, as their ages consisted of being in their twenties, which may only capture the knowledge of socialization messages from a parallel period that they share. Women within this age range may have encountered distinct socialization messages and microaggressions that could be unlike and not as prevailing for other generations of Black women in Finland. Despite this, the participants reflect varied areas and regions in Finland, and future examinations that conduct a more comprehensive search throughout Finland may offer compelling results. Furthermore, I selected to use the categorization of Black based on participants self-identifying themselves as Black, which is a unifying feature. However, investigating the diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds within the category will offer more significant insights. For example, being a Black woman from the United States could provide a dissimilar experience from being a Black woman from South Africa.

Furthermore, as employment and education were areas subject to harm by racial and gendered socialization messages, future research could examine the consequences they have on Black futures and dreams. Finland being predominantly white, proposes a site where racial and gendered socialization messages are critical to assess as racism might be familiar. However, it would be worthwhile to examine the forms of racial and gendered socialization messages that are transmitted within family and community settings — and how they might circulate or dismiss ideas of white normativity and what transmissions materialize within diverse and communal contexts. Last, a reasonable restriction in this research was the decision to employ individual interviews over focus groups. While individual and private interviews offer substantial benefits, such as establishing grounds for trust, privacy, and openness for participants who favored close-knit engagement; I would be curious to explore how the conversations would transpire in a group setting and conceivably conducting several focus groups in varied regions in Finland. The restrictions are essential to regard, yet, this analysis aids to and extends knowledge of how social factors influence the safety, protection, and feelings of Black girls and women. Contributing to an awareness and validation of the accounts of gendered racial socialization messages is advocating for the welfare of Black

girlhood. This research highlights narratives to affirm that racial and gendered socialization messages have the power to construct damage. Future research could powerfully analyze racial and gendered socialization messages on Black men, Black trans, Black non-binaries people, and communities throughout Finland.

6.3 Closing

Employing qualitative analysis methods, phenomenological and narrative research, this thesis research was performed to investigate the authentic accounts of Black women in Finland and the gendered racial socialization messages they encountered during their adult and formative years. Five participants contributed their accounts and perceptions of events that informed them of the significance of their identities in their interactions and the developments they held. Ventures of navigating socially accepted stereotypes, self-censorship, invisibility and hypervisibility, and overcoming were discussed as to how they made meaning of racial and gendered socialization messages in Finland. Semi-structured individual interviews with each participant were held to accumulate qualitative data concerning the participant's interpretations. The themes incorporated microaggressions as socialization messages, internalized racism as a consequence, feelings of not belonging in Finnish society, and overcoming. The discoveries illustrate that racial and gendered socialization messages are a prevailing mechanism in how Black women perceive themselves; however, they do not define Blackness. Each participant endured various degrees of demeaning messages concerning their race and gender, which contributed to self-doubt, yet, they learned to overcome and appreciate themselves. Regardless, such derogatory messages should be dismantled and not allowed to circulate freely within our society. The research conclusions illuminate the volume and effect of societal communication, particularly at the intersection of gender and race. I perceive the racial and gendered socialization messages perpetuating harm as contributing to ongoing violence towards Black women, having life-long effects, which must be dismantled and prevented. By engaging with Finland's chronologies of racialization and exploitation, and their relations to the contemporary struggles of racialized and marginalized groups in Finland, we can collectively dismantle constructs that eternalize oppression and, in return, assemble solidarity. In conclusion, this thesis is motivated by Black feminism and rooted in wisdom from intersectionality and critical race theories, conveying a substantial common regard for advocating social justice and communal liberation. Thus, I will conclude with the following quote by bell hooks in *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (2003 p.23 as quoted by Horton, 2021) which speaks to developing an inclusive and justice-oriented community.

> To build community requires vigilant awareness of the work we must continually do to undermine all the socialization that leads us to behave in ways that perpetuate domination.

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