Master’s Programme

Racism in Football Sweden: from the coaches’ perspective

IV607G- Spring 2022
15 Credits

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Msc in Sport Science: Sport in Society
60 Credits
Date of issue:
June 6th

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Abstract

Aim: To access the level of racial incidents and coaching on anti-racism in football Sweden.
Method: A qualitative interview was done with six coaches in different regions in Sweden. A base of eight main questions on three themes were asked – About you, Racism in football Sweden, and Working against racism in football. Interviews were semi-structured, done orally and recorded. The transcriptions were then thematically analysed.
Results: The coaches expressed that the players both young and old are exposed to racial incidents, both on and off the field. Racism is manifested in jargon from diverse areas, from spectators including parents, other coaches, or referees. Coach training programmes do not have any programmes on racism.
Conclusion: Racism does exist in all levels of Swedish football with a tendency to lesser incidents in junior levels. Coaches have almost non-existent training in anti-racist strategies and problems are solved ad hoc. There is a need for a structure to address this issue, both at club and federation level.
Preface

I would like to say a big thank you to all the participants in this study. Each and every one of you has been a key person and very important for this interesting and sensitive issue of race in our football. Without you, the study would not have been possible.

I am also grateful to my supervisor Sepandarmaz Mashreghi who has provided me with all the unheeding support, guidance and inspiration throughout the study.

The very best of my love to all very close to me and my family who have helped me in practical and diverse ways including moral support to get me through this very pressing but exciting year.
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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Topic

Sweden like many European countries have become multicultural, from a homogenous to a heterogeneous society where Sweden has been the model of admiration worldwide for its policies promoting social equality with the power of sport (Eliassi, 2015; Englund, 2002). Little is known about the attitudes and education in racial issues of coaches who are to strengthen bonds amongst heterogeneous groups in football. This research looks at the game from the coaches’ perspective. Sport, particularly football, is an element of world culture that has a tremendous impact on the lives of many people where it can be seen as a religion, and matter of life and death. Further, sport and more specifically football has the power to unite people of different backgrounds (Bar-On, 2014). Football and other sport movements in Scandinavia, are based on popular movements – “people’s movements” – and amateur ideology” (Tuastad, 2019). However, there are differences in sport between the Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Norway and Denmark), but there are also several common features between the countries termed as a common model. Compared to other countries the sport movement has a tremendous impact on sport for all, where there has been and still is a strong child centrism in children and youth sport. The egalitarian nature of the Scandinavian welfare system is even demonstrated in the sport sector as well. To begin with, the norms governing children's and youths’ football obviously reflects the egalitarian history of the nations that have a strong voluntary base. To define the Scandinavian sport model, it can be seen in four different elements (Tuastad, 2019). The first aspect, and possibly the most important distinguishing quality of the Scandinavian sport model, is its volunteerism. In terms of the number of associations, members, and volunteers, the Nordic nations have a larger voluntary sport industry than most other countries. Scandinavian sport clubs are the basis of the volunteer sector as a whole, as high levels of voluntarism are matched by high levels of athletic participation (Tuastad, 2019).

The Swedish sports movement sees itself as a democratic, popular and voluntary movement founded on ideals such as democracy, gender equality, freedom of participation, respect for others and volunteering assistance just to mention a few (Peterson & Schenker, 2018). Football is the largest sport in Sweden with about a million club members and there are about 600 000 active football players. In Sweden, football covers about a third of all physical activities in the country (SvFF, n.d.). The Swedish Football Federation’s (SvFF’s) main task is to govern and promote
football at elite and grassroot level all around the country (SvFF, n.d.). Further, it aims to keep the Swedish national sport (football) as the largest and most attractive sport in the nation. SvFF aims at welcoming everyone in Sweden who is interested in football. This can be seen in their five guidelines: Football for Everyone, Children and Youths Terms, Happiness In Focus, Dedication and Learning, and finally Sustainable Sports and Fair Play (SvFF, n.d.). Football is the “ultimate team sport” where everyone has to trust each other, this includes both players and coaches, which can then lead to a successful play (Santo, 2015). Further, we also know from studies that participation in sport is believed to lead to better integration (Flensner et al., 2021; Lin, 2015). According to Fundberg, as quoted in (Flensner et al., 2021), ”the democratic and egalitarian principles governing the Swedish sports movement and the extensive volunteer engagement this movement holds were believed to provide unique opportunities to create trust between people, and the sports club movement was expected to provide newcomers an opportunity to build social networks and acquire significant resources in the new country” (Flensner et al., 2021, p 65). However, some believe that sport is embedded in a social world characterised by structural inequality and that sport also can be a divider (Flensner et al., 2021). The Premier League (PL) in the UK is one of the most successful football leagues in the world. Whereas six percent of the population in the UK are Black, Asian, and minority ethnicity (BAME) (Government UK, 2021), 25% of the players in the PL are BAME (Chu et al., 2014). It is also known that if BAME players make the grade, they are routinely subjected to racial abuse and discrimination from spectators, other players, media etc. and further, may even be subjected to unequal and unfair recruitment practices in their own organisations (Richardson & Fletcher, 2010). However, some research has also showed that Black players are more likely to be hired by clubs of higher divisional ranking and thus have higher retention probabilities, implying a form of hiring discrimination which may impact on future professional careers (Goddard & Wilson, 2009).

Racism is an important issue where coaches who play a vital role for the team, also can be victimised to such intolerance (Heim et al., 2020). Coaches of teams with people of colour (POC) players have to be on the alert to recognise any racist frictions between the players in good time to be able to settle and create a good atmosphere for the sport. Not only do they need to be on the alert, but ideally also work proactively to prevent racism in their organisations. In order to know how to work proactively but also handle racist situations as they arise, coaches need knowledge,
tools and training. It is not certain that all coaches have undergone any training in this regard. However, there are few studies referring to training programmes for coaches where they discuss and address matters of racism and where they, after the programme, will have a new awareness for the issue and be equipped to have productive dialogues about it (Intosh & Martin, 2018). Since coaches play a central role in athletes’ lives as a trusted source of guidance, counselling and support, good programmes for student-athletes and coaches should thus also focus on the difficult conversations about race and racism. Usually, this topic is highlighted over a couple of days out of the whole programme of several weeks or months (Intosh & Martin, 2018).

The results of most coach training programmes show that both trainee coaches (novices) and already experienced coaches all increase their personal confidence, social and moral skills, benefit generally on most levels and all improve their abilities in problem disengagement (Atad & Grant, 2021). Studies therefore show that to work effectively as a professional coach, one needs to have undergone some sort of evidence-based coach-specific training (Atad & Grant, 2021; Eather et al., 2020; Larsen et al., 2015). What lacks in the literature available today is evidence showing that the level of confidence and competence of coaches can be reflected in their ability to deal appropriately with racism issues. The logical conclusion would be that this should be true, but we do not know. Social differences including ethnic and race issues in sport have been discussed in many articles per se but not in relation to coaches’ attitudes, education or competence in this field (Jacobs et al., 2016).

It is therefore of interest to investigate Swedish football to see if coaches have any education that includes anti-racist programmes to enable them to be effective in this area in their careers. This study will be looking at racial issues in football Sweden from a coach’s perspective and to examine if any differences exist between age groups in the different football levels/divisions.
2. Research aim and questions

2.1 Research aim

Sweden has been a model of admiration to the outside world for its comprehensive welfare policies, which are founded on social democratic concepts that promote universalism and social equality (Eliassi, 2015). However, Sweden like many other European countries is today a multicultural society, but migration seems to have brought about segregation in certain areas (Englund, 2002). The power of sport is thought to be a tool for bridging gaps and strengthening bonds amongst heterogeneous groups (Flensner et al., 2021). However, little is known about the attitudes and strategies coaches have on racial issues on the field, especially with regards to the different age groups. This research therefore aims to investigate if any differences regarding racial issues exist between the junior, youth and senior football levels. Should any differences exist, this would help to strategise preventive measures or guidelines to reduce racial incidents and enhance integration in the sport.

2.2 Research questions

The questions of relevance applied to the study are:

In what way does racism manifest itself in different levels of football Sweden?

Are there any differences in racial prejudice/incidents in the different football age groups?

Do coaches have planned strategies to deal with racial issues?
3. Previous research

Racist mindsets and racialised divides are now more visible and explicit than before (van Sterkenburg et al., 2019). Racism surrounds us every single day and so also in football which reflects the society (Bar-On, 2014; Santo, 2015). Previous research points to football being a pedagogical tool that not only teaches us a lot about life and the world irrespective of nationality, culture, age, gender, faith or sexual orientation but that participation in football can help open our eyes to new ways of adapting to each other, and understanding each other (Bar-On, 2014). However, in recent times there have been a lot of media coverage about racial incidents in the society including even football players both on the pitch and on social media. This has led to the evolution of movements as #BlackLivesMatter which is manifest in demonstrations both on the streets and on the pitch (Tepoel & Narcotta-Welp, 2020). Richardson and Fletcher (2010) write on racial problems experienced by players both on the pitch and in the media including uneven recruitment problems in their own organisations. Golash-Boza (2016) states that the concept of race is explained by the socially constructed belief that humanity can be divided into exclusive and biologically discrete groups based on cultural and physical characteristics. Racism is thus based on the ideology that races are groups of people with significant physical differences linked to significant social and cultural differences which can be measured and used to oppress people of colour who are thought to be inferior (Golash-Boza, 2016). The concept of superiority is linked with the concept of whiteness which is that one gets certain privilege/benefits which one would not get if he/she were not white (Kivel, 2017). According to Hornung (2012), it is a level of identity that exists solely to wield power over non-white people which can be seen as an “unconscious and invisible force of identity”. Munene Franjo (2017) writes that when a white athlete, the superior person (the western, heterosexual, masculine man) succeeded, it was attributed to dedication, perseverance and hard work, whereas the success of the black athlete was and often still is not because of hard work, but rather considered “natural” physical advantage. In sport, racism is expressed in many different ways, in the stands, in the boardrooms, on television, on the pitch and on the side-lines. In our contemporary moment there has not been a huge change, as white people regularly support political beliefs that harm black communities while cheering and rooting for black male athletes (Munene Franjo, 2017). Munene Franjo (2017) talks about of how black athletes are being cherished and appreciated until they lose a game, tournament etc. and then the athletes are instead seen as “others”, for example Ben Johnson got (re)labelled as a Jamaican
immigrant when he because of a doping incident lost his gold medal. When black athletes go against established norms, their “otherness” is often used to marginalise them (Munene Franjo, 2017). Racial incidents are sadly often “put down as part of the game” (Hylton, 2010) where many companies/federations only work actively with issues on the topic just to show political correctness. This way of working could also be called “image management”, a term coined by the scholar Sara Ahmed to explain the way in which organisations engage in polishing their surface to be viewed as “good” and antiracist organisations, whilst in practice not doing much to actually prevent and counteract racism in their daily operations. Image management also inhibits work that makes a real difference regarding racism, since people within the organisation view the mere presence of POCs in the organisation as a sign of them already being “good”, and thus do not see the need of any in depth engagement with antiracism (Ahmed, 2009).

Swedish football players can and have been experiencing racism within their own country and even when playing abroad via social media. One example was during the last World Cup in Russia 2018 (SR, 2018). In the group stage Sweden was playing against Germany, in the last minute of the game a German was fouled by the Swede Jimmy Durmaz of Syrian background. Germany scored and thus won the game. Directly after this situation racial slurs, death threats and lots of other hate comments poured down on Jimmy Durmaz’s social media. These were directed not only towards him but also to his family. However, the day after this, there was counteraction and support from all over Sweden via diverse media to protest the racist attacks on him via media (Niva, 2019). Two years after the incident regarding Jimmy Durmaz a Swedish newspaper released an article on multiple racist incidents experienced by both male and female football players who represent Sweden both on the national and club level (Bachner & Avdic, 2020). There were experiences where the opponent’s coach and players have been racist towards them, their own coaches who have said unappropriated things, the opponent’s supporters have shouted racial slurs and their own supporters have also been racist towards the players and even threatened them with death treats after the players have lost important games. Several participants in the article say that they do not know how to act, what action to take or what to do if/when racist acts occur against them. They do not know where or whom to press the charges to and most of them have never talked about those incidents and instead held them to themselves and that is what they have learned to do because they do not think there will be any consequences towards the people involved in the situation. One
example of the ludicrousness of the situation was during one game when a racial incident occurred, the player got upset and the police told him to go away and not cause a big scene (Bachner & Avdic, 2020).

To address the issue of minorities, football clubs are learning from other large or international corporations who have been working together with minorities and people in third world countries to bolster up their image. The football world is therefore mimicking this concept in order to also make it look good in the public eye but also to achieve better results as well as better social transformation (Hylton, 2010). Due to frequent race issues both on the pitch and in the public, major football clubs have corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes focusing on respect for players regardless of ethnicity or race both for players and supporters. Some even have programmes that support physical education in schools where they can have a big influence on children’s perspectives for the future (Breitbarth et al., 2015; Roșca & Marketing, 2011). According to Roșca and Marketing (2011) football clubs in the UK have through their CSR activities not only helped teenagers and homeless people from the street but have been focusing on respect for people of regardless of ethnicity or race. They have also put an emphasis on equality. Breitbarth et al. (2015) also make a point that football clubs have become more aware of their role in society where “…policies and ethics have become key values under close scrutiny…” and that global society these days is very much aware of companies’ actions. Woods and Stokes (2019) maintain that football clubs have thus through their CSRs activities strengthened their bonds with their supporters.

Eather et al., 2020; Hertting & Karlefors, 2021; Larsen et al., (2015) evaluated the impact football coaches have on their junior players and have found powerful evidence showing that the players well-being, motivation, enjoyment and retention can be affected in both positive and negative ways. They further state that all coaches, especially on community levels have to be given access to strategies and programmes to prepare and support them in their coaching roles and to help them develop high quality coaching competences. However, the concern here is that high-quality development courses are not on the market to all coaches which leads to the issue of today of the consequences of poor coaching and its great concern in sport for young players. Intosh and Martin (2018) mention specific athletic high school programmes in the United States where students and
Coaches are taught to become leaders by learning skills allowing them to acknowledge and address issues like racism, diversity and inclusivity. Jacobs et al., (2016), p 411 also talks about the crucial role a coach plays for athletes, especially in the youth sport where the coach teach the athletes “social and moral skills including respect and fair play, how to cope with social differences and with winning and losing and how to develop healthy habits”.

Swedish football teams at all levels have players with different backgrounds reflecting the nature of the Swedish society. Eliassi (2015) writes about the Swedish government actively adopting programmes to assist immigrants in developing ethnic relationships and maintaining their cultural identities while simultaneously being a part of Swedish society. Coaches are a central part of the game but not much has been written about them and their impact on race issues on and off the field. It is unclear how much education coaches have received on race and ethnic issues. SvFF together with Svenska Idrottsrörelsens Studieförbund (SISU) as well as some high schools offer career- and education programmes for sport coaches and other sport staff ranging between a few days to 22 months, and the school offers education for one and/or two years (eslovsfhsk, n.d.; SISU, n.d.; SvFF, n.d.). Prices of some of the courses have been reduced to make them more available. The focus is on fair play and with the vision on inclusiveness, Fotboll, nationalsporten för alla, överallt – which translates to: Football, the sport of the nation for everyone, everywhere however, the programmes do not specify how much of the course time discusses race and ethnic issues. Research on the performance of sport coaches and specifically in football, particular in the area race issues is unfortunately almost non-existent. There are anti-racism initiatives such as Football against racism which sadly has ceased to exist in 2013 (Arsvfonden, n.d.). There are however today also active initiatives regarding anti-racism in the south of Sweden where a football club together with schools and the municipality are arranging anti-racism work aimed at children in schools, and one football club in the north who also arranges anti-racism campaigns in their football tournament once a year, but nothing specifically aimed at educating trainers or football coaches (Malmo Stad, 2021; MFF, n.d.; Spelarforeingen, n.d.). There are thus no studies available to show if the education coaches are getting on race and ethnicity is of benefit or not. More research and studies are thus needed to examine the quality of coaching available in football and to understand better the impact of coaches in the field especially with regards to racism.
4. Theoretical Perspective

4.1 Critical Race Theory

The five key Critical Race Theory themes

1. ‘Race’ and racism are central to any theorising or intervention. Racism is not aberrational or rare – The question is not do we live in a racist society, but we do live in a racist society.
2. CRT presents a challenge to dominant ideas of objectivity, meritocracy, colour-blindness, race neutrality and equal opportunity.
3. Social justice and transformation are core goals of CRT.
4. Centralise the marginalised voice: naming realities.
5. CRT is transdisciplinary in the spirit of challenging dogma and orthodoxies.

When researching in a study a theory is important for the researcher because it provides the base and rational for the research as well as providing a structure within which the social phenomena being researched can be understood and research findings can be interpreted (Bryman, 2012).

This study is going to be assessed through the Critical Race Theory (CRT) which is a flexible framework to challenge certain beliefs or practices, especially narrow race thinking, racialized inequalities and racism in the society and in sport where it establishes that the question is not ‘do we live in a racist society’, but rather the realisation that ‘we live in a racist society’. That racist acts are not just episodic events (Hylton, 2010). Racial abuse is the most common form of racism in sport and has been described as a very dehumanising act. Very often racism has been trivialised and presented as been part of the game process (Hylton, 2010). But its impact on individuals can be, and often is, devastating.

Secondly, CRT presents and resistance to sports ideologies of “level playing fields”, colour-blindness and equal opportunity (Hylton, 2010). Race critics advocate for positive actions or equality strategies in order to rebalance historical inequalities. That is, moving over resources from those who earlier where privileged by whiteness to earlier unprivileged areas within the public sector.

Social justice and transformation are also central to the CRT (Hylton, 2010). This means challenging the status quo which implies changing historically racialized privileges regarding for
example services and facilities. In order to achieve this, race activists advocate that it is not enough to make laws through the legal system but that the changes have to be strategic and in some cases even proactive and radical.

The fourth theme in CRT implies that race, racism and the black experience have been marginalised or ignored (Hylton, 2010). That to be able to effect a change, we have to accept the reality on the ground, listen to the stories narrated by the POC players, examine the evidence and use it to make a positive change.

The last theme in CRT is that a transdisciplinary approach is needed to combat racist culture since the source of racist act are rooted in historical events and processes that include individual and institutional practices which may be overt or covert (Hylton, 2010). This makes the race issue very complex and therefore to be able to address this issue one needs to pull resources from different disciplines. Educators, policymakers and practitioners all stand to benefit from this lobbying strategy.

I find it relevant that I base the theoretical framework of this study investigating the level of racial abuse in Swedish football from a coach perspective. By using the CRT framework anti-racists have had a means of challenging narrow minded and instable or weak race thinking and approaches in sport, giving them support in their practical work in achieving harmony and integration in the sport (Hylton, 2010). The CRT should thus be a good foundation for understanding and analysing the findings of the study and thus enable me to make well-grounded conclusions.

4.2 Nordic exceptionalism

The idea of Nordic exceptionalism can be linked to the Nordic countries’ peripheral status in reference to the broader European colonialism and to the more recent globalisation trend. It might also symbolise the concept that Nordic self-perception is essentially different from the rest of Europe and that this self-perception causes interactions that are more distinct from those encountered elsewhere (Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012). It is said that people living within Sweden and the other Nordic nations are good people, reasonable and peace-loving. These nations have participated in anti-racist actions while ignoring their own involvement in colonial and racist
practices (Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012). This can be seen in everyday life by the citizens of these countries who in general express themselves in terms and words that can be seen as racist (Hübinette, 2012). It can encompass everything from a term being used by departments in universities; how certain locations with colonial links are termed to common racist words that are not seen or thought of as racist. There are many people who defend their right to freedom of words and expression (Hübinette, 2012).

4.3 Swedishness

Swedishness is a concept active in the modern Sweden, where whiteness is the primary core signifier of Swedishness, and therefore of being Swedish. It implies that in order to be seen and accepted as a “real” Swede you need to be white, and thus a non-white person is not a Swede (Hübinette & Lundström, 2011). There are approximately 10 million inhabitants living in Sweden and nearly 2.3 million of these people, in other words 25% have some type of foreign background. With the historical background about Sweden and its popularised idea of them being the most aesthetically, beautiful and physically perfect people on earth (Hübinette & Lundström, 2011). These ideas dates back to Carl von Linné, a researcher who in the 18th century divided the human race into different races with a hierarchy included, wherein white Swedes and other white groups were put on top and described in a positive light, and all other groups with POC were placed below and described with much more negative and degrading words (Levande Historia, n.d.; Pontén & Burnett, 2021). This image and history have led to a certain self-image, even though the inhabitants in Sweden have entered more inter-racial marriages and adopted most children of colour in comparison to other Western countries, this gives the impression of a place not being connected to racism.

In the study I will also use the concept of Nordic exceptionalism and Swedishness which I find will fit in well with the CRT mentioned above.
5. Methodology

5.1 Research strategy/design

My study is based on a qualitative research method which has been built on semi-structured interviews which is the most common method in qualitative studies (Bryman, 2012). In order to arrive at my sample, I have used a purposive sample which is an approach where the sample of participants are conducted to the goal of the research (Bryman, 2012). With this method I choose which sample to consider as I want to find out what their views and opinions are by using the snowball method, implying a technique where I first have a small group of people who are relevant to my research question and then they can propose other participants who might be of value who in their turn can suggest other people (Bryman, 2012). There is a base of questions that leads the interview, at the same time as there is room left for the participants’ answers to affect in which direction the interview goes, as it is important to have time for what they deem important (Bryman, 2012). I mostly used open-ended questions but there were a few closed-ended questions prepared to guide the participants in case they diverge from the research topic/question. The research has been based on football coaches for three different age groups: juniors (10-14), youths (15-18) and seniors above 18 years of age. In order to protect their identities in the study they have all been given names starting with the letter P. To also make the study/findings easy to follow, the participants have further been allocated the first letter of their football level (S – senior, Y – youth, J – junior) as an abbreviated surname. For example, Peter S therefore stands for Peter, football coach of a senior football team. The interviews are planned to last around one hour, depending on how much the participants have to share with me. Consent was collected from the participants to record the interview and transcribe it to make sure I do not lose any valuable information (Silverman, 2013). I always made sure that the participant could decide the location of the interview, to make sure that he was feeling secure in a safe location, since the topic being discussed could be seen as sensitive (Bryman, 2012). One of the interviews was on the premises of the association and others chose to invite me to their homes. Another option some chose were to have the interview at a location I set up, and for the ones that I could not meet face to face physically we had an alternative to have our conversation through Zoom (a digital meeting platform). After introducing themselves the coaches were asked seven main questions, followed by follow up/sub-questions on the topic depending on their answers. Some follow up/sub-questions were answered by everyone. In total there were eight questions divided into three themes. Question one – two are
under the theme “About you”, question three - four deal with “Racism in football Sweden”, and the third theme involving questions five - eight focused on “Working against Racism in football”. I was also available for questions and follow-up questions during the interview process so that they would be even more confident.

5.2 Selection and distribution of participants

For my sample of respondents to answer the interview questions, I have selected six different football coaches working for six different football clubs to study. In order to find out information about the topic, the six football coaches in different cities and counties were selected, who have and currently are working as football coaches. To get a broad representation I have chosen coaches from two bigger cities and one smaller town, these three cities are in different locations in Sweden. With regards to gender all the participants are men where they are coaches in different football levels. Two of them are football coaches for junior teams (10-14 years old), two others are working as a coach for youth teams (15-18 years old) and the two last people interviewed are in charge of senior teams (18+), who all are men coaching for boys/men teams. Regarding the coaches I chose to interview the same gender who are also coaching the same gender to minimise the gap of different factors of their view. Before contacting the associations, information was sought about various football coaches who might be suitable respondents for the interview, in this way bias in the interview is reduced as the respondent will have information to the questions and be knowledgeable in that topic (Bryman, 2012).

One of the rules Bryman (2012) suggests for conducting an interview is to design a good introduction letter that explains the purpose of the research. Another rule is to establish a trusting relationship with the respondents. This means making the respondent feel willing to take part in the interview and not interrupting them during their implementation. Therefore, well before each interview, they were informed about the length of the interview. During the interview I made sure to make a lot of eye contact as to show the interviewee that I am interested in what they have to say. However, when I noticed they got stuck in a thought or perhaps needed more time to think, I looked away or took a sip of water, or took some notes, as to show that there is no rush and that they have time to think further. This method helps the interviewee get deeper into their thoughts (Bryman, 2012).
5.3 Data collection

To gather data in this study I have chosen to use qualitative interviews (Bryman, 2012). More specifically, there are two main types, unstructured interviews and semi-structured interviews. I have chosen to use the semi-structured form where all six interviews have followed a list in a specific theme where the same base of already made questions were touched upon, but respondents had great freedom to shape the answers in their own way and this was followed by added questions during the process. Bryman (2012) believes that there is an emphasis in qualitative interviews regarding the formulation of the initial questions and an emphasis on the interviewees' own perceptions and views. A week before the interview the participants had the chance to go through the main questions to develop better thoughts I could collect as a result. What is appropriate about this method was that I had formulated questions I wanted to ask, and during the interview they were allowed to talk freely as they could move freely in different directions and talk about different points of view that were relevant and important. The advantages of interviews over questionnaires are that I as interviewer am on the spot readily available to help the respondents with any questions they are unsure of how to answer and that the interviewer can ask follow-up questions to get them to elaborate on their answers (Bryman, 2012).

According to Bryman (2012), it is recommended that interviewers learn the questions by heart before the interview starts so that questions are not forgotten, as this is a stressful task. Another recommendation to keep in mind is to clearly describe to the respondent beforehand what the interview is about, preferably in writing and verbally so that the person is informed and prepared to answer the questions. This is the structure I followed, so I practiced and memorize the questions, as well as both wrote to the respondents and gave them oral information on the spot about the survey (Bryman, 2012).

5.4 Data analysis

The data analysis has included several steps. The first step was transcribing the interviews directly after the interview was done. Secondly, I read all the interviews to get a better sense of them all together. Thirdly, when collecting the qualitative data, the thematic analysis is one of the most common approaches to use which is what I have used. In this method the results are constructed
into themes and subthemes where a theme more or less can be seen as a code (Bryman, 2012). The themes and subthemes emerged through a careful reading and rereading of the data's transcripts to make sure to discern patterns. The data is then sorted into basic themes and shown in terms of subthemes inside the matrix and for each instance, using this framework. The last part was a review of the themes to ensure they adequately captured related patterns (Bryman, 2012).

5.5 Evaluation of sources

Evaluation of sources implies that you evaluate the information you got. To consider of who says what and why. To be critical of the data I have obtained I have used MSB’s (2021) four different principles of Authenticity, Time, Dependence and Tendencies.

5.5.1 Authenticity

Authenticity is the core in all evaluation of sources (MSB, 2021). Here one must find out if the information provided says what it claims to be. If we look at the respondents who answers the interviews, it is possible to question whether what is answered is true or not. Since I do have a sensitive topic to discuss but also gained their trust and made sure they were feeling comfortable, there is less likelihood of them slanting or lying in their assertions (MSB, 2021).

5.5.2 Time

According to MSB (2021), when it comes to time, people tend to forget things that happened a long time ago. The closer in time the source has occurred the more credible it is. The positive aspect in my case will be that I interviewed the respondents about how they mainly see the current situation in football today with a backstory of their history as well, and that I did not stress them with questions so they could calmly answer as they wanted.

5.5.3 Dependence

The dependency criteria are about the relationship between different sources (MSB, 2021). The information gets spread to different places where two sources can get influenced by each other, leading to similar answers that cannot be seen as credible and therefore it is always best to seek the primary source. This applies mainly to topics that are controversial where there is a reason to
withhold the truth. Since I have seen to it that the participants have been anonymous to each other the likelihood of them influencing one another is minimised.

5.5.4 Tendencies

MSB (2021) last principle is tendency, which is about why a person says what they do. Implying that there is often a tendency for people to tell only what they are proud of and what is good about what they are conveying. During the interviews I have tried to create a comfortable environment for the participants to feel relaxed in, impressed on them the openness of the study, thus increasing the stimulus for them to tell the truth.

5.6 Ethical considerations in research

When it comes to ethical considerations researchers must adhere to particular guidelines. The information requirement, the letter of consent, the confidentially requirement and the requirement of use are described by Bryman (2012) as four ethical criteria that should be considered.

The information requirement states that the researcher must inform the persons concerned about the purpose of the study. One must also inform them about the voluntary participation and that they can drop out at any time if they wish. I presented who I am, the purpose of my interviews and why it was important in a so-called pre-information as is stated by Vetenskapsrådet (n.d.). Those who volunteered to participate in the study were allowed to respond at their leisure knowing that they could withdraw at any time. Once again just before the interviews began, I gave them a specific detailed information about who I am, how the interview would be conducted, and that the information collected would not be used for any purpose other than my research.

A letter of consent was sent to participants of the trial 2 weeks before the interview after they had been contacted earlier about the study. Bryman (2012) who points out that participants have the right to decide for themselves whether to participate in the research. From the standpoint of social science, this is the most contentious topic. Researchers have had covert observations on participants in past empirical work, which violates the principle that the participant does not get to choose whether or not to participate but is forced to. According to Bryman (2012) the researcher should be honest throughout and notify the individual in question, so that the participants may
decide whether or not to participate. I have been very frank with all pre-study communications with the participants. All the respondents have had a longer experience in football and worked as coaches for several years, which is what I aimed for. I intended to interview individuals with quite some experience in the field so as to get a better insight into the theme of the study.

The confidentially requirement is the principle in which information about people included in the survey should be confidential. Meaning that the personal data of the participants should not be identifiable by outsiders. If interviews are used, this is something that the writer must keep in mind so that no one else can access the personal data, which is what I have done in the study (Bryman, 2012).

All data collected in the study is being used only for research purposes and nothing else. This conforms with the fourth principle introduced by Bryman (2012) which refers to the requirement that any data collected for research purpose cannot be used for anything else besides the purpose of the thesis, especially not decisions or other actions that directly affect the individual (Vetenskapsrådet, n.d.).

The ethical consideration has been a keystone in this thesis research from the beginning to the end. The topic of this thesis concerns my own on reflections of my life within sports in Sweden in connection to racism, thus making the thesis and its process also personal. As a black person growing up in Sweden, especially in an area where the large majority were white people, I was the only black person in my class and even in my school apart from my other two sisters. I have also experienced racism in sport, but I have had good teammates and coaches who have stood up for me when needed. Although I have not been a coach, the topic being discussed is still of concern to me and involves me since I still feel connected to the stories they are sharing as I am still an active football player. By researching the football coaches’ views on racism, from the profession and not a personal aspect, the education they get in the field on the topic and investigating the possibility of any difference seen in the race issue at the different levels in football Sweden, I stand without prejudice since I do not work as a coach. I am however aware that the fact that I am a black person can affect the interviewees answers in different ways. When the interviewee was a white person, it could for example lead to nervousness as it is commonplace to be worried when
talking about these issues, not wanting to say something that could offend. This could in some senses have affected interviewees in not feeling that they could speak as freely as if when they would speak to another white person about racism. In the interviews where I interviewed a coach who also has experiences of being subject to racism, it might on the other hand perhaps make it easier for that person to talk to me, as there is most probably an assumption made by that person that I too have similar experiences.

5.7 Quality of references in research

In this study with different literature searches, it has been important for me to critically examine the content of the literature searched. I have tried to achieve the aims advocated by Bryman (2012) in order to reach a fully approved level. The four different criterions advocated and which have been met by me are: Authenticity, Credibility, Representativeness and Meaningfulness (Bryman, 2012).

Authenticity is about whether the material in the document is genuine and of an unquestionable origin (Bryman, 2012). That the theories and scientific articles used have undergone a review process, which can be considered to ensure that it is truthful.

That the sources are free from error and distortion and thus as credible. Credibility is very important and I have tried throughout the study to trace back to the original sources to ensure that the information is used correctly, that it is not distorted and not lead to any lack of credibility (Bryman, 2012). With regards to the representativeness criteria, the research must be typical of the relevant research area (Bryman, 2012). In my case, I obtained research and information from different key informants which allowed me to analyse and compare similarities and differences. Relevant literature and articles have been reviewed to find researchers who can be cited.

The last criterion goes under meaning, implying that the information should be clear and comprehensible (Bryman, 2012). Throughout the study, I have spent a lot of time making sure that I have understood what the central point of the research is that I have studied and done my best as not to distort any part of what I have taken on board in the study.
5.8 Validity and reliability

Validity is about getting answers to what is asked for and reliability is about whether the answers are credible and relevant (Punch, 2014). In order to conduct a valid and reliable study, I have asked and received about information that the participants have experienced in their jobs, and I believe the coaches have been sincere in the replies. We have discussed around the questions asked and they have been consistent with their experiences and thoughts about the issues involved. I presume that the input from all participants can be trusted that all information given is probably valid and reliable. I believe that the findings from the empirical data together with the scientific sources are sound. The concept of validity refers to the ability of a measurement instrument to measure what the research is intended to measure (Punch, 2014) and I believe that I have achieved this aim.
6. Findings and discussion

6.1 ABOUT YOU

6.1.1 Introduction

Interest in football is expanding rapidly in the world mainly due to all the media coverage that it is given but this has also brought to light the racist incidents have been occurring around players, both in and out the field. This study is focusing on the coach’s insight into the problem where I try to assess the level of problem in Sweden and the know-how of the coaches and their ability to handle the situations. I will be using the critical race theory as a basis for analysis of the findings.

Six football coaches contributed as participants in the study and there is a large difference in their age span as well as experience in the field. However, they are a homogenous group when it gets to their gender. They are all men, coaching male football teams. All six football coaches have been active as football players for several years, playing at different levels from junior to elite football. They all have a special love for the game, which led them to eventually take up positions as football coaches. Their reasons for being football coaches were varied, from either someone they knew offered them to try it out to one’s son starting to play in a team that needed a football coach and then just getting stuck to the position. The age gap between the oldest and youngest football coach is 48 years. The oldest participant, named Peter S, is 67 years old and has been playing football since he was young and been active as a football coach for 33 years. In comparison to the youngest participant, Pedro J who is 19 years old and also has the least experience as a football coach of four years duration, but with 15 years of experience combined as a player and a coach he has a newly fresh perspective and experience contributing to this thesis. The four other participants are all older than Pedro J and have more experience as football coaches than him but also less then Peter S. Patrick S is 38 years old with seven years of coach experience, whereas Phil Y is 28 years old and has been a football coach for 14 years. Paul Y is 22 years old and has been a football coach for six and half years and the last football coach introduced is Prince J, 48 years old and has been an active football coach for six years. Peter S and Patrick S are managing senior teams (men above 18 years) while Phil Y and Paul Y manage junior teams (15-18 years) and Prince J and Pedro J are coaches for the juniors (10-14 years). It has been common for these participants, at least five out of six coaches, to start their coaching career for young footballers and then move on to higher
levels. Four out of the six coaches have managed other age levels than the ones they are active in now. The majority of them, four out of six, have been active as football coaches in various regions in Sweden and the other participants have been active for several different clubs in the same city/region apart from one who was been involved for the same club since he started.

6.1.2 Coaching experience

The CRT states that one of the most dehumanising forms of racism is racial abuse which can be seen/heard in the field of play, side lines and in the stands which is why the coaches’ experiences of these acts is being investigated in the following themes (Hylton, 2010).

This theme touches on their professional coach roles. Here I specifically asked them if they have been coaches for players that could be exposed to racism, notably non-white players. All participants stated that they have or have had such players in their teams. One example from Patrick S’s response is

“You could say that I have been coaching the two different sides of football, I have coached many different teams with huge differences. Not only coaching a team full of white Swedish players but I have also been involved with a team with great diversity. Ever since I was a player, I have gotten the experience and understood that a mixture of nationalities and mentalities is what will get the best out of the team and the best result. So that was probably one of the first things I did here during the first year and slowly we got some more nationalities and especially a different mentality than the Swedish mentality”.

Here Patrick S is through his actions challenging the general perceived idea of race neutrality and colour-blindness by actively working towards more equal representation just as the CRT states (Hylton, 2010). One coach also took up the fact that one could have second generation Swedish players, born and brought up in Sweden but non-white. This led to discussions regarding diversity amongst the coaches for their various teams, clubs or as they have experienced in general. These questions revealed quite some different opinions. In short, they all agree that there is some diversity amongst the leaders in their clubs. Moreover, Phil Y says
“When you check diversity for players it is one thing but sadly whenever you check the diversity amongst the leaders, it is slightly different. There have been far more, how shall I put it, white men who have been coaches, if I say so very sloppy than people of other ethnic backgrounds but lately, I have experienced more people of other origins”.

Patrick S goes on by saying “It depends on what club you look at but most of the coaches are Swedish and then maybe there is a mixture of nationalities of the assistant coaches or other people in the staff”. Here Patrick S is implying that most of the coaches are Swedish more than other nationalities, however he does not state if the Swedish coaches are white or not which points to the concept of Swedishness when implying that coaches from other nationalities are POC but not the ones from Sweden (Hübinette & Lundström, 2011). Phil Y is touching on the issue of the whiteness process as in the CRT where he sees the construction of the coaching level not reflecting equal opportunities with regards to the ethnicities of the football coaches (Hylton, 2010). The participants are of different opinions about how much diversity there is in the sport. Some begin to compare football to other sports, mentioning that football has more diversity than other sports.

6.2 RACISM IN FOOTBALL SWEDEN

6.2.1 Is racism visible?

In the second theme, the first question asked was “In what way does racism manifest itself in football according to your experience as a coach?” - Here is where I found the biggest difference of their views on racism in football. Phil Y, together with other participants thinks this is a difficult question because he does not know exactly where the line runs, if something or a joke being said with ethnic, culture or colour tones can be seen as racist or normal. All coaches said that racial incidents occur, some participants said it happens more often whilst others mean that yes racial incidents occur, but they however do not see racism as something existing in general within Swedish football. I was told that there is a tough “jargong” - environment/norm/unspoken rule (my own translation) in football which can be very tough. There are jokes thrown around from time to time and that these may contain racial slurs, however some were unsure of how these jokes were
taken by the objects of the joke. Further, all the participants mention that racial jokes are common in football. A variety of racial micro-aggressions in everyday life show themselves in sport through jokes, where humour can also be used to speak truth to the authority (Burdsey, 2011). Yosso 2005 states that one way to disrupt unappealing experiences and to handle racism is through humour. Humour can be seen as a method to make it easier to share cultural wealth, which in turn helps cultural capital navigate and reject unfavourable situations (Yosso, 2005). In spite of the fact that racial humour and racism have been evidences as damaging aspects of sport, people use racialised humour in both directions, both as offence and defence and it is complex (Yosso, 2005).

Peter S is the only participant who clearly states that racism does not exist in football Sweden goes on by saying “I must say that I have been very spared from racism. Actually, I think football is among the best environments when it comes to everyone being seen as equal”. What Peter S is implying here is that racism is almost non-existent in the sport, which is the primary focus of the CRT, namely that there is racism in sports and it is not rare, we are not that objective and therefore it needs to be addressed. Here his assumption is that the game is colour-blind and the playing field gives equal opportunities (Hylton, 2010). Some of the other participants say that they have neither experienced racism as a coach in their own teams nor been involved in any racial incidents but rather, they themselves have experienced some form of it in their football career. Some have also experienced it both in their works as football coaches and also as players earlier in their careers, for example Phil Y who said that racism has been seen in football as long as he can remember and Pedro J who says, “there is some type of racism in almost every third game, the questions is how people see it”. Pedro J is saying that the question is how people here in Sweden view racism, because in Europe, Sweden is one of the countries whereby a large proportion of the population deviates from the norm due to skin colour, so one would have expected lesser problems (Hübinette, 2018). However, all participants have seen and heard of incidents with regards to racism occurring to teammates or others from the supporters, on the sidelines or even on the pitch. Many of the participants say that as a coach you do not hear about everything as it happens but rather quite often receiving information about incidents after they occurred. One reason coaches often say that they hear about incidents afterwards, even though they may be on the same pitch whilst the incidents are played out can be linked to the concept of Nordic/Swedish exceptionalism where one dwells in the image and reputation as a fair and peace loving country, beyond racism and that
racist acts just do not happen in Swedish football. Thus some coaches might not see the racism that others see (Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012).

Peter S gives me the one and only example of when he experienced racism through an joke “I was in the locker room and there was one white guy saying to a black guy that he has never seen a ni**er\(^1\) not having any muscles and then they both laughed, maybe he did not enjoy it but they both laughed”, he continues by saying that because of the jargon the player cannot get upset because then he will probably hear from the other guys that he is not a man if he cannot take a joke. How Peter S describes the jargon can be seen as an environment made of macho culture where one has to show that he is tough and not show signs of weakness (Pettersson, 2014). Peter S did not know how the guy actually felt because they both laughed afterwards and if the guy would be sad he would not have continued coming to play, Peter S said. Trivialising racist behaviour and putting it as part of the game is specifically one of the objects of racism that the CRT objects to (Hylton, 2010). Prince J says that sometimes he can hear jokes from players, but he is not sure if the objects of the jokes always fully understand what was said and that he then interrupts to explain why it is wrong to say these jokes as they can be seen as racist. Several of the participants also highlight that jokes with undertones in the football environment can be heard from any player, regardless of who they identify as. There is a disparity between the coaches in which way those jokes actually are leaning to because some state it happens more towards white players whiles others say it happen more to non-white persons, which makes this difficult to assess. One on hand it could be turn as positive since it goes both ways, but it all depends on the climate in which it is used. During the interviews I observed that one or other of the participants referred to Swedish people when they meant white people and immigrant when they referred to a Swedish POC. Here one might see the tendency towards the concept of Swedishness (Hübinette & Lundström, 2011).

Some coaches described racist actions they were spectators of during the time when they were players, but not an experience they have had as a coach. Several of the football coaches believe one gets exposed to more racism in the countryside, that is to say, the further you get away from

\(^1\) This can be seen as a four-letter word referring to a black person, which is why it is not spelled correctly and of use in this thesis
the city the more likelihood of racism one might meet and that on the contrary less racism is experienced within the city. Patrick S and Pedro J also continue by saying that racism is more prevalent when you are on the winning team and less prevalent when you are on the losing squad. This may also be an indication of macho norms coming into play where one turns to racist jargon to cover up a feeling of disappointment or weakness after losing a match. Some coaches believe that racism is most obvious on the pitch where you as a coach can hear concrete racial slurs for example “You fu**ing ni**er” or “a fu**ing immigrant” (Paul Y) (Pedro J) and sometimes it is rather shown through actions. Pedro J gives an example of an episode where in a heated game racial slurs were thrown at his team (a team with diversity) from the opponents coach (a team with mostly white players). After an escalation of the situation from both sides Pedro J’s team ended up getting booked with 4 red cards whilst the other team did not get a single booking, which he believes was a racist decision from the referee. The feeling here is that the ethnic minority experience in the light of the heated situation is being marginalised in the greater context when decisions are being made with regards to who to punish apropos the CRT (Hylton, 2010). In this regard Chu et al. (2014) found similar practices in the English PL where non-white players in the PL are 15% more likely to be awarded a yellow card or be booked than a white player. Both Prince J and Pedro J have experienced how opponent’s supporters and especially the players parents shout racial slurs at the young players. Prince J also says that he sometimes feels some referees watch specific POC players more carefully more than others.

Peter S tells me another story of how he does not let refugees play in his team. He says that other people in the club might prompt him to give everybody a chance to play but he does not think that is a fair way to coach. He explains it by saying

“Refugees who want to try out with us, I tell them no and do not let them in. Maybe the other people in my club tells me that I have to give them a chance and let them try, but to them I say that that is not fair because they have not hired me to make super social decisions with different people but rather to gain points for the team, it does not work that way. In fact, I am doing them a very big favour. For example, if they speak another language, then I have to put in a lot of energy into understanding them and then even more energy into speaking English with
them and I can admit that I cannot stand that, it is too much for me and for all the other guys in the team to have to wait even longer before the training or exercises can get started because someone has to understand. If I would let them play, whether if he is good or not and then sometime when he is not allowed to play maybe he will say that he is not allowed to play because he is a refugee, whilst nobody has said that. If I would coach a children’s/junior’s team where they would be 13 or 14 years old, this would not have been a problem but now I have to produce results regarding our performance and imagine me having to spend twice as long to explain everything”.

The conflict between his aim to produce results contra trying to assimilate the players into the group is interesting to note. Peter S highlights a topic that the CRT challenges, namely trying to maintain the status quo. He is very open, sincere and sounds credible in his discussions. However, to be able to transform the sport and overcome the under-representation of race minorities one has to be a proactive and radical in prioritising the resources/players at hand. The question here is the confrontation between social reform and corporate gains/achievements. The CRT maintains that the best thing to do for a better society is to transform the sport to make it more inclusive (Hylton, 2010). For the team to be better and stronger and for Peter S to gain points for the team by winning games he needs to understand the players. This means understanding the reality that their voices or feelings are being marginalised as the CRT says. In this way next time Peter S finds himself in a situation where he sees a player laughing to a joke, he will understand and appreciate the feelings involved and know how to tackle the situation better (Santo, 2015).

Many of the participants reflected on “what racism actually is, where does one draw the line?” one example from Phil Y is, “There are constant arguments about whether what some people are saying is racist or not, very odd arguments” he continued saying that “I believe that a key is to become more aware of understanding what is ok and what is not”. Phil Y believes that the perception of racism has changed with time and that is why it is hard to point out exactly what racism is and what it is not – “Now that I am a coach I can see and hear people expressing
themselves in a way that is not necessarily directly racist but is still highly inappropriate”. Further, he says

“People have different values where some believe that it is not acceptable with any type of racism and some think people overreact. The coach’s value decides how incidents will be treated and it is very individual of how a coach will act in these incidents. When a coach has not stood up for his player, I believe it is mostly white coaches who is in charge, and the ones that care about racial incidents and stands up for players have another ethnicity than Swedish. Therefore, I think that it is easier as a player to be exposed to racism depending on your coach”.

Phil Y’s thoughts above may be a reflection that those with privileges are ok with the status quo and so they just let it be. Further, with regards to the comment that one thinks that the majority of (white) coaches do not stand up for their players, I think can be linked to the concept of Nordic/Swedish exceptionalism where white people in these countries have the benefit of forgetting about their own skin colour and power, and thus do not see the racism someone else is exposed to (Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012). What Phil Y and other participants say about the difficulty of knowing what counts as racism or not is exactly what the CRT is explaining because the term race or racism is constantly changing and being reconstituted, and this is what makes it difficult for people and especially anti-racists to know how to behave and what to do (Hylton, 2010).

Regarding participants experiences as players and how they have experienced their coach’s behaviour I could identify a common observation from Peter S, Phil Y, Paul Y and Pedro J, which was the coach’s prejudice. It could be such as either blaming behaviour on a player based on where one is from, the coach’s behaviour depending on what location the game was held at or that they could hear them saying something racist. An example here is how Paul Y’s coach told them to win the game and afterwards they could celebrate by eating ni**er pastry. Pedro J believes that because football brings out a lot of emotions it gets heated quite often and then players say things they do not really mean, rather they want to get another player out of balance. Further, he believes racism is more common when older people play, especially players older than 18 years. From the above
discussions, one can see that there is a positive process or shift towards minimising the whiteness structure of the sport as the CRT advocates (Hylton, 2010). It is also known that many racist words and terms are still being used uncritically in everyday life in Sweden. One of these words is the N-word which Paul Y’s coach used when using the expression ni**er pastry. A journalist in Sweden once justified the continued usage of the term in the country, but a campaign of thousands of Swedes joined a group on Facebook called “The name is Negro ball” voiced their opposition to the term/expression (Hübinette, 2012). However, racism does not only exist as racial slurs or other clear swear words but can also be subtle and hidden acts and some in a dehumanizing way. Racial acts often exist in institutionalised settings and manifests in a variety of ways (Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012). Therefore, it seems that we still have some work to do with regards to the marginalisation of the realities of race problems and the effect it has on the players.

6.2.2 The coach’s behaviour

I also wanted to find out if they, as professional football coaches, acted in a specific way to prevent or dampen racial tensions or incidents, what the consequences were and if there were any lessons they learned from past experiences. Peter S once again tells me that the best place to be in if you want to avoid racism is in the sports world. He points out that when conflicts appear in football as anywhere else and when incidents arise with people from different backgrounds it may be a common cause for conflict. After Peter S witnessed the racial incident with the black player in the locker room he said “because of the jargon I did not say anything and then we all went out to start the practice. I did not know how to deal with it and felt as if there was nothing I could do to in that situation, so we just went out to the pitch to start the practise”. Prince J told me that he heard about an incident afterward it happened and could not do anything else than talk to the victim in his team because the opponent’s parents who had been involved had left. Most of the answers I got was that the football coach after the incident would talk to the player who was the victim in their team and sometimes send a complaint to the football association responsible for the region they are playing in, however none of them rarely heard of or saw any consequence of the case afterwards. The main point was talking to their players who had been abused and showing them that they care and that they do not tolerate such behaviour. Paul Y was the only one who said that he and his colleagues had called the opponents to discuss the case with them, however, even after that he does not know what was done with the information they got and did not hear anything after the phone call. After
an incident has occurred the majority of the coaches would talk to the person being involved in the situation by listening to them and makings sure they are all right, which is acting in line with the CRT, namely to centralise the voice of the minority and listen to their perspective of the issue (Hylton, 2010). Another show of the concept of the Nordic/Swedish exceptionalism above are the coach’s inability or inactiveness in seeing to be getting to the bottom of incidents that occur to the players is the fact that only one participant had called the other team after an incident whereas the other coaches did not take any action because as they said, the supporters or opposing team had already left. These actions are sometimes also termed as being the fear of conflict-resolution thought to be common of citizens in the country (Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012).

Patrick S shares an incident with me from when he was a player where the opposing teams coach and their supporters shouted racial slurs at Patrick S’s team, which later led to the opposing teams coach got fired from his job. With regards to the supporters Patrick S does not know if there were any consequences to them, he doubts there were none. Nonetheless, many of the participants believe they would be able to solve a racial issue if it occurs. Patrick S believes that he is not the only one that would react if a racial situation occurred “I know that football clubs around this area do not tolerate racism, but still it happens too often”. He says further that, in their club not just player or other staff but also people from other clubs in his area would call someone out if they behaved in a negative way regarding racism, and that is what football truly is about Patrick S says. Pedro J moreover tells me that when he reflects about some situations he has been in, he regrets that he did not do more than only talk to his own players. Additionally, Pedro J and Patrick S mention that negative comments and racial slurs can sometimes be seen as positive depending on who the player is, that is, if the player does not care about it too much one can use it as fuel to become motivated, score goals, be a better player and just laugh about and revenge the situation. Regarding if the participants learned any lessons from the racial cases mentioned, Paul Y said “Understand me correctly now but we have to be able to turn it off, it is completely wrong but it will happen again so every time it happens we have to try and be better and then it will not bother us. The most important is to understand that it will not get better if we do the same thing to the opponents”. Pedro J goes on in the same directions and also pointing out that “the mindset is the most important we got, football is more than just playing and kicking a ball”.

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6.3 WORKING AGAINST RACISM IN FOOTBALL

6.3.1 Challenges with racism in football

The first question reflected in this category was what the coaches find most challenging in preventing and dealing with racism as a coach. Five out of the six participants answered in different ways but they are not fully prepared to handle a situation when or if it arises and they would like to have more education on this. Phil Y once again says that it is hard to know the definition of racism, “I do not see the hard part about not having respect for other people, to express themselves in some ways without understanding the other people” where he implies that one does not necessarily have to be racist when saying something, but that we all should respect each other and learn how to use correct terms to not offend one another. Patrick S, Paul Y and Pedro J also said time is the most challenging factor. As a football coach you have to work with so many other aspects of the game/club and you do not see the players so often, therefore time is one of the biggest challenges. They point out that several of the people working in their clubs are volunteers and their players are there on their free time, that is why time can be crucial if one has to be effective. Further, some also stated that racism is bigger than football and that the society as a whole has to work with it. I think this is what the CRT talks about when it advocates for a transdisciplinary approach to racism. We need joint inputs from politicians, educators/schools, legal backing, religious people, social workers, psychologists etc. to be able to address racial issues (Hylton, 2010). Peter S, Patrick S, Phil Y and Pedro J also mentioned social media being one of the problems since it happens outside the field and therefore it becomes a difficult challenge – “unfortunately, with the internet today, there are a few people who feel they have the right to express themselves in whatever way they see fit – unfortunately, you will never get away from that,” as Patrick S express it. Patrick S, Paul Y and Pedro J also think that they have been spared from racial incidents due to their teams including POC players where many people have known each other for a long period of time and/or because the city where one’s team is located has made progress with integration within football.

6.3.2 Support and strategies

Two other questions I asked were, what support the coaches needed to develop their anti-racist work, and if they have any strategies to prevent and tackle racism in their professional roles. Five participants (Patrick S, Phil Y, Paul Y, Prince J and Pedro J) would appreciate more education or
workshops in the field. Further they all wish for more support from above, that is, higher up in the football clubs/federations. Patrick S, Phil Y and Prince J specifically hoped SvFF would take charge of this which could then lead to every club and coach having some type of education and knowledge in the field. Patrick S goes on by saying that if that would happen it could eventually lead to clubs in the same region or city starting to exchange knowledge and experiences with each other. This I believe is exactly what the CRT presents in its challenge to race neutrality, colour-blindness and equal opportunity. Pedro J also believes that support should also come from the society and not only from football “what happens in football happens in the society, they get their behaviour from somewhere”. What Pedro J is implying is that football is so global that the manifestations of racism within it tells more about racial inequalities in the society than other areas or sport can (Hylton, 2010). He mentions that his club is working with psychological surveys of their players every week in collaboration with SISU and this is something he would enjoy working more with, even though it does not have anything do to with racism. A lot of work is aimed at creating a good group, a good environment and group dynamic in the club. Regarding the players he says, “what we must not forget is that our responsibility is to educate them as people and individuals to become good fellow human beings”. Phil Y says that his club has come far in comparison to other football clubs in Sweden with regards to racism in the sport. They have come across this issue many times and are actively working with it. Within Phil Y’s club there is one person who actively works with the club’s identity, its values, their image and amongst other thing with racism. Phil Y would really be happy if more clubs worked with anti-racism “because everyone has to work with this both internally and externally. It would also be nice if people worked with respect and to understand one another”. One can clearly see here that objective structures are being put in Phil Y’s club to challenge race issues. However, to achieve a more meaningful transformation as required by the CRT more help or positive action seems to be needed from the football federations higher up in the hierarchy (Hylton, 2010).

None of the coaches interviewed had any planned strategies about dealing with racism but some gave me examples of what could be done. Peter S, Patrick S and Pedro J would remove their player from the team no matter of how important the player is to the team because “the biggest loss for me would be if the victim stopped playing, then I have failed my job” Peter S says. Phil Y and Pedro J would contact someone else who might have more knowledge on this in their club if a
situation should arise. Some coaches would report the incident to the SvFF and also call the opponents team for a discussion. All the participants have undergone leaderships educations provided by SvFF, but none of them had undergone any education or course where racism has been an active topic, neither from SvFF or anywhere else. Phil Y points out that some of the courses provided by SvFF touch upon fair play, but not so much about racism in general, and that even the discussion on fair play took only a short time. It is interesting to see that Peter S has been a football coach for 33 years and in his football education provided by SvFF there has not been any course on tackling racism, and as of today Pedro J who has been a coach for four years has not either had any education on racism strategies, meaning that none of the coaches has during this time span been offered any education in the field by SvFF. The introduction of racism in coaching courses organised by the SvFF may most probably be unthinkable in view of the fact that it challenges the self-image of Swedes being naturally anti-racist (Vidga Normen, 2019). In Sweden, few people desire to investigate how we are influenced by living in a world where racism has played a major role of shaping our perceptions of existence and in structuring the world (Vidga Normen, 2019).

6.3.3 Are football clubs active with work regarding equality and anti-racism?
Here the sport coaches answered questions regarding their football club, if they work with equality strategies and/or anti-racism. One out of six clubs is working with race and race issues and have someone who is employed to work with the core values, the code of conduct of the club race and racists acts which are touched upon some times. Phil Y who is working for the club that has made some progress in attending to the realities of race in comparison to other football clubs in Sweden informed that both their players and coaches undergo workshops together from time to time every year. Further, every coach in Phil Y’s club has some planned meetings with their players every year. The remaining five clubs do not have any planned race equality or anti-racism strategies. Paul Y says, “I would say that we have never talked about racism at all”. Pedro J says that there should not have to be a rule regarding that no one should be exposed to racism because he thinks it is very obvious. What all coaches point out is that they have their core values or basic values they work with. However, it seems as if the core values are not being evaluated that often and not every participant believes it matters - “just because someone reads the core values does not mean he will change because of some text on some piece of paper” Patrick S says, who still says people in his club should know about racism and that the football club is very careful of who they employ.
Here I think Patrick S is right because just because a law has been made or decision put on paper regarding a subject, and in this case racism, there has to be a concerted effort to make it work (Hylton, 2010). One has to be proactive and take positive action otherwise it just becomes a symbolic thing and thus not worth much. In some ways it might even be negative to the anti-racist course. According to Paul Y the 13 year old always go through the core values of his club but nothing more, and he is wondering why his own football club has not hired anyone for the position of introducing the race topic and theme. Prince J is coaching 14 year old boys and they have constructed their own core values –

“The players in our team specifically made new core values which apply only to them. We were thinking, since the values apply to them, we would also want them do decide what it is they are supposed to follow because when they are part of the decision making they will probably follow the values better, hopefully they will also enjoy it more”.

Prince J is however satisfied with the fact that SvFF in his region implemented a “game host” who is responsible for attending every game to make sure there is a safe environment for the children. Further, he says they are working with racism in the long run via night football (when his football club arranges open access to football during the evening in weekends for youths in the area with the purpose to improve equality, prevent exclusion and crime). Research I made by going through the participant’s football club’s webpages to find out if their clubs are active with work regarding anti-racism or equality strategies revealed that Paul Y’s club also engaged in night football as a social project. That was all I found about the clubs apart from one anti-racism campaign in 2010 in Prince J’s club. Whatever the action regarding the core values etc, Patrick S believes that it is important to start in the early ages of the players or else it will not matter. According to five out of six participants there is nothing on their football club’s webpage to show that they are working with anti-racism and/or equality strategies. Since only two football clubs are engaging with night football and one club had the anti-racism campaign in earlier days but nothing else, the clubs might not see the need for any or more active engagement since they may think that having POC players and also some POC coaches, they may have done enough. In this aspect some of the football clubs
can be seen to be acting only by image management as not addressing and working on core race-related issues as Ahmed (2009) describes it.
7. Conclusion

Football is a growing sport and racism is a problem not only in the society but also in sport. This is also why coaches are very vital in the process of the football game, especially for younger players (Eather et al., 2020; Larsen et al., 2015). In this study there were six football coaches interviewed from different parts of Sweden, responsible for coaching different football levels and where the coaching experience is between 4 and 33 years between the youngest and oldest coach. A weakness in the study is that all six participants are men and I had no representation from northern Sweden. However, they have all been coaching football teams with both white and POC players for many years.

With regards to how racism is manifested the football coaches gave multiple scenarios. Some see racism as single or rare incidents and do not believe that racism actually exists in football Sweden whereas others believe it is seen quite often. There has even been an incident where a police officer has told a POC player to just move on and not react to racial slurs being thrown at him (Bachner & Avdic, 2020). These discrepancies are exactly what the CRT is talking about when touching on objectivity and colour-blindness (Hylton, 2010). Racism seems thus to be manifested at all football levels of the population studied, by players making jokes of each other with racial undertones and tough jargon, both on and off the field, including in the dressing room. Coach prejudice could even be observed by for example exclusion of players because of colour. Tough decisions by referees and racial slurs shouted by the supporters.

With reference to differences in racial prejudice and/or racial incidents in the different age groups or levels of football, there seems to be a view that these incidents are occurring at all levels. There is however a perception of lesser racism amongst the juniors than youths and seniors. Further, where supporters shout racial slurs at the players in the youth- and senior level, those supporters doing the same at the junior level happen to be parents who shout racial slurs at younger children of the opposing team. Of all the six coaches interviewed, only one football club is actively working with anti-racism.
None of the participants have any planned strategy of handling racial incidents when they occur, however they have all undergone football coaching education programmes provided by SvFF. Some coaches feel they can handle the situation if it arises whilst others are insecure and expressed the need for more support in the area. None of the coaches’ clubs or SvFF is known to offer any course or programme on anti-racist strategies which the coaches hope, will or should be offered to them soon. There is a general feeling of insecurity when it gets to race issues. Many coaches in Sweden are also working voluntarily and especially with junior teams, where most of the coaches start their careers (Tuastad, 2019). Since racial incidents seem to arise at every football club level it may be a good idea to start the process of introducing the race issue earlier in the coaching programmes offered and that even volunteer coaches who are usually parents to juniors may be offered some of these courses. This way the problem may be addressed already at an early age and hopefully we will get a better climate in all of football Sweden. Here it is expressed specifically from coaches, the need of such programmes sponsored already at the club level, that way all employed have a planned strategy to follow. Further, there is also a need expressed to see that SvFF takes the lead in seeing to this reality that is occurring in the football of today. Even though I found no information in the literature about planned activities in race issues from clubs and federations, a weakness in the study may be the absence of direct information or interviews from football players, club- and federation representatives to also be able to give their view on the subject discussed. One can however conclude from the study, that a detailed planned strategy of dealing with racial issues in football is not available to coaches today. On the whole there is much less scientific research on racial discrimination in European sports, in particularly football (Chu et al., 2014). Racism is still very much under researched despite the global nature of football (Bradbury, 2010).

Sweden is a very social conscious and inclusive country and has many positive traits that many countries would yearn to have (Flensner et al., 2021). A lot is done for inclusivity in sports with regards to gender, disabilities and minority issues, but despite all these good achievements racism unfortunately is being experienced even on the football fields (Bachner & Avdic, 2020; Flensner et al., 2021). These findings are confirmed by Chu’s et al. (2014) research which states that despite the PL being one of the most inclusive leagues in the world, with at least a quarter of the players are from Black or ethnic minority backgrounds, various incidents in recent times suggest that racial
discrimination continues to exist. Most research has focused on players, referees and club managements and organisations, unfortunately there is nothing in the literature today on coaches’ knowledge and impact on race. This study is therefore unique, and it shows that more needs thus to be done to educate and train coaches and clubs to make the football environment a better place for all who participate in football Sweden, despite their background. While my analysis shows evidence of racism, it is equally probable that some of the issues raised may have other underlying causes that have not been fully researched. However, the urge for more to be done by clubs in Europe is supported by Llopis-Goig (2013) and Adriaan De Vlieger (2015) who plead for more engagement. This study is limited by the few numbers of coaches interviewed. To get a better understanding of the issue of race seen from the coaches’ perspective, larger studies including larger amounts of coaches, clubs and players will have to be done with more specific objectives in order to investigate more accurately the situation of coaches in the clubs of Sweden today.
8. Appendix – Questions for participants

ABOUT YOU

1. Tell me a bit about yourself: who are you, and how did you become a football coach?

2. How long have you been an active football coach in Sweden?

RACISM IN FOOTBALL IN SWEDEN

3. In what way does racism manifest itself in football according to your experience as a coach?

4. Can you share information about a concrete situation where someone has been subjected to racism from spectators/teammates/other coaches etc.? What happened?

WORKING AGAINST RACISM IN FOOTBALL

5. What do you find most challenging in preventing and dealing with racism, as a coach?

6. What support would you have needed to further develop your anti-racist work?

7. Do you have any strategies to prevent and tackle racism in football today, based on your role as a coach? Give concrete examples!

8. How does your association work with equality issues and anti-racism today? Do you have policies, procedures, training, etc.?
9. References

9.1 Literature


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9.2 Interviews

Peter S, Football Coach for senior level. 2022. Interview May 20th.
Phil Y, Football Coach for youth level. 2022. Interview May 19th.