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Rethinking minority status and 'visibility'

Miri Song

Correspondence: a.m.song@kent.ac.uk
University of Kent, Cornwallis NE, room 236, Canterbury, Kent CT2 7NF, UK

Abstract

Historically, minority status has been linked with visibility as a non-White person, and such phenotypical visibility has marked people in terms of racial stigmas and discrimination. But definitions and claims to minority status are increasingly complicated (and contested) by immigration and the growth of multiracial people, many of whom are racially ambiguous, and some of whom look White. As the multiracial population in various multi-ethnic societies continues to grow, and diversify, to include multigeneration multiracial people whose non-White ancestries are more distant, questions about recognized minority status will become more pressing. Do we need to rethink the link between minority status and visibility as a non-White person? To what extent should lived experience (as a multiracial person) matter for our understandings of minority status, if one is not a 'visible' minority?

Keywords: Minority, Race, Multiracial, Visibility, Non-white, Phenotype

Introduction

In a recent email invitation for a talk given about 'perceptions of internal and external spaces' sent around my university, the registration link states: 'This workshop is open to People of Colour ONLY'. On another occasion, I received a notice about the establishment of the Black Female Professors Forum (in Britain). On its home page, in which I have been listed, we are told that: '*When a person says that they are politically black, they identify themselves with these empowering sentiments rather than just a race. Throughout this website the term Black is used in a political sense and will encompass those of African, Caribbean, Asian and Arab descent.*' Both of these examples, referring to 'people of colour', and 'Black' female professors, illustrate the common usage of categories and terms which are meant to refer to specific and bounded forms of membership within multi-ethnic societies such as Britain.

Yet as I argue below, while the meanings and boundaries of such categories have always been contested to some degree, debates about the use of such terms, and how they are related to our understandings of 'visibility' and minority status, are becoming even more salient, given both immigration and demographic diversity. In much scholarship on ethnic and racial minority people, social scientists have tended to assume that their 'race' is readily apparent to the observer, so that people can identify their racial in-groups and out-groups without much difficulty (Masuoka, 2011). In that sense, racial visibility in terms of an unambiguously non-White appearance was an assumed characteristic of minority status, and did not require further reflection.

Historically, ethnic minority status has typically been linked with being non-White (often in conjunction with one's migration history). For instance, in a recent article about the socioeconomic integration of ethnic minorities, Yaojun Li and Anthony Heath (2017) write: 'In the past few decades, most ethnic studies in Britain, USA, continental Europe and many other parts of the world have tended to focus on 'visible' ethnic minorities who migrate from developing to developed countries in search of a better life for themselves and their children, or asylum seekers trying to flee war-torn zones, famine or political persecution in their home countries.' (p. 1) While the exact basis of such visibility is left unsaid, most authors use the term 'visible' to refer to a non-White phenotypical appearance, though some groups are also highly visible through their presentation, as in their modes of dress – e.g. Orthodox Jews or some Muslims.

Who is considered visibly different is, of course, contextually and historically specific; for example, in current day Australia, Fozdar & Perkins (2014, p. 123) argue that in addition to Aborigines, Muslim migrants, black Africans, and asylum seekers are most likely to be seen as 'visibly different'. These groups are presumed to be visibly non-White. Yet the basis of their visibility is not always written on the body – presumptions of their non-Christian foreignness and limited potential for 'assimilation' underlies our propensity to see people as visibly different. As this article will show, terms such as 'minority' or 'racially visible' can mean very different things across disparate contexts and populations, and thus need to be used with care.

Visibility (signifying non-White) has been central to our understandings of a stigmatized ethnic minority status. But exactly who is considered visible in constantly changing and diversifying multi-ethnic societies, is less than clear. Via a theoretical discussion and review of race scholarship, this article questions the assumed association between minority status and a visible racialized appearance. My contribution to existing scholarship is that I specifically question this link in relation to a major demographic transition in many Western multiethnic societies – the growing numbers of 'hidden' racially mixed people with more distant non-White ancestors, who may look either racially ambiguous or White to others, and who defy the neat binary of White and non-White.

I begin the paper with a brief overview of how racial phenotype and racial discrimination are shown to be linked. I then discuss the assumed link between racial visibility and minority status, by addressing the assumptions underlying our understandings of minority status. I then consider the ways in which our understandings of racial visibility and group membership are now increasingly contested. In the final and main part of the paper, I focus on the case of multiracial people as an exemplar of how the neat link between minority status and racial visibility is increasingly problematic. In doing so, I draw upon some examples of my research on multiracial people in Britain. In the concluding discussion, I consider ongoing debates about color-blindness and the tension between the need to 'see' and recognize race and racial bodies that do not look White alongside the claims of racially ambiguous or white looking multiracial people who identify themselves as both multiracials and minorities.

Phenotype and racial discrimination

As many scholars of racial discrimination and prejudice have observed, forms of institutional discrimination do not require the active support of individuals (Desmond &

Emirbayer, 2008; Wellman, 1977). Many well intentioned people who do not see themselves as racist can end up reinforcing racially discriminatory structures and institutions (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). In the context of 'color blind racism', and the sanitized discourses of cultural difference, there has been a careful avoidance of overt reference to visible, phenotypical differences, and other bodily traits that could point to the legitimization of corporeal and biological racial differences. As noted in one study by the Harvard Business School, people can be nervous about describing others in racial terms, even when it would be highly effective and convenient in identifying someone -- lest they be accused of being racist (Norton & Apfelbaum, 2013).

As documented by many scholars, one's phenotype is central to how we observe and categorize each other. People rely on cognitive shortcuts (such as racial stereotypes, often based upon the identification of specific physical characteristics) to simplify and navigate the world (Eberhardt & Fiske, 1998; Van den Berghe, 1997). Stereotypes can be understood as a 'cognitive structure that contains the perceiver's knowledge, beliefs, and expectations about some human group (Operario & Fiske, 1998, p. 40). In his famous study of prejudice, Gordon Allport (1954) observed: 'The human mind must think with the aid of categories....Once formed, categories are the basis for normal prejudgment. We cannot possibly avoid this process. Orderly living depends upon it.' (p. 20).

Such processes of categorizing each other relies fundamentally on visual cues, many of which have been deeply internalized throughout our lives. This learned visual understanding of the world provides a map, often unconsciously, to how we perceive people. This has been especially apparent in research on our unconscious biases (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013). Not only race, but also gender biases, are deeply held in these ways. Our propensity to racialize people, who diverge from the unspoken norm of Whiteness (Dyer, 1997), must also be understood in terms of our internalization of often unconscious negative biases about people, whose appearance can automatically trigger specific (and often negative) associations of otherness (see Banaji & Greenwald, 2013; S. Hall, 1997).

Numerous studies in the USA, mainly of Blacks, but also of Latinos, have shown that individuals who have physical features that are most typically associated with their race are perceived more negatively (Murguia & Telles, 1996; Roth, 2012). One key physical feature associated with race is skin color, which is a loaded signifier of social value and identity (Hunter, 2007; Jablonski, 2014). 'Colorism', which refers to the preferential treatment of same-raced people on the basis of their skin color, is a phenomenon that can be found in racially stratified societies all over the world (Hunter, 2007; Tharps, 2016).

Evidence of colorism and its role in racial discrimination in the wider society has been documented by various race scholars (see Dixon & Telles, 2017; Hunter, 2007; Rondilla & Spickard, 2007). In general, lighter skinned people have been found to suffer less discrimination and are in better paying and more prestigious jobs than coethnic individuals with darker skin (see Herring, Keith, & Horton, 2004). In the USA, Saperstein and Penner (2012) found that as individuals underwent upward mobility, they were more likely to be 'whitened' (seen as White) by others, while those who were unemployed or indigent were more likely to be racially assigned as members of darker races. Studies have also shown that multiracial people with darker skin perceive more racial discrimination and are more likely to identify with their minority race (Brunsma

& Rockquemore, 2001; Tashiro, 2011; Tizard & Phoenix, 1993). However, in Britain, Mok (2019) has found that part White mixed people who are more socioeconomically secure are more likely to identify as mixed, as opposed to White – pointing to the need for more research on the influence of class backgrounds and people's resources on their ethnic and racial attachments and identifications.

With ongoing streams of immigration and interracial unions, many contemporary multi-ethnic societies are becoming less white – in terms of their family lineage. As the multiracial population continues to grow, not just race, but the issue of color (and other somatic qualities), will become even more prominent in both our private and public lives (Tharps, 2016). In North American or European countries there is no equality policy or documentation which *specifically* addresses the experiences of mixed people. Where multiracial people are deemed to belong along a White/non-White binary is variable across disparate societies (and at different historical periods). In countries where racial mixing has historically been common, such as in Brazil, the issue of phenotypical appearance and more finely grained racial categories has been central to debates about affirmative action policies aimed at disadvantaged people (Daniel, 2006; Telles, 2004).

In Brazil, where 43% of citizens identify as mixed, and 30% of those who see themselves as White have Black ancestors (De Oliveira, 2016), where should the line between races be drawn, and what criteria should be used in identifying minority status? In an article about the politicized allocation of highly competitive university places, especially in fields such as medicine, a member of the student activist group *Setorial Negro*, asserts a not uncommon sentiment: "These spots are for people who are phenotypically black … It's not for people with black grandmothers." (De Oliveira, 2016).

Given the notable growth of the multiracial population in countries where (sanctioned) large scale 'mixing' is historically more recent, such as in North America and many European countries, the generational locus of mixture (the generational point at which the first known interracial union occurred in a family tree – Song, 2017b; Morning, 2000), will often be known and linked with a non-White ancestor in someone's family tree. Such questions about who is a visible minority, who is disadvantaged by their visibility as non-White, will increasingly engulf university campuses, the public sector, and the courts (see Warikoo, 2016). Britain is not Brazil, but these questions are not irrelevant for Britain or other multi-ethnic Western societies.

Visibility and minority status

Our perception of someone as a racialized minority (as somehow diverging from the 'norm' of Whiteness) involves a process of seeing someone's physical qualities and/or presentation as being of a particular and distinctive 'race', and this visual process has been central to the workings of social domination. However, this way of seeing is far from objective and of course contextually specific to the seer and the specific location and historical setting. What we see when we recognize people as being 'raced' is not in any way given, or obvious; this visual way of recognizing someone as being of a particular race is 'historically cultivated, enacted, and reproduced'. (Alcoff, 2006, p. 5).

While some definitions of minority status refer explicitly to race, many others do not, since minority status can be based upon various bases of disadvantage, such as religion and sexuality. Many definitions of minority status refer to a category of people who

experience relative disadvantage in relation to members of a dominant social group. For just one of many examples, according to the Cambridge dictionary, 'ethnic minority' refers to 'a group of people of a particular race or nationality living in a country or area where most people are from a different race or nationality'. Although many definitions of 'ethnic minority' do not state that such groups are, by definition, disadvantaged, in practice, the term ethnic minority has often suggested forms of disadvantage and marginality, often on the basis of their distinctiveness (whether phenotypical or presentational) from the wider society. As illustrated at the very beginning of this paper, political and administrative terms/categories that are meant to convey minority status abound, but they are often vague and slippery.

In Britain, Trevor Phillips, the former chairman of the [now defunct] Commission for Racial Equality has suggested that terms such as 'black minority ethnic' (BME), which are still in common usage in Britain, are now outdated and only served "to tidy away the messy jumble of real human beings who share only one characteristic – that they don't have white skin". (Okolosie, Harker, Green, & Dabiri, 2015). Yet other terms such as 'people of color' and 'visible minorities' are no more precise in terms of criteria for inclusion in non-White categories. One difficulty with all of these terms is that people of quite disparate ethnic and racial backgrounds (and appearances) and migration histories are all lumped together.

Even when we isolate our focus to phenotype based upon ethnic and racial backgrounds, there are ambiguities around who is visibly different, for instance in relation to Jews, Romany people, and many multiracial people. If being 'visible' is code for being non-White and/or non-Christian, what is the status of disadvantaged people who are read as phenotypically White? In Britain, many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people look phenotypically White, yet they are subject to denigrating racial imagery and stereotypes and their life expectancy is 12 years less than the general population and infant mortality three times higher (Okolosie, Harker, Green, & Dabiri, 2015). For such groups, Whiteness per se may not feel like much of a privilege. As such, while such groups are clearly disadvantaged, along many socioeconomic indicators, they are not racially 'visible' in the conventional sense.

Different dimensions of minority status are emerging as part of super-diversity (Vertovec, 2007) – minority status may be based on race, ethnicity, and/or religion, but it can also be based on diverse settlement and migration histories. The emergence of 'majority-minority' cities such as Amsterdam and Brussels requires a rethinking of the notion of what it means to be of 'minority' (and 'majority') status (Crul, 2015). Increasingly, we need to consider the multiple and intersecting bases and discourses around 'difference', belonging, and minority status. Existing terminology, such as 'minority' (or in Britain, 'Black minority ethnic'), is too crude to capture the growing heterogeneity in many contemporary societies.

For example, in Britain, a professional third generation Briton with Indian ancestry, a recently arrived Syrian refugee, or a first generation Slovakian migrant with limited means, all constitute an ethnic minority of sorts, but their visibility, and the specific ways in which that visibility is experienced, will differ considerably, depending on their presentation, their social and economic resources, the specific contexts in which they are seen. To refer to someone as visible, per se, does not tell us very much about the varied ways in which that visibility is characterized or experienced. Nor can we assume that visibility as a non-

White person automatically equates with socioeconomic deprivation or social and political marginality. Thus visibility is complex and interactive, not just a one-way process involving the perception and categorization of someone as somehow foreign, and/or non-White.

In this paper I argue that the demographic growth of multiracial people (of various racial 'mixes'), many of whom have some White ancestry, makes the question of who is (and isn't) a visible minority all the more pressing. With the growth of diverse multiracial populations, the idea of visible ethnic minorities (who are assumed to be straightforwardly non-White) cannot easily capture the varied phenotypes, racialized identities and experiences of multiracial people (see Edwards, Ali, Cabballero, & Song, 2012; King-O'Riain, Small, Mahtani, Song, & Spickard, 2014; Williams, 1996). In the case of multiracial people, especially those who are more genealogically distant from a non-White ancestor, their sense of selves, as non-White multiracial people, may not be apparent and validated by others – thus posing the question of whether being phenotypically visible as a non-White person is required for our understandings of minority status.

Why does the issue of visibility and its association with minority status matter in multi-ethnic societies? How do these demographic changes engender a need to rethink what we mean by minority status and in particular its link with visibility as non-White? These questions matter in terms of equality issues. The question of whether racially ambiguous or White looking multiracial people should be regarded as visible minorities (and their racial categorization as such) is critical, as many equality frameworks are premised on the White/non-White divide, and presume disadvantage on the basis of people being seen as either White or non-White (Feliciano, 2016).

In the USA, Camille Rich (2014) poses questions about how anti-discrimination law can and should apply to ' … [racially ambiguous] individuals as they attempt to control the terms on which their bodies are assigned racial meaning' (p. 1505). Because people, such as multiracial individuals, can self-identify in disparate ways (e.g. what choices people make on various administrative forms, or the racial identity someone adopts, publicly, in one's job) in different contexts, and over time, the application of anti-discrimination law is not uncomplicated. But these questions also matter for a more accurate sociological understanding of how people identify, and affiliate themselves, vis-à-vis others in an increasingly diverse society.

Changing and contested affiliations and memberships

Sociologists and other social scientists who study race and ethnicity have explored the ways in which beliefs about otherness develop, and are managed in society. For instance, how do some groups become stigmatised as 'others', and how do such ideas become contested and change over time? One key basis for being othered is racial visibility, especially in terms of being marked by skin color and other phenotypical features, which are very important in shaping racial assignment and how people are attributed certain stock qualities.

How people see you, racially, can fundamentally constrain people's ability to assert their desired racial and ethnic identities (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001; Khanna,

2004; Roth, 2016). For instance, if one looks White, according to prevailing societal norms, it is difficult for people to claim mixed ancestries (Aspinall & Song 2013) [1]. Conversely, if one looks Black, one's stated identification, for instance, as a Norwegian person with Black ancestry, is very likely to be refuted (Waters, 1990; Waters, 1999). However, other scholars have also argued that ethnic minorities do make ethnic and racial assertions, and do not entirely lack ethnic options (Song, 2003). Thus, the premise -- that race is an obvious given -- is problematic, especially given the growth of multiracial people, as well as the degree of phenotypical heterogeneity within so-called races. As Cornell and Hartmann (2007) aptly pose: 'How much physical diversity can one race contain before the category ceases to make any sense at all?' (p. 33).

It is important that a reductive measure of phenotypical 'visibility' as a White or non-White looking person is not conceived of in isolation, as one's visibility as a racialized being (to others) is subjective, and is mediated by multiple factors, such as gender and class. In *Mind, Self and Society*, George Herbert Mead (1934) argued that our social identities are created through our ongoing social interactions with other people, and that those exchanges with others then influence our sense of selves. One's racial appearance is interpreted, and is based on others' social perception of that person and that person's physical characteristics. The observer's perception of others, in turn, is profoundly shaped by the specific contexts in which such perception occurs, as well as the background characteristics of the observer. Therefore, the same 'visible' person can be seen in a variety of ways, depending upon the observer, the context, and the particular presentation of the individual in that given instance (Song & Aspinall, 2012).

Building on Mead (1934) (and Cooley 1902), 'reflected appraisal' is the process by which people's sense of selves are influenced by how they believe others seem them, especially in racial terms (see Khanna, 2004; Roth, 2016). While we are not able to control how others see us in many fleeting and largely anonymous interactions, some multiracial people do contest and 'correct' the ways in which others racially assign them (Aspinall & Song, 2013; Mengel, 2001; Mahtani & Moreno, 2001). Thus people are not passive recipients of the ways in which they are seen by others. In fact, recent research points to the many ways in which multiracial people (who wish to be seen in a particular way) engage in forms of identity work to assert their chosen identifications, whether this be in the form of their modes of presentation (dress, speech, emphasis of certain physical attributes), or their choice of friends and association (see Song, 2017a; Aspinall & Song, 2013; Khanna & Johnson, 2010).

Some mixed people, especially later generation multiracial people, may wish to hide, not assert, their *White* ancestry. For instance, 'biracial' Americans with Black and White ancestries, who may have concerns about being seen as inauthentically Black, may consciously work at 'passing as Black' (Khanna & Johnson, 2010). In fact, there is a growing disjuncture between how blackness is defined institutionally and socially. For example, admissions staff at universities may not differentiate between monoracial and multiracial black people, but there is increasing evidence that black/white mixed people can be seen as distinct from monoracial black people across a variety of settings (see Khanna & Johnson, 2010; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Smith & Moore, 2010).

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[1]Some analysts conceive of race as assigned and ethnicity as more voluntarily chosen and asserted (see Cornell & Hartmann, 2007).

Thankfully, the imposition of a 'one drop rule' of hypodescent is much less in force today, but this does not mean that racially ambiguous or White looking mixed people are necessarily able to enjoy a full array of ethnic options, or gain acceptance into their desired ethnic groups.

Nor can one's phenotype, in isolation, be assumed to tell us whether people see themselves or identify, or live their lives, in any particular way -- which then maps neatly onto a status as part of *either* the majority or minority. While being seen, and racially assigned, as visibly non-White, will continue to be an important indicator of inequality and racial stigma, increasingly, the question is not whether multiracial people are or are not visible minorities, but *in what ways* **they may or may not be visible**, and what the implications of such visibility (or non-visibility) are, as visibility may not always be unwanted or negative. The phenotypical characteristics of multiracial people (and people more generally), in isolation, cannot be assumed to be an accurate and effective proxy for disadvantaged minority status, or an indicator of how they 'lean' toward (or away from) specific ethnic ancestries (Song, 2019).

The issue of visibility as a non-White racialized person is further complicated by the fact that, increasingly, people's affiliations/identifications are not necessarily based on their birth families and ancestries (Brubaker, 2016; Morning, 2018). For instance, Jimenez (2010) has argued that there are growing instances of 'affiliative ethnicity', in which 'an individual identity rooted in knowledge, regular consumption and deployment of an ethnic culture that is unconnected to an individual's ethnic ancestry' can result in that individual regarding herself (and may be regarded by others), as an affiliate of a particular ethnic group. Such affiliative ethnicity reflects a more 'elastic link between ethnic ancestry and culture', based upon heightened forms of interethnic contact and a growing recognition and celebration of hybrid cultural forms (Jimenez, 2010). Instances of contestations about racial authenticity and racial memberships – most of which are far less controversial than that of Rachel Dolezal, who claimed to be and feel African American, despite having two White American birth parents – will only increase in the coming years. Dolezal's case points to assertions of ethnic and racial membership which are based upon affiliative ethnicity and lived experiences, and not upon one's racial phenotype and actual parentage.

Thus the question of minority status and one's visibility as a non-White person is further complicated by growing contestations around the ways in which people identify and claim membership in specific ethnic minority groups (Brubaker, 2016; Morning, 2018). As Brubaker has argued, the taken-for-grantedness of existing categories are increasingly interrogated and categories that have seemed 'obvious' in the past are now characterized by flux and instability. The assumed validity of ethnic and racial categories as denoting clear and distinctive phenotypes is increasingly in question. So while we are still acutely attune to phenotypical characteristics that are interpreted (whether consciously or not) as racial differences, there are now more scenarios where the perception of specific phenotypes is less straightforwardly linked with membership in particular racial groups. This is especially the case with the fast growth of multiracial people in multi-ethnic societies.

The phenotypical and experiential diversity of multiracial people

The 2011 England and Wales census reported that 2.2% of the population was 'mixed', though this is almost certainly a significant undercount, as some mixed people (by

parentage) may not have marked one of the 'mixed' subcategories (Platt, 2012). According to demographers, by 2020, mixed people will be one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in Britain, so that they will have grown by more than 80% compared with 2001, when the 'mixed' category was first introduced in the England and Wales census (Bradford, 2006). In the USA, according to the 2010 US Census, the population reporting multiple races (9.0 million) grew by 32% in 2010, compared with the 6.8 million who did so in 2000.

With growing diversity, the neat convention of conceiving of people as either visible minorities or not is increasingly complicated by the growth of multiracial people. In the USA, Richard Alba and colleagues (Alba, 2018) argue: 'Given the high proportion of ethno-racial mixtures that involve majority and minority parents, we have to ask whether it is reasonable to regard mixed individuals in wholesale fashion as minorities, or even to impose the majority/minority dichotomy on them in the first place.' (p. 32) While Alba and his colleagues are not referring specifically to their phenotypes, they rightly observe that binary terms such as 'majority' and 'minority' are unable to capture the status and experiences of many multiracial people.

Considerable scholarship has concerned the racial positioning of multiracial people vis-à-vis White and monoracial minority people, and the privileges associated with Whiteness (DaCosta, 2007; Mengel, 2001; Park, 1928; Spencer, 2006). On the whole, Black/White people are more readily seen as monoracially Black, and thus subject to more prejudice and discrimination (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Dalmage, 2000; Khanna, 2011; Aspinall & Song, 2013). Some scholars of race in the US have argued that non-Black multiracial people are often seen by others as White or more likely to self identify as White (see Alba, Beck, & Sahin, 2017; Lee & Bean, 2004; Lee & Bean, 2007; Yancey, 2006). However, when we examine the findings of qualitative studies, what we learn about part Asian multiracial people is less conclusive. Qualitative research about non-Black multiracials reveals significant diversity in how such mixed people identify, and relate to, their White, Asian, and Latino ancestries, respectively (see Chang, 2016; Chong, 2013; Song, 2019; Standen, 1996; Vasquez, 2011), and there are still only a limited number of qualitative studies that have *compared* disparate types of multiracial experiences (see Tashiro 2016; Aspinall & Song, 2013; Strmic-Pawl, 2016).

Numerous studies have found that multiracial people of various racial mixes can be seen as racially ambiguous, and thus not easily categorized into existing racial categories (see Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Tizard & Phoenix, 1993; King & DaCosta, 1996; Aspinall & Song, 2013; Root, 1996; Spickard, 1989). In fact, scholars have found that multiracial people are characterized by a huge range of phenotypes (Root, 1996; Williams, 1996; King-O'Riain, 2006; Rondilla & Spickard, 2007; Aspinall & Song, 2013; Song, 2010). For example, Kip Fulbeck's (2006) photographs of 'Hapa' people (East Asian & White) show a very diverse range of phenotypical features, including people who look entirely White, those who might be seen to be 'Latina/o', 'fully' Asian, or somehow racially ambiguous.

Yet our knowledge of the multiracial population in contemporary multi-ethnic societies, especially knowledge about their friendships, partners, and their day to day lives at work, or with their children, is quite limited. In their survey of attitudes toward multiracial people in the US, Campbell & Herman (2010) found that about half of the

monoracial minorities and most of the White respondents they surveyed did not think that multiracial people should be included in anti-discrimination policies in the US. Though this survey did not differentiate between disparate types of multiracial people, this finding suggests that most Americans do not believe that multiracial people actually experience racial discrimination or forms of racial disadvantage – despite the fact that the authors found that the multiracial people in their survey reported similar levels of discrimination to other monoracial minorities (Smith & Moore, 2010). As Campbell and Herman (2010) note, the findings of this survey are at odds with findings from qualitative studies that show that many mixed people (of various 'mixes') report forms of racial stigma at various points in their lives. It is clearly difficult to generalize about multiracial people as a whole.

However, one potential commonality is that the standpoints of multiracial people may be revealing, since they are not fully a member of any one monoracial group, leading to a heightened awareness or concern about racial identification and belonging (Parker & Song, 2001; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005; Root, 1992; Root, 1996). And unlike monoracial minorities, such as African Americans (with no *known* recent non-Black ancestors), multiracial individuals may encounter prejudice and forms of racial hostility from both sides – from both White people and from monoracial minority communities (see Herman, 2004; Mengel, 2001; Root, 1996). Their 'in-between' status, in relation to monoracial groups, may mean that their sense of social distance, both vis-à-vis White people and monoracial minority groups, is variable and subject to many factors, such as physical appearance, their exposure to minority and White people growing up, and class background (see Fhagen-Smith, 2010; Smith & Moore, 2010).

If we query whether and in what ways mixed people may occupy a visible minority status, it is important to consider the situationally specific ways in which the salience of their mixedness may vary, rather than remain constant. Various scholars of multiracial people have found that many multiracial people can identify themselves changeably in different contexts (Harris & Sim, 2002; Lopez, 2003; Song, 2017b), and are also racially assigned by others inconsistently (see Song & Aspinall 2012; Sims, 2016; Khanna, 2011; Mengel, 2001). The Office for National Statistics Longitudinal Study found that less than half of those who chose one of the 'Mixed' categories in the 2001 England and Wales census (the year the 'Mixed' category was introduced) had used the free text option to identify themselves as mixed in the 1991 census, when there was no 'Mixed' category (Platt, Simpson, & Akinwale, 2005).

Furthermore, studies of multiracial people have shown that their racial appearance, identifications and affiliations may change over the life course (Tashiro, 2011). For instance, while a multiracial person may not feel much attachment to or interest in a specific minority heritage at one point in her life, she may alter how she identifies or feels about being multiracial at another point in her life. For instance, in their study of multiracial young adults in higher education in England, Aspinall and Song (2013) discuss the case of Leo, who had been dismayed by being seen as Middle Eastern, and foreign, when he was growing up in a semi-rural part of England. But Leo reported that upon starting university in London, he came to embrace his Iranian heritage, and wished to be seen as mixed and Iranian, after meeting a panoply of ethnically diverse peers at his university. At university, Leo liked being visibly different, and being ethnically distinctive.

Thus far, studies about being a visible minority have focused upon the stigma and disadvantages associated with being visibly non-White; however, mixed peoples' visibility is experienced very variably, and their visibility as non-White may not always be a liability, and may be gendered. Prior studies have pointed to the fetishization of multiracial women on the basis of their ambiguous racial appearance (see Sims, 2012; Waring, 2013). For some, visibility as a non-White 'other' is reported as positive (Curington, Lin, & Lundquist, 2015; Song, 2010); For instance, a recent study of online dating in the US found that *both* multiracial men and women enjoyed a 'premium' in the online dating market, as they were often preferred by both monoracial minority and White daters (Curington et al., 2015).

Multigeneration multiracials: a lack of visibility

Another significant, yet understudied dimension to the growing heterogeneity of the multiracial population concerns the growth of multigeneration multiracial people – people who are the children or grandchildren of a multiracial person (Song, 2017b; Morning & Saperstein 2018). Most studies have focused on 1st generation multiracial people – that is, someone who has parents of two racially distinct backgrounds (e.g. Asian and White). But as 1st generation multiracial people partner (many of whom are White individuals) and have children themselves, some of their 2nd gen. children will look White, and their non-White ancestries will be obscured or invisible to others (Song, 2017a). With the not insignificant growth of 2nd generation multiracial people, the assumed relationship between visibility (as non-White) and minority ancestry may no longer hold. While this lack of visibility as someone with one or more non-White ancestors is inconsequential for some people, we cannot assume that it is the case for multiracial people more generally.

Up until recently, being involuntarily visible (as non-White) has been understood as a liability for people, and associated with forms of ill-treatment and stigma. However, claims to being multiracial can now be refuted on the basis of a lack of phenotypical visibility as a non-White person. This latter scenario is becoming more common, especially in the case of later- generation multiracial people who have mostly White ancestry.

In an article entitled: 'Helping my fair-skinned son embrace his Blackness', Myra Jones-Taylor, who has Black and White ancestries, writes (Atlantic 2018): 'I am a black woman married to a white man. Our 13-year-old son looks white—blond-haired, blue-eyed, straight-nosed, thin-lipped, fair-skinned white—but he identifies as black.' Such a scenario is no longer unusual, given the number of multiracial people who become parents, and who have White partners. The author tells us that she made herself present at her son's school in order to provide a form of visual proof of his Black lineage: 'My volunteerism [at school] was as much a display of parent engagement as it was a subconscious way of helping my children assert their blackness.'

This multiracial mother's concerns about the disconnect between her son's White appearance and his reported identification as a Black person illustrates the tenacity of norms about phenotype and racial authenticity (Song, 2003): Strong unwritten rules about whether later generation mixed people are able to claim a minority heritage are very much in operation, so those who look White cannot easily claim a minority or clearly 'ethnic' identity, or even name, as shown below.

In a study of multiracial people who are parents (Song, 2017a), one participant, Rose, who had a Chinese father and White English mother, spoke about the unwritten rules concerning phenotype and racial appearance, when it came to choosing a name for her son:

> I remember thinking I won't give him [her son] a Chinese name because he doesn't look Chinese and it will just be weird and awkward and people will be constantly asking him so there was a lot attached to the sense of … of … of well, it's the classic race concept in terms of it's about heritage and genes and what you look like.

Someone who is multiracial may (or may not) make a concerted effort to cultivate a connection with a minority heritage, for instance in relation to their choice of spouse and the upbringing of their children (Song, 2017a). We know that later generations of multiracial people (2nd or 3rd generation multiracial) are less likely to identify with more than one race (Morning, 2018; Aspinall & Song, 2013; Song, 2017a). Nevertheless, some later generation multiracial people *do* identify as mixed or in relation to a minority ancestry, and for some, not being recognized and validated as mixed can be a source of pain, especially if their identities and lived experiences *are* as mixed individuals, with strong attachments to their non-White family and ancestries.

In the same study of multiracial people who are parents, Song (2017a) found that most multiracial individuals (with White partners) insisted that their 2nd generation multiracial children (many of whom looked White to others) were and should be identified as multiracial too, despite the generational distance from their non-White ancestor (usually one of the 4 grandparents). Thus studies that point to the expanding boundaries of Whiteness (Alba et al., 2017; Lee & Bean, 2004) should not assume that first and second generation multiracial people (with mostly White ancestry) *want* to be seen as White.

Just as there is emerging evidence of third generation 'migrants' who are *more* likely to identify themselves in relation to their minority heritage than their second generation counterparts (see Jimenez, Park, & Pedroza, 2018), it would be erroneous to automatically assume that later generation multiracials who look White are simply White in their identifications and life choices. If people only use racial phenotype (as non-White) as a marker of minority identity and status, then this can obscure a great deal about this person, their history, their affiliations and their lived experiences more generally.

Discussion and conclusion

As the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah (2016) notes, our system of racial classification '[It] presupposes an extremely oversimplified picture of the relationship among ancestry, appearance, biology and culture. A lot of people have social circumstances and ancestry that don't fit into it.' With the growth in interracial unions and multiracial people in many multi-ethnic societies, along with continuing streams of immigration, our extant systems of racial classification, and the terms that are used to denote a minority status, are increasingly unable to capture the diversity contained within such categories, or the reality of people's experiences and lives – even at one point in time.

The issue of visibility, in terms of diverging from the norm of Whiteness, is still important: We need to counter claims that society is becoming more color-blind. This is

not borne out in studies which show that our propensity to racially stereotype people on the basis of their phenotypical characteristics is often automatic and deeply internalized, and will shape our perceptions and interactions with others in many contexts. Critics of identity politics – what philosopher Linda Alcoff calls 'the general anti-identity trend of current (mainly white-dominant) public discourses' (Alcoff, 2006, p. 5) – have for some decades pushed back against the belief that race or gender constitute a fundamental 'master status'. Although scholars, such as Patricia William (1997), see the idea of color-blindness 'as a legitimate hope for the future', she ultimately refutes the discourse, as does Amy Gutmann (1996), who argues for the importance of remaining 'color conscious', in order to address social justice. According to Gutmann, adopting color blind policies would be unfair in a society that does not actually operate in a color blind fashion.

While it is now de rigeur to acknowledge the ways in which 'race' is discursively and socially constructed, the embodiment of race must not be overlooked – people's corporeal selves, upon which others racialize them, are still a constant in most mixed people's lives, and the single most important factor in shaping how others see, and categorize, them. Thus, while one's phenotype is mediated by modes of presentation and interaction that are variable, one's racial appearance will still be highly influential in how one is perceived and treated by others, especially in public settings in which there is limited information about such persons. Nevertheless, rejecting simplistic notions of color-blindness does not preclude the possibility that we can work to 'unlearn racial seeing' (Alcoff, ch. 4, p. 3).

In the not too distant future, with the growth of multiracial people of many different racial mixes and phenotypes, and people who are several generations removed from a non-White ancestor, claims to a multiracial and non-White identity may challenge the traditional requirement that one is visibly non-White to claim a multiracial or minority identity. Conventional understandings of minority status – as 'obviously' non-White and connoting a stigmatized, disadvantaged status, will thus require rethinking; some people whose multiracial ancestors are not visible may still claim forms of minority membership and identifications. And some of these people will not be socially or economically disadvantaged (see Panico & Nazroo, 2011).

It is now difficult to talk about who is a 'visible' minority in a taken for granted way – given the highly heterogeneous nature of the multiracial population, both in terms of disparate racial mixes, and the variable generational locus of mixture. Many racially mixed people are regarded by others as racially ambiguous. Not only do phenotype and specific racial ancestries matter, but class and habitus mediate people's perceptions and experiences of their 'race' and how they are seen and treated by others. Thus visibility (as measured in terms of skin color, or other racially marked physical characteristics) in isolation from other factors, may provide too limited and static a picture of the ways in which people experience their reflected appraisals and interactions with others in their day to day lives. There is also growing evidence of the instability in how many multiracial people are seen.

Increasingly, we need to move away from characterizing multiracial people's experiences in a binary fashion, in relation to majority and minority, or Whiteness or non-Whiteness, as being mixed becomes more and more common. Indeed, the whole notion of being a 'visible minority' will need further qualification – visible how, and

where, and when? Visibility is highly contextual and may have multiple valences, some positive and some negative, and certain assumptions about someone's affiliations and identities cannot be extrapolated on the basis of a perceived phenotype.

Minority status cannot be straightforwardly discerned on the basis of one's physical appearance alone, in isolation from one's lived life – who one partners with, where one lives, how one raises their children. Is someone who is Asian/White and who looks mostly White but married to an Asian person then part of the 'majority' because of his or her appearance? Thus far, there is a paucity of qualitative studies that reveal such life choices among many multiracial people, including whether they experience forms of racial prejudice and discrimination. For many multiracial people, the binary of majority/minority will not make much sense (Alba, 2018), as such multiracial people may not relate to either of these terms, especially those who live in more ethnically diverse areas, where being multiracial is perhaps unremarkable (Song, 2017a).

While there is significant evidence that some multiracial people are not recognized as mixed, either because they are only seen as monoracial minorities, or seen as White, it is possible and even likely that as the multiracial population keeps growing, their visibility *as multiracial*, as distinct from White and monoracial minority people, may grow. In the past, critics of a 'multiracial' category/status, such as Rainier Spencer (2006), have argued that the recognition of mixed people would create a further stigmatization of Black people (who were not known to be mixed). But what the perception of such people, as multiracial, implies, for racial hierarchies, is still far from obvious. Given the sustained growth in 'mixing' in many multi-ethnic societies, as well as the significant diversity in class backgrounds among multiracial and monoracial minority communities, we need to de-couple the automatic linking of racial visibility (as non-White) with a disadvantaged minority status. And with the growth of later generation multiracial people, we cannot simply make assumptions about the relative salience of racial identities or their lived experiences.

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