

Ethnicity and Ethnic-racialized Identity
in Swedish Educational Contexts

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To Saam and Yahya

Abstract

The overarching aim of this thesis was to address ethnicity and ethnic-racialized identity in Swedish educational contexts. First, to gain a contextualized understanding of how ethnicity is addressed in a relevant educational context, Study I explored student teachers' experiences of how ethnicity is framed in initial teacher education, an important educational context that prepares future teachers of adolescents. The findings in Study I showed that student teachers experienced that ethnicity was framed as something that concerns minoritized "others". Furthermore, they experienced that "others" were framed through a focus on problems and lack of skills, and as resources in initial teacher education. Ethnicity was also framed as something sensitive, which related to student teachers' fears of engaging in ethnicity-related discussions and related to expressions of racism in initial teacher education. Second, to contribute to the limited psychological research on ethnic-racialized identity in Sweden, and to the limited intervention research on how to support youth ethnic-racialized identity development, Study II examined whether a school-based intervention, the Identity Project, could impact ethnic-racialized identity process components (exploration participation, exploration search, and resolution) and content components (private regard and centrality). Study II indicated that the intervention had an initial positive and simultaneous effect on exploration participation and resolution, and only affected the long-term trajectory of change for exploration participation. The intervention did not have an impact on the process component exploration search or on the content components private regard and centrality. Furthermore, the intervention effects did not differ for youth with minoritized and majoritized ethnic backgrounds. Third, expanding on Study II, Study III examined if the intervention could impact adolescents' psychosocial and academic adjustment through the processes of exploration participation and resolution, and examined whether the intervention moderated the relationship between resolution and later psychosocial and academic adjustment. Study III indicated that the

intervention had a positive indirect effect on adolescents' psychosocial and academic adjustment through ethnic-racialized identity resolution, but not through exploration participation. Consequently, only resolution was a mechanism toward better youth adjustment. The positive associations between resolution and youth adjustment did not differ between the intervention and control group, or between youth with minoritized and majoritized backgrounds. Thus, Study III suggests that the positive links between resolution and youth adjustment may be a normative part of adolescence. Taken together, this thesis contributes with empirical knowledge concerning adolescents' ethnic-racialized identity development, presents mixed evidence of a school-based intervention on adolescents' ethnic-racialized identity, and highlights potential challenges regarding how ethnicity is framed in the educational context that prepares their future teachers.

Svensk Sammanfattning (Swedish Summary)

Även om identiteten utvecklas under hela livsspannet så är identitet särskilt centralt under tonårstiden då ungdomar i allt högre grad ägnar sig åt att försöka förstå vilka de är (Crocetti, 2017; Erikson, 1968). Identitet är mångfacetterat, föränderligt, och består av flertalet domäner som kan vara olika framträdande i olika delar av livet. En identitetsdomän som har beforskats alltmer är utvecklingen av etnisk identitet. Ur ett psykologiskt perspektiv definieras etnisk identitet (*Ethnic-racialized identity*) som en multidimensionell konstruktion som karaktäriseras av individers tankar, känslor, beteenden och vardagliga erfarenheter relaterade till att se sig själva som en del av självdefinierade etniska grupper (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014).

Majoriteten av den psykologiska forskningen om etnisk identitet har utförts i USA, med fokus på ungdomar, och anses vara särskilt relevant i samhällen som präglas av etnisk mångfald. Det samlade forskningsläget tyder på att en mer utvecklad etnisk identitet (ofta definierat som att en individ har genomgått processer av utforskande och har uppnått en tydlig förståelse för vad etnicitet betyder för dennes identitet) har psykosociala fördelar som bättre psykisk hälsa (Smith & Silva, 2011), mer positiv självuppfattning (Schwartz et al., 2009) samt bättre akademisk prestation (Miller-Cotto & Byrnes, 2016). Vidare är en mer utvecklad etnisk identitet även associerad med mindre psykosociala besvär (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). De positiva sambanden har huvudsakligen observerats för ungdomar med olika minoritetsbakgrunder och har även observerats för ungdomar med majoritetsbakgrunder i USA (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Umaña-Taylor, Kornienko et al., 2018). Liknande resultat har funnits i europeiska kontexter (Cavdar et al., 2021; Schotte et al., 2018). Trots att forskning länge har indikerat dessa positiva samband så finns det begränsad forskning som undersöker huruvida interventioner kan vara ett sätt att stödja ungdomars etniska identitetsutveckling för att uppnå positiva psykosociala och akademiska utfall. Det gäller i synnerhet i Sverige, som alltmer anses vara en samhällelig kontext med etnisk mångfald, på makronivå (Medin et

al., 2024). Således finns det ett behov av att bättre förstå etnisk identitetsutveckling i detta sammanhang.

Det övergripande syftet med denna doktorsavhandling var därmed att utforska etnicitet och etnisk identitetsutveckling inom en utbildningskontext. De tre studierna i avhandlingen genomfördes inom forskningsprojektet *the Gothenburg Research Program on Identity, Culture, and Ethnicity*. Studie I var en kvalitativ studie med datainsamling genom tio fokusgruppsdiskussioner med lärarstudenter. Studie II och Studie III var kvantitativa studier med datainsamling genom frågeformulär vid fyra tillfällen och inkluderade elever i årskurs 1 på gymnasiet (16 årsålder).

Med avsikt att få en kontextualiserad förståelse för hur etnicitet adresseras inom den utbildningskontext som förbereder ungdomars framtida lärare undersökte Studie I hur etnicitet ramades in inom lärarutbildningen, utifrån lärarstudenters erfarenheter. Studien inkluderade 42 lärarstudenter som studerade sitt sista år av lärarutbildningen med inriktning mot högstadie- och gymnasieåldrar. Genom en tematisk analys av fokusgruppsdiskussionerna identifierades två övergripande teman. Det första övergripande temat visade att lärarstudenter erfar att etnicitet ramades in som någonting som berör "andra", vilka benämndes genom epitet som "annan bakgrund", "icke-svensk", "icke-vit" eller "invandrare". Å ena sidan framställdes "andra" genom ett fokus på problem eller bristande förmågor och å andra sidan framställdes "andra" som resurser inom lärarutbildningen. Det andra övergripande temat visade att lärarstudenter erfar att etnicitet ramades in som ett känsligt ämne. Den upplevda känsligheten handlade delvis om lärarstudenters egna rädslor eller farhågor om att delta i etnicitetsrelaterade diskussioner. Känslighet relaterades även till uttryck av rasism inom lärarutbildningen. Sammantaget tyder resultaten på behov av att kritiskt granska den ensidiga inramning av etnicitet som någonting som berör "andra", behov av mer strukturerat stöd för lärarstudenter vid sådana kritiska diskussioner, samt ett behov av att hantera rasism inom denna viktiga utbildningskontext.

Studie II och Studie III ämnade att bidra till den begränsade psykologiska forskningen om etnisk identitetsutveckling i Sverige, samt till den begränsade interventionsforskningen om hur man kan stödja ungdomars etniska identitet för att uppnå positiva psykosociala och

akademiska utfall. Studie II undersökte huruvida en skolbaserad intervention, *the Identity Project* (Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2016), hade en inverkan på hur mycket ungdomar ägnade sig åt beteendemässigt utforskande (*exploration participation*) och abstrakt sökande (*exploration search*) i relation till sina egendefinierade etniska identiteter, samt graden till vilken ungdomar upplevde att de hade en tydlig förståelse för vad deras etniska identitet betyder för dem (*resolution*). Studien utforskade även huruvida interventionen påverkade graden till vilken ungdomar hade en positiv känsla i relation till sina etniska identiteter (*private regard*) samt graden till vilken ungdomar ansåg att deras etniska identitet var en viktig del för vilka de är i stort (*centrality*). Resultaten indikerade att interventionen hade en samtidig, initial och positiv inverkan på ungdomars beteendemässiga utforskande av sina etniska identiteter samt deras förståelse för vad deras etniska identitet betyder för dem. Interventionen hade enbart en positiv långsiktig inverkan på ungdomars beteendemässiga utforskande. Inga effekter observerades för abstrakt utforskande, hur ungdomar kände i relation till sina etniska identiteter eller hur viktigt de ansåg att denna identitetsdomän var för vilka de är. Interventionseffekterna skiljde sig inte åt för elever med minoritets- och majoritetsbakgrunder. Sammantaget påverkade interventionen främst den komponent av etnisk identitet som den mest uttryckligen syftar till att påverka.

Studie III byggde vidare på Studie II och undersökte huruvida den skolbaserade interventionen hade en indirekt effekt på psykosociala och akademiska utfall (övergripande sammanhängande identitet, övergripande identitetsförvirring, självkänsla, livstillfredsställelse, depressiva symtom och akademiskt engagemang) genom att först påverka ungdomars beteendemässiga utforskande av sin etniska identitet och graden till vilken ungdomar upplevde att de hade en tydlig förståelse för vad deras etniska identitet betyder för dem. Studien undersökte även huruvida interventionen modererade sambanden mellan graden till vilken ungdomar upplevde att de hade en tydlig förståelse för vad deras etniska identitet betyder för dem och senare psykosociala och akademiska utfall, det vill säga, huruvida interventionen stärkte dessa samband. Resultaten indikerade att interventionen hade en positiv indirekt effekt på psykosociala och akademiska utfall genom ungdomarnas tydligare förståelse för vad deras

etniska identitet betyder för dem. Med en tydligare förståelse för vad deras etniska identitet betyder för dem så fick ungdomar en mer sammanhängande övergripande identitet och minskade i graden av övergripande identitetsförvirring. Med andra ord, en tydligare förståelse för betydelsen av en del av identiteten gav upphov till att förstå sig själv bättre i stort. Vidare framkom att en tydligare förståelse för betydelsen av etnisk identitet gav bättre självkänsla, högre grad av livstillfredsställelse, lägre grad av depressiva symtom samt mer studieengagemang. Vidare framkom att de positiva sambanden mellan ungdomars förståelse för betydelsen av deras etniska identitet och senare psykosociala och akademiska utfall inte modererades av interventionen, eller av ungdomars minoritets- eller majoritetsbakgrunder. Således är det möjligt att sambanden mellan högre grad av förståelse för betydelsen av sin etniska identitet och positiva psykosociala och akademiska utfall kan vara normativa för ungdomsåren.

List of Studies

This dissertation thesis is based on the following three papers, referred to in the text by their Roman numerals:

- I. Abdullahi, A. K., Berne, S., Juang, L. P., & Friséen, A. (2024). Framing Ethnicity in Initial Teacher Education: A Focus Group Study with Student Teachers. *Identity*, 24(4), 269–287. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15283488.2024.2366905>
- II. Abdullahi, A. K., Syed, M., Juang, L. P., Berne, S., Hwang, C. P., & Friséen, A. (2024). Evaluating a School-Based Intervention on Adolescents' Ethnic-racial Identity in Sweden. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 53, 2423–2442. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-024-02046-y>
- III. Abdullahi, A. K., Juang, L. P., Syed, M., & Friséen, A. (2025). *Psychosocial and Academic Outcomes of an Ethnic-racial Identity Intervention in Sweden*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

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Introduction

Although identity can develop throughout the lifespan, it is particularly salient during adolescence as youth are increasingly concerned with questions about who they are (Crocetti, 2017; Erikson, 1968). The increased salience of identity is thought to be fueled by developmental changes such as going through puberty, cognitive development, and confronting both opportunities and expectations from one's social or societal contexts (Crocetti, 2017; van Doeselaar et al., 2019; Erikson, 1968). Importantly, identity is multifaceted and various domains of identity can be more or less prominent in different periods of life. One domain of identity that has been extensively researched in relation to adolescence is ethnic-racial identity (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). From a psychological perspective, ethnic-racial identity is defined as a multidimensional construct that is characterized by individuals' thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and experiences related to their self-identified ethnic-racial group memberships (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014).

Ethnic-racial identity is considered an especially salient identity domain in ethnically diverse societal contexts and has mostly been studied in the U.S. with a focus on minoritized youth (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Schwartz et al., 2014). The accumulated research findings indicate that developing a sense of ethnic-racial identity has benefits to youth psychosocial and academic adjustment such as more positively loaded self-concepts (Schwartz et al., 2009), more positive wellbeing (Smith & Silva, 2011), and academic achievement (Miller-Cotto & Byrnes, 2016). Furthermore, a more developed ethnic-racial identity is also associated with less maladjustment (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). Similar findings have been observed in some European contexts (Cavdar et al., 2021; Schotte et al., 2018; Vedder & Virta, 2005; Virta et al., 2004). Nevertheless, despite a large body of research indicating positive associations between ethnic-racial identity and youth psychosocial and academic adjustment, there is limited knowledge of effective interventions that can support youth toward the associated benefits (Marks et al., 2020; Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2016).

This is especially true in Sweden, a societal context that is increasingly acknowledged as being ethnically diverse at the macro-level (Medin et al., 2024). Thus, there is a need to better understand youth identity development with a focus on the understudied ethnic-racial identity domain in this context.

The overarching aim of this dissertation thesis was to address ethnicity and ethnic-racialized identity in Swedish educational contexts. First, to gain a contextualized understanding of how ethnicity is addressed in a relevant educational context, Study I explored student teachers' experiences of how ethnicity is framed in initial teacher education, an important educational context that prepares future teachers of adolescents. Second, to contribute to the limited psychological research on ethnic-racialized identity in Sweden, and to the limited intervention research on how to support youth ethnic-racialized identity development, Study II examined whether a school-based intervention, the Identity Project, could impact ethnic-racialized identity process components (exploration participation, exploration search, and resolution) and content components (private regard and centrality). Expanding on Study II, Study III examined if the intervention could impact adolescents' psychosocial and academic adjustment through the processes of exploration participation and resolution, and examined whether the intervention moderated the relationship between resolution and later psychosocial and academic adjustment.

In the following sections of this thesis, ethnic-racial(ized) identity and related underlying terms are defined, followed by a Swedish sociohistorical contextualization of the terms race and ethnicity, and the relevance of educational contexts. Next, the theoretical framework of the thesis is outlined and is followed by a review of the literature on ethnic-racialized identity, including the school-based Identity Project intervention and adherent evaluation studies. Subsequently, the three dissertation studies and their findings are summarized and, finally, discussed.

Defining Ethnic-racial(ized) Identity

The meta-construct ethnic-racial identity has been operationalized in the U.S. and was for a long time divided into two related yet separate bodies of literature: racial identity literature (e.g., Cross et al., 1999; Sellers et al., 1998) and ethnic identity literature (e.g., Phinney, 1990). Both racial identity and ethnic identity are founded on social group memberships, that is, they are considered social identities (Cokley, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2014). However, the underlying terms race and ethnicity capture different aspects of people's lives and how they come to understand their experiences and who they are in the world (Umaña-Taylor, 2016). The term race refers to the social categorization of people based on phenotypic characteristics, which historically, and contemporarily, has been used to legitimize hierarchical and unequal distribution of resources and power across groups (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Although skin color is often the focus of discussions on race, other phenotypic characteristics that might affect how people are socially categorized are also encompassed, for example, facial features or hair texture. In a context of systemic racism and unjust treatment of minoritized peoples within the social fabrics of the U.S., the notions of race came to have substantial social, psychological, and behavioral implications based on an ideology that emphasized differences across groups while stressing similarities within groups (Helms, 1990). Consequently, racial identity has been defined as a collective identity of any group of people socialized to think of themselves as a racial group (Helms & Cook, 1999). Ethnicity is also socially constructed and is more often described through the lens of culture, referring to a group of people who have a subjective belief of a shared history, or a shared cultural heritage, such as language or traditions (Phinney, 1996; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). Ethnic identity has thus been conceptualized as a subjective sense of group membership in ethnic groups, and can include a sense of belonging, ethnic group knowledge, participation in cultural group activities, and a positive ethnic group evaluation (Cokley, 2007).

Although many scholars have argued the importance of acknowledging conceptual differences between racial identity and ethnic identity (Phinney & Ong, 2007), some have used the terms as though they

were interchangeable (Cokley, 2007; Johnston-Guerrero, 2016), and have argued that a combined racial-ethnic-cultural identity construct should be used instead as the concepts overlap “at the level of lived experiences to the point that there is little reason to associate each construct with a distinct identity constellation” (Cross & Cross, 2008 p. 156). Indeed, empirical studies have reported that measures of racial identity and ethnic identity are highly correlated (Cross & Cross, 2008; Hall & Carter, 2006), suggesting that there is significant overlap. However, the constructs seemingly also differ. Thus, the research field has faced challenges concerning comparisons of research findings across studies, and ultimately called for clarity in relation to the use of racial and ethnic identity constructs (Cokley, 2007).

In an effort to integrate knowledge from racial and ethnic identity literatures, scholars in the Ethnic-Racial Identity in the 21st Century Study Group proposed the use of the construct ethnic-racial identity, conceptualized as a multidimensional meta-construct that acknowledges both the cultural and racialized experiences that can impact people’s understanding of their identity (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). The meta-construct was conceptualized as including both process and content components. Ethnic-racial identity processes refer to the ways in which people develop and maintain their ethnic-racial identities and content components refer to the beliefs and attitudes that people have about their ethnic-racial group memberships. Specific process and content components that are central to the dissertation studies are defined in the theoretical framework of this thesis.

Note that the term ethnic-racialized identity will be used subsequently in this thesis. That is, the potential impacts of both culture and racialization on identity development are acknowledged, in alignment with the Ethnic-Racial Identity in the 21st Century Study Group (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). However, grounded in the Swedish sociohistorical context outlined in the following sections, “racial identity” or a direct translation to the Swedish “*rasidentitet*” [race identity] was not a suitable alternative to use with study participants due to common pseudoscientific connotations concerning the term race (von Brömssen, 2021). Thus, the term ethnic-identity was used with participants. As will become evident in

the following sections, ethnicity (and culture) has over time been introduced as a contemporary proxy for race in Sweden, and the terms are linked in similar ways as in the U.S. (Groglopo, 2015). The term racialization captures the processes through which people ascribe themselves and others “race”, “ethnicity”, or “culture” (Miles, 1993).

The Role of Context

Although the psychological study of identity generally focuses on the individual’s understanding of who they are, identity does not develop in a vacuum but rather develops in relation to one’s social and societal contexts (Erikson, 1968; Galliher et al., 2017; Rogers et al., 2021). As this dissertation aims to address ethnicity and ethnic-racialized identity, the following section begins with a broad sociohistorical contextualization concerning the terms race and ethnicity in Sweden. This can be understood as the macro-context in which the three dissertation studies are embedded (Rogers et al., 2021). Next, the focus shifts to the relevance of educational contexts, which can be understood as the micro-contexts in which the three dissertation studies are embedded.

Race and Ethnicity in a Swedish Sociohistorical Context

One aspect of the Swedish sociohistorical context that has been relatively neglected in discussions concerning race and ethnicity is Sweden’s participation in European colonial expansionism (Schough, 2008). Nevertheless, Sweden, and the Nordics, have long and intricate historic ties with the European colonial expansion, and scholars in the Nordic region highlight Sweden’s bouts of colonial pursuits in the Baltic region, and on the African, Asian, and North American continents between the 16th to 19th century (Ericsson, 2016; Fur, 2013; Groglopo & Suárez-Krabbe, 2023). Some scholars further emphasize the continuities of colonial involvement through “the fact that Sámi land was colonized by Denmark-Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia over a long period of time, and that the region remains, to all effects and purposes, a colony of these nation states” (Höglund & Burnett, 2019). Although race is often understood in relation to its use in the early to mid 1900s, as will be outlined next, historians

emphasize that discourses focused on differentiation, perceived lack of “purity”, or lack of skills (e.g., in treatment of indigenous Sámi populations) existed as early as the period of Swedish colonial expansionism (Ericsson, 2016).

Like several countries in Europe, race is contemporarily a contested term in Swedish public, political, and scholarly debate as well as colloquially in informal settings (Juang et al., 2023; von Brömssen, 2021). The distancing from the term is largely attributed to Sweden’s historical legacy of engaging in racial constructs through eugenics and social engineering, heavily influenced by Social Darwinism and race biology (Broberg & Tydén, 2005; von Brömssen, 2021; Ericsson, 2016; McEachrane, 2018; Osanami Törngren, 2019; Spektorowski, 2004). Laws concerning eugenics and racial hygiene were promoted by the Swedish government (Broberg & Roll-Hansen, 2005), and gained legitimacy through a broad support of the scientific community, with the pseudo-scientific knowledge production spearheaded by the State Institute for Race Biology during the early to mid 20th century (Schough, 2008; Wasniowski, 2018). During this period, race was seen as a biologically based hierarchical system of categorization, conceptualizing the “Swedish race” as “the whitest of the white” and the most pure and impeccable white race globally (Hansson, 2023, p.171; see also Groglopo & Suárez-Krabbe, 2023; Hübinette & Lundström, 2014; Keskinen et al., 2009). Such iterations of race biology were used to legitimize state-sanctioned oppressive and violent politics toward indigenous and national minorities, including the Sámi, Roma, Jewish, Tornedalians, and Swedish Finns, and included mass sterilization of groups deemed ‘degenerate’ as well as mass displacement of indigenous communities (Spektorowski & Mizrachi, 2008; Mulinari & Neergaard, 2017; Schough, 2008; Wasniowski, 2018).

Race biology largely lost its legitimacy in Sweden (and Europe) after WWII and was gradually abandoned as an analytical social category (Goldberg, 2006; Miles, 1989). It is for example evident in discussions concerning migration in the 1960s and 1970s, where the term race was rarely employed (Brännström, 2016, p. 35; von Brömssen, 2021). From the mid 1970s, the term ethnicity started to be introduced in official contexts, and eventually replaced race in state legislation (von Brömssen, 2021).

Ethnicity is the official and more accepted term compared to race and is defined as “Ethnicity refers to someone belonging to a group of people who have the same national or ethnic origin, skin color, or other similar characteristics. Everyone has at least one ethnicity. People who belong to an ethnic minority often identify as both, for example, Sámi or Chilean and Swedish” (Equality Ombudsman, 2020). It is also the definition presented to participants in the three dissertation studies.

On one hand, the erasure of the term race in European contexts has been argued to be a step toward eradicating mistreatment based on illusions of biological differences and was considered a potential leap toward equal treatment of all peoples (Hübinette & Lundström, 2023). However, the approach has also been critiqued for being color-evasive considering prevalent ethnicity/race-based discrimination in European contexts (Eurobarometer, 2019). Save the Children’s (2021) report on 1117 school pupil’s perspectives on racism across 32 Swedish schools found that approximately half of the participants had experienced, seen, or heard something racist targeted at someone’s skin color, perceived ethnicity, or religion once or several times in school. Consequently, while “not seeing color”, inhabitants still experience discrimination due to the color of their skin or in reference to their ethnic backgrounds (Eurobarometer, 2019; Save the Children, 2021). Furthermore, despite race linguistically being replaced by ethnicity in Sweden, processes of differentiation that ascribe groups of people as having stable inherited characteristics are contemporarily expressed in terms of people’s perceived ethnicities, cultures, religions, or migration status (Groglopo et al., 2023; Hübinette & Mählck, 2015; von Brömssen, 2021). Perceived ethnicity and phenotype are thus both relevant social markers, albeit not explicitly named through the term race (Jugert et al., 2022). Against this backdrop, ethnic-racialized identity is a relevant construct to consider in Swedish contexts (Juang et al., 2023), and is the focus of Study II and Study III.

Migration

Although heterogeneity and periods of emigration and immigration have always existed, Sweden is increasingly described as an ethnically diversified nation at the macro-level, which is attributed to increased immigration over

the past few decades (Medin et al., 2024; Statistics Sweden, 2022). Statistically, such ethnic diversity is officially denoted through familial migration histories (Statistics Sweden, 2022). Individuals are categorized as having a Swedish background if they themselves and at least one of their parents are born in Sweden. Those who are born outside of Sweden or have two parents born outside of Sweden are statistically categorized as having “foreign background”. As such 26.9% of the population are born outside of Sweden or have two parents born outside of Sweden, while 73.1% of the population are born in Sweden and have at least one parent born in Sweden. Furthermore, 40% of children and youth younger than 19 years of age have at least one parent born outside of Sweden (Statistics Sweden, 2024).

Sweden in particular has been described as ambivalent at the macro and micro levels in relation to migration (Medin et al., 2024). While the country has ranked high on so-called integration friendly policies directed at individuals who have migrated to Sweden (Solano & Huddleston, 2020), offers services to support Swedish language acquisition, and offers mother tongue education for minoritized youth in schools (Straszer & Wedin, 2020), it is also a country that has seen marked restrictions in relation to migration and asylum policies (Schierup et al., 2018). Furthermore, Sweden has received criticism for not adequately addressing issues with racism and hate crimes, and not adequately protecting the rights of asylum seekers and indigenous populations (Medin et al., 2024; United Nations Association of Sweden, 2020). Migration is highly politicized, with political discourse more openly including nationalistic rhetoric and monocultural ideals (Shierup et al., 2018). Thus, while Sweden has some of the most “immigration friendly” policies compared to other European countries, these ideals may not always translate into the lives of many minoritized youth (Gyberg, 2019).

School Contexts

Schools are important socialization contexts for youth (Aldana & Byrd, 2015). They play a central role not only in supporting and providing opportunities to develop beneficial skills such as critical thinking or perspective-taking (Barrett, 2018; Bayram Özdemir et al., 2024), but are

also crucial arenas that can impact adolescents' opportunities to explore and better understand who they are (Camacho et al., 2018; Schachner et al., 2024), and how they feel about their ethnic-racialized identities (Gharaci et al., 2019). Schools can contribute considerably to adolescents' ethnic-racialized identities, especially through the role of teachers in educational contexts (Bayram Özdemir et al., 2024). When teachers provide adolescents with in-class opportunities to reflect on the meaning of their own ethnic-racialized identities, adopt a pluralistic approach to such identities, and support identity related conversations and learning between peers, youth are more likely to explore and better understand who they are with respect to their ethnic-racialized identities and who they are in general (Camacho et al., 2018; Schachner et al., 2024). Thus, school contexts are particularly relevant for adolescents' identity work, and are the micro-contexts of both Study II and Study III. Both studies evaluate aspects of a school-based intervention that is designed to support youth' exploration of their own ethnic-racialized identities by providing in-class opportunities for reflection and critical discussions with peers, and with the support of adults. The intervention will be described in more detail later in the dissertation.

Based on the central role of the school context (Aldana & Byrd, 2015; Bayram Özdemir et al., 2024), and the crucial role that teachers can play in impacting or supporting youth ethnic-racialized identity development (Camacho et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2020), it is important to understand what experiences or preparedness teachers have regarding ethnicity-related topics (Bayram Özdemir et al., 2024). Thus, Study I contributes with its focus on gaining a contextualized understanding of how ethnicity is framed in initial teacher education, an important educational context that prepares future teachers of adolescents.

Initial Teacher Education

Global migration and ethnic diversity at the societal level in many European cities can often be reflected in school classrooms and has influenced proposals directed at initial teacher education (European Commission, 2017). In relation to such diversity, there have been increased calls for initial teacher education to better prepare teachers for work in

ethnically diverse classrooms. The preparation of teachers as well as the quality of teaching have been highlighted as crucial foundations to promote equitable education for all youth regardless of their backgrounds (Forghani-Arani et al., 2019). Relatedly, university-based initial teacher education has been criticized for its challenges to promote teachers who can effectively teach increasingly ethnically diverse student populations (Cochran-Smith et al., 2015; European Commission, 2017). Considering the increased calls for initial teacher education to better prepare teachers for ethnic diversity in classrooms, this thesis argues for a need to gain a contextualized understanding of ethnicity (Galliher et al., 2017) in this specific educational context.

The international literature concerning race and ethnicity in initial teacher education, mainly in the U.S. and U.K, has focused on a wide array of topics, including themes such as a “mismatch” between a student body that increasingly includes minoritized populations and a teaching faculty that predominantly includes majoritized white teachers (Bhopal & Rhamie, 2014; Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015). As teaching curricula have increasingly focused on preparing majoritized student teachers to teach minoritized students, initial teacher education has faced critique for assuming that the teacher work force is homogenously white despite including minoritized student teachers (Bell & Busey, 2021; Dillard, 2019). Nevertheless, the literature also highlights implemented strategies to increase the number of minoritized student teachers who have been described as important for the ethnic-racialized diversification of teacher education (Bell & Busey, 2021; Haddix, 2017). However, diversity in relation to ethnicity or race has generally focused on minoritized student teachers, who have been presented as representatives for minoritized communities (Bell & Busey, 2021; Haddix, 2017; Sleeter, 2017), and who have reported experiences such as tokenization, being silenced, and facing racialized tropes (Bell & Busey, 2021; Endo, 2015; Irizarry, 2011).

Concerning Swedish initial teacher education, ethnicity has seemingly been addressed more implicitly through related terms, such as diversity discourses (Rosén & Wedin, 2018). Diversity discourses have been found to focus on minoritized student teachers who were seen as the embodiment of ethnic diversity, and who were thus expected to add value

to initial teacher education by being so-called cultural representatives (Rosén & Wedin, 2018). Other studies have focused on general teacher norms in which teacher educators expressed wishes to acknowledge ethnic diversity in their teaching, but also used strategies that risked stigmatizing students who were seen as “non-Swedish” and who were contrasted to the label “Swedish” (Åberg, 2008). Notably, Åberg (2008) found that the label “Swedish” was not assigned specific content while minoritized student teachers were viewed as embodying diversity. Furthermore, Bayati (2014) specifically focused on the experiences of minoritized student teachers, who expressed experiences of being “othered” and of institutional everyday racism. While the findings from these ethnographic studies related to ethnicity, Study I in this dissertation sought to more explicitly explore how student teachers experienced that ethnicity is framed in initial teacher education, an important educational context that may indirectly hold meaning for the messages that adolescents could receive about various ethnic-racialized identities in schools.

Theoretical Framework

The field of ethnic-racialized identity is dominated by two major theoretical perspectives, both of which have bearing on the dissertation studies. First, a developmental model of ethnic-racialized identity, informed by the psychosocial theory of development (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980) will be presented. This perspective is central to the intervention and the theoretically motivated conceptual model that is examined in Study II and Study III. Next, a social psychological perspective with a focus on social identity theory is presented. Social identity theory has informed the intervention in Study II and Study III. Moreover, although Study I did not use social identity theory as its point of departure, the theory is utilized to discuss the study findings.

Developmental Model of Ethnic-racialized Identity

Phinney's (1990, 1992) developmental model of ethnic identity expands on Eriksonian (1968) and Marcian (1966) theory by focusing on ethnicity in the process of youth identity development (Moffitt & Rogers, 2022). It emphasizes meaningful exploration and subsequent commitment as the two vital process components through which adolescents establish a sense of ethnic identity over time. Here, exploration refers to the ways in which youth pursue information and experiences that may help them learn more about the subjective meaning of their ethnic backgrounds (Phinney, 1990). This type of exploration can be conceptualized as a form of *search* and consists of behaviors that could be more inward facing (e.g., reading books) and do not necessarily result in youth having learned something specific about the meaning of their ethnicities. (Syed et al., 2013). Furthermore, the process of commitment entails developing a sense of group memberships and includes an affective component regarding the extent to which youth feel a connection or attachment to their group memberships (Phinney, 1990; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). Studies concerning ethnic-racialized identity commitment often report a composite score that combines

commitment with, for example, search and has in such instances been positively associated with self-esteem and negatively associated with depressive symptoms (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). However, due to the use of a combined ethnic-racialized identity construct, it is difficult to ascertain how each construct contributes to the given associations (Syed et al., 2013).

Building on the psychosocial theory of development (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980), the developmental model of ethnic identity (Phinney, 1990), and racial identity literature (Sellers et al., 1998), Umaña-Taylor et al. (2004) retained an exploration dimension of ethnic-racialized identity and expanded on the developmental model by separating commitment into a process component, *resolution*, and a content component focused on affect (varyingly referred to in research as affirmation or private regard). In this model, exploration can be conceptualized as a form of *participation*, and includes participation in concrete, active behaviors that lead individuals to feel that they have learned something about their ethnicities (Syed et al., 2013). Indeed, there is evidence that participation and search constitute different factors of exploration. Participation has more consistently been found to be positively associated with well-being while search has been negatively associated with well-being (Syed et al., 2013). Thus, examining participation and search as separate constructs is warranted, and they are thus treated accordingly in Study II and Study III of this thesis.

Furthermore, the process component resolution is considered the cognitive aspect of ethnic-racialized identity and refers to the degree to which youth have a sense of clarity regarding the role of ethnicity for their lives (Umaña-Taylor, Douglass et al., 2018). Resolution, much like exploration, is considered crucial to the process of forming an identity in general and is argued by Umaña-Taylor (2018) to play a pertinent role in the formation of ethnic-racialized identity. Particularly, resolution that has been attained through a period of exploration is the goal of sound ethnic-racialized identity formation, and it is this proposed sequential increase in exploration then resolution that is at the heart of examination in Study II. Furthermore, in this conceptual model, increased resolution should be associated with better youth adjustment, and thus, this proposed link is evaluated in Study III.

By separating commitment into two constructs, Umaña-Taylor et al. (2004) highlighted an aspect of the content of ethnic-racialized identity, namely the extent to which youth have positive feelings about their self-identified ethnic-racialized group memberships (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). Ethnic-racialized identity is indeed conceptualized as a multidimensional meta-construct that also includes content components like *private regard* and *centrality* (Sellers et al., 1998). Private regard refers to the extent to which youth have positive feelings about their self-identified group memberships, and centrality is the extent to which ethnicity is an important part of one's identity. Study II included an examination of the process components exploration participation, exploration search, and resolution, as well as the content components private regard and centrality, while Study III included exploration participation and resolution.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory is one of the fundamental theories within social psychology and refers to a person's sense of self that results from their social group memberships (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Particularly, a personal sense of group belonging is at the heart of social identities. Tajfel and Turner (1979, 2004) distinguished between ascribed group memberships, which may denote being viewed as a group member but does not necessarily entail feeling oneself a part of such a group, from group memberships that entail a sense of group belonging that has been internalized and has become a part of a person's sense of who they are. The former does not suffice, while the latter is considered a requirement for forming social identities.

Furthermore, the group memberships from which people derive their social identities could be a source of self-esteem and positive affect on identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, the processes by which this positive sense of self-esteem is upheld entail some degree of social comparison that favors or values those who are seen as part of an "us", compared to those seen as part of a "them", also referred to as an "in-group" and "out-group" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 2004). The "out-group", broadly speaking, could encompass anyone perceived as different from

oneself. The act of distinguishing oneself from others contributes to the establishment of a sense of normalcy and one's place in the world. Thus, the idea or construct of the out-group plays a pivotal role in the formation of individuals' identities.

Importantly, in the studies that are the basis of this thesis, concepts such as race, ethnicity, and identity are considered socially constructed through interactions between individuals and groups (Ahmed, 2012; Erikson, 1968; Hall, 1997; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Hua and Wei (2016) for example argued that more or less implicit and explicit interpersonal interactions, small-talk, and discussions relating to nationality and ethnicity can be seen as acts of identity calibration in which identities can be “sought to be established, ascribed, challenged, denied, and/or resisted” (Hua & Wei, 2016, p. 450). People are thus not considered passive observers in social situations but rather active agents that on one hand could be influenced by ascribed social identities but could also negotiate them and influence their surroundings (Hua & Wei, 2016).

Social identity theory is relevant to the three dissertation studies. In Study II and Study III, social identity theory informs the design of the school-based intervention that is at the heart of examination by its emphasis on ethnic-racialized identity as an example of social identities. Relatedly, the intervention activities and discussions include both personal and group activities designed to provide opportunities for youth to reflect on their own identities, and to share experiences with peers with the support of group moderators. By sharing and comparing their experiences youth can explore both the commonalities they share with their peers and the sense of uniqueness they may experience in relation to who they are. Thus, in line with social identity theory, the intervention is designed to provide opportunities for youth to learn more about themselves in relation to their peers. The intervention will be described in more detail later in this thesis. Moreover, although social identity theory was not used as a theoretical point of departure in Study I, the theory is used to discuss the findings regarding the framing of ethnicity in initial teacher education.

Ethnic-racialized Identity and Youth Adjustment

The relationship between ethnic-racialized identity and youth adjustment has been studied through research approaches that combine different components of ethnic-racialized identity into a single overarching ethnic-racialized identity construct, and through more individualized approaches to specific components of ethnic-racialized identity. Both approaches are reflected in the reviewed literature in this thesis, and where possible, specific components are mentioned.

Developing a sense of ethnic-racialized identity has been linked better psychological adjustment among adolescents (Smith & Silva, 2011). Through a composite approach to minoritized adolescents' ethnic-racialized identity, Smith and Silva's (2011) meta-analysis examined associations between ethnic-racialized identity achievement and psychological adjustment. Achievement, defined as a composite score of ethnic-racialized identity exploration, commitment, and affirmation, was associated with higher levels of psychological wellbeing and self-esteem, and lower levels of depressive symptoms. The positive associations between ethnic-racialized identity achievement and measures of wellbeing and self-esteem respectively were stronger than the negative associations between ethnic-racialized identity achievement and depressive symptoms. Furthermore, the findings indicated that there were no significant differences between various minoritized groups (Smith & Silva, 2011). Thus, ethnic-racialized identity development could be both a promotive and protective factor in relation to youth adjustment, especially for minoritized populations.

Relatedly, ethnic-racialized identity defined as a composite score of exploration, commitment (resolution), affirmation (private regard), and a sense of belonging, has been positively associated with academic achievement for adolescents (Miller-Cotto & Byrnes, 2016). However, an individual approach to the included components of ethnic-racialized identity showed different patterns of associations depending on the

specific component at hand and depending on adolescents' ethnic-racialized backgrounds. Exploration, for example, was positively associated with academic achievement for Black adolescents but not for Latinx, Asian-American, or White adolescents. Moreover, affirmation was positively associated with academic achievement for both Black and White adolescents, but not for Asian-American or Latinx youth (Miller-Cotto & Byrnes, 2016). In other words, although positive links were observed in general, the findings suggest that the links between ethnic-racialized identity and youth adjustment can vary based on the included ethno-racialized backgrounds and the specific ethnic-racialized identity components that are being studied (Umaña-Taylor & Rivas-Drake, 2021). Thus, it is important to be clear about what facets of ethnic-racialized identity are being studied.

An individual approach to ethnic-racialized identity process components have found that a higher level of exploration participation was associated with higher levels of self-esteem, academic engagement, academic achievement, and was associated with lower levels of depressive symptoms, while resolution was associated with higher academic engagement and achievement for several groups of ethno-racially minoritized youth in the U.S. (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014).

Importantly, meta-analytic work on ethnic-racialized identity has also included examinations of the relationship between content components of ethnic-racialized identity and youth adjustment, with a particular focus on how youth feel about their ethnic-racialized identities (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014b). Having more positive feelings about one's ethnic-racialized identity, i.e., higher levels of private regard, has been associated with higher levels of wellbeing, self-esteem, academic engagement, and academic achievement, and has been associated with lower levels of maladjustment such as depressive symptoms, and internalizing and externalizing problems (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014b). The large body of research on ethnic-racialized identity has highlighted the importance of studying both process and content components of ethnic-racialized identity as they are both related to better psychosocial and academic adjustment and to clarity in youth's self-concept (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014).

Ethnic-racialized Identity in European Contexts

Beyond the U.S., there has been increased interest in studying ethnic-racialized identity in several European contexts (Juang et al., 2023). Studies on ethnic-racialized identity in Europe often adopt terminology such as “ethnic identity”, “cultural identity”, “heritage identity”, or “cultural heritage identity” rather than explicitly include the term race in the identity construct (Gyberg et al., 2018; Juang et al., 2020; Schotte et al., 2018). Nevertheless, they tend to acknowledge the potential role of racialization on youth identity development (Juang et al., 2021). European research on ethnic-racialized identity has also focused on minoritized youth and suggests that there is more mixed evidence for the associations between ethnic-racialized identity and psychosocial and academic adjustment (Erentaite et al., 2018). However, similar associations between components of ethnic-racialized identity and youth adjustment have been observed in some European countries. For minoritized youth in a German context, a higher level of ‘cultural heritage identity’ commitment (resolution) was associated with better self-esteem and satisfaction with life but was not associated with academic adjustment (Schotte et al., 2018). For minoritized youth in a U.K. context, exploration participation was positively associated with satisfaction with life, while resolution was positively associated with self-esteem (Cavdar et al., 2021).

Ethnic-racialized identity development among youth in Sweden is relatively understudied from a psychological perspective (Ferrer-Wreder et al., 2012; Gyberg et al., 2018; Svensson & Syed, 2019). Although few studies have addressed the potential links between ethnic-racialized identity and youth adjustment, such studies do exist. Limited studies that adopted an acculturation perspective on ‘ethnic identity’ found that a greater sense of ethnic identity belonging was positively associated with better psychological wellbeing among youth (Vedder & Virta, 2005; Virta et al., 2004). Thus, the findings in European contexts, including Sweden, suggest that ethnic-racialized identity components could potentially be mechanisms toward better youth adjustment. Study III will focus on this topic.

The Identity Project Intervention

Given the extensive research showcasing positive links between ethnic-racialized identity and psychosocial and academic adjustment, researchers in the U.S. asked the question of whether ethnic-racialized identity processes, exploration and resolution, can be promoted during adolescence, with the long-term goal of supporting youth psychosocial and academic adjustment (Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2016). Despite the cumulative knowledge of positive associations between ethnic-racialized identity and psychosocial and academic adjustment, there is still a scarcity in the intervention literature concerning how to adequately promote ethnic-racialized identity processes to attain benefits to youth adjustment (Marks et al., 2020). One intervention that was designed to do just that is the 8-week school-based intervention, the Identity Project (Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2016).

The intervention was developed in the U.S. and is grounded in the theory of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1968), in Marcia's (1980) extension of Eriksonian theory pertaining to the conceptualization of identity processes, as well as social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The intervention is designed to be a universal intervention, meaning that it is designed with all adolescents in mind, rather than only minoritized youth, which has been the norm in the study of ethnic-racialized identity (Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2016). The approach was based on the assumption that ethnic-racialized identity is a developmental task for all youth, emphasizing common processes in identity development while acknowledging that the content of identity may differ (Helms, 1990; Umaña-Taylor, Kornienko et al., 2018).

The eight intervention lessons are structured through a variety of in-class short information presentations and practical activities that encourage youth to participate in personal reflection and critical discussions with their classmates, and the moderators, on the socially constructed concepts of ethnicity and race (Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2016). The sessions include topics such as personal and social identities, challenging historic and contemporary stereotypes, discrimination, the potential influence of family (social not only biological family) and context

on ethnic-racialized identity, cultural traditions, and more (for more details, see Umaña-Taylor, Douglass et al., 2016). The intervention's primary aim is to spark a process of exploration regarding the potential personal meaning of students' self-identified group memberships to their ethnic-racialized identities.

In early descriptions of the intervention's conceptual model of change, the intervention was proposed to have a positive effect on post-intervention ethnic-racialized identity exploration and resolution, which in turn would be positively associated with later resolution. Later resolution would then be positively associated with global identity cohesion, which in turn would be positively associated with psychosocial and academic adjustment (Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2016). However, in U.S. based empirical evaluations of the intervention's conceptual model of change, the intervention was hypothesized to follow a chain of effects going from intervention to exploration, to later resolution, and finally, to psychosocial and academic adjustment (Umaña-Taylor, Douglass et al., 2018; Umaña-Taylor, Kornienko et al., 2018).

Prior Evaluations of the Identity Project Intervention

The intervention was first evaluated in the U.S. and included 15-year-old adolescents of varying ethnic-racialized self-identifications (Umaña-Taylor, Douglass et al., 2018). As expected, participants in the intervention group showed increased levels of ethnic-racialized identity exploration post-intervention, and exploration was in turn associated with a higher level of resolution. Furthermore, the intervention had a moderating effect so that exploration predicted later resolution for the intervention group but not the control group. The results thus supported the proposed chain reaction of the tested conceptual model.

A subsequent study focused on the intervention's potential indirect effect on youth psychosocial and academic adjustment found that the intervention group showed increased levels of global identity cohesion, self-esteem, higher grades, and a decreased level of depressive symptoms through a sequential intervention effect on ethnic-racialized identity exploration and resolution (Umaña-Taylor, Kornienko et al., 2018). The intervention did not have an indirect effect on academic engagement and

other-group orientation. Notably, each of the pathways going from ethnic-racialized identity exploration, to resolution, to the respective psychosocial and academic adjustment variables were compared descriptively for the intervention and control group, highlighting larger effects for the intervention group. These findings suggest that the intervention may have a moderating effect throughout the conceptual model, meaning that it might not only impact the mean levels of youth adjustment through exploration and resolution but might also strengthen the links between ethnic-racialized identity processes and adjustment. Although the first U.S. evaluation found that the intervention moderated the relationship between post-intervention exploration and later resolution (Umaña-Taylor, Douglass et al., 2018), it is unclear whether a moderating effect of the intervention exists throughout, motivating its examination in Study III.

Nevertheless, a moderating effect that was considered in the original evaluation of the intervention was the role of minoritization (Umaña-Taylor, Kornienko et al., 2018). Prior research has shown that youth with minoritized backgrounds consistently report higher levels on all facets of ethnic-racialized identity compared to majoritized youth (Moffitt & Rogers, 2022). Contextual factors such as a heightened risk of encountering ethnicity/race-based discrimination can push minoritized youth to reflect more on the role of race or ethnicity in their lives, while youth with majoritized backgrounds may perceive themselves to be the norm, and thus may not, to the same extent, have to reflect on the meaning of race or ethnicity to their identity (Moffitt & Juang, 2019). However, there were no differences in the observed intervention effects between youth with minoritized and majoritized ethnic-racialized identities when assessing the conceptual model of change (Umaña-Taylor, Douglass et al., 2018; Umaña-Taylor, Kornienko et al., 2018). However, a longitudinal assessment of the ethnic-racialized identity processes indicated that minoritized youth had a more positive increase in resolution from baseline to the first post-intervention follow-up measure compared to white youth, while white youth had a steeper increase in resolution post-intervention to the follow-up one year later (Sladek et al., 2021). Thus, although the groups ended up having the same levels of resolution a year later, their trajectories of change varied. The mixed findings regarding the intervention effects in

relation to minoritization highlight the importance of considering the role of minoritization in subsequent evaluations of the Identity Project, especially in sociocultural contexts where the conceptualization of minoritization can differ from the U.S. (Juang et al., 2023). Thus, potential differential effects based on minoritization was explored in Study II and Study III.

The overall positive intervention effects in the U.S. sparked a research interest in examining whether the intervention could also be effective in several European countries, where the intervention was eventually socioculturally adapted to the respective national contexts (Juang et al., 2023). A common thread in the various European adaptations of the intervention was to retain all intervention aims while adapting specific content. The Swedish evaluation retained all intervention aims and activities but changed aspects like using the term ‘ethnic identity’ and not ‘ethnic-racial identity’ with students, as racial identity labels are rarely used, and the term ‘race’ is highly contested due to a pseudo-biological understanding of the term (Juang et al., 2023; von Brömssen, 2021). However, the intervention retained discussions concerning ‘race’, racialization, and racism within a sociohistorical and contemporary Swedish context. Furthermore, as previously noted, participants were presented with the official definition of ethnicity in Sweden, which includes reference to both “ethnic” and phenotypic characteristics such as skin color, highlighting the racialization of ethnicity in the Swedish context. When filling out the measures of ethnic-racialized identity in Study II and Study III, youth were first asked to describe their “ethnic identities”, and in doing so could freely include both aspects of culture and racialization (and indeed some did). Participants then filled out the specific identity measures with their self-defined identities in mind. Furthermore, other adaptations included changing the sociohistorical settings of intervention activities, changing names or places, and including real stories of discrimination from Swedish archives. All activities and lesson goals of the original intervention were retained although their specific content differed from the U.S. version (Umaña-Taylor, et al., 2018; see Juang et al., 2023 for adaptation of the intervention in European contexts).

The European evaluations of the intervention's conceptual model of change thus far have mainly focused on examining the intervention's effect on ethnic-racialized identity exploration participation and resolution, with inconsistent evidence. At the beginning of the current dissertation work, the intervention had only been evaluated in Germany, where it was associated with increased levels of exploration participation for one of the two participating cohorts. Nevertheless, the intervention was not associated with changes in resolution or global identity. Interestingly, exploration participation, resolution, and global identity were all positively associated with psychosocial and academic adjustment regardless of whether students participated in the intervention or control group, supporting previous findings of positive associations between ethnic-racialized identity and youth adjustment (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014).

Next, the intervention was adapted and evaluated in Italy, where it had a positive effect on exploration participation. However, exploration participation was not associated with later resolution (Cecon et al., 2023). More recently, an Italian study focused solely on the intervention group found that youth with increasing levels of resolution (from low to average and high to higher levels of resolution) over a one-year period showed better psychosocial adjustment compared to youth with stable low or stable average levels of resolution (Cecon et al., 2024). Furthermore, youth with minoritized backgrounds were more represented in the group with high to higher levels of resolution.

The findings across the U.S., Germany, and Italy thus provide mixed evidence regarding the intervention's effects on ethnic-racialized identity processes. Furthermore, there is limited evidence of whether increased ethnic racialized identity processes lead to better psychosocial and academic adjustment in European contexts (for an exception, see Cecon et al., 2024). Thus, further evaluation work in more European contexts is warranted, particularly among adolescents in Sweden, an understudied and increasingly ethno-racially diverse context in Europe.

Building on Prior Work

The current dissertation studies sought to build upon prior research in various ways. Study I adopted a more explicit approach to the study of ‘ethnicity’ in a Swedish context by asking student teachers about their experiences of how ethnicity was framed in their education to becoming teachers of adolescents. How ethnicity is addressed in teacher preparation could indirectly have meaning for the messages that adolescents receive about various ethnic-racialized identities in schools, and could inform how prepared teachers feel about supporting youth with respect to their ethnic-racialized identities. Furthermore, while Study II and Study III examined the effects of the Identity Project intervention in a new sociocultural context, Sweden, the studies also sought to add nuance to our understanding of the intervention effects. Study II examined a stricter conceptual model of change compared to the original U.S. evaluation study (Umaña-Taylor, Douglass et al., 2018), included both process and content components of ethnic-racialized identity, separated ethnic-racialized identity exploration into two facets (participation and search), and went beyond the intervention’s conceptual model of change by also exploring the trajectories of change for each included ethnic-racialized identity component. Study III included both the indirect and moderating effect of the intervention to gain a better understanding of whether the intervention not only increased the average levels of youth adjustment through exploration participation and resolution, but whether it also impacted the strength in relationships between resolution and later youth adjustment. Furthermore, Study III separated the psychosocial adjustment variable global identity into its theoretically motivated, and empirically tested, facets: identity synthesis and identity confusion (Bogaerts et al., 2021), and included satisfaction with life as a psychosocial adjustment outcome given its positive associations with ethnic-racialized identity components in prior research (Cavdar et al., 2021; Schotte et al., 2018).

Summary of Studies

General Aim

The aim of this thesis was to address ethnicity and ethnic-racialized identity in Swedish educational contexts. First, to gain a contextualized understanding of how ethnicity is addressed in a relevant educational context, Study I explored student teachers' experiences of how ethnicity is framed in initial teacher education, an important educational context that prepares future teachers of adolescents. Second, to contribute to the limited psychological research on ethnic-racialized identity in Sweden, and to the limited intervention research on how to support youth ethnic-racialized identity development, Study II examined whether a school-based intervention, the Identity Project, could impact the process and content components of ethnic-racialized identity. Relatedly, Study III examined if the intervention could impact adolescents' psychosocial and academic adjustment through the processes of ethnic-racialized identity exploration participation and resolution.

The Research Program

The three dissertation studies were conducted within the Gothenburg Research Program on Identity, Culture, and Ethnicity, led by Professor Ann Frisé. The project was funded by Sten A Olsson Foundation for Research and Culture. The funding agent had no role in the design, data-collection, analyses, or interpretation, of data. The studies were ethically approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (Dnr Study I: 2020-06520; Study II and Study III: 2021-04027).

Study I

The purpose of Study I was to explore how student teachers experienced that ethnicity was framed in their initial teacher education, an important educational context that prepares future teachers of adolescents.

Method

Participants and Procedure. Students ($n = 399$) in their final year of initial teacher education to become secondary school teachers (7th-12th grade), at three universities in southwestern Sweden, were invited to the study through an information letter to their student e-mail accounts. A total of 42 student teachers who expressed an interest to participate in the study were included. Approximately two thirds of the participants (66%) were enrolled in a four-to-five-year long magistrate program of education. The remaining third of participants (34%) were enrolled in a one-and-a-half-year long supplementary pedagogical education program as they had already acquired academic competencies in relevant teaching subjects. The participants ranged between 23 and 59 years of age, 38% self-identified as women, 43% as men, and 19% did not respond regarding gender. In accordance with Statistics Sweden (2022), 76% of participants were born in Sweden to at least one parent born in Sweden, i.e., majoritized, and 21% were either themselves born abroad or had two parents who were born abroad, i.e., minoritized, and 2% did not respond regarding nativity (final percent lost due to rounding). In comparison, 26% of individuals in Sweden were born abroad or had two parents born abroad at the time of data collection (Statistics Sweden, 2020). Students' teaching subjects were mainly within the social sciences (civics, history, religion) and languages (Swedish as a first or second language and English). The participants were divided into a pre-defined number of 10 focus groups. All focus group discussions were conducted through a video communication platform due to the Covid-19 pandemic and were facilitated by two moderators.

Measures. In the focus groups, a semi-structured interview guide was used to prompt discussions and included three main areas of questions: Student teachers' experiences regarding if or how ethnicity was addressed in their education, experiences regarding if or how student teachers' own

ethnicities were addressed in their education, and finally if there was a need to change anything in how ethnicity was addressed in teacher education, and if so, in what way. At the end of each focus group the participants filled out a short online questionnaire on demographics including age, which educational subject matters they were training in, type of education, own and parental place(s) of birth, and self-identified gender.

Data Analyses. Data analysis was guided by the research question, and thus, the goal of the qualitative analysis was to understand student teachers' experiences of how ethnicity was framed in their initial teacher education. To that end, inductive thematic analysis was used in accordance with the reiterative steps outlined in Braun & Clarke (2006). Each focus group transcript was analyzed as its own "unit", and attention was paid to patterns across groups. Codes and adherent quotes were reviewed and organized into themes and subthemes, and were repeatedly reviewed by the research group in relation to the transcripts.

Main Findings

Table 1 Major themes and subthemes in Study I

Major Theme	Subtheme
Ethnicity concerns "others"	Ethnicity equated with minoritized "others"
	"Others" framed through focus on problems or lack of skills
	"Others" framed as resources
Ethnicity framed as sensitive	Fear of discussing ethnicity
	Racism and sensitivity

Through the thematic analysis, we identified two major themes with three and two subthemes respectively (Table 1). The first major theme revealed that student teachers experienced that ethnicity was framed as something that concerned minoritized "others" who were assigned categorical identifications (e.g. "not Swedish", "immigrant", "not white", "refugee", "foreign"). Ethnicity was seen as relevant to discuss based on the presence or potential presence of minoritized students in initial teacher education or

minoritized pupils in school classrooms. On the other hand, majoritized “Swedes” or “white” people were depicted as void of ethnicity or culture. Furthermore, students expressed that “others” were framed through a focus on problems or lack of skills, such as homogenizing stereotypes that mostly depicted minoritized populations in contexts of war, as victims of honor-related violence or through presumed lack in language skills. However, student teachers expressed that “others” were also framed as resources within initial teacher education, resources that could help majoritized student teachers learn about experiences that they did not personally encounter.

The second major theme indicated that ethnicity was framed as something sensitive and difficult to address. Sensitivities partly related to students’ own fears such as a fear of saying the wrong thing, fear of a “misstep”, of not knowing enough, being misunderstood, or a fear of offending others. Further, participants shared that some students would stay silent during classroom discussions due to these fears, and some discussions could be explosive or uncomfortable. Furthermore, the framing of ethnicity as sensitive was also related to expressions of racism in initial teacher education. Examples of racism included negative stereotypes or homogenizing portrayals of minoritized populations (e.g., in books, plays, during classroom discussions), racist “jokes” about minoritized populations, or derogatory racial slurs, which were varyingly expressed by students and teacher educators. On one hand, some student teachers experienced that they were ascribed sensitivity by their classmates when they sought to challenge racism. In contrast, other students experienced that their classmates were too sensitive.

In sum, Study I showed that ethnicity was framed as something that concerned minoritized “others” and that it was framed as something sensitive. The study highlights a need for more critical approaches to the framing of ethnicity, a need to disrupt racism in initial teacher education, and suggests a need for structured support in how to engage in this topic, given the overall framing of ethnicity as something sensitive.

Study II

The purpose of the second study was to examine if the 8-week school-based intervention, the Identity Project, impacted ethnic-racialized identity exploration (participation and search), resolution, private regard, and centrality among adolescents in the Swedish 10th grade. The following hypotheses were tested:

1. In the intervention's conceptual model of change, the intervention was expected to be positively associated with post-intervention (T1) exploration (participation and search), which in turn was expected to be positively associated with post-intervention (T2) resolution, when controlling for post-intervention (T1) resolution.
2. Concerning change over time, the intervention was expected to be positively associated with the trajectories (slopes) of process components exploration participation, exploration search, and resolution.

The potential role of content components private regard and centrality in the intervention's conceptual model of change was explored. How private regard and centrality changed over time and potentially as an effect of the intervention was also explored. Finally, potential differential intervention effects based on whether youth had minoritized or majoritized backgrounds was explored throughout.

Method

Participants and Procedure. The study included 509 adolescents in the 10th grade ($M_{\text{age}} = 16.28$, $SD = 0.80$; 52% minoritized ethnic backgrounds; 65% self-identified girls). Participants attended four high schools in southwest Sweden and 61% of participants were enrolled in theoretical education while 39% were enrolled in vocational education. Classwise randomization was used to divide participants into an intervention group ($n=290$) or a wait-list control group ($n=219$). Data was collected through an online questionnaire one week prior to the intervention at baseline (T0), and then three times post-intervention: 12 weeks (T1), 16 weeks (T2) and 25 weeks

(T3) after baseline. Data collection occurred during regular school hours in the academic year of 2021 to 2022. The intervention group participated in the intervention between baseline and T1, and the control group participated in the intervention between T2 and T3.

Measures. Demographic variables concerning students’ own and parental places of birth, age, SES, and gender were collected at baseline. Exploration participation and resolution were measured using the Ethnic Identity Scale-Brief (Douglass & Umaña-Taylor, 2015). Exploration search was measured using the Multiethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992). Private regard and centrality were measured using the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (Sellers et al., 1997). An overview of the measures is provided in Table 2.

Table 2 Ethnic-racialized Identity Measures in Study II

Instrument	Measures	Nr of items	α range	Example item
Ethnic Identity Scale-Brief (EIS-B; Douglass & Umaña-Taylor, 2015)	Exploration Participation	3	0.73-0.81	“I have participated in activities that have taught me about my ethnicity”
	Resolution	3	0.84-0.88	“I know what my ethnicity means to me”
Multi-Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992)	Exploration Search	5	0.70-0.80	“I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership”
Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (Sellers et al., 1997)	Private Regard	6	0.76-0.84	“I’m happy that I am a member of my ethnic group(s)”
	Centrality	8	0.52-0.65	“In general, my ethnicity is an important part of my self-image”

Note. The Ethnic Identity Scale- Brief was also used in Study III.

Data Analyses. Path analysis was used to examine the intervention’s potential effects on both process and content components of ethnic-racialized identity. These analyses focused on the intervention’s conceptual model of change. Relatedly, multigroup path models and nested model comparisons were used to determine whether there were differential intervention effects based on minoritization. Latent growth curve analysis was used to assess if or how key study variables changed over time, and whether they changed as an effect of the intervention. Multigroup latent growth curve analysis was used to determine whether the intervention effects on the trajectories of change for process and content components differed for minoritized and majoritized youth.

Main Findings

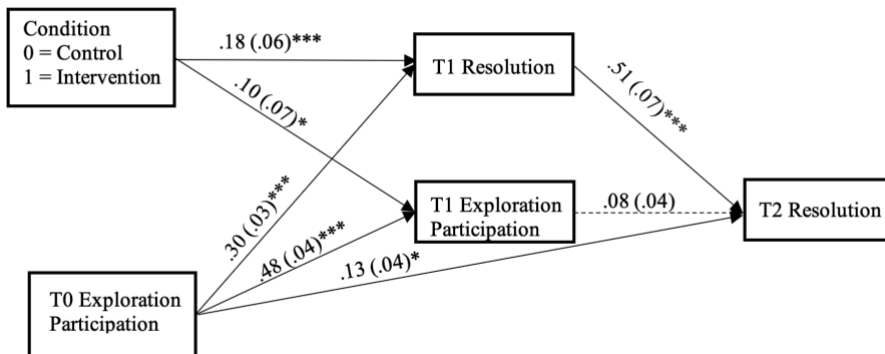


Figure 1 Stringent replication model examining if the intervention is a) associated with T1 exploration participation, and b) if T1 exploration participation is associated with T2 resolution, while controlling for T1 resolution. T0 exploration participation included to account for the observed baseline difference in exploration participation between the intervention and control group. T, Time. Standardized estimates are presented. Solid lines indicate significant associations. $*p < .05$; $***p < .001$

Results from the stringent replication model (Figure 1), which controlled for the post-intervention (T1) level of resolution in the conceptual model of change, indicated that the intervention was positively associated with T1 exploration participation and T1 resolution. However, the expected chain of effects from T1 exploration participation to T2 resolution was not observed. Nevertheless, T1 resolution was positively associated with T2 resolution. Furthermore, reversing the order of influence between exploration participation and resolution in the conceptual model, i.e.

examining the relationship between T1 resolution and T2 exploration participation, indicated that resolution was positively associated with later exploration participation. Moreover, the intervention was not associated with private regard in the conceptual model but was seemingly positively associated with T1 centrality. There were no differential effects of the intervention based on minoritization with respect to the conceptual model of change.

Regarding change over time for the process components, unconditional growth models indicated that exploration participation had an initial positive linear trajectory of change, but that this change decelerated over time. Furthermore, exploration search had a positive linear trajectory over time while resolution showed no significant change. The intervention was only associated with the average trajectory of exploration participation, indicating that the intervention group had a more positive initial change in participation compared to the control group. The intervention was not associated with the trajectories of exploration search or resolution. Concerning the content components, private regard had a negative linear trajectory, however, the intervention was not related to this change over time. Furthermore, centrality did not show a significant change over time, and the intervention was not associated with its trajectory. Finally, the intervention effects did not vary based on minoritization throughout the growth models.

In sum, the findings showed mixed evidence for the effectiveness of the intervention and suggest that it is tailored mostly toward exploration participation. However, given the intervention's short-term effects on both exploration participation and resolution, Study II highlights a potential to support youth with their engagement in these processes of ethnic-racialized identity.

Study III

The purpose of Study III was to examine whether the same school-based intervention as in Study II, the Identity Project, impacted psychosocial and academic adjustment through a simultaneous effect on the ethnic-racialized identity processes of exploration participation and resolution. The following hypotheses were tested:

1. The intervention (T0) was expected to have a significant indirect effect on post-intervention (T2) global identity synthesis, global identity confusion, self-esteem, satisfaction with life, depressive symptoms, and academic engagement through post-intervention (T1) exploration participation and resolution.
2. Post-intervention (T1) resolution was expected to be positively associated with post-intervention (T2) global identity synthesis, self-esteem, satisfaction with life, and academic engagement, and negatively associated with global identity confusion and depressive symptoms.
3. The intervention group was expected to have stronger associations between post-intervention (T1) resolution and later (T2) psychosocial and academic adjustment compared to the control group. That is, the intervention was hypothesized to have a moderating effect on the associations between post-intervention resolution and later psychosocial and academic adjustment.

The potential differential indirect intervention effects on psychosocial and academic adjustment based on whether adolescents had minoritized or majoritized backgrounds was explored.

Method

Study III included the same participants and procedures as Study II.

Measures. Demographic variables on own and parental places of birth, age, SES, and gender were collected at baseline. Exploration participation and resolution were measured using the Ethnic Identity Scale-Brief (Table 2; Douglass & Umaña-Taylor, 2015). Global identity synthesis and global

identity confusion were measured using the Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory (Rosenthal et al., 1981). Self-esteem was measured using the Single-item Self-esteem Scale (Robins et al., 2001). Satisfaction with life was measured using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985). Depressive symptoms were measured using the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (Radloff, 1977), and academic engagement was measured using the Engagement versus Disaffection with Learning: Student Report Scale (Skinner et al., 2008). See Table 3 for an overview.

Table 3 Psychosocial and Academic Adjustment Measures in Study III

Instrument	Measures	Nr of items	α range	Example item
Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory (Rosenthal et al., 1981).	Global identity synthesis	6	0.76-0.84	“I know what kind of person I am”
	Global identity confusion	6	0.76-0.84	“I don’t really know who I am”
Single-item self-esteem scale (Robins et al., 2001).	Self-esteem	1	-	“I have high self-esteem”
Satisfaction with life scale (Diener et al., 1985).	Satisfaction with life	5	0.78-0.72	“I am satisfied with my life”
Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (Radloff, 1977).	Depressive symptoms	20	0.92-0.94	“I felt sad”
Engagement versus Disaffection with Learning: Student Report Scale (Skinner et al., 2008).	Academic engagement	10	0.91-0.93	“When we work on something in class, I get involved”

Data Analyses. Path analysis was used to examine if the intervention had an indirect effect on psychosocial and academic adjustment variables through the ethnic-racialized identity processes exploration participation and resolution. Multigroup path analysis and nested model comparisons were used to examine if potential intervention effects differed based on minoritization. Multigroup path analysis and nested model comparisons

were also used to examine whether associations between each of the post-intervention (T1) ethnic-racialized identity processes and each of the (T2) psychosocial and academic adjustment variables differed based on intervention and control group condition i.e., whether the intervention moderated these associations.

Main Findings

The findings indicate that the intervention did not have any indirect effects on psychosocial and academic adjustment variables through ethnic-racialized identity exploration. However, the intervention did have an indirect effect through ethnic-racialized identity resolution on global identity synthesis (standardized estimate of indirect effect = 0.05; 95% (CI 0.03; 0.13)), global identity confusion (standardized estimate of indirect effect = -0.05; 95% (CI -0.15; -0.03)), self-esteem (standardized estimate of indirect effect = 0.04; 95% (CI 0.02; 0.15)), satisfaction with life (standardized estimate of indirect effect = 0.04; 95% (CI 0.04; 0.19)), depressive symptoms (standardized estimate of indirect effect = -0.03; 95% (CI -0.08; -0.01)), and academic engagement (standardized estimate of indirect effect = 0.03; 95% (CI 0.01; 0.09)), when controlling for the baseline level of psychosocial and academic adjustment. The findings did not differ based on whether participants had minoritized or majoritized backgrounds.

The associations between ethnic-racialized identity processes and later psychosocial and academic adjustment did not significantly differ between the intervention and control group. In other words, while the intervention increased the average level of ethnic-racialized identity resolution, which in turn was associated with increased average levels of psychosocial and academic adjustment, the links between ethnic-racialized identity processes and youth adjustment were equivalent for the groups.

In sum, Study III indicated that the intervention had small positive effects on adolescents' average levels of psychosocial and academic adjustment through ethnic-racialized identity resolution, but not exploration participation. Furthermore, given that the intervention and control group did not differ in the associations between resolution and later psychosocial and academic adjustment, and that these associations did not

vary by minoritization, the findings suggest that the positive links between resolution and youth adjustment could be normative for adolescence in ethnically diverse Swedish school contexts. Taken together, Study III highlights the potential benefits of supporting youth toward ethnic-racialized identity resolution in ethnically diverse schools in Sweden, adding to the international literature on youth ethnic-racialized identity development.

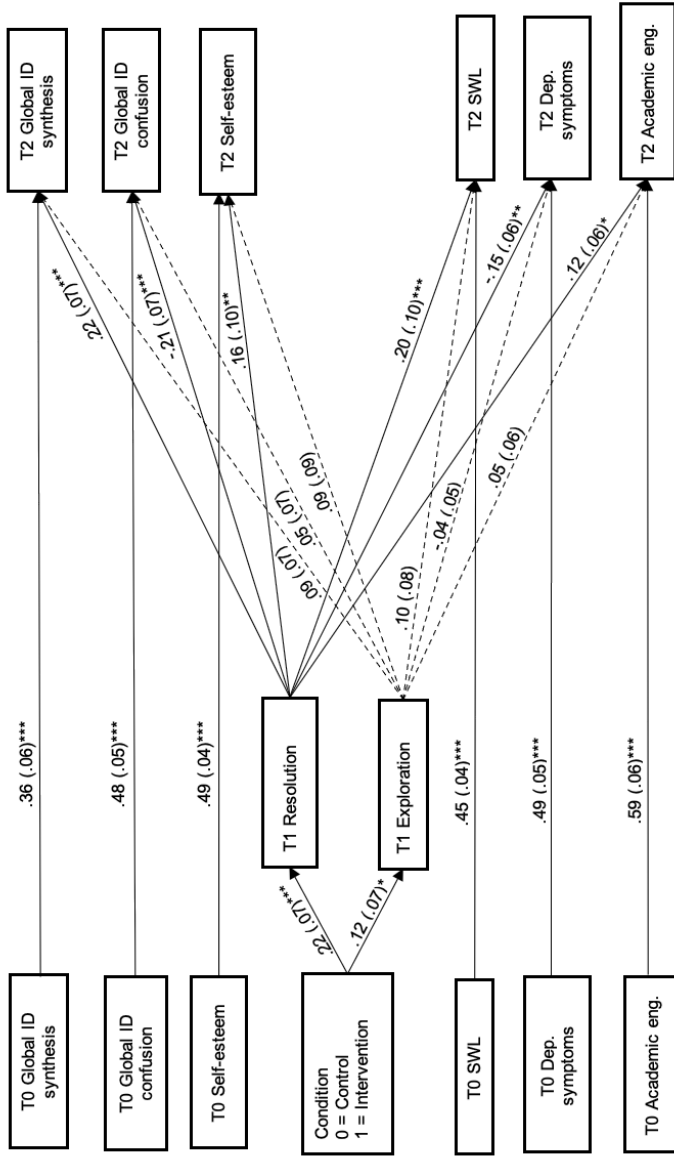


Figure 2 Model to test if the intervention has an indirect effect on psychosocial and academic adjustment through ethnic-racialized identity exploration participation and resolution respectively, while accounting for baseline psychosocial and academic adjustment. This model controls for the observed baseline difference in exploration participation between the intervention and control group, and controls for age and type of education on all T1 and T2 variables. *T*, Time. Standardized estimates are presented. Solid lines indicate significant associations. **p* < 0.05; ***p* < 0.01; ****p* < 0.001

General Discussion

The overarching aim of this thesis was to address ethnicity and ethnic-racialized identity in Swedish educational contexts. First, to gain a contextualized understanding of how ethnicity is addressed in a relevant educational context, Study I explored student teachers' experiences of how ethnicity is framed in initial teacher education, an important educational context that prepares future teachers of adolescents. Second, to contribute to the limited psychological research on ethnic-racialized identity in Sweden, and to the limited intervention research on how to support youth ethnic-racialized identity development, Study II examined whether a school-based intervention, the Identity Project, could impact the process and content components of ethnic-racialized identity. Relatedly, Study III examined if the intervention could impact adolescents' psychosocial and academic adjustment through the processes of ethnic-racialized identity exploration participation and resolution. In sum, the findings in Study I showed that student teachers experienced that ethnicity was framed as something that concerns minoritized "others", and that it was framed as something sensitive. The findings in Study II indicated that the intervention had an initial positive and simultaneous effect on the ethnic-racialized identity processes, exploration participation and resolution, and only affected the long-term trajectory of change for exploration participation. The findings in Study III indicated that the intervention had a positive indirect effect on adolescents' psychosocial and academic adjustment through ethnic-racialized identity resolution, but not exploration participation. The main findings will be discussed in more detail in the following sections, starting with the framing of ethnicity, followed by discussion of the intervention related findings. Next, implications and future directions for research as well as methodological and ethical considerations are discussed. The thesis ends with concluding remarks.

Framing Ethnicity in Initial Teacher Education

Study I explored how student teachers experienced the framing of ethnicity in initial teacher education. The overall findings in Study I showed that student teachers experienced that ethnicity was framed as something that concerns “others”, and that it was framed as something sensitive. The findings concerning the framing of ethnicity are discussed in the following two sections.

Ethnicity Concerns “Others”

Study I showed how student teachers experienced that ethnicity was equated with minoritized “others”. The findings that “others” were framed through a focus on problems and lack of skills are not unique to Study I. To exemplify, the findings in Study I which illustrated that minoritized pupils were depicted through homogenizing stereotypes such as “all being homophobic” are congruent with findings in Reimer’s (2017) observational study in an initial teacher education in Sweden, where constructions of “an intolerant and homophobic immigrant” was contrasted to constructions of Swedish identity as being “tolerant” and inherently good (Reimers, 2017). Similarly, studies focused on the examination of Swedish teaching curricula have found that teaching materials in Swedish educational contexts tend to reproduce negative stereotypes about minoritized groups based on perceived racialization, culture, or religious affiliations (Otterbeck, 2006; Tholin, 2014). Furthermore, Bayati (2014) found that minoritized student teachers in a Swedish initial teacher education context experienced that they were met with low expectations, presumptions of lacking language skills, and linguicism that entailed a focus on some students’ accents rather than the content of what they communicated. However, Study I also highlighted that there were variations in the degree to which student teachers expressed a legitimacy or critique of framing ethnicity as something that concerns “others”, and variations in how much teacher educators problematized the concept.

Contrary to the framing of “others” through a focus on problems and lack of skills, Study I found that “others” were also framed as resources in initial education. Similarly, Rosén & Wedin (2018) found that

minoritized student teachers were seen as symbolizing ethnic diversity. The minoritized students were expected to be cultural representatives that added value to initial teacher education, while they were also expected to meet the educational expectations that were relevant for all student teachers (Rosén & Wedin, 2018). On one hand, framing “others” as resources in initial teacher education can be interpreted as an inclusive approach that seeks to increase the input of minoritized student teachers in initial teacher education. On the other hand, an uncritical framing of “others” as resources to learn about ethnicity can perpetuate an understanding of minoritized student teachers’ competencies that is limited to questions concerning ethnicity (Ahmed, 2012). There could also be risks of minority taxation, where minoritized student teachers are not only expected to do the work that is expected of all student teachers but are also expected to carry the burden of educating their majoritized classmates. The findings from Study I thus suggest a need to challenge the framing of ethnicity as something that concerns “others”, and a need to explore more equitable conditions for sharing experiences as part of coursework. A suggested path forward could be to incorporate more critical self-reflection regarding how ethnicity is ascribed to “others” but portrayed as absent for majoritized populations (Milner, 2017). Critical self-reflection is applicable to all student teachers or teacher educators regardless of their backgrounds.

The framing of ethnicity through a focus on “others” while portraying majoritized “Swedish” or “white” populations as void of ethnicity in Study I could reflect the larger sociohistorical context of Sweden. In the broader sociohistorical context, ethnicity (and historically, race) has been focused on differentiation, deficit-based views, and oppression of indigenous and national minorities, including the period of Swedish colonial expansionism (Schough, 2008; Ericsson, 2016). More contemporarily, ethnicity tends to be discussed in relation to migration within a dichotomy of “immigrant” or “Swede” (Gyberg et al., 2018; Osanami Törnngren, 2020; Svensson & Syed, 2019) and is seemingly perceived as an absence of normative whiteness (Adolfsson, 2024). Similar patterns of a defined “them” and an unarticulated “we” have been found in analyses of Swedish school curricula (Brantefors, 2015).

The findings in Study I could also be understood from a social identity perspective as well as through the concept of “othering”. In social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), identities are grounded in group categorizations and includes social comparison between so-called “out-groups” and “in-groups”. Thus, differentiation is to some extent needed for people to determine where they feel like they belong or “fit”. In the context of Study I, the out-group could be interpreted as being minoritized “others” who were seen as having ethnicity, while the institutional in-group could be understood as majoritized “Swedish” or “white” people who were seen as being void of ethnicity. Notably, social identity theory posits a focus on both out-groups and in-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, Study I indicates an inequitable focus on minoritized “others” who were ascribed labels and presumed characteristics. In relation to the postcolonial concept “othering” (Said, 1979; Loomba, 2005), these findings can be interpreted as a process by which “others” are made hyper-visible in initial teacher education, while normative “Swedishness” or “whiteness” can be maintained by not being articulated (Ahmed, 2012; Mulinari & Neergaard, 2017). Furthermore, “othering” within institutions could risk (re)producing minoritized people as “foreigners” or perpetual strangers (Ahmed, 2012; Miles, 1989), which is considered a type of identity denial (Armenta et al., 2013). Identity denial can have negative impacts on youth’s interest to explore their self-identified ethnic-racialized identities and can limit minoritized youth from identifying with traditionally majoritized self-labels or limit the possibility of acknowledging multiplicity in their ethnic-racialized identities (Jones & Rogers, 2022).

Ethnicity Framed as Sensitive

The second major theme indicated that ethnicity was framed as something sensitive, and sensitivities related to students’ own personal fears, as well as to expressions of racism in initial teacher education. Student teachers’ expressed fears in Study I could be interpreted as having a relational element to them as they concerned how one potentially risked being perceived negatively by classmates and/or teacher educators (e.g. fear of saying the wrong thing, fear of being misunderstood etc.). Thus, participating in discussions could encompass discomfort for some

students. Discomfort in educational contexts, particularly discomfort related to discussing topics such as race and ethnicity, has been examined by numerous scholars, and can have important implications for teacher education (Applebaum, 2017; Berlak, 2004; Boler, 1999; Habel, 2012; Mayo, 2002; Zembylas, 2015). Pedagogies of discomfort specifically encourage students and educators to stay with and critically examine their own discomfort and to challenge their taken for granted beliefs and ways of engaging with the topics at hand (Boler, 1999). Thus, discomfort that is used rather than avoided is viewed as a potential for transformative social change within educational contexts. On the contrary, a persistent need to maintain comfort, which can be enacted by strategies such as staying silent, disengaging from conversations, or stopping conversations that are seen as too sensitive by some, can foreclose and obstruct both learning and social change (Ahmed, 2012; Applebaum, 2017; Felman, 1992). Based on this, the fears that student teachers expressed in the focus groups could be used as a point of departure for critical reflection and discussion in initial teacher education. Importantly, high levels of discomfort without support may also disrupt learning, and thus students could need more structured support or ways to engage with discussions they feel are sensitive (Felman, 1992; Zembylas, 2012).

Importantly, while ethnicity was framed as inherently sensitive by some, for others, the emotional reactions deemed to be sensitive reactions were understood as responses to the prevalence of racism in initial teacher education. That is, when students sought to problematize expressions of racism, such as racist stereotypes in educational content, they experienced being called sensitive or faced insinuations of supporting censorship. These findings align with prior research suggesting that it is not uncommon for contestation of racism in educational settings to be met with arguments of being too sensitive (Eisen, 2020). The findings have important implications for teacher education as racism, including microaggressions, can have a negative impact on well-being (Smith et al., 2011), identity (Jones & Galliher, 2015), and social relationships (Eisen, 2020).

Intervention Effects on Ethnic-racialized Identity Processes

Both Study II and Study III examined intervention effects by focusing on its proposed conceptual model of change. The intervention's conceptual model, as described in prior research proposes that the intervention (T0) should lead to exploration participation (T1), which then should lead to resolution (T2), which in turn should be positively associated with psychosocial and academic adjustment (T3; Umaña-Taylor, Kornienko et al., 2018). However, Study II contributed with a more stringent conceptual model that controlled for the post-intervention (T1) level of resolution and found that the intervention had a positive simultaneous effect, rather than a sequential effect, on exploration participation and resolution. This meant that while the hypothesis that the intervention positively impacted exploration participation was supported, we did not find evidence in support of the hypothesis that post-intervention exploration participation significantly predicted later resolution. The intervention effect on exploration participation in Study II is consistent with findings from the original evaluation in the U.S. (Umaña-Taylor, Douglass et al., 2018), and with the evaluations in Germany (Juang et al., 2020) and Italy (Ceccon et al., 2023). The findings are most aligned with the Italian evaluation, which also found an initial positive intervention effect on exploration participation but did not find evidence of post-intervention exploration participation predicting later resolution (Ceccon et al., 2023).

Notably in Study II, the intervention seemingly had a stronger positive association with T1 resolution than T1 exploration participation in the stringent replication model, suggesting that resolution may play a more prominent role in the conceptual model of change than previously tested for in evaluation studies. Early descriptions of the intervention's conceptual model of change indeed depict it as an intervention that simultaneously targets exploration participation and resolution (Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2016). However, when the intervention is described in prior empirical studies, the expected change in exploration participation and then resolution is formulated in a rather linear fashion (Ceccon et al.,

2023; Umaña-Taylor, Kornienko et al., 2018). Thus, Study II contributes with new empirical knowledge that warrants the question of whether such a conceptualization is too linear. Nevertheless, as the previous evaluation studies have not assessed models that account for post-intervention resolution in their assessments of the conceptual model of change (e.g. Ceccon et al., 2023; Umaña-Taylor, Douglass et al., 2018), it is unclear if this finding would be replicated in those contexts or if it is an isolated finding in Study II, leaving a gap for future research.

Study II also expanded on previous evaluation studies of the intervention by examining its potential effects on two types of exploration: participation and search. Contrary to the hypothesis that the intervention positively impacts exploration participation and exploration search, the intervention only acted on participation. The intervention is specifically designed on participatory activities throughout all lessons (Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2016). Thus, it may only act on the form of exploration it was designed to target, which is also reflected in the fact that the intervention's aims and activities are more related to the items in the Ethnic Identity Scale-Brief used to measure participation compared to the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure used to measure search (Douglass & Umaña-Taylor, 2015; Phinney, 1992). Furthermore, as the two measures focus on how much youth have engaged in exploration during the past 30 days, it is plausible that the intervention effect on exploration participation observed one week after the last intervention lesson (T1), is indicative of a successful intervention implementation rather than identity change. However, youth seemingly stayed at a similar level of exploration participation even after the intervention. Thus, it is also reasonable to assume that the observed effect on participation signaled identity change in this facet of exploration.

Moreover, like the U.S. evaluation (Umaña-Taylor, Douglass et al., 2018), Study II examined a reversed replication model which indicated that the intervention positively impacted T1 resolution, which in turn significantly predicted T2 exploration participation. This finding, although simplified in its modeling (did not control for T1 exploration participation), supports previous research emphasizing that youth may continue to explore their ethnic-racialized identities after periods of feeling resolved (Sladek et al., 2023; Syed, 2007). The combined findings from the stringent

and reversed replication models suggest a dynamic development of, and relationship between, exploration participation and resolution. Thus, a turn to dual cycle identity formation models could be of interest (Crocetti, 2017; Luyckx et al. 2006). In such models, identity can develop in two related yet distinct cycles. In Luyckx et al.'s (2006) conceptualization, the first cycle of the dual identity formation model consists of two parts, exploration in breadth and commitment, both relating to the process of identity formation. In this cycle, youth may explore various identity alternatives and ultimately make identity commitments. The second cycle consists of exploration in depth and identification with commitments. Here, youth may continue to explore and evaluate the identity commitments they have made thus far on a deeper level. Such exploration in depth may lead to even stronger identity commitments. However, exploration in depth could also spark reconsideration of commitments. Questioning prior commitments may therefore entail exploration in breadth of more identity alternatives. Interestingly, there could thus be periods in which youth make strong identity commitments, or in the case of Study II, score high on ethnic-racialized identity resolution, while at the same time could continue in ethnic-racialized identity exploration. Thus, exploration could co-occur with or lead to resolution and resolution could co-occur with or lead to exploration. While emphasizing that we have not tested dual cycle models in the appended studies, and to the best of our knowledge that dual cycle identity models have not been applied to the domain of ethnic-racialized identity, this type of theorization may open possibilities of adding more dynamics and nuance to our understanding of the processes of ethnic-racialized identity development.

It is important to acknowledge that dual cycle models are informed by Erikson's views on identity formation (van Doeselaar et al., 2019), the same psychosocial theory that indirectly informs Study II and Study III of this thesis through its application within the ethnic-racialized identity field of research. Erikson considered identity formation a lifelong process, but one that is increasingly salient during adolescence (1968). The increased salience of identity formation is thought to be fueled by developmental changes such as going through puberty, cognitive development, and encountering both opportunities and expectations from one's social or

societal context (Crocetti, 2017; Erikson, 1968; Ferrer-Wreder & Kroger, 2019; van Doeselaar et al., 2019). As youth are faced with various identity alternatives, and make choices, they are also triggered to reevaluate the meaning of such choices. Thus, the findings from Study II could also be understood as adolescents' engagement in adaptive identity formation, where the intervention through its many activities and discussions with peers provided an initial push or boost in ethnic-racialized identity exploration participation and resolution, followed by continued exploration even after feeling resolved.

Trajectories of Change for Ethnic-racialized Identity Processes

In Study II, the intervention only had a positive impact on the trajectory of change for exploration participation, while it had no impact on the trajectories of exploration search or resolution. Thus, while the path analyses indicated a dual effect on exploration participation and resolution, the longitudinal analyses of each variable, outside the constraints of the conceptual model, nuanced the picture of intervention effects. Taken together, the findings indicate that the intervention mostly impacted its primary target construct exploration participation. These findings are not surprising given that the intervention is built on participatory activities throughout its eight sessions.

Nevertheless, the average trajectory of exploration search increased over time for the whole sample, indicating that the control group was engaging in similar levels of search as the intervention group. From a developmental perspective, these findings suggest that ethnic-racialized identity search could be a normative aspect of development that occurs during the identity intense period of adolescence (Erikson, 1968; Phinney, 1990). It is therefore likely that the intervention was not needed to prompt this developmental process. Importantly, the participants had recently transitioned from secondary schools to upper-secondary schools. In Swedish cities, secondary schools are often segregated along the lines of SES and minoritization based on familial migration histories ("immigrant"/"non-immigrant"; Pettersson, 2003; Svensson & Flensner, 2025), while upper-secondary schools tend to be larger and are more likely places where youth from different parts of the cities meet. School

transitions have been linked with a heightened salience of ethnic-racialized identity, as attending a new, often larger school, entails meeting new peers with varying ethnic-racialized identities (French et al., 2006). The schools that participated in the appended studies reported that 40% or more of their youth had minoritized ethnic backgrounds based on familial migration histories. Perhaps this context was a prompt for increased exploration search. Finally, although the control group did not participate in the intervention until after T2, they did participate in filling out the questionnaire as much as the intervention group. It is also possible that the questionnaire itself was a form of intervention for the control group, one that sparked increased search but did not entail the behavioral participation found in the intervention activities (Syed et al., 2011).

Further, both the intervention and control group had stable and high average trajectories for resolution throughout the study. Considering that the students in Study II and Study III were older than adolescents in previous evaluation studies (Ceccon et al., 2023; Juang et al., 2020; Umaña-Taylor, Kornienko et al., 2018), these results could also be understood through a developmental perspective. That is, the students in the Swedish evaluation studies may have already followed an age-based developmental process in which youth are more likely to have higher levels of resolution later in adolescence (French et al., 2006; Phinney, 1990; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014; Yip et al., 2006). However, there is a need for more longitudinal work in the Swedish context, unrelated to intervening in ethnic-racialized identity, to better gauge whether this is the case. Nevertheless, despite no differences between the intervention and control group regarding their average trajectories for resolution, a closer look at differences in observed group means indicates that the intervention group did have a higher level of resolution than the control group at T1 when they had just received the intervention (as reflected in the path models). This fluctuation in resolution was not reflected when assessing the average trajectory of change over time in the growth models. Thus, the complementary analyses used in Study II contributed with a more nuanced understanding of the intervention effects on the processes of ethnic-racialized identity.

Intervention Effects on Ethnic-racialized Identity Content

In Study II, the findings from the path models indicated that the intervention did not affect the content component private regard (the degree to which youth had a positive feeling about their self-defined ethnic-racialized group membership) in the conceptual model of change. The growth models indicated a decrease in private regard over time and this decrease was unrelated to the intervention. Thus, it is not clear why such a decrease over time occurred. Prior research indicates that private regard may vary noticeably from day to day and that it is a component of ethnic-racialized identity that is sensitive to one's social environment (Seaton & Iida, 2019; Yip, 2014). Thus, a more contextualized approach to its study is needed. Nonetheless, we note that both the intervention and control groups on average started and remained at high levels of private regard throughout the study. On the other hand, the intervention seemingly had a positive effect on the content component (T1) centrality in the conceptual model. This finding was also mirrored in that the intervention group had a higher average level of centrality at T1 compared to the control group. However, a closer look at the intervention and control group means at T0, T1, and T2 suggests that the detected difference between the groups at T1 might be due to not only the intervention group scoring a higher average on centrality but perhaps also due to the control group scoring a lower average on centrality compared to their T0 average. At T2 (before the wait-list control group had received intervention), there was no difference between the groups. Finally, the intervention was unrelated to the trajectory of centrality, which showed no change over time.

Importantly, there are a few pertinent reasons for added caution when interpreting findings concerning the ethnic-racialized identity content components, especially centrality. First, the internal consistency of the centrality scale across all measurement points can be considered acceptable, at best, which might have been due to its combination of positively and negatively worded items (Zeng et al., 2020). Furthermore, the adapted version of the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity used to measure private regard and centrality in Study II, may not be

tailored for widespread use given that it was specifically developed to capture sociohistorically embedded experiences of black African-Americans in the U.S., and simply changing the word “Black” to “Ethnicity” may not be enough of an adaptation (Moffitt & Rogers, 2022). Similar reliability levels for the centrality subscale have been found in studies in the U.S. with adolescents of varying ethnic-racialized identities (Sladek et al., 2020; Wantchekon et al., 2021).

Measurement issues aside, Study II applied an approach to ethnic-racialized identity that centered the process components exploration and resolution, motivated by the explicit intervention aims to target these constructs. Consequently, when examining the intervention effects on the content components, we applied a similar logic, that they might be outcomes of the intervention. However, we neglected to consider the potential moderating role that content components could have in relation to the processes of ethnic-racialized identity. Wantchekon et al. (2021) found that youth who reported that their ethnic-racialized group membership was an important part of their identity (scored high on centrality) also had the largest positive effect of the intervention on their level of exploration participation. Thus, testing a moderated mediation model could be a fruitful way moving forward to assess the intervention in relation to both process and content components of ethnic-racialized identity (Fairchild & MacKinnon, 2009; MacKinnon, 2011).

Intervention Effects on Psychosocial and Academic Adjustment

Expanding on the stringent conceptual model from Study II, Study III found that the intervention did not have an indirect effect on youth psychosocial and academic adjustment through ethnic-racialized identity exploration participation but did have a positive indirect effect on youth adjustment through ethnic-racialized identity resolution. Thus, although the intervention was successful in prompting a short-term simultaneous increase in exploration participation and resolution, only resolution was a mechanism toward better youth adjustment. The increased average level of resolution predicted more global identity synthesis, less global identity

confusion, less depressive symptoms, better self-esteem, more satisfaction with life, and more academic engagement. Hence, the more youth understood who they are in relation to their ethnic-racialized identity, the less confused they felt about who they are in general. Instead, youth gained a better understanding of their identity as a whole. Furthermore, with a better understanding of their ethnic-racialized identity, youth also felt less sad, more content with their lives, had better self-esteem, and engaged more with their studies in school. These findings are largely consistent with those from the U.S. evaluation of the intervention, which demonstrated positive indirect intervention effects on youth adjustment (exception for academic engagement, Umaña-Taylor, Kornienko et al., 2018). Furthermore, Study III contributed with more nuance with regards to the indirect intervention effects as it separated global identity into two distinct facets, synthesis and confusion, and examined the intervention's indirect effect on satisfaction with life, which had not been considered in prior evaluations.

Nevertheless, the intervention effects in Study II and Study III were smaller than the observed effects in the original U.S. evaluation, which could be because of a 'decline effect' that has been persistently observed in social science research, including psychology (Pietschnig et al., 2019). The decline effect captures the phenomenon of how effect sizes have a tendency to decrease across studies as research evidence accrues over time, which is consistent with observed effect sizes across evaluation studies of the intervention's conceptual model of change (Ceccon et al., 2023; Juang et al., 2020; Umaña-Taylor, Kornienko et al., 2018). One possible explanation for this trend is that initial or early studies within a topic tend to include smaller sample sizes and thus have limited power, ultimately running the risk of biases through inflated effects (Pietschnig et al., 2019). Nevertheless, it is possible that the varying effect sizes are due to other factors such as differences due to the specific adaptations of the intervention in European contexts, different control group designs, using different time-points in the evaluations, or differing ages of the participants. Given that adolescents in the Swedish context were older than participants in prior evaluation studies (e.g. Ceccon et al., 2023; Umaña-Taylor, Kornienko et al., 2018), it is possible that they had already engaged

in the age-based developmental processes of exploration and resolution (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014), resulting in smaller direct intervention effects and eventually smaller indirect effects on psychosocial and academic adjustment.

Additionally, the intervention did not strengthen the relationships between post-intervention resolution and each of the psychosocial and academic adjustment outcomes, i.e. there was no moderating intervention effect. On one hand, the intervention was not effective in this regard, however, the findings do align with prior research (unrelated to interventions) indicating that gaining a sense of ethnic-racialized identity is associated with better psychosocial and academic adjustment (Miller-Cotto & Byrnes, 2016; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014b; Smith & Silva, 2011; Umaña-Taylor & Rivas-Drake, 2021). Thus, Study III suggests that the links between ethnic-racialized identity resolution and youth adjustment may be normative for adolescence in ethnically diverse Swedish school contexts as the associations were not moderated by the intervention or by minoritization.

Both Study II and Study III focused on group mean level changes, and it is therefore unclear whether the intervention worked better based on individual differences among adolescents. For example, a recent person-centered approach to the intervention evaluation in Italy found that youth in the intervention group who had increasing trajectories (high to higher and low to average) of resolution showed more psychosocial adjustment compared to youth with stable (low or average) trajectories of resolution over a one-year period (Cecon et al., 2024). Given the highlighted role of resolution in Study II and Study III, and given that there was variability in the average trajectory of resolution in Study II, a person-centered approach could be an avenue to gain more nuance in our understanding of the intervention effects on ethnic-racialized identity components as well as psychosocial and academic adjustment in a Swedish context. Additionally, increased attention to other individual and contextual factors could be beneficial, such as considering the potential moderating role of centrality, or other relevant socialization factors such as family or peer ethnic-racialized socialization (Cecon et al., 2024; Harding et al., 2021; Ruck et al., 2021; Sladek et al., 2021; Wantchekon et al., 2021).

The Role of Minoritization and Majoritization

Study II and Study III included a specific research question regarding potential differential effects of the intervention based on whether youth had minoritized or majoritized backgrounds. Minoritization was thus treated as a potential moderator of intervention effects. The effect of the intervention on the ethnic-racialized identity components (Study II and Study III) and indirect effects on psychosocial and academic adjustment (Study III) did not vary based on whether youth had minoritized or majoritized backgrounds. The intervention was thus equally effective, or ineffective, in relation to each of the studied aspects of ethnic-racialized identity. The equivalence of intervention effects based on whether youth had minoritized or majoritized backgrounds supports the argument that the intervention is “universal” in the sense that it is designed for all youth regardless of their backgrounds (Umaña-Taylor, Douglass et al., 2016). The findings that showed no difference in intervention effects based on minoritization, when focusing on the conceptual model of change in Study II and Study III, are consistent with the evaluation of the intervention’s conceptual model in the U.S. (Umaña-Taylor, Douglass et al., 2018; Umaña-Taylor, Kornienko et al., 2018).

However, while the intervention effects on the trajectories of change for each ethnic-racialized identity component in Study II did not differ based on whether youth had minoritized or majoritized backgrounds, Sladek et al.’s (2021) longitudinal assessment of the intervention in the U.S. found that minoritized youth had a more positive increase in resolution from baseline to the first post-intervention follow-up compared to white youth, while white youth had a more positive increase in resolution from the post-intervention measure to the follow-up one year later. Thus, although the groups ended up having the same level of resolution at the final time-point, they had taken different routes there. The cross-context differences regarding intervention effects could be interpreted as the intervention effects being more similar for minoritized and majoritized youth in the Swedish context compared to the U.S. However, the differences could also be a result of differing study designs and analytic strategies. While Study II assessed the average trajectories of

change over four time points across 25 weeks (i.e., assessing average change across time), the U.S. evaluation utilized bilinear spline growth models over four time points across 67 weeks (i.e., assessing short-term, then long-term change). It is thus possible that Study II and Study III did not detect potential differences between minoritized and majoritized youth given the shorter time frame of the intervention studies.

Although the intervention effects did not vary based on minoritization in Study II or Study III, there were some notable differences between minoritized and majoritized youth regarding their engagement with ethnic-racialized identity components before their participation in the intervention. Minoritized youth in the Swedish context reported higher levels on all ethnic-racialized identity components compared to their majoritized peers. This is consistent with previous research indicating a recurrent pattern in which minoritized populations engage more with, and score higher on, ethnic-racialized identity components compared to majoritized populations (Gyberg et al., 2018; Moffitt & Rogers, 2022; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Sladek et al., 2021). Contextual factors such as a heightened risk of encountering ethnicity/race-based discrimination has been found to push minoritized youth to reflect more on the role of race or ethnicity in their lives, while youth with majoritized backgrounds may perceive themselves to be the norm, and thus may not to the same extent have to reflect on the meaning of ‘race’ or ethnicity to their identity (Moffitt & Juang, 2019). In a Swedish context, Gyberg et al.’s (2018) study of narrative identity found that youth who reported ethnicity-related experiences were mainly minoritized youth, and most of their experiences were negative, including experiences of facing prejudice and racism. Importantly, none of the dissertation studies measured the potential role that experiences of prejudice or racism had on the participants’ engagement with the different facets of ethnic-racialized identity. Thus, there is a need to better understand contextual factors that may have impacted youth towards the ethnic-racialized identity processes, even before their participation in the intervention.

Unlike Study II and Study III, Study I did not include a research question concerning potential differences in findings based on whether the participants had minoritized or majoritized backgrounds. Consequently,

the focus group discussions were not systematically analyzed based on participants' positionalities. Nevertheless, as some participants across the focus groups referred to their own minoritized or majoritized self-labels in the discussions, the findings suggest that there were differences in student teacher experiences. One difference was that minoritized student teachers (and pupils) were recipients of instances of prejudice, discrimination, or racism from classmates or teacher educators, including racist "jokes", stereotypes and homogenizing teaching materials, or racial slurs. Similar examples were not described for majoritized student teachers. Another difference was that some majoritized student teachers who referred to their "Swedishness" or "whiteness" during the discussions expressed a sense of relief when their minoritized classmates or teacher educators shared personal experiences relating to their minoritized positionalities. However, student teachers who referred to their minoritized self-labels did not express the same relief. While acknowledging that no systematic analyses were conducted regarding student positionalities, the unprompted emergent findings in Study I suggest that this could be a meaningful path for future studies. Furthermore, although both minoritized and majoritized student teachers contributed with experiences that ethnicity was framed as something that concerned those seen as minoritized "others" at the institutional level, it is unclear whether student teachers systematically differed in how critical they were of this framing of ethnicity based on their own positionalities. Focusing the analyses on identifying the ways in which this unequal framing of ethnicity and described racisms are upheld, and how they are challenged (Rogers & Heard-Garris, 2023), can also be a fruitful path forward for future inquiries.

Implications and Future Directions for Research

Study I contributes with a contextualized understanding of how 'ethnicity' is addressed in one of the most important educational contexts that prepares future teachers of adolescents, specifically from the perspective of said future teachers. The findings that student teachers experienced that ethnicity was framed as something that concerns "others", whether it was through a focus on problems and lack of skills or through a focus on

“others” as resources, has important implications for initial teacher education. Specifically, Study I suggests an inequitable and uneven focus of attention on minoritized populations in the framing of ethnicity, including ascribed homogenizing stereotypes and presumptions of adherent values, all of which could risk normalizing discourses that ‘ethnicity’ or ‘culture’ are only relevant to discuss in relation to minoritized student teachers and pupils in schools, meanwhile notions of “Swedishness” or “whiteness” remain unarticulated or are portrayed as “neutral”. Furthermore, the combination of the framing of ethnicity as “other” and as something sensitive indicates that student teachers may not be prepared to support positive youth ethnic-racialized identity, and suggests a need to support student teachers (and potentially teacher educators) in relation to ethnicity-related topics. It would be of interest to explore whether pedagogies of discomfort (Applebaum, 2017) that focus on critical discussions concerning the framing of ethnicity as “other”, in combination with critical self-reflection regardless of one’s own background (Milner, 2017), could be a way to engage student teachers and teacher educators to challenge the status quo (Hua & Wei, 2016). This could be especially critical given the identification of racism within initial teacher education. The implications of racism can be detrimental in educational contexts as racism can have negative effects on well-being (Smith et al., 2011), sense of belonging (Lewis et al., 2019), identity (Jones & Galliher, 2015), and can negatively impact social relationships (Eisen, 2020). Thus, racism in all its forms requires actions at both interpersonal and institutional levels (Legette et al., 2023).

Although the collective findings in Study II and Study III highlight both elements of stability and change, and acknowledge that intervention effects were small, the findings have implications for anyone who works with youth in ethnically diverse schools, where ethnic-racialized identities may be salient. The findings highlight that ethnic-racialized identity is not unique to the social fabrics of the U.S., but rather, adolescents in a Swedish context are engaging in similar processes, adding to the cumulative knowledge about youth ethnic-racialized identity development. In European sociocultural contexts where ethnicity can be seen as sensitive, or even taboo, and where political debate often focuses on problems

(Gyberg, 2019; Juang et al., 2021, 2023), the findings shed a different light on the potential for leveraging youth ethnic-racialized identity resolution as an asset toward better youth adjustment.

Nevertheless, there is a need for measurement refinement and validation in a Swedish context, especially concerning the centrality subscale. Furthermore, as the intervention has mainly been studied as an eight-week package, future evaluations should consider examining whether some parts of the intervention are driving positive change more than others. Another interesting path for future evaluations in the Swedish context is to consider more individual and contextual factors that may impact youth towards ethnic-racialized identity processes, such as applying a person-centered approach to assessing stability and change in the ethnic-racialized identity components, considering the potential moderating role of family ethnic-racialized socialization, centrality, or experiences of racism (Ceccon et al., 2024; Gyberg et al., 2018; Rogers et al., 2021; Wantchekon et al., 2021).

Methodological Considerations

The following section outlines methodological concerns regarding aspects of the research design, focusing on the utilized methods for data-collection and analyses in appended studies.

Data Collection

Focus group discussions guided by a semi-structured interview guide was the method of data collection in Study I. Although focus group discussions are an established method for qualitative studies in psychology, and the social sciences more generally, the method can also entail some limitations that warrant scrutiny (Willig, 2013). Aspects of focus groups that require consideration are the group and power dynamics during the discussions (Greenwood et al., 2014). Due to the social group setting, some participants may feel discomfort when sharing their experiences and perspectives, some may feel pressure to agree with the group, or may remain quiet as a means to avoid conflict (Greenwood et al., 2014; Kidd & Parshall, 2000). Relatedly, there could be potential power dynamics

between the participants in the focus group, or perceived sensitivity or fears (e.g. being seen as sensitive, or being called a racist) in relation to the topic at hand, that could have influenced how much student teachers felt like they could share. Consequently, the focus group moderators in Study I explicitly normalized that student teachers could have both similar and varying experiences from their teacher education, and that all experiences in relation to the framing of ethnicity were of interest. These measures were taken to encourage openness and the expression of different perspectives in the discussions. Furthermore, the moderators paid attention to participants' signals of wanting to speak. Nevertheless, an alternative to the focus group discussions could have been to collect survey data which would bypass the specific social setting of the focus groups, however, increased privacy does not necessarily lead to higher rates of disclosure (Murdoch et al., 2014).

Another potential limitation in researcher-participant interview contexts relates to uneven power dynamics between researchers and participants (Kvale, 2006). Nevertheless, a strength of the focus group method is that it can disrupt some of the power imbalances commonly attributed to one-to-one interviews, particularly when the number of participants is greater than the number of researchers (Wilkinson, 1999). In Study I, each of the focus groups included three to five participants and two moderators.

As Study I concerned retrospective experiences from initial teacher education, which for some participants consisted of 4-5 years of studies, a possible critique is that participants may not have remembered all relevant experiences. In this case, the information shared in the focus groups could be understood as what was retained towards the end of student teachers' education, which arguably is still highly relevant. Nevertheless, focus groups provide a possibility for participants to build on and challenge each other's accounts, which can allow for more nuances to materialize in the study of various topics compared to one-to-one interviews (Willig, 2013).

Another limitation related to data collection is that participants in Study I were shown the official definition of ethnicity from the Swedish Equality ombudsman (2020), which could potentially have affected the direction that the focus group discussions took. An alternative to

presenting the definition would have been to initially ask student teachers what they understood ethnicity to be as a concept in teacher education, prior to asking questions regarding how ethnicity was or wasn't addressed. On the other hand, providing a definition at the start of the focus groups can also be seen as a strength and a part of providing a common place of departure in the discussions (Wibeck, 2011; Willig, 2013).

In Study II and Study III, the data collection relied on self-report measures for all key study variables, which had the advantages of permitting the collection of large amounts of data at each time-point as well as allowing for more confidentiality for students (Demetriou et al., 2015; Streiner & Norman, 2008). Further, the large data collection permitted statistical comparison of the intervention and control groups but on the other hand limited the possibility of an in-depth understanding of what exactly the process and content components of ethnic-racialized identity meant for the participating youth. A complement to using the self-report measures could have been to also conduct interviews with (a random subsample of) the 509 participants before and after the intervention. Such interviews could potentially provide a deeper understanding of whether, or how, any qualitative changes occurred to the students' ethnic-racialized identities (e.g. changes in thoughts, feelings, behaviors), and how changes manifested in their day to day lives (Gallihier et al., 2017; McLean & Syed, 2015). Another alternative, and recommendation for future evaluations of the intervention, is to include specific parts of the intervention assignments as part of the data collection and analyses. For instance, in lesson 7 of the intervention, students wrote about their own personal journeys over time in relation to their ethnic-racialized identities. Such personal stories, if ethically approved and included in the research procedures, would center the students' own voices, and would be suitable for narrative analysis to better understand ethnic-racialized identity (Syed, 2015) in a contemporary Swedish context. However, the ethical approval for Study II and Study III did not encompass analysis of students' intervention materials.

Furthermore, none of the ethnic-racialized identity measures in Study II and Study III had been validated for adolescents in Sweden. However, all scales except centrality (Sellers et al., 1998) showed good

internal reliability. Furthermore, we conducted confirmatory factor analyses of all the measures (except the single-item self-esteem scale), which indicate that measurement validation and refinement is needed, particularly for the content components of ethnic-racialized identity.

Analyses

In Study I, an inductive thematic analysis was used to analyze the focus group discussions (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which can be influenced by coders' preconceived notions of a topic, prior knowledge, experiences or personal inclinations (Nzinga et al., 2018; Roberts et al., 2020) Thus, while the transcripts were initially coded by one member of the research team, two more senior researchers also read all the original Swedish transcripts and discussed the focus group materials in depth and in relation to all preliminary themes and subthemes throughout the analytic process. A third senior researcher also read extracts translated to English in relation to preliminary, and later, themes and subthemes throughout the analytic process. Thus, all themes were continuously discussed and revised with the whole research team and in relation to the transcripts.

Furthermore, the degree of perceived homogeneity or heterogeneity in focus groups can affect what or how participants choose to share in focus groups (Greenwood et al., 2014). For example, homogenous groups have been found to more likely express provocative statements whereas heterogenous groups tend to be more critical. Six out of the ten focus groups in Study I included student teachers with minoritized and majoritized backgrounds, and four groups included students with majoritized backgrounds. These constellations could be an explanation to the fact that there was variation in how critical participants were regarding the framing of ethnicity as something that concerned minoritized populations. However, as previously outlined, while Study I provides overall descriptors of majoritization or minoritization, and some participants referred to their own self-labels in the focus groups, the materials were not analyzed systematically based on the individual participants' ethnic backgrounds as this was not a research question. Nevertheless, this could be an important limitation as the unprompted findings suggest that student teacher experiences may differ based on their

positionalities. A question that remains is whether the suggested differences are systematic and meaningful; a question that is suitable for further research.

In Study II and Study III, the wait-list control group design enabled longitudinal comparison between the intervention and control group within the same academic year. However, a limitation was that each school had both intervention and wait-list control groups. Although we did not receive such information, it is possible that students who were assigned to be part of the wait-list control group may have been privy to some parts of the intervention before participating at a later date. This could limit the possibility to detect differences between the intervention and control groups in the analyses (Aycock et al., 2018). An alternative research design could be to randomize schools to intervention or control condition rather than the classroom randomization within schools. However, this could pose other difficulties such as finding schools that are comparable on demographic variables, types of education, or other possible confounds such as school climate. An ideal alternative, and the golden standard, would have been to use an attention control group design where the intervention and control groups would participate in their respective conditions, get the same amount of attention, and separate yet equivalent content (Aycock et al., 2018). This was not possible due to restricted resources regarding the number of moderators who could be in classrooms simultaneously, as well as the resources needed to find or construct equivalent material that did not target the same constructs as the intervention.

Furthermore, the classwise randomization of students to the intervention and control group in Study II and Study III failed in relation to the main target construct exploration participation, and the demographic variable age. Unfortunately, the intervention group started at a significantly lower average level of exploration participation than the control group. The internal validity of experimental studies is threatened when groups differ at baseline as it is difficult to gauge whether post-measure differences depend on the intervention at hand or on the initial differences between the groups (Faber & Fonseca, 2014). However, this issue was dealt with through the preregistered plan to account for potential

baseline differences between the intervention and control group in the examined models.

Additionally, path analysis was used in Study II and Study III. Although path analyses are considered adequate for testing whether theoretically driven models are empirically supported, a common critique is that such models tend to only utilize one or few data points on variables of interest, limiting an understanding of how each of the studied variables' change over time (Streiner, 2005). Thus, latent growth curve analysis was used to examine if or how each of the key study variables changed over time, and potentially as an effect of the intervention in Study II.

Nevertheless, a limitation to the latent growth curve analyses in Study II and the path analyses in Study III was that the intervention group only had a comparable control at T0, T1 and T2, but not at T3 since the wait-list control group had also received the intervention after T2 and had thus become an intervention group by T3. In order to use as much of the collected data as possible for the latent growth curve models, the control group's observed data were treated as missing at T3 and were estimated using full information maximum likelihood. This allowed for a comparison between the intervention group and a control group throughout all time points. However, full information maximum likelihood is ideally used for data that is missing at random (Cham et al., 2016), but the missingness in Study II was now due to condition (intervention or control). Importantly, because the missingness was known and could be attributed to condition, it could also be accounted for by the inclusion of intervention as a predictor of intercepts and slopes in the conditional growth curve models for each of the study variables. However, this missingness also affected the steps in the analytic approach for determining the optimal functional form of trajectories for each of the key study variables. The regular steps of comparing nested unconditional models were not enough as these unconditional models did not account for the missingness by condition. Thus, an extra step was added and entailed nested comparison of conditional models that included intervention as a predictor of intercepts and slopes to ensure that an optimal functional form had been established for each variable. To exemplify, for exploration participation nested comparison of unconditional models indicated that a quadratic model was

the best fit to data. In the next step, intervention was included as a predictor of intercepts and slopes. Then, this conditional quadratic model was compared with a conditional linear model, to make sure that the quadratic functional form was truly a better fit than a linear functional form, when accounting for missingness due to condition. Alternative ways of examining trajectories of change without treating the control group's data as missing would be to only use data for the intervention and control groups at T0, T1 and T2. Thus, we performed unregistered robustness checks (reported in supplementary materials of Study II), which indicated that these findings aligned with those reported when utilizing the four time points. As mentioned previously, future studies should utilize an attention control group design which allows for comparison across all time points of interest (Aycock et al., 2018).

Concerning the overall design in Study II and Study III, the intervention was evaluated as an eight-lesson-package. It is thus impossible to say which aspects of the intervention work better than others to affect the target constructs. This limitation has practical implications for schools which, if interested in working with the intervention, would need to allocate resources in terms of time and personnel. Future research should thus work to determine what aspects of the intervention are driving mechanisms or moderators for change.

Finally, an emphasized part of this dissertation thesis is the importance of acknowledging how research studies are embedded in sociohistorical contexts and micro-contexts alike (Rogers et al., 2021). While this is imperative to gain a better understanding of the circumstances in which findings could be interpreted, a limitation of the dissertation studies is that they do not directly analyze contextual factors. Study I did so to some extent by explicitly asking about student teachers' experiences within a specific micro-context, however, Study II and Study III did not include the classroom or school levels in analyses. This was motivated by the fact that the intervention was implemented at the classroom level and that there was little variability between classrooms. Nevertheless, an alternative could have been to include this level in the models as a random factor to account for even small variability. Furthermore, other aspects of the context could be important to consider such as how adolescents'

perceived the classroom climate (Schachner et al., 2024), or how they perceived the ethnic-racialized identity settings in the classrooms with regards to for example group representation (Syed et al., 2018).

Ethical Considerations

Given that the topic of research concerned the potentially sensitive constructs ethnicity and ethnic identity, and that most participants across the studies were legal minors, particular attention has been paid to ethical considerations, guided by the Swedish Ethical Review Act (SFS 2003:460). The research procedures in all appended studies were reviewed and approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority. All personal data were handled in accordance with stipulations in the General Data Protection Regulations in the European Union (GDPR) and the Swedish Data Protection Act (SFS 2018:218). Several measures have been taken to protect the personal privacy of participants by treating the data confidentially, ensuring that no unauthorized persons can access the data, and by analyzing and presenting results at the focus group level and group level in the respective studies. Questionnaire data and focus group transcripts have been anonymized by assigning codes to each participant, and identifiable self-disclosures in the focus groups have been masked in Study I. Code sheets with information regarding assigned identity codes have been stored separately from the questionnaire data and focus group transcripts.

The data collections in the three studies included gathering personal information such as demographic variables, psychological health variables (Study II and Study III), and concerned questions regarding ethnicity and ethnic identity, all of which could potentially evoke discomfort in participants. Given the ethical importance of minimizing harm (American Psychological Association, 2002), all participants were informed that they could turn to any of the researchers with questions regarding the study and their own participation. They also received a list of support services, whom they could turn to if they struggled with any of the issues covered in the questionnaires or focus groups. Additionally, in Study II and Study III, principals and school staff were also informed about the

study and questionnaire, and a teacher was present during data collection and intervention sessions. Thus, adults in the youth's school networks were aware of the topics that were addressed throughout the research project.

Furthermore, in Study II and Study III the researchers responsible for the data collection were also those who facilitated the intervention. Consequently, we considered the potential risk that students participating in the intervention could feel obliged to fill out the questionnaire. Due to the potential sensitive perception of topics covered in all studies, and the dual role of researchers in Study II and Study III, it was important that all participants were informed of the study aims and the included topics prior to any data collection. All participants thus received information letters about the study aims and topics of the respective studies before data collection. Two trained members of the research team introduced the respective questionnaire before each administration and were present to answer potential questions from participants. The verbal and written information included that participation was voluntary, that participants could skip questions that they did not want to answer, and that they could withdraw their participation at any time without question. Furthermore, participants were informed that their responses would be presented at the group-level so that individuals could not be identified, and that no unauthorized people would have access to their responses. As mentioned, in Study I this meant that some self-disclosed identifiable information was masked in the results. However, it is possible that participants can recognize their responses in the presented quotes from the focus groups.

In Study II and Study III, the information provided to participants also clarified that while the intervention classes were a part of the regular curriculum, the questionnaire was a part of the research study, to which students could decline participation. Information regarding consent and confidentiality of data was crucial in all the studies and was particularly important in Study II and Study III as most students were younger than the legal adult age of 18. Although participants at the age of 15 and above can give informed consent (without parental approval) to research participation in Sweden, it was important to ensure that students were well informed (SFS 2003:460). Some of the participating schools also sent out information letters to parents, which included information about the study

aims and contact information to researchers in the project, whom they could turn to with potential questions. Further, participants in Study I received a 100 SEK gift card instead of the coffee/tea and pastry that would have been provided had the focus groups been conducted in person. All participating classes in Study II and Study III received a soft drink and a pastry or sandwich depending on specific school regulations, regardless of whether youth filled out the questionnaire or not.

Participants in the three studies were asked how they would describe their ethnic identities through open-ended questions in the questionnaires of the three respective studies. A strength of Study II and Study III is that the measures of ethnic-racialized identity were based on youth's own self-identifications. However, familial migration histories based on own and parental places of birth were used to assess whether minoritization and majoritization moderated the intervention effects in Study II and Study III. In Study I, familial migration histories were used as a descriptive demographic variable for the same. It is important to acknowledge that this categorization risks reinforcing and normalizing the homogenized dichotomy that is critiqued in the appended studies, and entails a researcher-enforced categorization. Nevertheless, we could not use all the varying self-identifications as a moderator in Study II and Study III. Instead, an alternative would have been to categorize youth as "minoritized", "majoritized" or potentially "multiple self-identifications". However, this alternative would also present researcher-enforced categories based on presumptions of which self-labels should be considered belonging to a specific category. Thus, although not ideal, we chose the commonly used statistical categorization based on familial migration histories. We adopted the terminology "minoritized" and "majoritized" instead of more static binaries such as "foreign/Swedish", "immigrant/Swedish" that have been found to be common ascribed labels in the Swedish context (Gyberg et al., 2018; Svensson & Syed, 2019). We also opted to not use "majority" and "minority" to acknowledge that these categories are socially constructed rather than essentialist and stable properties of people (Wikström, 2009). However, future research could more adequately use self-identifications rather than institutionally or researcher-enforced social categories.

Taken together, although there were potential risks that participants in the three studies may have faced, the study authors and the Swedish Ethical Review Authority deemed that the potential benefits of the research outweighed the potential risks, given the safety measures taken in planning and executing the study procedures.

Conclusion

This dissertation thesis contributes with new empirical findings concerning ethnicity and ethnic-racialized identity in Swedish educational contexts. Specifically, the findings in Study I showed how student teachers experienced that ethnicity was framed as something that concerns minoritized “others”, in which “others” were framed through a focus on problems and lack of skills. Minoritized “others” were also framed as resources in initial teacher education. These findings indicate a one-sided and inequitable focus on minoritized populations in the framing of ethnicity. Additionally, ethnicity was framed as a sensitive topic to address, and sensitivities included student teachers own fears of engaging in discussions as well as racism within initial teacher education. The findings suggest that student teachers may not be prepared to support youth ethnic-racialized identity in schools and highlight a need for structured support in how to engage with ethnicity-related topics in a way that challenges the current framing of ethnicity as equated with “others”. Pedagogies of discomfort and critical self-reflection are suggested as potential avenues for future work. Furthermore, concerted efforts are needed to address racism in this educational context. The findings from Study II and Study III indicate that ethnic-racialized identity is a relevant identity domain for adolescents in ethnically diverse school contexts, and that youth on average were already engaging in the various facets of ethnic-racialized identity prior to the school-based intervention that is a part of this dissertation. Study II indicated that an intervention that is focused on supporting youth in discussions and critical reflection on their ethnic-racialized identities, through a school-based curriculum, yielded simultaneous positive short-term effects on the processes of ethnic-racialized identity exploration participation and resolution, rather than a previously proposed sequential

intervention effect. Furthermore, the intervention only impacted the long-term trajectory of exploration participation, while it had no effects on exploration search, or the content components private regard and centrality. The findings indicate that the intervention is tailored mostly toward exploration participation. Study III indicated that the intervention's impact on ethnic-racialized identity resolution had positive impacts on adolescents' average levels of psychosocial and academic adjustment, highlighting resolution as a mechanism of change toward better youth adjustment. Nevertheless, the relationships between resolution and later psychosocial and academic adjustment were not moderated by the intervention, nor were they moderated by minoritization, suggesting that the links between resolution and youth adjustment may be a normative part of adolescence. Taken together, this thesis contributes with empirical knowledge concerning adolescents' ethnic-racialized identity development, presents mixed evidence of a school-based intervention on adolescents' ethnic-racialized identity, and highlights potential challenges regarding how ethnicity is framed in the educational context that prepares their future teachers.

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