

Research Article

Challenging the hierarchies of Swedish whiteness

Negative experiences and undesired effects of passing as white and Swedish

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This article focuses on the hierarchies inherent in the Swedish version of whiteness and shows how these hierarchical structures are challenged by subjects placed within the category white. Passing as white is often presumed to be something sought after. The aim of this article is however to empirically explore the other side of the coin, that is, negative experiences and undesired effects of passing as white. With theoretical inspiration drawn from critical race- and whiteness studies, interview narratives from 31 women and men in the rarely researched area of descendants of Polish migrants in Sweden, are examined. The analysis shows that the descendants in various ways contested racialized ascriptions of whiteness, Swedishness and sameness. They furthermore voiced a dissonance between the sameness they were attributed and their own perceptions of otherness, thereby illustrating that betweenness can also be experienced by descendants that pass as white.

Keywords: whiteness, Sweden, descendants of Polish migrants, passing, betweenness

Den här artikeln intresserar sig för de hierarkier som finns invävda i den svenska versionen av vithet och synliggör hur dessa utmanas av subjekt som passerar som vita. Att passera som vit antas ofta vara något eftersträvarsvärt. Syftet här är dock att empiriskt undersöka den andra sidan av myntet, nämligen negativa erfarenheter och oönskade effekter av att passera som vit. Med teoretisk inspiration från kritiska ras- och vithetsstudier analyseras djupintervjuer med 31 kvinnor och män i den underutforskade kategorin vuxna barn till polska migranter i Sverige. Analysen visar att de intervjuade på olika sätt utmanade rasifierande tillskrivningar av vithet, svenskhet och likhet. De gav vidare uttryckt för erfarenheter av dissonans mellan den likhet de tillskrevs och de egna upplevelserna av olikhet. Artikeln visar därmed att mellanförskap kan erfaras även av vuxna barn till migranter som passerar som vita.

nyckelord: vithet, Sverige, vuxna barn till polska migranter, passera, mellanförskap

“How come you wanted to be part of this project?” This was a question posed to people who volunteered to be interviewed for a study on experiences of growing up with Polish parents in Sweden. Katarina replied:

Maybe because I've reflected a lot on this over the years. Having Polish background in Sweden, it's a bit like being *in-between*. Because people can't tell you're from another country when you walk into a room or something. You pass as *Swedish*. But simultaneously, every time I meet other people with Polish background, we have a lot of things in common. Things which only we understand and

which we laugh at. But it has always felt like it is more anecdotal, rather than something that has been taken seriously or discussed in society. So, this is the first time I see that someone is doing research on this and taking this on as real material.

In Sweden, some 13 percent of the total population of around 10 million are descendants of migrants, that is, they are native-born with one or two foreign-born parents. This article focuses on descendants of *Polish* migrants in Sweden, how they struggle with the norms of Swedish whiteness and contest racialized ascriptions of sameness. Polish migrants form the fourth largest immigrant group in Sweden – after those born in Syria,

Iraq, and Finland – and their children make up almost 3.5 percent of the 13 percent natives in Sweden with one or two foreign-born parents (SCB, 2019, 2020). Despite this, their narrations are seldom heard. The article is based on a project where 31 women and men, who grew up in Sweden with one or two Polish born parents, were interviewed. Just like Katarina above, most of the participants – women and men alike – expressed passing as white as well as Swedish in public space. As whiteness is a position of structural advantage (see e.g. Frankenberg 1993), such passing is often presumed to be something sought after. The aim of this article is however to empirically explore the other side of the coin, namely negative experiences and undesired effects of ‘passing as white’. How did the participants narrate ‘passing as white’? Which negative experiences of this passing were expressed? Which more overarching undesired effects of this passing were made visible in the interview accounts?

By analysing these questions, the article illuminates how the hierarchies of whiteness are challenged from inside, by subjects placed within the category white. As we will see, the analysed negative experiences and undesired effects of passing as white contest not only ideas that such passing is always desired, but they also contest the strong linkage between whiteness and Swedishness.

Theoretical lens

The analysis is made through the lens of critical race- and whiteness studies, according to which whiteness is seen as the main normative cultural practice against which racialized subjects are shaped. In line with this perspective, I use the concept of racialization to illuminate processes through which race is constructed, by attributing socially and relationally produced meaning to phenotypes and performances (cf. Miles 1989; Rattansi 2007). Non-whiteness and whiteness are hence not seen as equal to certain phenotypes or performances, but as products of ascriptions and practiced social relations.

Racialization is a process where differentiation is made between those who are ascribed whiteness and those who are not. Here it is also seen as a process of differentiation made between people *inside* the category white (Clarke & Garner 2010; Garner 2017). I discuss both ascriptions of non-whiteness *and* whiteness as acts of racialization (cf. Frankenberg 1993, Garner 2017). The same goes for ascribing someone Swedishness or non-Swedishness based on interpretations of the person as white or non-white, respectively (cf. Roediger 2005). Such ascriptions are what I label as different modes of racialization, and all these modes of racialization structure people’s lives, though doing so in very different ways – where being racialized as (fully) white generates more privilege and opportunities in comparison to other modes of racialization (Frankenberg 1993). As Sara Ahmed says, racialization affects what bodies can

do – it “orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they ‘take up’ space” (Ahmed 2007: 150).

Whiteness is relational, meaning that there are variations in the whiteness norms in different locations (Garner 2014). There are hence variations of global white hegemony with local variants of whiteness constructions. Here I focus on the Swedish version of whiteness norms, and hence on the construction of Swedish whiteness. As pointed out in previous research, the categories of whiteness and Swedishness very much overlap in the Swedish version of whiteness (e.g. Mattsson 2005, Mattsson & Pettersson 2007, Hübnette et. al 2012: 27f). As expressed by Tobias Hübnette and Catrin Lundström “the difference between the bodily concept of race and the cultural concept of ethnicity has collapsed completely within the Swedish national imaginary” (2011: 44). As will be shown, the interviewees grappled with this strong interlinkage of whiteness and Swedishness.

To blend in and take place in space without standing apart is often labeled as passing (e.g. Ginsburg 1996). Passing is about subjecting yourself to dominating norms – in this case the norms of Swedish whiteness – and letting these govern you, as well as about trying to govern how others perceive you. As Tobias Hübnette (2021: 30) has pointed out, today as many as one in five of the Swedish population have phenotypes adjudged to be non-white. The interview accounts about feeling invisible in public spaces shall hence *not* be understood as descriptions of physical invisibility in relation to the bodies the participants were surrounded by, but – in accordance with the discussions on passing above – as experiences of going unnoticed in relation to the norms of Swedish whiteness.

Previous research

Swedish constructions of whiteness have been studied since the beginning of the 21st century (e.g. Fundberg 2001, 2003) and today *Nordic whiteness* is an established field of research (Lundström & Teitelbaum 2017). This article contributes to studies of Swedish whiteness by problematizing the category of white: by focusing on what is presently an under researched category, namely descendants who narrate being read as white, but also by focusing on the less explored aspect of their negative experiences of passing as white.

Existing qualitative research on descendants of migrants and their feelings of belonging, not only in Sweden but also in the rest of Europe, tend to focus on those racialized as non-white (e.g. Andersson 2003; Bredström 2003; Phoenix 2004, Karlsson Minganti 2007; Ajrouch & Kusow 2007, Simon 2008, Runfors 2011, 2016, Valentine and Sporton 2009, Leon Rosales 2010, El-Tayib 2011, Partridge 2012, Wessendorf 2013).

This focus on those racialized as non-white is also found in the small, recently nascent, Swedish research and writings on *mellanförskap*, in English most often translated as *betweenship* (e.g. Lundberg 2011, Arbouz

2012, Hellström & Netzler 2016). The so far limited literature dedicated to this issue is geared not only toward offspring of migrants in Sweden, but also toward adoptees holding phenotypes that are read as non-white. The literature generally coheres around the betweenship that is created by coming of age in Sweden, and thereby not notably diverging culturally from Swedishness, but despite this, due to body signs, becoming marked as non-Swedish in Sweden (while often being defined as Swedish in their parent's birth country) (e.g. Arbouz 2012).

While the writings on betweenship per definition exclude people read as white, there are, however, a few Swedish qualitative ethnographic studies investigating migrant offspring who are read as white, and which discuss questions related to whiteness and racialization. These include studies on people who grew up in Sweden with parents from Finland (Ågren 2003; Beckman 2018) and on people in Sweden with Jewish affiliation (Nylund Skog 2005, 2014). I will return to these studies in my concluding discussion.

The investigation and the sample

The investigation on which this article is based was conducted in 2018 and performed by in-depth interviews. The interviews were open in character and lasted between two and four hours. They were organized around four themes presented to the interviewees: biography, relations to different places, future plans and, lastly, the position as a descendant of Polish migrants. There were no direct questions posed on whiteness and racialization, nonetheless these issues were raised by the interviewees as they reflected over the themes above.

The participants were found through several channels: advertisements on Facebook, at the Stockholm University Slavic Institution; a Swedish podcast that reports on Poland and, in a few cases, through contacts. The advertisement process resulted in a sample of 31 interviewees – 23 women and eight men between 18 and 42 years of age. All but six grew up in Stockholm, which is one of the cities in Sweden where most Polish migrants have settled (Lubińska 2013). They are not – as one might assume – the children of those many Polish migrants who came to Sweden after Poland's entry into the EU in 2004 – and who are often employed in the construction and cleaning industries (Bengtsson 2016: 61). Rather, they are offspring to Polish migrants who arrived in Sweden during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s; that is, before or a few years after the fall of the communist regime. During this period – particularly during the 1980s but to some extent during the 1990s too – many highly educated people fled the precarious political and economic situation in Poland (Vigerson 1997: 220; Iglicka 2000: 4ff). This is reflected in the interview sample where as many as 26 out of 31 of those interviewed had at least one parent with a Polish degree, and even more described parents who strongly encouraged them to educate themselves (Runfors 2020).

The interviews were all voice recorded and with one exception were performed in Swedish. In the case of the exception, the interview was conducted in English on request of the participant. She had spent a lot of time away from Sweden, in English-speaking countries, and due to this was concerned that her Swedish would not be perfect. Giving the interview in fluent English rather than in slightly broken Swedish seemed to be a way of counteracting ascriptions of non-Swedishness and hence reflected her negotiations with the norms of Swedish whiteness.

The quotes used in this article are chosen to illustrate central themes within the material and are cited from transcriptions of the voice recordings, translated from Swedish into English, and sometimes slightly edited to increase readability. The greater number of quotes from females does not reflect gender differences in the results, but rather indicate the higher number of female interviewees in the project. All participants quoted in the article have been given pseudonyms, in order to ensure personal integrity. Omitted parts in the quotations are marked with [...], or with [---] if more than a few words are left out, while ... indicates that the interviewee made a pause. *Italics* specify those words that participants emphasized.

Going unnoticed in relation to norms of Swedish whiteness

To provide a background to the analysis of negative experiences and undesired effects of passing as white, I start out by summarizing previous articles (Runfors 2021a, 2022) on how participants narrated passing and how this mirrored the norms of Swedish whiteness as well as overlaps between Swedishness and whiteness.

In order not to homogenize descendants of Polish migrants, it is important not to assume that all pass as white. Among the 31 descendants interviewed, there were for example two who had fathers born outside Europe who recounted how they were read as non-white in Sweden – and in Poland. To remain consistent with the central aim of this article, the 29 interviewees who expressed passing as white will be the principal focus of this text.¹

Going unnoticed in public spaces was repeatedly mentioned among these 29 interviewees – such as when Susanna said: “People like me are like day walkers. We can move around society without drawing any attention to us”. People read as white most often do not think of themselves as such, but rather as neutral (Frankenberg 1993, Dyer 1997, Ahmed 2007, 2011). However, some of the descendants interviewed here explicitly talked of themselves as white, as for example Dominika:

The social climate towards immigrants has been getting tougher, especially for dark-skinned people. Although they are in the same situation as me...

¹ For more on the two descendants expressing being read as non-white, see Runfors 2022.

they grew up with two parents [born abroad] ... they are called "svartskallar" [a derogatory expression for people who are read as non-white, literally meaning people with black hair] and experience a lot of shit because they have a different skin colour. I have been able to escape that because I am white. And because I originate from a country less looked down upon.

As in the interview with Dominika, situations in which descendants expressed awareness of their own ascribed whiteness often occurred when they contrasted their own situations to those of "dark-skinned people". This indicates attentiveness of the privileged position they themselves have been attributed, as well as the fact that skin-color impacts on one's life opportunities (Runfors 2021a).

To be white is to go unnoticed in a context of white hegemony, as Werner and Björk state (2021). But, as mirrored in the introductory quote with Katarina, the interviewees placed an equal sign between passing as white and passing as Swedish. As I have explored in more detail elsewhere their narratives empirically demonstrate the strong intersection between whiteness and Swedishness (Runfors 2021a, 2022). They furthermore help to illustrate what I have labelled the norms of *materialized Swedish whiteness*. They illuminate aspects required for being interpreted as white and Swedish and hence for satisfying the current norms of Swedish whiteness: a body with physical characteristics such as light skin colour, but also other blond phenotypes (Runfors 2021a). But they also illustrate the need for performative abilities to be interpreted as white and Swedish: to speak Swedish as a native and to enact dominant Swedish norms by dressing, moving, and behaving in particular ways. These seldomly discussed aspects of the norms of Swedish whiteness I have labelled *performative Swedish whiteness*. To be able to pass these latter norms also distinguished these descendants from their migrant parents, who came of age in Poland (Runfors 2021a).

Imputed sameness

Although the descendants in focus here passed both the norms of materialised and performative Swedish whiteness, and seemed aware that this entailed privileges, there was an urge among many of them to talk about negative experiences of passing as both white and Swedish. Just as Katerina expressed in the introductory quote, many perceived of such experiences as seldom acknowledged.

One of the aspects of passing as white and Swedish that was experienced negatively by several interviewees, was being assigned experiences they did not have. Being imputed particular childhood experiences is one such example. "'Oh, that TV-programme we watched when we were small children', they can for example say. 'No, we did not', I reply. I rather watched Polish children's

programmes", Adam recalls when talking of his relations with peers who also grew up in Sweden but with native born parents.

Many felt that people often assumed that they would have experiences not only of contemporary Swedish children's culture, but also of popular holiday Swedish locations, or the habit of visiting a family summer house in the Swedish countryside, of celebrating midsummer or joining crayfish parties. "But I spent my summers in a car, traveling to and through Poland", Adam explains. The attribution of majority experiences hence often concerned everyday issues and assumingly banal things. Nevertheless, this attribution mattered to the interviewees. It meant that they had to handle assumptions about the existence of sameness in the form of similar experiences, and also similar knowledge. As Veronica remarks:

There are a lot of things people [in Sweden] expect from me that I do not really master. [...] I can myself feel that it is a bit odd that there is so much in Swedish everyday life that is strange to me – as I lived here all my life and I am *born* here [...]. But things such as having a summer cottage, having grown up in a dull neighbourhood with villas [...] all those things my friend talk about. I simply *cannot comprehend* these things. It turns out a bit strange, why shouldn't I – that seems to be so Swedish and middle class – understand these things. But I am totally bewildered. As I did not grow up in Poland it is natural that I do not understand all Polish things. But I can feel an equal distance toward Sweden. Although I came of age here, things can suddenly pop up...such as when people at work talk of skiing holidays. I never ever used a pair of skis. In my family, we have never done some of the things that are so *common* in Sweden.

Experienced expectations of sameness also meant navigating expectations of fitting into dominating norms. And these expectations sometimes seemed to generate feelings of estrangement and of not fitting in, as reflected in Veronica's account.

As in the abovementioned quotes, other respondents also contrasted their own experiences with those of 'Swedes'. Even if it is obviously the case that the experiences of people with native born parents themselves do differ, owing to a myriad of aspects – such as for example class position, location and alike – the interviewees had constructed for themselves a clear and often very coherent picture of Swedishness. In their narratives they both produced and reproduced this picture. This imagined homogenous Swedishness can be interpreted as being formed in relation to the norms of Swedish whiteness norms with which the descendants of migrants struggled – norms to which they had to adhere if they wanted to pass.

To summarize then, one aspect of passing as white and Swedish that was experienced as negative were expectations about being the same in relation to majority people. But, as we saw, the interviewees themselves did not necessarily experience this sameness. For, when it came to the performative side of Swedish whiteness there were aspects that some felt they could not always master – for example having experiences and knowledge about some traditions and habits common in Swedish contexts. Paradoxically enough, the ascribed sameness could generate feelings of lack and alienation.

Clouded experiences of differences

Sometimes I feel that ethnic Swedes...they do not understand what it entails to have parents born abroad. They think we are the same and do not grasp all those small things we [who have parents born abroad] experience in our everyday life – and have experienced since we were small children. [---] If I compare with somebody who is Swedish solely, I have taken part in another culture and seen another country and people [---] It is *different*. The country [Poland] has a different history [...] which of course contributes to people behaving differently. [---] Then again, it's another thing with people who have a background that's visible – in the Middle East or Somalia for example – where it *shows*. That is also very different. We both have an equal amount of foreign background, but I go unnoticed, I am not *identified*. Still, it's very different [---] You are foreign, but you are not foreign enough. [---] It's just as if you don't have the right to your background. While my friend, who is from Somalia, it is like she has a *right* to her background to a greater extent – because it *shows*.

Paulina above states that, due to having parents from Poland, she has acquired experiences that make her different from people with native born parents. But since she passes as white, she is not identified as having parents born in another country. This means that her own experiences of difference are left unacknowledged. She contrasts herself with a friend who has parents from Somalia, who due to her phenotypes does not pass as white and is neither ascribed Swedishness nor sameness, but rather otherness and experiences related to other places. The consequence to which Paulina draws attention is that while the background of her friend is acknowledged due to the racialization of her as non-white and non-Swedish, her own background, and the experiences of differences that go with this, remains unrecognized due to the racialization of her as white and Swedish.

Although expressing awareness that passing as white and as Swedish meant being in possession of privileges, many – just as Paulina above – expressed not always

wanting to go unnoticed, not always wanting to pass. Because passing also meant that some of their own experiences as descendants could be obscured. Veronica for example describes this feeling quite vividly:

Sometimes I almost wished that I had more foreign *looks* or that I maybe had a Polish accent – or something. That it sort of *showed* a bit more. It would just be kind of *nice*. Because I sense the differences – and it would be nice if these differences were more visible also to others. [---] To have them sort of acknowledged. To lay all the cards on the table. [---] It is like a collision between how I feel and how I am perceived of. There is no real overlap there.

When asked about the kind of difference that the acknowledgment of her Polish connections might make to her, Veronica responds: “Then it would be sort of *clear*. It would be clear that I am not fully Swedish. I would not have to explain or add anything”.

So, passing as white not only meant being imputed sameness and not only fostered feelings of incompleteness. It also had the undesired effect that descendants' own experiences and feelings of difference were left unacknowledged.

Hidden personalities and concealed identity positions

The interviewees' possibilities to pass as well as to choose not to was probably a prerequisite for desiring visibility. As we saw above, this desire could even contain a wish to stand out from the crowd rather than to be regarded as the same as everyone else. Many participants also said that – due to their Polish upbringing – they had developed personalities they described as being a bit too outgoing and assertive for Swedish contexts. Most however displayed a clear awareness that these extrovert traits could make them stand out. “I feel rather uncomfortable – or I actually feel like an UFO – for example in situations when I talk too much. Then it feels weird, and I feel I take up too much space. And I think I often do”, as Katarina reflects.

Due to this awareness many participants also described a pressure to play down in many Swedish contexts, their outgoing sides. As Jacob expresses it: “I feel I need to put a strain on myself in certain situations in Sweden. [---] I cannot really be myself. I cannot be as extrovert as I can be in Poland”. Yet, many expressed a longing to be able to show their whole personality. Veronica, for example, comments:

I would like to be allowed to behave a bit different and to have another type of personality. But when it does not *show* that you grew up in a different context, it is also made invisible. I for example have many friends from South America and nobody questions

their personality, nobody questions them for being extrovert and for talking a lot and so on [...] Sometimes I feel – maybe more some years ago – that I do not behave as subtle and withdrawn...yes, as *Swedish* [as people expect]. [---] So, I have played down my personality a lot. Because I look like a Swede, I talk like a Swede, so why do I not behave like a Swede. [---] But if you do *not* look Swedish, you can get away with not behaving like one.

To have their own feelings of difference and their personalities acknowledged, these descendants could choose not to pass, by making their Polish affiliation known. This possibility was however described as leading to unwanted situations – such as having to face the derogatory stereotypes of Poles. Visibility of their Polish affiliation also led to questions on whether they felt Swedish or Polish, and to people trying to place them in one clear identity position, as *either* Swedish or non-Swedish and Polish. Because, according to the interviewees, these were the only and dichotomic identity categories offered.

There are a lot of Swedes who want to tell you that ‘you are Swedish’. I *am* Swedish, but sometimes I want to ask them not to deny my [Polish] background. It is who I am. And I have the right to be that person’. Of course, I am also Swedish! Sweden is where I feel I belong. But it’s a bit sensitive. I think the only one who can decide on these things is *me*.

Thus, choosing not to pass not only generated stereotypes, but also identity ascriptions to which the descendants could not fully relate. Moreover, this did *not* lead to acknowledgement of their own feelings of being different and their own perceptions of self. Nor did it lead to recognition of their own perceptions of belonging. Raised in Sweden, with one or two parents who grew up in Poland, many, like Paulina above, stated that they could or would not define themselves solely as Swedish, nor as solely Polish. As put by Joanna: “Well, I don’t know how to feel like a Swede, or how you feel like a Pole. I’ve just felt the same way all along, and that is like a kind of a mix.” Or as expressed by Izabel: “It really varies. I would never say that I am Swedish *or* Polish, because I think I am quite a lot of both”. As explored in greater detail elsewhere (Runfors 2021b), the self-images expressed by the interviewees varied in accordance with contextual factors. Often, they felt as though they did not fit into the discursively received identity category ‘Swedish’, which Paulina and several others claimed was the first ascription people in their surroundings tended to choose, nor into the position ‘Polish’, which was the identity category they tended to be ascribed if they resisted the ascription of being Swedish.

In addition to the earlier described negative experiences and undesired effects of passing as white and

Swedish, one can hence add more overarching unwanted effects. Because this passing also meant that no room was left for displaying their personalities, nor for the complex and varying identity positions they had developed as descendants.

Concluding discussion

This article has contributed to the field of research on Swedish whiteness by focusing on the under researched category of descendants who narrate passing as white and by making visible undesired effects of such passing. Thereby it has sought to problematize the category of white.

Although the descendants studied here passed most of the norms of Swedish whiteness, and while this opened for both privilege and choice, those interviewed also narrated negative aspects of such passing. Passing as white meant being positioned as Swedish as well as being attributed sameness. It resulted in being ascribed majority experience and knowledge and having to handle expectations of fitting into dominating norms of Swedishness. This in turn, meant that everyday experiences acquired as descendants went unnoticed and that the descendants, in order to adjust to the prevailing norms, had to conceal parts of their personalities. It furthermore meant that multifaceted subject positions the descendants had developed were obscured. Taken together, the effect was that the descendants’ own feelings of difference were unacknowledged and that feelings of alienation and of being incomplete were fostered. This generated desires not to be defined by others, but rather to be acknowledged in all facets of lived experience and in all subject positions taken up.

Studies on betweenship and on descendants racialized as non-white and non-Swedish have illustrated dissonances, that is, non-convergences between how people are perceived due to bodily markers and performances, on the one hand, and how, on the other hand, they perceive themselves – that is, between on the one hand the otherness ascribed to subjects racialized as non-white and non-Swedish and on the other hand their own feelings of sameness and Swedishness (Leon Rosales 2010; Arbouz 2012; Runfors 2012; Lundberg 2011, Hellström & Netzler 2016). This article has sought to make its contribution to this field by showing that betweenship and dissonance can also be experienced by migrant descendants who are racialized as white, such as in the case of descendants of Polish migrants discussed here. In this specific case, the dissonance surfacing was inverted compared to the examples mentioned above. It was a non-convergence between on the one hand the sameness ascribed to them, and on the other hand their own perceptions of otherness.

Moreover, these negative experiences and undesired effects of passing, and the resulting dissonance that ensued, challenge the hierarchies inherent in the

Swedish version of whiteness. They contest the strong linkage of Swedishness and whiteness, where passing as white means being positioned as Swedish and seen as the same. It furthermore challenges the homogenizing, dichotomic and hierarchical identity categories Swedish and non-Swedish offered by the Swedish version of whiteness as well as the ideas that the former is always the clear-cut, sought-after position.

The results discussed here to some extent resonate with previous Swedish qualitative studies on descendants passing as white (Ågren 2003, Nylund Skog 2005, 2014, Beckman 2018). Within the frame of this short article, I will briefly comment on this – at risk of simplifying and missing nuances. The descendants with Finnish affiliation in Ågrens (2003) and Beckmans (2018) investigations, and those with Jewish background in Nylund Skog's (2005, 2014) also described passing as white and thereby as Swedish. They were also able to choose whether or not to pass. Just as the Polish affiliated descendants discussed here, participants in these other studies described how this passing could unwillingly be disrupted if their names were made visible or if they chose to speak their parent's mother tongue. Although none of these studies explicitly analyze the question of negative experiences of passing as white, Beckman and Nylund Skog both touch on the subject. Beckman states that although his interviewees were not racialized as different, they sometimes perceived *themselves* as different in relation to Swedishness (2018). This implies navigating undesired ascriptions of sameness following with passing as white. Nylund Skog (2005, 2014) in turn, describes how her research participants had to negotiate the question whether they should (try to) pass as a Swede, and thereby conceal their Jewish background and face expectations of fitting into the norm? Or should they disclose their Jewish affiliation and take on the risk of being confronted not only with stereotypical ascriptions related to Jewishness and clear-cut categorizations as Swedish or not – as in the case of the Polish affiliated descendants – but also feared prosecution and violence? Nylund Skog's research participants thus seemed to experience similar undesired effects of passing as those discussed here.

Both Beckman and Nylund Skog thus implicitly depict negative experiences and undesired effects of being read as white. This indicate that the dissonances illustrated in this article may be at hand among descendants racialized as white more generally. That in turn calls for more studies on undesired effects of passing as white among descendants ascribed whiteness. Not only because this is an underexplored subject, where the intersections of whiteness with class and gender are still to be explored, but also because such studies may further problematize assumptions that passing as white is always desired by those who are attributed whiteness and hence further challenge the hierarchies of whiteness.

Author biography

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