

# Racial appraisal and constraints of identity among multiracial and multiethnic persons in Sweden and Japan

Ethnicities

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**Abstract**

Increasing immigration and intermarriage in Sweden and Japan have led to a growing multiracial and multiethnic population. Approximately 7% of the Swedish population and 2% of the Japanese population are multiracial and multiethnic today. Based on a total of 39 interviews with mixed persons in Sweden and Japan, I examine the self-claimed and ascribed identification among mixed Japanese and mixed Swedes. I argue that, despite the contextual differences, there are commonalities of experiences and identification. These commonalities of experiences shed light on the conditions the mixed individuals feel that they must fulfill in order to have their different claims to identities validated. The study gives a unique insight into how racial appraisal constrains individual choices of identity in a context where there is no official classification of racial and ethnic groups.

**Keywords**

Sweden, Japan, mixed identity, racial appraisal

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## **Introduction**

Migration has expanded the structural possibilities of meeting a life partner across countries, borders and contexts which has created a new generation of multiracial and multiethnic people. Research concerning multiracial and multiethnic identity is conducted widely in the North American and British contexts (see DaCosta, 2020 for an overview) and is spreading globally, including in non-English-speaking European contexts (Balogun and Joseph-Salisbury, 2021; Osanami Törngren et al., 2019; Sandset, 2018). Research on mixed identity in the Asian and the Pacific contexts are on the rise as well (Iwabuchi, 2014; Rocha and Fozdar, 2017). While an array of research is conducted on the experiences of mixed children and adults in different contexts, these studies are often concentrated on certain geographical areas (Small and King-O’Riain, 2014). Moreover, studies comparing multiracial and multiethnic experiences in multiple locations exist but are scarce (Chito Childs, 2018; Edwards et al., 2012; King-O’Riain, 2014; Osanami Törngren et al., 2019; Rocha and Fozdar, 2017). Scholars do agree that there are a multiplicity of mixed identities which make it difficult to generalize mixed experiences, even within one national context (Masuoka, 2017; Song, 2017). Some argue that the contextual differences across countries and societies makes it difficult to establish a base for comparing their experiences (Childs, 2014; Parker et al., 2015), while others points to the emergence of a ‘hybrid space’ (King-O’Riain, 2014) that spans the globe and suggests a global understanding of mixed identities and experiences (Osanami Törngren et al., 2019).

This article expands upon those critical mixed-race studies which call for a more global and multi-contextual approach (Daniel et al., 2014) through examining how multiracial and multiethnic people self-identify and negotiate their identity in two different societies, Sweden and Japan. Based on a total of 39 interviews with mixed persons in Sweden and Japan, I analyse how mixed interviewees express their self-claimed and ascribed identification, and their experiences of racial ascription. This underscores the practice of racial appraisal in Japan and Sweden and how it constrains the individual choice of self-identification as either mixed, Japanese, Swedish or foreigner. The analysis highlights the ‘conditions’ and ‘attributes’ (Morning, 2018), such as visibility based on phenotype as well as ethnic names and language, which mixed individuals feel that they must fulfill in order to claim different self-identification categories, and to have their claim to being mixed Swedish or Japanese validated.

## **The contexts of Sweden and Japan**

Even though postwar Sweden and Japan have very different approaches to migration and integration, both countries have experienced a significant change in their racial and ethnic landscapes. Sweden, up until WWI, was a country of emigration, sending around 1 million – close to a quarter of the total population – to the US. By the end of the Second World War Sweden had started to receive a substantial

number of immigrants. Until the 1980s, immigrants came to Sweden to work, predominantly from the Nordic countries and Europe. Since then, the predominant category of immigration has become asylum-seekers and family reunification. As the dominant category of immigration shifted from labour migration to asylum migration, the countries of origin have also shifted from within to outside of Europe (except for asylum-seekers from the former Yugoslavia). Today, 18% of the 10 million residents in Sweden were born outside of the country, the majority having origins in MENA regions (SCB, 2020). Japan was also a country of emigration, especially up until the 1960s. A total of around 1.35 million Japanese emigrated predominantly to North and South America. Japanese nationals and their descendants living outside of the Japanese territory today are estimated to be around 2 million. Japan colonised other parts of Asia, which intensified the movement of people between them until the end of the Second World War (Majima, 2014; Tsuchida, 1998). Due to different factors such as the large Japanese diaspora, Japan's colonial history, and its aging society, Japan, as any other developed country, is also experiencing a rapid increase in immigration. However, the stricter Japanese immigration control is clearly reflected in the diversity of the population – only 1.7% of the 130 million Japanese residents are non-Japanese citizens (Ministry of Japan, 2015).

The population register and census in Sweden and Japan only identify the nationality, citizenship and place of birth of the person. Ethnicity or race are not officially registered, which makes it difficult to identify the exact number of multiracial and multiethnic persons in the countries, especially when they are multigenerational. With this in mind, around 7% of the Swedish population today can be identified as mixed, having one parent of Swedish origin and another born in another country (SCB, 2020). In Japan, around 2% of new-born babies had either a father or a mother who was a non-Japanese citizen (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2015). Assuming from the statistics on mixed marriages based on the country of birth of the spouses, the largest number of mixed Japanese persons born today are predominantly of Asian origin mix (China, the Philippines and Korea, with an exception of America), while mixed Swedes are predominantly of European mix (Finland, Norway, Denmark and Germany, with the exception of Thailand) (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2015; Osanami Törngren and Irastorza, forthcoming).

In order to understand how the majority society treats mixed persons in Sweden and Japan, it is crucial to note that both countries have lived the myth of racial homogeneity until recently (Befu, 2001; Burgess, 2010; Hübinette and Lundström, 2014; Oguma, 2002; Rosenburg, 1995). Research in Sweden shows that whiteness and visible, racial, phenotypical differences shape the definitions of Swedishness and non-Swedishness. The binary of 'Swedes' and '*invandrare*' (immigrants) is established in Swedish society through whether or not you 'look Swedish' (Mattsson, 2005; Runfors, 2016). Different researchers illustrate how African, Asian, Latin American and Middle Eastern identities are developed through interaction and contact with the majority society, through which they become aware of

phenotypes such as skin colour or hair (Kalonaityte et al., 2007; Khosravi, 2009; Lundström, 2007). How the Japanese view themselves and consider what it means to 'look Japanese' is also defined by skin colour, facial features and certain behaviour and culture i.e., language, behaviour and ethnic name (Ashikari, 2005; McVeigh, 2000; Yoshino, 1997). The word '*gaikokujin/gaijin*' (foreigner) is the most commonly used in Japan today to refer to those who are phenotypically different and the binary of Japanese/foreigner is salient (Arudou, 2015; Kashiwazaki, 2009). Immigrants to Japan are mainly from other East Asian countries and the country remains racially homogeneous, most immigrants have been phenotypically 'invisible'. However, through residential segregation and establishment of ethnic communities, ethnic and cultural identities of the immigrant communities are becoming more visible (Komai and Sasaki, 2016).

Based on the logic of 'either-or', with the idea of singular identity (Brubaker, 2016; Lou and Lalonde, 2015), multiethnic and multiracial persons in Japan and Sweden risk being racialised as foreigners and immigrants (Murphy-Shigematsu, 2001; Osanami Törngren, 2020; Osanami Törngren and Sato, 2019). Despite the logic of 'either-or', various terms have emerged to address mixedness in Japan. The most common and established term used today referring to the mixed population is '*haafu*' (Osanami Törngren and Okamura, 2020). Originally assigned with the connotation being 'half white', the term has evolved into a self-claimed and positive social identification that embraces all mixed people (Murphy-Shigematsu, 2012).<sup>1</sup> Alternative terms such as '*kokusaiji*' (international children) – an attempt to shift the focus on their background to their international and cultural quality – or '*daburu*', deriving from the English word 'double' – an idealistic term used especially in media outlets in the context of Okinawa, with its US military presence – emerged as well (Carter, 2014; Kamada, 2010). Moreover, the term 'mixed roots' has recently been introduced into the Japanese language (Yamashiro, 2017) and is gaining more recognition. Contrary to the Japanese context, there are no established terms and awareness equivalent to 'multiracial', 'multiethnic', and 'mixed' in Swedish society and the Swedish language; this is reflected in mixed people's constraints in contesting the existing binary and having their identity claim validated (Hübinette and Arbouz, 2019; Osanami Törngren, 2020).

Research on multiracial and multiethnic Japanese has mainly focused on the children of US military men and Japanese women because of the historical and political circumstances that they have faced (Carter, 2014; Welty, 2014). However, research focusing on the mixed population outside of the military context has started to grow as well (Kamada, 2010; Kawashima and Takezawa, 2017; Osanami Törngren and Sato, 2019). Research on multiracial and multiethnic identity is exceptionally rare in the Swedish context (Adeniji, 2014; Hübinette and Arbouz, 2019; Osanami Törngren, 2020)

In sum, Japanese and Swedish contexts differ greatly in terms of the racial and ethnic diversity of the countries and the established awareness towards mixed populations. However, the persisting dichotomized way of thinking about their

populations and racialisation based on visible differences, including phenotypes, are quite similar.

## The identification of mixed persons

Identity is not static, but flexible and fluid. It develops through a dialectic relational mode and is subject to change according to time and context. In understanding identity as dialectic and relational, a distinction needs to be made between what is self-identification (or acquired identity) and what is assigned by others (ascribed identity) and how these two are intertwined and affect each other (Jenkins, 2005). Identification based on race and ethnicity therefore happens through interactions between individuals and a group of people. Racial ascription and appraisal in this article refer to ‘the way that people classify the race of others. Both particular individuals and larger groups’ (Roth, 2018: 1094). More specifically, reflected race, how a person experiences and believes that he or she is classified and perceived by others (Morning and Saperstein, 2018; Roth, 2018; Vargas, 2015), is of interest. In a Japanese and Swedish context where official racial and ethnic labels do not exist, the practice of racial appraisal and individuals’ understanding of reflected race becomes a key in understanding racialisation, ‘the socio-historical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed’ (Omi and Winant, 1994: 55).

Mixed persons may experience an incongruence between their own racial and ethnic identification and their reflected race based on the assumption of a person’s identity based on his/her phenotype (Morning, 2018; Roth, 2018). Phenotype – an individual’s physical appearance as an objective fact – is perceived and understood as relevant to racial and ethnic classification (Daynes and Lee, 2008; Roth, 2016). In line with this, Torres and Colón (2015) argue that ‘racial experience is real, and human biological diversity is real’ (307). Here, the conceptual difference between race and ethnicity needs to be outlined. Both race and ethnicity are socially constructed but the idea of race is evoked by phenotypical differences (Daynes and Lee, 2008), while ethnicity – which is an identification of cultural origin and heritage independent of whether or not the individuals practise the culture – is not always visible (Gans, 1979; Song, 2003). Race often functions as a categorisation mechanism for maintaining privilege and structure for certain groups, while ethnicity – which centres on a sense of belonging and inclusion – is primarily chosen by a group or the individuals within the group (Omi and Winant, 1994; Smedley and Smedley, 2005). A person’s identification relative to ethnicity is not always validated by others and can lead to constraint in the ethnic options (Waters, 1990) – the ability to claim your own ethnic identity and have that claim validated because of racialisation and racial appraisals based on phenotypes. Mixed persons’ claims to be Japanese or Swedish can be contested and scrutinised differently by the majority society depending on their racial and ethnic mix (Brubaker, 2016; Morning and Saperstein, 2018). The important question to ask is ‘Which identity labels do people choose for themselves and why?’ (Deaux, 2018).

Research examining self-identification and racial appraisal provides an assessment of how the meaning of race and ethnicity affects individual lives and the choice of identification (Roth, 2016, 2018). The Swedish and Japanese contexts provide a unique insight into racial appraisal in a context where no official race classification exists. In this context, subjective self-reported identification and reflected race and identification become key in understanding how racialisation works.

## Method and data

The analysis is based on a total of 39 semi-structured interviews that I have conducted between 2015 and 2019 (see Appendix for their details), consisting of 18 interviews with mixed Japanese (aged 18–25) and 21 interviews with mixed Swedes (aged 19–33). The interviewees were recruited through social media and the university network on the basis of their identifying with the description of having ‘one Japanese or Swedish parent and one parent of foreign origin or who is not a Japanese or Swedish citizen’ – the place of upbringing of the respondents being predominantly in Japan or Sweden. Interviewees were recruited through snowball sampling. Interviews were conducted in person or via online meeting systems, in the preferred language of the interviewees (Swedish, English or Japanese) and lasted from 30 to 90 minutes. All names that appear in the analysis are pseudonyms.

Due to the snowball sampling, interviewees represented multiethnic and multi-racial Swedish or Japanese people with a higher socioeconomic status who had completed higher education. This higher socioeconomic status is also reflected in most of the interviewees regularly visiting (at least once a year or every other year) their non-Japanese or non-Swedish parent’s country, thus being able to maintain their transnational ties. The majority of the mixed Japanese interviewees had a white American or European background and the rest had a mixed Asian background. More than half of them had a mother with Japanese citizenship, which does not correspond to the actual statistics which show that Japanese men intermarry to a greater extent than do Japanese women. Many reported fluency in the non-Japanese parental language. Contrary to the Japanese mixed interviewees, very few Swedish ones reported that they were fluent in the non-Swedish parent’s language. Moreover, half of the interviewed mixed Swedish persons’ parents were divorced, while very few mixed Japanese persons reported their parents separating. Swedish mixed interviewees predominantly represent Latin American-Swedish ( $N=6$ ), Asian-Swedish ( $N=8$ ) and European-Swedish mix ( $N=4$ ) while Japanese mixed interviewees represent Asian-Japanese mix ( $N=8$ ) and White European<sup>2</sup>-Japanese mix ( $N=9$ ). The racial background is indicated in cases where interviewees mentioned it, however most interviewees referred to their parents and their mixed background by their country of origin, reflecting the administrative practices of Japan and Sweden.

The positions of the interviewees and interviewer were negotiated constantly through implicit and explicit inquiries of similarities and differences. Many interviewees did ask me ‘Why are you interested in mixed identity?’ ‘Are you mixed?’ and wanted to know my connection to them. When I explain my position as a Japanese, racial minority in Sweden and a mother of two mixed children, we shared and recognized common experiences of racialization, especially in terms of being categorized as Asian in Sweden or ‘foreigner’ in Japan. At the same time, there was a clear difference, especially the psychological impact of racialization. I, as a person of racial and ethnic majority in Japan and of a minority in Sweden, somewhat fitting into the traditional either-or dichotomy, do not face skepticism from others towards my self-identification as an ‘immigrant’, ‘foreigner’, and ‘Japanese’ the same way as the mixed Swedes and Japanese do.

In the following analysis, interviewees’ responses to the following two questions are analysed: How would you describe your racial and ethnic identity in your own words? How do you think others (the general public) see you in racial and ethnic terms?

## Analysis

### *Flexibility of self-identification*

Table 1 shows how the 39 interviewees account for their self- and their reflected identification. While Japanese mixed interviewees used the word *haafu* actively in the interviews to refer to themselves and to others who are mixed, the answers were diverse when the interviewees were asked how they identified themselves in their own words. Eight answered ‘Japanese’ (including those who said ‘more Japanese’), six identified as multiracial or multiethnic (using words such as *haafu*, mixed roots, *daburu*, Japanese and something else, nationalities of the parents), four as simply a human being – which is non-categorical and transcends any reference to national and ethnic origins – and two as ‘more American than Japanese’.

In the Swedish context, there is no single word to describe a multi-ethnic and multiracial background. Therefore, it can be assumed that they have more freedom in selecting terms when self-identifying. Six identified themselves as ‘Swedish’ while the rest used diverse terms to describe their mixed backgrounds including hyphenated identification and specific self-claimed and invented through English terms such as ‘halfie’ (*halvis*), ‘mixed’ (*mixad/blandad*), or ‘half and half’ (*halv-halv*). As with the Japanese mixed interviewees, there were a few Swedish mixed participants who self-identified in non-categorical terms, with references to geography of upbringing or simply to a human being.

In both contexts it is very clear that mixed interviewees self-identify in various ways. As Root (1996: 7) suggests in her Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People, mixed Swedes and Japanese identify themselves differently from the existing dichotomies of either-or and reserve the right to create a vocabulary to communicate about being mixed. The expressions ‘more Japanese’, ‘more American’, or



**Table 1.** Self-identification and ascribed identification.

Name	Self-identification	Ascribed identification
Japanese interviewees		
Anna	Japanese	Korean
Akemi	Chinese and Japanese, haafu	Japanese
Akira-Matthew	Human being, haafu	Foreigner or haafu
Amanda	Mixed roots	Foreigner or American
Ashley	Japanese	Foreigner
Brittany	More American than Japanese	Foreigner
Chie	Japanese	Japanese
Daiki	More American than Japanese	Foreigner
Hiroshi	Human being	Japanese
Jessica	More Japanese, haafu	Haafu
Kazuko	Japanese	Japanese or haafu
Keiko	Japanese and white	Foreigner
Makoto	Don't know, maybe Asian	Japanese or haafu
Michael	Human being	American or haafu
Takashi	Japanese, haafu	Japanese
Tomoko	Daburu, haafu	Daburu or American
Yoko	Japanese	Japanese
Yuuto Christopher	More Japanese	Japanese
Swedish Interviewees		
Adam	Jewish Latino	Swedish
Agnes	Swedish, half or mixed	Swedish
Alicia	Swedish	Swedish
Claudia	Swedish and Italian, half-half	Swedish
David	Swedish	Swedish
Edvin	Non-categorical term	Non-Swedish
Elise	Swedish, Swedish Ethiopian	Non-Swedish
Eman	Swedish and Moroccan	Arabic
Eri	Half Japanese and half Swedish	Non-Swedish, non-white
Felicia	Non-categorical term	Cuban
Hugo	Swedish	Swedish
Ines	Swedish-Argentinian	Swedish
Jennifer	Mixed, half Asian	Asian
Lucia	Swedish	Non-Swedish
Mari	Half Japanese	Asian, Japanese
Maria	Swedish and Roma	Non-Swedish
Melinda	Mixed	Swedish
Mina	Swedish, Japanese-Swedish	Non-white
Nille	Swedish	Swedish
Sana	Mixed	Asian, non-white
Tova	Swedish	Indian



the hyphenated Swedish and non-categorical identifications can be interpreted as an exercise of the flexibility and the right to identify oneself differently in different situations. Despite the diverse ways in which the interviewees identify themselves, most of them reported reflected identification based on the binaries of Japanese/Swedish and foreigner/immigrant. Japanese mixed persons experienced being asked 'Are you *gaijin* (a foreigner)?' or 'Are you *haafu*?' The equivalent question in the Swedish context is 'Where are you from?' These questions reflect the process of racial appraisal and the drawing of the dichotomised boundaries of majority and minority. The following section will look more closely at how mixed persons in Japan and Sweden self-identify, and what conditions and attributes they share in order to have their claim validated.

### *Conditions for inclusion in Swedish and Japanese identity*

Experiences of racial appraisal, not fitting into the mainstream racial idea of Japanese and Swedish, constrain the mixed interviewees' claim to Swedish and Japanese identity. Interviewees whose mix is not phenotypically visible, who are racialized and pass as Swedish or Japanese, are not questioned on their claim to Swedish and Japanese identity. For example, David (American French Swedish) identifies himself as Swedish and says, 'It never comes up in a conversation that I am different,' and claims that he feels at home in Sweden and passes as Swedish, French, and American everywhere he goes. His ethnic identification as French and American are symbolic (Gans, 1979) and situational (Okamura, 1981). He shares his memories of visiting France and visiting his American relatives and 'hopping to a normal life' in the US. He does not have any close connection to the ethnic communities, except for his family, but describes his feelings towards the US and France as 'homely'. He says that his family does not have any visibly traditional cultural practices related to France, the US, or Sweden: 'Honestly the only real traditions [that we have] as part of the culture of our home is Hanukkah and Thanksgiving and Christmas and we celebrate the Swedish way'. His experiences reflect the flexibility of ethnic identification based on cultural origin and heritage, 'allegiance to symbolic groups that never meet' (Gans, 1979: 12), independent of whether or not the individuals engage in cultural practices. David can exercise ethnic options, and claim his background identity in interactions with others, according to the importance he puts on each ethnic identity in a situation (Okamura, 1981)

Conversely, Elise (Ethiopian Swedish) who self-identifies as Swedish says that her claim is constantly questioned. She asserts her self-identification as Swedish through her cultural and ethnic background, while her phenotype leads to incongruency between self-identification and reflected race. She is seen as 'Black' and says: 'It is quite confusing because it is such a contradiction that one sees oneself in

one way, and then it is pointed out that you are not. [...] it gets strange to handle.’ Like Elise, Tova (Indian Finnish Swedish) also shares the experience of being questioned on her claim to being Swedish. When asked how she self-identifies, she answers, ‘Swedish. Yes. I feel that it’s quite easy to say so; meanwhile, it is hard to have to defend it so often’. Her parents were both adopted and had no close contact or references to their countries of origin, and therefore she grew up in a monocultural Swedish environment. This has created a mismatch between how she is perceived to be based on her phenotype, and how she is brought up culturally. She says she is always seen as ‘Indian’ because of her phenotype. Elise and Tova’s words clearly reflect not only the process of racial appraisal based on their phenotype but also how their identity is scrutinised and policed because of it (Brubaker, 2016). Tova explains what the conditions are that make her claim her Swedish identity.

There are different definitions on the basis [of what it means to be Swedish]. Some think that one must be born in Sweden, some think that your parents must be born in Sweden, some think that one must be able to speak the language, or some say that it is just to have a passport. I feel that I can check off the majority [of these things], but not all. Some think that you must look Swedish, which I may not, but I think I look Swedish in my definition of Swedish.

Japanese mixed interviewees also share the experiences of racial appraisal and not being able to pass as Japanese. The repeated racial assignment led interviewed mixed Japanese persons to choose minority identification. Daiki and Brittany (both American Japanese) identified themselves as ‘more American than Japanese’ because they experience constant appraisal as ‘foreigners’. Daiki says that he can never consider himself as Japanese because of the experience of being treated differently. Passing as a foreigner and American makes his life ‘easier’ and does not give him a feeling of alienation because his self-identification and racial assignment match. Brittany also feels that it is ‘easier’ for her to pass as a foreigner in Japan. She says:

When people don’t know anything about me, and I tell them I am Japanese, I have seldom been accepted as one. ‘No that’s not true’, ‘Don’t joke about it’, and ‘Does Japan accept immigrants?’ – these are the comments that I get.

However, some mixed Japanese interviewees experienced being accepted as Japanese, despite racial appraisals as ‘foreigners’. There are clearly differences in individual experiences and perceptions of racial appraisals among the mixed interviewees. Yuuto Christopher (British Japanese) identifies himself as ‘more Japanese than British’, stressing the importance of the predominant language (in his case Japanese) and the environment in which he grew up in. Yuuto Christopher says that passing becomes especially impossible once his name is revealed. Ashley (Swiss Japanese) clearly identifies as Japanese because she was born and raised

in Japan and feels Japanese despite her name signaling foreignness and her ‘non-Japanese and more Western phenotypical features’ – which she later described as ‘not being Japanese at all’ with ‘brown hair and blue-green eyes’. Although people question their claim to be Japanese, both Ashley and Yuuto Christopher still experience being ‘accepted’ as Japanese because of the way they behave. Through stressing non-visible characteristics, such as Japanese being their native language, or their cultural knowledge, they can negotiate their racial appraisal and reclaim their Japanese identity. These experiences can also be understood as ways of challenging racial assignment as a minority. They can exercise their ethnic options and can claim their Japanese identity situationally in interaction with others, similar to David (American French Swedish) introduced earlier.

In both contexts, phenotype plays a large role in racial assignment and questioning of identity but names can also convey a foreign identity for mixed persons, even when the mix is invisible phenotypically (Wykes, 2017). Anna (Zainichi<sup>3</sup> Korean Japanese) expresses the mismatch between her self and her reflected identification. She identifies as Japanese, and she passes and can be ascribed as Japanese until her last name is revealed. Then her observed identification becomes ‘Korean’.

Since I was very young, whenever people ask my name, I answer, ‘Anna Park’ and then the answer is ‘Oh, Ms. Park, your Japanese is very good’. [...] I was thinking all the time that we were Japanese. I think I didn’t like these comments. I was thinking that I was the same as all the others around me, and my dad is also from Japan.

Anna’s experience in Japan resonates with Ines’ experience (Argentinian Swedish) in Sweden. Ines passes as Swedish phenotypically, but her last name becomes a basis for ascription and racialisation as ‘not Swedish’.

And it is really about drawing a boundary directly when I meet people in a context where my name is directly [visible] as soon as I introduce myself. I am very quickly reminded of my background and my parentage and where I come from, why my name is my name, and I get a lot of comments about it. Then there are many who get confused and say, ‘Oh, when I saw you, I thought you were Swedish.’

At another point, she said that, as soon as people notice that her name is not Swedish, they no longer accept her as being ‘completely Swedish’: ‘[My name] comes up directly, and then I am not given a chance to say how people should treat me before they realise that I have Latin American ancestry’. Anna and Ines’ experiences show how individuals who can pass and be racialised as majority due to their phenotype can be re-racialised due to their names, which is a visible aspect that is often overlooked. Their experiences show how racial assignment is practised through what is visible through both appearance and interaction (Roth, 2016).

### *Conditions for inclusion to minority identity*

Phenotypes that fit with mainstream ideas of Swedish and Japanese, foreign-sounding names, and cultural and linguistic assertions are attributes that enable the interviewed mixed Swedes and Japanese to have their claims to being Swedish and Japanese validated. But what are the conditions for mixed Swedish and Japanese interviewees to feel that their claims to minority identities can be validated when there are no visible signs of mixedness?

When I asked Chie (Korean Japanese) to describe her racial and ethnic identity, while acknowledging that her Korean background influenced her life, she said that when she is asked 'what are you?' she will never answer that she is Korean. Her self-identification as Japanese is based on her being born and raised in Japan and having Japanese citizenship. When I asked her why she felt that she could not answer that she was Korean, she mentions the lack of language skills and Korean citizenship. She tells me that her close Korean friends in the Korean community do not see her as Korean, and when she is in Korea, she is treated as a 'foreigner'. What is interesting with Chie's experience is that she occasionally experiences ascription as 'Korean' due to her first name and her facial features. Kazuko (Filipino Japanese) also reasons in the same way as Chie and shares the feeling of exclusion from the Filipino community due to her behaviour and her lack of language skills: 'Even though I am mixed, I don't feel that I am a Filipina even when I spend time with other Filipinos'. She shares her experience of visiting her relatives in the Philippines and how she still could not identify herself as a Filipina. She explains to me that phenotypically she is considered to be ethnically ambiguous and people ask her if she is mixed.

Similarly, in a Swedish context, Agnes (Latino Swedish) feels that she cannot claim that she is Latino. In her case it is her passing as 'white and Swedish' and being in a predominantly white middle-class environment which constrains her identity, despite her language skills, transnational ties, and ethnic last name. She stresses her phenotype: 'Appearance-wise, I'm very white passing, and that is exactly what has led to me having a complex feeling'. She also explains to me the racialised geography of Stockholm – to come from 'the hood' (*orten*) – and how the fact that she does not come from 'the hood' has affected the way she acts (as white Swedish). She connects her phenotype and middle-class status as a reflection of Swedishness which limits her claims to Latino identity. Contrary to Agnes, who feels that she cannot claim her Latino identity, Adam (Argentinian Swedish) identifies strongly as a Jewish and Latino person and experiences a gap due to being racialised as Swedish. He shares his experience of being excluded from the category 'Latino' and feeling strange about it.

The above interviewees' experiences highlight how mixed interviewees may feel constraints in claiming their minority identity. All of them are racialised as the majority but possess different attributes and face different conditions in having their ethnic minority identity validated. While Chie and Kazuko focus on the linguistic and cultural knowledge and citizenship which limit their claims to

minority identities, Agnes and Adam focus on phenotype and ‘whiteness’ constraining their claims to their Latino identity.

### *Claiming identity to challenge the existing conditions of belonging*

In the above, the conditions and attributes mixed interviewees experience in claiming and validating their majority or minority identification are outlined. In the following, I turn the discussion to the varying forms of mixed identification, and the reasoning behind their choice of identification, to challenge the existing conditions of belonging.

Mixed interviewees contest the racial appraisal and the fixed singular idea of belonging by identifying as ‘mixed’. Akemi (Chinese Japanese) describes herself in terms of two nationalities because, for her, it is impossible to choose which one is more important. Moreover, she says that because her mixedness is not visible, claiming that she is mixed becomes important. Similarly, Claudia (Italian Swedish) who passes as Swedish, identifies herself as ‘Swedish and Italian’ and reasons: ‘I don’t want to rule it [background] out’. Mixed interviewees who are racialized also choose to identify as mixed in order to challenge the either-or logic and claim not to be categorised as one. Mari (Japanese Swedish) explains that it has always been important for her to point out that she has a Japanese background, but her identification as half-Japanese also comes from her experiences of racialisation when she is constantly referred to as ‘that Japanese girl’: ‘Being tied to just one thing – it is a suppression which I may not be really happy about. [...] I want to be me. I do not want to be tied to any single category’. Jessica (Australian Japanese), says that considering her language ability, number of friends, and knowledge of the country (such as its culture and society), her Japanese identity is stronger than her Australian one. However, she does not want to ‘take sides’ either and identifies herself as *haafu*. She also says that her phenotype, which is visibly different from what is expected of someone who is Japanese and is ethnically ambiguous, validates her reflected identification as mixed.

Other mixed interviewees self-identify as mixed as a means of claiming Swedishness and Japaneseness. Sana (Japanese Swedish) problematises the fixed idea of the category ‘Swedish’ as White. She describes herself as ‘mixed’ and sometimes ‘Japanese Swedish’ even though her cultural identity – such as language, values and other traditions – is Swedish. She self-identifies as mixed to signal her Swedishness; ‘it gets much more complicated for me when I say that I am Swedish. Then I have to have a much longer conversation about it’. Similarly, Jennifer (Chinese Malay Finnish Swedish) self-identifies as mixed in order to claim that she is Swedish. She explains that she regularly gets asked the question ‘Where are you from?’ and is racially appraised as ‘Asian’.

I’m half Asian, my dad comes from there [Malaysia], my mother comes from there [Finland], and I was born in Sweden. I know that when I was younger, it was very important that I was born in Sweden. It was my identity. I have always felt that I am

Swedish to a greater extent. Although I don't look Swedish and maybe not everyone has seen me as Swedish, I myself have felt very Swedish.

Akira-Matthew (Italian Japanese), although he wants to be recognised first and foremost as a human being, also self-identifies as *haafu*. He resists the categorical claims because, as with Sana and Jennifer in the Swedish context, Akira-Matthew also experiences constant racial appraisal as a 'foreigner' in Japan. However, he realises that when he claims that he is *haafu*, people validate that he is Japanese. Akira-Matthew does not expect people to understand that he is a mix of Italian and Japanese just by his 'ethnically ambiguous appearance', but reasons: 'It's enough for me that people recognise that I am Japanese.'

The above mixed interviewees' experiences demonstrate that, independent of whether or not they meet the conditions and attributes to be included in majority/minority identification, they may choose to identify as mixed in order to contest a dichotomized identification, and also to have their self-identification recognised. The established term, *haafu*, in the Japanese context, enables racial ascription as mixed, which offers mixed Japanese interviewees the possibility of wider recognition and validation of their mixed identity, while validation of mixed identity seems to be more difficult in the Swedish context.

Racial appraisal as majority, minority or mixed also pushes mixed interviewees to identify themselves outside of the categorical terms. Growing up, Michael (American Japanese) experienced being treated as *haafu* and not as 'a complete Japanese', while his parents told him that he was 'both American *and* Japanese'. His identification was heavily influenced by his surroundings, which he was not happy about; he has now come to an understanding that everybody, including himself, is different in one way or another and he has therefore started to identify himself as just a 'human being'. Edvin (French Korean Swedish) and Felicia's (Cuban Finnish Swedish) claims to a non-categorical identification in Sweden mirror Michael's experience in Japan. Both are up against constant racialisation, and through the impossibility of passing as Swedish, learned that 'Swedish' is a White racial category. They therefore distance themselves from any ethno-racial identification. Edvin explains that he has never seen himself as Swedish because his Swedishness is constantly questioned. Felicia says that she has never been treated as Swedish but, rather, as Cuban, or someone who is 'Brown'. They contest the category 'Swedish' through avoiding national, ethnic, and racial reference. Edvin claims that he belongs to his hometown, and Felicia identifies herself as 'global': 'I see myself as part of the world, and I am myself. I am [me]. You do not need to put me into boxes.' These interviewees' words reflect a way of self-identifying outside of the prevailing idea of ancestry and of any particular ethno-racial category based on an either-or logic – a non-categorical identification (Lou and Lalonde, 2015). They have found ways of identifying themselves that are different from what people around them expect (Root, 1996). Their identification resonates with studies which show a superordinate identity as a 'human' or a 'world citizen',

(Amiot and de la Sablonnière, 2010) and challenges the validity of the idea of race itself (Shih et al., 2007).

## Concluding discussion

Based on 39 interviews with Japanese and Swedish persons of multiracial and multiethnic backgrounds, I explored the ways in which mixed persons self-identify in two different national contexts. The interviewees' expressions of self-identification truly show a multiplicity of mixed identities. As scholars researching the US context argue, it is clear that individuals have increased fluidity in how they identify themselves (Morning, 2018; Roth, 2018). This illustrates that race and ethnicity are indeed socially constructed. In all different expressions of identification, there are feelings of exclusion and misrecognition, which influence individual identification choices (Ahnallen et al., 2006; Aspinall and Song, 2013). Moreover, there are different political meanings and consequences in their assertion of identity (DaCosta, 2020; England, 2010). Self-identification as majority may be motivated by the context of upbringing and nativity in their cultural and linguistic aspects, which are reflected in their behaviour as 'Swedish/Japanese'.

However, despite this fluidity, the practice of appraisal and assignment is persistent. As previous studies in different contexts show, my analysis also highlights that, in Japan and Sweden, mixed interviewees experience incongruence between the identity they claim and their reflected identification. The mismatch relates to the rigidity of racial appraisal based on the existing ideas of ethno-racial boundaries. The ideas of Swedishness/Japaneseness play a role in the validation of mixed persons' identity claims. Roth writes, '[i]f racial classification norms are remaining relatively fixed, we can expect to see a continued or increasing disparity between self-identification and how people are seen by others' (Roth, 2018: 1107). The interviewees' experiences of racial appraisal and their ways of expressing their identity in response, shed light on the process of racialisation. The interviewees' experiences exemplify how aspects that are visible, both in appearance and through interaction (Roth, 2016), such as phenotype, language skills, citizenship, name, behaviour, and cultural knowledge become the 'conditions' and 'attributes' that racial and ethnic appraisals are based on.

Despite the incongruence between their self and reflected identification, the interviewed mixed persons challenge the existing conception of Japanese/Swedish by continuing to assert their choice of identity. As previous studies show, individual responses to the mismatch of identification and expression of identity vary greatly. Identifying as majority, for some, entails constraints in their ability to claim their non-majority ethnic identity – constraints which come from both the ethnic minority community and the majority society. For other interviewees, identifying as part of the majority involved the practice of resisting and challenging racial assignment as a minority. Identification as mixed may be motivated through the embracing of differing parental backgrounds. This resonates with the findings by Newman (2020) indicating that assertion of mixed identity is a way of claiming



connection and belonging to multiple groups, instead of rendering to marginalisation. For others, assertion of mixed identity derives from experiences of exclusion and racialisation. Self-identifying as mixed is a claim for recognition of their belonging in Japanese/Swedish society and the emergence of a mixed space which breaks down and contests the dichotomised boundaries (Masuoka, 2017). This relates to Khanna's (2011) study exploring how White–Black biracial persons focus on the fact that they are 'partly the same' as White, especially as they experience constraints in passing. For Japanese and Swedish mixed persons, to claim that they are mixed becomes a practice of validation of them being Japanese and Swedish.

What can we say about the emergence of mixed identity across contexts? To theorise global mixed experiences, a conceptual model of mixedness is proposed (Osanami Törngren et al., 2019). The model suggests that the experiences of mixed individuals may shift as a pendulum between the experiences of the majority group and minority groups to varying degrees, depending on a set of intersecting individual and contextual factors. There is an 'in-betweenness' of experiences and identifications which is formed by the existing ideas of who belongs to the majority and the minority, but also an emerging 'neither-nor' identification which is specific to mixed persons. Despite the contextual differences of Japan and Sweden, the unique mixed experiences are evident in the assertion of their identity and the contestation of the categorical and dichotomised ways of belonging. Which individual factors – such as citizenship, language skills, phenotypes or socioeconomic status – constrain the interviewed mixed individuals' claims of belonging to the majority or minority differ in Japan and Sweden. However, the flexibility of self-identification shapes the position as 'mixed', a 'hybrid space' of being mixed across contexts despite the structural differences in the two contexts. The hybrid 'mixed' space reflects the rights of racially mixed people, and the flexibility of their self-claimed identity (Root, 1996).

This article is my attempt to respond to a call for a more global and multi-contextual approach in understanding multiracial and multiethnic identity (Daniel et al., 2014). The focus was solely on the experiences of racial appraisal in order to understand the ways mixed persons in Japan and Sweden self-identify and what kind of constraints they face in claiming their racial and ethnic belonging. I would like to end the article by calling scholars to further the studies on mixedness through multi-contextual and intersectional lenses, incorporating different processes of ascription, not only of race and ethnicity, but gender, class and sexual orientation.

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**Notes**

1. See the historical overview and development of different terms from ‘ainoko’ (today a derogatory term) to ‘mixed roots’ in Okamura (2017) and Osanami Törngren and Okamura (2020).
2. Include parental country of origins in Europe, North America and Oceania. Some self-identified as ‘White’ (*hakujin*).
3. The term refers to ethnic Koreans whose family members and their descendants settled in Japan during or soon after the end of Japan’s colonial rule of Korea.

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