Crossing the Colorline: Biracial Identity in Sweden and Denmark

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Abstract: Migration to Scandinavia has increased in the last fifteen years. Still, little scholarly research has been devoted to the topic of mixed individuals, particularly those of African Danish or African Swedish heritage. This study seeks to fill this gap by delving into how individuals of mixed heritage navigate their identities in the Danish and Swedish contexts, a region where there are no socially accepted terms for identifying or classifying them. This study can provide an excellent starting point into the race discourse that is being overlooked in both Denmark and Sweden. Drawing from qualitative data, this article examines the position of mixed heritage individuals with a special consideration of their sense of identity and belonging as well as the reality of being mixed. Consequently, three pivotal questions drive this research: What are the individuals' realities in the context of understanding mixed heritage? How do they define themselves? How do they navigate the challenges that come with mixedness? The mixed heritage individuals in this study reveal two common strategies of identity: they position themselves as possessing an "in-between" identity or one that is simply "Black." Sometimes they use the term "African" to imply Black and "European" to refer to either a Dane or Swede. None of the respondents self-identify as White.

Keywords: racially mixed people, multiracial identity, biracial identity, mixed-race identity, critical mixed race studies, Denmark, Sweden, Nordic

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Introduction

Globalization has changed the world in an irreversible way. The number of biracial individuals has increased considerably in most European countries due to migration, a dominant feature of globalization. Nordic countries have a great deal in common, the most notable the notion of Nordic exceptionalism. This ideology rejects colonialist engagement and espouses a narrative where racism "proper" is construed as something that prevailed in the past, not the present.[1] Accordingly, there continue to be discrepancies across the Nordic region in terms of the sources available on racialization, Whiteness, anti-racism, and postcolonialism in which there is significant focus on ethnocentricity and particularly Eurocentricity. Furthermore, there is limited consideration of various manifestations of racism, Islamophobia, and anti-Semitism.[2]

A considerable amount of research has revealed that environmental factors are significant in the course of identity development.[3] Social environments differ across Europe in terms of racial composition and societal attitudes. Taking into consideration the diverse cultural and historical trajectories of people of African descent in Europe, it is erroneous to purport that biracials have the same experiences across Europe, although there are conceivably some environmental similarities in many countries. My study does reveal, however, considerable commonalities among the respondents surveyed in Sweden and Denmark. Some of that is attributable to the contradiction between the socially mandated "color-blindness" to race and the simultaneous prevalence of racism. As I show in my analysis, most of my respondents had similar predicaments, perceptions, and experiences with racial phenomena despite the different contexts. This is not, however, a comparative analysis of multiracial identities and experiences in Sweden and Denmark but rather two case studies.

Methodologically, the study draws largely on qualitative data collected while I was in those two countries between 2018 and 2019. The data consist of semi-structured interviews and an online survey completed by two hundred individuals of mixed heritage: one hundred males and one hundred females. The data focused on individuals residing in Denmark (Aarhus, Copenhagen, Aalborg, and Odense) and Sweden (Uppsala, Stockholm, Gothenburg, Nybo, and Malmö). These cities were selected due to the presence of multicultural families that met the conditions for racial assessments.

Swedish and Danish Contexts

As in most European countries, both Sweden and Denmark have a growing immigrant population. As of 2012, around 20.1 percent of inhabitants in Sweden were of foreign origin. This includes an indigenous population of Swedes with Finnish and Sámi minorities and foreign-born or first-generation immigrants like Turks, Greeks, Finns, Yugoslavs, Danes, and Norwegians.[4] Until 1980, immigration in Sweden largely comprised European labor immigrants. Today, immigrants are predominantly composed of non-European asylum seekers and family members of the preexisting immigrant population.[5]

The African presence in Sweden was felt as early as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when Sweden engaged in a small trade of African slaves. But Afro-Swedish minorities did not begin to become numerically prominent until the 1960s and 1970s. The number increased in the 1980s and was composed of refugees, labor migrants, and family reunifications. Furthermore, during World War I and World War II, Swedish immigration policy was restrictive. This policy was later liberalized in the wake of economic expansion that was followed by a shortage of laborers. In 1968 and 1975, the Swedish Parliament passed immigration policy with three goals that underlined equality, freedom of choice, and cooperation.[6] These three goals are barely consistent with the realities of people of African descent in Sweden.

Racial discourse in Sweden is often refracted through a color-blind lens to the extent that such issues as discrimination are typically accredited to cultural or ethnic differences. In 2001, Parliament passed a bill to remove the term "race" from official language, which led to the subsequent removal of the word "race" as a basis of discrimination in 2009.[7] Accordingly, the objective of Swedish integration policy included the same rights, duties, and possibilities for everyone, irrespective of ethnic and cultural background, with a focus on individuals rather than on groups. Access to the labor market is a central feature of integration policy, which derives from a belief that the labor market is color-blind and rational. In 2014, the Swedish government thus announced that the word "race" should be erased from all existing legislation and should be replaced with another term. The argument behind this shift is the notion that race does not exist.[8]

In public discourse, the application of the term "ethnicity" is common when discussing issues about Muslims or Black people in Sweden. However, the term is not applied in reference to German, Danish, or Norwegian immigrants. Ethnicity or culture is used to indicate visible, that is, physical, differences.[9] Indeed, the structural divide in Sweden and Denmark has historically been and continues to be based heavily on notions of ethnoracial differences, particularly in terms of physical appearance, compared to ethnocultural ones, notwithstanding the societal denial of this fact.[10] Furthermore, Sweden was actively

engaged in the development of race in the twentieth century. In fact, Sweden established the world's first governmental institute engaged in racial biology in 1922.[11]

The discourse and application of the term "race," however, is not permissible in twenty-first-century Sweden. Instead, ethnic groups or national origin are preferred. Swedish integration policy is embedded in the color-blind approach, which encompasses and validates equality regardless of cultural or ethnic background. Indeed, Swedes consider themselves to be democratic, liberal, equalitarian, and tolerant. Sociological polls illustrate that the Swedish population has a positive attitude toward diversity and migration.[12] Previous findings have demonstrated that Swedish democrats regard themselves and Sweden to be among the "good guys" in terms of peoples and nations.[13]

Sweden also has a robust system of anti-discrimination legislation. It maintains a firm commitment to equality and inclusiveness beyond questions of race and ethnicity. Yet the paradox is that by jettisoning the concept of "race," Sweden undermines its own initiatives to counter prevalent racial discrimination, furthering a disjunction between the nation's progressive liberal image and the lived experience of its residents of color.[14] Sweden also embraces multiculturalism, which emphasizes diversity and equality of difference that distinguishes individuals based largely on their unique ethnic and racial group differences. At the same time, among the Nordic countries, residential and economic segregation, by extension, is most pronounced in Sweden. Indeed, ethnoracial residential segregation in Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö is among the most extreme in Europe.[15]

School curriculum is a significant element in cultivating and stimulating critical thinking and connections. A teacher's behavior and attitude, plus the school curriculum, are still promoting Eurocentric perceptions in a continent that is changing rapidly and increasingly becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. For instance, in 2017, a Swedish school was under fire after a teacher gave a ten-year-old a homework assignment containing a racial slur. The assignment involved writing different forms of nouns and one of the words used was "negern," which means Negro.[16]

In Denmark, according to the 2017 Danish Institute of Human Rights report, about 44,000 immigrants from Africa reside in Denmark. The biggest "group is of Somali origin, comprising 11,871 immigrants and 9,304 descendants of immigrants." Other large groups are from Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, South Africa, and Uganda, with the largest migration contingent, among these African countries, from Morocco (5,685 immigrants and 5,530 descendants of immigrants) and the smallest from South Africa (1,108 immigrants and 114 descendants of immigrants).[17]

Around 1900, for approximately thirty years, Denmark was importing people from Africa, India, China, and other countries with the aim of exhibiting them in a zoo. The locations were amusement parks in Copenhagen's zoological garden and Tivoli Park, as well as in other parts of the country. Any contact between the exhibited people and the Danish society was met with considerable suspicion; in fact, Danish women who fell in love with the exhibited individuals were disparaged and considered untrustworthy.[18]

Over the last twenty years or so, researchers in Sweden and Denmark have pointed out that racism and discrimination have taken on a more subtle form. This, in turn, has had insidious impact on many minority groups and has led to a more racially divided society. In Denmark, studies show that White Danes earn twice that of non-White Danes. Danes with minority backgrounds are also poorly represented in institutions of higher learning.[19] More important, individuals of mixed heritage in Denmark are still invisible in the general

statistics, and their challenges are barely discussed in such areas as education and social services. Even though their mixedness is being ignored, it is relevant to their everyday experiences and realities.[20]

Overview of Studies on Mixed Individuals

The term "race" has been widely vilified as a relic from the nineteenth century when it was applied to identify a group within the human species so that people could be classified in conformity with ideological and physical fundamentals—phenotypical traits, such as skin color, facial features, hair texture, and shape of the nose. The approval of race as a reliable model that ranked groups in a hierarchy in terms of their "superiority" and "inferiority," with White Aryan Europeans at the top, has been used as a rationalization for racism and the justification of White supremacy.[21] Accordingly, race has also been exploited in both legal and other perspectives at national and international levels.[22] Yet the concept of "race" is unequivocally a social construct; all humans are members of the same species. Consequently, this implies that race is not entirely based on the physical appearance or biology but rather molded in ways that buttress the wealth, power, and prestige of members of the dominant White group. According to a 1978 declaration by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), "Any theory which involves the claim that racial or ethnic groups are inherently superior or inferior, thus implying that some would be entitled to dominate or eliminate others, presumed to be inferior, or which bases value judgments on racial differentiation, has no scientific foundation and is contrary to the moral and ethical principles of humanity."[23]

Race as a social construct is clearly demonstrated when we reflect on how society categorizes people of mixed heritage. For example, individuals who are half Black and half White in the United States are still largely classified as Black based on societal norms. This is evoked by the infamous one-drop rule of hypodescent, a US social and legal principle dictating that any person with any African American ancestry is automatically designated and self-identified solely as Black.[24] The concept is only applied to individuals of African American descent and does not legally exist outside the United States.

In the US, this began to change in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when many Black-White couples, in particular, began to counter racial norms by socializing their children to embrace multiracial identities.[25] They also formed educational and support organizations addressing the concerns of interracial families and multiracial people, particularly their marginalization and frequent outright erasure and pathologization.[26] The efforts of this multiracial movement were most visible in changing census data collection on race and ethnicity.[27] Despite the growing number and visibility of multiracial-identified individuals, as well as changes in data collection that now include them, the needle appears to be moving more slowly in terms of societal norms and racial commonsense.[28] Notwithstanding that caveat, the United States is certainly much further along in this regard than Denmark or Sweden and the entire Nordic region. Yet, paradoxically, in the global social sphere, the one-drop rule has been internalized in the European mentality. Consequently, most Europeans, and even Black people in Europe, invariably tend to categorize Black-White biracials as Black.

Many people would attest that race is rooted in biology such that the concept has a societal foundation ingrained in the perception of many individuals. This is especially the case with those who are members of the dominant racial group. Yet there is a common recognition that biologically and even

mentally, there is no evidence that Whites are "superior" to Blacks. Still, the color-blind backlash against race discourse in Denmark deters the ability to grapple with the everyday inconsistencies connected to and influenced by racial concerns.[29]

Indeed, the case of Denmark and Sweden reveals how race has been proscribed in terms of the recent racialization of mixed individuals of Black-White heritage. According to official statistical categorization, mixed-race children in Denmark are foremost categorized statistically as "Danes." Yet the survey I conducted shows that the burden of race plays a central role in people's lifestyle, their way of thinking, and even their authority over others, notwithstanding Danish society's denial of its relevance. Moreover, parents of biracial individuals are susceptible to the dichotomy of single-racial (or monoracial) categorization. Many biracial adults are socialized as Black and many self-identify as such. Former US president Barack Obama, for instance, always maintained he was Black. This was not only because he felt Black but also because society already considered and treated him as a Black man even though he acknowledged his biracial background. Indeed, Obama was more frequently referred to as the first Black, rather than biracial, president, by both Blacks and Whites.[30] Still, it is important for people to be cognizant of how they categorize individuals and to remember that racial identities and experiences are not merely singular or monoracial. They are also biracial or multiracial.

Misconceptions and stereotypes about biracial individuals are plentiful. There are several myths about biracial individuals, including the belief they are unhappy, confused, and in most cases, mentally unstable due to the marginality and ambiguity in understanding their sense of belonging.[31] According to this line of reasoning, marginality was necessarily pathological. Individuals ostensibly stood on the margin of two racial or cultural and often mutually exclusive and hostile worlds, not fully a member of either. This caused life-long personal conflict characterized by divided loyalties, ambivalence, and hypersensitivity. In the case of my study, most of my respondents indicated displeasure with most of the stereotypes they face, although some of these perceptions and comments may seem like or are meant to be compliments. Some respondents feel objectified.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this mindset fixated on the supposed genetic inferiority of multiracials and was supported by scientific racism and theories of hybrid degeneracy. By the end of the first half of the twentieth century, these theories had largely been substituted with theories of marginality. These focused on the psychological dysfunction purportedly originating in mixed-race experiences rather than on social forces that made psychological functioning difficult for multiracials. They therefore supported the prevailing ideology that prohibited or discouraged miscegenation seeking to preserve White racial purity and dominance.[32] Theories of "negative" marginality emphasizing pathology, especially the work of sociologist Everett V. Stonequist (1901–79), overshadowed the nuances of sociologist Robert Park's (1864–1944) original "marginal man" thesis in the 1920s. Park did not dismiss the challenges, psychological ambivalence, and conflict that could accompany marginality. However, he believed "positive" marginality could also imbue individuals with a broader vision and wider-ranging sympathies, which might enable them to help facilitate mutual understanding between individuals from different groups.[33]

Navigating Identities: Challenges and Self-Identification

The subject of identity has already generated considerable discussion, and my study adds to that discussion. My research study considers how biracial individuals navigate their identities in Sweden and Denmark, showing that their voices are central to the discussion on identity.

Most respondents reported that one of the most common questions they are asked is "Where are you from?" This typically evokes a surprise reaction from them because they were born and raised in the only country they know as their homeland, where they have grandparents, friends, and relatives. When their response aligns with an unexpected answer, the question "where exactly are you from?" becomes a further probe for more information. They feel ostracized—a prima facie case of pontification about people's identity. "I have been asked umpteen times where I am from," noted a respondent from Sweden. "When I say I am Swedish, that I was born here, the question that follows is, 'but where exactly are you from?'"

Multiracials are also frequently considered to be exotic with regard to their physical appearance, which can lead to fetishization. The racial fetishization of biracial women, in particular, is rife with othering with a sexual flavor. This is quite noticeable in terms of women of mixed parentage. Indeed, sex is one of the citadels that undeniably continues to intersect with racial prejudice.[34] I witnessed this in my study. A respondent from Sweden, for example, reported: "Before I got married, I had a problem dating men because I felt that they were only interested in having sex with me because I am biracial. There is this notion that biracial individuals are beautiful and every man wants to date us." Some of the stereotypes are overlooked and seen as positive and are thought to be harmless by non-biracial individuals. Another respondent from Sweden affirmed that "many White people in Sweden always want to put people like me in boxes. Sometimes they use really annoying and degrading statements. The most common one is that 'you are not darker like them,' implying that I'm better than dark Africans because I have some White heritage in me. This is racism to my understanding."

That the physical appearance of biracial women is apparent may have consequences rooted in jealousy. Black women of darker complexion may resent biracial women with lighter complexion due to the attention they get, especially from men. One respondent from Denmark expressed her concern: "I love my Black people and whenever I encounter any Black person whether man or woman, I always strike a conversation. The response is not always the same especially when I am in the company of some Black women, they have this kind of subtle jealousy like I'm going to snatch their boyfriends. Don't get me wrong, these types of women are few. I have genuine Black women friends. I think for some Black women, being light skin is synonymous with beauty and feel insecure when they have a darker complexion." On the contrary, men rarely get the same kind of attention as women, probably because men do not place as much emphasis on colorism or they simply have no concerns about it.

The notion that biracial children and individuals are physically attractive is undeniably pigeonholing; regrettably it is construed as a genuine compliment whenever someone encounters a biracial child.[35] Generally, the vulnerable group or community at some point could internalize pigeonholing, which leads to a reaction. Consequently, this kind of generalization of all biracial children as being physically attractive may have an effect on some individuals who feel they do not fit into that space. Oversimplification regarding race risks presenting

emotional setbacks due to their invalidity in every individual case. Moreover, no one wants to be judged per se by their race. As one respondent in Denmark noted, "In Denmark, having a biracial child sometimes is like a commodity, you hear conversations among women how desperately they want a biracial child. You hear words like, 'they are so cute, and you are so cute.' It seems that most White people are not wary of the challenges biracial children face in Denmark and almost the whole Western world; they don't understand what it takes to raise a biracial child. They just think we are some sort of items on the shopping list."

Another major challenge biracial individuals experience in Denmark and Sweden is that society perceives them to be Black. Consequently, they are subjected to the same stereotypes Black people undergo along with those specific to being mixed race. Often, they are considered unintelligent or to be drug addicts due to their Black ancestry. This is clearly a case in which biracial individuals become victims of anti-Black racism by simply being affiliated with Black people. "Whenever I am in a queue in a club with my Black friends," stated a respondent from Denmark, "there is a high chance that I and my friends will not be let in. However, when I am with my White friends, they let me in. This is disturbing."

Biracial individuals do not escape the tirade of name calling. Although some labels may be perceived by people to be inoffensive, the victims (biracial individuals) themselves are the ones to make that determination. I, therefore, asked the respondents about some of the exhausting statements they hear from other people and received varying responses, ranging from banal to egregious.[36] Most researchers of biracial individuals agree that personal experiences, as they relate to the paradigm of race in Europe, have a significant impact on racial identity. Phenotypes, environment, and racial awareness, among others, could have an effect on the everyday experiences of biracial individuals.[37] The respondents shared many similar experiences. Some of the common types of statements biracial individuals are tired of hearing from people are: "I don't like Africans, but you're OK and variations on that theme" (respondent from Denmark) or "'You look exotic' or they call me names with a racist history (mulatto, half-caste, and hybrid)" (respondent from Sweden).

Some individuals variously experience similar kinds of compliments that explicitly indicate that they are considered foreign. The hair story, which of course was the most common one among my respondents, also had varying responses. "I am always complimented how my hair is better than the hair of black people," said a respondent from Denmark. A respondent from Sweden stated: "People I know and sometimes even strangers, ask me if they could touch my hair or more often, they just touch my hair without asking. They also ask 'what hip hop do you listen to,' 'you must like hip hop or jazz?,' 'oh, you sing, jazz right?,' and 'how many Black men have you slept with?'"

I tested a follow-up question that asked respondents "if they are incorrectly classified" by the larger society. Society's perception, which often is disconnected from reality, exposes multiracial individuals to exclusion in some cases as well as perpetuation of different manifestations of racism and prejudice. The common response was about how others connect their physical appearance with other ethnic groups. Recurring responses included: South American, Latin American or Hispanic, fully Black, or Arabic. A respondent from Sweden has been perceived as "anything from Latin to Hispanic, just never mixed," while a respondent from Denmark said, "sometimes I have been confused with being Arabic." Another respondent from Denmark replied that "some talk Spanish to me whenever they see me."

Most of the discourse around identity centers on the idea that for a long time, old identities—which were well established in the social world—are now in decline. They supposedly herald the overwhelming

increase in new identities that are undermining the notion that individuals today can be thought of as displaying a continuous and whole self.[38] The identity crisis is a component of a wider course for transformation. In many ways, this fragments the central tenets and course of actions of present-day society, deviating from the structures that advanced a firm attachment in the social world. Indeed, modern society has undergone a considerable transformation due to globalization, which, in turn, has also changed how identity is perceived, undergoing a constant transformation in which there is considerable ambiguity.

Identity is informed by the transformations and shifts we make in the cultural structure in which we are embedded. The assumption that we have the same identity from cradle to grave is due to how we build our self-consoling narrative, which is based on the belief in a unitary, stable, and transparent self. At best, this is an elusive aspiration, and at worst, an illusion. Individuals always have incongruous identities with opposing forces that incessantly shift their bearings.

Ethnicity has been one of the barometers for identity in Denmark and Sweden. Even though individuals, in fact, self-identify as either Black, White, or biracial, the implications are that this will influence how other people relate to them, for example, who they associate with, who they get into a relationship with, and even who they marry. To those whose identity is not well determined, it becomes problematic for them. One respondent from Denmark had this to say:

> One of the worst experiences is when I am being blatantly told by strangers and sometimes by the people I know that I do not fit the image of a Dane. I am always being referred to as exotic. However, I also feel that people always want to interact with me because of my appearance. One day I was hurt so bad by a racist comment by a family member blaming my mother for choosing a Black man as my father. Danish people say they are not racist but occasional slip of the tongue proves that in their subconscious, it is the other way round.

Some respondents define themselves as mixed, for example, Danish African or Swedish African. They consider themselves as an intersection of two racial groups and assign some labels for themselves that exhibit an amalgam of Black and White, and to varying degrees, take pride in this kind of self-labeling. They recognize their dual heritage and define themselves as half-half. One respondent from Sweden reported: "It is not easy being a mixed person sometimes. There is this feeling that kicks in sometimes that you do not belong anywhere. I experienced this a lot growing up in Sweden. Being an adult now, I really do not care how people describe me, it is all how I feel and now I feel mixed, I feel African, I feel European. I define myself the way I want. People should stop defining us the way they want because that's not what we are or we want." Conversely, African Danish transcends any sort of categorization, in the opinion of a respondent from Denmark, as she plainly categorizes herself as part of the human race with African and Danish features. "I believe in humanity, I believe in a human race not a single nomenclature of races, however, I prefer to be mixed in the sense of having both heritages. I know a lot about my African roots as well as my Danish ones and I try to balance them. I don't see one better than the other, but since I have been living in Denmark my whole life, my behaviour is more Danish."

Others identify as Black, not mixed. "It depends, in French, we say 'Métisse' however, since I am in Europe, I tend to say more and more that I am African," noted a female respondent from Denmark. For biracial

children in Denmark and Sweden, the consciousness of being different always appears early in life, although they have no way to intellectualize it—until a later stage when they are bombarded with racism.

Due to their social context, most of the biracial respondents in this study showed a strong affinity for Black people. They are easily accepted by the Black community as their own and they feel comfortable and at ease identifying as Black. They are also pushed by society toward their Black background. A respondent from Sweden has physical appearance that makes it possible for her to be White passing, that is, to be perceived as a White person, but she identifies as biracial and internally as Black. "This is the race (Black) I feel I am more accepted. Unlike the White race, Blacks accept I am mixed race and that I am one of them. I like the Black culture too." Another respondent from Sweden reiterated that "even though I've lived here in Sweden for many years and visited Africa not many times, I still don't feel I belong here in Sweden. I have always no sense of belonging at all. One reason is because of the subtle racism we as biracial people experience. The White Swedes call us mulatto, I do not remember hearing any other word used to describe me. This word is derogative and racist especially when you understand its historical implications."

Biracial adults may at some point find it necessary to cope with issues surrounding their identification; children are the most affected because at a tender age they cannot fathom the rejection by their peers due to their physical differences. As teenagers and adults, they spend more time trying to develop survival mechanisms to navigate the environment. "Race wasn't a part of a conversation in our family, nobody was talking about it," stated a respondent from Denmark. "But things changed when I joined 1st grade that's when children started asking me why my father is very dark and my hair is curly. I recall children making fun of my hair in 2nd grade, saying it looks like a poodle's hair. I got really frustrated, I later asked my mum to make my hair straight."

While analyzing racial identity, the inconsistency of choosing more than one race on a race question and classifying as biracial informed my assessment to apply attitudinal questions as a dependent variable to measure the affinity of a respondent's sense of belonging. Some respondents reiterated that they relentlessly have to negotiate dual identity that does not compromise either of their heritages. They feel they will become whole when they can have a balance of the two. "I feel both Black and White sometimes, depending on what angle you are looking at it," noted a female respondent from Sweden. "Being born in Sweden, I behave like most Swedes, however, I love African culture and I actively engage in African initiatives and programs. I took a lot of time to learn about African philosophy and civil rights movements. Sometimes it is not easy to balance the two, but yes, I feel I am both most of the time." A respondent from Denmark had a different opinion: "I am African because it would include me more since I am living in a White country and I do not look like a White person. I am brown like most Africans."

The most recurring outcomes shared among the respondents was the feeling of being an African due to how they are treated by the White society they live in. But some respondents who reported allegiance to only one race said they considered themselves biracial when asked the question about their sense of belonging. Those who expressed their opinion as "sometimes" showed a higher degree of identifying as biracial as well. As one respondent from Sweden put it: "I belong to a biracial, mixed group of people where one parent is Black and the other, White."

A significant and often appalling event frequently provokes an individual to understand how racism works and the impact that has on approval of oneself and Black people. An interesting point by one

particular respondent was that she felt that her allegiance is drawn more by the vulnerability of that specific group, especially those who experience racism. She categorically pointed to how the exclusion of this minority group builds her sense of belonging toward the Black community. A central tenet here is that thinking and acting like a particular racial group involves a lot of experience, depending on the level of engagement, which eventually informs who they are. The majority of the respondents said that allegiance to a particular race should not be tied to behavioral characteristics. As one respondent from Sweden articulated: "I am not aware that generic behavior can be attributed to racial groups."

Biracial individuals must endure a considerable number of challenges that come with ideological conflict not structured by them. They are invariably boxed into one racial category, which means they must constantly deal with societal misclassification of their racial identity—projecting the feeling of ambiguity toward their racial ascription as perceived by the larger society.

Various narratives demonstrate that some individuals of mixed parentage do not identify with either of their racial backgrounds. A respondent from Denmark chooses not to identify primarily as a member of a particular racial group. "I don't like being subscribed to any race, I think over talking races and classifying people based on their differences is one of the reasons racism is doing so well. Most of the time, there is no reason classifying people based on their skin tone. People always say I am mixed or Black, never White. Well, only in Africa, I am White."

Conclusion

Despite the considerable increase in the number of biracials in Scandinavia, there is little scholarly research on these individuals, particularly those of African Danish or African Swedish heritage. This research seeks to help address that lacuna by providing an examination of how individuals of mixed heritage navigate their identities in the Danish and Swedish contexts, where there are essentially no common social terms for classifying them. Indeed, mixed individuals of African and Swedish heritage frequently develop a Black identity during their interaction with Whites in the larger society. Through these interactions, they become cognizant of their skin color and hair texture as well as specifically racist remarks. This study reveals that race as a reflected appraisal of physical appearance matters in terms of individuals of mixed heritage in both Swedish and Danish culture. I have attempted to clearly show that it is not an individual's ethnicity and culture that are factored into this equation. Instead, the concept of "race" manifested as physical appearance is most applicable, despite the dominant discourse on ethnic homogeneity and color-blindness that prevails in Sweden and Denmark.

Biracial individuals need to resonate with and embrace an identity with which they feel a great affinity, an identity that will promote their personal sense of belonging and well-being. It is their personal choice and right to make such a decision. In the absence of having this kind of agency in Denmark and Sweden, they are doomed to fail in finding their place in society, developing a niche within the social environment. Nevertheless, having an identity will prepare them to prevail against the impediments that inevitably accompany their life experiences. They will be able to stand up to and repudiate any challenges that cross their paths. Biracial children are representative of an emergent blending or melting pot phenomena that will become increasingly more common in Europe despite the continued presence of significant racial and

cultural differences. They thus deserve all the support they can get in due course, because of the social obstacles that can invariably compromise their identities while growing up.

Biracial children do not, however, shape or mold their identities in a vacuum. Their parents, and even the larger society, will always play a central role in this process. Therefore, parents do have a crucial role in conveying the concept of race and culture in terms of socializing their biracial children. They have the obligation to inculcate their children with a valid racial identity by providing a supportive environment of favorable identity development. Notwithstanding the uniqueness that crystallizes around the experience of being biracial, in early childhood, biracial children do not necessarily think of themselves as being considerably different from any other children in their social milieux. They are socialized in such a way that they do not attach meaning to the different colors they encounter in their environment although they may be aware of these differences.

That begins to change considerably during adolescence. This is a complex, and frequently, turbulent period when young people typically begin to sort themselves and each other into in-groups and out-groups based on various kinds of difference, including those based on race and ethnicity, as they make the transition to adulthood and the process of individuation. As one respondent from Denmark puts it: "When I was young, I never understood what "Black" and "White" meant. I grew up with both parents and to me, color was not an issue, I did not even know what race is until I reached [my] teenage stage that's when my neighbors, friends, and teachers started to put it into my ears."

Notes

[1] Danbolt, "Retro Racism," 110–11.

[2] Hervik, "Racialization in the Nordic Countries," 3–37.

[3] Hopwood et al., "Genetic and Environmental Influences," 1–2, 11; Hall, "Please Choose One," 50–64; Townsend et al., "Being Mixed," 91–96; Sims, "Reevaluation of the Influence of Appearance," 557–81; Wijeyesinghe, "Intersectional Model of Multiracial Identity," 83–103; Binning et al., "Interpretation of Multiracial Status," 37–49; Townsend, Markus, and Bergsieker, "My Choice, Your Categories," 189–90.

[4] Sweden Population 2022 (Demographics, Maps, Graphs), accessed February 28, 2022, worldpopulationreview.com.

[5] Westin, "Sweden: Restrictive Immigration."

[6] Ericsson, "Enfranchisement as a Tool for Integration," 235–39.

[7] Osanami Törngren, "Talking Color-Blind," 137, 142.

[8] Osanami Törngren, "Does Race Matter in Sweden?," 127.

[9] Ibid., 131.

[10] Sandset, *Color That Matters*, 65.

[11] Osanami Törngren, "Talking Color-Blind," 140; Törngren, "Does Race Matter in Sweden?," 130; Marttinen, "Eugenics, Admixture, and Multiculturalism" (in this issue of the journal).

[12] Osanami Törngren, "Does Race Matter in Sweden?," 303; Dennison and Dražanová, "Public Attitudes," 47.

[13] Hellström and Nilsson, "We Are the Good Guys," 55–76.

[14] Antoine, " Swedish Disconnect" (in this issue of the journal).

[15] Östh, Clark, and Malmberg, "Measuring the Scale," 45; Tunström and Wang, *Segregated City*, 13; Englund, "Migrants, Minorities, and Employment," 3–4, 11–26.

[16] Catherine Edwards, "Swedish School under Fire for Racist Slur in Homework Task," *The Local*, November 16, 2017. https://www.thelocal.se/20171116/swedish-school-under-fire-for-including-racist-slur-in-homework-task.

[17] Institut for Menneske Rettigheder, *Afro-Danskeres oplevelse af diskrimination i Danmark*, 9.
[18] Jensen et al., "Historicity of (Anti-)Racism," 15.
[19] Hervik, "Racialization in the Nordic Countries,"3–37.
[20] Appel and Singla, "Mixed Parentage," 47.
[21] Banton, *Racial Theories*, 1; Smedley, *Race in North America*, 14–16, 27–29.
[22] Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, 109, 112. Social constructivism proposes that the concept of "race" (i.e., the belief that a classification based on skin color and other skin-deep properties like body shape or hairstyle) maps onto meaningful, important biological kinds a pseudo-biological concept that has been used to justify and rationalize the unequal treatment of groups of people by others (Machery and Faucher, "Social Construction and the Concept of Race," 1208–19).
[23] UNESCO, "Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice," Article 2, November 27, 1978, https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/raceandracialprejudice.aspx.
[24] The broader rule of hypodescent is a social code designating racial group membership of first-generation offspring of unions between White Americans and Americans of color exclusively based on their background of color. Successive generations of individuals who have White American ancestry combined with a background of color have more flexibility in terms of self-identification. The one-drop rule of hypodescent designates as Black everyone with any African American ancestry ("one-drop of blood"). It precludes any choice in self-identification and ensures that all future offspring of African American ancestry are socially designated and self-identified as Black (Davis, *Who Is Black?*, 12, 55, 58, 77; Jordan and Spickard, "Historical Origins,"101; Khanna, "'If You're Half Black,'" 97–119).
[25] Daniel et al., "Emerging Paradigms," 6–7.
[26] Daniel, "Beyond Black and White," 333–35; Daniel, "Black and White Identity in the Millennium" 123–38.
[27] Multiracials totaled 7 million on the 2000 census. Based on 2010 census data, their number increased to 9 million—or 2.9 percent of the population. Although they still make up only a fraction of the total population, this is a growth rate of about 32 percent since 2000, when multiracials comprised 2.4 percent of the population (Daniel and Kelekay, "From *Loving v. Virginia*," 652). According to 2020 census data, multiracials now comprise 33.8 million people, a 276 percent increase (US Bureau of the Census. "Supplementary Tables on Race and Hispanic Origins: 2020 Census Redistricting Data (P.L. 94-171)," August 12, 2021, https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/dec/2020-redistricting-supplementary-tables.html?mc_cid=783f5c19d1&mc_eid=414939f104, see specifically "Table 1. Population by Race: 2010 and 2020." Notwithstanding its comparatively small size, the multiracial movement brought about measurable changes in US racial formation.
[28] Daniel, "Sociology of Multiracial identity," 47.
[29] Jenkins, *Being Danish*, 355.
[30] In the media Obama is generally referred to as Black or African American, less frequently as multiracial or biracial. Yet individuals have displayed varying responses in terms of how he is viewed racially. Data on these attitudes were collected for Mark Williams by Zogby International in a November 2006 Internet poll of 2,155 people. Individuals were told Obama's parents' background and then were asked to identify Obama's race. Obama was identified as Black by 66 percent of African Americans, 9 percent of Latinas/os, 8 percent of Whites, and 8 percent of Asian Americans. He was designated with multiracial identifiers by 88 percent of Latinas/os, 80 percent of Whites, 77 percent of Asian Americans, and 34 percent of African Americans. Most respondents designated Obama with multiracial identifiers. Small percentages responded with "White," "none of the above," and "not sure." Blacks upheld the one-drop rule (BBS News, "Williams/Zogby Poll"; Williams, "Identity Survey 11/1/06 thru 11/2/06"). Indeed, Obama has never said he *identifies* as multiracial although he frequently has referred to his interracial parentage. This was underscored when he checked only the "Black, African American, or Negro" box on the 2010 census race question, although since 2000, respondents have been allowed to check more than one box. For all his hybridity, Obama's identity is situated in the Black community and extends outward from that location (Daniel, "Race and Multiraciality," 3–40; Daniel and Kelekay, "From *Loving v. Virginia*," 650).
[31] Stonequist, *Marginal Man*, 10–11, 24–27; Newman, "Revisiting the Marginal Man," 27–29; Rockquemore, Brunsma, and Delgado, "Racing to Theory or Retheorizing Race?," 15–20.
[32] Daniel, "Sociology of Multiracial Identity," 113–14.

[33] Park cited in Stonequist, *Marginal Man*, xiii–xviii.
[34] Root, "From Exotic to a Dime a Dozen," 19–31.
[35] Leece, "Why Biracial People Are Seen as More Beautiful."
[36] Johnston and Nadal, "Multiracial Microaggressions," 124–37; Nadal et al., "Microaggressions and the Multiracial Experience," 36–37.
[37] Hall, "Please Choose One," 50–64; Townsend et al., "Being Mixed," 91–96; Bradshaw, "Beauty and the Beast," 77–88; Pauker et al., "Review of Multiracial Malleability," 3–15; Sims, "Reevaluation of the Influence of Appearance," 557–81; Wallace, *Relative/Outsider*, 121–25, 147–52; Wijeyesinghe, "Intersectional Model of Multiracial Identity," 83–103; Binning et al., "Interpretation of Multiracial Status," 37–49; Townsend, Markus, and Bergsieker, "My Choice, Your Categories," 199–202.
[38] Hall, "Question of Cultural Identity," 596, 601–9.

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