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Understanding multiethnic and multiracial experiences globally: towards a conceptual framework of mixedness

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ABSTRACT

This special issue brings together nine articles on the experiences of multiracial and multiethnic individuals from nine different countries across the globe – the United Kingdom, Sweden, Ireland, Spain, Canada, the United States, Japan, Singapore and Israel. The articles in this volume address the diverse experiences of the identification, socialising and mainstreaming of multiethnic and multiracial individuals in different national contexts. The collection consists of both qualitative and quantitative research from various disciplines in the social sciences and thus contributes to an interdisciplinary understanding and a multi-method approach to this reality. Through a cross-country analysis of the results provided by each paper, this Introduction proposes a conceptual framework for better understanding the realities of mixedness globally.

KEYWORDS

Mixed identity; critical mixed race; multiracial; multiethnic; intermarriage; conceptual model

Introduction

The April 2018 special issue of *National Geographic* entitled ‘Black and White’ featured on its cover two biracial fraternal twins, one of whom looked phenotypically white, while the other looked phenotypically black.¹ The cover story about these two sisters makes us rethink concepts of race and belonging. It shows how people’s appearance, especially the colour of their skin, defines how we identify them. Even though today we all understand that race holds no genetic meaning (Lewontin, Rose, and Kamin 1985) and that a person’s capabilities and intelligence are not defined by race, race, together with gender, is still one of the most significant forms of categorisation that we use in society. For multiracial and multiethnic persons, as the *National Geographic*’s Race Issue cover story illustrates, the questioning of their belonging is something *real* that they face in their social spheres. So while the ontological argument is clear that race is a social construct, it must be understood that race, and ethnicity too, are *social facts* with *real* effects on people’s everyday lives (Bonilla-Silva 1999; Song 2018; Telles and Paschel 2014). Racism, racialisation and other variants of the ‘race phenomenon’ that are based on perceptions of phenotypes exist because the notion of race is structurally embedded in social, political, economic and cultural institutions (Bonilla-Silva 1999).

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In many countries, especially through colonisation, mixed populations have existed and are not a new phenomenon. Nonetheless, mixed marriages and mixed persons have been problematised throughout history. On the one hand, the idea of people mixing and ‘whitening’ has sometimes been promoted, particularly in colonial contexts, while, on the other hand, such marriages have been prohibited or highly discouraged for fear of degeneration on the mainland. The establishment of anti-miscegenation laws historically put mixed marriages and mixed persons in vulnerable positions and gave them an illegal or non-citizen status (e.g. De Hart 2015; Lee and Edmonston 2005; Rodríguez-García 2013). Most notably in the United States, among other widespread segregation efforts, interracial marriages were forbidden in many states; the related ‘one-drop rule’ was also implemented to prevent mixed-race people (especially those with distant African ancestry who could pass as white) from partnering with whites and from having access to the same rights and privileges as whites (Davis 1991). Even in countries that did not have any official anti-miscegenation laws, the idea of mixed marriages commonly was, and still often is, seen as taboo, and people of mixed origin have historically been pathologised and stereotyped (see, for example, Osanami Törngren 2011 on Sweden, and Thompson 2009 on Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal unions in Canada).

Increased international mobility and interaction between people of different origins have brought about a significant increase in the number of both mixed partnerships and the descendants of these unions in contemporary society (Alba, Beck, and Basaran Sahin 2018a, 2018b; Irastorza, Osanami Törngren, and Song 2016; Parker et al. 2015; Rodríguez-García 2006, 2015; Wang 2012). It is undeniable that population prognoses predict that mixed populations will continue to grow and that the ‘beige majority’ (Lind 1998) is emerging. Looking at some of the countries that are presented in this special issue, in the United States, 2.4% of the total population in 2012 identified themselves as mixed (US Census Bureau 2012). Significantly, one in seven babies born in the US today is multiracial or multiethnic (Bialik 2017), and the white majority there will become the minority by the year 2045 (Frey 2018). In Sweden, in 2016, 7% of the entire population born in the country were the children of binational marriages, having one Swedish-born and one foreign-born parent (Statistics Sweden 2017). The native population with two Swedish-born parents is no longer the numerical majority when we look at the population under 18 in Sweden’s three biggest cities, Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö (Statistics Sweden 2017). In Japan, around 2% of babies born in 2016 were classified as mixed based on the parents’ citizenship (Statistics of Japan 2016). Finally, in Spain, according to data from the Spanish Statistics Office (2019), the children of binational unions rose from 3% of the total number of births in 1997 to 11% in 2017.

Scope and objectives of the volume

While intermarriage has been a widely studied topic in the literature for more than a century (for a comprehensive literature review, see Osanami Törngren, Irastorza, and Song 2016; Rodríguez-García 2015), researchers have paid less attention to the next generation – that is, the multiethnic and multiracial descendants of mixed couples, who constitute, as some scholars argue, an ‘overlooked category’ (Bang Appel and Singla 2016, 139). There are still many unanswered questions about the lived experiences,

identifications and social outcomes of the multiethnic and multiracial descendants of intermarriages:

- What are the individual and contextual factors that determine whether a person is ‘mixed’ or not?
- Are there different, as well as similar, experiences of being ‘mixed’ depending on factors such as ethnicity, race, religion, class or gender?
- Are there disparities and similarities between different countries or regions in all these processes?
- How do individual and contextual factors interact and affect multiracial and multiethnic experiences?

The growing field of mixed-race studies, pioneered by the work of Paul Spickard (1989) and Maria Root (1992, 1996) on multiracial people in America, needs to continue developing in an increasingly socially and culturally complex and interconnected world (King-O’Riain et al. 2014). In the existing literature, the identity processes, socialising and mainstreaming of new generations of multiethnic and multiracial individuals are still very unclear. On one level, mixed-background people have been celebrated as a bridge between cultural, ethnic and racial boundaries. Their mixed, multiple, multicultural or hybrid identities are thought to (1) contribute to the ‘destabilising’ (Hollinger 2008) or ‘blurring’ (Alba 2009) of the racial and ethnic divide that may exist in society; (2) advance a post-racial (Ali 2003) and colour-blind world – what Michael Lind (1998) has called a ‘beige majority’; and (3) enhance the attractiveness and marketability of the ‘Generation EA (Ethnically Ambiguous)’ (La Ferla 2003; see also DaCosta 2007). However, some recent research indicates that we are not heading toward a ‘post-racial’ ideal. Indeed, we are seeing that mixed-background youth may face discrimination and racialisation in the society of their birth. In some cases, they may experience an ‘identity mismatch’ between their self-identification and their ascribed or externally assigned identification (e.g. Daniel and Newman 2015; Franco, Katz, and O’Brien 2016; Roth 2016; Song 2017a; Song and Aspinall 2012; Tutwiler 2016; see also contributions by Chito Childs, Lyons, and Jones 2019; King-O’Riain 2019; Osanami Törngren and Sato 2019; Rodríguez-García et al. 2019; Song 2019, in this volume).

Studies on mixedness have traditionally been conducted in English-speaking countries, and the focus of the mix has largely been concentrated on the black/white dichotomy (e.g. Brunisma and Rockquemore 2001; Dalmage 2000; Davenport 2018; Khanna 2010; O’Donoghue 2004). Yet, there is an increasing body of literature analysing mixedness outside the English-speaking context as well as focusing on different types of mixing that include more racial, ethnic or religious variations (see Gonzalez-Sobrino and Goss 2019; Osanami Törngren 2018a; Rocha et al. 2019; Rondilla, Guevarra, and Spickard 2017; Song and Aspinall 2012; see also Rodríguez-García et al. 2019 and Song 2019 in this volume). Furthermore, edited volumes that apply a global comparative perspective to mixedness have tried to bridge the global divide in research that exists between English-speaking settings and non-English-speaking or non-European contexts (see, e.g., Chito Childs 2018; Edwards et al. 2012; King-O’Riain et al. 2014; Rocha and Fozdar 2017).

Scholars have questioned whether there is too much difference between the different contexts to find common ground for comparing the experiences of multiethnic and

multiracial people (e.g. Chito Childs 2014). Undeniably, many differences exist between continents, countries and regions – and even between cities in the same country or province – because of historic, demographic, political or cultural variations. One factor that poses some of the biggest challenges to the comparative examination of global mixed experience is the varying understandings of race and ethnicity across context. Moreover, these differing perceptions affect processes of racialisation within a given place and form the bases of institutionalised and everyday racism and discrimination in different world settings. Indeed, the lived experiences of mixed persons are shaped by these national (or regional) racial ideologies and national racial paradigms, which vary greatly across different countries, as can be observed in the majority of contributions in this volume.

At the same time, other researchers investigating mixed-background individuals have pointed out the emergence of ‘a commonality of experience (often exclusionary from both of the communities of descent) that spans the globe with increasing efficiency and speed’ and a consequent ‘hybrid space’ (King-O’Riain et al. 2014, 277). In Song’s (2017b) study on multiracial parents conducted in the UK, she also finds that some of her interviewees reported a sense of commonality based on their experiences of being mixed, although others did not (2017b, 141). Song’s study, while carried out in a single country – the UK – indeed shows the complexity in understanding the similarities and differences in mixed experiences.

In this special issue, we attempt to find commonalities across the wide-ranging experiences of multiethnic and multiracial people and argue that this type of comparative analysis of mixedness in different settings is crucial to advancing our knowledge of this complex reality. We take up the challenge of conceptualising mixedness across the globe by bringing together nine articles from nine very different countries – the United Kingdom, Sweden, Ireland, Spain, Canada, the United States, Japan, Singapore and Israel. This broad selection allows for meaningful international and transcontinental comparisons of experiences, while emphasising the need for a global framework for understanding mixedness.

The articles in this issue address the diverse experiences of the identification, socialising and mainstreaming of multiethnic and multiracial individuals in different national contexts. The collection comprises both qualitative and quantitative research and incorporates various methodological and analytical approaches from a number of disciplines in the social sciences, thus contributing to an interdisciplinary understanding of this research area. While being aware of the difficulties of nuancing and finding commonalities between the heterogeneous experiences of mixed people worldwide, this Introduction provides a cross-country meta-analysis of the results produced by each paper, enabling a conceptual framework to emerge for the analysis of mixedness globally.

From a theoretical point of view, the novelty of this special issue is that it goes beyond simplistic notions of mixedness by including contributions that show both positive and negative outcomes – that is, highlighting the socially transformative value of multiethnicity and multiracialism, while warning about the persistence of the racialised divisiveness that hinders social inclusion and cohesion. This outlook offers a middle ground – showing the advantages and unique identity developments among mixed populations while not idealising mixedness in itself as a panacea for social harmony (Parker and Song 2001).

The challenges of defining and identifying ‘mixedness’

The term ‘mixedness’ has become more prevalent in the past several years when addressing the limitations of classic terminology related to intermarriage. ‘Mixedness is a broader term that encompasses and expands on ideas of intermarriage, multiculturalism, assimilation and the end products of immigration’ (Rodríguez-García 2016, 1; see also Collet 2015; Varro 2003; Yeoh, Acedera, and Rootham 2019). In this Introduction, we use ‘mixedness’ as an encompassing concept that refers to individuals of mixed descent, across national, racial, ethnocultural or religious boundaries (Osanami Törngren, Irastorza, and Song 2016; Rodríguez-García 2015), and to the sociocultural processes involved. In other words, this term refers not just to demographic outcomes and patterns of mixing but also to the processes and social meanings involved (i.e. identity processes, everyday construction of cultural hybridity, and the contestation of social categories and norms).

Just as race is a constructed category, the idea of what constitutes ‘mixing’ itself can also be contested (e.g. Aspinall and Song 2013; Rocha 2018). To start with, determining whether or not a person or a couple is considered ‘mixed’ is context-dependent and relates directly to how we conceptualise groups and boundaries. The notion of ‘mixing’ draws on a preconception of individuals and groups as somehow being ‘pure’ and static (Rodríguez-García 2015, 11). Moreover, how we conceptualise mixing depends on which variable we choose to categorise individuals – whether race, ethnicity, religion or nationality, among others. For example, an individual of Chinese and Japanese descent would not be considered mixed if both parents were grouped under the broad category ‘Asian’. Further, the significance of mixing depends on the extent of stratification and segmentation that exist in a given context, whether in economic, social, ethnic, racial or religious terms. The more stratified the society is, the more meaningful the act and consequence of mixing becomes (ibid., 10). For instance, a multiracial individual will seem more socially transgressive and be much more visible and controversial in ethnographically homogeneous societies than in more diverse ones.

Mixed populations are, therefore, born through diverse forms of intermarriage, which, in itself, is also defined in different ways. In more traditional immigration countries such as the US, Canada and the UK, a significant number of mixed populations are the descendants of native-born couples whose union is interethnic, interracial or interreligious in character. On the contrary, in the more recent countries of immigration, a large part of the mixed populations are the children of binational couples, having one native-born and one foreign-born parent; they are sometimes referred to as ‘first-generation’ multiracial individuals (Daniel et al. 2014). The generational structure of the mixed population can be a factor shaping individuals’ self-identifications as mixed, especially in traditional migration countries (Morning and Saperstein 2018; see also contributions in this special issue by Chito Childs, Lyons, and Jones 2019; Rocha and Yeoh 2019).

Another key theme affecting what constitutes ‘mixed populations’ is a long-standing theoretical discussion on race and ethnicity and the post-racial and colour-blind ideal. The choice of nations to foreground race and ethnicity or to eschew such classifications impacts on how mixed populations are defined and represented in national statistics (see, for example, Alba and Nee 2018; Aspinall 2018; Masuoka 2018; Morning and Saperstein 2018 for English-speaking countries; and Rocha 2018; Rocha and Aspinall 2020; and Yeoh, Acedera, and Rootham 2019 for other countries across the world).

While gathering self-reported data on racial and ethnic categories is a normal practice in English-speaking contexts (including Singapore – see Rocha and Yeoh 2019 in this volume), this is not the case in most European and some other non-European countries (Rocha and Aspinall 2020; Simon 2017; see Osanami Törngren and Sato 2019 on Japan, this volume), where the term ‘race’ became a tainted and taboo concept after the experience of WWII. In countries that resist the collection of statistical data on race and/or ethnicity, citizenship or country of birth and parental country of birth usually become proxies for ethnicity, race and mixedness, as the European contributions in this special issue suggest. Such a decision rests on the principle of non-discrimination and colour-blindness as an ideal (see Osanami Törngren 2018b; Rodríguez-García et al. 2019, in this volume; Simon 2017). Notably, though, even in (frequently multicultural) English-speaking countries that collect data on race, there is often a theoretical prevailing notion of a post-racial state where, owing to great diversity, race does not matter (Bonilla-Silva and Ray 2016; St Louis 2016).

However, it is clear from previous research and the articles in this special issue that race-consciousness and social prejudices based on an individual’s phenotype endure in most societies (see also Hunter 2007). ‘Whiteness’, though it may be defined differently across national contexts (see, for example, the cases of Japan, Spain and Ireland in this volume), is frequently central to national identity and the nation’s power structure. It is a mechanism for dominance and socio-ethnic stratification: the norm that affords privilege and unquestioned belonging, against which persons with a non-white or ‘deviating’ phenotype, which often includes mixed individuals, are cast as ‘foreign’, even in contexts where racial difference is not supposed to exist or matter. Phenotype should thus be understood as a construct that has no meanings in itself until we perceive them and whose interpretations vary according to context (Daynes and Lee 2008; see also Roth 2016).

Further affecting how mixed people are defined is the complication that in countries where statistics on race and/or ethnicity are available, the census and survey categories referring to racial and ethnic groups vary greatly and are often contentious. For example, in Canada, ‘Arab’ is presented as a possible self-identification choice while, in the US, after much debate, ‘Middle East and North African groups’ (MENA) will not be a separate racial category in the 2020 census. Moreover, ‘Asians’ may be used to refer to East Asians in the Canadian and US contexts, while this same label refers to South Asian (Indian and Pakistani) populations in the UK (read more about Canada, the US and Britain in Alba and Reitz 2019, and Song 2019, in this volume). Furthermore, there is an ongoing debate about the validity of such self-reported census or survey statistics: research shows that people who mark multiple race responses do not always do so in every census or survey (e.g. Aspinall 2018; see Alba and Reitz 2019, this volume). However, rather than being assessed in terms of accuracy, this variable self-reporting could also reflect the flexible nature of identity among mixed populations (Deaux 2018).

Regardless of whether mixed people are located in countries that officially engage in or avoid racial classification, they may encounter difficulties being accepted and identified based on their preferences, especially if they self-identify as part of the majority society. Many contributions in this volume clearly show the struggle for identity recognition that many mixed people face, on the basis of their racially ambiguous, non-white or white phenotypes. Several scholars have argued that while mixed individuals are experiencing an increased personal agency in choosing how they define themselves, their ethnic

options (and the validation of such options) are still constrained by many social factors (see, for example, Franco, Katz, and O'Brien 2016; Masuoka 2018; Roth 2016; Song 2003; Waters 1990, 2009).

Towards building a global conceptual framework of mixedness

With the worldwide increase in mixed families, there has been a need to address the similarities and differences in mixed people's experiences and in attitudes towards mixedness across the globe (e.g. Chito Childs 2014, 2018). Developing a conceptual framework is important for understanding mixed experiences from a multiple country and interdisciplinary perspective. The large geographical, thematic and methodological scope of the contributions to this special issue provide us with very rich and unique material with which to build such a framework.

The articles can be divided into two broad themes: (1) identification of mixed persons and (2) the mainstreaming and blurring of existing social categories. The articles by King-O'Riain (Ireland), Sagiv and Yair (Israel), Osanami Törngren and Sato (Japan), Rocha and Yeoh (Singapore), Rodríguez-García *et al.* (Spain) and Chito Childs *et al.* (US) discuss the identification processes and the potential identity mismatch among mixed populations in each country. The contributions by Alba and Reitz (Canada and the US), Irastorza and Elwert (Sweden) and Song (UK) address and question mainstreaming in different ways.

Depending on the identity choices available to mixed people and the choices they make – which also hinge on numerous individual and contextual factors, as will be discussed – multiracial and multiethnic people may find themselves inclining either more towards the minority or more towards the majority population; alternatively, they may find themselves going beyond this type of 'either-or' classification by positioning themselves in a 'neither-nor' space: As Brubaker (2016) has stated, 'Mixedness can also be constructed according to a 'neither-nor' logic that locates mixed identities outside the prevailing category space'. The question is whether it is possible truly to achieve a 'neither-nor' category that is outside the existing options. The process of 'choosing' an identity, in terms of looking at both constraints and possibilities, has been critically analysed in previous studies, and continues to be so in this special issue. According to past research – the majority of which was conducted in the US – mixed individuals are not breaking down racial boundaries or bringing us closer to a post-racial ideal (DaCosta 2007; Masuoka 2018; see Yeoh, Acedera, and Rootham 2019 for the case of Singapore). Masuoka (2018), for example, writes of how the concept of being 'multiracial' has been developed as an extension of the existing racial system and how multiracial activists themselves believe the category should be added to the existing spectrum of racial categories.

The option of 'choosing' has different meanings for individual mixed persons. Interpretations found throughout the traditional literature and theories (e.g. Park 1928; Stonequist 1935) tend to focus on the burden of this choice and the negative consequences of choosing. Indeed, as also demonstrated by various articles in this volume, it is easier for those with more socially valued mixed backgrounds than for those with less valued mixed backgrounds to be socially recognised and accepted. However, the articles in this collection (see the contributions by Chito Childs, Lyons, and Jones 2019; Osanami Törngren and Sato 2019; Rocha and Yeoh 2019; Rodríguez-García *et al.* 2019) offer a more complex

perspective on the process of choosing, showing that it is not always imposed and onerous (see also Song and Aspinall 2012).

A conceptual model of mixedness

Based on previous studies and a meta-analysis of the contributions in this special issue, we suggest a conceptual model for the global analysis of mixedness, as illustrated in [Figure 1](#).

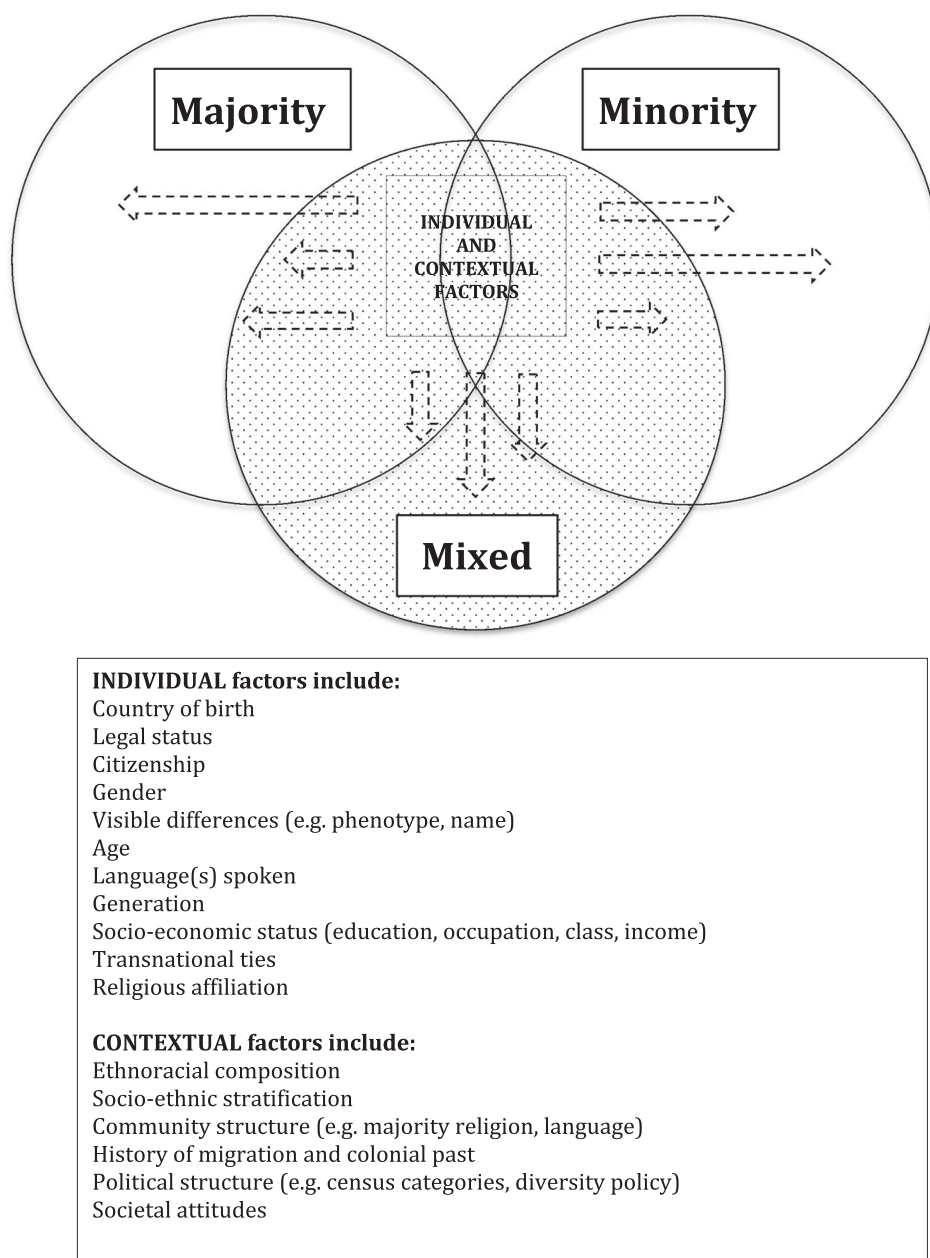


Figure 1. Conceptual model of mixedness.

We first introduce the conceptual model and then explain it through the conclusions drawn from each contribution in this collection. It is also important to remember that the model is not static. On the contrary, shared experiences, which are represented by the circles and the overlapping fields in the model, can be very dynamic, and the identifications might also vary depending on different circumstances or aspects of people's lives.

The main idea that we have tried to illustrate in [Figure 1](#) is that the experiences of mixed individuals may correspond, to a greater or lesser degree, with the experiences of members of the majority group (circle on left-hand side) versus those of minority groups (circle on right-hand side) depending on a set of frequently intersecting individual and contextual factors, such as those listed in the figure. Some clarifications must be made regarding the majority/minority distinction. First, majority and minority groups are understood here in terms of the socioeconomic and political positions they hold in society, not necessarily in terms of size (although there is often a correlation). Second, there might be differing degrees of majority/minority status within a single group of people – that is, minorities within minorities, or minorities within the majority. The case of Israel presented in this volume by Sagiv and Yair (2019) – who analyse the identifications and lived experiences of mixed (Mizrahi and Ashkenazi) Israelis – is very relevant in this respect, as it shows that Israeli society is divided not only between Arabs and Jews but also *within* those categories, which happen to be very heterogeneous.

A mixed person's oscillation between the majority group and minority groups, overlapping with one group or the other in certain respects, represents the 'either-or' process of being mixed. The overlaps between all three circles represent the experiences shared by the mixed population simultaneously with majority and minority groups. These are the mixed experiences that represent 'in-betweenness' or 'both-and', which, importantly, are formed within the existing system of categorisation and identification (Brubaker 2016; DaCosta 2007; Masuoka 2018). Alba and Reitz's article in this special issue, which discusses the association between mixed family backgrounds and mainstream integration in Canada, constitutes a good example of the process of oscillating between the majority and minority and, alternatively, sometimes occupying an in-between status. For example, when it comes to individuals' identification as visible minorities and Canadian, mixed Canadians occupy the in-between or, in the authors' words, 'mid-way' status. On the contrary, mixed Canadians are veering more towards the majority when it comes to their socioeconomic status, their choice to marry a white person and their identification with minority-related experiences. King-O'Riain's examination in this volume of how the historical developments around racialisation in Ireland have shaped the experiences of mixed individuals also shows that mixed-race Irish people are in more recent times occupying the space in-between majority and minority identification, a position that is very different from the minority, highly marginalised status they occupied in earlier times of systemic discrimination against mixed-race children in Ireland.

King-O'Riain's article additionally is suggestive of particular identifications and experiences that might be unique to mixed individuals. With reference to our conceptual model, this emergence of a 'neither-nor' identification among mixed people is depicted by the lower part of the bottom circle in [Figure 1](#). King-O'Riain demonstrates that in contemporary Ireland, the new generation of mixed people seems to be more positively redefining and reformulating their position as mixed, moving towards a 'neither-nor' understanding. The contribution by Irastorza and Elwert (2019) in this volume is similarly illustrative of

both the in-betweenness and the unique experiences of mixed individuals. The authors analyse the marriage patterns of those born in Sweden who have one native-born and one foreign-born parent (multiethnic Swedes) in comparison to those of non-mixed native Swedes (mono-ethnic Swedes). Their findings show that the odds of multiethnic Swedes marrying individuals with a foreign background are higher than those of mono-ethnic Swedes; Irastorza and Elwert explain this difference – this distinct experience among the mixed population – by appealing to the literature on societal attitudes towards intermarriage, according to which individuals who have had prior interracial or interethnic contact are more likely to be positive about intermarriages and to intermarry.

How the life experiences and identification processes of mixed people lean towards majority, minority or mixed positions depend on the intersections of individual and contextual circumstances. Individual and context-based factors include, but are not limited to, the characteristics listed in [Figure 1](#). The prevailing role of the individual factor of phenotype is illustrated by Alba and Reitz's USA–Canada comparison article in this special issue, which reports different experiences among mixed individuals depending on their racial background. The contributions by Osanami Törngren and Sato on Japan and by Rodríguez-García *et al.* on Spain report similar findings. These studies are illustrative of how individual and contextual conditions act together to affect how mixed persons identify themselves and how they are identified by others in Japan and Spain, respectively. The narratives included in these studies are clear examples of how mixed individuals' discernible characteristics, such as phenotype, language, names and religious affiliation, may influence the choices they make and the constraints they face in their identity development processes and life experiences. In the Japanese case, the country's colonial past is of significance for Chinese and Korean mixed individuals; in the Spanish case, Islam is shown to be a racialised religion and is argued to have become a crucially divisive and marginalising force in a national context where Islamophobia and Maurophobia are long entrenched. Osanami Törngren and Sato's article and, to some extent, Rodríguez-García *et al.*'s contribution also suggest that in countries where state-driven racial and ethnic categorisation does not exist, mixed persons' affirmations of themselves as being simply 'individuals' or 'who I am' present strategies for self-identifying as 'neither–nor,' that is, locating themselves in a space outside the parameters of origin and ethnoracial background.

Song's contribution on Asian/white multiracial people in Britain is yet another example of how both individual and contextual factors affect the fluidity of, and lived practices associated with, identity. In line with previous studies that challenge the idea of mixed individuals' experiences as being representative of a post-racial ideal (Brunsma 2006; DaCosta 2007; Lichter and Qian 2018; Masuoka 2018; Yeoh, Acedera, and Rootham 2019; see also Bonilla-Silva and Ray 2016), Song probes deeper into this subject by questioning the idea of whitening through observing the experiences of British Asian/white individuals. She argues that conceptualisations of part Asian people as leaning toward their white heritages are still based upon very little qualitative research and are inferred primarily from one key factor: their high rates of intermarriage with white spouses. Song argues, 'In addition to the variable ways in which part Asian people may relate to their minority and white ancestries, we must consider the ambivalence, tensions and contextually variable identifications and practices adopted by multiracial people' (see Song

2019, this volume). One point that Song's analysis clearly demonstrates is how certain ethnic options cannot be exercised when a person does not look white or like a member of the white majority group.

Chito Child *et al.*'s study focusing on the first-generation multiracial population in the United States, who have one native-born and one foreign-born parent, also illustrates the effect and intersection of both personal and contextual factors on the experiences of this group. Looking at various narratives, the authors explain how the identity choices of mixed individuals growing up in New York City are profoundly shaped by the racial and ethnic communities in which they were (or were not) immersed, their family experiences both at home and with extended family abroad, and 'larger social messages from their global communities' (Chito Childs, Lyons, and Jones 2019, this volume). Two key conclusions articulated by this article are (1) that identity classifications can clearly be influenced by the racial hierarchies and readily available constructed categories within a given society (e.g. terms like 'biracial' or 'Asian-American' that circulate in the American context), and (2) that the complexities associated with claiming ethnic and religious identities can additionally be affected by a mixed individual's transnational ties, both real and imagined.

The paper by Sagiv and Yair (2019) on Israel further presents a strong example of how contextual factors – in this case, competing ones – shape and affect individuals' mixed identities. The authors show how the traditional majority/minority dichotomy of identity and the reality of ethnic hierarchies and stratification are persistent among mixed-ethnicity Jewish Israelis despite the politically enforced idea of colour-blindness (or an 'ethnicity-free' identity) and the country's promotion of the melting pot model. In this sense, colour-blind logic has not brought about the redefinition and reformulation of identity – the inhabiting of the neither–nor space – that would be expected.

Rocha and Yeoh's discussion of mixed individuals, namely Eurasians, in Singapore and how they navigate their racial identities likewise demonstrates the paramount role that contextual conditions play in this process. Rocha and Yeoh observe not only the multigenerational mixed persons who make up the current communities but also the growing numbers of the so-called 'first generation' of mixed persons, the 'new' Eurasians resulting from increasing rates of mixed marriages and immigration. The self-assertion of a 'mixed' identity in this country is shaped by the essentialising state-sanctioned and institutionalised racial ideologies of multiracialism: the country's explicit race classification system, which forms a part of everyday life. Mixed people in Singapore are faced with the limited official statistical categories of Chinese, Malay, Indian or Other (CMIO) and with negotiating their identification through a single CMIO option. Without whiteness as a factor central to national identity, the Singapore case is interesting in that Eurasian people here may face more invisibility than they might in national contexts where partial whiteness brings a mixed individual's experiences more in line with the majority group. In fact, the authors of this article indicate that the mixed population (of citizens) in Singapore, especially younger members, expressed growing support for the 'neither–nor' identity position described in this Introduction's conceptual model of mixedness, as could be seen by the interviewees' increasingly common personal identification as 'just Singaporean,' rather than as any specific racial (or biracial) category.

It is important to reiterate that individual and contextual factors are not isolated from one another. For instance, regardless of whether or not the terms race and ethnicity are

socially accepted and elicited in a national census or other official statistics, the majority of the nine contributions in this volume point to the fact that the phenotype, especially the skin colour, of a person – which is ‘read’ and perceived through a lens of racial and ethnic stereotypes – has an impact on mixed people’s positions in their respective societies. Whether multiracial and multiethnic individuals incline towards the minority or the majority group is structured by the national context, which defines the role of visible, racial, ethnic, religious or linguistic differences in a given context. A mixed person’s self- and ascribed identification(s) with certain racial or ethnic categories may change across differing national settings, depending on how such categories are constructed and institutionalised (see Bonilla-Silva’s 1999 discussion of a racialised social system) in that particular national (or regional) milieu or whether these categories are even available as a form of classification. Specifically, mixed persons’ identification(s) will be affected by different racialisation processes and policies that derive from the dominant racial ideologies of the state, such as anti-racialism, colour-blindness or multiculturalism on the one hand, and xenophobia, Islamophobia, colourism (Walker 1983), racism and anti-blackness on the other – or the intersections of some of these systems. Moreover, the country’s migration history (which will affect whether multigenerational minority populations exist), the colonialist history, existing transnational ties, diversity policies, social hierarchies and social attitudes also influence where mixed people are positioned in a society and what their choices are (see, for example, Chito Childs, Lyons, and Jones 2019; Osanami Törngren and Sato 2019; Rodríguez-García et al. 2019, in this volume). In this way, it is clear that the meanings attached to phenotype, as well as to many other individual factors, are socially constructed and vary according to context.

Concluding remarks and paths for the future

The primary goal of this special issue is to bring together articles that further the knowledge of multiracial and multiethnic people’s experiences in multiple contexts around the globe. As will be shown through the research findings in this collection, mixed descendants constitute a privileged area for investigating processes of intergroup relations and dynamics of segregation and assimilation in the respective societies explored.

Following an extensive review of previous studies on mixedness and building on a cross-country meta-analysis of the results produced by each paper, we have, in this Introduction, proposed a conceptual model for understanding and analysing mixedness globally. Our suggested model is based on the idea that the experiences of mixed individuals are diverse and depend on a number of individual and contextual factors. Furthermore, we have argued that the identifications and experiences of particular mixed individuals might vary depending on different circumstances or aspects of their lives. Nonetheless, by applying this model of analysis in a comparative way, it is possible to find structural similarities between different cases around the world, illuminating hidden patterns that may serve to improve our comprehension of this complex phenomenon.

In reflecting on the material collectively, we can assert that the rise of mixedness is helping to expand the mainstream (Alba, Beck, and Basaran Sahin 2018a; Alba and Reitz 2019 in this volume) and is making ethnoracial categories more complex, fluid and difficult to measure (Chito Childs 2018; Deaux 2018; Morning and Saperstein 2018; Rodríguez-García 2015; Song 2017b). However, this process does not occur without

complexity and not without the paradox of the persistent exclusion of certain groups. Societal structures remain ethnically and racially divided to a great extent and not all people can choose their identities lightly, flexibly and contextually to the same degree. Notably, 'Black exceptionalism' or the 'one-drop rule' of hypodescent (by which even one drop of blood that is not white makes you something other than white), or, rather, a 'dark-skin rule' (Feliciano 2016), is still experienced among multiracial people with black ancestry in North America (Khanna 2010; Lee and Bean 2012; Waters and Kasinitz 2010; see also the contribution by Alba and Reitz 2019). This reality shows the still-powerful stigmatisation of African heritage amid pervasive white privilege, a pattern also observed in other national contexts explored in this special issue. In parallel, there has been increasing discrimination towards Muslims (Alba and Foner 2015; Foner, Deaux, and Donato 2018). All these trends (i.e. colourism, Islamophobia and the privileging of whiteness, with particular groups and identities being stigmatised and problematised) seem to apply to a number of the cases presented in this volume (see, for instance, Chito Childs, Lyons, and Jones 2019; King-O'Riain 2019; Rodríguez-García et al. 2019).

It seems clear that race, and skin colour especially, remain a significant boundary driving stigmatisation and discrimination around the world, and that a colour-blind approach in itself does not equate to creating greater democracy and social inclusion. As articulated by Miri Song (2018, 1), we still need to talk about race because 'an avoidance of 'race' undermines our ability to engage in clear and meaningful measures of difference, as well as our ability to challenge racisms' (see also Bonilla-Silva 1999; Dalmage 2004; Lentin 2008; Simon 2017). Although it is apparent from most of the contributions in this special issue that the experiences of mixed individuals do not illustrate a post-racial ideal, we also find that mixed individuals do challenge the existing majority and minority borders and are more flexible in identifying and placing themselves in between the dichotomies. In so doing, mixed populations do not necessarily 'blur' the colour-line (see also Lichter and Qian 2018), yet they help to redefine the existing boundaries and categories. What we see repeatedly in the articles in this collection is the level of flexibility and agency that different types of mixed individuals have in manoeuvring and claiming their own identities.

There are many ways in which future research could help to improve our understanding of mixedness. Applying intersectional analyses (Anthias 2008) is crucial for better comprehending the relationship between the different variables at play: for instance, for clarifying how social class affects mixed people's experiences (see Brunnsma 2005; Korgen 2010; Panico and Nazroo 2011), as well as for assessing the extent to which these experiences are gendered (Rockquemore 2002; Travers 2018). Cross-disciplinary research in the social sciences is also necessary to advance our knowledge in the field of mixedness. Furthermore, comparative research based on the idea of colourism (Walker 1983) – or intra-racial discrimination based on colour – would enable us to evaluate whether or not light-skin privilege can apply globally, as some contributions in this volume might suggest. Future studies could also explore how mixed descendants are going beyond ethnoracial categories and parental origins in their self-identifications. For example, being 'young' and feeling a paramount connection to a global youth culture of shared music, food, sport or leisure may be a young person's most crucial identifier, as some studies in different countries have suggested (Aspinall and Song 2013; Garrod, Kilkenny, and Gómez 2013; Ross 2018; Song 2010; Tetreault 2015). Additionally, explorations of the

relationship between parents, families and children would advance our understanding of how mixed people's identities are influenced by parental choices and narratives (e.g. Bang Appel and Singla 2016; Twine 2011) and how identity processes are further influenced by the life-changing events of partnering and becoming a parent, as pioneering work by Song (2017b) has started uncovering. Finally, more cooperation between academics, third-sector practitioners and policymakers is needed in order to devise practices and policies related to raising awareness of mixedness (especially in the educational sphere), combatting racism and discrimination, and improving interethnic relations.

Note

1. See <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2018/04/race-twins-black-white-biggs/>.

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