

**BECOMING BLACK:
BLACK AFRICAN NURSES RACIAL EXPERIENCES IN
FINLAND, PRE-MIGRATION TO POST-MIGRATION**

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| Abstract <p>The aim of this study is to contribute to the process of Nursing student mentorship, to better assist Black African nurses/students alongside other minority nurses, in their integration into the Finnish nursing workplace/work practice environment. In this exploratory study, through interviewing, the subjective views and opinions on race of Black African nurses and nursing student participants are explored. This study seeks to better understand participants' views of their race and its relevance in their everyday interactions within the Finnish environment. Subjective views on race from participants are collected from a pre-migration to post migration period. The findings of this study highlight ways participants (n = 6) have experienced negative changes in their transition from racial majorities to racial minorities; in terms of negative self image, poor integration, poor professional advancement opportunities, racism and negative stereotyping of Black Africans in Finland.</p> | |
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Table of contents

| | | |
|-------|----------------------------------------|----|
| 1 | INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 1.1 | Foreign Nurses in Finland | 2 |
| 1.1.1 | Black African Nurses | 4 |
| 1.2 | Race as Social Construction | 6 |
| 1.2.1 | Immigrants in Finland | 9 |
| 1.2.2 | Racism and Afrophobia in Finland | 11 |
| 1.2.3 | Microaggression | 15 |
| 1.2.4 | Colorblindness | 19 |
| 2 | RESEARCH STUDY | 22 |
| 2.1 | Research Aim | 22 |
| 2.1.1 | Method | 22 |
| 2.1.2 | Sampling | 24 |
| 2.1.3 | Interview Questions | 25 |
| 2.1.4 | Ethical Considerations | 25 |
| 2.1.5 | Researcher transparency | 25 |
| 3 | RESEARCH FINDINGS | 27 |
| 3.1 | Pre-migration: Shades of Black | 27 |
| 3.2 | Finland: Normality of racism | 30 |
| 3.3 | Elusive Equality | 35 |
| 3.4 | Poor opportunities for Blacks | 38 |
| 3.5 | Discussion | 41 |
| 3.6 | Limitations | 43 |
| 4 | CONCLUSION | 44 |
| 5 | REFERENCES | 46 |

1 INTRODUCTION

This study is an exploratory attempt at understanding the changes in the participant's self image, and is approached with a spirit of curiosity, it aims to explore and contribute to the limited information promoting successful integration of international/minority nursing students into the Finnish nursing profession.

In my work as a registered nurse and international student mentor, I have the task of introducing and mentoring nursing students from all over the world to the Finnish nursing workplace. The task of learning the Finnish language and challenging clinical nursing skills is difficult regardless of nationality or race. However, there is an added challenge that has been recurrent in regards to African students, the issue of race and Blackness. Issues/events concerning not just racism, but also their subjective view of themselves as they compare their progress and capabilities in comparison with their foreign and Finnish peers alike. Black African students in my mentoring experience, have a tendency of increased low self esteem compared to any other group of students. While other international students e.g. Spanish, Japanese, Canadian, Chinese; all admit to finding the nursing practice challenging, they most often cite language difficulties for their frustrations in the nursing work environment during professional practice. This however tends to be slightly different in challenges faced by black African students. They have an added stress of being extremely visibly racially different, and therefore have different challenges to other international students, as well as their Finnish peers.

I am curious as to what changes in the confidence and self-esteem of Black nursing students, as they shift from being Black in an all White Finland. If we take into consideration students' prior educational backgrounds and achievements before their enrolment in Finnish nursing institutes, most holding bachelor's degrees in varied fields; e.g. law, engineering, we should therefore be concerned with the dramatic changes seen in their performances in an all Finnish work environment.

While there are undoubtedly numerous factors that are relevant to the challenges faced by international nursing students in the workplace/practice experience, gender, age, ethnicity, culture differences, cultural care differences, and language. Few studies have concentrated on foreign nurses in Finland, and none of these studies have been done on solely Black minority nurses in Finland.

There are limited sources examining the lived experiences of Black nurses in Finland. This study hopes to add to the discourse of race and its implications on minorities' adjustment and integration in an all white Finland. As well as contribute to better understanding the challenges minority nurse students face during work practice, and ultimately improving the mentoring and guidance of all international nursing students in the Finnish nursing environment.

1.1 Foreign Nurses in Finland

The percentage of foreign born nurses working in Finland in 2020 is estimated at 3,4%. (Sairaanhoitajat, 2020). In what few studies have been done on foreign nurses in Finland, none have concentrated on race as a matter of concern when they discussed challenges faced by foreign nurses in the Finnish work environment. The prominent issue discussed is usually language and cultural differences. The study by Calenda, Pitkänen & Sippola (2019), findings

reveal that integration into the Finnish work organizations is easier for Estonian nurses, than for nurses coming from other countries; nurses from especially Africa, Asia and Spain. In the case of Spanish and Filipino nurses in this study, the adaptation problems at the workplace originated firstly from insufficient language skills. The study also showed similarities between languages of Finland and Estonia, as well as proximity, facilitated better integration for Estonian nurses. Filipino and Spanish nurses were found to have lower status positions and had to start their careers in jobs for which they were overqualified (Calenda et al. 2019). Although African nurses were interviewed for this study, there was but a general and broad grouping of foreign nurses. In another study by Vartiainen, Alenius & Koskela (2017), language barriers were also shown in this study to be foremost in the cases of failed integration of foreign nurses. This view was supported by both Finnish and foreign nurses interviewed for this study. All nurses interviewed for this study held the opinion that Finnish language skills were the key to integration and the lack of language skills slowed down the process of integration. Apart from language, adjustment difficulties were also attributed to foreign nurses being sidelined in terms of them being given assistive roles in the workplace, where opportunities for advancement were limited (Vartiainen et al, 2017).

The biggest obstacle to gaining employment and participating in professional areas for foreign nurses in Finland has shown to be inadequate language proficiency, alongside the poor attitudes from employers and poor interaction with the mainstream population (TEHY, 2012). Research has also shown how foreign nurses have a more difficult task of negotiating the workplace, as their skills are always under scrutiny and not considered as advanced as their native Finnish peers (TTL, 2013).

In comparison to their Finnish counterparts, international nursing students often feel less supported and perceive their work practice environment as unfriendly. There have also been shown to be marked differences between Finnish and international nursing students in de-

pression, loneliness, being trusted and feeling like an outsider during their clinical placement. International nursing students experience great difficulties when in work practice, they find it challenging to continuously shift between English and Finnish during work placement (Pitkajarvi, Eriksson & Pitkälä, 2012).

There are implications for nurse educators according to Starr (2009), in realizing the differences in teaching students who have a different primary language. In addition to language, there are other differences that make these students stand out, differences in beliefs, values, and practices all need to be taken into account in education and appreciated when teaching in a diverse nursing student environment. In addition to educational challenges facing foreign and minority nursing students, students also had to learn an additional language, and the healthcare language simultaneously. Foreign nursing students also have the added challenges of learning to live in two new cultures, the mainstream culture and healthcare culture. In addition these students have to learn a new profession in a manner that is not familiar to them and mostly neglects their learning needs (Starr, 2009).

The lack of language skills amongst international nursing students, has lead some employers, and educators to assume that international students were less intelligent; with this perception often leading to problems with integration, job retention, employment, self-confidence and completion of nursing programmes (Starr, 2009; Davis & Nichols, 2002).

1.1.1 Black African Nurses

No studies have been conducted specifically on Black African nurses in Finland, however, there are studies from the UK, United States and Australia. These studies while not in the Finnish context nonetheless introduce and frame lived experiences of Black African nurses in an all White environment.

Black African nurses in the UK experience greater job barriers and disadvantages than other overseas nurses (Henry, 2007; Likupe, 2015; Trueland, 2013), this being visible in being over-represented in disciplinary procedures and under-represented in the higher echelons of nursing (Trueland, 2013). Findings by Likupe (2015) show African nurses in the UK experience discrimination and racism from white colleagues, other overseas nurses, managers, patients and relatives. They also experienced lack of opportunity in the workplace. This was also viewed as a wasting of Black nurses skills and potential. Consistent findings were shown by Alexis (2015), in that African nurses were more likely to experience social isolation and had more difficulties in adapting to their new environments when compared to their international counterparts. In the United States, similar findings show the disadvantages of Black African nurses, studies showing their skills and competencies were devalued, their status as qualified professional nurses were discounted, and this leading them to feel untrusted and incapable as qualified nurses by their coworkers (Ideduru-Anderson, 2020).

Mapedzama, Rudge & West (2012) conducted a qualitative study on black African migrant nurses working in the Australian healthcare system on their post-migration adjustment processes and experiences. This study documented their experiences of nurse-to-nurse racism and racial prejudice in the Australian workplace. The most significant marker for the black African nurses in their post-migration experience was the process of racialisation, what the authors conceptualized as 'becoming black'. It was this meaning and black embodiment in a white dominated society, that the color of their black skin locates them into the racialised category 'black', along with all its implications for their professional identity as registered nurses. In addition to being racialised, black African nurses became aware of the predetermined racial scripts that black embodiment had in Australia. Racial stereotyping defined African nurses in this study in terms of the meaning attached to the region, as lacking the appropriate skills to practice nursing competently, and in need of the guidance of the white nurse.

This study showed the silence on racism in Australian nursing, this silence Mapedzama et al. states, creates the impression that racism is not relevant, or that race is no longer an issue. When racialised, these migrant nurses according to this study became ‘the problem’, through a focus on English language competency and ensuing communication barriers (Mapedzama et al. 2012).

As Robinson, suggests, nurses who subscribe to a color-blind perspective, and the issue of in-groups racism, contribute to the problem by not acknowledging that one's racial or ethnic group is relevant. This perspective adds to the discussion of not identifying race as a variable of conflict. Robinson also suggests that non-minority nurses move past the discomfort or embarrassment that exists when engaging in the topic of race (Robinson, 2014).

1.2 Race as Social Construction

Races do not exist among modern humans today, neither have they ever existed in the past, and given the clear scientific data that demonstrate the non-existence of biological races among humans, the concept of race is still however a reality. There are prevalent and persistent elements in our everyday lives, and generally accepted aspects of culture; the concept of races is not a biological reality, but a cultural one (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Kivisto & Croll, 2012; Orbe & Allen, 2008; Sussman, 2014;).

Race matters, and across history, racial dynamics have been a source of conflict and division; while race was originally conceptualized as physical aspects of identity, race is now asserted as a social and historical construction (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Orbe et al., 2008). Racial categories have a history and are subject to change (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Race and ethnicity would not be controversial topics if all that was involved was categorization, but based on the histor-

ical use of these terms we understand that to categorize is to place people in a hierarchy that defines groups in certain terms, whether they be in favor or not, empowered or not, or economically advantaged or not. History has revealed how dividing people along racial and ethnic lines has generated forms of intra-group conflict, coercion and violence (Kivisto et al., 2012). Racial difference produces a particular relation of power and this influences the ways in which intercultural communication takes place. However, the notion of racial difference and its association with inequality, injustice, and discrimination is all too rarely discussed in relation to intercultural encounters (Kubota, 2014).

Race as a social construct has far reaching implications and has increasingly been known to be implicated in health and healthcare of racial, ethnic and cultural minorities (Johnstone et al, 2008). The notion of racial difference is a human creation and racial categories have a history, and are constantly subject to change; herein argues Bonilla-Silva (2014), begins the different variations of how social scientists approach this constructionist perspective on race. The first approach being popular amongst white social scientists is the idea that race is socially constructed, seeing race as not a fundamental category of analysis and praxis. Some go so far as to suggest that because race is a constructed category it is therefore not real and social scientists who use the category are the ones who make it real. The second approach relates to the social constructionist view; this approach looking at 'racial' differences in academic achievement, crime rates, SAT scores etc. This is usually the central way in which scholars contribute to the propaganda of racist interpretations of racial inequality, but this however fails to highlight the social dynamics that ultimately produce these racial differences. The third approach states Bonilla-Silva, acknowledges that race, as with other social categories such as class and gender are constructed, but are instead a social reality. Meaning, after race, gender, or class is created, it produces real effects on the actors racialised as black or white (Bonilla-Silva, 2014).

Fitzgerald (2014) argues that race and ethnicity overlap, and the terminology that should be used to collectively refer to racial/ethnic minority groups that have been subjected to discrimination as people of color, rather than using the term non-white. The use of non-white, states Fitzgerald, reinforces white as the norm against which all groups are defined (Fitzgerald, 2014). Socially constructed categories produce real race effects, this comes in the notion of 'racial structure'. After the emergence of race in history, it formed a racialised social system, this system awarding systematic privileges to Europeans (whites) over non-Europeans (nonwhites). Society' racial structure is constantly reproduced, and regardless of the folly of racial thinking, racial structures remain in place and the modern existence of racial structures and racial inequality remains in order to benefit the members of the dominant race (Bonilla-Silva, 2014).

Speaking of ethnicity is a poor substitute for speaking of race states McEachrane (2014), and saying someone is Black, White or Asian is not the same as pointing out their ethnicity; on the whole it is confusing to speak of black or white people as ethnic groups, not only because their ethnic belonging may be undecided or diverse but because speaking of them as this supposes they have a culture in common. Ethnicity according to Katrak (2008) is understood generally indicating differences in culture, national origin, ancestry, language, and among other characteristics that distinguish people' of color within large racial groups such as blacks, Latinos, or Asians. There is no such thing as a race free or ethnicity free society. It is important to recognize the distinctions between race and ethnicity, and not use them interchangeably, as is often the case with race as a means of categorizing people in large groups based on biology and skin color as a concept that is heavily debated (Katrak,2008).

Race and ethnicity have an important effect on the experiences and frequency of different types of racial and ethnic microaggression; and perceived discrimination is a significant issue for non-White adults, with many young people of color experiencing discrimination in the form of microaggression in their daily lives (Forrest-Bank et al, 2015).

In contemporary discourse, according to Kubota (2014), cultural difference has replaced the idea of racial difference in the conceptual dimension of intercultural discourse, thus making racism obscure. Discussions of cultural differences carry undertones that legitimate racial superiority and inferiority, this however does not deny the legitimacy of the field of intercultural communication or the concept of cultural difference as an academic inquiry. Rather, it suggests the need to critically reflect on taken-for-granted ideas about culture and language in order to uncover unequal relations of power, reveal the mechanism of domination, subordination, and recognize strategic essentialism for resistance (Kubota, 2012).

1.2.1 Immigrants in Finland

The discussion of racism and a shared understanding of race as a social construction are a relatively new phenomena in the Nordic countries. There has also been opposition from immigrants organizations because words referring to race have been considered imports from the United States and Britain and products of those societies' histories and political movements rather than accurate terms for immigrants racial identifications (Rastas, 2013). A commonplace image of the Nordic societies is that they have been bystanders to European colonialism, therefore untouched by notions of white superiority. In the case of Finland, alongside Sweden, and Norway, race is not given proper credence as grounds for discrimination. It would be misleading to call the Nordic states race neutral/ race-equal, they are better described as racial states that both in theory and practice privilege the humanity of

white people. Perceptions of whiteness vary from societal contexts. What is static however is that the social order from society or context to another tends to value white people while devaluing people of color, black people in particular (McEachrane, 2014). Even though Finland was not at the heart of the colonial conquests, there are regardless links that connect Finland to the kind of knowledge that arose in the context and support of the colonial positions; consequently accepting colonial projects and taking on board the then ‘universally’ excepted regimes of truth (Vuorela, 2009). The idea that Finland is innocent in relation to colonialism is largely built on the fact that Finns never established any colonies themselves, they were historically part of Sweden and Russia and themselves gained independence at the turn of the century. Nevertheless, Finland gained economically from colonialism, and many Finns took part in the colonial enterprise (Rastas, 2012).

The term postcolonial does not imply that colonialism is by any means over and a new era has begun, according to Kubota (2012), rather; it signifies that colonial relations of power are sustained with new political, economic and cultural configurations of power and that a new history of resistance and transformation have begun.

Research by Jaakkola, showed marked differences in how different ethnic groups adjust in Finland. Research showing a more favorable attitude by Finns to cultures closer to their own and foreigners from nations of a higher standard of living. The attitude to immigrants from poorer nations, who have a more visual difference, and come from cultures more distant to the Finnish culture, are met with more caution and negative attitudes. This research results showed how nearly half of Finns agreed with the idea that some races were unsuitable for living in Western modern society (Jaakkola, 2009).

Finnish attitudes towards northern Europeans were more positive, as opposed to more negative attitudes towards other Europeans, Asians and African Immigrants (Jaakkola, 2009; Pitkänen, 2008). The most welcomed groups according to research are those who benefit

Finnish society intellectually and who most resemble the native Finns (Pitkänen, 2008). During the last decade there has been a hardening of views towards immigration and multiculturalism in Nordic countries. New populist parties aligned with anti-immigrant movements have gained support in all Nordic countries except Iceland. In Finland the populist party 'True Finns', have gained popularity, with their party being part of parliament, and this has shaped the political practices in Finland in many ways. This change has seen a shift in how immigration and multiculturalism are discussed and addressed in public (Nikunen, 2015).

1.2.2 Racism and Afrophobia in Finland

According to Statistics Finland (2019) in December 2019 the total number of people in Finland with a close African background was 54,450, which is 1% of the Finnish population.

Around 40 percent of people of foreign background in Finland reported having experienced discrimination within the last year, however there are clear differences within these foreign background groups. In the African group, up to half of respondents reported having experienced name-calling, being marginalized, and left out of group activities. Discrimination experienced in this group was significantly higher than that experienced in other groups like Russian, Estonia, Asian or other foreign background groups (FinMonik, 2020).

In a new Report by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, the experiences of 6,000 people of African descent in EU countries were gathered, alongside 25,500 people of other immigrant background across 28 EU countries. The findings show there are challenges faced by blacks in Europe from harassment, race-related discrimination, and racially motivated violence. This report showed the normality of racial discrimination against blacks living in Eu-

European countries, and among these European countries Finland topped the list in regards to perceived racial discrimination, racial harassment, and physical attacks (FRA, 2018).

In a study by Heikkilä (2005), vulnerabilities faced by immigrants in the Finnish labour market were researched, and results showed the most successful immigrants in the Finnish labour market were so called Westerners. This was in contrast to immigrants from the developing world, who faced difficulties in accessing the labour market. There was evidence from this study of 'othering' in the Finnish labour-market, it appeared that recruiters felt closer to immigrants who had a closer cultural proximity to Finnish culture. Those immigrants who were labeled as most distant faced the most difficulty in finding employment. Finns, Ingrian Finns, Estonians and Russians were the best employed, while immigrants from outside Europe were difficult to place. The fear of 'difference' alongside language problems meant that migrants from developing countries faced particularly acute problems in entering the labour market.

There showed a dualism in the labour market in Finland, where certain jobs went for natives and 'other' jobs for immigrants. Additionally Heikkilä argues; there also exists a dualism within the immigrant labour market- a double dualism. The immigrants who succeeded in finding jobs were usually college educated Westerners, while those who did not succeed usually came from the developing countries. Heikkilä further points out that there seems to thus be a hierarchisation in occupational integration on the basis of immigrants nationalities (Heikkilä, 2005).

According to Martikainen et al, Finland's official policy of social integration is a version of multiculturalism that is focused on labour market integration but gives space for linguistic and ethno-cultural diversity. However, in practice, more resources are dedicated to labour market integration than to other types of integration activities. There are mixed results as a consequence, with a large portion of immigrants remaining outside of the labour force or have remained unemployed. People of refugee background have had the most difficulties, and

there are also varied differences between individuals and groups. Despite the labour shortage that is predicted for the future in the Finnish labour market, many immigrants already in the country find it difficult to get access to the labour market. There are indications that immigrants in Finland are discriminated against and that marginalization and exclusion experienced by immigrants in the general labour market are reflected in a relatively high rate of unemployment. Furthermore, the jobs available to immigrants in the Finnish labour market tend to be unskilled and insecure (Martikainen, Valtonen & Wahlbeck, 2012).

There were issues raised by the EU in a report published in 2010/11, where concerns were raised about the high cases of racism and discrimination experienced by Africans in Europe. Since that report according to ENAR (2015), there has been a lack of improvement; and in some instances, the situation for Blacks in Europe has actually worsened.

There is the need for improvement according to ENAR by EU member states, not only in their role in slavery and the violent colonization of parts of Africa and beyond, but also recognize the contribution Black people have made to the Europe of today, economically and culturally. There is great concern according to the ENAR report, in that discrimination, racist bullying, biased teaching materials and practice continue to be used to reinforce racist beliefs in children and maintain structural racism. Also seen is the staggering rate of discrimination in employment, and barriers to employment that are erected in every stage with the intent to prevent Black people from gaining employment that matches their skills and experience (ENAR, 2015).

In the survey carried out in 2019 by the Non-discrimination (ombudsman) up to 67% of respondents that had gone through the Finnish education system reported having experienced discrimination or harassment based on their skin color in education. The report showed the wide occurrence of racism in all areas of education. Racism was experienced by respondents by other students and teaching staff, as well as other staff members, social workers and

school nurses. Also a fifth of the respondents reported having experienced discrimination before the school age in early childhood education (Syrjintä, 2019).

A majority of respondents reported facing discrimination on a monthly, weekly or daily basis. Their first experiences of racism were usually during the preschool years or in the first years of school. A fifth of respondents also reported experiences of racial profiling by security guards, police or other law enforcement authorities. Racial discrimination and harassment were most often experienced in public spaces and city areas, in work life or job seeking processes, as well as in education (Syrjintä, 2019).

Several studies have shown the presence of Afrophobia in Finland.

The definition of an African in Finland could be described as follows:

- A person recently moved/migrated from Africa
- A person born in Africa
- A person with one or both parents born in Africa
- A person with both parents born in Africa, but one or both having roots from Africa
- A person adopted from Africa
- A person with other roots from Africa (e.g. afro American afro German, afro Indian etc. (Syrjintä, 2019).

The term “Afrophobia” is not a universally agreed term within the anti-racist movement according to the European Commission. There is a division on preferences for other terms by scholars and organisations on other terms such as “anti-Black racism” or “Negrophobia”. The term “Afrophobia” is presently used in official capacity by the Council of Europe High Commission for Human Rights and the United Nations Working Groups of experts on People of African descent (European Commission, 2018).

Afrophobia is a term that has been used to describe the racism that targets specifically people of African descent. While different terms may be used on the target person or collective

group concerned, the term Afrophobia can also be generally understood as the manifestation of racism towards individuals, groups and communities that define themselves as 'Black' (European Commission, 2018).

Afrophobia according to the European Network Against Racism, is a term used to describe the specific racism that targets people of African descent. Much like homophobia, Islamophobia and other forms of hatred, Afrophobia aims to dehumanise and deny the dignity of a large group of people. Afrophobia is according to ENAR, based on the socially constructed ideas of 'race'. This is associated with understandings of racism as a concept and is in accordance with historically repressive structures of colonialism. Afrophobia takes many forms, such as dislike, personal antipathy, bias, bigotry, prejudice, oppression, racism, structural and institutional discrimination, xenophobia, enslavement, societal marginalization and exclusion, systematic violence, racial and ethnic profiling, hate speech and hate crime (ENAR, 2015).

Afrophobia can be seen as the result of the social construction of race, hence, racialisation, which is deeply embedded in the collective European landscape and is present and continues to impact the lives of people of African descent (ENAR, 2015).

As Rastas argues, there is still a lack of knowledge and understanding of the meaning of race among the Nordic academia and among authorities, and consequently of racism (Rastas, 2020). Through the avoidance of the word 'race', people who are categorized as white, will continue to be racialised and face racism because of their skin color (Rastas, 2020; Kubota (2014).

1.2.3 Microaggression

It has been increasingly difficult to deny the existence of racism in the Nordic countries, yet attempts to discuss racism are often turned into questions of cultural difference or problems

related to immigrants integration (Rastas, 2019). And there is an agreement amongst researchers in Nordic countries states Hervik (2018) that the discrimination of visibly different minorities has become subtler in the last 20years, which continues to have serious consequences for many of these minorities as well as contributing to an increasingly polarized society.

Through the constant questioning of their sense of belonging in everyday experiences states Pellander (2013), racially different minorities in Finland are subjected to regular questioning, gazes, and racist comments and practices; and these are a constant reminder to their difference from the average Finn, and that they are the other.

In her studies on children's experience of racism in Finland, the use of the N-word 'neekeri', in intentional racism directed towards young people, numerous such encounters showed how these young people were told by their peers and by grown ups that they 'should not mind'. Whereas these personal experiences of intentional and non-intentional racism were distressing towards these group of non-white Finns; they were however attempts by white Finns, from the majority background, to assure them of the innocence of the N-word 'neekeri', repeatedly referring to this word as neutral and not a racist term. The reasoning behind these statements by white Finns was that the n-word was not racist in Finland, but rather a term used to describe a black person (Rastas, 2012). References to races and accounts based on old ideas of hierarchies were still common in school books and media texts in all Nordic countries in the 1960s. And, although explicit ideas of racial hierarchies and races as biological facts have disappeared from present day texts, school books and social discussions, they are still very part of the cultural memories of all Nordic countries (Rastas, 2014).

The characteristics of Microinvalidations are that perpetrators are often minimally aware that they have engaged in a demeaning or denigrating manner towards people of color. According to Sue, (2010) because Whites are socialized into Eurocentric values, beliefs, standards, and norms, they become invisible to them and further become a default standard as how all other group norms and behaviors are consciously and unconsciously compared, contrasted and made visible (Sue, 2010). One strategy employed by Whites to regulate the appearance of prejudice during social interaction is to avoid talking about or acknowledging race (Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2008).

According to Sue, Capodilupo, Nadal & Torino (2008) there are four psychological obstacles to honest self-examination as to reasons why many Whites pretend not to see race, and resist the notion that they hold racist attitudes, and find it disconcerting to conclude that they may be racist.

1. Fear of appearing racist
2. Realizing one's own racism
3. Acknowledging white privilege
4. Accepting the consequences of action or inaction

These four layers of self-awareness states Sue et al, pose unique challenges, when viewed from this perspective it becomes clear why denial, anger, defensiveness, guilt and helplessness represent unpleasant emotional roadblocks and prevent Whites from recognizing microinvalidation (Sue et al, 2008). Recognition of race and racism in Whites argues Sue (2010) changes self-concept and shatters the false racial reality that has been instrumental in shaping White identities and establishing their positions in life.

When differences in microaggression experiences by Asian, Latino/Hispanic, Black and White adults were examined by Forrest-Bank et al (2015) in the American context, non-White racial and ethnic groups experienced racial and ethnic microraggressions significantly and

more frequently than Whites according to Forrest et al (2015). Black participants experienced more interpersonal microaggressions and were also less likely to see positive images of their race in various forms in the media compared to other participant groups. Black participants reported significant scores on being considered a second-class citizens and assumption of criminality, which are consistent with negative stereotypes normally found for Blacks in the United States. Latino/Hispanic participants reported the next highest rates of microaggressions; followed by the Asians, with less frequent experiences of microaggressions. This finding was consistent with stereotypes who are often characterized by the model minority myth. Asians also reported frequently seeing people of their race being portrayed positively in general. Blacks in this study experienced the lowest rates of Exoticization and Assumption of Similarity. Findings in this study showed that Whites had significantly lower scores on the total microaggression scale when compared to other non-Whites groups (Forrest-Bank et al, 2015). The results of this study demonstrate how differently people perceive color according to Forrest-Bank et al (2015); Whites may perceive life in a way that places little value on color, and might hold the beliefs that not seeing color is equivalent to not being racist.

The meaning and perception of color may however be very different for Whites and non-Whites, which questions the intent versus the impact of microaggressions, in that well intentioned people might believe that we should be living in a post-racial society, while others might get offended by such a notion because differences in race and ethnicity tend to shape more than their own identities and lived experiences (Forrest-Bank et al, 2015). While the attainment of a truly colorblind society remains an objective for many, the insistence and attempt to avoid the mention of race can ultimately create more problems that it solves (Apfelbaum et al, 2008).

1.2.4 Colorblindness

There are several factors that impact both the practice and perception of a colorblind approach to social interaction according to Apfelbaum et al (2008), studies showing that the social consequences of Whites efforts to avoid talking about color differ, depending on who they interact with, how the interaction partner talks about race, and in what context the interaction takes place. Whites individuals' institutions concerning effective strategies for navigating the perceived minefield that is race-relevant interaction can sometimes be inaccurate and can even be counterproductive.

According to Crocker et al, collective representations are sometimes broadly known and shared by both stigmatized and non-stigmatized persons, and this may lead the same situation to have different meanings, and implications for self—worth for some stigmatized people but not others. Therefore, to better understand the effects of having a devalued identity on the self, one must first understand both the collective representation that stigmatized individuals bring to situations, and the features of the situation that make those collective representations relevant or irrelevant in that given situation (Crocker et al, 2000). One collective feature shared by members of stigmatized groups is the belief that others are prejudiced against them; and this belief has an effect on the meaning that positive and negative events have and implications for the self. Stigmatized individuals are constantly aware of the stereotypes against them, African Americans for example are likely to be very aware that stereotypes accuse them of being intellectually inferior and aggressive. Awareness of stereotypes tends to affect the meaning of performance in settings where the negative stereotypes apply (Crocker et al, 2000).

Self-esteem is constructed in the situation, argues Crocker et al, and the effects of stigma on the self is negotiated, created and acted upon in the situation. Self worth, or lack of it in

stigmatized individuals is not stable, rather meaning is partly shaped by idiosyncratic meanings which stem from past personal experiences that shape individuals' construals of situations. Collective representations alongside shared beliefs and values and attitudes of stigmatized people). In order to understand the differences in self esteem between stigmatized and non-stigmatized people, it is important to first understand shared meanings, or collective representations that any lead to consistent differences between different groups (Crocker et al, 2000).

How is it possible to have a tremendous degree of racial inequality in a country where most whites claim that race is no longer relevant, questions Bonilla-Silva, in work on the enigma of race in contemporary America. How do whites explain the apparent contradiction between their professed color-blindness and the United states color-coded inequality. Bonilla-Silva refers to what he labels, color-blind racism (2014). The discourse on color blindness negates the importance of experience, with the persistence of a colorblind stance, the context for dialogue on race and racism will remain uneven and limit the potential 'radical encounters with otherness' (Simpson, 2008). The dismissal of differences in lived experiences of White people and people of color as irrelevant only upholds and affirms dominant ways of being, knowing, and of doing all at the expense of other alternatives (Simpson, 2008).

Color blindness is considered a recurrent microinvalidation directed towards people of color, as this promotes the unwillingness to admit seeing race in the belief that not seeing a person's color makes them biased and free of racism (Sue, 2010). The kinds of encounters that truly transcend our many common sense beliefs about ourselves and about others often occur in mundane exchanges and contexts; rather than in auditoriums, convocation or study groups (Simpson, 2008).

There is the ironic twist according to Simpson (2008) how arguments against colorblindness are sometimes dismissed as racist, based on the emphasis being made on difference rather than similarities (Simpson, 2008).

2 RESEARCH STUDY

2.1 Research Aim

The aim of the study was to explore Black African nurse participants' subjective ideas and experiences race and of Blackness, from a pre-migration to post-migration period.

2.1.1 Method

A qualitative exploratory approach was used for this study, using in-depth interviewing as data collection. The use of an exploratory methodological approach for this study is based on limited examination of race from the subjective viewpoint of minorities in Finland. As Stebbins (2001) observed; the use of the exploratory approach in qualitative study is preferred under at least three conditions: when a group, process, activity or situation has received little or no systematic empirical scrutiny, has been largely examined using prediction and control rather than flexibility and open-mindedness. And thirdly; when(subject/ it)has grown to maturity, and changed so much along the way that it needs to be explored anew (Stebbins, 2001).

The use of in-depth interviewing was used as the source of data collection to answer the research questions for this thesis. As Rastas argues, the victims of racism in the Finnish context lack words with which to talk about themselves and their experiences (Rastas, 2005, 2014). Stories serve as a powerful additional function for minority communities, as many victims of discrimination suffer in silence or blame themselves for their predicament. Stories there for can create awareness where a certain discrimination can be named, and once named can be combated. Through the idea that race is not real or objective, but rather constructed, racism and prejudice can therefore be deconstructed, as beliefs and categories are of our own making (Delgado et al, 2012). According to Quaraishi et al. the key considerations when researching race and racism in everyday life is a world consisting of not external immutable categories, classes, and correlations, but rather of experiences. What lies behind meaning, perspectives, discourses, affiliations, and dis-affiliations, institutional, institutionalized practices, identities and interactions must all be accessed when researching race and racism. With race and racism as a research topic in particular, qualitative rather than quantitative should be used in order to understand this aspect of the social (Quaraishi et al, 2015).

As Schostak (2006) describes, the interview as, ‘individuals directing their attention towards each other with the sole purpose of opening up the possibility of gaining insight into experiences, concerns, interests, beliefs, values, knowledge and ways of seeing, thinking and acting of the other (Schostak, 2006). The interview can be seen not just as a tool, but as an encounter, an event amongst events in the lives of people. Where each encounter involves negotiations, calculations, and interpretations. At the heart of the interview there are essential discrepancies, differences between views. Each interview is a partial view of particular states of affairs or events, it involves the opportunity to enrich experience through increasing the field of difference, where new things to see, feel, and think about multiply (Schostak, 2006). .

Participants were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was used to analyze collected data. Data was reduced to uncover 'themes', in order to sort and classify into theme categories. The themes found in the data are supported by evidence from collected data through transcribed records of interviews. Findings are presented as recurrent themes within collected data amongst participants

2.1.2 Sampling

Recruitment for the study was done through personal networking, and consisted of six participants. Selection of research participants was based on their visual difference compared to the native Finnish person. Specifically 'Black' minorities were approached for this study and interviews. Participants came from three African countries, Kenya, Cameroon and Ghana. Also of importance in the sampling selection was the voluntary migration status of participants.

Average years spent in Finland from sample was 6,3 years. Average age of participants was 27,6 years, with 5 female participants and one male. Other important criteria for participant inclusion was adequate Finnish language proficiency, current employment status, and a sufficient length of stay in Finland. All participants were at the time of interviewing, in full time employment as nurses, having graduated from a Finnish nursing University of Applied Sciences, with a Bachelors Degree in Nursing Science; or in their final stages of their Nursing degree studies in Finland. Due to the small numbers of nurses matching the sample, participants will remain anonymous, and any identifying details will be removed from interview data.

2.1.3 Interview Questions

The interview questions were divided into two sets:

1. Significance and meaning of skin color as majority, prior to migration
2. Significance and meaning of skin color after migration, as a minority in Finland

These questions were kept open, giving the participants the opportunity and freedom to talk about what was most important to their own experiences of their skin color and relevant changes during their migration.

2.1.4 Ethical Considerations

All participants signed a consent form that was provided prior to the interview, and participants were informed about the purpose of the interview.

All participants were assured of their anonymity. Names and any recognizable information were excluded from the interviews transcripts to ensure the participants anonymity.

Informed consent was obtained and participant' confidentiality and anonymity was maintained throughout this study, with participants having the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

2.1.5 Researcher transparency

The researcher for this study is a minority of mixed African and Finnish background. The researcher is aware and takes into account the relevance of transparency of own racial background and its possible implications on the research.

The status of the researcher as an insider or outsider may influence those being interviewed in what they are prepared to say or do in the researcher's presence (Quaraishi, 2012). There is an advantage of a minority researcher with shared understanding to research participants according to Mizock, Harkins, Ray & Morant (2011), based on the race of a researcher, Black participants might be comfortable and trust sharing sensitive or traumatic experiences. However, while researchers' race might be an advantage in data collection, it however introduces the biases, feelings, values and prejudices of the researcher, and could possibly impact research results. The researcher must therefore honestly recognize and be aware of possible personal bias related to research (Quaraishi, 2012).

The researchers cultural and ethnic background in this study allowed the forming of a trusting relationship with the participants, allowing them to speak freely about their experiences on a sensitive subject. Furthermore, the researcher made a conscious effort to decrease bias by asking participants to clarify statements, and to verify answers where there was a possibility of misunderstanding or misinterpretation on the researchers part. The researcher has also taken care to reduce the potential for bias in participants' responses, as they may feel obligated or pressured to produce answers to accommodate the interviewer.

3 RESEARCH FINDINGS

3.1 Pre-migration: Shades of Black

The interview for each participant began with questions that encouraged participants to reflect on their initial ideas, feelings or significance of their race from a pre-migratory stage. Questions invited participants to explore their racial identity from a majority mentality. Answers on the significance of race from this majority perspective were consistent amongst all participants; they viewed race as a reference to one's skin color, and without any social significance that appeared in their everyday lives. There was no meaning behind race, or being black. Being black was not an issue for contemplation in their culture, as everyone in their communities were black:

Back home you really don't stand out, because everyone looks like me, doesn't really come to my mind. I don't really think about my skin color when I'm back home.

According to all participants, being black had no meaning; however, they mentioned being light skinned, as opposed to being of a blacker skin tone as having a meaning in their communities and wider society. When asked to elaborate further about this concept of lighter and darker (Colorism), participants seemed uncomfortable and reluctant to further explain. Most initially having long uncomfortable silences before they formulated their answers. One participant however was very vocal about the differences in her experiences in what being ‘a light skinned black’ or ‘dark skinned black’ actually meant:

That is there back home as well, if you have lighter skin, because it's rare, you get special treatment. For example in Europe you have blondies etc. back home we have light skinned equals, they get away with everything. The darker you are the harder you have to work.

Another participant remarked about the preferential treatment given to lighter skinned people back home, stating they often received special treatment and in situations such as job interviews, a lighter skinned candidate most often gets selected over a darker skinned candidate for jobs.

I think people with lighter skin are treated with preferential treatment.

There were also gender differences mentioned by participants regarding the preference of having lighter skin in their home countries. The pressure and preference for having lighter skin was directed towards women according to participants, whilst men were exempt from any preferences of skin tone. There was also the general conviction that men preferred lighter skinned women, in their home countries.

The sole male participant in this study was uncomfortable when asked about the differences in skin tones, and how they differed in terms of gender:

Well we do have some people with light skin, but....How can I put it... in our society men prefer women with light skin. I don't have any answer for that...(nervous laughter).

Colorism whilst present and experienced by all participants in their home environment, was discussed in an almost hushed tone. Participants had a matter of fact attitude towards Colorism in their home cultures, in which lighter skinned people received preferential treatment compared to darker skin individuals. Amongst participants, those with darker skin were of the same opinion with those participants whose skin color was considerably lighter. Participants with lighter skin commented on how they had observed and experienced better treatment than their darker skinned peers, both back home in their home countries and also in Finland.

It's because of the influence of the West. Yeah...we have a strong cultural influence from the West, from the TV and magazines, and most of the men and women are light skinned. So, beauty is portrayed in light skin, so it is very difficult to convince someone back home that they can be comfortable with their dark skin.

Interestingly, all participants were adamant that they had a healthy confidence of their skin color being darker, and had ultimately accepted this societal preference. Using this acceptance of lighter skin preference, participants mentioned they were usually prepared for situations in which this occurred; these situations usually in their experience, meant they were expected to work harder than those of lighter skin tones, such as in cases of job employment.

3.2 Finland: Normality of racism

Migration to Finland however saw a shift in participants' subjective ideas of their skin color. Their transition from majority to minority also saw a transition from unseen to seen, 'being different'. Participants were all informed prior to their arrival in Finland about the differences they would face as Blacks in a White Europe, this information was mostly passed on by word-of-mouth, but also through the media in stories of difficulties faced by Blacks in Europe. Regardless of these preconceptions of racial difference and the possible discrimination they would face, they were all excited and optimistic about their future and upcoming new life in Finland. The presence of racism in Europe, and also Finland in particular was pre-knowledge according to participants'. Ultimately, the reality of experiencing this racism for themselves however, was a shock.

As one participant explained:

It was still a surprise. I expected it, but it was a surprise. But I still wasn't ready for it. So when it happened, I was like 'wow', so this is how someone feels when this happens.

How some experienced their black skin amongst the White Finnish majority was mixed:

To some it's interesting, they wanna touch your skin to see if it's different. Some will compliment it. And there are others who don't really like it. It's just something dark, something bad. It's associated with poverty; 'you guys are poor', you're from a poor place, so something like that.

Racism; described by all interviewees, has been a normal part of everyday life in Finland as a black minority. Frustration was evident during all interviews, as participants found it sometimes difficult to express how they felt hurt, and how disappointed they were from their experiences of racism in Finland. Participants expressed their frustration of having to learn how to live as 'Blacks' in their new environment. This was very challenging as explained by participants; what black meant to other non-blacks was not congruent with their subjective view of themselves. When asked what being black in Finland meant? One participant explained:

It means you stand out like an eyesore, but it also means that you work harder than they do. Much, much, harder, it means you don't have room for mistakes, because, if you do, then it's because you're Black. It means you cannot be late for work, even for one minute, then you are labeled. It means you have to work harder than them, just so you're equal to them.

Another participant, said:

You need to have thick skin to survive in Finland. Of course, before I came here I only understood my culture, but oh yeah....here's it's different. People think differently. I've been in Africa all my life but at least I am open to other cultures.

Being a visibly different from the general all White population became a constant reminder of their 'otherness', not just seeing people's reaction to their visible difference, but also the changes they started to integrate into their day-to-day lives, verbal and nonverbal changes in their interactions with others.

Everyday racism, was explained by one participant:

On a bus most people don't want to sit with someone with dark skin. They would rather move their seat. I have had a few cases when they discover that you're dark skinned, they are very careful with their belongings. They are afraid that you will steal something from them. I have noticed this difference.

Being conscious of the way people viewed them, as 'different', dangerous, something to be feared; participants themselves started to question their own observations of these interactions and experiences. They all at varying stages of their stay in Finland started to downplay/minimize these experiences and sometimes even questioned their own objective interpretations of racist experiences; convincing themselves they were imagining these covert racist interactions.

Participants were honest about their experiences of racism in Finland, they were also very open about the difficulties they faced in recognizing situations where covert racism occurred. They however admitted to sometimes being overly sensitive to certain situations, due to past experiences. When these situations occurred they however consciously made an effort to be aware of their own sensitivities in regards to normal interpersonal conflicts as opposed to racially stimulated conflicts.

Once, when I was in the supermarket a woman kept looking at her bags next to her, thinking I was going to steal it.....always scared I might take the bag. I don't blame them, because men and women of the Black skin have always been discriminated against in the past, and there is always the negative impression of the Black man. Also in the movies, they portray the black man as a thief.

As these occurrences of daily racial slights began to accumulate, participants over the years have accepted these experiences as normal, and have come to expect them in all areas of their lives and interactions with Finns in varying degrees. Racism was described as a normal day-to-day occurrence. Racism is inevitable according to participants, based on the historical and social reality of Blacks; not just in Finland, but in all developed countries and the world in general. The meaning and repercussions for having black skin, in participant's experience, could be disastrous to one's ambition and status in society. They all spoke of their acceptance of this fact, and have chosen to find ways to navigate the uncomfortable presence of the known disadvantage, and instead have fully engaged themselves in their goals, regardless of setbacks that they or others could attribute to their race.

I would say there is lots of silent racism, because they fear the authorities, not because they want to be with you. Because they think if we do this, 'I'll be fined for this'. It's not respect, its just fear. Silent racism is there.

Another participant also said about the experiences of daily living:

This is just the reality. This has been a reality since blacks came to Europe I imagine. You were less; and you're still made to feel like you are less. 50 years down the line, 100 years down the line, and it still happens. With the Internet, everything is a Google away, an Instagram away, there's all this information available but it's all the same. The thing is, it also maybe says a lot, that nothing is ever said about it, that I'm made to feel like I'm less. And Finns are very good about not saying anything about making you feel like you're less.

Assumptions of sexual promiscuity were mentioned by all participants; including the sole male participant. The idea that Blacks were very sexualized and in the case of women, available for prostitution was a common experience amongst all participants. Experiences of being approached by Finns in a manner that was bluntly put, alluding to prostitution. Black females in Finland are very often labeled as easy, uneducated and unintelligent according to the participants. This sexualized stereotype was particularly damaging to young females, who found it uncomfortable to constantly be approached based on a negative stereotype of women of their skin color.

This stereotype of the sexualized Black was also experienced by Black men according to participants. The sole male participant when asked if this was experienced to his knowledge amongst other Black men, he confirmed this stereotype was indeed experienced amongst the wider male black minority population. He spoke of his disappointment and sadness of not being able to engage in dating relationships with Finnish women, this he attributed to the way in which Finnish women viewed black African men; as a joke, nothing but sexual toys to be played with. This he continued was a huge shift from his experiences of being a man back home, where respect and appreciation for men was embedded in their culture. Men in his experience, in Finland, were not respected. He explained how this was a common experience amongst black men in Finland.

Participants all felt that being with others of the same background was preferable to being with Finns from the majority population. Reasons stated, were differences in culture, mainly Finns being cold, and often taking too long to foster relationships and friendships. Keeping a strong relationship with others of similar cultures or race was a means by which they could better cope with the isolation they felt in their everyday lives:

I find myself making friends with a lot of people from Africa, people with the same skin color. I feel more comfortable and relaxed than with making friends with someone with white skin.

I have Finnish friends, but I feel more comfortable with Africans. Maybe with time, this will go away.

3.3 Elusive Equality

In addition to racism, there was an added aspect, that of the hierarchy of foreigners in Finland. This hierarchy according to participants went in the order of wanted and unwanted foreigners in Finland. Starting with Whites, Asians and with Blacks at the bottom. Race was seen as the divider in these circumstances, as the hierarchy of the races was formed from lighter to darker skin color.

Skin color....not the country of origin. Because I know what I've observed, the Asians are more accepted here than the Africans.

Another participant explained:

And the foreigners, the white foreigners of course they're treated differently but still, they are stepped on. Still stepped on, but not as much as the blacks are. No one can convince me otherwise. If I was still at home and you told me this, I would think, no...that's a lie. I've seen it, I've experienced it and I don't think I will ever see eye to eye about racism with a white person. They only read about it, they only hear about it, they don't live it; they don't have expe-

riences. And it's out of fear, they don't accept foreigners, because they don't want to, they do it out of fear; and as much as they try to deny it, they need us. The labor force, if all foreigners decided to up and leave Finland, whoa!....the tax we pay, we bring to this country. Of course they're helping us, it's not that we're the only ones helping them; it's a two-way thing. But still we have to give 180%, that's what hurts. That you give more than the other person, but still the other person sees you as nothing.

When asked about future plans, and the idea of raising a family in the long-term in Finland, there was a clear divide in future plans amongst participants. Predicted racism, institutional and societal, were the reasons given by participants who were reluctant to have and raise children in Finland. They had grave concerns about their children being accepted and given equal opportunities compared to White majority children.

However, those who already had children, saw the education opportunities in Finland as a good reason to stay. While those without children wanted to leave:

Yeah, I was seriously thinking of leaving and I had gotten some information about maybe going to English speaking countries, maybe Australia, America; but because I had a child I had to think about all the things that would affect my daughter's life, that was also another thing that would keep me here.

Participants were also very determined to pass on the realities of race to their children, this was expressed in their intent to empower their children with coping skills to help deal with racism, when it happened. Racism, they noted is a given and expected reality for Blacks living in predominantly white societies, and rather than shying away from this reality; they

would rather confront it and find ways to build self-esteem and coping mechanisms to better navigate this reality.

Concerns were predominantly around Black children not fitting in and being accepted by Finnish society, not being able to make friends and receive equal opportunities in life were mentioned as reasons they would not want to raise children in Finland. When asked about future plans on raising family in Finland:

I wouldn't want to lie to them, because they are black. I would want to tell them the truth about how the world works, in a way they understand. Teach them not to compare themselves with someone else. Do the best you can and that's all you can ever do.

The male participant of this study had a strong emotional reaction when asked this question, he answered:

(Nervous laughter).....That's a difficult question. Hmmm...I think to be honest...no! I would not want to raise children in Finland. Because, I do not believe they would have an equal opportunity like a native Finnish, and I don't want to see my child go through a lot of challenges just because they are black.

Another participant stated:

I think, living your whole life feeling inferior; it's the worst thing that can happen. And most kids who are mixed feel inferior. Yeah. It takes a strong kid to survive here.

Future plans to stay in Finland were quite obviously dependent on the participants' present status, whether childless or not. Those without children wanted to leave Finland, to countries that spoke English as their first language, in hopes that they would be offered a better chance or opportunities for career advancement, alongside improved chances of integration. However, they all remained resigned in their opinion that being Black, whether in Finland, or somewhere else, was still a negative quality.

3.4 Poor opportunities for Blacks

Overall the dominant reason participants' gave for wanting now, or in the future to leave Finland, was due to limited job opportunities. The differences in whether they chose to stay or go were rooted in the ability to find and sustain a supportive network. These networks were as much rooted in the cultural side as well as their professional and work interactions with the Finnish majority. Those that had positive ongoing experiences in job employment, were more inclined to stay and build a life in Finland. They had both support from their own culture and communities and also positive experiences from Finnish cultural aspects.

Those however with ongoing negative experiences were naturally more inclined to want to move to a more accepting and open society, which in their view would possess a lower level of racism.

No....this culture doesn't agree with me. We'll see where I'm headed from here. Money in Saudi is good, but they are the worst people when it comes to skin color. It's tough that you have to think about that every time you look for somewhere to go. Where would my skin color be ok?

Concerning future plans for staying in Finland, most participants were of the same idea that their future prospects or opportunities for career development in Finland were very poor, given their experiences and that of other blacks in Finland.

The male participant in this study noted:

Because, the Finnish society does not, how can I say....I don't see.....I don't see ahhh....(deep contemplation). Before coming to this country I knew that it is now just opening up to the rest of the world, and still a very homogenous society, and it hasn't created a great capacity to integrate foreigners, especially blacks in their society. Yeah...I think it would be very difficult, there are lots of barriers to overcome as a black man in Finland.

Even though racism was expected in their experiences as Blacks, and according to all participants, always would be; they however expressed the level of opportunities for Blacks and foreigners as being lower in Finland as compared to other developed countries. Whereas racism was expected in other countries, they however expected a better climate for career advancement and opportunities, in comparison to Finland, where racism was a reality but also had the added burden of absent opportunities for foreigners and in particular, Blacks.

I will study, work for a few years, and leave to another country. Where I can be more accepted.

When questioned about their career advance opportunities, all participants were of the opinion they had extremely lower chances of advancement in their chosen career as compared to

their Finnish or other foreign background peers in Finland. When asked to elaborate on this idea, one participant explained:

Yeah... it is common knowledge....no matter what you do, education and all, you are not going to be accepted. And it will be very difficult for you to make progress in your career here in Finland. Because; I know a lot of people who have a PHD in Finland, and yet they are still cleaning. A lot of Blacks in the country are in that situation. A lot of them get fed-up. They move out of Finland and get better opportunities that fit their qualifications. I know a lot of people who get fed up. What is the point in getting an education, education here is free. What is the essence of getting a good education and not making use of what you've learned. Education goes with opportunity. If you give me an education, you must give me the opportunity to use the education I have.

Another participant explained her options for the future:

Canada; its more open and multicultural than Finland. And the UK is another, maybe Australia. There are more ways for me to stretch out.

3.5 Discussion

Race is indeed a societal construct that has prevalent and persistent elements in everyday life', it is a cultural reality (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Kivisto & Croll, 2012; Orbe & Allen, 2008; Sussman, 2014; Delgado et al, 2012). The experiences of participants in this study show how race does matter, as argued by Bonilla-Silva (2014) and Orbe et al. (2008). Race in participant' realities transcended its original conceptualization as physical aspects of identity to one asserted in a social and historical construction.

The regular questioning of their belonging felt by participants, in everyday experiences such as racist comments and practices, were as Pellander (2013) stated, a constant reminder of their difference from the regular Finn, and of them being the other. Realities of race were described by participants in terms of their income, education, wellbeing and social mobility, which were consistent with other findings regarding black experiences (Okohiro, 2008; Finmonik, 2020; Rastas, 2012; McEachrane, 2014).

Blackness as experienced by participants through their movement from majority to minority was defined by negative stereotypes. Stereotypes that were connected to negative assumptions about Blacks; and in particular, negative stereotypes about Africa and Africans. The realities and consequences of these stereotypes were evident in participant' poor integration into Finnish society, in terms of poor employment opportunities, discrimination and low interaction with the Finnish majority population. These findings were in alignment with prior research on blacks integration in Finland (Jaakkola, 2009; Pitkanen, 2008; Rastas, 2012; Pellander, 2013).

According to Delgado et al, (2012), racism is ordinary, and is a common everyday experience of most people of color. This finding was constant in the lives of participants, as they reported racism in Finland was a normal, and everyday experience. Research by Essed (1991),

elaborates how racism does not just happen through action, but also happens through verbal, nonverbal, and also through inaction, hence passive racism. This was experienced by participants in what they described as the Finns' silence on the realities of racism in Finland towards blacks. The denial by Finns in participant' experiences to admit the presence of racism or racial stereotyping and discrimination when it happened, was deeply wounding and damaging to minorities attempts to integrate into Finnish society. This colorblindness and denial of race; was seen by participants as silent agreement with racist attitudes towards minorities, and in particular Blacks. And colorblindness as stated by Simpson (2008), denies and devalues the lived experience of people of color and provides no space or outlet for other perspectives and experiences, which are important to inform a collective understanding of our social world.

We see in this study the normality of the sexualized image of blacks from participant' experiences. They experienced this stereotype as part of their everyday interactions, and considered this part of the representations and stereotypes of Africans and Africa in Finland. As Rastas (2012) in her research showed, there is the continuation of the colonial discourses and this shows in the encounters between Finns and non-Finns. As Johada (1999) states, there is little awareness of the fact that the origins of ethnocentric images reach far back into Western past, with the civilized descendants of savages, marked out purely by their pigmentation, introduces issues of identity. We see in the experiences of participants the reality of the negative stereotypes of the Black, as being of lower intelligence, lower value than other races or non-whites. The sexualized stereotype of Blacks is seen to be a remnant of past portrayal of the pigmented savage.

There was the experience by participants as being part of a racial hierarchy. A hierarchy that saw Whites at the top, Asians in the middle, and Blacks at the bottom. This they attributed to their experience of Asians getting preferential treatment in Finland in general, compared to Blacks. They experienced the Finns as being less prejudice towards Asians, as well as Asians

having more job opportunities than Blacks. This experience was consistent with findings by Forrest et al. (2015), and consistent with the model minority myth.

The use of colorblindness by Whites in order to prevent the appearance of prejudice and promote positive interracial interaction, most often backfires according to Apfelbaum (2008); and rather leads to negative interpersonal perceptions by Black observers. This was true for participants as they saw the inability for Finns to acknowledge race during interracial interaction when it was relevant, often led to negative outcomes. An alternative approach suggested would be simply talking about race when it is clearly relevant (Apfelbaum, 2008).

3.6 Limitations

An obvious limitation for this study was the relatively small sample size. The results therefore cannot be overly generalized throughout the whole Black African nursing population, but rather through the exploratory perspective that it was conducted in.

Another limitation for this study is the poor representation of male participants. While several Black African male nurses were approached for this study, only one was willing to discuss and answer subsequent questions about racial experiences in Finland. Further studies in the future would benefit greatly from an equal response from both genders.

One limitation of this study, while deliberate, was an exclusion of results in a nursing clinical setting. The issue of race was concentrated for participants during interviews on their general interactions, and not work/clinical settings. Further research could be concentrated on how race manifests in minority nurses' everyday interactions in a Finnish nursing environment.

Despite the limitations, this study presented the presence of race and 'otherness' in the everyday lives of Black African nurses.

4 CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to better understand the experiences of Black African nurses in regards to experiences of racial difference in an all white Finnish environment. Understanding what challenges they face will better inform nursing mentors and nursing educators on possible alternative approach in providing successful mentorship and guidance for minority students in the Finnish nursing environment to better achieve a more inclusive multicultural nursing professional community. While this study' participants' were Black African nurses/nursing students, the challenges they faced have commonalities faced by other racial minorities in Finland to various extents.

The reality of migration with all its difficulties, is only complicated when we have an added burden of racial difference. Being Black has real life consequences in an all White society. The feelings of isolation and difference in a new environment have lasting effects on self-esteem, health, income, and safety. Looking at the difficulties faced by Black African nurses, learning a new language, in a new country, a foreign culture, and a new and demanding profession, the added burden of racial discrimination only makes their adjustment seem impossible. Mentoring and integrating such a unique group of nurses/students into the nursing workforce in Finland can understandably be challenging. However, by not taking the issue of racial discrimination of racial minorities in the Finnish nursing environment, we by our actions

approve and continue to support the silence of colorblindness that serves no one, least of all the most disadvantaged in our professional community.

In the Finnish context, statistics show the societal positions of Blacks in terms of employment, health, and education as being in the lowest brackets of all minority groups. Rather than generalize this evidence of poor integration as a matter of cultural difference and language barriers; we should explore the obvious differences based on racial division. The stigma of being black in Finland is a reality, one that should be discussed rather than maintaining a colorblind stance.

Race is integral to the lived experiences of people of color, and as such should be taken into serious account in discourse on minority integration and included in the intercultural communication paradigm in a more substantial way. To speak of race, is ultimately to speak of racism. When we acknowledge race, we acknowledge our histories and societal prejudice, and ultimately identify our individualized prejudice.

Further research could be developed in which an exploration of the concept of colorblindness from a Finnish perspective is taken into account. In looking at race from the Finnish majority perspective, we gain a broader understanding of how racial stereotypes have been created and maintained in the Finnish context. This perspective would be beneficial towards improving interracial communication, which promotes better minority integration in an ever-growing multicultural Finnish society.

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