

UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG  
School of Global Studies

# DECONSTRUCTING & RECONSTRUCTING WHITENESS:

*A study of the perceptions of young, white, middle-class women in regard to their participation in processes of segregation and structural racism in Gothenburg*

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# ABSTRACT

In Gothenburg, between 1990 and 2006, the average disposable income in East Bergsjön (a so-called immigrant-dense suburb) increased by 3 percent, while in Hovås (an affluent, white suburb) it increased by 176 percent. The aim of this thesis is to analyse the perceptions of young, white, middle-class Swedish women on their participation in structural racism and processes of segregation. In this thesis, segregation is understood as parallel processes of geographical and social difference-making that adhere to a racialized hierarchy in society, in which whiteness is the unmarked norm. The theoretical framework for the thesis is based on the work of Sara Ahmed on the phenomenology of whiteness. The data in this study is collected from in-depth interviews with five white, middle-class women between the ages of 20-30, studying the first semester of the Bachelor of Social Work at Gothenburg University. The conclusions drawn in this thesis relate to the invisibility of whiteness and how it affects the complicity of these women in processes of segregation. The thesis also provides examples of strategies used by these white women - knowingly or unknowingly - to relate to issues of structural racism. The thesis is structured according to four themes from the interviews; the Us-Them phenomenon, the invisible white self, white politically correct paranoia and perceived white powerlessness. The fifth section in the analysis is a theoretical discussion on what can be accomplished within the logic of whiteness, whether whiteness can be deconstructed/reconstructed and the possibilities for further research.

**Key words:** whiteness, segregation, structural racism, Gothenburg, politically correct paranoia, phenomenology of whiteness, Sweden, Social Work

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# INTRODUCTION

Segregation is inequality and separation. Segregation is evidence of the failure of the welfare state. Segregation is the result of cultures clashing. Segregation is lack of housing, lack of jobs and lack of opportunity. Segregation is distance. Segregation is the unfortunate result of poor integration. Segregation is undesirability of a group. Segregation can be defined and explained in many ways. In each locality, segregation takes on different forms, and the consequences of segregation are different. Whatever segregation is, it is not static, and it is not accidental. Inherent to the concept of segregation is the idea that geographical differences imply social and cultural differences. Segregation should be understood as socially constituted processes of difference-making, occurring within the racial hierarchy in society. Certain spaces are racialized as white – with all the benefits that entails – while others are not (Frankenberg 1993, 43–44). This thesis argues that these processes of separation and difference-making are “produced and reproduced through the conscious efforts of white people” (Frankenberg 1993, 48). Extreme variations of segregation are exemplified by the apartheid in South Africa, modern day Palestine and American suburbia. In Sweden, there is a strong link between economic and ethnic segregation in metropolitan areas, specifically Stockholm, Malmö and Gothenburg. Ethnic segregation has stabilized in the last couple of years, but economic segregation has increased exponentially, with the consequences being that low-income areas are usually dominated by visible minorities, or immigrants (Socialstyrelsen 2010, 13).

To understand the influence segregation has on society in Sweden, it is common to research the consequences of specific segregation, such as economic, residential or social segregation. It is always relevant to study segregation as such, as it influences access to job opportunities, stable incomes and integration into Swedish society. Research cannot neglect, however, to focus on the factors that explain the specific, local make-up of segregation (Salonen 2012, 61). Segregation as a continuous process in society, encompassing social, cultural and geographical aspects, means that all members of a society are, in some way or another, participating in these processes. According to Ruth Frankenberg, “in a racially hierarchical society, white women have to repress, avoid and conceal a great deal in order to maintain a stance of ‘not noticing’ colour” (1993, 33). By studying the behaviour of women participating in processes of segregation, I wish to subvert the tradition of conducting research focused on those considered other (in a white, academic context) and instead shine the spotlight back on the white majority. In this thesis, I want to analyse

patterns of behaviour of young, white, Swedish, middle-class women, from their own perspective. I want to understand how this specific group understands their participation in segregation. I want to consider not only the conscious participation in processes of segregation, but also the unconscious participation. My hope is that the perceptions of young, white, middle-class, Swedish women of their involvement in segregation and structural racism may help clarify aspects of how segregation continues to be so prevalent.

## AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTION

Every experience I have had of pleasure and excitement about a world opening up has begun with such ordinary feelings of discomfort, of not quite fitting in a chair, of becoming unseated, of being left holding onto the ground. So yes, if we start with the body that loses its chair, the world we describe will be quite different.

(Ahmed 2007, 163)

Segregation encompasses numerous social and spatial processes of inclusion and exclusion. There is, for example, a difference between who is allowed to move in certain spaces (according to laws and regulations) and who is allowed to move effortlessly, or comfortably. When a group is the norm in society, they often do not consider how the spaces they manoeuvre in may exclude others. The normative group may have difficulties understanding that part of dismantling structures of power is illuminating and altering the exclusionary nature of certain spaces. Where spaces are adapted for white bodies, the interaction of the body identified as other will always stand out. And in this case, it is both relevant to consider the assumptions that a person that inhabits whiteness has about the ability to move freely within a certain space, and whether this freedom can be seen and articulated (Ahmed 2007, 159). If whiteness is made visible, the discomfort caused by whiteness and the discomfort of the acknowledgement of whiteness can – and should – cause those inhabiting whiteness to question the place and relevance it has in society today.

The aim of this thesis is to understand how young, white, middle-class, Swedish women in Gothenburg perceive their participation in the processes of segregation and structural racism. There are multiple aspects of segregation that are relevant for this study. The focus, however, will be on segregation as socially constituted processes where areas are marked as simultaneously culturally and geographically apart. The whiteness of white areas may remain unmarked –

invisible – for its inhabitants, just as their own whiteness is invisible to them (Frankenberg 1993, 228–29; Lundstrom 2010, 153). White people are simply read as humans, and the unmarked nature of whiteness allows it to reiterate its status repeatedly, meaning white people are free to disregard the benefits of being white (Yancy 2008, 45; Puwar 2004, 65). When white people exhibit little to no understanding of the implications of whiteness on society, the unmarked power of whiteness is upheld (Puwar 2004, 58). As one must question the patriarchy and the role of men to dismantle it, so must white supremacy and the role of white people in upholding or dismantling it be questioned to reach the same end. The ways in which white people justify, deny, challenge, accept or question how they participate in structural racism and segregation is relevant to the process of change. To this end, in this thesis, I aim to answer the question: How do young, white, middle-class Swedish women perceive their role in processes of segregation and structural racism?

### *Delimitations*

In this thesis, I aim to analyse the perceptions of white, young, middle-class women on their involvement in processes of segregation and structural racism. This thesis will not aim to analyse the respondents' behaviours as such, rather, the focus will be on the way they respond to and reflects upon questions about segregation, structural racism and identity. The difference is significant, as analysing perceptions more directly relates to attitudes. Attitudes can be analysed through answers and non-answers, through the tone of response and silence, enhancing the study of this thesis' research question. Tendencies (of perceived behaviour, attitudes and justification, for example) can also be revealed throughout interviews. It will also become clear which tendencies are common, and which are not. In a study with a small sample size, it is imperative to ensure that the data collected is of high quality. This thesis does not aim to define and discuss segregation outside of Ruth Frankenberg's theoretical definition as socially constituted processes. This is due this thesis dealing with perceptions of the respondents. The respondents' own interpretations and definitions of the concept of segregation are more relevant to this thesis, and thus segregation will not be defined as exclusively residential, economic, racial or otherwise.

### *Relevance to Global Studies*

Whiteness, segregation and racism are global phenomena. They take on different forms across the world and continuously interact in structures of oppression. To end poverty, gender-based violence, right-wing extremist movements and other structural violence, there needs to be

consideration of the tendencies and behaviours that enable these structures. Acknowledging and analysing the structural nature of racism and dissecting it in a local context may provide a template on how to move forward with dismantling structures of oppression. Additionally, in a globalized world, different people will continue to meet in new contexts. This makes it vital to determine the ways in which different groups are co-existing, and in which ways this co-existence is currently failing. In a globalized world, it is relevant to consider how the world is shaped by how we speak of it. In adhering to an understanding of the world as produced by social processes, the importance of meanings attached to concepts such as race, ethnicity, segregation and whiteness need to be acknowledged, as well as the purpose that those specific meanings serve (Marcuse 2010, 68). The Swedish context is only the setting for a global discussion on racial hierarchies and structures of oppression in this thesis.

## PREVIOUS RESEARCH

### *Critical whiteness studies*

Critical whiteness studies were initiated by W.E.B. DuBois (as explained herein by Twine and Gallagher), when he developed the seminal theories on whiteness. DuBois described whiteness as a normative center around which society is organized, which resulted in racial hierarchies in which whites are premiered. DuBois clarified that whiteness is not static, that it is not an essential category, but rather “a host of competing, situational, mutating and at time warring ethnic identities.” This is something that critical whiteness studies still focuses on today. DuBois illustrated these issues with the example of white migrant laborers in America, who were – due to their whiteness – able to align themselves with white Americans, rather than the freed slaves with whom they worked. Adopting this white identity provided these white laborers with a “inherited racialized social status” (Twine and Gallagher 2017, 8–9). In what Twine and Gallagher call the second wave of critical whiteness studies, focus shifted to understanding the unmarked nature of whiteness, in comparison to other racialized categories. In the American example, being American became defined in terms of not being part of the black portion of the population. Whiteness was theorized as similar to property; something which needs to be guarded and protected from intruders (Twine and Gallagher 2017, 11). Critical whiteness studies is currently in its third wave. The third wave builds upon the earlier work on whiteness and incorporates aspects of how whites “produce, translate, and negotiate whiteness”. Additionally, the third wave



focuses on how “cultural practices and discursive strategies” are employed by whites. Finally, there is increased research on the nature of the negotiation of racial and colour lines, concerning groups that have previously not been racialized as white now being racialized as such (Twine and Gallagher 2017, 12-13).

### *Whiteness & racialization*

Whiteness is part of the process of racialization of society. There is no original or global whiteness, but rather whiteness evolves and changes within the framework of each society (Mattsson 2010, 16; Twine and Gallagher 2017, 6). The changing lines for who can inhabit whiteness clarifies the performative nature of whiteness. Performativity is the defining of identities in the naming of them. For example, there is no gender before we name it. The way gender is done is always an approximation of the concept of gender, rather than a reflection of an original, essential state (Butler 2006, 34). Gender, therefore, is constituted differently in each context. Similarly, we must understand race and whiteness as something that is continuously shaped by society. Both well-intentioned colour-blindness and white supremacist movements exhibit different reiterations of whiteness (Hübinette and Lundström 2014; Lundstrom 2010). They constitute different expressions of the same racialized hierarchy. Certain expressions of whiteness may be dominant in society at any one point in time. Matthew Hughey defines this as hegemonic whiteness. According to Hughey “meaningful racial identity for whites is produced vis-a-vis the reproduction of, and appeal to, racist, essentialist, and reactionary inter- and intra-racial distinctions” (2010, 1292). Whiteness is the thesis, the norm, by which people, spaces and institutions are defined. Whiteness requires an antithesis, or a multitude of these, constructed within each specific context as the undesirable, the thing which is not white (Yancy 2008, 20). The marginalization of those whites who “fail to exemplify dominant ideals” is an expression of hegemonic whiteness. Whiteness can be approximated by both white and non-white bodies, which affords these bodies social and cultural capital (Twine 1996, 208; Lundstrom 2010, 160). The norms and ideas that the hegemonic system express “function as seemingly neutral yardsticks against which cultural behaviour, norms and values are measured” (Hughey 2010, 1292).

To determine the consequences of whiteness and racialization in society, the concept of race needs to be defined. Race is performative, and repeatedly defined and redefined by those who live it, those who see it, those who do not see it and those who claim not to see it. All utterances of what race is defines it (Puwar 2004, 59; Ahmed 2007, 154). Race puts into place a racial

schema, a system of predictions, assuming behavior, social status, income level, as related to race. Judith Butler (as quoted by Puwar) exemplifies this in a discussion of a video shown as evidence in the trial of the beating of Rodney King by police, in Los Angeles, in 1992. The video showed King prone on the ground, putting up a hand to protect himself. In the trial, however, the footage was used as evidence of the threat of violence from King. The racial schema both presumed violence on account of his blackness, and justified violence against him in turn (Butler 1993, 16 in Puwar 2004, 51). Reducing race to skin color, to heritage, to ethnicity, reduces it to a question of interpreting how people look. Reducing it to skin color also removes the structures of power inherent in the concept. In a racialized hierarchy, being a certain race means having certain societal power, along with access to social and economic capital. The process by which bodies are interpreted as ‘races’ is called racialization (Ahmed 2007, 150).

### *Structural racism & segregation*

A generalized definition of racism is of it being an equation of prejudice and power. Racism in its overt form may be easy to identify and acknowledge. When racism is understood as singular acts, it may get reduced to acts committed by people with ill intentions. However, racism can also be, as Desmond and Emirbayer argue (quoted by Song), “habitual, unintentional, commonplace, polite, implicit and well meaning” (2014, 112). No individual is exempt from the racist logic that exists in their specific context. The term structural racism is used throughout this text as a strategy to clarify the systematic nature of racism. Individual acts of racism and structural racism are not separate phenomena; individual acts of racism can be counted as expressions of structural racism. When racism is depicted as individual acts, it is possible to ignore how structural racism benefits white people, and how white people are implicated in processes of racism. Instead of racism being explained as specific behaviour or actions, it needs to be defined as the logic that guides those behaviours (Lentin 2016, 36).

A final note needs to be included on the definition of the term segregation in this thesis. A common conception in public discourse on segregation is that the geographical distance inherent to residential segregation implies actual cultural difference. This difference is constructed by parallel processes of social and geographical difference-making that should be understood as being part of the racial hierarchy in society (Frankenberg 1993, 44; Ericsson 2007, 14). This racialized hierarchy privileges white people and may mask their participation in processes of segregation. This may in turn lead to non-white people being blamed for their segregated behaviour, linking it to racist stereotypes inherent in the idea of cultural difference. It is imperative

to understand segregation as a discursive process that occurs in the relationship between the affluent and the non-affluent areas; the white areas and the non-white areas (Sandstig 2014, 218). It does not occur only in one place. It is a discursive process of a symbolic and ideological nature with real economic and social consequences.

### *Whiteness in Sweden*

At the core of Sweden's national identity is the ability to judge peers without prejudice. Swedish national identity is built on solidarity and equality (Hübinette and Lundström 2014, 431). Discussions on racism in Sweden have for a long time been reduced to questions of its existence in Sweden (Habel 2008, 9, 12). Colour-blindness has been the standard for approaching race and racism. Colour-blind ideology – well-intentioned, though, it may be – diminishes the possibility to discuss race, as it posits that it no longer matters. (Hübinette and Hörnfeldt 2012, 44). In Sweden, there is a hesitancy to use the word race. It is common to refer to white Swedes as “ethnic Swedes”, implying that whiteness plays a part in determining who is Swedish (Lundstrom 2010, 52; Hübinette and Hörnfeldt 2012, 58). Non-white Swedes are colloquially called immigrants – with the implication being that they are not ‘true’ Swedes (Ericsson 2007, 14). When the word Immigrant is used, it symbolizes a person who does not have access to the Swedish – the white – identity (Habel 2008, 15). Immigrants are defined by the act of having migrated to Sweden in some capacity<sup>1</sup>.

Difficulties with using the words race or racism in the Swedish context results in difficulties discussing the nuances of racism (Hübinette and Hörnfeldt 2012, 44). The term racialized<sup>2</sup> – referring to racialized people or the process of racialization – is increasingly used when discussing issues of race and racism, instead. When racialization is used in the Swedish context, it refers to the process of difference-making in which white and non-white people are differentiated between according to specific racialized social codes (Mattsson 2010, 17). These racialized social codes are established within each local context and are part of the performative nature of race and

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<sup>1</sup> The term immigrant refers to the action of migrating, but a person defined as immigrant does not have to have migrated themselves, it may be their parents or grandparents that have migrated to Sweden. Swedish bureaucratic terminology differentiates between immigrant groups and visible immigrant groups, to clarify that not all immigrants are reduced to homogeneity. Nordic immigrants, for example, are rarely referred to by their immigration status (Socialstyrelsen 2010, 184).

<sup>2</sup> *Rasifierad*, in Swedish

racialization. When the word racialized is used, it illuminates the socially constructive nature of race. Racialization is not static, and groups that have previously been racialized as non-white in the Swedish context – Finnish people, for example – may now be racialized as white Swedes (Hübinette and Hörnfeldt 2012, 58–59). In each local context, race and whiteness are done differently. To understand Swedish whiteness, it is relevant to both consider Sweden’s history with racial eugenics, its history with equality and the current resurgence of extreme right-wing politics. This will be discussed further in the *Background* chapter.

As a way to understand whiteness in Swedish society, Catrin Lundström has analysed the behaviour and thoughts of non-white Latinas in the white, inner-city context in Stockholm. She illustrates the relationship between white and non-white areas, interpreted by inhabitants of non-white areas when moving in white areas (Lundstrom 2010, 153). In white areas, these women’s bodies regularly cause discomfort, disorientation and are constantly out of line. The discourse on segregation in a white, inner-city context shapes how solutions to the issue of segregation are articulated (Lundstrom 2010, 162). Scrutinizing the implications of whiteness may subvert the expectations about who participates in segregation processes and who does not. Analysing the discourse of young, white, middle-class, Swedish women on processes of segregation might reveal how the discourse of segregation is constructed by people who benefit from it (Margolin 2015, 4).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this thesis, Sara Ahmed’s theories on the phenomenology of whiteness is used as the main theoretical approach. Whiteness should be understood as a materialistic, spatial and social process. The phenomenology of whiteness is described by Ahmed as the fit of a body inhabiting whiteness into a space welcoming whiteness. When this occurs, the body and the space become extensions of each other (Ahmed 2007, 158), and are seamlessly adapted to each other.

Alternatively, we could say that ‘the corporeal schema’ is already racialized; in other words, race does not just interrupt such a schema, but structures its mode of operation. The corporeal schema is of a ‘body-at-home’. If the world is made white, then the body-at-home is one that can inhabit whiteness. (Ahmed 2007, 153)

Whiteness is not just white skin. Whiteness is a performative project, approximated through repetitions and iterations. It is a history of habits, passed down through generations, with implications for both those inhabiting it and those unable to (Ahmed 2007, 159-60). Implied in the phenomenology of whiteness is that it is unmarked to the white body. The white body is comfortable, does not question its place and is in effect invisible to itself (Ahmed 2007, 157). When bodies that do not exhibit whiteness correctly, or at all, appear in a white space, they are marked from the start. These bodies are not welcomed in these spaces, they are stopped, they cause discomfort – they feel discomfort. This discomfort illustrates the restrictions of the white space. The white space becomes visible when revealed as a space that excludes certain bodies (Ahmed 2007, 159). However, whiteness rarely becomes visible for white bodies, rather it is the non-white bodies that recognize that they do not inhabit it.

Extending Ahmed's theory to that of the concept of segregation, a segregated space is one in which only certain bodies are welcomed – as in the space that welcomes whiteness. Not being aware of the (white) body's phenomenology and interaction with the space around it, allows for the body to be ignored. Lack of awareness of the white body implies lack of comprehension of participation in processes of segregation. Whiteness and its effect on society, on bodies that inhabit it and bodies that do not, become invisible to white people. Ahmed explains that the body lags behind when whiteness is inhabited correctly, but if it is not, the body's history and background is constantly visible, and impossible to ignore (Ahmed 2007, 156, 163).

Whiteness as a bodiless experience, rather than simply a social and spatial one, means that whiteness can be inhabited even by non-white bodies. Whiteness can be seen as a discursive identity that can be adopted differently by different groups of people (Lundstrom 2010; Twine 1996). Sara Ahmed calls this “approximating the habitus of the white bourgeois body” (2007, 160). Acting according to white racial codes, you may be read as white in society. However, only as long as the group, the surroundings, agree with your reiterations of whiteness. A body with white skin will in and of itself bring benefits that a body without cannot, and outside of context in which their whiteness is accepted, a non-white body will remind others of their inability to easily approximate whiteness properly (Hübinette and Hörnfeldt 2012, 64). If you are out of line, if your whiteness is wrong somehow, then you are no longer part of the sea of whiteness, you are a reef sticking up, making waves and disrupting currents (Ahmed 2007, 159). Whiteness is generally not understood as a racial identity by white people, rather racial identities are interpreted as only applicable to non-white people (Frankenberg 1997, 6). Those who see themselves as white, or perform a white identity, often have difficulty understanding the implications of this white identity

on the wider society, even if they are able to identify their whiteness. White supremacists may be aware of their white body and identity, but perhaps not the discursive power that it holds in society (Hughey 2014, 727).

To relate the performative project of whiteness to the group of respondents chosen for this specific research project, it is necessary to clarify that whiteness is also an intrinsic part of white feminism. Whiteness in this aspect is related to the feminist subject and the feminist object. The feminist subject is the feminist who can act for herself and others, according to her own interests. The feminist object is – according to Spivak’s logic about the subaltern – the one who needs to be spoken for, the one whose inability to speak about their grievances is inherent to their identification within white feminism and broader society (1996, 291, 1993, 102). This logic allows the white feminist to exploit non-white bodies – and the idea of these bodies suffering under perceived ideals of harsher patriarchal structure and foreign rule of law – as stepping stones in the creation of the white feminist identity, as an antithesis to the ideals of white feminism (Ambjörnsson 2010, 246).

## RESEARCH METHOD

### *Choice of Data Collection Method*

The choice of data collection method for this thesis has been qualitative interviews, specifically semi-structured interviews. To answer a research question focused on the perceptions of my respondents, I considered the flexibility provided by semi-structured interviews beneficial. In a qualitative, semi-structured interview, the data can be collected from the responses from the interviewees, but also the way in which they respond. In a qualitative interview, answers do not have to fit into a format (Bryman 2012, 471–73) and the focus of the research can develop organically during interviews. During preparation for my interviews, I constructed an interview guide divided into two themes; segregation and identity. I had a set of thirteen questions, seven questions related to the theme of segregation theme and five to the theme of identity. During the interview process, the number of questions increased to eleven and nine, for each respective theme.<sup>3</sup> I followed my interview guide to a certain extent, diverging from it to adapt to the discussions with each specific respondent. A number of questions in the second part of the

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<sup>3</sup> To read the interview guide, refer to appendix, 1.1 (Original) or 1.2 (Translation)

interview guide were closely aligned with the first section (questions concerning individual participation in segregation and structural racism, for example). This was a strategy employed to search for coherence (or lack of it) in the answers, and to allow the respondents to develop their previous answers. I also followed the recommendations made by Bryman, adapted from Kvale's suggestions on types of questions to ask in semi-structured interviews. I focused mainly on (1) probing questions, (2) specifying questions, (3) interpreting questions and (4) silence (Bryman 2012, 478). The importance of silence in this specific interview process cannot be underestimated, and often helped respondents flesh out their answers or move on to new trains of thought. The data collected was processed via thematic analysis, which is explained further in the chapter on *Method of Analysis*. In this thesis, the analysis is conducted exclusively using first-hand sources (interview data).

### *Choice of Respondents*

The respondents chosen for this study were first-year students at the Bachelor of Science in Social Work at Gothenburg University. The choice to interview Social Work students is relevant due to their possible professional future in the welfare sector<sup>4</sup>. They should have some level of theoretical skill to interpret the interview questions, as well as a practical interest in the issues discussed. I found my first respondent through a relative, hoping to find the rest through snowball sampling. However, the additional respondents were found through advertising the study in the Facebook group for the Bachelor of Science in Social Work that began in September 2017<sup>5</sup>. The remaining respondents all volunteered to be part of my study via the Facebook post. They are all between the ages 20–30, white, middle-class, Swedish women and live in the greater Gothenburg area. The interviews lasted between one and two hours. I communicated with the respondents individually and am not aware of whether they know each other or have discussed participating in my project. In the process of advertising for respondents, I asked for young, middle-class women, excluding the fact that they should be white, as I thought this could affect the response to my inquiry.

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<sup>4</sup> “For a Degree of Bachelor of Science in Social Work, the student shall demonstrate the knowledge and skills required to work autonomously as a social work practitioner at individual, group and community level.” (Department of Social Work 2010)

<sup>5</sup> Socionomprogrammet HT17, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/142772799651546/>

### *Interview Process*

While interviewing the respondents, I wanted to create a comfortable atmosphere. Furgerson and Jacob recommend semi-private places that are quiet and non-threatening for interviews, for both the comfort of the informant and the quality of the recording to be guaranteed (2012, 7). For these reasons, I chose the public library and a campus café. Before starting each interview, I clarified their rights as informants, asked their consent for a recording and emphasized that they did not need to produce quality content, only answer my questions. It became quite clear to me, however, that there may still have been an intent to answer some questions “correctly” according to social norms. This will be discussed further in the chapter on *Ethical Considerations*.

The interviews were conducted during a three-week period. I started with a pilot interview, analysed the results, edited my interview guide and then did four more interviews during the following two weeks. In the interviews, it was initially important for me not to influence the process of the interviews overtly. As the interview process progressed, however, I was more active, asking follow-up questions and following the interview guide less rigidly. This may mean that the interview process became more organic and the data became richer, as the process went on.

### *Translations*

The interviews were conducted in Swedish. To translate the interviews for the thesis, I transcribed the interviews in Swedish, chose the excerpts I wanted to use and then translated those into English. I am fluent in both English and Swedish and judge my ability to translate context, words and meanings to be adequate. My focus in the translation process was on guaranteeing the quality of the data. This meant that I occasionally focused less on quality of language and more of the quality of meaning in my translations.

### *Terminology*

The defining terms ‘white’ and ‘non-white’ are used in this text and might at times appear as binary opposites. That is not my intent. The racialization of white and non-white individuals should be understood within a spectrum beyond two nodes. I use the binary terms due to the study focusing on whiteness and on the behaviour and thoughts of people who are racialized as white and the results of that specific kind of racialization. This binary informs the language used by my respondents, however, as well as theory. I therefore find it relevant to make this specific distinction in this thesis. Additionally, whenever my respondents used a specific term to describe white or non-white Swedes, I used their terminology in the thesis. This was done to enable a



discussion of their use of language. I clarify throughout my text whenever this distinction is necessary.

## METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The method of analysis used in this thesis is thematic analysis, guided by the recommendations provided by Ryan and Bernard (2003). To determine a set of themes to guide analysis, Ryan and Bernard recommend looking for the following in the source material; (1) repetitions, (2) indigenous typologies or categories, (3) metaphors and analogies, (4) transitions, (5) similarities and differences, (6) linguistic connectors, (7) missing data, and (8) theory-related material (2003, 89-93). In the source material for this thesis, the techniques used most frequently for identifying themes were (1) repetitions, (2) indigenous typologies or categories, (4) similarities and differences), (7) missing data and (8) theory-related material. To process the data, each respondent's transcript was colour-coded, then the data pertaining to each theme was collected and organized according to these colour codes. This was done in Microsoft Excel. This is a variant of the technique Bernard and Ryan identify as 'Cutting and Sorting,' in which the data is processed by separating relevant parts of the transcript from the original data and reorganized according to the identified themes (2003, 94). The identification of important words, sentences and expressions was done in two steps. First, a general selection of relevant material was made. Then, the context in which the data was collected was analysed. These contexts could be, for example, relevant questions precluding the response, tone of voice, or significant pauses or silences. This involved listening to the recordings multiple times. This was done to enhance the value of the transcription excerpts. After analysing the data and processing the results, five themes were deemed relevant for answering the research question. Four of these were used in the thesis in their original form. These four themes are:

- The Us-Them phenomenon
- The Invisible (White) Self
- (White) Politically Correct Paranoia
- Perceived (White) Powerlessness

The fifth theme, *The White Bystander Effect*, remained relevant to include in the thesis for different reasons. While the first four themes are more directly related to the respondents'

perceptions, the fifth theme showcased my own implications in the logic of whiteness. The corresponding thematic discussion focuses more generally on the possibility of the deconstruction/ reconstruction of whiteness. Albeit less straight-forward than the four initial themes, the theoretical nature of this final section provides an opportunity to strengthen the analysis of the source material.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### *Whiteness and reflexivity*

As a white researcher looking at whiteness, it is imperative that the study of whiteness must have the clear goal of “making white supremacy visible” (Twine and Gallagher 2017, 1585). Along with that, it must also strive to make white complicity visible. As a white researcher, there is always the risk that I may act power-evasive or colour-blind because I am unknowingly implicated in structural racism. I must be aware that the complicity which I am analysing in my respondents, may be mirrored in my own approach to the subject.

It is imperative that research should question the current paradigm, not merely observe it. In this context, self-reflexivity is important. Considering that I am part of the community that I am researching (Pillow 2003, 182), I must ensure that my position in society is not unmarked, as the participation of white people in segregation must not be unmarked. I must be reflexive and aware throughout the research process (Kelsky 2001, 429).

As a final reflection, the words whiteness/white, white bodies/bodies with white skin, non-whiteness/non-white are used interchangeably throughout this text. The reason that the binary division remains relevant is due to the differences relevant for this project being those between white bodies and ‘other’ bodies, i.e. non-white bodies. This does not mean that this dichotomy is entirely representative of the power relations in a racialized society. Framing the problem this way has implications on the depth of the analysis, of which I am aware. I am aware that these words – white and non-white – might risk reproducing processes of exclusion. This indicates that I may unwillingly participate in certain power structures. In this thesis, I will attempt to discuss and orientate myself in relation to the concept of whiteness, in an effort to ensure it is not portrayed as essential or static.

### *Data Collection*

Prior to this thesis, I had not conducted any formal interviews for research purposes. This may have had an influence on the quality of the interviews. As the process unfolded, I focused more on follow-up questions and less on the interview guide. This could have implications on the results of the interviews. I determine that the data collected from all the interviews was rich, as they have all been used in the thesis. Initially, I wanted a higher number of respondents for the study, and to follow up initial interviews with focus groups interviews. Lack of time and issues with scheduling made this impossible. I am aware that a small number of respondents could signal lack of data, but due to my interviews being between 1-2 hours and the majority being close to two hours, I consider the data rich. Due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, there was less coherency between the interviews as the process developed, as the interview guide was not followed as closely. In the interviews, I attempted to balance the effort of being responsive to my respondent's thoughts without steering them overtly. I had certain concerns with the environments chosen for the interviews, the public library and a campus café. The use of a public space to conduct the interviews might in this way have been a detriment to the process, as the respondents could be aware (and I was aware as well) of the possibility of the public listening in.

One aspect that made it difficult for me to gain more respondents was the lack of self-identification as middle class among the Social Work students. When I attempted to acquire more respondents for the second round of interviews, I did this via the method of snowball sampling. The most significant obstacle in getting further respondents was the lack of Social Work students that identified as middle-class. Additionally, self-identifying as middle-class implies a measure of awareness of the class system and the implications this has on one's position in society. I am aware that this made it impossible for me to interview young women unaware of their middle-class status (a relevant group to interview for different reasons), and this may have had an impact on the respondent's reflections in the interviews.

# FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

## BACKGROUND

To understand the perceptions of young, white, middle-class women in Sweden on their role in segregation and institutional racism, the Swedish context needs to be presented. Sweden has a long-standing history with racial eugenics. In 1921, the State Institute for Racial Biology was inaugurated in Uppsala. In the name of racial hygiene, several measures were introduced to reduce the number of ‘unwanted individuals’ in Sweden; people who would dilute the Swedish race. These unwanted groups included Jews, Roma, Sapmí, other minorities and those deemed unfit to reproduce, such as neuro-divergent people and people with non-normative physical variations. There were strict immigration laws put into place to keep Jewish and Roma refugees out leading up to the second world war. An expansive sterilization program was put in place in 1934 to keep those deemed unfit from reproducing. The sterilization program was in place until 1975 (Hübinette and Lundström 2014, 428; Guevara 2015, 23). In contemporary Swedish society, a common conception of racism is that it has to involve racist ideologies, the intent to do harm and conscious action as a result of these ideologies and intents (Pripp 2008, 69) Debates concerning internalized structural racism have in the last number of years drawn strong reactions. Examples of this are the case of critique against a candy logo which drew on racist stereotypes of Asians, and calls to boycott a newly-released ice-cream with the name Nogger Black (for which the ad campaign heavily alluded to black culture). There was public backlash against the attempts to critique both these products (Pripp 2008; Hübinette and Tigervall 2012). These examples will be discussed further in the first section of the analysis, *The Us-Them Phenomenon*.

Gothenburg is a city that has wide-spread residential segregation and subsequent income disparities. Gothenburg can be loosely divided into three different areas; the affluent south-west, the upper-middle-class inner-city and the northern suburbs of the city - the immigrant-dense suburbs (Abrahamsson 2014, 33; Lundquist 2014, 41). The phrasing ‘immigrant-dense suburb’ describes an area dominated by non-white people<sup>6</sup>. These immigrant-dense suburbs are also

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<sup>6</sup> When the term immigrant-dense suburb is used hereon in this text, it is not used uncritically, but rather as a reference to the common way of referring to these areas. However, it must be considered a fantasy-made-reality (*verkliggjord fantasi*) (Ericsson 2007, 27)

constructed as spaces of fear, violence and with a strong sense of otherness, from within white spaces. This construction is reiterated in the media, among peers and by politicians (Sandstig 2014, 219; Ericsson 2007, 163). Additionally, Sweden is the country in the OECD where income inequalities have increased the most between 1995 and 2010 (Abrahamsson, Guevara, and Lorentzi 2016, 25). In Gothenburg, between 1990 and 2006, the average disposable income in East Bergsjön (an immigrant-dense suburb) increased by 3 percent, while in Hovås (an affluent, white suburb) it increased by 176 percent. Along with the disposable income discrepancies, there are also notable inequalities in average life expectancy, unemployment and levels of schooling (Abrahamsson 2014, 53).

To study the implications of whiteness on structural racism and processes of segregation, these concepts need to be contextualized. Sweden's history with racial eugenics, the contemporary debates on racism and relevant statistics pertaining to segregation in the Gothenburg area may help to illustrate the social and cultural context behind the respondent's reflections in this thesis.

## FINDINGS

The respondents I have interviewed for this study live in different areas of Gothenburg. One respondent lives slightly outside, but commutes into Gothenburg on a regular basis. Four of the respondents have moved to Gothenburg from other parts of Sweden, either to study or work. Two of the respondents are married and have children. The rest live alone or with roommates. Four of the respondents identify as being middle-class since birth, while one identifies as being born working class, having transitioned into the middle-class as an adult. For most of the respondents, this is their first venture into academic studies. One respondent has studied at Gothenburg University previously, some have worked, and some have gone to community college.

The pseudonyms used for the respondents in this thesis are Maria, Ingrid, Nina, Ellen and Sara. When the respondents refer to specific locations, these have been changed to protect their anonymity. The only original locations referred to by their real name are Saltholmen and Bergsjön. When these are used, it is in reference to a seminar in the Social Work programme for which students are to take a tram from Saltholmen to Bergsjön, or vice-versa. Saltholmen is an affluent part of Gothenburg, located in the south-west part of the city. Bergsjön is an area which is less affluent and commonly referred to as an immigrant-dense suburb. They are at opposite

ends of the number eleven tram line, which runs through central Gothenburg. The seminar exercise required students to reflect on their impressions of the different areas. I asked one respondent, Ellen, if anyone else stayed on the tram during the entire trip and her answer was no. She explained that there seemed to be a switch of passengers in the centre of the city. Another respondent mentioned that while in Bergsjön the tram was quite full, in Saltholmen it was comparatively empty. This could be linked to the socio-economic status of Saltholmen's residents (meaning they travel by car).

As I conducted my interviews, I learnt that during their first semester, Social Work students study a course called 'Power and Categorization,' in which they discuss identity, segregation, power, intersectionality and ethnicity. This implied that the respondents had a basic theoretical understanding through which they would interpret my questions. I asked three of the respondents to describe the typical Social Work student and they described a white, middle-class woman, 20–25 years old, left-of-center politically. The assumption could therefore be that the reflections of the five women I have interviewed may align with the rest of the Social Work students. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, I had a difficult time finding additional respondents for my study due to the lack of self-identifying middle-class women in the Social Work class.

In my analysis, I have chosen to integrate the data from the interviews into the text to allow for seamless discussion and analysis. This is done to help create a narrative in which context, behaviour and silence, among other things, can be accurately depicted. When a quote is especially relevant, however, it is presented as a block quote.

## ANALYSIS

### *The Us-Them Phenomenon*

In Ruth Frankenberg's explanation of segregation, segregation must be understood as parallel processes of geographical and cultural difference-making (1993, 44). In this section, I have chosen to look at the difference-making processes that the respondents engage in, in regard to themselves as white Swedes and non-white Swedes; or 'Us' and 'Them'. 'Us' is identified by my respondents as ethnic Swedes, whites and Swedes in general. 'Them' is identified as non-white Swedes, non-whites, dark-skinned, immigrants, second-generation immigrants, and, in one case, first-generation Swedes. When I asked the respondents what they meant by the specific terms they may have used, they often did not know how to answer. They often referred to their own lack of

knowledge about what terms to use. When I asked Nina what she meant when she used the term ethnic Swede, her response was that the phrasing is new to her and that she has not used it before she started her studies in Social Work. She said that she thinks I know what she means when she says ethnic Swede, but that she cannot really define it. Being unable to see and reflect on whiteness is a pillar of the logic of whiteness, and in not being able to explain what she means by ethnic Swede, Nina exemplifies this behaviour. As has been mentioned previously, the concept of ethnicity is often used in Sweden as a substitute for the concept of race. Following that, according to HübINETTE and HörNFELDT, 'Ethnic Swede' can be understood as a euphemism for white Swede (2012, 54). When the words ethnic Swede and immigrant are used, they implicitly identify whiteness as a major factor in a process of separation (Habel 2008, 15). This exemplifies the cultural difference-making in processes of segregation. When the word immigrant is used to describe a group of people, it tends to refer to non-white Swedes. When the word Swede (or Ethnic Swede) is used instead of white, this implies that being white is seen as synonymous with being a Swede (HübINETTE and HörNFELDT 2012, 59). The national interest of being a Swede is, in this way, aligned with being white (Puwar 2004, 65).

When words such as immigrant and second-generation immigrant used to describe people, this differentiates them from 'regular' Swedes. Sara and I had a discussion about the segregation between Ethnic Swedes and immigrants, in which Sara suggested the need for low-income housing in wealthy areas to integrate these groups. The way Sara discussed the separation of these two groups made it seem difficult for her to consider that some non-white people also might already be living in the wealthier areas. I do not believe that Sara intentionally excluded this group, but due to the logic of whiteness not affording subjectivity to the non-white masses in society, she did not consider them. As the white identity tends to be unmarked for whites, this distinction can easily pass unnoticed. Non-white Swedes are marked, while white Swedes remain unmarked. If they are not aware of their whiteness, white Swedes, they are usually unaware of the power their whiteness affords them. This invisibility generates power in itself (Puwar 2004, 57-58). The power being invisible to those that hold it, mean its existence can be denied. In turn, it becomes more difficult to identify an oppressed body as powerless, as the oppressor cannot be identified. Sara's reflections exemplify the tendency of white people to dismiss the spectrum of people that don't fall into the seemingly mutually exclusive categories of 'Swede' and 'immigrant'. This reveals a pattern of behaviour among white people in Sweden that identifies an 'Us' and a 'Them,' that are seen as mutually exclusive.

The mutually exclusive division between ‘Swedes’ and ‘immigrants’ influences the way people are treated. This binary distinction results in difficulties in identifying the processes of segregation. When asylum seekers, economic migrants, and people who have lived in Sweden their whole lives are bundled together into one anonymous mass - immigrants - the nuance of the issue is lost. When Ellen and I discussed how to curtail segregation, her focus was on providing support for new arrivals in Sweden. Ellen suggested that the focus when addressing issues of segregation should be on allocating resources and dealing with any issues specifically related to refugee reception directly upon arrival. She mentioned that resources are usually provided too late, and that immigrants are routinely placed in immigrant-dense suburbs, which enhances segregation. If the problem of segregation is linked exclusively to the moment of arrival of certain groups of people in Sweden, the problem seems at once to be limited to an issue of migration. The processes of segregation should be understood to be ongoing and intrinsic in our society (Frankenberg 1993, 44). When the moment of arrival is considered as the initiation of segregation, the scope of the issue is limited. As a result, the course of action in the face of segregation is limited. It follows that due to lacking quality of refugee reception, those who have recently migrated to Sweden must accept a reality of being poorly – or never – integrated into Swedish society. I agree with Ellen that integration processes upon arrival are essential to allow new Swedes to enter into Swedish society. However, it follows a set of logics that if the moment of arrival has passed and integration was not successful, later effort will make no difference. In essence, everything is already ruined.

Ingrid: The city and the patterns of movement really invite [segregation], if you aren’t aware, if you don’t move in an opposite direction.

When I asked Ingrid to clarify how she participates in segregation, she reflected on her place in the patterns and processes of segregation. Her movements in the city, her friends, where she lives, where she hangs out, all these things contribute to upholding segregation, according to Ingrid. In my interview with Sara, she claimed that those who are born and raised in Sweden are more prone to separating themselves. Sara said that those with power in society make the rules; they decide where they want to live; who they want to keep company with; who they open their doors to. She told me that those who have grown up in Sweden and are ethnically Swedish have a higher tendency towards separation. From a phenomenological point of departure, Sara and Ingrid can identify the way white bodies are able to move in white spaces unencumbered, and that the processes of separation behind are not accidental. Ingrid is able to refer to herself and her own



movements, identifying her whiteness and how it affects her life. She identifies how she can live according to her whiteness, how she walks while white. Sara also identifies similar patterns of behaviour, referring to white Swedes, in general. In this way, they illustrate that they are able to define behaviour related to whiteness. They are illuminating the position of 'Us'.

When Sara reflected further on patterns of separation, she said that fear will continue to cause divisions between people. Nina had a similar reflection, mentioning that fear of the unknown - unknown people, unknown groups - has always been crucial to the survival of the group. And that fear brews hate, according to Nina, which solidifies separation. There are certain implications in using concepts like fear to explain why separation is upheld in society. Firstly, fear implies lack of logic, instinctive reactions, distancing and being emotionally involved in an issue. Being afraid of other groups does not necessarily mean fearing the group in themselves, but rather fearing how this group could impact your life. Sara Ahmed would call fear the defining factor in "securing the relationship between bodies" (2014, 63) When certain bodies are feared, that defines them according to certain preconceived ideas about those bodies. Certain aspects of a person's livelihood can be under threat by another body that threatens that livelihood (Ahmed 2014, 72). Different aspects of white, middle class life might be seen as being threatened due to the influx of non-white, non-middle-class bodies. As long as the group that is feeling threatened can define the group that is causing them threat, they can regulate the behaviour of the threatening group. This fear defines the expected behaviour of the others and upholds this separation. All that is necessary to uphold the separation is the fear of the other group. The fear needs no origin, only rationalization.

Further, it may be simplistic to reduce all behaviour guided by whiteness or racism to hate. If we limit the problem of structural racism to that of hate, other factors such as ignorance, discomfort/comfort, forgetfulness might be considered harmless. When something is deemed harmless, it is difficult to question, and it becomes even more pervasive. Consider, for example, the debate about the logo of Swedish candy *Kina-puffar* (Chinese puffs). For a long time, the logo for this candy was a racist caricature of an Asian person (it has now been changed). In 2011, Swedish journalist Patrik Lundgren questioned the idea that a racist caricature was appropriate for a candy logo, especially since it demonstrated that racist stereotypes against Asians were (and perhaps, are still) socially acceptable in Sweden. The ensuing debate was centred around the idea that the logo was harmless, and that the criticism was blown out of proportion (Hübinette and Hörnfeldt 2012, 43). The racist stereotyping passed many people by, and once it was questioned, people were defensive and argumentative over the right to 'keep this logo'. The apparent

harmlessness of this expression of racism became the reason why it was so important to defend. This should not be understood as an action of hate. Rather, it is the result of habit, ignorance or comfort. There is a sense of complicity in understanding certain iterations of racism as harmless. What people don't consider problematic, they don't consider necessary to change. And when something is viewed as harmless, it poses no threat, it incites no fear. When racism and its consequences are denied, there is no space for action in the face of them.

In defining separation of groups as a divisive phenomenon in society, the implication is that the respondents (and white people in general) should be able to identify the position of 'Us'. Invoking this logic also invokes the non-subjectivity of 'Them;' they can speak, but they won't be heard by 'Us'. Implicit in this binary is also a breadth of other dichotomies; such as active-passive, rich-poor, free-unfree, privileged-unprivileged. When the Us-Them logic is invoked, this range of identifying factors is invoked, as well. 'Us' are the ones with agency, the rich, the free and the privileged. 'They' are the passive, poor, unfree and unprivileged. The idea that fear creates this division, however, may be a way of misrepresenting how separation persists. Fear and hate are strong emotions. It may be difficult to claim that fear of other people is a continuously defining factor in processes of separation. Rather, it could be that this fear is related to losing privilege, and exclusive access to the spaces that has always been defined as white. To realize that, however, a rudimentary understanding of whiteness may be necessary. And if white people do not have that self-reflection, they may refer to the logic of the fear of the other, instead. Whiteness as a norm is often invisible to those who are able to approximate it. Thus, it is often only possible for white people to identify those who are not white, those who are out of line and do whiteness incorrectly. This is elaborated on in the next section, *The Invisible Self*.

### *The Invisible Self: No Self-Reflection Required*

Whiteness makes the body invisible to those that inhabit it. It greatly reduces white people's abilities to understand how their own behaviour could be implicated in the processes of segregation (Frankenberg 1993, 228-29). In my interview with Ingrid, I asked her the question, 'how do you identify yourself?'. My intent with this question was to find out how she understands her intersectional positions in society. She - along with several of my other respondents - had difficulties answering this question. After a long period of thought and some discussion of the question, Ingrid identified as a woman. She eventually clarified that she also identifies as white, cisgender and middle-class. Ingrid told me that she does not think about her identity on an everyday basis; "I just walk around and am who I am". This way of understanding the body is

mirrored in the other women's answers. Ellen is aware of how her body is judged in society, in terms of her weight. Maria said that her identity as a woman affects her place in society the most. She said that does not consider how being middle class and white affects her life on a regular basis. In reality, the positions of being white and middle class affect these women's place in society as well, but the nature of privilege may result in an inability to critically analyse those positions. Sara - like Ingrid - firstly identified as a woman. Sara called it "shaping her life according to her womanhood." When I asked Sara whether her understanding of her position as a woman helps her understand other oppressive structures, she explained that it has given her insights she may not have been privy to otherwise. However, she did not want to claim to understand what it is to be subject to racialized power structures. She said that the limitations of society are different for different individuals. The respondents bring up their whiteness and middle-class identity as a matter of identification and positioning when prompted but have difficulties assessing how it directly influences their life.

When I asked Ingrid how she is affected by segregation on a personal level, she initially had a difficult time defining it. First, she responded that she is not affected by it in her everyday life. This may be because it is unfamiliar for her to view herself as participating in the processes of segregation. After some consideration, she said the following:

Ingrid: I mean, [segregation] affects me in a way, that I can react to it, that I could get involved in a political movement, that it makes me angry. It creates certain problems. I can understand that, intellectually.

If Ingrid does not actively consider how segregation affects her, nothing in her immediate surroundings will remind her of it. Maria responds similarly, emphasizing that she does not experience segregation on an individual level. When I discussed this with Maria, I asked an additional question about how she benefits from segregation. Maria mentioned that her middle-class identity, her whiteness and the associated social and economic capital make her life easier. Her whiteness and middle-class identity automatically deem her trustworthy in society. The way Ingrid responded to a more open-ended question implies that without prompting, it might be difficult to perceive the benefits whiteness provides. Being unable to directly define how she's affected by the processes of segregation, it is possible for Ingrid to disregard how she benefits from the racialized structures in society. Meanwhile, Maria identified how she benefits, when the question was phrased differently. She may be aware of it, but she may not be regularly reflecting on it. When I asked Ellen about how she participates in segregation, she listed the ways in which

she contributes towards dismantling segregation, for example, her friendships with non-white people and in striving to live without prejudice. When I asked Ellen about segregation on a wider scale in society, she identified the role of white people in upholding it. Ellen seemed not to be unaware of the role of white people in the processes of segregation but seemed to have difficulties identifying with the general category of 'white people'. Ellen, Ingrid and Maria all exemplify whiteness as a bodiless experience, where their whiteness seems theoretical, affecting others but not themselves.

After having asked Ingrid about how she is personally affected by segregation, I asked her about how she participates in structural racism. When I asked this question, Ingrid was able to articulate more clearly how she is personally implicated. She said that structural barriers that impede other people's lives make her life easier. When we discussed the benefits that being white provides her with, Ingrid mentioned feeling that she is regarded as a better-suited candidate when applying for jobs, simply due to her ethnicity. She explained that she is awarded more respect and dignity as an individual. Ingrid explained that many times she does not reflect on the privileges she has. They just pass her by. She added that privilege is usually invisible to those inhabiting it, and thus is difficult to name and act on. Maria said that (as a white person) it is possible to live a big part of your life without realizing that you are white. She mentions that she 'discovered' her whiteness recently, in contrast to her having been aware of the burdens of being a woman since she was in elementary school. Nina mentioned that those who are oppressed are always aware of it, but those who benefit from the oppressive systems do not always understand their own position. They also may not reflect on why they hang out with certain people and not others. The history of whiteness may be inherently invisible to bodies successfully approximating it. Being unaware of the unmarked nature of your body means being unaware of the consequences of having a marked body, by which you are judged and categorized in a system of oppression. If your body is lagging behind you, in, if your body and your whiteness are invisible to you, the effect your body has on society is not apparent to you (Ahmed 2007, 155). When a person is not aware of their body, they can disregard the impact their body has on the trajectory of their life. In this way, Ingrid, Maria and Nina exemplify the behaviour of white people who can identify their body, meanwhile also identifying how their whiteness impacts their lives in other ways. They illustrate how they can understand the benefits that whiteness provides them with, but that unless they actively do it, they will continue to repeat the history of habits that whiteness has taught them.

Participation in structural racism is often unmarked for the privileged group. And this behaviour can undermine efforts to mark privilege and whiteness. Sara Ahmed describes a situation in which a white woman came up to her, held her arm up next to Ahmed's and claimed to see no difference between the two. Ahmed's colleague called her focus on racism a "paranoia". This idea of the experience of racism as paranoia, as an invented difference, works according to the logic of whiteness (2009, 47). In reality, racialization and the consequences of it extend beyond the colour of skin. When limiting race to the perceived colour and the difference between a white woman's arm and a non-white woman's arm, this disregards the social, economic, cultural hierarchies implicit in the word race; in the word white, and in the word black. By reducing race to skin colour, by claiming the difference between skin colours to be negligible, it is possible to claim to "hear, speak and see no evil". A world is created in which these evils do not exist (Habel 2012, 4). If the words used for discussing racism are denied validity, there is no way to act on it. As a result, privileged people are free to act as they wish, because in their reality, this structural violence is non-existent. It is "a form of racism to say that racism does not exist" (Ahmed 2009, 47). If the existence of racism is denied, it shows that the structures of racism may be deeply ingrained in society, and that there is no avenue in which change can be enacted.

The first step in dismantling structures of oppression is identifying your role in them. If you cannot identify your privilege, you do not have to deal with it and you do not have to take a stand against it. Even when you identify your whiteness, however, taking a stand is difficult, uncomfortable and troublesome. Not taking a stand - turning a blind eye - is in many ways easier. Not taking a stand can be done in many ways. One of these is refusing to speak up due to a sense of shame, guilt or of not having the right to speak up. This is what I call *Politically Correct Paranoia*.

### *Politically Correct Paranoia*

Ingrid: In the Social Worker programme, we have a lot of discussions about, like, intersectionality.

We've had seminars on the topic. And in these seminars the groups have often been mixed, I mean, ethnically. That's a situation in which I had a hard time speaking up. It was difficult, I felt like, this isn't my place to speak. Because, you know, my minus is being a woman, but being a white, middle-aged man, that's the best, then you're at the top. And I'm not a man, not middle-aged, but being white is such a privilege. There's a huge difference in how you are perceived in society depending on your ethnicity. So, then I feel that I don't want to speak up. But we also talked about that issue in class. That it's difficult to speak up while white, because you don't know what to say. And then the teacher said that many African-American feminists say that white people have to speak up to understand their position. I mean, you

can't just say, this is your guys' issue, you talk about it. It's everyone's issue. But in that situation my position makes me insecure.

In my first interview, the concept *politically correct paranoia*<sup>7</sup> was brought up to explain the feeling of being unwilling to speak up as a privileged white person in front of non-white people. Being aware of the whiteness of one's body causes a certain level of discomfort, as explained by several of my respondents. For Ingrid, this discomfort becomes the fear of wrongdoing, and as a result, a passivity in the face of (self-identified) uncomfortable situations. Sara Ahmed's theories on white phenomenology deal with whiteness being intrinsic and invisible to white people due to the fact that the white body is essentially part of the white space around it (Ahmed 2007, 153). When these white women deal with the issues of politically correct paranoia, they are essentially being forced to evaluate how their whiteness affects their opinions and their relationship to the issue at hand.

In working to dismantle structures of oppression, privilege has to be a source of discomfort for those holding it, I mention to Maria. Being called out on privilege, calling others out on their privilege will cause discomfort, since it is part of the process of questioning norms in society. Discomfort is part of being unseated, part of questioning your place in the world. Discomfort is a relevant strategy of change for privileged individuals (Ahmed 2007, 163). Maria responded by saying that careful people do not have all the answers and that keeping quiet does not necessarily help anyone. When the fear of being reprimanded takes precedence over concerns related to racism, this clearly shows that white people can disregard these issues without any (apparent) consequences for themselves. White people cannot begin to understand the specific oppression that non-white people experience, but there is no way to understand the consequences of these structures if white people are passive bystanders. Additionally, by not speaking up about an issue, privileged people may believe that an issue does not affect them. As Maria said, it helps no one.

Ingrid: You don't know...what you can say. Or who will judge me if I say this or that? What's what, you know. You have to speak from your position. And I think this position is one I'm not comfortable with. I don't know what to do with it.

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<sup>7</sup> *PK-rädsla* in Swedish. This term was used by the respondent in the first interview and later on brought up by me in the following interviews to gauge the other respondents' reaction to the concept.

Staying silent in order not to say something wrong has consequences that are not always obvious for those who choose not to speak. When privileged individuals distance themselves from an issue, it creates the impression that it does not affect them. When these women reflect on politically correct paranoia and the subsequent discomfort, they may understand their room for manoeuvring to have shrunk. They may acknowledge and accept their white privilege, but this is clearly not enough to inspire a change of behaviour. This 'white guilt'-phenomenon means that the fear of wrongdoing may result in these women not doing anything at all.

Sara: It's problematic not to be aware of the benefits of being white.

In considering the case of Sara, she exhibits an intellectual understanding of how she personally benefits from structural racism. She considers herself aware but finds it difficult to identify all the ways in which racist structures impact her life. Even if Sara shows awareness of racism and being implicated in it, she has difficulties naming the ways in which she is directly affected by it. I would argue that this is due to the fact that racism is understood as something that only affects those who suffer from it, and not those who benefit from it. Even being aware, it becomes difficult to act.

Nina talked about it becoming more difficult to talk since began her studies in Social Work. Ingrid mentioned that it is difficult to approach the discomfort she feels concerning herself speaking out as white. Politically correct paranoia is not a given state, and in the case of these women, seems to be born out of increased knowledge on the topic of structural inequality and racism, rather than lack of knowledge. Ingrid told me that she thinks that her position could be used constructively. She is not sure how, but she believes that discomfort could be potentially constructive. Discomfort and vulnerability may cause aggression and defensiveness, or as in the case of politically correct paranoia: passivity. Discomfort and vulnerability could be considered a tool to dismantle whiteness, however. When Nina told me about hanging out with her 'immigrant friends' in school, she mentioned that she often plays the role of the clown, because there are certain things (cultural codes) that she does not understand. Nina told me that she is aware of her position of power in society in this situation (compared with these friends) and defuses any potential discomfort by being vulnerable. Feelings of shame may be triggered by failing to live up to a social ideal (Ahmed 2014, 104). The discomfort caused by being forced to acknowledge privilege may cause shame as well. Shame that, in turn, causes silence and passivity. Rather than politically correct paranoia being born out of an explicitly uncomfortable situation, it may be the fear of a potentially uncomfortable situation that inspires politically correct paranoia.

When I asked Nina what kind of responsibility people have when witnessing racism, she said that it is everybody's responsibility to take that fight, and to never talk about other people in that way. She said that those that are subject to racism cannot be expected to fight it on their own. Nina considered whether people's seeming inability to take a stand is part of the Swedish identity; that Swedes have learnt not to get involved, as not to upset others. When Ingrid and I discussed intervening when another person is the target of racial abuse, Ingrid told me about a situation where she had defended a colleague that had been subjected to racist slurs. She found this situation difficult to maneuverer. Ingrid spoke up on her colleague's behalf, defending her to a client. However, Ingrid mentioned feeling insecure about how to act since she did not want to make her colleague feel like she was speaking in her place. Even when acting in the face of racial abuse, Ingrid was worried about her chosen course of action. Politically correct paranoia may lead to white people wanting to avoid committing any wrongdoings. Even solidarity can be done incorrectly, and may be not done at all, instead. Politically correct paranoia may also be a fundamental fear of getting involved and not upsetting others. The paralysis that happens as a result may bring additional shame and guilt.

Ingrid being worried how to act in the fact of racism exemplifies another aspect of politically correct paranoia, as well. This is the assumption that all non-whites have expertise that white people do not. This behaviour may be guided by the assumption that 'all non-whites are the same', and that white people cannot differentiate between the multiple experiences of non-white individuals. This can be seen as a kind of white paternalism. By acting as if a non-white person has authority on a subject simply due to them being non-white, white people are reducing them from individuals to stereotypes (Turner 1970, 21). Politically correct paranoia may be an expression of the inability of white people to handle the subjectivity of non-white people. It could also be, as Gayatri Spivak theorizes, that white people (subjects) who communicate with oppressed non-white people (objects) are incapable of listening, incapable of understanding their subjectivity, due to the White Saviour Complex (1993, 93). The division between 'Us' and 'Them' which is visible in my respondents' discussion implies a subjectivity and agency in 'Us' and a lack of it in 'Them'. When discussing issues of segregation, Ellen and Ingrid both suggested solutions closely linked to the arrival of refugees into Sweden. According to the logic of whiteness, these individuals could be argued to be those with least subjectivity, due to being presumed not to speak the Swedish language or know Swedish culture, for example. It is easy to equate this group with those suffering most heavily under segregation, as it appeals directly to the aforementioned White Saviour Complex; the project of saving the refugees from themselves. An



indivisible mass of ‘Them’. The veil debate is also an example of this. Banning veils may be constructed as a feminist project but is often an example of ‘white women saving brown women from brown men,’ to repurpose Spivak’s famous quote (1993, 92). When assuming that brown women need the subjectivity of white women to be saved, it assumes that these brown women have no subjectivity and no agency (Yancy 2012, 11). When white people are forced to confront the range of subjectivities of non-white people, politically correct paranoia may be the result.

When experiencing politically correct paranoia, white people may feel worry, fear, and discomfort. They may feel vulnerable, which might make them passive and careful. It is relevant to discuss why white people feel vulnerable in these contexts. Vulnerability and discomfort go hand in hand. Discomfort, bodies being ‘out of line’ is part of the process of approximating whiteness. Those who approximate whiteness successfully sink into whiteness and become inseparable from it (Ahmed 2007, 160). A body that is out of line with whiteness becomes immediately visible. Similarly, whiteness can become visible when whiteness itself is out of line. Sara Ahmed calls whiteness a “social and bodily orientation,” in which certain bodies will feel more at home when whiteness is the point of orientation (2007, 170). This implies that when bodies do not have a point of orientation, this becomes a stressor instead. When people who inhabit whiteness exist in a space where their whiteness becomes a point of stress, they become uncomfortably aware of that whiteness. I believe that this discomfort can be a source of vulnerability, and a source of action. This will be discussed further in the section on *The White Bystander Effect*.

To finalize this discussion, it is critical to consider intent. The intention of these women when backing away from discussions due to politically correct paranoia may not be to dismiss the subjectivity of non-white people. Their intent might be the complete opposite. The intent may be to be a good white ally. The result, however, is still passivity. The result of politically correct paranoia is silence by white people. The result is white people being able to step back from issues that they believe not to concern them. The result is white people being afraid to speak up. When these women stay quiet in a situation due to politically correct paranoia, they are reorienting towards their whiteness. They are disregarding a situation where their whiteness is threatened. The logic of whiteness results in a differentiation between white issues and non-white issues. Passivity can also be the result of a lack of understanding of the power whiteness holds in society. The invisibility of whiteness means that white people may be unable to understand how whiteness is involved in structures of oppression. This will be the focus of the next section, *Perceived Powerlessness*.

### *Perceived Powerlessness: An Exercise in Power*

In Ellen and I discussed societal power, she claimed to adhere to a Foucauldian understanding of power. Ellen said that those with power have to be ready to let go of it for the power to spread in society. When I asked her how she would share her own power, she responded by listing all of her privileged positions; as cisgender, white, having a normatively functional body, passing as a heterosexual. She mentioned that in situations where you have to face your own prejudice, it is important to do so. She emphasized that the point is to observe your own behaviour and change it. When I asked her to describe how she could use the power she holds in society to dismantle structures of oppression, however, her answer was as follows:

Ellen: I actually feel rather powerless, I can't do much, I can be unprejudiced, perhaps. I'm not in parliament, I'm not in a position of power. I can't do anything about it, I have to sit and watch, it doesn't help if I speak up.

When Ellen refers to herself, power to make a difference seems almost abstract. Power seems rather to be in the hands of governments and legislators. Ellen insisted that her speaking out<sup>8</sup> does not help because not enough people are listening, and her contribution therefore would be negligible. But what is 'enough people'? How can the reason for not speaking out be that you only make a negligible difference? Processes of segregation and structural racism involve the actions and behaviors of individuals. Individuals participate in and uphold structural inequalities. Thus, each individual's attempts to disrupt patterns and processes must be understood as a way to dismantle power structures in society. Attempts to share power, criticize habits and change patterns of behavior can be understood as a part of the dismantling and sharing power. Ellen may not comprehend the power that she holds in society, and thus does not think she can make a difference. At the same time, she claimed that those with power must strive to share it if structures of oppression are to be dismantled. When a white person is unable to acknowledge how they utilize the power afforded to them by the logic of whiteness in society, they are in effect seeing themselves as a blank page. George Yancy encourages people to flip the script on the phenomenology of Frantz Fanon's "look, a negro!" by instead remarking "look, a white!" and calling attention to whiteness. Yancy brings up the need to shift our attention to "white discourse and white social performances that attempt to pass themselves off as racially neutral" (2012, 8).

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<sup>8</sup> She uses the word *skrika* in Swedish, translated as scream. I felt this word did not carry the same meaning in English, so I adjusted the translation.

Ellen reflected that it is a necessity for those with power to share it. She mentioned that working to free yourself from prejudice is a way to share power. In the end, however, she has difficulties comprehending the power that she has by virtue of her whiteness. Each micro-aggression, lack of action, distancing oneself from the issues of racism should be understood as an assertion of power. Ellen's own difficulties with understanding her white identity, her whiteness, makes it difficult for her to understand that it affects her actions and decisions, whether she chooses to act or not.

In being unable to consider their position of power, white people may also be unable to recognize the possibility to act that comes with belonging to the privileged group. This means that white people may feel powerless in the face of segregation. Awareness is a step towards dismantling the power structures of whiteness but is not enough in and of itself. When Ingrid and I discussed how she, personally, could help to reduce segregation, she suggested the idea of moving to Tynnered (an immigrant-dense suburb). However, she also questioned the possibility that this would actually make a difference. She put on a voice and made a parody of it, "look at me, a white person, isn't it great that I want to live here?". For white people, acknowledging the existence of white privilege may seem to be part of the dismantling of that very privilege. However, a white person acknowledging and understanding the benefits of white privilege does not mean they will act on this acknowledgment. This acknowledgement may only guarantee complacency in the face of the current hierarchy (Margolin 2015, 4). Ingrid seemed bothered by the question and seemed deep in thought before deciding on her answer. These efforts would seem miniscule, she continued, but if others are inspired to move, if it's something that the middle-class starts to aspire to do, then it might make a difference.

Nina lives in an upper middle-class area in Gothenburg. When she described this area to me, she described a group of people entirely separate from the rest of society, that are isolated and unaware of the consequences of this isolation. In this area, whiteness is an invisible part of these people's lives. Their societal and economic capital may appear to be invisible to them but awards them significant power in society. Nina almost had a mental breakdown, she claimed, approximating the behaviour of people in this area. Her shortcomings may have clarified her as being out of line in this specific context. The power is in being in line and those out of line are clearly marked as different (Ahmed 2007, 159). In discussing the responsibility white people have in dealing with issues of segregation, Ingrid touched upon the idea that society should not be built upon the idea that the middle-class is expected to save other groups in society. When the white middle-class is expected to 'rescue areas', this implies that the only people who are able to make

a difference in society is the white middle-class. That means that the power inherent in whiteness is not questioned, rather it is reinforced. The white middle-class is a group with power, but the aim should not be that they keep their power, while sharing it at their leisure. The aim should be that the position of power that the white middle-class holds is dismantled and deconstructed

In this thesis, the respondents have been able to identify both how they, along with ‘white people in general’ participate in structures of oppression. These women may still see themselves as powerless to make a difference, however. Discussing the phenomenon of feeling powerless, how to share power and who holds it, there needs to be a final caveat on the concept of power. The way we understand and discuss power in these scenarios has to be guided by the way power is understood in society today. And that is within the limits of structural oppression. As long as power is being ‘handed over’ by someone who holds that power by virtue of being white, it is still done within the limits of whiteness. When power is shared, it is shared within the constraints of whiteness. This is because the logic of whiteness permeates all behaviour in society. Power being handed down within the limits of whiteness is still an expression of whiteness. Behaviour that we might not interpret as stemming from the logic of whiteness still works according to the logic of whiteness. Whiteness surrounds you, even as a feminist, an anti-racist, married to a non-white person, researching whiteness, or hanging out with your white friends (Yancy 2012, 11). As long as behaviour is understood to be within the confines of whiteness, we are not revolting against the system, we are upholding it (Molina 2010, 84). The question to consider at this point is whether white people should even be encouraged to act within the confines of whiteness. This is the focus of the final section of the analysis, *The White Bystander Effect*.

### *The White Bystander Effect: Deconstructing/Reconstructing Whiteness*

In the method of analysis for my interviews, I identified five main themes, four of which I have already discussed. The fifth theme is centred around being a white bystander in the face of structural racism. During my interview process, I theorized that I had found a blueprint on how white people should act to dismantle structural racism. I wanted to analyse how my respondents were theoretical experts, not activists, (this is what I called *The White Bystander Effect*) and discuss how they could become activists, in the future. After some reflection, I realized that this theory was a result of my own implication in whiteness and white paternalism. I was emulating the White Savior Complex in my attempt to inspire white people to help save non-white people from other white people (Spivak 1993, 92). As a white person, it is difficult for me to continuously

recognize the ways in which whiteness influences my research, but I must do my best to continually identify, discuss and deconstruct this influence. I approach this theme guided by the idea that white people have a responsibility to act in the face of racism. However, instead of simply criticizing *The White Bystander Effect*, the following section will focus on acting within the logic of whiteness, the implications this has on the deconstruction of whiteness and if this could be argued to be a small effort towards dismantling structures of oppression, or no effort at all.

### **ACTING WITHIN WHITENESS.**

In a discussion with Maria about whether people have a responsibility to confront others in regard to their problematic behaviour, she said that the easy answer is that you do, but that it may not always be socially acceptable. If friends and family participate in this kind of behaviour, she ventured, it may be possible to question their behaviour and hopefully initiate a process of them thinking about these issues. I asked Maria how we can interpret that some people continue to defend their right to say and do what they want when they are confronted with their problematic behaviour, rather than admitting their mistake. In response, Maria referred to a personal experience, where she was confronted about her problematic behaviour and her ego was bruised. She said that at the time she thought the other person should have understood that she did not mean it 'that way'. The focus seemed to be intent of the behaviour, rather than the result of it. When white people refer to their own individuality - I did not mean it 'that way' - as a defence for their actions, they are revealing the difficulties they have in understanding themselves in a structural context. When whiteness is not acknowledged, the structural context of the action can be ignored. The oppressive nature of 'harmless' jokes, actions and words can, in turn, be disregarded.

Nina: A classmate worried about me going home [from Bergsjön] by myself, she spooked me. The tram was pretty empty until I got to Haga, where a bunch of loud people got on. It was fine, but I realize that if it would've happened in Bergsjön, I would've been afraid for my life. It scares me, it's totally subconscious. I get more scared if I see a dark-skinned person than a white person.

In a discussion with Nina discussed about the tram ride seminar from Saltholmen to Bergsjön, Nina mentioned that her friend was worried about her travelling back home by herself late at night. This scared Nina. However, nothing happened on the tram ride until she got to Haga, where some rowdy teenagers entered the tram. Nina explained that she was not scared of these teenagers at all, but if the same thing had happened in Bergsjön, she would have probably been

scared. Nina, Nina's friend, society, expectations regarding so-called problem areas, the interpretation of young people's behaviour (and how that interpretation relates to their whiteness); all this serves to create fear and worry concerning certain areas, and not others. Nina self-reflection is evident during our interview. She is able to criticize and analyse her own behaviour. She may be afraid, but she attempts to not be uncritical of that fear.

In a different part of the interview, Nina admitted to experiencing an instinctive fear when seeing a dark-skinned person, that she does not experience with white people. In a discussion on how to deal with this sort of fear, Nina said that you have to talk to 'them'. She relayed an anecdote about her talking to a group of non-white boys that were hanging around her apartment. At first, she was nervous about them being there. Then she got angry at herself for being nervous. She decided to talk to them when she passed them by, to ask them for directions, to joke around with them. "You have to identify these people as human beings," Nina said.

When I asked Sara if she was afraid of any specific areas in Gothenburg, she admitted to being afraid of being out in Gothenburg at night. I asked whether her fear came from being unaccustomed to it. She replied that she does not feel at home at all in Gothenburg at night, and that unfamiliarity definitely could have something to do with it. After having said this, Sara admitted that she thinks it is odd<sup>9</sup> to think like this and that she can understand that she participates in perpetuating a fear of the unknown. Additionally, she admitted to not using public transport at all. When I asked her if she had considered starting to use it, she admitted that she does not want to, and probably never will. This shows how easy it is to let prejudice dictate action. Sara said that this behaviour is due to her being afraid of men, not of non-white people. However, the result is Sara being unable to challenge her preconceived ideas about Gothenburg at night. In contrast to this fear, Sara said the following earlier on in the interview:

Sara: I think that people need to open up, it's difficult to put aside your prejudice, but people should be interested in testing and challenging them, along with their ideas about other people. Of course, people should be treated equally by all people, but it's easy to treat people differently due to preconceived ideas and stereotypes

This illustrates how it may be difficult to reconcile a general understanding of privilege and prejudice with a personal one. Sara rationalized that she does not need to change her behaviour. Earlier, Ellen rationalized that she was powerless to make a difference in society. Ingrid

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<sup>9</sup> *Verklighetsfrånvänt*, in Swedish

rationalized that she had no right to speak out on certain issues. All these women have provided concise explanations for how to deal with structural racism and segregation, in a theoretical sense. Yet they still struggle to act in the face of structural oppression.

It may come down to a question of embodied knowledge. The critique Nina showcases against her own fear can be related to a process of embodiment of whiteness. To comprehend the difficulties that the lack of embodied whiteness may cause, an anecdote by George Yancy on meeting with a white woman in an elevator can be perused. In coming across this woman, he assumed that his status as an academic and his respectable clothing would shield him from her white gaze, but she still reacted to him and his non-white body. The way his blackness affects him is not determined by him, but rather by the woman interpreting his blackness. He is made aware of how his blackness is interpreted, feared, hated and remade in this instance. (2008, 21) Yancy may never be able to step out of the bodily experience of blackness. White women, however, can at any time ignore the impact their whiteness has on their life. And instead, only react to that-which-is-not-white with fear, worry, or excitement. Nina, becomes aware of her fear of that-which-is-not-white and is critical of it. She recognizes her whiteness in that moment. Sara's fear, on the other hand, illustrates the results of whiteness which is not questioned, and is not embodied. Sara's fear stems from her vulnerability as a woman, according to her. She does not relate it to her whiteness. Sara's whiteness may be masking her own participation in these structures invisible to her and masks her perpetuating of racialized structures. If the ways in which white people participate in racist structures -well-meaning, open-minded people - are not illuminated, there is no opportunity to critically analyse that behaviour.

### **DECONSTRUCTING WHITENESS.**

During my discussion with Sara about the responsibility of the individual when dealing with structural oppression, Sara became introspective. She listed ways in which she could change her behaviour and attitude towards other people. She said that it is important to take responsibility for your actions and attitudes. Sara mentioned that she feels increasingly affected, the more she considers these issues. Having had kids, Sara has begun to reflect more on her surroundings. When I asked Maria if it is possible to stop being racist, she said that in a future utopia, in the next generation, she could consider it possible for racism to disappear. But, she continued, it is so deeply rooted in society that it is difficult to see it happening while we are alive. Sara told me that she puts her hopes to the next generation. She hopes that in the next generation, people will not be as afraid of other people. Entrusting future generation with the only possibility of change

implies that change will simply happen by itself. The implication is that this generation is already ruined. Considering the current situation impossible to change only contributes to upholding current structures of power. Lack of belief in your own ability to enact change upholds power. Not claiming responsibility for enacting change upholds power. Passivity upholds power.

The concept of separation appears repeatedly in the anecdotes of my respondents, as being the root cause of the processes of segregation. Having all taken a course called 'Power and Categorization' in their first semester, my respondents use the word categorize to describe the processes of differentiating and separating groups of people. According to this idea, people categorize other people based on internalized prejudices. Attempting to be free of prejudice is difficult, Nina told me, it takes a lot more energy than not caring at all. When I asked Ellen about the possibility of being entirely without prejudice, she said that awareness is important to understand where prejudice comes from. Ellen made a comparison to the prejudices she has against smokers, but we did not discuss any prejudices directly related to whiteness. Perhaps this may be because of shame. Shame can be understood as an inability to live up to a social ideal. Sara Ahmed theorizes that shame requires a witness, another person in which your inability to live up to this social ideal is reflected (2014, 109). If Ellen, for example, felt shame at being unable to control her racist prejudice, her choice might be to keep quiet as to give the impression that she does not hold these prejudices. It could be possible that Ellen might not see herself as holding these racist prejudices. As long as prejudices are not voiced, it is possible to point to oneself as an exception to the rule when it comes to racism and whiteness. Thinking that you are the exception to the rule basically only means that many aspects of your whiteness are still invisible to you. Thinking that you are the exception also means that you think that you have somehow managed to evade the structural hierarchies which govern all people's lives. Complicity is seeing yourself as an individual while everyone around you is part of the masses.

Acknowledging prejudices calls attention to the fact that the world is permeated with whiteness. The question is if it is possible to be completely free from prejudice, or if it is more relevant to acknowledge the difficulties of manoeuvring around them. Maria told me that she thinks that you cannot control what happens inside you, but what is important is how you deal with your behaviour towards other people. Maybe it is not possible to affect prejudice, but rather the approach to it. Nina said that the main thing is that you reflect on the categorizations that you make. It does not help to have a bad conscience about what happens in your subconscious, she continued, challenging those instincts is the important thing. Maria said that the work of being inclusive never stops, and that just because you consider yourself an inclusive person does not



mean you should stop working on being and thinking more inclusively. Nina claimed that white middle-class women seem to know the theory, but have a hard time putting it into practice. She said that just because people know what to say, does not necessarily mean they know how to act.

The question is whether it is even relevant to discuss the fears and concerns white people have toward their own prejudices. One reason to encourage these discussions is due to it calling out whiteness. Nina and Maria's statements relate their prejudices to their whiteness. It tampers with the logic of whiteness by marking it and making it visible. With acceptance, however, there is always the risk for complacency. Acknowledging racist prejudice could cause white people to become complacent. Acknowledgement could be seen as enough of a statement. It is vital to consider not only the intent of discussing these prejudices, but the consequences of them. Critically discussing racist fears in a white space could dehumanize the people who suffer due to these racist fears. Cataloguing these fears and prejudices, becoming complacent about them, being passive in the face of them, all these behaviours run the risk of feeding into the logic of whiteness, rather than deconstructing it. George Yancy mentions that the white students in his whiteness classes at first only see their whiteness as a "benign phenotypic marker" (2012, 9). Approaching this issue as if it is somehow benign, simply because it is benign to a white person, could cement whiteness rather than begin to deconstruct it. Many white people are unable to, or refuse to, deal with white privilege and instead deny the world in which such oppression takes place. They create a fantasy world in which these oppressive structures simply do not exist (Yancy 2012, 8). In effect, denying the existence of racism.

### **RECONSTRUCTING WHITENESS.**

Passivity is a weapon in the hands of those with social, economic and political power that can be used to uphold structures of oppression. If people see themselves as passive individuals, they may unconsciously eliminate room for action. When people see themselves as powerless, or as being too far removed from an issue, the behaviour that they are passively participating in may continue without reflection. When white people are not reflecting on their whiteness, when they let the logic of whiteness determine the subjectivity of non-white individual, when they use hate speech, white people are complicit in their whiteness. Being unable to interpret the power whiteness affords you in society, being unable to speak up due to a fear of saying the wrong thing, these are also examples of being complicit in whiteness. Whiteness is pervasive because it affords white-orientating bodies subjectivity, while denying those bodies that are 'out of line' subjectivity.

It is not simple enough to demand action from white people within the context of whiteness. *The White Bystander Effect* is synonymous with whiteness. The White Bystander Effect is a process in which white people may repeatedly emphasize their inability to act in the face of racism, and thus remain passive. Resolving the White Bystander Effect could only be accomplished within the context of whiteness, however. It would be another expression of white paternalism. It would involve white people utilizing their whiteness to dismantle the very same structures of oppression. A system of oppression cannot be used to dismantle itself. Having said that, neither is the complacency the solution. White people's solidarity with non-white people is essential to dismantling whiteness. The idea that solidarity - by itself - will dismantle the logic of whiteness must be questioned, however.

Deconstructing whiteness can never be an entirely white project, considering how the lack of subjectivity of non-white people is inherent to the logic of whiteness. Being identified as a white person is dependent on the concept of whiteness. The act of calling out whiteness may make a difference, since the invisibility of whiteness is inherent to the system. However, identifying the whiteness of bodies does not mean that the system is being dismantled. The privilege of walking while white will not naturally disappear or diminish. As a white person, in a space governed by whiteness, a society orienting towards whiteness, the acknowledgement and use of the white identity will always imply that the system of whiteness is still in place. The discomfort of this fact may encourage complacency. That discomfort could also serve a purpose, however. The discomfort in a space that has previously been comfortable, can be related to the discomfort for those who are always out of line (Ahmed 2007). As a white person caught between a rock and a hard place, you are out of line. White people calling out their whiteness will be uncomfortable in their whiteness will hopefully no longer naturally orientate towards it.

With all the caveats involved in detailing whiteness and how to act in the face of it, it might seem an impossible task to dismantle these systems of oppression. An easy solution would be to not act at all since the choices are difficult and uncomfortable. With the fear of wrongdoing, with having to deal with shame, comes the inability to act. Not acting in the face of racism and segregation only favours the existing systems of oppression. Complacency only favours the existing systems of oppression. The racial hierarchies in society already cause everybody except white people discomfort. If not being uncomfortable, of being afraid of being called out on your whiteness, dictates your actions, you are disregarding the discomfort non-white people live with on a daily basis. Channel that discomfort and be part of the process of change.

# CONCLUSION

## *Results*

In this thesis, having analyzed the perceptions of young, white, middle-class, Swedish women of their participation in structures of racism and processes of segregation, four distinct conclusions can be drawn. The first is that when discussing segregation, social distance is initiated by the use of words like 'Us' and 'Them'. The 'Us' is often implicit but can be understood to refer to white Swedes as a commonality. 'Them' is in reference to those that suffer due to segregation, those who live in impoverished areas, those that need to be integrated; in short, non-white Swedes of different origins, but usually referred to with the term 'immigrant'. The verbal distinctions between 'Us' and 'Them' help to construct the difference between the two.

Secondly, the unmarked nature of the white body has implications both for the respondents themselves, but also for their thoughts about white people in general. The respondents sometimes had difficulties reflecting on the impact of whiteness on their own bodies, but sometimes could identify it, thus positioning themselves as white. Prompting was generally necessary for this identification to occur, however, which illustrated how whiteness, when invisible, may be disregarded without any apparent consequence. Being able to ignore whiteness means being able to ignore the benefits afforded by structural racism and participation in processes of segregation.

Thirdly, the concept of politically correct paranoia illustrates the difficulties well-meaning white women may experience while discussing racism and race. Politically correct paranoia can be exemplified by three distinct behaviors the respondents experienced in the face of discussions of inequality. In being made aware of their whiteness and the benefits it afforded them, this caused them discomfort. In being uncomfortable, they became silent. This silence bred passivity. Passivity, in turn, allows white people to distance themselves from issues of racism and segregation without any consequences apparent to themselves. Relating back to the issue of distinctions made between 'Us' and 'Them,' it could also be proof of the difficulties white women - orientated towards their whiteness - may have with dealing with the subjectivity of non-white individuals. This may lead to the previously mentioned discomfort and silence, but also stereotyping and paternalism, where non-white individuals - regardless of heritage or previous experience - are understood to have all the answers to racism.

The result of the intersection of the three previous themes may be identified as a white person's perceived powerlessness. In this section, white women's ability or inability to perceive their abilities to affect change was analyzed. This theme also dealt with the possibilities of sharing

power without dismantling whiteness. In not being able to acknowledge the power inherent in whiteness, this lead to a similar passivity as with politically correct paranoia. In being able to disregard or ignore that power, there is a clear participation in upholding structural racism in society. Meanwhile, sharing power within whiteness only contributes to upholding the power of whiteness.

In the discussion of how to share power within whiteness, I was clearly made aware of my own privilege. At first, the conclusion in this thesis was the need for young, white, middle-class, Swedish women to act on their theoretical knowledge, instead of being passive observers. This conclusion was drawn within the logic of white paternalism, however, and only proved the difficulties of dismantling whiteness. The analysis in this study finishes with a discussion on how to act within whiteness, how to dismantle whiteness, and whether all these will only prove to strengthen whiteness, in the end. However, just as I have reiterated throughout this thesis, things worth changing are rarely easy, and may not involve comfortable choices. Discomfort and insecurity in the face of whiteness may indicate that the perceptions of myself and my respondents can help produce a less anxious, less passive involvement in these issues by white people, in the effort to dismantle structures of oppression.

The conclusions that can be drawn concerning the perceptions of young, white, middle-class, Swedish women in processes of segregation in Gothenburg show that awareness of participation in structural oppression may in itself cause complacency, passivity and discomfort. However, it can also cause anger, vulnerability and introspection. As men call out the patriarchy, white people must call out racial injustice. It is not enough to identify the oppression whiteness exacts upon non-white people. The lens has to be shifted to focus on what white people do in the name of whiteness. By showing how whiteness impacts white and non-white people's lives, and the consequences this has, the structures of oppression may be illuminated and dismantled.

### *Reflections*

In this thesis, I have studied the perceptions of white, middle-class women in processes of segregation and structural racism. The thoughts and feelings of these women do not exist in a vacuum. When analyzing the behavior, actions and thoughts of these white women, there is a necessity for all white, middle-class women to reflect, myself included. If you have grown up white, with the privilege that entails, it must be assumed that you have been complicit in structural racism in some capacity. Studying groups of people who may see themselves as benevolent and exempt from systems of racism could contribute to processes of change. These groups of people

may have difficulty assessing their role in structural racism and segregation. Not due to ill intent, but because those with power and privilege are systematically unaware of it. Without conscious reflection, it is always easier to consider yourself the exception to a rule. There are no exceptions to the rules of racism, however, when societies are governed by structural racism.

In this thesis, as I have studied whiteness, it is also relevant to consider how my own whiteness relates to the conclusions I draw. I must consider how my whiteness affects my ability to identify how whiteness impacts the life of other white, young women. In the initial closing argument of my analysis, I was unaware of my own unquestioning approach to white paternalism. Luckily, self-reflection and relevant theorists made me aware of my misstep and allowed me to correct my assumptions. My judgement will always be affected by my whiteness, however, even if I actively work against it. At this point I cannot guarantee that my white privilege and ignorance did not impact the results of this thesis. In fact, I can assume that my own complicity in these systems of oppression has affected the results of this thesis, in some way. It is always relevant to consider whether I, as a white person, should conduct studies such as this one. Those of us who benefit, however, must do our part to dismantle systems of oppression. One aspect of that is always questioning what we do in the name of whiteness.

### *Future Research*

In the analysis, there were some discussions that could not be expanded upon due to the restrictions of time and space. One of these was leaving it to the next generation to solve issues of racism and structural oppression. This implied a different dimension of complicity which could warrant further discussion and analysis in a separate study. Another question was whether it could be possible to be free of prejudice. This could provide backdrop for future discussion. Analyzing prejudice has strong implications on the approach to dismantling and deconstructing structures of oppression.

In this thesis, I aimed to do an in-depth, qualitative analysis of a group of white women who self-identify as middle class and possibly have a professional future in social work. To bring this study to the next level, it could be relevant to conduct a two-part interview study. In a second round of group interviews, the themes brought up in the first round of interviews could be discussed to increase the quality of the study, and to allow for even further reflection from the respondents. To give the study a wider scope, I would also consider focusing a future study on white working-class women, or – like Nina – those who have achieved middle class status later on in life. Focusing on respondents that do not, in fact, inhabit hegemonic whiteness, could

emphasize the fluidity of whiteness and how access to the power of whiteness could be considered dependent on how well you approximate hegemonic whiteness.

Initially, it was easy for me to find respondents for my study, but it became difficult when I wished to increase the number of respondents for a second round of interviews. Since I had chosen to study (self-identified) middle-class women, it became apparent to me that the number of Social Work students who self-identify as middle-class were few. A future study could shift focus to how the process of identification of middle-class status affects perceptions about participation in processes of segregation and structural racism in this group of women.

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# APPENDIX

## 1.1 INTERVIEW GUIDE (ORIGINAL)

*Berätta lite om dig själv.*

- Hemort
- Hur länge har du bott i i Göteborg? Var bor du? Var pluggar du? Var bor dina vänner?
- Familj
- Drömjobb
- *Varför socionomprogrammet?*

### SEGREGATION

- *Har ni pratat om segregation på socionomprogrammet. Om ja, vad har sagts?*<sup>10</sup>
- Vad tänker du på när jag säger segregation?
  - *Vad orsakar segregation*
  - *Vad får segregation för följder?*
- Kan du beskriva hur segregationen ser ut i Göteborg?
- Hur påverkas människor av segregation?
- Hur påverkas du, personligen, av segregation?
- Vad behövs göras i Göteborg för att minska segregationen?
- Vad kan du göra personligen för att minska segregationen?
  - *I framtiden som socionom?*
- Är du delaktig i segregationen? Om ja, på vilket sätt?

### IDENTITET/VITTHET

- *Kan du beskriva den typiska socionomstudenten?*
- Hur skulle du identifiera dig själv?
- Kan du beskriva hur din identitet påverkar din plats i samhället?
- Kan du beskriva vad det innebär att rasifieras?
  - *Vad får rasifiering för följder?*

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<sup>10</sup> Kursiverade frågor lades till under intervjuprocessen

- Kan du ge ett exempel på någon gång du upplevt rasism i Göteborg?
- Kan du ge ett exempel på strukturell rasism?
- Hur påverkar strukturell rasism dig?
  - *Hur kommer det påverka ditt potentiella arbetsliv som socionom?*

## 1.2 INTERVIEW GUIDE (TRANSLATED)

*Tell me a little bit about yourself.*

- Where are you from?
- How long have you lived in Gothenburg? Where in Gothenburg do you live? Where do you study? Where do your friends live?
- Family
- Ideal job
- *Why Social Work?*

### **SEGREGATION**

- *Have you spoken about segregation during the Social Work programme? If yes, how?<sup>11</sup>*
- What do you think about when I say segregation?
  - *What causes segregation?*
  - *What are the consequences of segregation?*
- Can you describe what segregation looks like in Gothenburg?
- How are people affected by segregation?
- How are you personally affected by segregation?
- What needs to be done in Gothenburg to decrease segregation?
- What can you do personally to reduce segregation?
  - *In your professional future, in Social Work?*
- Do you participate in segregation? If so, how?

### **IDENTITY/WHITENESS**

- *Could you please describe the typical Social Work student?*

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<sup>11</sup> Questions in italics were added throughout the interview process.

- How would you identify yourself?
- Can you describe how your identity affects your place in society?
- Can you explain what racialization means?
  - *What are the consequences of racialization?*
- Could you provide an example of when you experienced racism in Gothenburg?
- Could you provide an example of structural racism?
- How does structural racism affect you?
  - *How will it affect your professional future in Social Work?*