

Master's Thesis

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The importance of Belonging

A case study of high achieving upper secondary school students in Oslo

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Content

Abbreviations and word list	3
Abstract	5
Foreword.....	5
Acknowledgments	6
Introduction of the project.....	7
Introduction – Chapter 1.....	8
Background – chapter 2.....	8
Assimilation and “sameness” in the Norwegian society 2.1	9
Janteloven, Law of Jante, Norwegian norms, and attitudes 2.2	10
Belonging in Norway and the Nordic 2.3	11
Norwegian school system- creating low and high achieving schools. 2.4	12
Figure 2, average GPA among the Oslo schools (.....	14
Oslo is a city divided 2.5.....	15
Attitudes towards immigration 2.6.....	16
Why is this important? 2.7	16
Theory and methodology – chapter 3.....	17
Theory and core concepts 3.1.....	17
Defining belonging 3.2	17
Elements of belonging 3.3.....	18
Objective belonging 3.4.....	18
Why is belonging important? 3.5	19
Consequences of belonging 3.6.....	19
How can schools and workplaces help prevent unbelonging 3.7.....	20
Mental Health 3.8.....	20
Unbelonging 3.9.....	20
Elements of unbelonging 3.10	21
School Belonging 3.11.....	21
School Belonging and Maslow’s theory of motivation 3.12	22
Social relationships and their relations relation to physical health 3.13.....	23
Social norms and what is accepted within a society 3.14.....	24
Defining discrimination 3.15.....	24
Islamophobia and discrimination 3.16	25
Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory 3.17	26
School Connectedness (SC) 3.18.....	26
Grounded theory importation for analysing interviews 3.19	27
Research methodology Chapter 4	27
Photovoice 4.1.....	28
<i>Why Photovoice as a tool?</i> 4.2	29

Validity 4.3	30
Humaniores and researching people 4.4.....	32
Sampling 4.5	32
Informed consent 4.6.....	33
Data storage and security 4.7.....	33
Teacher participation 4.8	33
Student participation 4.9.....	34
Ethics and ethical considerations for the project 4.10	34
Literature Review chapter 5	35
History of research on belonging 5.1.....	36
Sense of Belonging among Students 5.2.....	37
Bourdieu's cultural capital 5.3	39
Social capital 5.4	39
Cultural capital in relation to Norway and this thesis 5.5	40
Where does this research differ from the current research within the field? 5.6.....	43
Interviews, data security, ethical considerations, and profiles – Chapter 6	44
Interviews 6.1	44
Photovoice – the photos and discussion- chapter 6.2.....	45
Vignettes and photos by participants 6.3	47
School A	47
Aga's profile.....	47
Alvilde's profile.....	49
Alessa's profile	51
Alina's profile.....	53
Annika's profile	54
Alice's profile.....	56
Agnes' profile.....	58
Astrid's profile.....	60
School B.....	63
Arif's profile.....	63
Arsalan's profile.....	64
Discussion of the photovoice pictures 6.4	64
Interviews transcripts, analysis, and discussion- chapter 7	67
Covid and its effects 7.1	67
Mental Health 7.2.....	69
Students and belonging 7.3.....	73
Students and unbelonging 7.4	77
School belonging 7.5.....	87
Stereotypes and how they affect the students (discrimination) 7.6.....	88

Difficulties getting a job- foreign name 7.7	99
Issues regarding the discrimination aspect 7.8.....	102
Racism in jokes? 7.9.....	104
“Not bullying” or the dislike for being viewed as a victim 7.10.....	104
Shortcoming in relation to the interviews. Chapter 8	107
Conclusion chapter 9	108
Bibliography.....	115

Abbreviations and word list

BIPOC – Black indigenous people of colour

POC - Person or People of colour

FOMO – Fear of missing out

Meme- a cultural item in the form of an image, video, phrase, etc., that is spread via the internet and often altered in a creative or humorous way

Neurodivergent - differing in mental or neurological brain functions from what is considered typical or normal (frequently used with reference to autistic spectrum disorders or ADHD); the opposite of neurodivergent is neurotypical.

School belonging- the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, and included, and supported by others in the environment (Goodenow 1993)

SIAN- Stop the Islamization of Norway, an interest organization against migration of specifically Muslims.

Mottaksklasse- Norwegian word for the class newly arrived foreign students in Norway attends. The students are attending normal secondary school; however, they have extra classes in Norwegian to learn the language.

Janteloven // Law of Jante – Fictitious work by Aksel Sandemose (1933) that conceptualizes the notion that the individual is never as important as the group, attitudes that can be seen in several Scandinavian countries. Conformity is an important part of the Law of Jante, which is not a real “law” but rather a pair of unwritten social rules on how to behave in Scandinavian society.

Saami// Sami – Indigenous people of northern Norway, Finland, Sweden and Russia), The Sami people have had many names in English ex: Lapps or Laplanders, but these terms are regarded as offensive by the Sami, who prefer the name from their own language.

Islamophobia- Irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against Islam or people who practice Islam or people who are or look Muslim.

School Connectedness- When students feel that adults and peers in school care about their learning and care about them as individuals.

Photovoice- Qualitative participatory method where the interview objects are tasked to take photos, where the photos would later be discussed. The idea of photovoice is to communicate in a way that transcends language. Photovoice consist of the photo, and the discussion regarding the photo. (Wang 1992)

School Belonging - the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, and included, and supported by others in the environment (Goodenow 1993)

Zoom- Zoom is a video conferencing platform, popularized during the covid 19 pandemic due to working from home, and online school.

Unbelonging – feeling a lack of relationship to a place, people, animals, or a person.

Belonging- close or intimate relationship to a place, people, animals, or a person.

High achieving schools- A high-achieving schools are defined as where students score high on standardized tests and or a high percentage of the students go on to prestigious universities.

Low achieving schools- Low achieving schools are defined as where students score low on standardized tests and or a high percentage of the students do not go on to university.

The importance of belonging

A case study of high achieving upper secondary school students in Oslo

Abstract

The importance of belonging attempts to answer the research question “How do youth in higher academic achieving upper-secondary-schools view the concepts of belonging and unbelonging. Seen through the lens of Photovoice and accomplished by semi-informal interviews.” This has been accomplished by using literature from multiple fields relating to concepts of belonging, unbelonging the benefits and consequences from these concepts. This thesis takes a modern approach with nods to history to explain normative culture in Norway and how the culture’s attitudes play a part in concepts of belonging. The main focus of this thesis is to explain belonging through the eyes of the students, in two high achieving upper secondary schools in Oslo. Therefore, concepts of belonging have primarily been geared towards school belonging, school connectedness and towards themes like bullying and discrimination. The students interviewed were from different backgrounds, and the thesis had a focus on students with minority backgrounds; however, ethnic Norwegian students, adopted Norwegians, 1st, 2nd, 3rd migrants and refugees were interviewed for this study. In lieu of this, the student participated in a photo project named photovoice to easier explain their own interpretation of concepts like belonging and unbelonging. The importance of belonging focuses not on “one” issue that needs to be solved but rather on identifying stories and experiences the students might have encountered at this specific time the interviews were conducted, and how the data collected fit into the academic world.

Foreword

When writing and accomplishing research, we become acutely aware of how connected we all are, despite the feeling of any academic isolation we might encounter. All research within all fields comes from somewhere and builds on one another, whether it is the philosophy of Aristotle, the communist theory from Marx or the paradigm shift of Kuhn. To find future research, all researchers build on the groundwork laid down by previous researchers. Within each field of research, there are ones who are considered *giants*, the pallbearers of the field,

who have laid down the foundations of the field. Within this research we will investigate such giants within the educational, developmental, and field of belonging such as Goodenow, Allen & Bowles, Lund-Holstad, Baumeister & Leary, Maslow and Wang (photovoice.)

However, it is important to note that this academic text does not attempt to solve an issue but rather to obtain clarity on a specific topic of belonging. In research, we tend to focus on unfortunate outcomes and how we can change this; we research groups that are less fortunate than us, to attempt to fix an issue. This is especially visible if we analyse who are doing the research, and who they are doing research on. Most of the research on the Global South comes from the Global North, and it often tackles issues that the Global South is struggling with. This research differs from the norm; the research subjects or students all come from high academic achieving backgrounds and/ or higher socioeconomic backgrounds. This thesis does not attempt to solve a “problem” but rather look if there is a problem, and, if so, how do the young people view this issue. The media and Norwegian society tend to view migrants and refugees as “unfortunate” groups, following this logic, one could imagine that young migrants might feel like outsiders, and oppressed, but is this the case all the time? Are the migrants and refugees the only ones who feel like they do not belong, or is this concept also applicable to the Norwegian students? Perhaps other factors come into play when it comes to belonging than just surface factors like moving countries. This is something the thesis tries to uncover.

Acknowledgments

African proverb, “*It takes a village to raise a child*” in this case, the child is this thesis, and indeed it took a village to raise it. A collective “thank you” to all helping parties, you know who you are.

First, I would like to thank all the students who were willing and able to participate in this research study, who took time of their day to answer questions that might be uncomfortable for no personal gain of their own.

Secondly, I would like to thank their teachers who participated in this project and offered up their classrooms to help a student do their research. This thesis would not have been created without their help.

Thirdly, I would like to thank the Islandic team who invited us to Iceland. And used time of their day to teach methods and theory to lay the groundwork of the study.

Lastly, I would like to thank my supervisor who have helped me through the process of writing this thesis, which has not been easy. I have been very lucky to have a patient and meticulous supervisor who wants the best for their students. I could not have done this without them, and I will be eternally grateful for that.

Introduction of the project

My thesis is a part of a more significant project from Iceland. The research project is funded by RANNÍS, The Icelandic Centre for Research. Research findings are expected to be published in English in an edited book in 2024 and in a peer-reviewed and international articles. This project collaborates with Oslo Metropolitan University and RANNIS, where my contribution to the project is collecting raw data on the Norwegian side. Therefore, it will follow the guidelines of the project however, I will add my perspective to the project through a historical and contemporary take on the research questions.

As a part of the Sustainable Development Goal agenda, leaders worldwide have agreed to ensure inclusive and equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (UN, 2018). Within an increasingly culturally diverse world, inclusion has become a key concept. Not only to signify access to public services, including education but also to express the nature and characteristics of services and settings such as the possibility of participation and feeling of belonging. This thesis looks at core concepts regarding belonging, unbelonging, inclusion and exclusion and how they impact students from higher achieving upper-secondary schools.

Interviewing “gifted”, or high achieving foreign students is not always done in Norwegian academia. The point in doing a thesis is not to discuss a “problem” or fix an “issue,” since there might not always be a visible issue, and the students might be carrying themselves fine. However, they might still have their own personal problems. This thesis only interviewed students from “good schools” from middle to high socioeconomic backgrounds, making this narrative of researching “unfortunate” outcomes not fitting for this thesis. Here there is no obvious problem that needs to be solved, something that sometimes can be more challenging. How can you solve something that the students themselves do not perceive as an issue? The way I have chosen to do this is through analysis, perception and changing of my initial thought of solving a problem to discussing the concepts and the phenomena of belonging.

Research Question: How do youth in higher academic achieving upper-secondary-schools view the concepts of belonging and unbelonging. Seen through the lens of Photovoice and accomplished by semi-informal interviews.

Introduction – Chapter 1

This thesis has gone through several stages, initially it had a focus on critical race theory and intersectional as its core values, however after conducting and analysing the interviews, I found myself struggling to connect my literature with my data. I spent a significant amount of time to write the background, trying to find the right words to make the interviews and literature connect. This led me to backtrack to the start, with my interviews in mind, what is discussed in the interviews and how can I build my thesis from there? Looking at core concepts regarding belonging, unbelonging, connection, discrimination and bullying a more solid piece of theory could immerse.

Finding “ONE” theory did not fit this kind of thesis, however, working from concepts and building out the branches of concept of ideas fit this thesis well. Working retrospectively has been an easier task, with a clear timeline. This might be to the way I organize my thoughts, which takes a lot of discussion, back and forth. I struggle to work from A to B, often I work with one idea and jump to the next, might jump to a third point and then go back to the first again. This might be difficult for others, but this is how my brain works. I did not enjoy rewriting my thesis twice, however it was important to make a thesis that can be considered a whole piece of literature with fitting concepts and themes.

Background – chapter 2

Before presenting the data from the interviews, some background information needs to be laid down to have the complete picture of the study. This chapter examines Oslo as a divided city, the history of the town, socioeconomic differences, language differences, Norway as a society, brief Norwegian history, and Norway its norms. This gives the reader a broader understanding of the students’ answers and how Norway works as a society.

Assimilation and “sameness” in the Norwegian society 2.1

Despite praising individuality, Norway is a country with very similar people. These values have been a part of Norwegian society for several hundreds of years. It can be seen through the Jewish Paragraph in our constitution (1814-1884) which effectively banned Jewish people from entering Norway. The Norwegianization of the Saami population, forcible removal of Saami children and forcing the children into “Norwegian” schools, this was an attempt to “unify” and “Norwegianize” the Saami population, actively removing their Saami culture and committing genocide. Historically if you did not fit into the definition of how a Norwegian should be, you would either be not allowed in; Jewish people were not allowed in Norway between 1814-84 (Abrahamsen,1968) or deported. Jewish people were deported during WW2 and contributed to the Holocaust from 1940-45. The Norwegianization of Saami people from the 1700s until modern day. Saami children were forcibly removed from their parents and placed in Norwegian schools, not allowed to speak their language, and indoctrinated into the Norwegian church (Williamson, 2021).

“History is always told from the perspective of the dominant group. Minority perspectives in the form of narratives, testimonies, or storytelling challenge the dominant group’s accepted truths.” (Zamudio, 2010) Immigrants, children of immigrants, national minorities and indigenous peoples have been disproportionately marginalized throughout history. Norway has a history of treating marginalized groups differently, and it is interesting to note that similar debates about the Jewish population in 1814, are what people are having regarding the Islamic population today.

The Norwegian ideology of ““imagined sameness” (Stokke, 2019), that *equality* creates sameness, supports the conformist idea that differences are inherently wrong” (Stokke, 2019). This creates an unattainable goal of how a Norwegian should be, nevertheless, since humans are different at their core, and prescribing to a notion of conformity only makes us try to hide our differences, which is harmful to the minority groups and the ethnic Norwegians who do not fit into the Norwegian “norm.” This ideology supports dominant colour-blind liberalism: where if you treat everyone the same- regardless of differences, that this is *equality*. Instead of focusing on treating people differently based on their needs so everyone could be met with equity and celebrating differences and diversity.

Janteloven, Law of Jante, Norwegian norms, and attitudes 2.2

“In Norway, the case is that equality is used as a mantra for how we want to be. The dilemma is that equality can undermine ideals of diversity and acceptance of differences. In short, equality is often translated into a pressure of conformity” (Rogstad & Skjeldal, 2020). The egalitarian view, conformity and assimilation have deep roots within the Norwegian society. This has in popular literature been made a point of commentary by author Aksel Sandemose, who writes the story of the fictional small Danish town called Jante. Where all individuals are expected to follow different laws that make the individual conform to the group/society. (Avant & Knutsen, 1994) The law of Jante conceptualizes the notion that the individual is never as important as the group, attitudes that can be seen in several Scandinavian countries. The “you” is the individual, while the “us” is society. In Sandemose’s story, a “good” citizen adheres to the society, much like the assimilation and Norweginazion of ethnic groups throughout the history of Norway. The Law of Jante tends to discourage personal differences and encourages its’ citizens to exclude those who are different. Even though the law of Jante is a fictitious work from 1933, it comments on issues of the Norwegian culture and its norms, issues that are still prevalent today regarding assimilation and immigration.

THE TEN LAWS OF JANTE

1. You shall not believe you are anything.
2. You shall not believe you are as much as us.
3. You shall not believe you are wiser than us.
4. You shall not imagine you are better than us.
5. You shall not believe you know more than us.
6. You shall not believe you are more than us.
7. You shall not believe you are suitable for anything.
8. You shall not laugh at us.
9. You shall not believe anyone cares about you.

10. You shall not believe you can teach us anything. (Sandemose, 1933. English translation by Trotten, 2015)

Belonging in Norway and the Nordic 2.3

Anne Dorthe-Christensen (2009) discusses different levels of belonging in Nordic society. Which she claims the “Nordic countries were built around a high degree of homogeneity, and equality, for instance, played a large role in the development of democracies there. Thus, integrating new groups into democratic citizenship has been rather successful—first peasants, then workers, and finally women.” (Christensen, 2009) Christensen claims that the infrastructure of homogeneity has made it easier for other people to integrate or assimilate to those countries Christensen relates these into different levels, Macro, Meso and Micro.

1. Macro level

Is the grander “imagined” societies or communities. These can be linked to nationalism, religion, or culture. These often hold strong positive feelings of community and connection. They hold negative feelings since these types of communities often signal a strong “we” or “us” community which can feel alienating or isolating for the individuals who do not belong or feel like they fit into these groups. This is nothing new in Nordic society, and has been pointed out by multiple researchers, including Sandemose and his Law of Jante from 1933, to Christensen and her “Belonging and Unbelonging from an Intersectional Perspective” from 2009. “Imagined communities are, therefore, an important link in the construction of us/them” (Christensen, 2009)

2. Meso level

Is the level related to organizations and associations related to political parties, voluntary organizations, or social movement. This level may also contain forms of feelings of belonging relating to social identity. Such as worker’s rights, female rights, rights for LGBTQ+ people or rights for Black, Indigenous people of colour or the abbreviation BIPOC.

3. Micro level

Is the relation to everyday life. The lived experiences of people in their local communities and cultures. This level contains local communities, which is based off

social distinction that the individual identifies with. This can be through interest, culture, and what a person enjoys. (Christensen, 2009)

Norwegian school system- creating low and high achieving schools. 2.4

The school system impacts the students within the system, with after affects which impact the students after they have graduated. This thesis does not make a central point to discuss the educational system in Norway, however since this thesis comments on the belonging of students in Norway, it is important to give background information on how the educational system in Oslo, Norway works, since this affects the students interviewed.

In Norwegian lower secondary, 8th to 10th grade, the students are graded in all subjects they have in school. They will also have several graduation exams in a plethora of fields. Students are graded from 1 to 6, where 6 is the highest possible grade. Their grades when graduating 10th grade are accumulated into their average personal grade. When applying to high school (higher secondary), 11th grade, the students compete for a set number of schools and spots available in those schools, under a political concept known as “freedom of school choice”. You can only apply to five schools within one field. You will only get placed in the school you applied to, and you have a matching GPA. Meaning even if you, in theory, could qualify for more schools, you will only get offered one, which matches your grade and placement on your list. This creates high achieving and low achieving schools since the most popular schools are the ones that are the most challenging to get into. Schools that have more students, and with students who does not drop out receive more funding from the Norwegian Government. This is also where several teachers apply to work, to work with “the best students” in the city. When graduating 13th grade, you will then again have exams that will create a personal grade average that the students will use to apply to university.

When the students apply to schools based on grades, and school receive funding based on student number, that affectively creates low and high achieving schools. It is also a self-fulfilling cycle. Students who want to attend school will apply to higher achieving schools often based on what is popular. The schools who receive more students (and students who do not drop out) will receive more funding, funding that will be used to better the school and their programs, which again makes the school popular creating a self-fulfilling cycle in the education system.

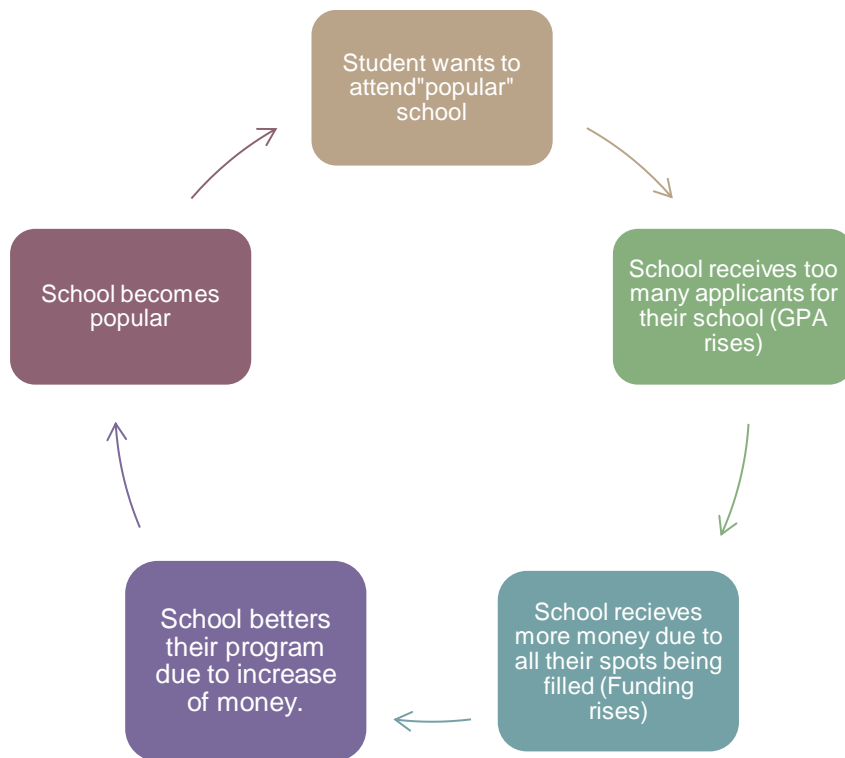


Figure 1. Cycle of competitive school system.

On the flip side we can look at lower achieving schools. They usually have fewer applicants, higher number of dropout rates, which then creates lower funding for school, the school cannot build “better programs” due to their lack of funding, which then again makes the school less popular and have fewer applicants. The Norwegian government has seen this as an issue and is in the process of discussing different systems to prevent “high and low-achieving” schools or “A and B” schools which it is named in Norwegian, by changing the application process. (Fjelltveit, 2019).

Oslo has the most significant between high and low achieving. They have the schools with the highest-grade average in the country; in addition, Oslo has schools where there are vacant spots in class. This creates a homogenous environment where students of the same grade level of grades go to school together, and mainly meet other students of the same grade level. In 2009 the average GPA among Oslo school was relatively even, yet this has drastically changed in recent years. The average GPA in 2009 (Sørgjerd & Fjelltveit, 2019) was between 3.5-4.5 among all Oslo schools; however, in 2021, as shown in the graph below, the grade gap reaches from 0.0, everyone got in, to 5,27, out of a possible 6.0 points. (Oslo District, 2021)

Nedre poenggrense for inntak til Vg1 (videregående trinn 1) for ungdom med opplæringsrett, skoleåret 2021/2022, 1. inntaksrunde

Skole/Programråde	Spesialisering																																		
	Studieopplæring	Studieopplæring, toppidrett	Studieopplæring, teknologi og miljø	Studieopplæring med fonerlige	Studieopplæring med IB, MYP5	Studiespes. business	Kunst, design og arkitektur	Musikk, dans og drama	Idrettsfag	Medier og kommunikasjon	Helse og kommunikasjon	Guilfovi SK 3 år	Helse og kommunikasjon	Jernvgs SK 3 år	Helse og kommunikasjon	Frisk, blomst, int, eksp. design	IT og medierproduksjon	Inform. telen og medierprod. SK 3 år	Inform. telen og medierprod. Inform. telen SK 3 år	Helse og oppveistfag	Helse/oppveistambulansesk 3 år	Helse og oppveistfag, barne og ungdomsberedelse, SK 3 år	Helse og oppveistfag, helsearbeid, SK 3 år	Helse og oppveistfag, YSK 4 år	Restaurant- og matfag	Elefiro og dataelefirologi	Elefiro og dataelefiro, autorm, SK 3 år	Elefiro og dataelefiro, elevenngi, SK 3 år	Telefirolog og idrettsfag	ByBB- og anleggsteknikk	ByBB- og anleggsteknikk, YSK 4 år	Balg, service og retidiv			
3005 Blindern vg. skole	45,3				***																														
3007 Edvard Munch vg. skole	50,0					51,3	*				47,9	48,7	29,3	35,5																					
3009 Elvebakken vg. skole	52,7					50,0				47,8							43,1	46,8								40,0		45,3							
3011 Fyrstikkalleen skole	45,2									41,7																									
3018 Foss vg. skole	48,0						*																												
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3027 Hellerud vg. skole	36,1																																		
3028 Herleb vg. skole	**																																		
3030 Holtet vg. skole																	26,4																		
3031 Kongshavn vg. skole	40,0																25,7	39,3																	
3032 Kuben vg. skole	44,7		34,3													39,6	45,5	36,7						43,6	38,9	43,6		35,7	38,7	40,3					
3033 Lambertseter vg. skole	45,0									46,1																									
3036 Bjerke vg. skole	42,0					39,3				40,0																									
3043 Nydalen vg. skole	51,7	*																																	
3045 Oslo handelsgymnasium	40,7																																		
3048 Oslo katedralskole	48,7																																		
3052 Etterstad vg. skole																									19,3	35,3		24,3						**	
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3069 Stovner vg. skole	**																			**															
3070 Bjørnholt skole	**														22,9											27,3									
3072 Ullern vg. skole	49,0			40,3						42,0																									
3075 Ulstrup vg. skole	**								**																	36,7		37,9							
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Merknader:

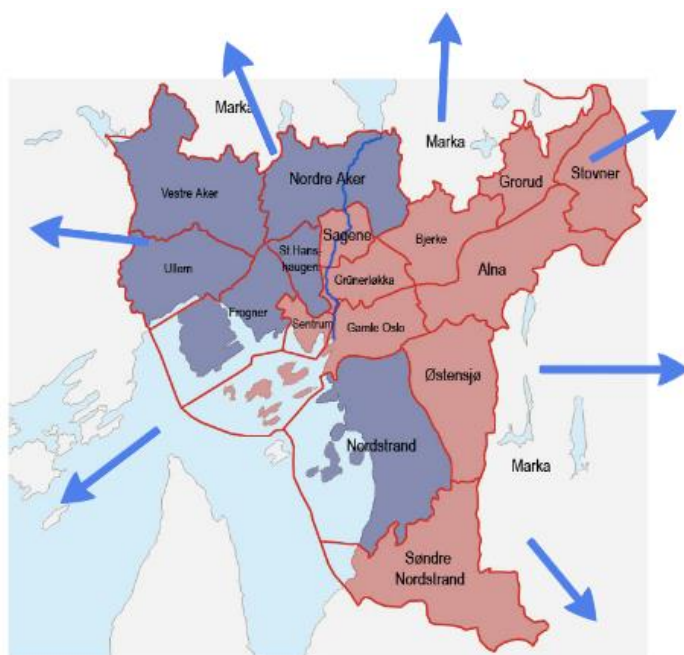
- Nedre poenggrense for inntak er lik poengsummen til den sist innfattede søkeren og viser ikke karaktergjennomsnittet blant elevene.
- Nedre poenggrense for inntak er avhengig av forholdet mellom antall søkere og antall plasser og kan derfor forandre seg fra år til år.

* Til Vg1 musikk, dans og drama og Vg1 stud.spes. m/toppidrett tas 50% av elevene inn etter kombinasjon av ferdighet og karakterer. Derfor ingen nedre poenggrense.
 ** Alle/de aller fleste som hadde søkt på skolen kom inn.
 *** Til IB ranereres søkerne etter flere kriterier enn karakterer. Derfor ingen nedre poenggrense.

Figure 2, average GPA among the Oslo schools (Oslo District, 2022)

Many of the high-achieving schools in Oslo are located near the inner-city area. Most of the lower-achieving schools (academically) are located on the East Side. The higher-achieving schools also have a smaller percentage of migrants than the lower-achieving schools. The lower achieving schools are often in “poorer” areas, on the East Side of Oslo, and the school receive less funding due to fewer students and dropout rates. While predominantly white schools receive more funding. Ingvil Bjordal, PhD researcher from the University of Oslo claims that this system leads to segregation in the Norwegian school system, and society. (Bjordal & Haugen, 2018)

School choice is a form of market capitalism, where the schools are reliant on steady flow of students, while the students benefit from schools with a high number of students due to better funding. Funding is related to student enrolment and dropout rates. Similar to market capitalism, where the belief is that a free market will create competition which then again will create better schools with more diversity. However, studies find this to be the opposite, with the OECD recording that “school choice may be related to greater levels of segregation in the school system with potentially adverse consequences for equity in learning opportunities and outcomes” (OECD, 2019).



¹ Figure 3. Map of Oslo

Oslo is a city divided 2.5
Historically Oslo has been a divided city, stemming from the industrial revolution; Oslo city has been divided in half along the river Akerselva. This divide crosses dialects, economy, the job market, schools, architecture, and class differences. The west side of the river is named “Vestkanten”, the West Side. The

West Side is traditionally a wealthier area, where the upper class has lived for the last 200 years. On the east side of the river, we have “Østkanten”, the East Side, which was traditionally a place for factory workers to live, near their factories positioned next to Akerselva. If you look at figure 3, you will see a picture of Oslo city. Furthermore, you will see where the city is divided. In red areas, and in blue areas, the red areas visualise the East Side while the blue side represent the West Side of Oslo. In the middle of the map, you will see a blue line representing the river “Akerselva” anything west for this river, is technically considered the West Side. As a result, some parts of Oslo have inhabitants that belong to both the West and the East side of Oslo.

In the decades right after World War two, the class differences within Oslo and the Norwegian society had decreased. However, with this last generation, the differences seem to be increasing. The wealth increase is mainly located on the West Side of Oslo. 70% of the wealthiest people in Oslo live on the West Side of town (Pileberg & Wiborg, 2018). Migrants and immigrants situate themselves in the city centre and/or the East Side. Several of those areas have been nicknamed “ghettos” by the media. (Jakobsen, 2014) The people who are rich in money, but not cultural resources settle down in the traditional areas of the West Side. In contrast, those who are rich in cultural resources, such as professors, museum directors and

¹ Blue is depicting the West Side and red the East Side (there is no straight line dividing the town. But it largely follows the west and east of the river Akerselva)

publishers move to the “richer” part of the East Side, which has been nicknamed the East Side’s “west side.” (Jakobsen, 2014) While newly arrived migrants often settle down in the city centre and districts such as Stovner and Alna. The minority to ethnic Norwegians ratio in those areas is often close to 50%. Which is interesting since 67% of Oslo is made up by ethnic Norwegians, nearly 30% of Oslo are born to immigrant parents but might have a Norwegian citizenship. (World population review, 2022)

Attitudes towards immigration 2.6

In the FAFO report (Tyldum 2019), regarding immigration, they found various arguments for why immigration in Norway should be limited, according to the subjects’ answers. Some argue that immigration is a burden for the welfare state, while others argue that immigration makes Norway more unsafe, or undermines key values in Norwegian society, equality, freedom, and freedom of speech. Around 31% of the responders agreed with both arguments, while 41% disagreed with both arguments. Men, and especially older men without education, more often agree with both statements. While women, and people with higher education tend to disagree with those opinions. This might be to a various number of factors, but since many believe the immigrants to “exhaust” the welfare system, uneducated ethnic Norwegians might perceive this as unfair, when they are struggling. Some might have an aversion to migration, due to the perception that immigrants are stealing “their” jobs and therefore makes it harder for them to find work. However, people who migrate to Norway usually are highly educated who take jobs very few have the requirements for, or low-skill workers take the lowest-paying jobs very few Norwegians want. More than every third man, and every fifth woman believes that today so much emphasis is placed on helping the vulnerable groups, that we end up with white Norwegian men being discriminated against. (Tyldum,2019)

Why is this important? 2.7

Language, location, and socioeconomics all play into the individual’s sense of self, and how they as microsystems, interact with the society’s macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner 1977). Norms, traditions, expectations, and culture interact with the individuals, however since Norway is a system based on perceived “sameness”, thereby any individuals who do not comply with the “rules” of the majority, might feel excluded from the narrative. Oslo is a divided city where within socioeconomics have significant gaps, the school system also has the most significant divides in the country, and a disproportionate dispersion of 1st 2nd and 3rd

gen migrant settlers. Norway has been perceived as an egalitarian country, where equality is considered one of the cornerstones of their core values within society. However, Norway does have significant differences if we compare the country within itself, and not compare it to differences with other countries. When interviewing students in Oslo, due to the freedom of school choice policy, they will be from all areas of Oslo. This is important for the answers they give, but also when analysing the responses. Since some questions relating to belonging might be heavily connected to socioeconomics, while other students might feel that other factors are playing into their place of belonging. Therefore, the background information regarding the history of Oslo, socioeconomic and educational gaps are important underlying factors that are necessary to outline before discussing the interviews and the data retrieved from them.

Theory and methodology – chapter 3

Theory and core concepts 3.1

No “one” theory fits this thesis accurately. Therefore, it has been constructed through multiple core concepts and theories. The concepts are regarding belonging, school belonging, school connectedness, unbelonging and Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory, Carol Fuller’s theory of high aspiring students. This thesis has, in addition, used grounded theory as an inspiration on how to analyse and code the interviews, however, due to the number of interviews, grounded theory has not been applied to the whole thesis. Since this would have required more interviews and a more extended collection period. The issues that this thesis has run into will be discussed further down under “thoughts and considerations,” regarding the issues that have occurred while writing a thesis during the pandemic, and through semi-lockdown.

Defining belonging 3.2

When individuals establish belonging, they often interpret their own personal standing in each environment, to judge if they belong to that environment or not. This cognitive process draws on an individual’s life experiences, their perception of these experiences, their identity, and their interpretation of how these experiences fit into a social setting. (Kusenbach, 2019). “The

idea of *belonging* implies the existence of a meaningful connection between a person and their social environment.” (Kusenbach 2019) The statement indicates the importance of meaningful connections is integral to the concept of belonging. When discussing belonging, we cannot ignore social structures and norms, which often influence someone’s interpretation of their individual belonging. Belonging somewhere is crucial to our own mental wellbeing. Feelings of exclusion, isolation or loneliness are largely harmful to the human mind, and issues like these can bring with them other mental issues like anxiety or depression. Belonging is much more than just *connectedness*, “At its core, belonging is about connection, membership, attachment, and a sense of security” (Harris, Cuervo & Wyn, 2021)

Elements of belonging 3.3

The elements needed for belonging is connections to the environment, the space, or people. Either one of these combinations can bring forth feelings of belonging. Belonging brings forth themes related to contribution, connection, and comfort. They are contributing to an environment that creates meaningful relationships, comfort, and feelings of belonging. There is some element of contribution for the individual to experience belonging, however, extrarenal factors can also contribute to feelings of belonging. (Escalera-Reyes, 2020) Feelings of belonging are subjective and are often largely connected to our personality, upbringing, and cultural norms in our society. A feeling of belonging or lack of belonging has often been linked to our mental health and/or self-confidence. One cannot force the feeling of belonging onto an individual, this is something largely internal, with elements of external factors coming into play. Measures can be put into place for a person to feel more welcome in a space, but ultimately it is up to the individual if they feel like they belong or not. However, it is important to note that if the community and/or environment is not welcome towards an individual.

Objective belonging 3.4

Objectively belonging to a place, does not mean that a person feels like *they* belong to a place. This issue is related to where we cognitively place people in society. For example, a student will belong to the classroom, but other factors might make a student *feel* like they belong to that classroom. The student inhabits the role of a student, who belongs in a classroom. However, the students might feel disconnected from their teacher or other students, which might lead to a feeling of unbelonging in the given environment. The sense of unbelonging can be external factors like bullying, isolation or discomfort, or internal factors like anxiety or

depression. It is important that the feeling of belonging is something one cannot force, you cannot force someone to feel like they belong. This is something that comes internally from the person who define where they themselves belong. However, we can make changes, so a place becomes more welcoming for the students who feel like they do not belong. This can be external factors like dealing with the classroom environment (Fetters, 2018) as an educator, and co-student. Or it can be dealing with internal factors like the mental health of young people and attacking the issue at its core (Holt-Lundstad 2010)

Why is belonging important? 3.5

In everyday life, we all have spaces we feel like we belong. These places can be our workplace, our school, with friends or within society. In belonging we inhabit different “roles” to fit into different spaces.” There are also spaces where we feel like we do not belong, very few people feel like they belong everywhere, no matter how adaptable a person is, they are bound to feel uncomfortable in certain areas of society. Having citizens, students or co-workers feel a sense of belonging in their prospective spaces, has a positive outcome on their productivity and overall work life, and it is important for humans to belong somewhere. This thesis research topics like belonging, unbelonging, perception and stereotypes among young people to see how they react to themes like this. That has been accomplished through in-depth semi-informal interviews and a photo study called photovoice.

Consequences of belonging 3.6

Having somewhere or something to belong to, has been linked to higher levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction (O'Brien, Bowles & Vincent, 2013). A study from Australia in 2010 by Copper and O'Rourke investigated what made students find happiness or become happy. The researchers found that friendship, optimism, and belonging were indicators to the student's wellbeing and overall happiness. at children's experience of stress related to family, friends, and school (John O'Rourke & Cooper, 2010).

Unbelonging has negatively been connected to loneliness. Unbelonging has been negatively associated with loneliness, mental illness, and suicide. (O'Brien, Bowles & Vincent, 2013). Studies have shown that physical health is linked to belonging and unbelonging. Health benefits in relation to a social connection have seen studies of longer mortality, for the individuals with a good community and connections. (Holt-Lundstad, 2018) Social isolation or unbelonging bring forward health risks greater or equal to health risks associated with obesity, high blood pressure or smoking. Lack of belonging bring forward negative consequences like poorer mental health. Having bad mental health has connecting effects on

the physical health (Allen & Slaten 2018); therefore, it is important and necessary to focus on belonging as a society, and especially for young people.

How can schools and workplaces help prevent unbelonging 3.7

If belonging and especially school belonging promotes good mental health, which affects physical health, and promotes academic success. It should be in the utmost interest within the educational sectors like schools to focus and foster school belonging. Schools may be more open to looking at meaningful ways to foster belonging. Positive psychology highlights the significance of focusing on strengths and abilities of the given individual. This takes a non-pathological approach, where rather than focusing on pathology or treating mental issues, it aims to prevent any mental issues to appear. This is accomplished through understanding and nurturing positive aspects of human psychological behaviour. This approach has been more popular within the educational sector as preventative strategies for school fall-out and to foster academic achievements. (Holt-Lundstad, 2018)

Mental Health 3.8

Mental health includes our psychological, emotional, and social well-being. Mental health encompasses mood disorders, anxiety disorders, personality disorders, psychotic disorders. However, in this thesis we will focus on the importance of good mental and psychological health. Mental health will be connected to themes of belonging and how belonging or lack of belonging connects to someone's mental health. This will be seen through Baumeister & Roy and Holt-Lundstad. Mental health has been considered increasingly more important, due to the impact mental health has on the overall life quality of humans. The World Health Organization (WHO) proposed the slogan "no health without mental health" through Dr Brock Chisholm, Director-General of the WHO, which has been supported by EU Council of Ministers, the World Federation of Mental Health, and the Pan American Health Organisation. The notion of linking mental health to physical health has been increasingly more important, studies has shown that depressed patients are twice as likely to have a heart attack compared to the those who do not have depression and treating patients for depression increases their likelihood of survival. (Kolappa, Henderson & Kishore, 2013)

Unbelonging 3.9

Words like unbelonging have a negative connotation to the word, however not belonging to a space is not necessarily negative. There are several spaces where we do not want to belong.

For example, people tend not to want to belong in prison. This is subjective, but I wanted to point out that feelings of unbelonging are not necessarily bad at a first glance, it depends on how the person views the unbelonging and if they want to fit into that space or not. However, it is important to note it is important for human well-being and mental health to feel like they belong *somewhere*. A lack of belongingness or rather *unbelonging* could form severe deprivations in human beings and can cause a variety of ill effects related to mental health. This has created an interpersonal motive in humans, where their behaviour and emotions are driven by a need to belong and human connection. (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Psychologists Baumeister and Leary states, “if belongingness is a need rather than simply a want, then people who lack belongingness should exhibit pathological consequences beyond mere temporary distress.” These consequences can be related to mental health, however, since mental health is largely connected to physical health, the physical health of an individual lacking belongingness can show physical symptoms as well. (Ohrnbergera, Fichera & Sutton, 2017)

Elements of unbelonging 3.10

The elements needed for unbelonging are often insecurity, isolation, and othering. You are not feeling a connection to the environment, or the people belonging there. A sense of belonging is personal, and if you do not have a connection, it can make you feel insecure about your role and placement in the environment, leading to feelings of isolation and alienation. This is of the unbelonging is negative. Unbelonging can be positive and a choice, there are places where you do not want to belong and therefore choose not to participate in that environment. Thus, belonging or not belonging is not inherently positive or negative, but one is often mainly considered positive, while the other is primarily regarded as negative

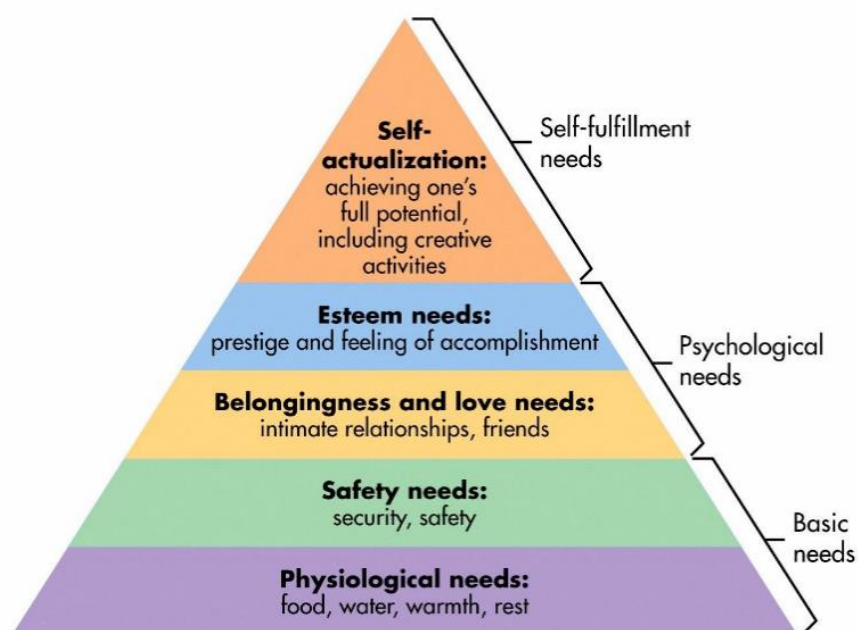
School Belonging 3.11

Being accepted and belonging to a thriving school environment has in recent years been considered increasingly important for students' wellbeing and a contributor to academic growth (Goodenow & Grady, 1993). This school belonging is reliant on the students themselves, peers, the school, and the educators. There is a variation of definitions on what school belonging is defined as. Still, I have chosen Carol Goodenow's (1993) definition, who described school belonging as, “the extent to which students feel personally accepted,

respected, and included, and supported by others in the environment.” In Goodenow’s study, she researched adolescents’ school belonging in secondary schools, and how they do academically. The results showed that the students with a poorer sense of school belonging, and low school motivation tend to score lower academically. Meanwhile, students who have a high sense of school belonging are more likely to have a higher school motivation and achieve better academically. Compared to those with low school belonging. This means school belonging is directly related to how students manage academically, but also how they relate to peers and educators. Goodenow concluded her research that people find school more worthwhile, enjoyable, and interesting if they believe that their peers, educators, and school value and like them.

School Belonging and Maslow’s theory of motivation 3.12

Goodenow’s views can be supported through psychologist and academic Abraham Maslow’s theory of motivation (Maslow, 1962/1968), in which he proposes that meeting the need for love or belonging is a necessary step to higher needs such as the desire for accomplishments, knowledge self-actualization (50 minutes, 2015). This means that to accomplish belonging, you will need to have certain criteria filled in before you can achieve that level. Firstly, the individual needs to meet their physiological needs such as water, food, and rest. Secondly, the individual requires to have security and safety. Thirdly, the individual requires love and belonging. This is seen through intimate relationships, family, and friends. These levels need



to be achieved before the individual can obtain the higher levels relating to prestige, accomplishments, and self-fulfilment. Inhabiting school belonging is deemed almost as crucial as water and food. According to Ann

Allen, and Christopher Boyle (2018), having a good psychological well-being is deemed necessary for students' mental health, which also relates to their psychical wellbeing. (Allen & Boyle, 2018) Allen and Boyle also heavily rely on Maslow and his hierarchy of needs in their research.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Figure 4 (Figure from Simply Psychology, retrieved 2022)

Related to school belonging, psychologists Baumeister and Leary discuss how people tend to prefer achievements recognized and validated by other people, over individual achievements. This may be tied into the interpersonal components related to the need for achievement, need for approval and personal bonds. According to Baumeister and Leary, the need to belong is linked to maintaining and forming social bonds and intimacy relating to interpersonal relationships. (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) This we can see connects to the school belonging aspect, since opinions by peers, educators and the school play a significant role for the student involved and their own personal wellbeing and academic growth. Goodenow's research highlights the importance school leaders and educators play in creating a thriving school environment. This can be achieved through having an environment that is positive for academic achievement, belonging and student's overall well-being. In regard to what schools can do specifically to improve school belonging, Goodenow points out that the school can either function as a whole entity or be fractured to smaller groups to create a sense of community for the students. Where it is easier to show appreciation for the students by making them feel valued, important, and encouraged to be active class participants. (Goodenow & Grady, 1993)

Social relationships and their relations relation to physical health 3.13

Humans are social animals, and their mental and physical health is reliant on other human beings. Humans, in comparison to other animals, are heavily dependent upon other humans from birth. A baby deer or horse can walk a few hours after birth, while a human infant is incredibly vulnerable and requires the round o'clock care from caregivers to help the infant survive. A study from 2010 by Julianne Holt-Lundstad, researched the effects social relationship have on mortality and physical health. Looking into several factors related to social relationships, community, norms, social status, and isolation. This study indicated that individuals with stronger social relationships had a 50% increased likelihood of survival, when compared to the individuals with weaker social relationships. The individuals who

participated were all initially healthy, however, the ones with stronger social bonds statistically lived longer than the ones with weaker social bonds, “those with strong social relationships were 50% more likely to be alive at the follow-up evaluation, regardless of initial health status.” (Holt-Lundstad, 2010) This shows us that having a place to belong, and strong social bonds, is not only important for someone’s mental health, but also for overall physical being and life expectancy. (Holt-Lundstad, 2018)

Social norms and what is accepted within a society 3.14

Social norms may influence the level of social participation, and what is considered desirable and acceptable participation. Different cultures have different values regarding independence and interdependence. Personal independence tends to be valued high in Western societies like Norway, Europe and the United States. People in Western societies move out earlier compared to Asian communities, and inter-generational family ties tend to be more connected in Asian cultures ex: living together inter-generationally is more common in Indian communities compared to Norwegian societies where people tend to live alone. However, the isolation that comes with hyper-independence may be affecting the long-term health of the people in those societies. According to Holt-Lundstad, “societies that value independence, and communities that support it, may be doing so at the detriment of long-term health.” (Holt-Lundstad, 2018) Therefore, the social expected norms of how we are supposed to live and thrive in Norway, might not be suitable for the well-being of society if we continue to focus on hyper-independence. It might also be interesting to study how certain societies value hyper—independence and if someone can be done to prevent this, finding the core issues, rather than simply treating the “problem.”

Defining discrimination 3.15

Discrimination is acts that, with or without intent, create unjustified or unreasonable inequality between citizens, this can be due to someone’s skin colour, sexual orientation, country of origin, disability, religion, or gender identity. (FAFO report, Bråthen, Zhang and Rogstad, 2016.) Discrimination is often an action, on how people treat other people, based on their expectations or stereotypes of one perceived group. Positive or negative perceptions can be influenced by culture, but also by the media. Some groups argue that to challenge anti-discrimination and gender inequality, the media needs to take a more significant role in creating positive images of minority groups, to change stereotypes. (FAFO report, Bråthen,

Zhang and & Rogstad, 2016.) Positive representation is not just beneficial for the groups to change their stereotypes about a perceived group, but most importantly for the targeted group who can see themselves represented in a positive way.

Islamophobia and discrimination 3.16

Merriam-Webster defines islamophobia as the “irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against Islam or people who practice Islam,” However, Awan & Zempi (2020) has a more elaborate and in-depth definition of Islamophobia. Islamophobia is the “fear, prejudice and hatred of Muslims or non-Muslim individuals that leads to provocation, hostility and intolerance by means of threatening, harassment, abuse, incitement and intimidation of Muslims and non-Muslims, both in the online and offline world.” (Awan & Zempi, 2020) Linking this to the Norwegian narrative, we can look to the FAFO report (Tyldum 2019), where 1 out of 3 Norwegians claim to be afraid to pass a group of Muslims. This indicates that a rather large group of Norwegians are scared of Muslims and/ or have certain biases against Muslim people, which make them afraid to pass a group of them. While this does not prove active malice, it does show certain attitudes that link Muslim people to characteristics that are frightening/ fearful for a portion of the population. In this thesis, the focus of islamophobia would be the aversion or discrimination against Islam or Muslim people. Several of the students whom I interviewed are Muslims, and they recounted stories where they were met with hostility or discrimination from their teachers. This will be shown under the interview analysis in chapter five.

There is increasing recognition in the public sphere that Islamophobia and anti-Muslim discriminatory attitudes are forms of a new type of racism, parallel to anti-Semitism’s racialisation of Jews or the racialization of the Saami people. People who “look Muslim”, regardless of their religious and political beliefs, are attributed with negative characteristics. They are seen as suspect and potential threats. (Stokke, 2019) This has been especially prevalent after the terror attacks on 9/11, the fear of the Taliban and ISIS. This fear was also strengthened due to the European terror attacks in 2010s that were in several European countries, actions that the terror group ISIS took ownership of.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory 3.17

Psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) wrote the book "The ecology of human development" as a reaction to how ecological studies were done on children in the 70's.

Bronfenbrenner was critical of how ecological studies were done on children; the scholarly theory of bringing children into an unfamiliar environment ex: a laboratory, with an unknown person: or unfamiliar researcher, would make the research ecologically invalid.

Bronfenbrenner claimed that these studies were invalid because the foreign environment the children were placed in was not similar to the environments the children were used to, belong to and developed in. (Bronfenbrenner 1979) During this study all the students were interviewed in their own environment, their school, however they were separated from their peers in a group room so they could talk with the researcher without other people listening.

School Connectedness (SC) 3.18

School connectedness is closely related to school belonging. School connectedness is the belief in which students believe that educators and peers in the school care about their learning and caring about them as individuals. (American Psychology Association, 2014).

When students lack feelings of connectedness to the school, they are more likely to participate in violent behaviour, substance abuse and early sexual activities (McNeely & Falci 2004).

They also have an increased risk for mental issues relating to disordered eating, attempted suicide and are more likely to drop out of school. (Osterman, 2000). If we compare this to the students who inhabit school connectedness, we see higher reports of academic achievement and academic success. The Commission on Children at Risk (2003) concluded in their study (Berger, 2004) that the current negative trend in children and youth's mental health, could be linked to the failure of school and youth connectedness on an institutional and societal level (Whitlock 2006).

According to Berger (2004), humans are biologically wired to form relationships. This stretches from human biology to the development of the brain and neurotransmitters. From infancy, human beings are reliant on their guardians to survive, human beings are also longer with their parents than other animals. For an infant to develop in a healthy manner, it requires reliable, responsive relationships and physical intimacy. This need for intimacy and connection continues through infancy to adulthood. Most children have immense potential to succeed emotionally, academically, and practically, if they are put into an environment that is

responsible and nurturing. This could either be their home environment, or their school environment. “The same genetic trait that is especially troublesome when the child is raised in an inadequate family structure can be an unusual strength when the same child is given supportive surroundings.” (Berger 2004,) Meaning some traits that are considered troublesome by some environments, can be seen as a success and a strength if the child is allowed to grow up in an accepting environment. Ex: neurodivergent students with ex ADHD or autism can be good students and quite successful, sometimes more than their classmates. However, this is only possible if those students are allowed to grow in an environment that is fitting to them, an environment where the child’s needs are met, and the child is not expected to fit the system, rather the system is built to fit the child. It is important to note the values and ideals the child encompasses within them; all have an origin in the child’s family and upbringing. This colours the child’s experiences and values when interacting with teachers, friends, peers, and society in the future.

Grounded theory importation for analysing interviews 3.19

I have been inspired by methods from grounded theory, especially regarding the coding and analysis part of grounded theory. However, since this project have a limited number of participants (10 students) this is not sufficient to be adapted fully by grounded theory. Due to covid, I had a limited number of students to interview, this was both due to restrictions and students being sick with covid. The time limit was also something to consider, since I interviewed graduating high school students with a limited amount of time they wanted to spend away from studying. However, I do find grounded theory interesting and therefore decided to implement parts of it for this project. However, if I had more time for the project, or covid was not an issue during my interview phase, I believe I would have used grounded theory more, if I had more participants and more time to review the data.

Research methodology Chapter 4

This thesis is a quality, in-depth case study, which uses photos and interviews to investigate minority youth’s experienced world. To help accomplish this, I will be using a methodical participatory tool called Photovoice and through in-person interviews. In addition, I have used

literature from journals, news articles, academic books, and documentaries to provide definitions, background, and additional educational information to answer the thesis question.

Photovoice 4.1

Brought forward and invented by PhD. Caroline Wang and PhD. Mary Ann Burris in 1992, photovoice is a process in which people “can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique.” (Wang & Burris, 1997) This photographic technique is a participatory tool, where the interview object attempts to answer questions through photos. The interview object will get a prompt or a question but will only be allowed to answer this question with a photo or several photos. After the initial images have been taken, participants will analyse their photos. Either in a group or with a researcher. Both steps are crucial to the photovoice process. The reason why photovoice is implemented is to answer questions that might be difficult to respond to verbally or where language might be an issue. Photovoice has three main points of content:

1. To enable people to record and reflect on their community's strengths and concerns
2. To promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues through large and small group discussions of photographs
3. To reach policymakers (Wang & Burris, 1997)

The discussion regarding the photos is incredibly integral while using photovoice as a method. Analysing the photos and discussing *why* they were chosen for the questions is almost as important as the photos themselves. Using photos as a communication tool can talk about themes that are often difficult to broach verbally. Initially, photovoice was made to be used in the health sector. However, it is applicable in other facets of academia. Photovoice has been typically used with marginalised groups who have been silenced politically. “Using ethnographic techniques that combine photography, critical dialogue, and experiential knowledge, participants reflect on and communicate their community’s concerns to represent their culture, to expose social problems, and to ignite social change.” (Sutton-Brown, 2014)

In this thesis, photovoice will be used as a participatory tool where the students will answer questions through pictures. We often hear that “a picture says more than a thousand words,”

and therefore asking youth to communicate with a tool they use daily (their phone) has made the task easier to accomplish. It is sometimes complicated to vocalize emotions, especially negative ones. This thesis asks several things from the students, but one of them visualises where they do not belong. Within this project, participants interact with and describe images they created.

While carrying out the photo-elicited interview, the researcher is a part of the audience for the students' photographs. The students will, prior to the interview, receive questions they should answer with 1-3 photos per question. The interviews will have a background in the images, and they are an integral part of the interview process however, the images will only be a starting point for the researcher to jump off on, before diving into deeper questions related to discrimination, bullying, belonging and loneliness. If we did not have these pictures to jump off of- I do believe the teenagers would have a more difficult time answering the questions during the interview phase. Photos can also transcend any language, so for teenagers who might not master Norwegian well, connecting through pictures might be a way for them to feel understood.

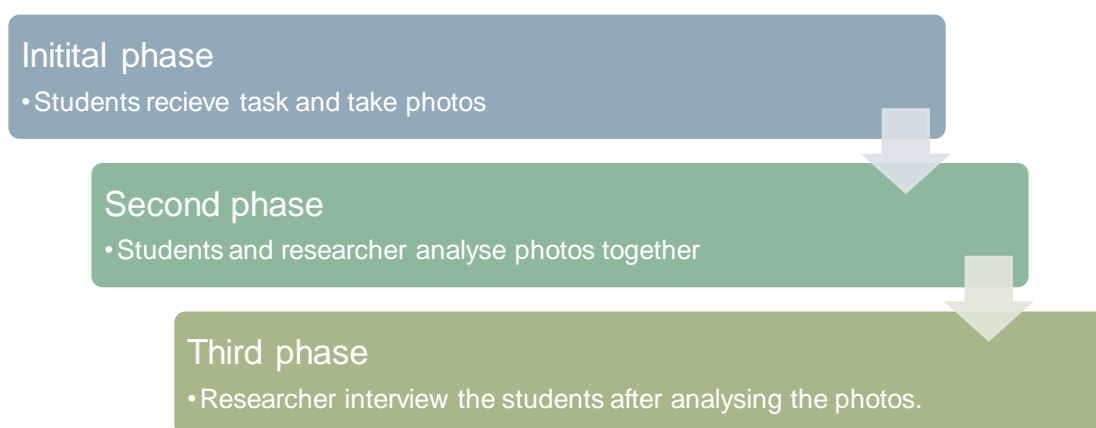


Figure 8 (Stages of photovoice and interviews)

Why Photovoice as a tool? 4.2

The reason exactly photovoice has been chosen as a method for this thesis is the theme relating to belonging and unbelonging. For many, it is difficult to explain when we have been treated unjustly, in fear of being seen or treated as a “victim”. It might also be hard to vocalize where we belong, if we have never thought about where we belonged before, therefore, tasking the students with picture tasks, where they must analyse the questions themselves beforehand, gives students the autonomy to choose their personal narrative. It might be easier to explain with photos, although I expect the students to have some issues

answering the questions since they relate to themes that might be hard to think about and discuss. However, I think the photos will help them explain non-verbally, and the analysis afterwards will supplement what the image excludes.

Validity 4.3

The validity of this research project was conducted a couple of different methods. This will be discussed more below in their own paragraphs.

1. Trying to be as verbatim, despite translating the interviews- Having verbatim descriptions of participants' accounts to support findings
2. Interviewing and sampling diverse students
3. Personal biases and my position as a researcher
4. Redoing my literature, when after data collection, when the initial literature did not fit the data collected.
5. Respecting the students answers and not forcing the students to answer questions they do not want to answer.

Translation of transcripts and the concept of being verbatim

The students' interviews were conducted in Norwegian, to make the students comfortable, then translated. Therefore, it might be some information that might be hard to translate, or some things that might be lost in translation. I have to the best of my ability tried to make the students translated interviews as close to their original meaning. The student's transcripts are as close to verbatim it can be, based on the concept it had to be translated to English.

Interviewing diverse groups, for more diverse answers

Inclusion of using two different sampling groups, from different areas of Oslo, the groups also happened to have different genders, due to school A all being female students, and school B all being male students. The research concluded a photovoice project where students were asked to bring photos related to the theme and having an in-depth conversation interview with the researcher afterwards. The sample included young adults (age 18-19) in the urban areas of Oslo. However, due to the freedom of school choice policy, the students are from all areas of Oslo, some from the suburbs, some from the inner-city area, Oslo has a great divide geographically (West side / East Side of Oslo) which also affects the socioeconomics and

housing, therefore, interviewing students from all areas is important due to the different information available with different students. The students were ethnic Norwegians, 1. Gen migrants, adopted Norwegians, 2. Gen migrants and 3. Gen migrants. The inclusion of multiple interview subjects created a diversity in the answer received from the students, since several of the students interpreted the question of unbelonging / belonging to something personal to themselves, so their answers were quite different from each other. However, some themes / pictures repeated themselves among some of the students. By having multiple schools participating in the project, with subjects with different genders, religions, ethnicities and socioeconomic created a base for valid results within this qualitative research. This study accomplishes to research the research question which is “how youth in higher academic achieving upper-secondary-schools view the concepts of belonging and unbelonging. Seen through the lens of Photovoice and accomplished by semi-informal interviews,” since it answers how the students themselves view belonging and unbelonging by their own terms, backed by the literature on how belonging and unbelonging effects both physical and mental health of humans. Due to the semi-informal nature of the conversation other data than unbelonging/ belonging was also uncovered and will be a part of the thesis. This is specifically related to the discrimination and stereotypes part of the thesis.

However, this study only explains what this group of students are experiencing in this specific time. If the project was duplicated or recreated in the future, the research outcome would most likely be something different, since this qualitative data was based on a small group of students in 2021-22. It would be interesting to see this project recreated in another school that had a different pool of students, or even in a different city, to see if the students face similar struggles.

Personal biases my position as a researcher and interviewer.

During this research project, I have had a unique position. Due to me finishing my bachelor's degree right after high school and continuing my master's degree immediately after, I am still relatively young. This has been immensely helpful in my data collection regarding my interviews. The students have been very welcoming, they have also attempted to answer the questions to the best of their ability. Due to our close age range, and semi-informal style the interviews did not feel “stale” or awkward, more like conversating with an upperclassman or an older sibling. The different in age with the students is 4-5 years from the researcher's age. However, everyone has their own biases, to attempt to avoid my own biases I tried to make the students talk as much as possible by themselves, without me interrupting, and rather be

supportive in them telling their own stories. In addition, the data I had initially prepared before the interviews, did not fit with the data I found from the interviews. Therefore, I had to redo my literature review and find literature that was more benefiting to the data I found.

Humaniores and researching people 4.4

While doing this research, I have realised something we tend to forget while we are doing research. As researchers, we rely on hard data, be objective, and accomplishing our tasks with little to no human emotion. I do think this is a wrong approach on doing research on humans.

It has been hard for me not to be affected while interviewing teenagers. They account for their experiences while being discriminated against by their teachers in high school and not be affected by their words. Yes, I am doing research, and it is crucial to remain “objective,” however, I would argue in research, it is more important to be aware of our biases than to remain objective. I would argue it is almost impossible to remain genuinely objective while researching humans- since we as humans will be affected by the data we will find and the data we have experienced before doing the research.

I think remembering the human aspect is very important. Each teenager I have interviewed have a complex life; they have multiple struggles outside of their sexuality, religion, skin colour or ethnicity. None of them wants to be a “victim” and often, IF they experience some sort of discrimination, most of them tend to ignore it due to them not wanting to give people the “joy” of hurting their feelings. Some of the students are willing to openly talk about issues, however others are shy. Treating all students as individuals and treating them with humanity has been important to this research. I want the students I interview to be comfortable and have a good experience in this project, so their wellbeing and comfort has been the most important factor while accomplishing this study. Some of the students might go into research in the future, and therefore I would want one of their first experiences to be safe and trusting and they are met with understanding.

Sampling 4.5

During this study, we have contacted two upper secondary school teachers and asked them if their students were willing to participate in this project (IPIC). Both classes have had students who have agreed to participate. The prospective teachers have chosen a sample of 2-8 students from their class who were willing to participate during the interviews. Students in

both classes have participated during the photo project (Photovoice) however, a sample of those students was interviewed afterwards. The main criteria of the participative students are that they have answered the three photovoice themes. The pictures were used as a starting point for the interviews so that students could explain their point of view in an easier way than in a formal interview.

Due to covid the sampling is smaller than anticipated. Initially there were going to be six students from each class. However, one class had eight available students (before covid restrictions) while the other had two available students (due to students sick with covid and covid regulations) The interviews are completely voluntary, so the sampling of interviews I have gathered I am content with, but I would have had wished for more if the situation was different.

Informed consent 4.6

All parties involved in this project has signed an informed consent form. Students who participate are expected to have their experiences published in a research book in 2024, and all personal information will be anonymised and/or redacted. Informed consent can be withdrawn at any time. (Flick, 2018) This project is based on trust and understanding. It is voluntary. There is no payment for the students who participate; all participation is voluntary.

Data storage and security 4.7

All information has been treated to national security and privacy laws. Project approved by NSD. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. During the transcription, pseudonyms have been used to uphold the anonymity of the students and their teachers. All personal or individual information was deleted after transcription. All data has been stored in a secure folder, accessible only by the main researcher. Teachers from the school, staff or school authorities will not have access to any data or information from this research. No public or administrative staff will have access to any data or information provided for this research, including social workers or immigration officers.

Teacher participation 4.8

The teachers play an innate part in this research project. They were recruited early in the process and had been following this project since the summer of 2021. They have joined the Norwegian side of the data collection process from the Icelandic IPIC team. The data collection and the interviews would be difficult to achieve without the cooperation of the teachers. The teacher has opened their classrooms for me to do my research. And they have

been helpful and accommodating regarding the data-collection process. My research could not have happened without such willingly helpful teachers.

From September of 2021 to early October, the IPIC team attended a workshop-seminar in Iceland. The Norwegian team, which contained two professors, two upper secondary school teachers, and a research assistant (me). There we met the Icelandic team, which was based on several professors, several upper secondary teachers, and a PhD student. Some professors called in digitally since they are a part of the research project but could not attend. The meeting was for the different branches in the prospective countries to meet one another and to understand the project on a deeper level.

All attending members got to try out one of the scientific methods: photovoice, which has made it easier to collect data since all research parties have tried the method and have attempted to analyse the photos in lieu of the photovoice criteria. The attendees got to exchange experiences teaching material and got to discuss issues they have encountered while teaching migrant or minority youth—such experiences are especially connected to concepts such as belonging and unbelonging. The Icelandic team has made a teaching material in English, Icelandic and Norwegian regarding photovoice, which the teachers were welcome to use in their home schools.

Student participation 4.9

The students play the most integral part in this research project. They are the ones who are making their voice heard through visual and oral tools. Their lived experiences have made this thesis, and this project could not have been done without them. Every year Norwegian schools are served with surveys for the students regarding how they feel at school however this only gives an overall view of the vast student body. This project dives into depth on a select few students and their lived experiences as minority groups in Norway. The students are encouraged to share their lived experiences beyond surveys. This is done through photovoice and an in-depth interview with a starting point in their pictures.

The students from School A who participated were all female students.

The students from School B who participated were all male students.

This is due to participation being voluntary; in addition, while I did my interviews, several students were absent due to covid.

Ethics and ethical considerations for the project 4.10

Due to my research being an in-depth case study revolved around teenagers and discrimination, I face two different ethical challenges.

1. Dealing with teenagers who are still developing, I need to be extra mindful of how to approach this topic and have teenagers informed of the project. I need to receive their consent; however, I also need to be cautious if they understand what the consent implies. They should be informed of what they are participating in. Anonymity is also essential, this is to ensure the safety of the youth, and so they feel safe with me as an interviewer and trust me to take their experiences and write them into a good thesis.

2. The other issue is regarding the sensitivity of the topic. Unbelonging, belonging, racism, bullying and discrimination are not easy topics to discuss; I need to be wary of the consequences of what I might find, and that people might be critical to the research based on human biases we all carry. However, it is crucial for me to accurately display what the youth say and protect their identity, so they are not singled after the research project is over.

Trust, understanding, and empathy are what I want my core values to be while interviewing the youth. I want to make sure the youth is comfortable, so I would like to emphasise the notion that they do not need to answer all the questions if they are uncomfortable. It is more important for me that the youth trust me than for me to get "all the information." After all, we are dealing with humans and their lives, so we need to meet them with empathy and understanding. (Flick, 2018)

Literature Review chapter 5

This chapter contains themes, definitions and concepts used to discuss the research and thesis question. The difference between background chapter, and literature review chapter is the background chapter is laid down to describe the underlying factors of how history, culture, and society of the environment for the student interviewed in this thesis, this reaches a surface level of the thesis. Literature review discusses concepts and theories, and goes deeper, and discusses abstract concepts that will be used for the analysis of the data.

The study was conducted in Oslo, Norway, by the researcher. Participants ranged from age 18 to 19 years of age in their senior year of upper secondary school, both female and male students were interviewed. The students were chosen based on their teachers, who were

required for the project by the researcher. Common factors among the students were a high academic achievement in school and being the same age. Other factors were their ethnicity, religion, and gender.

History of research on belonging 5.1

Belonging is a relatively new term within research and surfaced in the 1970s and 1980s within the fields of education, family studies, and social psychology. Research on belonging has evolved from its beginning in the 1970s and has transformed into encapsulating themes like globalism, postcolonialism, migration, urban planning, urban studies, and anthropology. Researching belonging has become increasingly more important whether it is in the workplace, within education or in society. Belonging encapsulates all facets of life, and due to humans being social beings, it is important for the human psyche to have somewhere to belong. Under the overarching theme of “belonging,” we have subcategories under school belonging, unbelonging and connectedness. In youth studies, the topic of belonging has been increasingly more important. However, the concept is seldom concretely defined and has been critiqued for being considered “self-explanatory” within research. “Belonging” is a word that is frequently used but rarely with conceptual clarity, it is both theoretically and empirically underdeveloped” (Dadv & McLeod, 2021,)

The desire to form and maintain social connections and social bonds, has a long history within a plethora of fields, but especially the psychological field. Through Baumeister & Leary (1995), we have the “need for belongingness”, Goodenow’s (1993b) school belonging, Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1954) and the disadvantages and consequences of unbelonging or lacking strong social bonds. (Holt-Lundstad, 2010)

Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggested that the need to belong is described by a need for regular contact, and the observation that interpersonal relationship has an innate sense of stability and concern for the wellbeing of the other. Failing to fulfil the need for belonging might lead to feelings of social isolation, loneliness, and alienation. Thus, a sense of belonging can be seen as a precursor to social connectedness. The need for belongingness can be fulfilled by an interpersonal relationship containing these factors “stability, affective concern, and continuation into the foreseeable future” (Baumeister & Leary 1995).

Baumeister & Leary comments on those with well-established, strong social bonds, and they are less likely to seek new social bonds or feel the need for new social bonds, compared to those who are socially unfulfilled in terms of belonging. To exemplify this, students who

already have strong social bonds, do not feel the need to socialize outside their bonds due to their needs already being met, however, for the students who do not have strong social bonds the need is not fulfilled. There can create a disconnect when these two people meet, since one already has their needs fulfilled, while the other one does not. Creating a person who might want to create social bonds, and one who is not interested since they have fulfilled their need for social connection.

The need to belong could contribute to explain a variation of behaviours within humans. This stretches from their cognitive, motivation, emotion, academic success, mental and physical health. For example, the satisfaction of belonging often brings joy, higher academic achievements, and longer life expectancy, while a lack of belonging brings forward negative feelings related to anxiety, depression, increased levels of stress, jealousy, loneliness, lack of motivation, decrease of academic achievements and decrease in life expectancy (Lund-Holdtstad 2010.) Several negative behavioural and social consequences. This includes mental illness, increased levels of criminal tendencies, social isolation can be explained by unbelonging (Maslow 1968) implied that underneath the majority of emotional breakdowns, a contributing factor is the need for belongingness, respect and love.

Sense of Belonging among Students 5.2

Appropriate, ample, and just fulfilment for the need for belongingness, leads to good physical and mental well-being (Maslow, 1968. Holt-Lundstad 2010). Goodenow (Goodenow, 1993b) described a sense of belonging in educational environments as the following “the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, and included, and supported by others in the environment.” (Goodenow & Grady, 1993) Goodenow’s research is invaluable to the educational field, the understanding of the students’ need of acceptance, inclusion and encourage by both peers, educators in the academic setting, is both considered important within the pedagogical and psychological fields. The notion of the students’ needs for validation beyond just perceiving being liked by their peers, but rather needing the support and respect for personal autonomy and the respect of the student as an individual (Goodenow 1993b).

Several researchers within the educational field have a common understanding that the need to belong is considered one of the most important needs for all students to function and grow

within all types of learning environments. (Goodenow 1993b, Baumeister & Leary 1995, Osterman, 2000) According to Goodenow's research the feeling of belonging may have a direct influence on student's motivation in relation to academic performance. The perceived support and school belonging by both peers, educators and the school as an origination are expected to increase students' beliefs in their own success and improve their academic performance and school motivation. Goodenow (1992) claimed that school belonging is especially important to ethnic minorities, and economically less advantages families. The inclusion, and making the student feel important and that their presence and academic performance matter, is not only beneficial for the student's wellbeing, but also academic performance.

Belonging is considered an important aspect to youth development (Cooper & Cooper, 2008), in which the research suggested that social identity and group-life can help young individuals cope, and transition into different group environment, and help with academic achievements. The Wingspread Declaration from 2004 illuminates that schools and educational organizations have a greater sense of responsibility in relation to belonging, academic success, psychological and mental well-being. There are multiple studies regarding the importance of belonging, however there is lacking research on how to foster belonging and a wide-ranging setting. Researching the different practical ways to foster belonging, nurturing both belonging and school belonging would give peers, families, students, educators, and the community a better understanding how to accommodate all students. Students who have a greater sense of school belonging advance better academically which is beneficial to the students, their families, their school, and the community overall. There is a need for a bridge between educational theory to practise of those theories within school belonging and belonging of youth.

Photovoice is a participatory research tool, that initially was used within the health sector research, as a mechanism for personal autonomy and community change (Wang & Burris in 1994). Photovoice has been used to empower marginalized groups, which allows individual to analyse and reflect concerns within their own community with a tool that transcends language, through photos. Communicating with tools that transcends language might make it easier to discuss issues that are hard to verbalize. By allowing marginalized groups to capture their own daily life, concerns, and issues they might encounter, one effectively gives them a voice. Photovoice can be used directly to help a community, or for the community to discuss

and analyse their own issues. Photovoice does this by facilitating discussions, assessing the dialogues. This can encourage change on the policy level.

Bourdieu's cultural capital 5.3

Cultural capital is a term introduced by Pierre Bourdieu to designate that symbols, ideas, tastes, and preferences can be used as resources in social action or as cultural capital, culturally valuable knowledge. He regards this cultural capital as a “habitus” an embodied socialized tendency or disposition to act, or feel, in a particular way. By comparison with economic capital, these resources can be invested and accumulated over time and generations can invest in this cultural capital which again can be converted to economic. Thus, middle-class parents can equip their children with the language- and cultural skills that will give them a higher chance of succeeding in university and in the work sector. Working-class children, without access to cultural resources, like these, have significantly decreased chance of succeeding in the education system. Thus, according to Bourdieu parental participation is pivotal for the child's academic success. Therefore, when the children do not get the needed amount of help from their parents, or receive cultural capital, education then leads to widening inequalities in society. The cultural capital affects education and overall stance in society, which then again affects job opportunities and economic capital. The students who lack help fall behind and must fight harder to reach their peers who have a higher sense of cultural capital engrained to them by their parents. If we compare this to the Rich vs Poor gap, we can see the gap is continuing to grow for each generation. However, it is easier to gain cultural capital today with the widespread use of internet and online resources, since now anyone could in theory gain access to linguistic skills, through apps like Duolingo, learn math from Khan Academy, learn literature analysis from YouTube among other online platforms. (Fuller, 2009)

Social capital 5.4

Concerning education, research suggests that families with high levels of social capital promote achievement, such that educational attainment is as related to informal contribution to a student family's social capital. Families with strong relationships with the community, in this case with the school, are more likely to promote and reinforce attitudes and values relevant to their children's education. For example, if a parent gets involved in the children's

school, he is likely to value the work that is done. Research suggests that children are less likely to drop out of school, skip school, or perform poorly in school if their parents are involved in one or more ways. Social capital explains why children of migrants do well in school with parents who expect them to complete their studies. According to Fuller, in her research, she found out that; several of her interviewed students stated that education and upward mobility were important for their parents. (Fuller, 2009)

Cultural capital in relation to Norway and this thesis 5.5

Norway is a unique case when it comes to education, education is available, obtainable, and free. The popular public schools in Norway generally do better at testing, have more applicants and have higher grades compared to private schools (Udir, 2022). There is also a higher percentage of public schools in Norway, and there is no “private” school culture as we can see in other countries such as the UK. Therefore, students from all social groups are able to apply and get into the top public upper secondary schools in Norway. This is not to dispute that the students with higher economic and cultural capital might have more resources to get into these “top” schools, however, it is to point out there are no economic school fees that discourage the lower and working-class students from applying to the top schools since the enrolment of students are solely determined by grades, and not money, status, or power. Therefore, students who have ingrained a high amount of social capital from their parents have the ability, to apply and get into high achieving upper secondary schools. This is also something that was visible during the interviews, when refugee students, migrant students with working-class parents, students from rich areas and students’ poorer areas all studied together at high achieving upper secondary schools. Therefore, the Bordieuan theory of habitus and cultural capital is not completely affective towards the Norwegian school system, however, I have chosen to use his terminology due to the importance of cultural capital, however I have geared it towards the Norwegian culture and with an addition of social capital.

Research indicates that good and bad mental health affects the body in varying degrees. And to live a healthier lifestyle, it should all start with the mind. A student’s life expectancy and life fulfilment are determined by varying degree of different factors. However, researchers agree (Lund-Holdtstad, 2010/2018) (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) that having bad mental health affects someone’s physical health negatively. Having school belonging or feeling a sense a belonging within a community, also affects someone’s mental health (Goodenow &

Grady, 1993) Lacking school belonging does not only affect the student's mental health, which again contributes to their physical health, it leads to increased levels of stress, anxiety, loneliness, depression, jealousy, and lack of motivation. It also leads to a decrease of academic achievements and decrease in life expectancy (Lund-Holdtstad 2010.) With such important data, and risk for those who lack school belonging, it is increasingly important for educators to put in measures to counter the lack of school belonging. Increasing school belonging school increase academic achievements, life expectancy, life fulfilment, and decrease drop-out rates for the students who experience it. If Norway want to have more students who finish higher secondary education, and continue to university, it seems pivotal to foster school belonging and understanding among students, but also among educators and politicians.

2017 in Norway, the government implemented a percentage-based absence program in upper secondary schools, (Norwell, 2022) which allows students to be absent from 10% of a given class, and if they are absent for more than 10% of the given class, they will automatically fail that class, despite how well they might perform in that class. The absences are "undocumented" absences which include all absences that are not noted by a doctor, dentist, psychologist, or any other required health official. This system was implemented to battle the increase of student's absences in higher secondary schools across the country. However, it seems counterproductive to battle a student's absence with the threat of failing classes if you want the student to pass and graduate higher secondary school. There are different factors for why a student is absent, and not all absences can be recorded by a doctor, anxiety, depression, or other mental health factors might be hard to diagnose, or hard to reach out for help for. If the Norwegian politicians and educators want more students to graduate, they should foster school belonging, and positive mental health, instead of "punishing" the students who are absent for more than 10% in a class. The year 2021-22 has had an increase of student drop out compared to the year before, with an increase of 0.7%, the dropout rate during 2021-22 is 3.7%. (Udir, 2022) It is interesting to note that there is higher dropout rates pre and post pandemic, 2018-19 and 2021-22 had higher dropout numbers compared to the pandemic years 2019-20 and 2020-21, portrayed with the figure below, made by Udir.

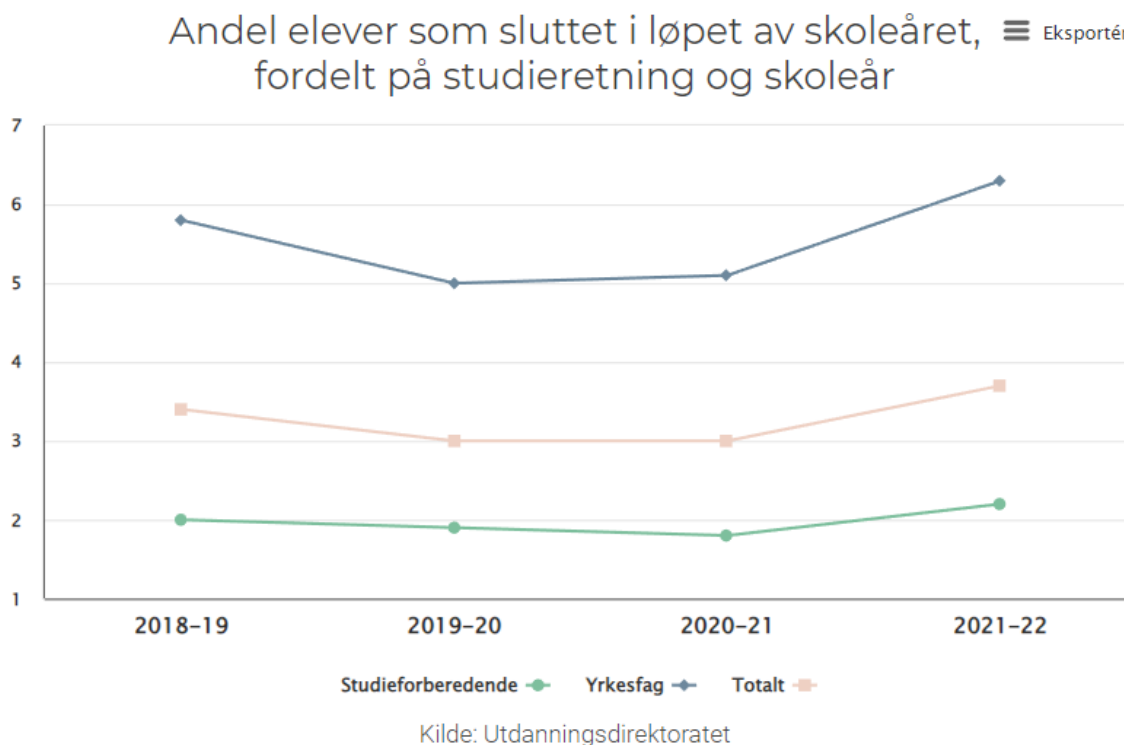


Figure 6, percentage of students who quit throughout the school year, divided by study and year. General study (green), vocational subjects (blue), total (beige)

Politicians and educators are aware of the high dropout rates, absence in class, and increase of loneliness among students, but it can seem that they do not have the correct solution to the issue. Instead of looking for the reason why a student is absent, they try to fix the issue by capping the approved absence at 10% and having consequences of not being able to pass that class if they exasperate 10%. Having 10% absence of a given class will look very different, depending on the class, for example within one semester, if you are gone for two gym classes, you have already passed the 10% approved absence mark. My main research is not on the 10% absence rule in Norwegian upper secondary schools, however that rule points out an important issue. Norwegian schools have a problem with attendance, and dropout rates, however how they deal with the issue might not be the most affective. I believe focusing on belonging, fostering good mental health among students would be a more effective way to keep the students in school.

Increasing student health nurses in higher secondary schools, educating staff and teachers on the benefits of belonging and fostering healthy conversations regarding mental health in young people would be a good start to foster school belonging and try to prevent loneliness.

Relating to photovoice as a communicative participatory tool, it might be beneficial to implement during topics that are hard to discuss. (Wang, 1992) Using photos, which young people are accustomed to take, due to the rise of smart phones. This might be an easier way to communicate with younger people regarding their feelings or needs. This approach is also a low-effort contribution, since it does not require any literature analysis tool or extensive knowledge by the participants, since the researcher/ educator is the one guiding the participants through the process. Photovoice is not new, it has been around since the 90`s, however it is not widely used or popular within academia. It is more linked to sociology, medical health, or anthropology, or when communicating with photos is easier than to communicate with speech.

Where does this research differ from the current research within the field? 5.6

It is nothing new doing research on students or school belonging. Many studies are done yearly to focus on students' mental health, bullying and belonging in higher secondary schools in Norway. Research on school belonging and school connectedness also has had a growing following and more studies accomplished since the 90's, however the research is not implemented in schools, or the research can show us if they had implemented measures based on school belonging in schools, the rate of lonely and depressed students decrease, however it has increased, especially compared to pre-covid numbers. (Aas, 2022)

I have not found much research that focuses on high academic achieving students in relation to belonging, most studies are either all-encompassing or focus on at-risk-youth. Many studies are focused on "issues" and how to solve these issues. However, this thesis is not attempting to fix an issue, but rather look at an event, the photos, and interviews, and see what information it brings forth. I also believe interviewing the student during the pandemic is quite special, and it would be interesting to interview the same students again, in a few years while asking similar questions. To see if their perspective has changed or stayed the same. The impact of covid is not easy to see or realize currently, however it would be interesting to see the long-lasting effects in the future.

Where my research differs from the current research is in its relation to photovoice, the focus on high academic achieving students and the in-depth interviews after the photos. Talking to the students over several hours (combined) gives a different point of view to their view of

belonging, unbelonging, discrimination and racism. Studies will commonly find trends and based on large pools of study participants, this study uses a small group and talk to them in depth. Therefore, my research can be used to look at this specific group of students, in this specific time through the lens of academic literature within the fields of education, sociology and psychology regarding belonging, unbelonging, discrimination and bullying. In addition, studies usually tend to focus on how to fix issues. Or do studies on unfortunate groups that might be struggling. This thesis does not look to fix an issue, but rather gather clarity regarding the concept of belonging and how teenagers within higher secondary might face issues and what kind of issues they might be. There is little study done focusing on high achieving academic students, most of the research on this topic have been deprived from Carol Fuller's research, however majority of research on students is either focused on generalization a full class or doing research on "problems" students face, often without a focus on high achieving students. By using research and academia from a multiple of fields from Humaniores, psychology, photography, sociology, to history we can get a broader understanding of the constructs, themes, and topics in this thesis. As author Khaled Hosseini explains, "nothing happens in a vacuum in life: every action has a series of consequences, and sometimes it takes a long time to fully understand the consequences of our actions." All events and moments are affected by one another, be it history, research, or everyday life. By excluding one event, or one part of research, the research discussed would not have the proper background to be discussed and analysed.

Interviews, data security, ethical considerations, and profiles – Chapter 6

Interviews 6.1

I have two upper secondary schools in the Oslo area, participating in my master project. The schools were recruited through personal connections through my professor and me. Teachers and their students have participated as subjects for my field study. The fieldwork contains a case study with qualitative in-depth interviews with minority and Norwegian teenagers in Norwegian high schools and their teachers. The focus will be on belonging and unbelonging experienced by minority and Norwegian youth in Norwegian upper secondary schools.

Before the interviews, the students have been asked to prepare at least three pictures and some text or headlines to the photographs (photovoice) to the themes given belonging and

unbelonging. The images are a jumping-off point where students are asked the meaning behind their pictures, if there is something only the photographer knows when the picture was taken, or if there is some additional information the students can tell to flesh out the photos. This can be feelings at the time the photos were taken, whom the photos were taken of, where it was taken, feelings related to the photo etc. After asking questions relating to the photos, the conversation will follow thesis' focus regarding belonging and unbelonging.

The reason why the students are asked questions about the photos first is due to the theme of the photos. Themes regarding belonging and unbelonging can carry emotions that are hard to discuss, so asking them to photograph those feelings might be easier for the students to answer. However, it seems that asking them to capture such emotions is difficult for most teenagers, and the discussion concerning that is pivotal to this research.

The interview is semi-structured but informal. By this, I mean I have specific questions relating to the photos, but mostly it depends on the student I am interviewing. Some students need more questions, while others speak more freely. The students are encouraged to speak normally and discuss whatever makes them comfortable. As a researcher, I am speaking how I usually would, which is in some slang, some English and Norwegian. Due to the proximity in age to the students, I opted for acting naturally so I could earn their trust. Suppose if they do not want to answer a question, which is okay. They were also made aware that they would be anonymous, which caused some students to be more willing to talk. Their consent can be withdrawn at any time, but no one has made that choice.

Photovoice – the photos and discussion- chapter 6.2

Photovoice is a participatory tool and process where individuals or groups, often individuals or groups with limited power due to language, race, ethnicity, socioeconomics, poverty, sexuality, culture, or gender can express themselves. The individuals or groups use photo images or video to capture aspects of their own environment, and they later share this experience with others in their group and/or the researcher. The photos can be used with or without caption or texts. This method tool first introduced by Caroline Wang (1992) was created to show the lives of disadvantaged individual, in a medium that transcends language and creates bridges rather than barriers. One of the goals when using photovoice is to reach policy makers and create change. However, this thesis uses this tool to communicate with younger people in a medium they know well, photos. Due to the sensitive matter of the questions, it might be easier to answer some of them, if they have the photos to relate to. Ex:

the students were asked to take a photo where they belong and had time to think about where they should take the photo. This lets the student have autonomy over their own narrative and choose themselves how they want to present. They were later asked the question to answer where they feel like they belong, and to elaborate on the photos, this is something the students already have discussed with themselves due to the photos they needed to take. Therefore, the interviews had an easier flow, compared to if the interviewer simply asked the students to describe where they belong without any prior knowledge. Since topics like belonging and unbelonging are often difficult to describe, navigate and discuss.

School A

I have interviewed a class in an academically high-achieving school, where the competition to enter school is based on the average grades of the students attending. This school usually is between the number one or two most difficult schools to get into in this city. The class is very homogenous and primarily based on ethnic Norwegian students. However, I interviewed some adopted, 1 and 2. gen migrant teenagers. However, the ethnicity of the students I did interview was either white European or East Asian (whether migrant or adopted.) Therefore, the answers from school A are based on their experiences. Thus, the absence of BIPOC students will be considered, and therefore, their data will be compared to the other class I interviewed; there were several BIPOC students. The students at school A were also all female, which is essential to note since the experiences from male to female students can be different.

School B

I have interviewed a class in an academically high-achieving school, where the competition to enter school is based on the average grades of the students attending; however, the students in this class were newly arrived foreign students in Norway. They were a mix of asylum seekers, immigrants, children of foreign workers etc. They are placed in these classes to assimilate into the Norwegian school system. The ages of these students might vary due to their previous schooling in their prospective home countries. These classes and programs aim to get teenagers to a similar level as their Norwegian counterparts. This is done with intensive courses in Norwegian and otherwise other courses they might be missing. These students are academically gifted and attend classes with their Norwegian classmates, and they only have extensive courses in English and Norwegian to learn the language.

Vignettes and photos by participants 6.3

All names are fictitious, and chosen based on the letter A, the vignettes of the prospective students are real-life experiences, however, due to the upkeep of their anonymity some changes have been made to their profiles (such as place names, school names, and their names.) The names chosen for their students have not been selected at random, they are all based on the letter A, the names are chosen to fit the profile of the students. For example, the Muslim students have gotten a fictitious Muslim name, from the letter A, while the Polish students are given traditionally Polish names. Names are important, someone's name connects to their history, identity, family, culture, and individuality, and connect us as readers to them. By giving the research participants name, we flesh out their characters and bring life to their lived experiences. The girls are all from the same school, school A, while the guys are from the same school, school B. It is important to give these student names, since the audience of the thesis, have not met these students. Therefore, the experiences of the student might seem foreign or disconnected with the audience. By giving the students fictitious names, it is intended for the audience to connect to the experiences.

This chapter also contains the photos from the students. Underneath are the photos the students themselves related to belonging and unbelonging. The students have taken the photos themselves, some have created additional text, given the photos names while some have chosen to keep the name blank. The information regarding the photos have also been derived from the interviews related to the thesis. Not all students have participated in the photo project, the students from school A all contributed, however school B have not participated during the photo portion, due to lack of time related to the COVID pandemic and online schooling. Therefore, it will be a varying degree of analysis of the photos, depending on if the students were interviewed, added headlines or text to their photos.

School A

School A has conducted both the photovoice and the interview part of the thesis.


Aga's profile

Aga is a third-year student in a high academic achieving upper secondary school in Oslo. She is from the East Side of town and has grown up in the same area all her life, but she has recently moved to a new apartment. She misses the place she grew up, because it feels like

home, however she is happy with the change as well. Aga is Polish, with Polish parents, but has grown up in Norway. Her family has deemed it important to climb up the social ladder and make something of oneself. Therefore, grades are something that is important to Aga, and her family. Aga is a social student, who enjoys being with friends. Aga sometimes feels guilty and ambivalent regarding studying, since she wants to spend the time with friends and relaxing but feels guilty when she does not use the time to study. Aga has felt some forms of “discrimination” directed towards herself regarding Polish people, however Aga regards these acts as “bad jokes” or immaturity. These acts have been related to stereotypes against Polish people. Regarding fitting in, Aga has found it difficult to fit in to some parts of Norwegian culture, especially our winter sports. Skiing or snowboarding is not something she has grown up upon, so when going on cabin trips or school winter days she finds it hard to keep up, since she is not on the same level as the Norwegian students. This has led to some frustration and even tears from Aga. Aga wants to study psychology, however since the grade average for clinical psychology is very high in Norway, she has looked into studying in Poland, but she wants to study in Norway since this is her home. Aga does not know if finding a job with a foreign name would be difficult, however her dad has advised her to change her name to a Norwegian last name, if she marries a Norwegian man in the future. Aga works at a grocery store with her family. She explains that she has not experienced discrimination herself but has seen her colleagues been treated with anger and hostility due to them being visibly foreign and having an accent. Aga felt this situation was off putting since she is also technically an immigrant, but she was not singled out, like her co-worker was.

Aga's photos

Belonging

	<p>“No caption”</p> <p>“This was taken at my old veranda, in the place I used to live. I just moved to another part of town, but I have lived there all my life. All the buildings are the same, which gives me a sense of belonging.”</p> <p>Picture of a couple apartments in the orange sunset.</p>
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Unbelonging

Aga’s second picture regarding unbelonging was from a sport shop, this photo is not in the document, since all other pictures were sent in file, while this photo was added right before the interview. The photo was a photo inside a sport shop, and pair of skis were in the centre of the photo.

“I do not know; it is one thing I must never have had in common with everyone else (winter sports). It has to do with the fact, that it is not common for my parents to ski when it is winter because they do not come from Norway. So, there is just something I have felt that I am a little different from everyone, other than Norwegian children when it comes to winter activities - and I feel like it’s an important part of Norwegian culture.”

Alvilde’s profile

Alvilde is a third-year student in a high academic achieving upper secondary school in Oslo. Alvilde is ethnically Norwegian and has grown up in the West Side of Oslo. She feels like the subway throughout Oslo is what connects the city. Alvilde feels outside of the norm of where she grew up, and relates this to the attitudes by her peers, and what was considered popular. In

the interviews this was more explicitly shown by the photo of a soccer field, which Alvilde took. Alvilde used to play football due to her peers and friends played there, however she did not feel like she fit in in that setting. After a few years she quit football and started practising karate. Alvilde feels like she does not fit in with the norm of what a West Side girl is, she feels outside with the West Side girls, however the East Side girls considered her “too” West Side, while the West Side girls do not consider her West Side “enough.” Something that has been that she had to be mindful of when meeting others. Due to Alvilde’s parents not being from Oslo, she does not relate to the West Side environment or attitudes, however she loves the place and neighbours where she grew up. Alvilde used to care a lot about grades, and what other’s thought of her, but she wishes she did not, since she would end up the same place anyways (her current school)

Alvilde’s photos

Belonging

		<p>“No caption”</p> <p>Alvilde took a photo of the subway stop near them. She feels like the subway portrays belonging very well since the subway connects all of Oslo.</p>
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Unbelonging



“I’ve never been good at football” Alvilde expressed that she does not feel any belonging to the football field. She used to play football when she was younger but did not feel like she fit in with the team or the “environment” regarding football. She felt little belonging to their classmates and explained “things were much easier in higher secondary.”

Picture in the day of a football field, the sky is grey.


Alessa’s profile

Alessa is a third-year female student in a high academic achieving upper secondary school in Oslo. Alessa is a stoic and serious student. She is Asian but is born in Norway. Alessa has grown up in Oslo and feel a sense of belonging to the city. Alessa feel a sense of unbelonging when it comes to names. She rarely finds her name in Norway, or in statistics over names. Regarding discrimination and stereotypes Alessa likes to steer away from such topics and ignore comments if it happens. She does not like to seek out racism or discrimination or give it her attention, she would rather ignore it, when the racism /discrimination is in relation to her. Alessa is from the East Side of Oslo and has grown up with a diverse group of friends. They would often use edgy jokes, edgy jokes are often offensive jokes that typically can be seen as rude or dark and play into racist, homophobic, religious, or gendered stereotypes. The appeal of edgy jokes is to play into the shock and offensive power of the joke, it is so outrageous it “becomes” funny. Alessa and her friends would use edgy jokes, that might be considered racist but was said by People of colour (POC) to other POC regarding stereotypes against themselves. This creates a form dark humour geared towards themselves, edgy jokes used by the intended target group about themselves can in a way reclaim the power to the

affected group by reclaiming stereotypes used against them. Aleesa’s interview was very short but got to the point. Her interview was the shortest of all interviews conducted.

Alessa’s photos

Belonging

	<p>“No caption”</p> <p>Alessa felt like Oslo is belonging to them, since this is where she has grown up. Alessa is not geographically from Norway (parents migrated), but still feel some sort of belonging to Oslo.</p> <p>Picture of Oslo, from a Birdseye view, you can see all of Oslo.</p>
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Unbelonging

<p>Real photo redacted due to privacy.</p> <div data-bbox="209 1272 817 1637"> <p>Resultat</p> <hr/> <p>8 har Alessa som sitt etternavn</p> <p>Andre treff på søket ditt</p> <p>8 kvinner har Alessa som sitt første fornavn</p> <p>4 kvinner har Alessa som sitt eneste fornavn</p> <p style="text-align: center;">× Lukk</p> </div> <p>This photo is just an exsample similar to the real photo, with exchanged names.</p>	<p>This photo was a photo over name statistics in Norway, from Norway statistics (Norway Statistics, SSB, 2022), which the student used to show how her name is never represented and often do not show up on statistics. That is the feeling of unbelonging the student described when she felt excluded on a name basis. This photo is redacted due to it containing the real name of the student.</p>
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Alina's profile

Alina is a third-year female student in a high academic achieving upper secondary school in Oslo. Alina is 18 years old she likes art and watching netflix. Alina loves her family and being close with them. She says that being independent is important, but for herself family is considered more important. Alina has had some health issues lately and have spent time in the hospital. Therefore, a big portion of her interview is related to her hospital stay and feelings around that. Alina is Polish, with Polish parents but moved to Norway during her childhood. She had met some animosity due to her ethnicity; this has majority been stereotypes against polish people, swearing at her in Polish or commenting on her oral Norwegian abilities. Alina regards these types of acts as immature jokes, mostly done by uneducated young people. Alina loves birds and nature. Alina has had some difficulties with relationship and sexuality. This came across in the interviews when Alina commented on a person, she fell in love with but could not have, and then mentioning sexuality has been difficult for her. However, the topic was not broached further due to the student did not seem like she wanted to speak further on the matter, therefore the interview did not go into depth regarding sexuality. Alina was very careful when speaking, and her character was very serious and came across trying to get her words straight and her thoughts understood. Something that was echoed in her interview since she wants to be understood by others.

Alina's pictures

Belonging





“No caption”

Alina has had a tough time lately with their mental health, Alina have spent time in the hospital due to this. This picture was taken outside the hospital of her parents holding hands. She felt a sense of safety and belonging with their family still supporting them.

	Picture of Alina’s parents holding hands.
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Unbelonging

	<p>“No caption”</p> <p>Alina expressed how she was afraid of the dark and being alone, she also pointed to a star in the picture, and expressed how she did not want to be a “single shining star.”</p> <p>Picture of a forest, dark background and a single star behind the trees.</p>
	<p>“No caption”</p> <p>Alina expressed how she did not want to always be the “shining sun” who is alone and always have to show that she is happy. She also commented that the sun is alone.</p> <p>Picture of the sun, the whole sky is yellow.</p>


Annika’s profile

Annika is a third-year student in a high academic achieving upper secondary school in Oslo. She has a twin brother, who attends a school in the West Side of town. Annika is Norwegian but has a foreign last name due to her grandpa being Hungarian. Annika feels Norwegian, but

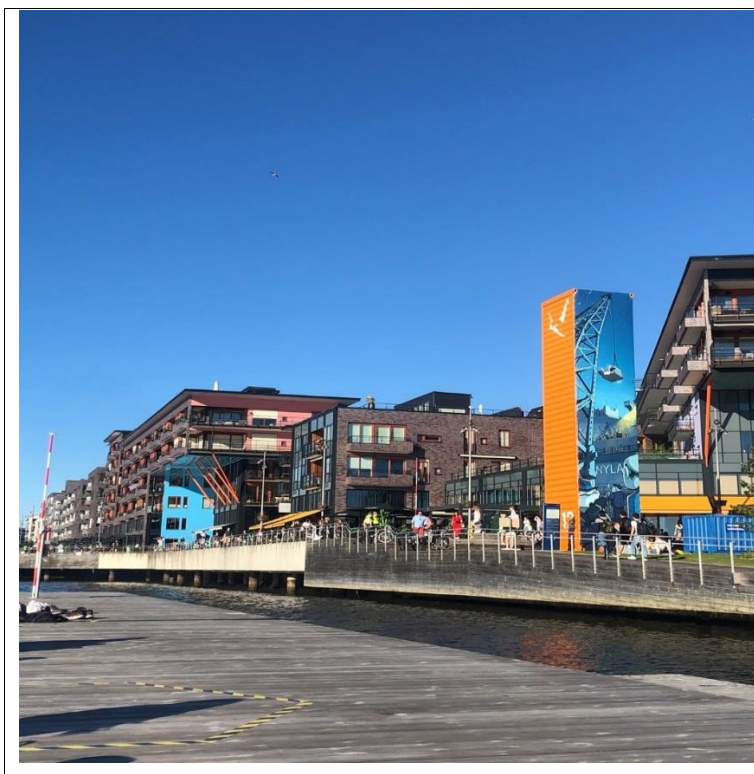
due to her name several other European students feel a sense of connection to her, since they connect to her Eastern European identity. Annika did not know her identity was special until she attended upper secondary school where there was less diversity compared to lower secondary school. Annika has also become prouder of her Hungarian side, and has decided to use her Hungarian name, which is a contrast to her brother who only uses their Norwegian name. Annika feels like the community of where her brother studies has coloured his views on his name and upbringing, causing him to become shameful and hide his Hungarian side, while Annika feels like embracing it.

Annikas' photos

Belonging

 A black cat is sitting on a white windowsill, looking out of a window. The view outside shows a white house with a dark roof and a wooden fence. There are green plants in the foreground. The scene is lit with warm, indoor light.	<p>“No caption”</p> <p>The cat symbolizes belonging since the cat would never argue or yell, no matter how other family members might yell. In addition, the picture was taken from the kitchen which also holds another form of belonging.</p>
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Unbelonging



“No caption”

Annika felt the environment surrounding “Sørenga” a popular bathing spot in Oslo, was foreign to her. She feels little attachment to this place so the degree of unbelonging is high. She pointed out the anonymity of the location feels unattached to her

Picture of water (sea), next to modern buildings, there are no people near the camera.

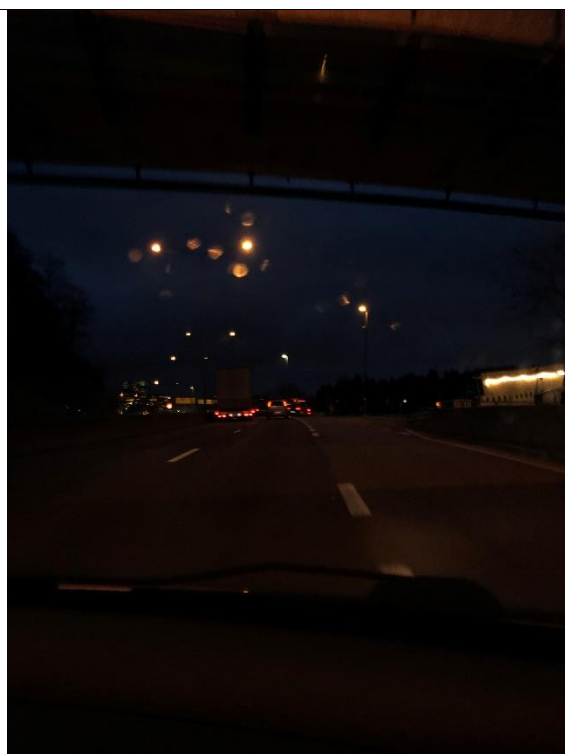
Alice’s profile

Alice is a third-year student in a high academic achieving upper secondary school in Oslo. Alice likes swimming and travelling. Alice is Asian and lives on the East Side of Oslo, she is born in Norway. Alice likes the driving, especially at night since it gives her a special feeling being awake when everyone else is sleeping. Alice does not like to cook and feel like she does not belong in the kitchen. She dreams about one day studying abroad in America but struggles to find the money for the expensive tuition fees in the US. Alice feels out of place in the classroom and feels like she is ignored and not invited to things. However, since this is all done passively, she feels like she is unable to blame her classmates. She wished she was bullied actively since she could then put the blame on someone. The classroom environment according to Alice is “really bad”, and there is one group of students who benefit from the current environment. Alice does not know what she has done wrong to not fit into class, she feels like if she would have stayed longer in that environment maybe she would learn how to adapt to her peers. Alice has also been affected by covid education and claimed that zoom class has made her more introverted. Alice told the interviewer she struggles to find a photo where she belongs, since she feels like she has never felt belonging anywhere. Alice was happy to talk to the interviewer since Alice had the impression of the interviewer feeling

belonging to somewhere and therefore could discuss it with her. Alice was very talkative, and her interview was one of the longest.

Alice's photos

Belonging



“On the road again”

“I took a picture of, no - when I was in the car and looking out over the road because I feel that I am a person who likes the journey the most. Getting to a place is not as important as the journey there. And then I do not mean it poetically, but in general. I tend to hate everything before and everything after- I like that things are a bit new and I'm on my way to new places”

Picture of a night sky, taken inside of a driving car. The streetlights, and car taillights are reflected.

-Alice

Unbelonging



““No caption needed”

Alice explained the picture was a double innuendo since there is often a joke about “women belong in the kitchen.” Which she does not relate to. After conversing with her, she explained she wanted to take a photo of the school but was afraid the photos would be discussed in plenum, and therefore decided not to, to avoid “drama.” Alice expressed her feeling of unbelonging in the class structure and felt like she is “left out.” Alice expressed no one is treating them actively malicious, but she feels like “she does not fit their (classmate’s) standard of “normal.”

Picture of a clean kitchen
-Alice

Agnes’ profile

Agnes is a third-year student in a high academic achieving upper secondary school in Oslo. Agnes is ethnically Norwegian. Anges has grown up on the West Side of Oslo. She feels at home in her garden since that is where she used to sit while having zoom classes during covid times. She likes how the garden is an extension of her house. Agnes feels not at home at the

football field, not because it is an exclusive place, but more since this place belongs more to her brother, than it does to her. For Agnes it was hard to find a place where she does not belong, since she feels like she belongs anywhere, even though she has not been everywhere yet. She does not feel unwelcome in a football field, however it is not “her” place. Agnes journals her thoughts every day, to make sense of her feelings and remember back on events. It is an active choice for her to do so. Agnes has not experienced discrimination herself, however she mentioned that if she has been discriminated against positively, someone had to be negatively affected. Then she mentioned that her classmates in lower secondary used to be singled out as a problem child without doing something wrong, mostly due to the impression the teachers had of the students, while Agnes was treated as a “good student” who could do no wrong. Agnes does not want to be treated badly, but thought it was odd that she was treated nicer than her classmates. While others had to “prove” to be good, Agnes was treated as good from the start, and she never had to prove anything.

Agnes’ photos

Belonging

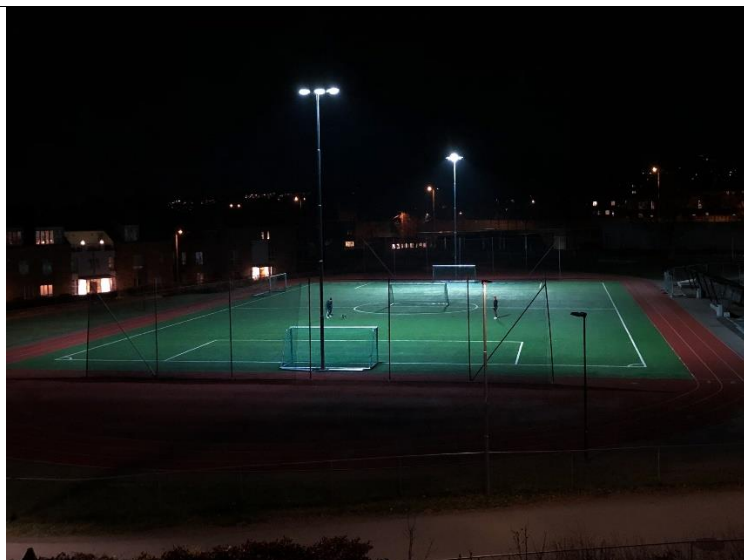


“No caption”

“I have a lot of tea in the garden, at least in the summer. And that part of the garden frames the house, so you can see it like that, no matter where you are. It feels like it is part of the house.”

Picture of Agnes’s dog in the garden

Unbelonging



“It was difficult to take a picture where I do not feel at home. Because I do not get that feeling like many places and things. That is more among *people*. But then I thought that the football field is not my place, in the same way it is my brother's place, who has played football all his life.”

Picture at night, of an up lit football field.

Astrid's profile

Astrid is a third-year student in a high academic achieving upper secondary school in Oslo. She loves travelling and has family in both Norway and Scotland. Astrid works in the school musical and loves when everyone can contribute without being afraid to feel silly or being judged for performing. Astrid especially likes the community since everyone is welcoming and there are no “silly ideas” in the school musical community. Astrid loves being social and has an issue with FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) this means having a fear of not attending social gatherings with friends or feeling afraid to not be invited to social gatherings. For Astrid, this portrays itself by being afraid to not attend social gatherings, when invited to multiple at the same time, in fear of not being invited in the future. It also portrays itself as the need to be social and drink, in fear of not seeming “fun enough” and therefore not being invited to social gatherings in the future. Astrid drinks, however, the point for her and alcohol is not to get drunk, but to be social and have a good time.

Astrid is adopted from Asia to a white Norwegian family. She feels at home in the Norwegian culture. She wears bunad (Norwegian traditional clothing) on the constitutional day, and majority of her friends are white ethnic Norwegians. However, there has risen some issues with being adopted to a family who do not look like you. Astrid recalls that looking at family photos, it is obvious she is not biologically related to her family, and when walking outside with her dad, she sometimes fears that people would think she is a “mail-order-bride” from

Asia who is dating her white father, due to the stereotype of young Asian female and elder white man. Astrid has very few -to none, Asian friends (who are not adopted) and therefore finds it difficult to relate to them. Astrid has a dream of one day studying abroad, and wonders if it would be easier to feel included in a place where more people look like her, where she does not need to explain her ethnicity and ethnic identity. Astrid was very talkative, positive and social and her interview was one of the longest.

Agnes' photos

Belonging

	<p>“Plan for the mini-musical”</p> <p>Astrid is helping to plan the mini musical at school. She explained that being a part of the musical encapsulates belonging. There are no “bad” ideas, and no one is scared to be “silly.”</p> <p>Picture of a whiteboard with a handwritten plan of the mini musical.</p>
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Unbelonging



“No caption”

Astrid pointed out that she often is afraid to miss out on social interactions and often join parties when she might not really “want” to party. Astrid explained FOMO, and how she often has to go to multiple parties, despite being tired, in fear of not being invited in the future. Astrid said that drinking is not something important to them personally and getting drunk is not the point. But she partakes to not feel left out or disappoint the people at the party.

Picture of a table at a party, there are no people in the photo, but there are several empty glasses and bottles on the table.

-Astrid

School B

School B had a more diverse student body, especially the class I was able to interview. The students were refugees and migrants from all over the world. Only two students wanted to do the interview, this was due to a combination of factors. There were very few students in class the day the interviews were conducted. This was due to covid regulations, and students being sick with covid. There were ultimately six students in class that day, where two chose to do the interviews. Since the interviews were voluntarily, and the study is made to be participatory, the students were not forced to join the study, and those who wanted to would join. The two students who joined did not participate in the photovoice study since School B had some issues with the time frame regarding covid, exams and testing for the students. Therefore, the students were just interviewed about the themes, without connecting it to the photos. School A had both photos and interviews, but they had less struggles with covid related education, and their interviews were able to be conducted months before School B. Due to the timing of the thesis, and the student's schedule School B has just interviews, and the interviewer did not go back to the students to conduct the participatory photovoice part of the project. The reason why the interviews are still in the thesis is due to the data that was collected through the interviews. Even if the students did not share photos, they did share experiences that were needed to show a diverse response to the themes in the thesis. If this thesis was conducted under normal circumstances (i.e., pre/post covid) the photovoice and interviews would be conducted in both schools. However due to these issues, and time restraints some modifications have been put into place.

Arif's profile

Arif is a second-year student in the general studies program, in an academic high achieving upper secondary. Arif is 18 years old and works part time at a local restaurant, while he waits to finish his upper secondary degree. He loves gaming, and that is the usual way he communicates with friends, through online gaming and sites like Discord (discord is a website where people can play, stream, call, chat together with friends or strangers.) Arif wants to be a programmer and is planning to work in the IT sector in the future, since he feels like that sector suits his lifestyle and preferences. Arif is fluent in several languages including English, Norwegian and Arabic. Arif has lived in Syria, the UEA in and now Norway. Arif came to Norway as a refugee from Syria, however due to his interest in gaming he did not feel that big of a cultural difference since he could still communicate with his friends as he used to before. Through online gaming on websites such as Discord. Arif even bragged that the internet is

better here than back at home, so he can play more and faster games in Norway. Arif is Muslim, which is something that is prevalent in the interview since several of his experiences is based on his intersectional personality of both Muslim and refugee in a majority white school in Norway.

Arsalan's profile

Arsalan is a second-year student in the general studies program, in an academic high achieving upper secondary. Arsalan is a popular student who does not have a problem finding friends. Arsalan is 18 years old, and he arrived in Norway in 2017 as a refugee from Syria, but is already fluent in Norwegian, and he is in regular classes with the other ethnic Norwegian students. Arsalan speaks several languages. Arsalan cares about social issues such as rights for refugees and racism. Arsalan is a positive and open student who were willing to discuss diverse topics. Arsalan also thinks it is important to see issues from multiple sides. Arsalan is Muslim, and his interview is coloured by his experiences as a Muslim, refugee student in Norway. Arsalan tells the interviewer that to his friends he is just "Arsalan," not "the Muslim" or "the refugee" he feels like he can fit in anywhere- The students in the school treat him with respect, however he has encountered events what he deemed unsatisfactory, but these events have been with educators or teachers at the school, in relation to religion and refugees.

Discussion of the photovoice pictures 6.4

The purpose of using Photovoice within this study was to communicate with a medium the youth was accustomed to; photos, whilst discussing topics that might be hard to vocalize ex: bullying, discrimination, belonging. Not all students are willing to discuss deep topics in depth, however our hope was to use the photos as a jumping-off-point to where the students would be comfortable to discuss their lives in relation to photos, they had chosen themselves.

In addition, the interviews were in regard to Bronfenbrenner ecological theory (1977), in a place where students would feel "comfortable." The interviews were not done in a sterile laboratory within a formal setting, rather it was done at their school, within school hours, separated from their peers, by a researcher that was close in age with the students. This was done for the convenience of the students, to make the interviews easy to participate in, while at the same time using the researchers age to their advantage while conducting the interviews.

To elaborate on this topic, the age being close proximity with the research subject, could make it easier for the students to open up, in addition the form of the interview was semi formal- meaning the certain questions were set, while the rest was of the interview was driven forward depending on the students' answers.

There were some common denominators within the students. Several related belonging to physical place like their garden or a place they grew up with. Aga related her belonging to her old neighbourhood, Agnes related belonging to her garden, Alvilde to the closest subway station and Alessa to Oslo as a whole city where she relates to belonging. Other students related beings or people to the matter of belonging such as parents or pets, this was particularly Alina, who chose to picture her parents' hands and Annika who pictured her cat. While Alice related belonging to activity like travelling or the feeling you get when you drive. This shows that the topic of belonging has many faces and aspects, from something tangible one can touch such as places and people, to ideas such as travelling. Only one student, Astrid, related belonging in something related to school. Her picture was of the school musical, while all the other students related belonging to something outside of school.

The common denominators within unbelonging in relation to the photos were: physical places like sports arenas, these where Alvilde and Agnes chose this motif, these are spaces that hold certain "attitudes" and expectations. A football field hold a certain expectation with either enjoying, participating, or watching the sport. Alice related the feeling of unbelonging due to her inability to cook, and the expectation that women should be able to cook. Aga related her feeling of unbelonging to Norwegian winter sports, through her photo of a sports store featuring winter skis, and the feeling winter sports give her. Alina featured photos of a shining sun and a lonely star, which for her presented was the notion of not wishing to be a "shining sun" due to the feeling of not being "shiny" or happy all the time, in addition to the sun being alone. Or the concept of a "shining star" due to the star being alone, separated and surrounded by darkness, both themes relating to loneliness. Annika related unbelonging to a physical place, a popular bathing spot in town, where she felt anonymous and felt like she did not belong to "that place." Alessa related her experience with not finding her name on statistics over names in Norway, due to having a foreign name, to the notion of not feeling like she is fitting in or belonging. Lastly, Astrid related unbelonging to a feeling of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) and the fear if she does not participate in parties, she will be excluded from the social circle in the future.

If we compare the photovoice pictures to the in-depth interviews, we do get some interesting data. Some students found the question of belonging / unbelonging hard to answer due to a myriad of reasons. Some felt the question hard to answer since they have never questioned where they did *not* belong and felt that even if they have never been certain places in Oslo, that does not mean they do not belong, it just means they have never been there before. While others found the question regarding belonging hard to answer since they felt like they never have felt a sense of belonging, and do not know where they belong. If we would have just accepted the answers from the student based on pictures, we would never have known that the student's felt these feelings, since the photos simply show places, people, or nature. That is why the discussion afterwards is considered incredibly important within photovoice, this is where we can understand the pictures, and if there is something behind the pictures the students might know, that we, who did not take the picture, do not understand.

In addition, asking questions in a semi formal setting, and following the natural curve of the conversation has helped this study. A particular student, Alice, felt like the class environment was bad or exclusionary, however she did not open up fully, until the researcher explained their personal experiences with exclusion within higher secondary and asked the student if they might have encountered something similar. Tailoring the conversation to each specific student has made the interviews easier to conduct, and the information received very valuable, compared to if the study would have followed a strict interview checklist. Following an interview checklist would give clear guidelines and uniform information that is easier to analyse, however deviating from a script and following the natural flow of the conversation can give unsuspecting answers and experiences.

A clear example of this was the discussion with the student, Alice, who felt like the student environment in their class was bad, this topic would never have been broached if the interviews were strictly following the pictures. If we strictly followed the photos there were no indicators of any student not feeling school belonging, or belonging in class, however unveiled through the interviews it was made very clear that some of the students strongly feel like they do not fit in, and no matter how "hard" they try, they cannot seem to "fit" right.

This discussion is not to discount any of the photos or photovoice as a method. The photos have a clear place within the study, and the photos bring an incredibly important factor to the thesis. The ability to communicate with photos, be creative, and broach topics that might be hard to talk about through a medium that the students know and use every day, has been beneficial to the thesis. The students were asked to bring and take the photos in advance, this

already starts their thought patterns and discussion within themselves regarding topics of belonging. This led to the questions within the interview be something “expected” since the overarching topics were given as photo tasks to the students beforehand. I do believe photovoice will have a bigger impact on the academic field in the future, with the rise of social media and photo taking phones. Photovoice is also an inclusive method transcending language, where the subjects can all participate, gather they have the access to a photodevice. This means the possibilities for photo studies, and photo elicit interviews are endless.

Interviews transcripts, analysis, and discussion- chapter 7

Several of the teenagers expressed similar issues, in relation to belonging. Many felt like an outsider, struggling to fit in with a group. If several of the participants in the project have the same issues, maybe it would be beneficial to talk about mental health in youth as a baseline in how to approach their wellbeing. We as a society tend to focus on remedial measures, how can we fix an issue that is already there. But the same energy is not put into preventative measures, especially regarding mental health. Society has become better at it, but mental health is still ranked below physical health, if we look at the economy and resources poured into the two healthcare sectors.

Even when interviewing young people from high achieving schools they face similar issues relating to teenagerhood, fitting in or a feeling of belonging. This transcended race and ethnicity. However, based on gender, it seemed like the guys felt more a sense of belonging compared to the girls I interviewed. It is important to note that I interviewed 8 girls, and 2 guys so the number might be skewed due to a small research pool (regarding the guys' answers.)

Covid and its effects 7.1

We have the specific number of covid related deaths, however there is no total number on the death toll of humans who died due to self-isolation, either through “natural” causes of death and suicide. Loneliness or isolation are not used for official causes of death; however, they might be indicators to someone's passing. “Many clinicians and non-clinicians saw patients, family members, and friends suffer and die and recognized that it was due to isolation—but cannot directly say so” (Lund-Holdtstad 2022). By interviewing the students, it is clear to see that the covid-19 pandemic has affected them, to what extent is hard to tell due to them also being in a time coloured by personal growth and changes, the students interviewed talked

about being anxious, having problems with their mental health, not fitting in a classroom setting or with classmates, being uncomfortable in class and missing “zoom” class, being more introverted, not going out as much, being anxious to go to two parties in fear of not getting invited in the future, not feeling confident until physical school started again, these are a few examples. It would be interesting to go back, in a few years to interview the same group of students after covid restrictions have been disbanded and the students are allowed to socialise in a natural environment (meaning real life environment devoid of social isolation and restrictions.) Lower and higher secondary students have also felt the effect of the pandemic, since they in varying degrees have had their schools go into lockdown. The students who had been interviewed, commented on how they feel they have changed due to covid, and how covid schooling has affected their confidence. The number of lonely students in Norway pre-pandemic was one out of every four students, whilst during the pandemic the number increased to three out of five students felt lonely (Aasaaren & Aas, 2020) This study was done on university students, and this number is the highest recorded since the study. We are just in the starting phase to realize that there has been damages in mental health due to covid. The extent of the ramifications due to the covid-19 pandemic has still yet due be discovered. (Lund-Holdtstad & Perissinotto, 2022) began.

“I have become very introverted after some unfortunate circumstances (covid) I love to be inside, hate to go out.” Alice, 13th grade, School

However, not everything relating to covid has been seen as negatives, in the student’s opinions. The same student commented on how she liked online school more and being in class physically is more stressful. Nevertheless, this could be contributed to the student’s introverted nature and lack of belonging (which will be discussed further below)

“YOU may be aware of it, but you do not notice it when you are up there. Definitely, I make a very big difference from when we had corona teaching to school teaching. It was less stressful before - I definitely think so.” Alice, 13th grade, School A

Common trait among several of the students was their wish to travel abroad. Either to study, explore or visit family. The need for travel and exploration is most likely a combination of lack of being able to travel due to covid, but also a wish for young people to explore the world outside of their “normal” habitat.

“I was especially safe with family; we did something very cozy together. As we do not get to do so often because they live in Scotland, we in Norway and then it has been covid.” -Astrid, 13th grade, School A

and

“I did was not until this year; I got the security in class and at school. You become more confident in yourself, but also the others at school. Now I do not feel that heavily, on the feeling of “transition”, while such large parts of high school it was about getting through the day. Even though it's nice, there are expectations, and a bit like stress. The social aspect.” Annika, 13th grade, School A

Annika commented that she did not feel a sense of belonging until 2021, she has attended class with her classmates since 2019, however due to covid they only got half a year with physical school before the country went into lockdown. This has undoubtedly affected their sense of belonging.

Mental Health 7.2

During this section, quotes from the interviewed students have been collected to explain the mental health in their lives. The students were very vulnerable and opened up to the researcher, despite not being familiar with the researcher. The students had different struggles with their mental health, as many young people have. Mental health is interconnected to belonging, so students discussing their own mental health can also relate to their concepts of belonging.

“Yes, it was really about not being able to show that I am more different than I am. To be like that sun. But most about the fact that I do not want to be a shining sun. They are alone too, a shining star, a shining sun. I'm not very independent, I do not like it.”
Alina, 13th grade, School A

And

“Yes, there are some conflicting pictures. It may be a little poor quality, but it's a little better on camera. But here it was really about being a star. I felt like I could not be the only one shining. I felt it was not quite my place to be, to get so much attention. It was a bit like that. I'm also not so fond of the dark. I have bad experiences with it. So that's also why I chose that picture. And here it is sunny, but it was also then that the sun was shining. This was from the hospital window. I felt then that I cannot be a shining sun. So that was a bit of what I was thinking then.” -Alina, 13th grade, School A

Alina was asked to explain why she felt a lack of belonging in relation to her picture of a shining sun. Alina explained that she did not like to be shining all the time, or to be alone. She did not want to be overly independent and was rather anxious and wanted to rely on her family, where she felt a sense of belonging and security. The feeling of loneliness, or independence was scary for some students, while liberating for others. Alina recounted that she did not want to be a “shining sun” or a “lonely star” indicating she did not want to be alone. Alina had several pictures of a lonely star or a lonely sun, which she related to unbelonging. Later this was reiterated when she said, “people need people” and how she wanted and needed to rely on her family, and did not want to be independent, but reliant on her family. Perception, and how we like to be perceived as is important for the human psyche. Few people want to be misunderstood, so being understood clearly is something most humans want. Especially if you care about someone's opinion of you. Alina recounted her difficulty with perception, and she felt like people often view her differently than how she feels she is. However, Alina was ambivalent, and both said she wanted to be understood and it was important, while at the same time claiming it to be unimportant. This can be due to the difficulty of the topic and changing emotions. However, you cannot exclude that the student feels like it is important in some aspects and not in others, making both statements coexisting yet contradicting.

“I'm very concerned with how people perceive me to be. And I feel I am perceived very differently than I am. It's something I want sometimes; I do not want to show the real side and try to show other sides of myself. But it's not really that important how people see you. It's not important. Now that didn't really make sense.” -Alina, 13th grade, School A

Alina recounted the difficulty she had going on in life at the moment. She talked about her stay at the hospital, and how lucky she was to have a supportive family who loved her. When she wondered how anyone could love her. She talked about how she did not want to be alone or keep shining all the time. She also was quite mad at herself for falling for someone she should not have fallen for; I did not dig deep into who that was since the student seemed like she did not want to talk about it. But we briefly had discussions regarding sexuality and relationships was difficult to talk about. She told me she just wanted to curl up into a ball and disappear and but felt happy she had loving family around and she felt happiest around nature and birds. I do think this is not due to her nationality or ethnicity, but rather how some find it difficult growing up as a teenager. Especially if you do not fit the norm. These students are complex so assuming all of their issues are due to their nationality, ethnicity or religion would be a simplification on what the students are going through on a daily basis. While Alina took solace in her family, other students took to journaling to discuss their feelings.

“Every day I write down feelings and thoughts in that book. It is a choice since for me it makes me feel better, and it is an active choice to choose to write in the book. I do it to work on feeling better, so I can feel good. Yes, it is a choice.” Agnes, 13th grade, School A

It is not unusual to feel a sense of insecurity while growing up, this was also echoed by some of the students. Some found it hard to fit in, or to be perceived as they truly are. Sometimes the students put on another persona, to hide their true self. Several of the students were differentiated in the way they deal with their own emotion. Differentiated deals with how someone communicates their emotional needs. Agnes uses written tools to understand and deal with her feelings and mental health. She regards this as an active choice, to write every single day in her journal.

Alina has spent some time working around her mental struggles and explained she would often take her anger out on her family, without really having a reason to do so. Alina had a conversation with their teacher, where the teacher explained that the people closest to us, is often whom we argue with the most. Alina felt guilty regarding her outbursts and had asked her brother how he could love her, when she acted that way. Which then again, her brother explained that loving was a choice, and that is what he had decided, which comforted her.

“I was in the hospital talking to my brother, I asked him on my cell phone, how he could love me. Then he replied that love is a choice. It may sound very big and cliché, but I think it's very nice that he said it, because I agreed. That he made an active choice to love me, and it's not just emotions. Because then you decide to be with that person anyway.”

-Alina, 13th grade, School A

While some students had struggled with mental health and their feelings, other students struggled with procrastinating, prioritising and how to differentiate between these things. Aga wants to prioritize herself and sleep in, and not do schoolwork, however she feels guilty if she does this. This notion was echoed by several students, which is not odd considering these are students attending a school where all their peers are high academic achieving students. Not only do the students compete with themselves, in addition they also have expectations from their families, teachers and peers to achieve good grades.

“I struggle with, well struggle with priorities and choose what is important to me. So, what is more important, it is important for me to get up the next day and feel good because my body feels good. Or should I be up and do schoolwork. It's something I've been struggling with lately. That I cannot quite find the balance” -Aga, 13th grade, School A

Alina had explained that she fell in love with someone she was supposed to fall in love with, this made her feel small, and she wanted to curl into a ball. Discussing sexuality was something the student thought was difficult; therefore, this issue was not pried more into, and it was left with only this comment.

“The inspiration (the picture) for this was that I fell in love with someone I should not fall in love with. Then I felt like I just wanted to curl up into a little ball and become an egg. I think it's very problematic with sexuality and love and stuff. It was about many things” -Alina, 13th grade, School A

Students and belonging 7.3

Belonging has a significant part of this thesis, but also in the interviews. All the students were asked to take pictures of where they belonged. These pictures were discussed afterwards, and the concept of overall belonging was discussed, in relation to the pictures, but also outside of the pictures. There were several places where the students felt a sense of belonging. There are different explanations and definitions for each teen related to their own sense of belonging and unbelonging. Most student felt a sense of belonging in upper secondary school, when themselves compared their levels of belonging in lower secondary school. There can be several factors to this but self-confidence, new environments, growing up and friends could be a contributing factor to the growing sense of belonging. However, the freedom of school choice policy might be a contributor due to the students who attend the schools all applied to this school willingly, whilst in lower secondary they attend the school located geographically close to them. Some students connected belonging geographically such as a place, like Oslo city, a subway stop, the garden next to their home or the place where she grew up. Some students connected physical beings to belonging like their cat, friends, or family, while other students could not relate anything to belonging and struggled with the photovoice task.

“It's just that- I do not really know. It's kind of the place I grew up in. There's no other place I can call home, geographically speaking. That place is Oslo, and I do not know, I took it since I have an immigrant background and am not actually from Oslo "biologically". But it's one of the only places I actually feel at home” -Alessa, 13th grade, School A

Alessa explained how where she felt a sense of belonging was Oslo as a place. Alessa picked a photo of Oslo from a birds-eye view to picture her version of belonging. Alessa was not “biologically” from Oslo, being a child of immigrants. However, she was born and grew up there and considers Oslo their home. Alessa used belonging in relation to their concept of home, which relates to her notion of physical belonging.

“I do not know if I feel belonging or not belonging so often since I am in so many places. Especially in Oslo, there are many places I have not been, but I do not feel unwelcome

there, even though I have never been. It is not like I feel unwelcome on a football field, but that's not my place.” Agnes, 13th grade, School A

Agnes had a difficult time to picture one place where she felt belonging, since she feels like she fits into several spaces, and it is difficult to pick one. Agnes commented that there are many places where she has not been, however she still does not feel unwelcome there, but some spaces feel more like “her” space compared to other spaces. However, we can contrast this notion of finding it hard to find “one place to belong” with the next student who felt like she had “nowhere she belonged” which is quoted below.

“It is very nice when we talk about belonging, that someone knows their place, as I have got the impression of you (student addressing the interviewer.) I know many who know where they belong and which I do not. I have no idea what culture I should attach myself to other than the United States. I'm still very western. Although I have family in the United States.” -Alice, 13th grade, School A

Alice had a difficult time finding out where she belonged. Since she does not feel like she belongs anywhere. Alice also felt like she did not belong in the classroom and could not relate to her classmates. Alice felt comforted talking to the interviewer since she felt it was comforting talking to someone who “knew” where they belonged in life. Alice has a dream of going to America, since that has been of dream of hers since she was young. Due to covid and economics this has been put off. Alice also had a difficult time of fitting into class, she felt like she was ignored and did not feel welcome by her peers, this will be discussed further under “students and unbelonging.” However, the notion of unbelonging or not having a place to belong has been with Alice since lower secondary school, however she believed it would be easier to belong and fit in in higher secondary.

“Well, what I feel is that I know all the nooks and crannies on (redacted place name) -I have sat on every single bench. And yes, I know, there is nothing, that I do not know about the place. So, it's a little sad to leave.” -Aga, 13th grade, School A

Aga related belonging to the place she had grew up in in Oslo. Her picture was of her old apartment complex, which she recently has moved from. Aga explained that she felt at home

at that place, and there is nothing she does not know about this area, since she feels like she has been everywhere. She relates this particular geographical place she grew up around, to her notion of belonging.

and

“I think the subway station is very "Oslo" it becomes a belonging to Oslo in an overarching sense. The subway is very much like it connects the whole of Oslo.” Alvilde
13th grade, School A

Alvilde connected the feeling of belonging to her closest subway stop, this is also what she chose to picture during her photovoice section. She connected the notion of subway to the concept of it being a connecting force. The subway system connects all parts of Oslo, from the Vestkanten to Østkanten.

While other students connected created spaces or physical beings to their place of belonging. This was their family members, animals and even objects like computer games.

“Today I watched "Sex Education"² and then there was someone who said, "People need people," very simple, but so true. We need each other.” -Alina, 13th grade, School A

Alina connected belonging to people she enjoys such as her family. This is also what she chose to picture during her photovoice session, she pictured a photo of her parents holding hands. Alin reiterated the notion several times that she loves her family and even though independence is important, she felt a larger need to rely on her family. This student had spent time in the hospital, but she talked about the love she received from her family during that

² Sex Education is a Netflix show, depicting the life of young people dealing with relationships, friendships, sex, sexuality, and life.

time to be important. Sex Education had defined something important to her, regarding people needing people in their life, which Alina related to her notion of belonging.

“Mmm, yes. It's really just that, it's that simple really. It's my cat I associate with that feeling of home. It is a very such associated with security. Whether you have been to school or away or out in general, that is what I symbolize by coming home. And be safe, to be among people who know them on a perhaps deep level, with family. Ehm, or I do not know, that is perhaps the motif I felt was the simplest - it illustrates it the best.”

-Annika, 13th grade, School A

and

“I am mostly playing video games at home. So, I didn't really feel as much as other people would (culture shock). In a way. Because it's my PC is with me.” -Arif, 12th grade, School B

Arif explained that when he moved to Norway, he did not experience culture shock since he continued doing things he used to before moving, gaming. He also explained that he could still connect with his friends from before he moved, and that the internet is better in Norway, so a couple of his friends were jealous. Arif connected belonging to something he enjoyed since childhood, which is computers and gaming. This is also something he wants to work with since his dream is to work in the IT industry in the future.

Arsalan connected belonging to the system of Norway. Being a refugee and travelling through multiple countries, he felt at home in Norway, due to the feeling of protection from the system put into place. Arsalan explained that he has lived in multiple countries however, he likes the people and culture more in Norway. He feels welcomed and enjoys being here, Arsalan especially loves the snow.

“Yeah, I think the people here, who are nicer I would say. And the system really protects like, the people outside.” -Arsalan, 12th grade, School B

Arsalan felt like he is a normal teenager, and among peers he is “just Arsalan,” however there have been some instances where he has felt unwelcome by his teachers in Norway.

“I mean, I don't know. I mean, I feel like I am normal. Only sometimes, like in classes, some topics, some teachers, they have some wrong info. Or they're like, I mean, this is the main thing I like to talk about. Because especially in the where subjects where we have history, or subjects like sociology, we talk about this, like there's some fun stuff. They (the teachers) say some wrong things that actually, you know, they are saying incorrect things.” - Arsalan, 12th grade, School B

Students and unbelonging 7.4

It is hard to determine if the student who lacked belonging in class would be affected by this academically. According to Goodenow (1993) students who lack school belonging score poorer academically, and are of higher risk for dropping out, increased risk of violence and poorer mental and physical health (Holt-Lundstad, 2010) All students that were interviewed scored high or very high academically, due to this the statistics of students scoring lower due to low school belonging is not fitting to this case study. This is not to discredit the data or research, however, to point out the research is not always a “one size fits all.” The student's grades were not discussed, however the fact of the matter that the students are attending high academic achieving schools, therefore no students were struggling academically, when it comes to grades. Students were struggling academically when it came to balance of work, school, and social life, or balancing when to study, when to sleep and how to reach their goals for higher education. This does not mean that the feelings of exclusion did not impact the students, it most definitely did, to the point that some of the students did not know where they belonged at all. The student never blamed their classmates since these actions were not done with malice, and therefore not the student could not blame anyone, even though they disliked their classmates and felt the classroom environment was “crap”.

There are several layers of unbelonging in society and among ourselves. The students had all their own interpretation of what unbelonging feels like to them. Some students commented on physical unbelonging to a certain place, some feel like they do not belong to a certain group

of people, or statistic within Norwegian society while some students felt like they do not belong to anywhere at all. What happens when we do not look like the people around us or the people in our family. What happens when we do not relate to the people around us, and feel like we do not quite fit in. Does it affect us emotionally, or is not a significant factor to our everyday life?

“It is very obvious, since I have been adopted, so of course I have a completely different ethnicity than my adoptive parents and the rest of the family. It's weird, but I have not thought much about it because I feel very much a part of where I come from. Me, mom and dad do not have a strained relationship that way. But it has also been a bit strange, for example all family photos, or whatever it may be – it is obvious that I do not belong (talking about how she does not look like their family in pictures) It's very clear then, and it may have been a little strange. I have not really thought much about it, but it is a small thought, that no one in the family looks like me.” -Astrid, 13th grade, School A

Later in the interview, Astrid also discussed how she felt out of place with Norwegian Asians as well. She felt like she felt between two cultures, since she has the Norwegian culture and has been raised by a Norwegian family but looks visibly Asian. And has the physically Asian look but does not have any cultural ties or friends related to that culture.

“So, then you (student talking about herself) become a minority in the minority.” - Astrid, 13th grade, School A

In addition to physical unbelonging in regard to familial ties, some students commented on unbelonging and insecurities in relation to peers. FOMO, fear of missing out. Not fitting in with classmates and insecurities within themselves were themes mentioned by the students.

“Oh, a little scared of- I do not know- be invited to things, if you show that you do not need to party. And then it may be, that others think that you are a bit boring. And there is no point in inviting you anymore, since you do not drink or like to party. It is a bit silly, since I worry about that. I feel that I have to show that I am very fun to be with, when they first meet me. So, they will invite me to more parties, it is fun to go to parties, but I can quickly become tired. Then it's like "why am I bothering this for so long?"

since I do not need to drink and party. Although it is very fun to be with people, you are afraid of falling out of the social aspect. It's a little weird.” -Astrid, 13th grade, School A

Astrid specified that the point of partying was not to be inebriated with alcohol but to be invited to things and be social. The thought of saying no to any of these events holds the fear of not being invited in the future. The thought of not drinking and being fun at the party also holds the thought of not being invited in the future, which leads to FOMO. The fear of not belonging to a group, or upsetting friends are thoughts which are quite common in adolescence. We as humans rely on the people around us, and during adolescence the most influential people are often your friends. Therefore, it is not uncommon for young people to feel like they have to attend everything. There is also the factor that these students have had their whole upper secondary experience coloured by the covid-19 pandemic. Suspecting that this might be a factor to why some students feel the added anxiety of needing to attend social events, in fear of missing out.

Feeling left out of the “norm.” Each year Norway releases statistics over the most common girls and boy’s names, one student, Alessa, felt a sense of unbelonging in relation to names. The student has never seen her name on any of the list, and her name is very uncommon in Norway. This was shown through her picture of the Norwegian Name Statistics, where she researched her name, and name was considered unusual or uncommon in Norway. Alessa commented even though this is a small difference, it is still big enough to mark a difference and feel a sense of unbelonging. The most common girl names in Norway have stayed similar throughout the last years, where Emma, Nora and Sofie tend to be top scorers. (SSB, 2021)

“At school they talk about statistics and name statistics. What are the most common names, so and so many are called etc. But my name never comes up. I do not know; it marks a difference. Which I usually do not notice. But I'm not part of the majority.”

-Alessa, 13th grade, School A

Not fitting in to cultural norms. Norway has very rigid cultural norms, a perceived sameness, especially in relation to winter sports. There is a saying in Norway “Norwegians are born with skis on their legs,” which means Norwegians are good at skiing. From kindergarten to lower secondary winter sports are encouraged, participated, and held during the winter season. However, not being able to ski, can lead to feelings of unbelonging since being able to ski is considered important in Norway. One of the students noted on this topic, due to them not being able to ski well.

“So, I do not know, it is one thing I must never have had in common with everyone else. It has to do with the fact, that it is not common for my parents to ski when it is winter because they do not come from Norway. So, there is just something I have felt that I am a little different from everyone, other than Norwegian children when it comes to winter activities - and I feel like it’s an important part of Norwegian culture.” -Aga, 13th grade, School A

and

“It is fine to have to ski on a flat slope, but as soon as I go downhill it never goes well. We had a winter activity day at school. SO, I thought it was a clever idea to go alpine skiing. So, I thought okay now I have to learn something new somehow. The trip was nice, but then everyone says "Oh, I'm so bad at skiing," but then they skate off like pros. So yes, at the end of the trip cried.” -Aga, 13th grade, School A

The student recounted their anxiety and annoyance of not being able to ski when the social norm in Norwegian culture is largely related to being able to participate in winter sports. The student talked about how it is hard to join sport days and cabin trips, when her parents never taught her to ski. This has resulted in the student crying due to the stress from skiing. Each country and culture will hold its own cultural capital, what is considered important and valuable. This can be through art, music, history, linguistic and other cultural assets. Lack the cultural capital that is accumulated within Norwegian society, which encompasses such activities as skiing, snowboarding, hiking, visiting the cabin/ vacation home and other winter activities. However, these students hold currency in other types of cultural capital, the students who are migrants might not hold the Norwegian cultural capital.

But they might hold the cultural capital for Polish families, for Muslim cultures, from the internet or other places they might have encountered more than Norwegian culture, due to their upbringing. Students who are migrating from other countries are more likely to speak several languages, have different experiences and cultures which again gives them a unique sense of cultural capital, even if it is not the traditional cultural capital of the society, they moved into.

Physical unbelonging to a certain area. There are several areas in everyday life where we feel like we do not belong. It is not necessarily a negative action, not to belong to a certain place. But it can feel isolating for the individual if they do not belong in any place. The students had different physical spaces where they felt like they did not belong. This spanned from geographical places like the West Side of town, sports arenas, kitchens, and crowded spaces.

“It is an area (picture unbelonging Annika) that is densely packed with buildings and people. There are a lot of new building projects, and a lot happens there from time to time. There is always a lot going on. And I'm often there in the summer with friends. Then I'm happy to be there and feel safe, since I'm sitting with those friends. But had they not been there, I would not have had the same feeling of security. It is an area you may feel a little small, not quite taken care of. Since it is very anonymous.” Annika, 13th grade, School A

The student explained their unbelonging in relation to a specific space. A popular swimming spot in Oslo. Annika explained that she did not feel like she belonged to the area with the anonymous buildings. When there is a lot of people at the swimming area, she feels insecure, but she also said that if she was with friends, she is comfortable going to that area. Meaning having strong social bonds can help someone feel a sense of belonging in a place they might not initially feel a sense of belonging to.

“Yes, especially since my mother and father are not from Oslo, I do not feel a complete belonging to the Westside environment. But I still love the area I grew up in.” Alvilde, 13th grade, School A

In relation to the city divide of Oslo, certain parts of Oslo carry certain norms and attitudes. This student grew up on the West Side of Oslo, which is traditionally richer and less

ethnically diverse. The different sides of Oslo carry certain stereotypes and attitudes on how people perceive the people from those places to be and act. However, the student Alvilde, does not feel like the stereotypes of the West Side fit her. So, in this case it is not necessarily the geographical area that carries unbelonging but the environment that area encompasses.

Two students felt like they did not belong on the soccer field, Agnes, and Alvilde. They both decided to take a photo of a similar image from two different location. However, they both had different reasons for depicting the soccer field. One had a brother who played football, and therefore the space belonged to their brother and not to them. While the other student used to play football but never felt a sense of belonging with their classmates or teammates who played football and ultimately decided to quit and join another sport. For that student, the soccer field depicts everything that made the student feel different from when they went to elementary and lower secondary school. This can tell us that multiple people might have the same space where they feel like they do not belong, however the reason for said feeling of exclusion might be different. It is therefore important to ask and discuss answers that might seem easy, since the discussion might bring forward interesting answers. We can also look at soccer fields as gendered spaces, where often the students or kids who belong to these places are male. This is not to discount the female soccer players, but the majority of players are male. There is, therefore, maybe an additional gendered factor why the students did not feel a sense of belonging.

“So, it's purely why I took a photo of the soccer field, and why it is exactly this soccer field is, that soccer field, is that where I grew up. It was about fitting into the norm. So, after I started high school, I have felt that I fit in more than when I went to middle school.” Alvilde, 13th grade, School A

and

“It was difficult to take a picture where I do not feel at home. Because I do not get that feeling like many places and things. That is more among people. But then I thought that the football field is not my place, in the same way it is my brother's place, who has played football all his life.” Agnes, 13th grade, School A

While most students had a clear understanding of where they belonged, others felt like they did not belong anywhere. They had a challenging time of understanding where they belonged, the feeling of belonging and how to achieve it. Feeling a sense of belonging as discussed above comes from within, however, it is largely linked to peers, educators, and school. There is, therefore, measures that can be put into place to prevent students from feeling excluded.

“I have long wondered for myself where I belong and where I do not belong. I have absolutely no idea, I have never had a place where I feel like I belong.” -Alice, 13th grade, School A

Unbelonging, exclusion and isolation are all concepts that any person can experience. Negative consequences related to unbelonging encompasses mental health issues like depression, anxiety, low confidence, loneliness, higher rates of eating disorders and suicide. The students who feel like they belong to class and feel validated by the school and teachers are more likely to score higher academically, it is also important to note that feelings of exclusion do not only affect a person's mental health but also their physical health (Holdt-Lundstad 2010)

“I do not know what it was like for you when you went to high school. Now it is much more open? Very few requirements for how to be - but very high requirements for how to be. Very open that you do not have to be anything other than yourself. But there is a type of "yourself" you should be. In other schools, there may be very clear lines about how to be, but here it may be a little more indirect. No one is rude or mean to anyone. But one sees that there is a majority, or a type, and they do not necessarily look down on others, but it becomes an exclusion without it necessarily having intention. Because exactly there is just so many who fit the "type." -Alice, 13th grade, School A

The student felt a sense of unbelonging in school and felt like she could quite never quite fit into the classroom setting. Her personality and how she acted did not fit how the perceived “accepted” personality of how the students should be. The student explained that the classmates are very welcoming to different personalities, and the ability to be as “special” as

they want, but it is very high requirements on how one should act. The student felt like the type of “yourself” she was, was not celebrated or welcomed by their peers. Which has led to the student feeling isolated in class. What Alice is describing here, is the homogenous imagined sameness, which is prevalent not only in Norwegian school, but in Norwegian society, previously discussed in this thesis through Stokke (2019). The Norwegian imagined sameness creates an unattainable goal of how a Norwegian person should be. Humans are different at their core, with different likes and interests, and prescribing to the notion of conforming, only make people hide their differences. This can be especially harmful to minority groups, who have different cultures who might be assimilated, if they follow the Norwegian imagined sameness, in addition it is harmful to the Norwegians who do not fit the norm. This ideology supports dominant colour-blind liberalism: where if you treat everyone the same- regardless of differences, that this is equality. Instead of focusing on treating people differently based on their needs so everyone could be met with equity and celebrating differences and diversity. (Stokke 2019).

“We can talk about outside the pictures as well. I had planned to take a picture outside the school (of the building), but it was too strange- not strange but weird and too exposing (exposing as in exposing the class structure) to post in front of the whole class. To be completely honest, I thought, I thought we should show this in front of the group (class) and then I was conscious of not taking anything too personal.” -Alice, 13th grade, School A

During the picture part of the interview, Alice had chosen a picture of a kitchen, to make a commentary about the joke where “woman belong in the kitchen,” which is an internet meme from the late 2010’s. However, when her about elaborating regarding the photograph, she explained that she wanted to take a photo of the school, since she felt like she does not belong in the school, the classroom or anywhere. But this would be too exposing to explain to her teachers and peers. The student was although comfortable to disclose this information to the researcher, since the researcher was a separate party, removed from the classroom environment. Alice lacks school belonging, she feels very little attachments to her classmates, or the school environment. School belonging is reliant on both the school and the peers, for a student to inhabit school belonging. It seems like in this case, some students feel excluded from the majority, however they do not know how to take the space or ask for help to gain a

place in class. If we follow Carol Goodenow's definition from 1993 on school belonging as, "the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, and included, and supported by others in the environment," the student Alice, does not feel accepted, included, or supported by her peers. However, what is interesting is all the student who were interviewed came from high achieving upper secondary schools, where there were extremely high-grade averages to be able to attend. The students despite lacking school belonging, still scored high academically, which indicates that a lack of school belonging might not always indicate low grade average. Having school belonging is a positive benefit for the student, and therefore should be a priority for the school, even if the students score academically high, it is also important that the students have good mental health and feel that their presence is important in the classroom setting.

"You do not know; our classroom environment is so crap. It is so bad. There are a lot of people in my class who are friends with each other and get along, but some have their entire group of friends in this class. In that sense, it is nice, but some are with no one. There are some who are good with everyone, but others are nice to people but do not have friends" -Alice, 13th grade, School A

The interviewer asked if the classroom environment was a good environment and if the student felt welcome in the classroom setting. The interviewer graduated high school four years before the interviews taking place and had a class with an ambient classroom environment. The interviewer shared their first-hand experiences with not fitting in with the majority of their classmates and asked the student if she could relate to this notion. The interviewer and the student could connect on this topic, and the student was willing to speak about their experiences. This interview with this student was the longest compared to any of the other students, and the student had a lot of different things on their mind. Alice feels anxious at school and liked online school better. Connecting this to school belonging we can see that Alice does not feel "personally accepted, respected and included by their environment" (Goodenow 1993b), due to the students being from a high achieving school, Goodenow's theory of students with higher amount of school belonging scoring better academically is not applicable here, since all the students were scoring high academically.

However, Allen and Bowles' theory (2018) on school belonging will be more applicable here due to their relation to mental health and student's wellbeing. Having a good psychological health at school, is seen as needed and deemed necessary for students' mental health and physical health. Alice who felt a lack of belonging, often remarked feelings of loneliness, introversion, fear of the future and a lack of understanding on why she did not fit in. This also led to irritation and questions on why "she" was different, since she herself felt she was normal. Feeling excluded from the classroom environment might have led to these feelings, however the complexity of the issue might have other underlying factors contributing to the loneliness and feelings of exclusion such as covid, underlying mental health or the environment around the student.

"I have never really had this problem before. I think it is only about moving environments and being adaptable. If you do not adapt you will have a harder time. On the inside I feel strange in a way, I think I am pretty normal. But here it is a representation of how normal should be. Genuinely I am normal, but I do not reach "their" view of normal. If it makes sense?" -Alice, 13th grade, School A

The student felt confused since she did not have this issue in lower secondary, she did not have a challenging time fitting in with their peers and in the school. The student considers herself normal but feel like she does not fit into the mould of how normal should be in the current school they are attending. The student had a tough time on realizing that she did not fit in, but they added if they stayed in this environment for a bit longer, she would adapt to the environment she was put in.

"You cannot blame a group of people for not being "like that" It will be bad to blame a group that has not made an active choice. I had a classmate change classes, and we had a conversation once where he said, "Why do I have to adapt all the time?" It sat a little with me, I woke up a little. I explained that those in my class had not done anything wrong, and there is nothing you can do but adapt. I felt he called out the system. Which does not really seem wrong in theory but seems very wrong in practice. (...) If you are directly bullied, it is easier to blame a person, but when it is an environment that is passive, or passively aggressive. Then you never blame anyone for not doing something. You cannot blame something they "have not" done, you can only blame someone when they actively do something." -Alice, 13th grade, School A

Alice did not want to blame the school or her peers for being excluded. Alice felt like she could not blame someone for what they were passively doing, since the students were not “actively” bullying her. She was also adamantly explaining that she was “not bullied,” this is also something that is a common factor among the students, who will explain something happening to them that they did not like, and affected them emotionally, but also explained that these actions are not something they consider bullying.

Some student had a hard time finding somewhere they did not belong this included the male students, Arif and Arsalan from school B, and Agnes,

School belonging 7.5

Feeling accepted and feeling like you belong at school is incredibly important to a thriving school environment, but most importantly to the individual student to feel like they belong among their peers and at the school. A school inhabiting a high sense of school belonging often has higher achieving students. Having school belonging does not mean that the classmates in one class get along, but rather the students feel a connection to the school, a sense that their presence and lives matter, in addition to their relationship with their peers and teachers. While the interviewed students came from higher achieving academic schools, there were still some students who felt like they did not belong. The majority of these students felt like they did not belong in lower secondary schools, however, they felt a sense of belonging while attending higher secondary. Some students felt the effects of covid and did not feel a sense of belonging until their senior year of high school, while other students felt like they did not belong to the school and class environment at all.

“I did was not until this year; I got the security in class and at school. You become more confident in yourself, but also the others at school. Now I do not feel that heavily, on the feeling of “transition,” while large parts of high school it was about getting through the day. Even though it is nice, there are expectations, and a bit like stress. The social aspect.” -Annika, 13th grade, School A

The importance of confidence and self-love plays an innate part of the students' wellbeing and feeling of belonging. If the student enjoys themselves, it is easier for them to fit into social groups. Internal and external factors like stress, family, friends, and school play into the students' mental health which then again also plays into their feeling of security and belonging.

The researcher asked the student if they felt belonging in school or if they felt like they had somewhere in school they could feel at home. Arsalan, replied that he felt like a normal student, and among peers he is "just Arsalan", however sometimes the teacher makes him feel uncomfortable by having incorrect, or personal opinions in class regarding religion or refugees.

"I mean, I don't know. I mean, I feel like I am normal. Only sometimes, like in classes, some topics, some teachers, they have some wrong info. Or they're like, I mean, this is the main thing I like to talk about. Because especially in the where subjects where we have history, or subjects like sociology, we talk about this, like there's some fun stuff. They (the teachers) say some wrong things that actually, you know, they are saying incorrect things." Arsalan, 12th grade, School B

This topic on will be further discussed under "stereotypes and how they affect students" and under the topic Islamophobic and anti-refugee targeted comments, since more students have noted on the same topic in relation to their teachers, and it reaches a broader topic than simply "unbelonging." That is why I have decided to have a dedicated section to the comments from School B, in relation to their experience with some of their teachers and comments those teachers have had in front of their students.

Stereotypes and how they affect the students (discrimination) 7.6

Discrimination are acts that, with or without intent, create unjustified or unreasonable inequality between citizens, this can be due to someone's skin colour, sexual orientation, country of origin, disability, religion, or gender identity. (FAFO report, Bråthen, Zhang and & Rogstad, 2016.) Discrimination could often be an action on how people treat other people,

based on their expectations or stereotypes of one or more perceived groups. The students were asked if they had faced discrimination, seen discrimination, or have encountered certain stereotypes. The researcher told the student that this could be something they themselves have experienced or if they had seen other people been affected by stereotypes or discrimination. Different stereotypes are present in different societies, Norway is no exception. In this section we are analysing which stereotypes the young people experience or worry about in their own lives. Some students have experienced different forms of discrimination. Some related to their ethnicity, refugee status, language, looks. Most students had a challenging time calling instances for discrimination or bullying, despite them not liking actions done towards them. Shows how difficult discrimination and bullying is to research since the definition is subjective and based on the individual's perception of the experience. Being perceived as a victim or being bullied are not "desirable" qualities to inhabit. Most students that I interviewed had experienced instances of undesirable actions done towards them, but they were hesitant to call this discrimination or bullying, while rather calling it childish, stupid, or ignorant. I have still chosen these quotes under discrimination, since it is easier to analyse in that sense, instead of calling this topic "not bullying." Others deliberately avoid topics like racism and try to not let it impact their lives.

The stereotype of the young Asian woman and the elderly white man.

Stereotypes of the young Asian woman and the elderly white man. A common stereotype in Norway is in relation to older white men, finding younger wives abroad, often in Asia, this stereotype is visible in the media. This stereotype is also visible in other countries in the West; however, it is especially prominent in Norway in relation to whom it relates to and often depicts elder rich white men, and "poorer" Asian younger women. One student was adopted from an Asian country to Norway, by a white family. The student expressed her fear of people thinking she was the "wife" of her dad, due to her increasing age and her not looking like her dad. She expressed that this has never happened, but she fears that people might think she is a "mail-order bride" belonging to her father.

"In recent years, when I'm out with Dad, somehow, it can seem like I am a "mail-order-bride. (Astrid fears that others can think that of her and her dad) I have not felt so much about it, but I do not think the first thought of people we meet is "she must be his adopted daughter" it is not the easiest explanation you think of first. But it has mostly come when I have grown older. I do not think people would have thought it was strange

when I was a child, but when I get older it is harder to see. (...) Yes, I fully understand that sometimes it can be a little easy to misunderstand (on people misunderstanding her dad as her partner since she is adopted). If you just go outside and see us. But I do not know- I have not been so aware of whether it can have a greater impact on me. Maybe it has more influence subconsciously. It is something I think about - not when sleeping - but a little in the back of my mind. -Astrid, 13th grade, School A

The student felt a fear of other people assuming she was not her father's daughter. While she has never experienced anyone tell her or her family this, she is fearful that it can happen, due to the stereotype of elder white men, and younger Asian women. The student did not worry about this when she was younger, but due to her increasing age it is a worry "in the back of her mind." This stereotype is unique and intersectional since it relates only to Asian woman specifically, and in this case, it is unique due to the factor of adoption, the society she has been adopted in to and her gender. This is something this student is cognitive aware of these biases she might encounter, which is something other adoptees who look like their parents, or Asian children with Asian parents do not have to worry about.

The stereotype of Asian people (Eat Dog, racially motivated jokes)

Alessa, had encountered some racially motivated "jokes" when she grew up. Alessa is Asian but is born in Norway. Alessa usually ignores racism and discrimination since she does not want to give it attention. Alessa commented on how she did not feel bullied, but did receive racist remarks towards her ethnicity, which she chose to ignore.

"I have not experienced any major incidents. But have received such comments as "you eat dog". Such small racist jokes or comments. -Alessa, 13th grade, School A

The stereotypes geared towards Polish and Eastern European students.

Several Polish students, commented upon the jokes they have received based on their ethnicity. Most of them did not consider these jokes "racist" or xenophobic but rather "immature" jokes that they experienced mostly in lower secondary school. Most of these jokes are based on Eastern European stereotypes related to work, such as the stereotype of Polish people being carpenters or cleaners. The Polish students did explain that they thought these stereotypes and jokes were annoying, especially since they do not hold the view that

being a carpenter or plumber is something bad, or something to make jokes about. In addition, one student retold stories of other students (who were not Polish) cursing at the Polish students in Polish.

“It (stereotypes) has been talked about a lot at home, because there is some prejudice against Eastern Europeans and especially when it's about cheap labour.” -Aga, 13th grade, School A

and

“But there are a lot of non sensical jokes about jobs. Jokes regarding Poles and Eastern Europeans who are like "your father can do nothing more than build a house" or "oh, are you Polish, can you paint my house?". Such stupid things that are not funny.” -Alina, 13th grade, School A

“They cursed in Polish at me and a friend. (...) Maybe not in high school, but in middle school there were many stereotypes about whether we work as painters and carpenters. I think there is nothing to be ashamed of, mum is a cleaning lady and dad is a plumber. But it's weird that people talk so much about it.” -Alina, 13th grade, School A

It was important for several of the Polish students to “prove” that their family was normal like Norwegian parents, that they were well fed, and how their parents wanted them to climb up in society. This is something that is echoed in Carol Fuller’s research (2009) where she recounted that migrant and immigrant parents often put an importance on climbing the social ladder, and the importance of an education.

“I feel I have to prove that I have a good family, who eat healthy food. That when I especially talk to adults and teachers that I have to defend the stereotypes they may have against my family then. I have to constantly show that my family are ordinary people.”
-Alina, 13th grade, School A

Meeting racism with understanding or ignoring it

Some students believed when faced with racist or discriminatory behaviours that they should meet those opinions with compassion and understand why they might think that way. Both Astrid and Alessa, both Asian students, thought they should either meet the person with such opinions with understanding, or ignore the racist opinions and remarks. The reason to ignore the racist remarks was to not give attention, or the student gave her energy to racist or discriminatory behaviours. Alessa deliberately avoids topics and discussions of racism since she does not think it is fun, she suggested this is probably why she has not encountered racism and discrimination since she chooses to ignore this. She has encountered “racist” jokes, but she chooses to treat them like “jokes” or childish taunts. While Astrid met topics of racism with understanding and willingness to open to dialogue to understand why someone might hold such an opinion. It seemed like they did not want to facilitate and partake in “cancel-culture” but rather meet bigoted opinions with understanding and dialogue.

“There is a reason why some people come up with racist opinions, they do not do it to be stubborn. There are different reasons why they act like that. How you were raised and such. So, I feel the need to add a little goodwill. Maybe it's a little silly - you should not take racism lightly. But one should look at why that person is acting racist” -Astrid, 13th grade, School A

and

“I have not really thought about it. Racism is really something I choose not to relate to - or I choose not to think about. I do not approach or seek out discrimination. Maybe that's why I do not recall so many events. Since I am not trying to not get close to it.” -Alessa

Islamophobic and anti-refugee comments

Two students, Arif and Arsalan, talked about discrimination experienced by them, from their teachers. This was towards multiple teachers, specifically in science and religion. Arsalan and Arif are Muslim refugee students in a mostly white upper-class area. Why is this important? The intersectional identity of the students plays into how the students are treated. Both students are male, Muslims, refugees, from the middle East and are currently studying in Norway in an upper secondary school, for high achieving students. Arif explained two

instances in two different classes where the teacher was either negative towards Muslims, during Ramadan and tried to lecture the Muslim students on their religion. In addition, the teacher was being critical towards refugees, in a class where the majority of students were refugees (mottaksklasse.)

“She was talking about, about fasting, that it is bad. That we should not be we shouldn't make ourselves not drink water all the all day when we're in Ramadan. And that it is really bad for our health. But then like, I know, there are some internet sites and videos that explain that. It is good luck. I do not have enough knowledge to talk about it. So, it was like one sided conversation.” -Arif, 12th grade, School B

and

“Yeah. Well, it was one time at a high school during Ramadan. There was one teacher, a science teacher. She, well, it was something about Ramadan, where she just said something that we could not actually defend our religion because we did not have enough information or enough knowledge to defend our religion. But she was a teacher. So, like when she said, when she said something to discriminate, our religion, we could not everyone. Almost everyone, I think was Muslim in that class. And then she just said something, and we could not defend back. I felt really bad at that time. I couldn't say anything back” -Arif, 12th grade, School B

The student felt like the teacher singled out Islam, compared to other religions in the way the religion is portrayed as a “violent” religion. The student said that he did not think the teacher was a bad person, just misinformed and he commented that the teacher is often a person the students look up to and the students can be “brainwashed” into misinformed opinions if the teachers are not careful. If we compare this to the definition of Islamophobia from Awan & Zempi (2020) where Islamophobia is the “fear, prejudice and hatred of Muslims or non-Muslim individuals that leads to provocation, hostility and intolerance by means of threatening, harassment, abuse, incitement and intimidation of Muslims and non-Muslims, both in the online and offline world.” (Awan & Zempi, 2020) We could interpret the teacher's ignorance or blatant passive remarks as provocation, intimidation or hostility towards the Muslim students. The teacher in this case has a power imbalance relationship compared to

their students. Therefore, teachers should be very careful how they word themselves in the classroom. A classroom that judges an ethnic group, sexuality or religion does not portray or foster feelings of belonging, but rather feelings of conformity which can lead to feelings of isolation for the groups who feel like they do not fit in.

“So, I mean, when they (teachers) talk about other religions, I would say, like, any other religion, like Christianity, or Hinduism, or anything, any other religion, they talk about it, like, you know, normal, just presented. But when it comes to Islam, I would say the, the, say some negative stuff. That is actually not true. Yeah, make me feel like there is something different (about Islam)”. -Arsalan, 12th grade, School B

Relating this back to the FAFO report from 2019 (Tyldum 2019), regarding immigration, some argue that immigration is a burden for the welfare state, while others argue that immigration makes Norway more unsafe, or undermines key values in Norwegian society, equality, freedom, and freedom of speech. Around 31% of the responders agreed with both arguments, while 41% disagreed with both arguments. Men, and especially older men without education, more often agree with both statements. The teacher who had these opinions was not interviewed, so the reasoning behind his³ opinions can only be speculated, however the teacher's opinions are not created in a vacuum, and this study shows us a great portion of Norway's population, have similar opinions as the teacher.

Being a migrant and a minority in a school with mostly white teenagers has had an impact on the students, but perhaps not in the way we would think it would. Arsalan fits in well with his peers and does well academically, and said he felt a sense of belonging within the Norwegian society. However, there has been two instances with two different teachers where they have commented on refugees and Islam, to refugee Muslim students. In this case it was to not let more refugees into Norway, and about Islam and how it is a violent religion and how fasting is bad. The teacher claimed that Norway should not allow any more refugees, based on the cost. The student felt odd about this statement, disclosing that if the refugees cannot flee, they would die in hunger or war. These statements were made before the invasion of Ukraine, so it

³ The gender of the teacher is unknown, the “he” is not an indicator of the teacher's gender.

could be interesting if the teacher had changed opinions and if the student could see a change in regard to attitudes among certain kinds of refugees.

“I mean, yes, I have an example, when they talk about like immigrants and how we should not let them in, stuff like this. And sometimes they (teachers) talk about Islam, and how they are incidents of violence and stuff, like wrong stuff.” -Arsalan, 12th grade, School B

and

“I think, especially like topics about like refugees and stuff. They (teachers) only focus about like, should we let the refugees come to Norway, but they don't ever think should we let these kids die and war? They never talk about another talk about that. Like, they made me feel like if these people, are like kind of not worth it.” -Arsalan, 12th grade, School B

The Muslim students were particularly affected by the school environment. Not in an exclusionary sense from peers, but rather the students met biases from their educators. This related to the teacher telling the students that Islam was a violent religion, that fasting is dangerous, that the Muslim students were uneducated regarding their religion and Norway should not take in more refugees. The students wanted to point out that they did not think the teacher was mean or a bad person, but uneducated and unaware of the power their words hold. Especially considering they are educators who are educating a new generation.

“Yeah. And the thing is, when especially teachers, they have very big role, because what they say actually affects the mind of the, of how the students will think. And if this if the teachers actually say these negative things about the religion, the student doesn't know if this is true or not, but they will believe the teacher because they believe that the teacher knows more. And this way, you know, students I would say, be like, is sometimes brainwashed.” -Arsalan, 12th grade, School B

To determine if the comments for the teacher was discriminatory or Islamophobic, we will first need to define the word. This thesis uses the definition from Awan and Zempo from 2020

which is the “fear, prejudice and hatred of Muslims or non-Muslim individuals that leads to provocation, hostility and intolerance by means of threatening, harassment, abuse, incitement and intimidation of Muslims and non-Muslims, both in the online and offline world.” (Awan & Zempi, 2020) This is brought forward and helped by institutional, political, ideological, and religious hostility that transcends into the structural forms of society, who specifically targets ideals related to Muslim and Islam. (Awan & Zempi, 2020)

The teacher’s comments can be seen as Islamophobic based on Awan and Zempi’s definition. The Teacher showed their prejudice towards Islam, by implying that Islam is a violent religion. Islam was specifically targeted since it has already been established that the teacher did not speak about other religions this way. In addition, the implication that fasting is bad, and this point was only brought up during Ramadan can be seen as targeted prejudice. Fasting is not dangerous when done correctly and pointing out the dangers of fasting only when in relation to the Muslim students, shows the prejudices the teacher holds themselves. In relation to this, when the students questioned their teacher out on their behaviour, their response was to tell the students that they are young, and do not know enough about Islam. This is effectible belittling the students, creating and emphasising on the already power imbalance from teacher to student.

Teacher are educators and they play an important role in the student’s life. Who you have as a teacher affects how you enjoy school, and also how you perform in class? Several students commented upon the discriminatory or Islamophobic opinions they were met with by their teachers. The school where this happened at is majority white, with majority white teachers, where there was a small group of refugee and minority students. There has been made attempts to discuss racism and discrimination at this school, and accommodate to the Muslim students, however talking to students and their main teacher it did not seem like the rest of the teachers were interested in participating.

Aga, who do not know the students from School B, also commented in something she deemed was the hypocrisy in Norway towards migrants and refugees. Aga discussed her annoyance at the hypocrisy in Norway. Aga felt like Norway claims to be an inclusive country, but simultaneously ignoring the prejudices that exist in Norway. The treatment of refugees and the attitudes towards them was in addition something she felt like Norway has a dual attitude towards, especially when it comes to stereotypes.

“Yes. It irritates me how much or how much people do not talk about it (racism/ prejudice). That Norway seems like a very inclusive country, at the same time not really

being that since everyone has prejudices. Then you never talk about the prejudices. Then they say that they want to accept all refugees, at the same time as they comment on those refugees with stereotypes.” -Aga, 13th grade, School A

The bad and good minority refers here who is the best to conform to the perceived Norwegian culture. Spiritually, culturally, work wise and often also look wise. According to the 2016 FAFO report on hate speech and discrimination, being a practising Muslim is a conflict with the Norwegian culture. Whether or not it is actually conflicting with Norwegian culture is not important, since we are discussing people's *perceptions*. People assume Islam to be in conflict with the Norwegian culture, and therefore the people who think that way, will have this notion when they meet Muslim people. The Muslim person could be “as Norwegian” as anyone else, but due to their religion there are disregarded. Another point is some people believe Norwegians to “look” a certain way, so anyone deviating from that “look” will not be considered Norwegian, since they look viably different.

A good minority conforms to the Norwegian “sameness” culture. They take part of the work life, celebrates Norwegian holidays, and assimilate into Norwegian culture, even if it means to abandon their own. “Researchers following the nationalist paradigm problematize immigrants in relation to the welfare state. A common denominator in this research is that it sees immigrants as a problem, a challenge to the assumed “national values” of gender equality and the welfare state, assuming a conflict between the others’ culture and Norwegian/Western values.” (Stokke, 2019) Hostility towards minorities who do not assimilate into the perceived Norwegian culture, is also nothing new, if we look into history we can see to the treatment of national minorities such as the Saami and Tater population and their forced assimilation into Norwegian culture, the Jewish population who under the Jewish Paragraph in Norway (1814-51) were not allowed to be in Norway, or the mass genocide of Norwegian Jews under WW2, where most Jews in Norway either fled or were killed.

Second-hand discrimination

One student, Aga, had not experienced racism directed at her but had seen a co-worker been a target of discrimination by a SIAN member. The student looks European and speaks Norwegian well compared to their co-worker who looks visibly foreign and has an accent while speaking Norwegian, the student is Polish. SIAN (Stop the Islamization of Norway) which the student has mentioned below is an interest organization against migration. They hold public protests migration. SIAN is a controversial group in Norway, who holds regular

public rallies where they burn the Quran or protest migration in Norway. The protest often rallies protesters on all sides and the police. SIAN will often protest in mainly migrant populated areas, and they are generally against migration, but especially Muslim migration.

“I work for my parents, and they work in a shop. And when you work with other people, you quickly understand that weird people exist. There is actually a customer with us who is part of SIAN. Also, it was the other day, that a customer had come in with his dog. But it is not allowed since people can be allergic. So, a colleague told them to take the dog outside. She spoke in Norwegian, but she clearly has a foreign accent. Yes - so then she was called "fucking immigrant". And I am also a migrant, and he did not say that to me since I speak fluent Norwegian and am white. So, I see it that I do not fit as a migrant when you just look at me.” -Aga, 13th grade, School A

Aga felt a sense of familiarity with their co-worker, due to them both being migrants. However, she realized that she is treated differently based on ethnicity, skin colour and language skill. In some way, although the action was not directed at the student, was still effective. Showing that racism and discrimination does not only affect the target, but the people around them, and their community too.

It was not only the migrant students who elaborated on the topic of discrimination. The ethnic Norwegian students were also asked the question if they have or seen anyone discriminated against, the topic of discriminated had a wider scope in terms of intersectional theory, which was explained to the students. One of the Norwegian students acknowledged that discrimination exists in society, and if they have been discriminated against “positively” then some people might have been discriminated against negatively. Agnes also recounted that when she attended lower secondary school teachers and staff expected her to act good, based on her appearance, since they did not know her. While her friend was treated as a “trouble” child based on how her friend looked. Agnes talked about this being unfair due to her not “proving” that she is a good student, and her friend “proving” she was a bad student, but they were still treated differently. Anyone can experience discrimination or treated differently based on internal or external factors. However, these feelings and actions are often difficult to describe due to the complexity of humans, their environment and the actions taken.

“I do not think I have felt it myself, negatively (discrimination). But if I have been discriminated against *positively*, then I understand that it affects someone negatively. Then I think a bit like people judged me on how I looked - in my old school. Where they expected me to be “very kind” due to how I looked. Not that I did anything bad, or anything kind. But people had already painted a picture of me being kind. While a friend of mine was often treated worse on the basis of how she looked, without necessarily doing anything bad.” Agnes, 13th grade, School A

Difficulties getting a job- foreign name 7.7

Having a foreign name has been proven to be more difficult during job hunting. Especially if your name is non-western. A study from FAFO, from 2012, was sent out to check for the accuracy of the claim for job discrimination based on names. They sent out 1800 fictitious applications, to 900 real job advertisements. There were two applications per position, written in perfect Norwegian. The candidates were completely identical, with equally good qualifications the only difference was one of the applicants had a “Norwegian name” while the other had a “Pakistani name.” What this study found out is that having a Pakistani name makes you 25% less likely to be called in for an interview compared to Norwegian sounding counterparts. (Hansen,2012) Due to this several migrants have opted to change their names to sound more Norwegian, to avoid discrimination in the job market. (Hellevang & Støre, 2018.) The students commented on this issue, which has been prevalent in the Norwegian media, and society. All the students were asked if they had a job, would want to apply for one, or thought the application would be difficult or different.

“I know that it is a real thing, where it is difficult to get a job. But both dad and mom did completely fine, and there was no such thing as direct as “you did not get a job” because “you are Polish”. But dad tells me very often, that if I marry a Norwegian man, then I have to take his Norwegian last name. He was very aware that I would get a job easier.” - Aga, 13th grade, School A

Aga has not personally seen the effects of the job discrimination; however, she is not old enough to be fully engraved into the job market. She discussed the issues with her family, and her family has never openly struggled to get a job due to their name. But the father wants her

to change her name to a Norwegian one, if she happens to marry a man with a Norwegian name in the future, since that would make it easier for her to get a job.

“My mom and dad think it has been important to work their way up the social ladder in a way.” -Aga, 13th grade, School A

This student, Aga, commented on how building oneself up the social ladder, have been seen as important for her family while moving to Norway. To be seen as successful and avoid stereotypes. This is not something odd for Aga to experience since often when people migrate to different countries, they want to build a good life for their family and their kids. Aga has a strong relationship with her family, who consider working and education to be important aspects in someone's life. Connecting this to Fuller's social capital, we could see why children of migrants do well in school with parents who expect them to complete their studies (Fuller, 2009) Having someone believe in you, and value your work, strengthens the social capital but also supports the students school belonging, since a parent who cares if their child performs well in school, would also be invested in their child's social life in school. They would most likely attend teacher-parent conferences, ask about their child's day and an involved parent might be able to pick up on something if the child is not feeling well. Having a supportive parent could strengthen the school belonging, since having someone advocating for your rights regarding the school environment, might be able to change the lack of school belonging.

Fuller's theoretical explanation to why the high aspiring student contribute so much to their own academics, can be due to the increased level of social capital, however part of this is also due to the student's interest and inspirations. (Fuller, 2009) Key factors for a high aspiring student are a sense of belonging and a bond with friends and/or family. This is important for the student's self-identification. A close relationship with the parents of high aspiring students, is important due to the needed understanding for the student by their parents, receiving emotional support, encouragement from their parents and understanding of a common goal, and achieve a higher education. (Fuller, 2009)

“I have often thought of such names, if you see my name, it is not always that they had associated me with my name (having a Norwegian name but looking Asian). I have thought about that a little bit, it is not a problem in society. I should say that this is me. I'm not lying- I might be thinking of someone who had been disappointed or had felt cheated if they saw my face with a Norwegian name, But I will not know the reaction until I apply to jobs. I think about it a bit that immigrants have less chance of getting a job, their job application is often disregarded, due to their foreign name. But if they change it, they get more opportunities, so I think about it a bit.” -Astrid, 13th grade, School A

Astrid is adopted and commented on the discrimination in the job market. She has a name that one would not immediately assume would belong to her, due to her name being Norwegian and her looks being Asian. Astrid said that someone might be disappointed when they call her into an interview expecting a Norwegian-looking person but receiving an Asian-looking person. She also acknowledged the difficulties immigrants might face when they apply for jobs, and if they change their name, they might get more opportunities. This was not said as a flippant remark on how to assimilate to Norwegian culture, but rather a comment on how is easier to get a job *if* you have a Norwegian name, compared to a foreign one.

“But then we have talked about it in the family, that more family members have experienced discrimination because of our name. That one may have had some prejudice attached to it because of it. People find it difficult to pronounce and understand that it is not Norwegian. Then I also thought about this, without having experienced it yet: when I am looking for a job, it is wise to use my Norwegian surname. It's a concern I have, even though I've only been to Hungary once. And I feel like I have nothing to identify with.”
-Annika, 13th grade, School A

Annika has roots from another country, and a foreign-sounding name but has parents from Norway and considers herself completely Norwegian. It has been a topic of conversation within her family to discuss the discrimination of foreign-sounding names in the job market. However, due to the student being young and not in the job market yet, she has not experienced it yet. The same student also commented on how her twin brother has opted out

of their Hungarian name, and only uses the Norwegian one. While she feels proud of their Hungarian name and uses both the Norwegian and Hungarian name.

Issues regarding the discrimination aspect 7.8

Several students talked about actions that could be described as discriminatory, targeted or bullying, however a majority of the students, if not all did not view this as discrimination. These actions were targeted comments about their race, jokes about their race or ethnicity, offhand comments about their race, ethnicity, language or religion, isolation from classmates and “passive” exclusion. The students did not like these actions; however, since the intent of the actors were not seen as severe or intentional, they (students) often regarded the event as “bad jokes” and not discrimination. The students wanted the “bad” jokes to stop, and if they knew the jokes were targeted towards them due to their nationality, but this was not “strong enough” to be considered discrimination by majority of the students. Which is not surprising since discrimination is hard to measure, since it is up to several factors what are hard to define. Other teenagers did view these kinds of targeted jokes as discrimination, so discrimination like bullying is based on how the “victim” perceives the event and not the intent of the actor doing the action. Very few wanted to be seen as a victim, so this might be why several of the students said they “brushed” off mean comments and ignored them.

One student felt left out of the classroom setting however, she did not blame her classmates, since she doubted their intent was to freeze her out. It was just the unfortunate result of the classroom dynamic. She wished that the students would have been more “mean” towards her so that she could blame someone, but due to all her classmates being “passively” ignoring her and not being inclusive, she felt she could not blame “one person.” This student pointed out that since the students were not intending to discriminate / isolate her, they could not be blamed for the isolation, and she did not see it as discrimination. This student stated intent behind an action was important. However, she added that often the results are similar, with or without intent and it hurts just as bad, maybe worse when people are not actively mean, since then she could not complain.

“It has not been such direct discrimination; it has mostly been jokes. They’re trying to make it a little more hidden, through jokes. It is not very funny.” -Alina, 13th grade,
School A

and

“I find it (discrimination) more uncomfortable when it is hidden, since then it is not obvious. If one is to be so stubborn, it is better to show it, than for someone to say they are inclusive and then say something else behind closed doors.” -Astrid, 13th grade, School A

Alina and Astrid find hidden discrimination more uncomfortable than if it would be more out in the open. They would rather encounter someone who showed their bigotry openly, than interacting with someone who claimed to be inclusive, but said something else when they were not around. Looking to the media, and specifically American Media, one of the students had feared the rising numbers of Asian-related hate crimes in the US. Astrid, was worried that this might happen in Norway, and told her adopted parents this, the parents told Astrid, who looks visibly Asian, to not worry because “she’s an ordinary Norwegian.” Astrid felt like this comment was not accurate to her appearance. She might have a Norwegian name, family and passport, however the “stranger” on the street might not know this and treat her differently based on her look. The student’s identity encompasses female, Asian, Norwegian culture and adopted, something which uniquely builds up her identity. Astrid felt like if she walks outside and are purely judged on looks, she could be the target of Asian hate. Something an ethnic Norwegian would never experience. It is important to note that there has been a rise of reports in the media related to crimes against Asian people in Norway ex: a Thai massage worker who were proposition for sex, was beaten up by a white Norwegian man, for rejecting his offer (Rønning, Holtung & Øverbø, 2022,) so the student’s fears are not unfounded. However, it is not nearly to the same extent as in USA.

“I have not felt any such discrimination in Norway, maybe someone has done it behind my back, but then I have not seen it. I have not thought of it, so I will continue to think that no one has done it to me. But then I thought a little further, maybe mostly in the US. That several older Asians have been assaulted, I think it is unpleasant. This is strange, because you can say that it does not happen here, and that you do not have such racists as in the United States. There is a little bit of the extra that lies there, which I would like to believe, but I do not know if it reflects the truth. I have been a little more aware of that. Then I talk to my parents, and then they say "but you do not feel anything regarding that

/ you are ordinary Norwegian" I am, but not in appearance. Right now, it is very easy, to take everyone the same under the same brush. Yes, we are Norwegian - I have a Norwegian passport. But I will always be seen as different, or "you are the minority" so it is a bit difficult to bear - that I am the minority, and everyone wants to be the majority." -Astrid, 13th grade, School A.

Racism in jokes? 7.9

The one who tells the joke, and the intended target is important when it comes to joke-telling. Certain jokes are more "acceptable" in certain groups of people, compared to others. For example, using dark humour to joke about pain, is usually in relation to our own pain. We have previously discussed the topic of edgy humour, that has been popular among young people, where people joke about offensive topics, or vulnerable groups. If we joke about someone's pain, we risk the fear of punching down, and the joke not landing as intended. Ex: An Asian person who jokes about Asian stereotypes is reclaiming the power, whilst if an ethnic Norwegian person tells the same joke the intent could be good, but the impact can be interpreted as punching down on the Asian person, since the ethnic Norwegian person comes from the majority in the country, while the Asian person is the minority and the target of said joke. One student touched on this topic- The student, Alessa, had experienced "racist" jokes, which she ignored and did not want to "feed" into or give her attention. However, sometimes her friend group or community would make "racist" jokes towards themselves, however the difference is that friend group was all migrants. Therefore, the joke is reclaiming the power to the minority teenagers. This shows who tells the joke, and who is the receiver is important for the joke to land and not to be consider offensive.

"Sometimes we say jokes that are racist, but we are not affected since it comes from our "own." Maybe that's why I do not think so much about discrimination." -Alessa, 13th grade, School A

"Not bullying" or the dislike for being viewed as a victim 7.10

To discuss bullying and the notion of a bully, and why some students do not think the label fits, we will need to define the word. The word bullying implies there is one or more "bully /bullies" and atleast one victim. The bully exposes the victim, repeatedly, over a period of time, to negative actions "when someone intentionally inflicts, or attempts to inflict, injury or

discomfort upon another” (Olweus, 1997). In addition to these criteria there needs to be an imbalance of strength between the bully and the victim.

“I was not bullied, but there was someone who could say in front of the whole class, that they did not understand my Norwegian.” -Alina, 13th grade, School A

Alina did not want to claim the label as bullied, even though she had people curse at her in Polish and people tell her that she did not speak Norwegian well. Alessa did not want to claim the label as bullied when people said racially motivated jokes towards her. Alice did not want to claim the word bullied, even though she explained that she feels left out of the classroom environment, she even explained that she “wishes” she was actively bullied so she could claim the label bullied, since she felt like her peers passively not including her, was not enough to claim the word bullied. Aga explained she had encountered some racist jokes, but viewed these as small petty jokes, and not bullied. Arsalan and Arif had encountered religious and classist comments regarding Islam and refugees, however they did not view this as bullying, however they did view this as racist.

Most students who were interviewed explained actions where they did not like how they were treated. How they were the target of ethnic or racist remarks. While other students explained they were passively excluded from the class and thought the class environment was “really bad”. However, all students who experienced this adamantly explained that they did not view these actions as bullying. There might be several reasons to this. Often bullying comes with fear, embarrassment or shame for the individuals involved, and to accept being bullied might come with negative feelings targeted towards the self. On another note, subtle bullying like exclusion, isolation and passive aggressive remarks is still one type of bullying. However due to the subtle nuances of this kind of bullying both the victim and the perpetrator might find it hard to realize that the act is bullying.

Norway’s importance with achieved sameness, also portrays a picture that everyone is equal, this means to disturb this image does not only affect the individual and the bully, but the society around them. However, the majority of the reason why the students did not view themselves as bullied is probably due to the view of what is a bully, and how is being bullied. None of the students were had an inherit power imbalance, so the criteria for bullying would

not suit these students. They were all from good socioeconomic backgrounds, in well academic achieving schools. In addition, the comments they receive are often single-handed comments, that they encounter from multiple people, so it is not “one” person or group who is bullying them over a period of time. Therefore, the criteria for bullying does not fit these students either. Therefore, it is most likely the rigid view of what bullying is, for the reason the students did not view themselves as bullied despite receiving discriminatory or racist remarks by peers. It is therefore, maybe of interest to use other words to describe incidents that cannot be labelled as bullying, but still protects the affected party, from racist and discriminatory remarks. Viewing someone as weaker, might be an updated term, and rather focusing on the impact the actions have, than to look at social imbalances and a hierarchy in class.

To comment on the exclusionary notion from one of the students, these actions have happened over a long period of time, and therefore, fit the criteria for bullying. However, I doubt the student feels that they themselves are weaker than their classmates, therefore lacking the criteria of power imbalance. They did not want to blame anyone for their exclusion, and said that since everyone did it passively, she could not blame anyone. Maybe this subtle form of exclusion, where there is one majority big friend group in class, had made it more difficult for the student to be labelling these actions as bullying. Since nothing was done with malicious intent, however the impact feels malicious due to the lack of belonging in class. This student also feels in general a lack of belonging, this is not solely based on their exclusion from their classmates, since they experienced these feeling before. However, feeling excluded from their class environment, and having a lack of school belonging, most likely did not help the lack of overall belonging the student encompasses.

Being seen as a victim is not a good feeling. Rising above “hate” or attempted “bullying” seems to be a common theme for the students. None of them claimed to be bullied, despite retelling stories that could be seen as bullying, racism, or discrimination. They are willing to give peers, teachers, or even strangers the benefit of the doubt, at the cost of their own emotions. Insensitive jokes are attempted to be forgotten, despite having an impact on the student. Comments that are harmful or insensitive are seen as “just comments,” while most of the students agreed they did not like this behaviour they were adamant that this was not bullying. One student wished she was “actively” bullied due to them being passively ignored in class, and isolated from their peers. If the students were mean to them, they could call it

bullying. But since the student feels like they do it passively and not with intention, they cannot blame the class. Especially when it is done by a group and not a single individual.

“If you are directly bullied, it is easier to blame a person, but when it is an environment that is passive, or passively aggressive. Then you never blame anyone for not doing something. You cannot blame something they "have not" done, you can only blame someone when they actively do something.” -Alice, 13th grade, School A

It would be interesting to attempt to see why the students are reluctant to call certain actions bullying. The researcher asked if they had experienced discrimination, or bullying. There more students would explicitly say that their experiences were something they did not consider bullying or discrimination, however from an outsider's point of view, it could be interpreted like several of the students were either bullied at one point in their school education, or discriminated against based on their ethnicity, religion, or language. The encompassed comments like “eat dog” to Asian students, Polish stereotypes jokes and cursing in Polish, to Polish students and being excluded in class by the majority of the class by another student.

Shortcoming in relation to the interviews. Chapter 8

It is important to note that during my interview process I did not interview any Black or Brown students, due to them not being in the classes that was chosen for the interviews. This is partially due to covid, but also due to the students who belonged to the classes where their teachers worked. I had chosen the teachers beforehand and therefore I had to follow along in the classes they were assigned. I did also not interview many male students, due to it being less males in class, the project was voluntary, and few male students volunteered. This has also affected my data. The student-pool I interviewed were ethnic Norwegians, Polish migrants, Adopted Asian, Asian migrants, and Muslim Refugees. Therefore, it would be beneficial to future studies to interview a more diverse group of young people since their answers might differ from mine. It might also be beneficial in the future to interview both higher and lower achieving schools, since you have a more diverse student body, which often leads to more diverse students that can help get diverse research.

Things might have been different if I interviewed other schools, this is not to diminish the data that was found, however, to point out what someone can possibly do in the future to expand on the project and theories. It might be good in the future to have a diverse pool of schools, classes, and students to get different answers for the study. This thesis had limited time due to covid restrictions and the students interviewed were senior high school students, who were invested in school, therefore they did not want to use extended amounts of time for an interview that was not going to class credit. Therefore, I would suggest if this project were continued in the future, it should be conducted in three schools from differing areas of Oslo. With second year high school students who have fewer academic responsibilities compared to the third-year students.

Conclusion chapter 9

To answer the thesis question how youth in higher academic achieving upper-secondary-schools view the concepts of belonging and unbelonging, as seen through the lens of Photovoice, and accomplished by semi-informal interviews. We will have to look back to the concepts of unbelonging & belonging, photovoice and the students' interviews.

Belonging has multiple levels and aspects. It relates to our personal belonging within ourselves, in addition to the given environment at a certain time. Belonging is related to social norms and rules that play into a person's individual life. Belonging in different communities and countries, will look different due to social norms. The level of belonging will also differ. Countries in the West are used to having an individualistic society, where large levels of the population live alone, while societies in the Global South usually have bigger families and live at home longer. In this study all student scored high academically, however not everyone inhabited school belonging, or a sense of belonging at all. This illustrates that a lack of school belonging does not necessarily mean that the student will score worse academically, in addition to that, it indicates that schools that score high academically also have students who lack belonging and school belonging.

Social capital among migrant parents, who considers school to be important, strengthens the will and ability of the student (child) to perform well in school. (Fuller, 2009). By having parents or guardians who are active in their child's life, and want their child to perform well in school, the parents would also be more likely to want to be involved in their child's school life. Making sure that their child has a good school environment, this ties in with school

belonging. Involved parents who want their children to perform well in school, are more likely to attend teacher parent conferences, ask their children about their day, and keep up with the child's school life. Having an involved parent pay attention to their child's education, could make the parents aware of the child's problems in school. Ex: if their child is bullied, ostracised, or having a bad time in school. This could increase the student's school belonging, if the parent steps in, and the school takes the issue seriously. If no one knows that the student has an issue, and the student themselves do not reach out to their community, it is hard to fix the problems regarding the lack of school belonging.

The problem with school belonging, when it is lacking, is often students are less likely to reach out. It is not something desirable to not have friends in school, or not getting along with classmates. Like with bullying it is difficult to speak about those issues, due to the complexity of the feelings involved. It can be embarrassing, hurtful, angering, or depressive to be ostracised, or bullied, and feelings of hurt like that, might be hard to articulate or speak about.

The reasons for higher school belonging in upper secondary school for some of the students have several factors to why. The freedom of school choice policy might be a contributor to an increased sense of school belonging. The students themselves have applied to these schools, and the schools interviewed were considered hard to get into based on grade average. During lower secondary school the school you go to is based on your geographical location, while the school you attend during higher secondary is based on your application, which often encompasses your interests and abilities. Several students commented that they felt a stronger sense of belonging when interviewed, compared to their start of upper secondary school, or when comparing it to lower secondary school. Other reasons for higher levels of belonging might be security within themselves due to growing up, the insecurities teenagers have while growing up might also be underlying factors for the lack of school belonging, since being insecure in yourself would make it harder to feel secure in other aspects of like, like school. Having friends in class, or someone you could relate to is something that can contribute to a greater sense school belonging. The students might feel more secure in their third year of upper secondary school due to the students being able to attend in-school teachings again, due to the students being unable to attend physical school for 2/3 years due to the covid 19 pandemic.

School A had a very social environment for the students, the class consisted of a large friend group. Which is good for the overall school belonging for those students, however not everyone in that class were invited to social events were friends with that big friend group. Something that led to one student switching classes (this story was mentioned by the Alice during her interview, the student who switched classes was not interviewed), and another student; Alice felt like she wished she would be bullied maliciously since being ignored and ostracised, makes her feel worse since she cannot blame her classmates of the inaction to not invite her to social events. However, Alice had bigger struggles regarding belonging, since she feels like she has never belonged anywhere, and does not know how to feel that sense of belonging.

School A and B has had their whole upper secondary education coloured by the covid-19 pandemic. They had attended 6 months of regular classes, when the pandemic hit Norway and went into lockdown March 2020. This continued to the students graduated, where students still were affected by covid in the early months of 2022. This has undoubtedly affected the students in some way, however to what extent is hard to determine, since it hard to distinguish what was pre-pandemic, what is related to feelings of teenagerhood, and what is related to the isolation the covid-19 lockdown.

The students also commented on covid and how it has affected them, some students explained they have become more introverted, and missed having online school, when in person schools started (Alice). Others explained they feel a strong feeling of “FOMO” fear of missing out, if they do not attend everything they are invited to, when events are overlapping (Astrid,) the student felt a sense of anxiety, that if she does not attend both events she will not be invited in the future. In addition, other students explained that they did not feel a sense of security or belonging in class until their third year of high school, due to the last two years being online school (Agnes.) Lund-Holdtstad & Perissinotto (2022) claim that we are only starting to see the damages covid-19 has had on the mental health. Even this research was affected by covid, the interviews took longer to accomplish due to lockdown, and when done one of the schools had half of their class absent during the days for the interviews due to covid related absences. The full ramification of the pandemic is yet to be discovered and will probably take years to fully grasp. However, covid has affected the students in some way and has altered the way they view the world. This is in relation to the student’s need for travel, wanting to find

themselves and explore (Astrid, Alice, and Aga,) something that has been impossible for the last years due to covid.

What we do know is isolation and loneliness is negative factors for the mental health of humans. Having bad mental health affects the overall physical health of a person negatively. Having strong social bonds or a place to belong to has been scientifically proven to prolong life (Holt-Lundstad, 2010) Since the pandemic the number of lonely students has increased from 16 % of the student population to be lonely (Tønnesen, 2014) while during the pandemic the numbers rose to 2/5 students after the pandemic. (Aas, 2022) And we are yet to determine the grander health affect that loneliness has affected the students.

If schools want their student to perform well, it is pivotal to consider school belonging. Research shows that students who inhabit school belonging, performs better academically, when compared to those who lack school belonging. However, it is not only the school's responsibility to ensure a student's school belonging. The parents who are more involved in a student's school life, and want their child to perform well academically, enlarges the student's social capital who can help play a part in the student's school belonging. The educators, the overall staff, parents, and the peers all play an innate part of a student's sense of school belonging.

School B has participants who overall felt welcome in school and liked going to school. However, the issue the students at school B encountered were religious and refugee targeted remarks, in a class where the majority of the students were either Muslim or refugees. Islamophobic comments targeted at school minorities, such as "Islam is a violent religion" or "fasting is dangerous for your body" are personal opinions where an educator is placing his personal feelings on his students. Which is not contributing to the student's school belonging positively. Having Islamophobic comments are not contributing to school belonging which is the extent to which students feel "personally accepted, respected, and included, and supported by others in the environment" (Goodenow 1993) using such comments contributes to alienating the Muslim students from that educator, since they do not agree with his opinions regarding Islam. This also relates to the educator's comments regarding refugees to where the educator did not think Norway should let in any more refugees, which was said to a class of "Mottaksstudenter" or newly arrived students in Norway, where a good portion of them were refugees.

What the students themselves related to topics of belonging varied from physical belonging to spaces related to their homes, a library, the subway, their immediate neighbourhood, the city

they grew up in or their garden. Object belonging to things like computer games or cars. Familial belonging related to parents, siblings, or personal animals. While topics of unbelonging had the name notion where students felt unbelonging related to spaces: sports shops, football fields, dark places, open popular swimming areas, kitchens, the high school they attended. Alvilde, Aga and Alessa related belonging to physical places. Alina, Astrid and Annika related belonging to family, friends, or animals. Arif related belonging to gaming with his friends. Arsalan and Agnes felt like they belonged anywhere while Alice related belonging to nothing, she felt like she belonged to nowhere.

Alessa related unbelonging to statistics in Norway since she did not feel herself or her name being represented. Astrid related unbelonging to FOMO (Fear of missing out) Alice related unbelonging initially to the kitchen, but under further inspection during the interviews she explained she related unbelonging to her school and her peers. Alvilde and Agnes had related unbelonging to a football field, however for two different reasons. Aga related unbelonging to a sport shop, which featured skis. Since she did not grow up in the skiing culture and finds it hard to ski. Alina related unbelonging to loneliness and being alone without her family. Annika related unbelonging to a certain place in Oslo which she does not frequent or enjoy whilst Arif and Arsalan did not feel a particular sense of unbelonging but had encountered instances when their teachers had made comments against Islam or refugees which they did not like. The students come from good socioeconomic backgrounds, with a variation of ethnicities, genders, sexualities, and experiences. Both Norwegian and foreign students felt a sense of unbelonging to certain spaces, however the student pool is not large enough to draw large parallels to the larger society.

Norway has a big culture of homogenous or “imagined sameness” (Stokke, 2019). Even though the Law of Jante is a fictitious work from Sandemose, it has real traces of how the Scandinavian culture operates. The issue with a homophonous culture, is when we have outliers who do not “belong” or fit into that culture. The options those people have are either to assimilate into Norwegian culture and standards, affectively erasing their own, or become an outlier who do not belong to Norwegian society. Having a different culture is not automatically something bad and opting to have a mix of culture could be beneficial for Norwegian society, since an exchange of cultures could lead to gaining new knowledge.

Biases, and stereotypes should be actively worked against. Several students have been the “victim” of stereotypes, either directly from other people, or the students are worrying about the possible stereotypes people might have against them. These stereotypes include: worrying if people think if other people believe the student, Astrid, is a mail-order-bride to her father (due to being adopted from Asia to a white family), students being the target of slurs from their native language by ethnic Norwegians (polish students), actively showing how good they eat and how their life is good to disprove stereotypes peer and teachers might have, receiving racial remarks like “eat dog”, students receiving comments on their Norwegian accents, teachers telling refugee students that Norway should not accept more refugees, teachers telling Muslim students during Ramadan that fasting is bad and dangerous and when the student discussed this, the students were told they were young and did not know enough, lastly the teachers telling the students that Islam is a violent religion to a class of refugee Muslim students.

Not only are these attitudes annoying and can induce anxiety some of them are outright dangerous. Classmates and teachers are supposed to be people, the students can trust; they are also parts of what is needed to have good school belonging. Allowing students and teachers to have biases like these might hinder a student’s academic achievements, their personal mental health which again affects their personal physical health.

Despite this, the students are all adamant regarding the issue that they are not bullied. There might be several layers to this. How Norwegian society is structured, social norms, students’ feelings embarrassed, students not wanting to feed into the “perpetrators” taunts, students not wanting to be seen as victims, students not seeing the comments “as a big deal.” The one-time remarks that they receive is often not enough to be considered bullying, however it can fall under discrimination. The students are also more willing to reason with people who inhabit these opinions, focusing on dialogue rather than “cancel culture”. Most students when met with remarks such as these, did not believe the people to be bad people, but simply believed them to be either stupid, landing bad jokes, uneducated, or carried biases. On the topic of exclusion in the classroom environment, this student also carried the belief that their classmates were not bad people, and they could not blame anyone for being excluded. Since this was done by the majority of class passively, whilst no one was actively malicious. This student felt a sense of unbelonging in class, and lack of belonging anywhere.

The biggest difference from the ethnic Norwegian students to the other students were the comments the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and adopted students received which was racially and ethnically

based. No ethnic Norwegian student retold a story where they were bullied due to their looks, language, culture, or race. However, some of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and adopted students did, however, there were more minority students interviewed, so there might be Norwegian students who experience this, however not in this data collection.

Students overall are aware the difficulties getting a job would be when having a foreign name. Parents of some of the students want their child to change their name to a Norwegian name, given the chance. Siblings of students have changed their names to Norwegian names to better fit in. In addition, one adopted student felt on the opposite of the spectrum where they feel like they are “tricking” people with their name, when it is Norwegian, and their looks are Asian.

These interviews have illustrated the need for discussion in classrooms and schools regarding belonging, school belonging, school connectedness student’s wellbeing and mental health beyond simple questionnaires, some topics are hard to answer without having a proper discussion. The clearest example of this is the picture I received from one of the students, however when I pried into the reasons behind the photo, the student explained they found a random photo, since they felt what they wanted to picture, would be too difficult to explain to their teacher or peers, the picture the student wanted to take was of the school. This information would not have been found had the researcher not asked, the usual questionnaires do not ask questions like this, since it is rigid and not up for interpretation. This also shows that unbelonging and a lack of school belonging can happen anywhere, with both ethnic and minority students, this data collection had more minority students who felt a stronger sense of unbelonging, although this is just one study with limited research subjects. Topics like school belonging and belonging might not be discussed enough in school. Belonging is especially important to discuss due to the consequences it holds when there is a lack of it, there are both mental and physical consequences to this. Researching belonging in schools who are high achieving, with students from high socioeconomic backgrounds can tell a common denominator among all students. Since research tends to focus on unfortunate outcomes and how to solve them, they often look for “issues,” this thesis does not look for issues, but experiences and how they can relate to the world. The teenagers have shared experiences, which might be difficult to discuss and open up about, however if done so the youth might realize they have more in common than they think.

This thesis researches a certain group of students in two given areas at a specific time. Therefore, it cannot be used as a standard for all research within this field. This simply indicates what these young adults were experiencing in this particular time. There is a possibility that their experiences would change if they were interviewed several years into the future. It might have been a different outcome if the interviews were with more students, or with different kinds of students, from different types of schools. It is also important to point out that no BIPOC students were interviewed for this thesis, due to lack of those students in the classes that were interviewed. This is important to point out, due to the fact that the answers might have been different if those students were included.

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