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Review

The Double-Edged Nature of Whiteness for Multiracial People with White Ancestry in the US and UK

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Abstract: The privileges of Whiteness have been theorized and debated for some decades. Because White privilege has been manifested, historically, in myriad forms, it has been possible to treat the privileges of Whiteness as a given, even when its changing manifestations are acknowledged. The continuing growth of multiracial people with White ancestry in the US (and other societies) provides an opportunity for scholars to rethink what we mean by White privilege, and how the workings of White privilege for multiracial people and families may differ from those associated with traditional understandings of Whiteness. One of the important questions posed in this special issue concerns the question of how multiracial people may benefit from the unearned privileges of their genealogical and lived proximity to Whiteness, including a White appearance, White relatives and networks, and White spaces. The key question I address in this review article is this: How is White ancestry and proximity to Whiteness and White people experienced by part-White multiracial people, and how does it differ from traditional forms of White privilege? First, I review various bodies of literature to address this question, and second, I draw upon examples from my research on racially mixed people with White ancestry in both the US and Britain. I argue that although many multiracial people benefit from their White ancestry (in a variety of ways), not enough attention has been given to the double-edged and negative aspects of Whiteness for multiracial people with White ancestry.

Keywords: multiracial; White; Whiteness; whitening; ancestry; mixed; US; Britain

Received: 11 February 2025
Revised: 1 April 2025
Accepted: 17 April 2025
Published: 22 April 2025

Citation: Song, Miri. 2025. The Double-Edged Nature of Whiteness for Multiracial People with White Ancestry in the US and UK. *Genealogy* 9: 46. https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy9020046

1. Introduction

The privileges of Whiteness have been theorized and debated for some decades, and despite pushback from many quarters, such privileges constitute a kind of unspoken orthodoxy among many race scholars in the US (and elsewhere). Because White privilege has been manifest, historically, in myriad forms, it has been possible to treat the privileges of Whiteness as a given, even when its changing manifestations are acknowledged. While the boundaries of Whiteness have changed over time, for instance in relation to the inclusion of European migrants to the US, the unabating growth of part-White multiracial people in the US (and other societies) provides an opportunity for scholars to rethink what we mean by White privilege, and how the workings of White privilege for multiracial people and families may differ from those associated with traditional understandings of Whiteness.

I use the terms 'multiracial', 'racially mixed', and 'mixed' interchangeably throughout, as no one term is definitively accepted among scholars or even the lay population. When referring to a 'multiracial' person, I mean someone who has biological parents who are deemed to be of different races (Morning 2000; Song 2021).

A number of important questions are posed in this special issue, including, as Waring (2023) asserts, the question of how multiracial people may benefit from the unearned privileges of their genealogical and lived proximity to Whiteness (including a White appearance), White people, and White networks. The key question I address in this review article is this: How is White ancestry and proximity to Whiteness and White people experienced by part-White multiracial people, and how does it differ from traditional forms of White privilege? White ancestry refers to knowledge of recent or distant biological relatives of European heritage; even if White ancestry is known, it is not necessarily reported by a mixed person, or validated with others. First, I review various bodies of literature to address this question, and second, I draw upon examples from my research on racially mixed people with White ancestry in both Britain and the US.

I argue that although many multiracial people benefit from their White ancestry (in a variety of ways), not enough attention has been given to the double-edged and negative aspects of Whiteness for multiracial people with White ancestry. Having White ancestry can be double-edged because while there are ways in which multiracial people can benefit from having a White (or light) appearance, parent, upbringing, or partner, mixed people may also simultaneously experience these connections to Whiteness as personally complicated and/or difficult. In this review article, I focus on the ways in which mixed people with White ancestry can feel ambivalent about their White ancestry, and/or see it as somehow problematic, especially in their efforts to connect with their minority cultures and communities.

In this review article, I draw upon findings from two studies of mixed people with White ancestry: one US study (a mixed-methods study employing US census data and interviews), and one UK study (based on in-depth interviews).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Histories of White Privilege

The privileges of Whiteness, borne of diverse colonial histories, are well documented (Young 1994; Stoler 2002; Fanon 1952). White privilege refers to the often unseen and unconscious advantages that operate as an invisible force. Whiteness as a basis of material, social, and psychological privilege has been documented for decades, especially as it intersects with heteronormativity and male privilege (McIntosh 1989; Frankenberg 1993). A key benefit of Whiteness is that to be White is to be an unencumbered individual, who is not subject to essentializing forms of racial assignment (Kao 2000; Sullivan 2006; Chesler et al. 2003). As Dyer (1997) has observed: 'White people create the dominant images of the world and don't quite see that they thus construct the world in their image' (p. 9). Whiteness is an 'unmarked cultural space' (Frankenberg 1993), where White people are the non-defined definers of others. In *Revealing Whiteness: the Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege*, Sullivan (2006) has written about the unconscious sense of entitlements that White people enjoy in their everyday lives.

It is difficult to overstate the wide-reaching nature of White privilege. For example, much has been written about the dominance of Eurocentric beauty norms across much of the globe (see, e.g., Bakhshi and Baker 2011). The premium attached to a White appearance and/or some White ancestry is documented in many areas of social life. For example, studies of online dating show that part-White men and women are more likely to receive interest than monoracial minorities without White ancestry (Curington et al. 2015; Feliziano and Kizer 2021). The privileges of Whiteness are also extensively documented in writings about colorism, and the many benefits associated with a White or light-skinned appearance (Hunter 2007; Tharps 2016). Studies document the global commodification of the skin-

lightening industry, pointing to the nexus of White supremacy and color consciousness (Dixon and Telles 2017).

Given the growth of part-White mixed people in many Western societies, how do we situate and conceptualize the experiences of mixed people with White ancestry in relation to White people with no known non-European ancestries?

2.2. Expanding Boundaries of Whiteness?

As noted by various scholars, the boundaries of Whiteness have been historically changeable, and are shaped by changing demographics and politics—migration, rates of intermarriage, and changing social norms. Historically, Irish and Jewish immigrants, as well as many Southern European immigrants to the US, were not considered to be White—a category of membership reserved for Anglo and Northern European immigrants to the US (see Ignatiev 2006; Brodkin 1998). More recently, on the other side of the Atlantic, scholars have pointed to the lesser status of certain Eastern European migrants to the UK and other European countries—problematizing understandings of a shared Whiteness. In fact, gradations of Whiteness are recognized, and fought over, in order to gain the full privileges associated with Whiteness, especially in relation to other racialized minorities (Krivonos 2018; Fox 2013).

In the US, in the context of increased diversification, some scholars have argued that the boundaries of Whiteness are being enlarged, to include many Asian and Latino immigrant groups, at least in an 'honorary' capacity, in specific contexts; the characterization of especially well-educated groups as model minorities has been central to this purported expansion (see e.g., Yancey 2003; Lee and Bean 2010; Gans 2011). Bonilla-Silva (2004) observed the emergence of 'honorary Whites', including some Cuban Americans, and lighter-skinned Asian Americans, within an emergent tri-racial hierarchy in the US.

Furthermore, we are now living in a time where racial contestation contributes to debates about group membership, and who is and is not White (Brubaker 2016; Song 2020; Vargas and Stainback 2016). People who may not have been born into a specific racial origin family may claim a racial identity that differs from their known family genealogy. Increasingly, though not uncontroversially, people who look White (but who have minority ancestry) may claim a minority identity or affiliation (see Morning 2018; Pilgrim 2021; Song 2021). While heated accusations of racial fraud or inauthenticity still abound, the very fact that some individuals can go against the racial orthodoxies of the past (where racial appearance and racial identity 'match') is sociologically remarkable.

Recently, the growth of multiracial people with White ancestry has engendered debate about whether and how they may be expanding the boundaries of the 'White' category. According to the 2020 US census, people counted as multiracial (that is, those who marked more than once race group) has grown to 10.2%—though the coding practice changed from the prior census (Tavernise et al. 2021). The characterization of many multiracial people is fundamentally influenced by the fact that most multiracial people in North America and Europe have White ancestry—often, one White parent (Pew Research Center 2015; Bradford 2006). However, we are already witnessing the growth of second-generation mixed people with one White grandparent (Pilgrim 2021). Some of these mixed people with 'more' White ancestry may reject quantifiable measures of genealogical ancestry as a basis of their racial identity claims.

Historically, in the US the 'one-drop rule' of hypodescent would have made the question of whether part-White people could be considered White an impossibility, since one's non-White ancestry was assigned to someone, even if they had mostly White ancestry and a White appearance (Davis 1991). Although it is still rare for Black-White people to identify as White, recent studies of Black-White mixed people in the US point to the

decline of the one-drop rule, especially in terms of how such people racially identify or are identified by their parents (see Roth 2005; Bratter 2007).

In fact, some sociologists have argued that contemporary understandings of an expanded Whiteness can include some part-White multiracial people (especially people without Black ancestry), because Whiteness no longer requires the absolute need for 'racial purity'; instead, this notion of Whiteness relies upon 'socioeconomic standards and cultural assimilation as the price of admission' (Rockquemore and Arend 2002, p. 61). In Whiteshift, Kauffman (2018) asserts that racially mixed part -White people will increasingly blur and expand what we understand as the White population, what Kauffman calls the 'ethnic majority'. Kauffman asserts 'that the ethnic majority will ultimately become transracial or beige. . .' (Chotiner 2019).

2.3. Are Multiracial People with White Ancestry Minorities?

There is ongoing debate about how we should characterize multiracial people with White ancestry. For instance, how should they be situated in a racial hierarchy, vis-à-vis White and non-White people? Should part-White mixed people be deemed a racial minority (Song 2020)? In the UK, the Office for National Statistics treats part-White individuals as 'mixed'—as a non-White category (as anyone who is not solely White)—and hence, an implied minority. In the US, Alba (2020) argues that the US census wrongly counts part-White mixed people as minorities, as many people with White ancestry could be seen as more White than minority.

Legal scholar Rich (2014) argues that multiracial people occupy a distinctive legal and social status which should be recognized, but Hernandez (2018) disagrees, arguing that it is not mixedness per se, but Black ancestry, that makes Black-White mixed people much like other monoracial Black people. In fact, it is very difficult to generalize about multiracial people, given the substantial racial, ethnic, and generational diversity among this population (Song 2021).

While Alba (2020) acknowledges that the identities of mixed individuals are not consistent with exclusive Whiteness: '. . .mixed young Americans. . .show the most unambiguous signs of assimilation, such as feeling socially comfortable with whites, frequently marrying whites, and identifying in flexible ways that include references to whiteness. . .For those in the mainstream, ethno-racial origins carry much diminished weight in determining life chances, social affiliations, and even identities. This reduced role of origins can be characterized as decategorization, which also entails interactions with others that are not fundamentally colored by ethno-racial categories (p. 213)'. Here, Alba suggests that part-White multiracial people are really much closer to White people than to their minority counterparts.

Yet some political scientists point to a different sense of mixed people's positioning in relation to White and non-White Americans. Political scientists have investigated the political attitudes and leanings of multiracial people in relation to both White and minority people. Masuoka (2008) has argued that multiracial people in the US occupy a kind of in-between position in terms of their political alignment vis-à-vis White and monoracial minority groups (namely, between White and Black). Following Masuoka's study, Capili (2024) examined whether disparate types of multiracial people lean White or non-White in their political ideologies and party affiliations. Capili concludes '. . .that multiracials are more likely to lean non-White. Results suggest that they experience group consciousness with their non-White monoracial counterparts. . .' Furthermore, Capili reports that multiracial people 'exhibit significant agency in the process of racialization, choosing to understand themselves as minorities rather than aspire toward Whiteness, which in many cases is readily available to them'.

2.4. Disparate Multiracial Experiences and Ethnic Options

In the US, a number of scholars have argued that Black-White multiracial experiences are distinctive. While other types of multiracials (especially Asian-Whites, and Latinx-White) are said to lean more toward their White backgrounds, Black-White people are characterized as leaning toward their Black ancestries (Strmc-Pawl 2016; Alba 2020; Lee and Bean 2007). Numerous studies have found that Black-White mixed people are often racially assigned as Black by others who may disregard their White ancestries (see Aspinall and Song 2013; Rockquemore and Brunsma 2002; Tizard and Phoenix 1993).

While part-Black people's ethnic options are historically more constrained than those of other multiracial people, studies have shown that growing numbers of Black/White multiracial people are now racially identifying as both Black and White (see Pew Research Center 2015; Rockquemore and Brunsma 2002; Roth 2005; Bratter 2007; Khanna 2011; Liebler 2016). Furthermore, some Black-White people feel more aligned with their White ancestries and family members, though this is rarely documented (Liebler and Song 2025).

Those without Black ancestry are characterized as identifying more as White people, and it is assumed that they are seen by others as largely White. Thus, in addition to the idea of cultural whitening, whitening is also suggested in their embodiment, with such mixed people being reportedly 'flexible' in how they identify themselves, which presumes that their desired identifications are validated by others. However, there is significant physical variation in how mixed Asian-White people are perceived by others, with some appearing 'fully' Asian, while others are seen as racially ambiguous, or White (Fulbeck 2006; Rondilla and Spickard 2007; Standen 1996). The characterization of part-White mixed people as enjoying fluid racial identities is belied by the fact that their 'observed race' (Roth 2016), the race they are attributed by others, may not correspond with how they see themselves—there can be a racial mismatch.

Ideas about White privilege enjoyed by mixed people with White ancestry tend to presume that they can invoke their Whiteness at will—that this is an ethnic option that is readily available to them. In fact, various qualitative studies have shown that this is not the case for many Asian-White multiracials (see Murphy-Shigematsu 2012; Chang 2016; Aspinall and Song 2013). As I have argued, 'it is clear that unless one looks (by conventional norms in Britain) entirely White European, one's membership in the category White was not likely to be secure—and thus one's desired ethnic option (as White) could not be exercised (Song 2003)' (p. 942).

Qualitative studies do not point to a clear trend toward whitening for multiracial people of various racial ancestries (Song 2017, 2021; Chong and Song 2022; Davenport 2018). Nikki Khanna's (2004) study of 110 Asian-White multiracial people in the US found an almost even number of respondents identifying most strongly as White (50.9%) and as Asian (49.1%). Davenport's (2018) study of Asian-White, Black-White, and Latino-White college students on the West Coast found an aversion to adopting a White racial identity, even if they looked White by prevailing social norms—across all three mixed groups.

A new study comparing Black-White, Asian-White, and Native-White mixed people in the US found not only differences but also important areas of convergence among disparate mixed people, especially among those who identified with multiple races (Liebler and Song 2025). For example, part-White mixed people across (and within) all three groups varied in their propensity to choose White and minority spouses, but some of those who chose White spouses reported that they were racially and politically conscious, and mindful of the history of White supremacy.

Furthermore, as discussed below, it is not the case that all part-White multiracial people wish to 'whiten', if given the opportunity, as is often implied (e.g., see Saperstein and Penner 2012; Yancey 2003). It is also important that we do not conflate a wish to be

accepted as bona fide Americans with a wish to be recognized as White (Aspinall and Song 2013). Empirical research suggests that this is not the case for many part-White mixed people, some of whom may be more attached to their minority ancestries, and who acknowledge, yet resist, or problematize, their White ancestry (see Aspinall and Song 2013; Song 2017).

2.5. Multiracials and Intermarriage with White People

Furthermore, the idea of the whitening (and White privilege) of multiracial people is linked with the fact that most multiracial people in Western societies partner with White individuals (Bradford 2006; Muttarak and Heath 2010; Song 2009; Pew Research Center 2017). For many analysts, one longstanding orthodoxy is that intermarriage with White people is the ultimate litmus test of integration (see Gordon 1964; Alba and Nee 2003). That is, intermarriage with White people is deemed the ultimate marker of social acceptance, resulting in both socioeconomic and cultural benefits. Large-scale intermarriage (with White people) is said to result, inevitably, in the loss of ethnic distinctiveness and 'ethnic attrition' (Duncan and Trejo 2014).

However, this theorizing of intermarriage makes a number of problematic assumptions, such as that marriage with a White person will inevitably result in the minority partner's erosion of attachments to his or her minority ancestries, and that partnering with a White person will translate into automatic social acceptance by the White mainstream. I have argued against a simplistic equation of intermarriage (with Whites) and 'integration' (Song 2009; Rodríguez-García et al. 2015). The presumption that the minority partner is simply folded into, and embraces, their White partner's background and dominant culture is unsubstantiated in qualitative research.

This tidy picture is problematic. Recent work by some scholars, such as Vasquez (2014), Vasquez-Tokos (2017) and Chong (2020), challenges the idea that Latinos or Asians who partner with White Americans are necessarily 'whitening'. Chong and Song (2022) have also challenged the idea that it is always the minority partner who adapts to a predominantly White culture and habitus in their relationships. Vasquez-Tokos and others argue for the importance of recognizing that cultural exchanges and processes of identification are not solely one-way, or ones that involve ethnic minorities who inevitably 'lose' their ethnic distinctiveness and attachments—as will be illustrated below.

2.6. Whiteness as a Liability? The Double-Edged Nature of Whiteness and White Ancestry

Above, we have discussed that the boundaries and meanings of Whiteness are being contested, especially in light of major demographic shifts. Furthermore, as argued by Linda Alcoff (2015), in *The Future of Whiteness*, White identity in the US is 'in ferment'. White people are becoming increasingly aware of how they may be perceived by non-Whites. According to Alcoff (2015), younger generations of White Americans can no longer inhabit a country in which their White identity constitutes 'the unchallenged default that dominates the political, economic and cultural leadership'—although the combative re-ascendancy of Trump, and his attacks on DEI initiatives and deportations, may revitalize and embolden forms of White supremacy in the US and other countries.

Interestingly, especially among many younger White people, Whiteness is not regarded as an unalloyed positive attribute (Horowitz et al. 2019).[1] In fact, in various politically and racially conscious sectors, Whiteness is associated with a shameful history of enslavement, conquest, and racial injustice, and this consciousness has been enhanced in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder and the ongoing Black Lives Matter movement. Jardina et al. (2021) found that some negative emotional reactions, in the aftermath of the 2016 US elections, such as disgust toward Donald Trump, were associated with some Whites distancing themselves

from their racial identity. Such unease about the negative resonances of Whiteness was articulated by some part-White mixed people, who could feel some unease and ambivalence about their White ancestry (Liebler and Song 2025). However, critics who acknowledge that histories of White racism and colonization are constitutive of Whiteness and White subjectivity may still insist that Whiteness cannot be simply reduced to this nefarious history alone. For example, Alcoff (2015) has argued that Whiteness—based on a hugely varied demographic of White people—is more complicated.

As discussed above, writings have emphasized the unearned privileges of Whiteness and proximity to White people and networks (McIntosh 1989; Waring 2023). Waring (2023) also refers to 'white privilege by proxy'—resources that can be accessed via a White parent 'that improved their opportunities and quality of life' (p. 61). Such a connection with a White parent can yield privileges that can be enjoyed regardless of one's racial appearance (such as a White parent showing up to parent–teacher meetings). However, Waring also notes that being light-skinned or White can mean exclusion from minority communities; such dynamics are reported in many other studies (see Khanna and Johnson 2010; Nakashima 1996; Rockquemore and Brunsma 2002; Mengel 2001; Aspinall and Song 2013; Campion 2019).

On the whole, there has not been enough attention to experiences of exclusion and marginalization of part-White mixed people by their monoracial minority counterparts or relatives. This is not a minor afterthought for some mixed people (see chapters in Root 1992; chapters in Root 1996; Standen 1996; Song 2017; Mengel 2001). A substantial body of qualitative research has documented many experiences of rejection, and how they shaped mixed people's pathways in relation to their identities, social networks, and spousal choices. Song (2017) and Pilgrim (2021)'s research on second-generation mixed people illustrates the constraints to minority identification and affiliation, and how such mixed people (especially those with mostly White parentage) must often contend with tropes around racial authenticity.

Therefore, while most research has focused on the unearned benefits of White ancestry and genealogical proximity to Whiteness, not enough research has focused on what I call the racial aspirations of mixed people who wish to forge connections and membership in their non-White ancestry groups.

We need to re-evaluate what it means for mixed individuals to have a White parent, partner, or (White-appearing) child. In addition to the potential privileges, having a White parent, partner, or White-appearing child may entail a complex set of feelings and scenarios that can be difficult or challenging for mixed individuals. White parents and partners can also vary considerably in their racial consciousness and politics. As I argue below, one important conclusion is that even as forms of White privilege still flourish, we cannot talk about White people (whether as a parent, partner, or child) as a monolithic and homogeneous whole.

While some part-White mixed people may see themselves and experience their day-to-day lives as largely White in an unproblematic way, this will not be the case for other part-White mixed people, who identify and affiliate more with their minority heritage. There is significant variability in the lived experiences and identities of part-White mixed people (even among mixed people with Black heritage), such that all forms of White privilege cannot be assumed. While many mixed people acknowledge forms of privilege that derive from their White appearance, or a White parent, these privileges can also be double-edged, especially if they do not see themselves as White, or value their White ancestry. Nor can part-White people, as a whole, be assumed to be an expanding part of the White mainstream in any straightforward sense—the empirical evidence is still nascent (Liebler and Song 2025).

As Waring (2023) notes, multiracial people with White ancestry can enjoy both privileges—but also disadvantages ('a price') associated with their White ancestry: 'I illuminate the price of appearing White (and light) for bi/multiracials in ways that are similar to but also different from monoracism'. In a review of microaggressions experienced by multiracial people, Johnson and Nadal (2010) elaborate upon various categories of microaggressions that can be experienced by multiracial people involving exclusion or isolation (often on the basis of racial authenticity), the denial of multiracial reality, and the pathologizing of identity and experiences (p. 132). Multiracial people may experience the denial of their multiracial reality when they face 'microinvalidations' whereby multiracial people '. . . are told that their experiences with race are not as difficult as they are for monoracial people of color' (p. 138).

In this article I want to take Waring's article further, and, in particular, extend the discussion of the 'price' of White ancestry for some multiracial people. While forms of privilege persist in various ways, by virtue of mixed people's proximity to their White ancestry, we need more investigations into how Whiteness and White ancestry and/or relationships with White others are experienced by multiracial people. I will do so by drawing on examples from my prior research on part-White multiracial people in the UK (henceforth referred to as the 'UK study'), and also from a recently completed study about part-White people in the US (henceforth referred to as the 'US study').

3. Methodology

In both the US and UK studies, I look at how mixed people with White ancestry negotiate their racial identification, choice of spouse, and children's upbringing. The UK study (funded by the Leverhulme Trust) of Black-White, East Asian-White, and South Asian-White people (who were parents) explored how issues around race and culture were transmitted down to their children (Song 2017); the UK study relied on a non-representative sample of in-depth interviews (mostly conducted face to face) in England. The US study was funded by the Russell Sage Foundation, and carried out with Carolyn Liebler, of the University of Minnesota in the US (Liebler and Song 2025). This US study compared Black-White, Asian-White, and Native-White mixed people who are parents; this study focused on the interrelationships between the mixed person's racial identification, their spouse's race, and the upbringing of their children. This was a mixed-methods study, employing both an analysis of US census data over several decades, as well as in-depth interviews to illuminate the census findings. This article draws on only the interview data from both studies.

In both studies, pre-interview online surveys were used to collect background information from respondents—though the two surveys differed in the UK and US. Respondents were asked about their parents' ancestries, their own racial identifications, their spouses, children, educational attainment, and work outside the home. In the interviews, respondents were asked about their childhoods, family upbringing, schooling and neighborhoods, racial identities, racialized experiences, spouses, and their children.

The interviews in the UK study involved 62 racially mixed people with White ancestry (37 women, 25 men), mostly aged between 25 and 45. These interviews were carried out in person, and the vast majority of the respondents lived in the Southeast of England. Respondents were interviewed in their homes, cafes, and/or private offices, and the interviews were recorded and transcribed. In the US study, 68 interviews (25 men, 43 women, with most in their 30s and 40s) were carried out online (most often using Skype), involving participants who lived in different parts of the US, to capture the importance of racial context. For both studies, we relied upon a variety of social media and word-of-mouth methods for recruiting participants. We avoided recruitment channels that specifically catered to

mixed-heritage people and families, such as websites for mixed-heritage people. Given that these are not random samples, some biases, such as the relatively high educational background of respondents, are acknowledged.

In both studies, all the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and subsequently analyzed using traditional coding methods based upon thematic strands drawn from repeated audio and written analyses of the interviews. As researchers, we engaged in an interpretation of the interview transcripts (Bryman 2012). By both listening and recording of themes, we then created codes to reflect key themes. In both studies, we compared the thoughts and experiences of participants of different ethnic and racial ancestries, and in the US we also compared a range of participants living in diverse, urban areas, compared with largely White, more suburban locations. All names and tribes reported here have been changed for confidentiality reasons.

In the remainder of the article, I discuss three ways in which mixed people with White ancestry found their White ancestries problematic: (a) White ancestry constituted a barrier to minority membership; (b) a White parent or partner could be a liability, especially in terms of color-blind racism; (c) having White-appearing parents or children violated norms around racial resemblance, engendering awkward and judgmental social interactions. By drawing on disparate types of mixed people with White ancestry in these two studies, we gain further insights into the many different kinds of experiences associated with White ancestry.

4. Findings

4.1. White Heritage Is Not Valued: Mixed People Struggle to Assert Their Minority Membership

Given that many mixed people's connections with their diverse ancestries can be hindered by generational distance, a lack of cultural exposure, and forms of social rejection by majority and minority communities, it is striking that many multiracial people report their disparate ethnic and racial ancestries in the census, and many other official forms (Song and Liebler 2022). In the US study, it was found that the reporting of ancestry detail was not necessarily closely correlated with identity; for example, few of the respondents showed an interest in their White heritage, though many knew of and reported their European ancestries. Contrary to the characterization of mixed people as part of a burgeoning ethnic majority who do not see themselves as ethnically or racially distinctive, many mixed people could feel ambivalent about their proximity to Whiteness, even if they recognized some of the privileges of their White ancestry (Song and Liebler 2022)—though this part of the study draws on a purposive, biased sample.

Some negativity toward their White heritage could be engendered by either direct experiences of rejection by their White relatives, or stories shared by their parents and/or other relatives. Yet, as reported in many studies of multiracial people in the US, many respondents could feel marginalized by both their White and minority families and communities more generally. Nevertheless, many participants in both studies spoke of their wish to forge recognition, and meaningful ties, with their minority ancestries.

In their study of Black-White, Native-White, and Asian-White mixed people in the US, Liebler and Song (2025—the US study) found that most participants reported meaningful ties with, or an attachment to, their non-European ancestries. By comparison, they tended to see their European ancestries as residual and/or incorporated into their status as Americans (Waters 1990). People's wish to claim a connection with their minority ancestries could involve emotional experiences concerning the cultural survival of specific ancestral groups (such as Native Americans), and their identification with minority ancestries that had been historically subordinated or devalued in American society. Two main motivations were found among participants who asserted a claim to a specific minority ancestry. One

involved a desire for a more individualistic sense of self, countering the experience of being racially homogenized or misrecognized. Whiteness is typically associated with individualism in the sense that White people are often recognized as individuals with a capacity for various interests, abilities, and ways of being, whereas people of color are often racially assigned to groups in limiting and often negative ways (Kao 2000; Chesler et al. 2003). Another motivation involved a wish to create connections with family and relatives or members of an ancestral group (such as a tribe) to which they had not had prior access or whom they had not had the opportunity to get to know.

Given the histories of conquest and enslavement, White ancestry could evoke negative resonances for participants with Native and Black ancestries, in particular. Although almost all the Native-White participants knew of specific White European and tribal ancestries, it was commonly reported that their American Indian parents (or grandparents) had suppressed their Native heritage, as many of these older relatives had been sent to forcibly assimilationist Indian boarding schools and been prohibited from speaking a Native language or participating in any form of Native practices.

Alex's (Native-White, 38M) Native father had grown up feeling negative about his Native heritage; Alex's grandmother had been sent to a 'boarding school' that was meant to assimilate Natives. However, to Alex, his White heritage was seen as a barrier to achieving recognition as a Native person. He was uninterested in his mother's Dutch heritage, which he associated with colonial conquest. Alex had always yearned to feel more Native, but his Navajo father had distanced himself from his Native heritage: 'When I was in high school, I'd go visit my [Native] grandparents and help them out on the farm [on the reservation]. The reservation was always close to my heart, even though. . . Even though I was sometimes treated badly by the Navajo people'. When he was growing up, Alex said that his Native peers treated him as not really Native. Alex reported that other Native people could see that he was half-White. 'People said, "you don't look like a [a common Navajo family name]". You can tell I'm not full. It doesn't bother me as much as it used to. I'm more secure now'.

Alex had tribal membership through his father, but he was able to solidify his standing as a Native person by marrying a Navajo woman and moving to the reservation: 'We have CIBs (Certificates of Indian Blood). It's one of the reasons I married a Navajo because I was always drawn to that. . .For me, it also goes to wanting to be as self-sufficient as possible. How the Navajos used to live; they raised their crops, they had their sheep, I think it's neat. . . I want to become more self-sufficient in my lifestyle'.

Some participants who had chosen minority partners specifically stated that they did not align with Whiteness and/or did not value their White heritage. Devon (Native-White, 43F) identified strongly as a Native woman with White European ancestry. According to Devon, her White father had been upset that she was not interested in her French background. Devon told him that she felt more attached to her Native side, having had more exposure to Native language and culture: 'My mother was the one who I lived with primarily [her parents divorced when Devon was young] and would teach us the Ho-Chunk values, traditions and practice. Ho-Chunk spirituality with prayer. . .we did attend powwows, we ate traditional food, we used some of the language in our household, so because she was my primary parent that I do have a stronger identity connection with my Ho-Chunk side'. Devon's upbringing was politicized, meaning that she had a strong political and cultural affiliation with being Native: 'My mother always drilled it into me that even though I am half-White that I need to identify on those forms as American Indian so that way we can be counted'.

Some Black-White people, like Native-White and Asian-White people, could also feel that their White ancestry posed barriers to feeling fully accepted by Black people and or

relatives. A number of Black-White participants associated their White ancestry primarily with the histories and aftermath of transatlantic slavery, and while some Black-White participants had wholly positive relationships with their White relatives, others did not. In one case, Adriana (Black-White, 37F) had tried to reach out to White cousins whom she had had no contact with growing up, but she felt rebuffed, and she was certain that Adriana's (and her mother's Blackness—Adriana's mother was mixed, Black and White) had been the source of her White family's rejection of her mother and her. This rejection clearly hurt Adriana, and her feelings about her White heritage were complicated. On the one hand, Adriana wanted her Italian heritage to be recognized, as part of who she was. She said: 'I grew up in mostly Italian American neighborhoods, and I'm [hesitates] Italian as well. . .' However, her hesitation also suggested that many people would not validate her claim to being Italian. Adriana was usually seen as Black, and or a dark-skinned Latina. On the other hand, her White heritage was associated with the devaluing of Black people and with societal and personal rejection. Like some other Black-White participants, while Adriana did not see herself as White, and was mindful of the history of White supremacy, this did not preclude a wish to be accepted by White relatives and White people more generally. The fact of her maternal White Italian ancestry yielded no White privileges, as there was no recognition of her Italian heritage.

In this respect, Whiteness could constitute an exclusion zone whereby longstanding ideas about White supremacy and purity still prevailed—though this was especially the case for people who looked unambiguously non-White. The opposite tended to be true for Native-White and Asian-White people, who were more likely to report feeling excluded by their Native and Asian counterparts—and where their Whiteness effectively constituted a kind of barrier to their wish to gain membership in their minority communities and networks.

As in the experiences of many Native-White people, Asian-White participants who felt attached to their Asian ancestries could feel aggrieved about how monoracial Asians rejected them, because of their White ancestry. This was especially the case if they were deemed to be racially ambiguous, or 'mixed', in their appearance. Donna (Asian-White, 48F) reported that she was deeply interested in her Japanese heritage, and that she did not consider herself as a White person. However, because she looked racially ambiguous, and was known to have a White parent (and an Anglo surname), Donna experienced a lot of rejection by monoracial Asians in college. Donna reported that she had naively assumed that she would be accepted by other Asian Americans in college. She had been excited to make contact with other Asian Americans: 'I had, you know, a weird experience at college . . .I felt really unwelcome at that [Asian student] group, like you're not really Asian. . .Surrounded by White people my whole life, so that was a bummer'.

Andrew (Asian-White, 43M) said that while he never felt White, and was interested in his Korean heritage, he consistently felt rejected and othered by other monoracial Asians, including his Korean relatives, who did not see him as really Korean. He was usually seen as racially ambiguous by other people. Andrew did not identify as White, and he was not particularly interested in his White father's Germanic heritage. Andrew spoke of feeling othered and rejected by his Korean relatives: 'I think yeah [I feel] a deep deep insecurity from feeling different, not looking like anybody. Not having, not being part of something, you know, not being part of a tribe'.

While both Donna and Andrew acknowledged that their liminality as racially ambiguous individuals could mean that they could sometimes experience the privileges of not being racially marked, their Whiteness was not something they personally valued. In Donna's case, she had virtually no ties anymore with her (deceased) White father's family; all of her active ties were with her mother's Japanese American family.

Not being interested or consciously valuing a European heritage did not preclude the possibility that mixed people could benefit from their White heritage in a variety of ways—especially if they appeared White to others. However, the reported barriers to claiming membership in minority groups and communities were very common, and negative feelings about their White ancestry (and White people, who could be socially and politically insensitive) were not uncommon.

In the UK study of mixed people (with White heritage) in Britain, one not uncommon theme was that respondents had had little exposure to their minority heritages, and that a primarily White upbringing had handicapped them in their efforts to connect with minority counterparts. Countering the suggestion that multiracial people want to be seen as White, many multiracial people perceived a lack of familiarity with minority practices and ancestries as a loss. Not having knowledge of languages or cultural practices was regarded as delegitimating claims to minority membership. So, while mixed people with White ancestry could benefit in certain ways from their ties with a White parent, and/or growing up around White people and networks, Song (2017) found that some mixed people reported feelings of loss—and rejection, often feeling buffeted by both monoracial minority people and White people.

Louise (Black-White, 44F): spoke of her White heritage as posing problematic and difficult and existential questions about who she was, especially in relation to other Black people: 'but I can't be culturally Black, I didn't grow up around Black people. I grew up around White people, I went to school with mainly White people. I didn't have Black friends until I was in my twenties. So that's really. . .I find it very difficult to talk race or culture, or identity, to people who are from the same area that their parents are from, grandparents, great-grandparents. . .they've had no challenge to that identity. . .they've never had to question it, they've never had to explain it, or express it—it just is' (Song 2017).

Alan (South Asian-White, 53M) spoke bitterly of how he was uninterested in his White background, but quite interested in his Bengali father's background, to which he had had no access while growing up. Alan was cut off from his father's South Asian relatives, but was also 'othered', growing up: 'So [his father] didn't give me the language, didn't tell me his family names. . . never met my grandparents. . . And it [his family background and culture] wasn't going to be shared with anyone. . . I would have liked to have known all that stuff, and then if people were saying all sorts of things about me I could have actually said, "Well, stuff you, I know who I am"' (Song 2017).

4.2. Having a White Parent or Partner Could Be a Liability

Waring (2023) has observed the potential importance of 'white privilege by proxy' via a White parent or relatives for multiracial people with White ancestry. However, as noted by Waring, having a White parent or relatives could also engender negative or uncomfortable feelings or difficulties, including more existential issues around racial identity, as well as certain everyday scenarios that pointed to the gulf in experience between themselves and their White family members. The privileges of having White parents or relatives could also be tempered, if they were from working-class backgrounds (Korgen 2010). In this special issue, Waring's (2025) intersectional analysis illustrates how experiences of White privilege by proxy [for the multiracial family member] can coexist with White family members being the perpetrators of racial discrimination. However, because White family members possess differing levels of socioeconomic privilege and cultural capital, they may perceive their White privilege differently.

In the US study, Corey (Black-White, 28F) largely grew up with her White maternal grandmother when her White mother had substance abuse problems. And while she felt that her White grandparents loved her, she reported:

> 'Well, my grandparents are color-blind racists. My grandma tried to look beyond racial stuff. Which was kind of invalidating for me. . . She'd say: [. . .], I love you so much. You're different on the outside but on the inside you're just like me. We have the same heart. She'd say that to me so many times. I know you're Black, but you're not that kind of Black. You're so smart and articulate'.

For Corey, being raised by her White mother and her mother's White relatives was difficult, and she felt conspicuously different from her White family: 'Everyone who raised me was White'. It was emotionally difficult for Corey to reconcile her love for her grandmother, with Corey experiencing dismay and upset about her grandmother's color-blind narrative (and see Waring 2025 in this issue). Corey reported that her family had little money, and she did not feel much sense of privilege or advantage derived from having a White mother and White relatives, especially in a predominantly White setting where she felt she stood out in terms of her racial appearance. When she went to college in a city with many Black students (including some who, like her, had White ancestry), she was self-conscious about not having had many of the experiences her Black peers had had, or the shared cultural references she might have had, if she had been raised by a Black parent and Black relatives.

> 'Like if I'm having a conversation with someone, I'll tell them I'm mixed. Like I wouldn't want them to feel that I'm hiding it. What is most important is that I was raised by a White family. When I met people who are fully Black but adopted by a White family, we have a lot in common'.

Evan (Black-White, 43M) felt that, despite his White mother's educated background, she lacked the racial literacy (Twine 2010) to help him deal with racism as a young Black man. Although there was no one moment of revelation, Evan spoke of a gradual realization that being mixed, and having a White parent, did not register in a meaningful way anymore—especially as he grew older in his teens. What was most salient in his lived experience was that he was seen and treated as a (light-skinned) Black man.

> 'My mother, bless her, claimed to not see color. It's a very loose liberal thing to say when you don't want to take a stand. I don't see color. Ok, that's great that you want to not see color but you got to see color; you got to see it'.

Having a well-meaning White parent or relative, who engaged in color-blind racism, could clearly be extremely hurtful and frustrating, resulting in a degree of alienation from that loved family member.

As discussed above, scholars of migration and intermarriage have tended to assume that intermarriage with a White 'mainstream' person in the US or in European societies meant that the minority partner was then 'integrated' and thus the beneficiary of material and cultural resources associated with that union. While White partners could provide forms of privilege via 'white privilege by proxy' (Waring 2023), mixed people with White partners could also find their partners' Whiteness to be problematic, or limiting, if they felt that their White partners were not as attuned to the reality of the mixed partner's racial realities and experiences, or those of their children. While there is significant variability in the racial consciousness and appreciation of their mixed partners' minority ancestries among White spouses, with some White partners making significant efforts to cultivate a minority culture and practices in family life, some White spouses did not readily apply a racial lens to how they saw their partners, children, or the world around them.

In the US study, Makana (Asian-White, 42F) described her White husband as having progressive social and political views. Nevertheless, Makana was aware that her husband did not seem concerned about ensuring that their son attended an ethnically diverse school:

> 'And interestingly, going to sort of a co-parenting aspect, it wasn't a high priority for my husband and I remember him saying at one point kids don't even notice race at that age. . . remembering back to my own childhood that kids would call me and my brother names on the playground without even understanding what they meant. So, I think he is Caucasian, he grew up in a very predominantly White community. . .and it's not a frame that he automatically sees the world in'.

And unlike Makana, whose Asian ancestry was visible to others, her son was usually assumed to be White. So, their assumed Whiteness in many contexts placed a burden on Makana, who wanted her son to grow up with an appreciation of his Asianness. She did not want her son to see himself as just White. While her White partner was politically progressive, he did not always see the significance of race or difference in the way that she did, and she had to ensure that their son appreciated his sense of being a person of color, as she saw herself.

Therefore, rather than seeing White parents (or other family members) or partners as providing unalloyed positive access to Whiteness (and the comfort and safety of not being racially targeted), some mixed individuals who valued their minority ancestries (and who identified as mixed people) could feel the burden of being in a close and intimate relationship with a White partner, parent, or grandparent who did not necessarily understand or support their world views and experiences—even if they were well-meaning. Such mixed individuals also had to grapple with their anger and disappointment when their family members, whom they loved, articulated forms of color-blind racism.

4.3. White Ancestry and the Norms Around Racial Resemblance

A lack of racial resemblance to a parent can be difficult for a mixed person, who may be seen as not related to their parent, for instance, a White mother, or the multiracial parent being assumed to be the nanny to a White-appearing child (Waring and Bordoloi 2018). It is awkward and difficult to be seen, conspicuously, as not constituting a 'normal' family—one that does not transcend racial boundaries (Tharps 2016; Ifekwunigwe 1998; Goss 2018).

For mixed people who did not look White, their appearance, and questions about relatedness in the company of a White parent, could be awkward and painful—a theme noted in studies of interracial adoption (Tuan and Shiao 2011; Goss 2018). In the US study, Jane (Asian-White, 38F), who was seen as someone with Asian ancestry, was raised by her White father after her Korean mother died when she was quite young. Because she grew up in a mostly White environment, with White schools and neighborhoods, she was self-conscious about being seen as a possible Asian adoptee in her wider White family:

> 'I feel like I may be an outlier on some things because I'm more closer to somebody who was adopted and then raised completely White than somebody who had an actual parent that they lived with that was Korean'.

For Jane, her family's Whiteness constituted a norm that excluded her, especially when she was in public places with her White father. In the UK study, as someone who looked Black to most people, Luke (Black-White, 48M) spoke of the visceral disgust that people could show when they saw him with his White mother:

> 'Yeah, if I'm walking along with my mother with her shopping, people sort of. . . they. . . because she's this white-haired White lady, you know, and she's walking along chatting to me and they see me give her a kiss and you know. . . and I go, 'Mum', they go [makes an expression of disgust] just like that'.

Not only was their familial relatedness in question, but, as in Luke's case, his intimacy with his mother was palpably disconcerting to some people. While Jane could be assumed to be a non-biologically related Asian adoptee (with no visibly Asian parent around), Luke

calling his mother 'mum', and kissing her, evokes a more threatening and disturbing set of feelings for some people who struggle with the idea that this nice 'white-haired White lady' could have given birth to this Black man.

Another way in which proximity to Whiteness could be emotionally difficult and complicated concerns the White appearance of mixed people's children (when the mixed parent with White ancestry does not look White)—something that has yet to receive much empirical investigation. Having White-looking children usually meant that racially mixed parents did not have to worry about their children being racially targeted, but this 'mismatch' in racial appearance between mixed parents and their children could involve some awkward and difficult feelings and scenarios. Accompanying dynamics around racial resemblance, or the lack thereof, are discourses around racial fractions, which are difficult to avoid, even if the mixed parent rejects the idea of quantifying racial and ethnic identity in those terms (see Wong-Campbell and Soltis 2025 in this SI on having children who are 'only a quarter Asian'). This dynamic (having White-looking children) is the generational inverse of Luke's scenario, discussed above, where his White mother was not assumed to be Luke's mother (or he, her son), given his Black appearance (see Harman 2010; Twine 2010).

A child's White appearance could evoke some uncomfortable feelings for mixed people, especially if they valued a connection with their minority heritage. How did these parents navigate the fact that their children looked White to others, if they did not resemble their White-appearing children? In fact, many racially mixed families have significant differences in the racial appearance of siblings (Song 2010; Tharps 2016). How do parents in mixed families foster a sense of family identity that unified their children into a wider family culture and minority group membership, despite their disparate racial appearance?

In the UK study, Elise (Black-White, 44F) had a number of children who varied in age, and Elise and the White father of her youngest daughter had split up; he no longer lived with them. Elise spoke of how her daughter questioned her White racial appearance, in comparison with that of her siblings, and her mother, who were all much darker: 'I think [daughter] found it, the fact she looked different to us, I think she sort of struggled with the fact that she didn't feel that she fitted in with the family'. As a result, Elise made a concerted effort to reassure her daughter that she very much belonged in their family, and told her that family members could look very different from each other. Elise reported that she did not feel able to go into a deeper and complex discussion about the racially charged dimensions of disparate racial appearances with her young daughter, because she wanted to 'keep things simple' for her very young daughter. However, Elise was able to convey that their family was 'normal', and that her daughter was not somehow anomalous in their family.

When my mixed respondents (in both the US and UK studies) talked about having White-appearing children, it could be emotionally wrenching for them. I had to be quite careful about probing, as I was concerned about how upsetting this issue was for them. My sense was that respondents who struggled with their children's racial appearance felt very constrained about articulating their feelings—because they felt they should not admit to having negative or difficult feelings about their children's White appearance. Rose (East Asian-White, 45F) struggled with felt a sense of 'erasure' when she had her sons with her White partner. She described her reaction when she gave birth to two blonde and very fair babies: 'I was really surprised and I felt a bit disappointed because. . . It felt like it was an erasure of part of my own heritage. . . I did feel that on a sort of biological erasure of. . .me on some level'. The fact that her sons bore no resemblance to Rose, and her Chinese heritage, was upsetting to Rose, who felt that their White appearance somehow signaled their disconnection from their Asian heritage, which seemed more tenuous, a further generation down (Song 2017). With the death of her Chinese father, her sons' Anglo

appearance seemed to cement the idea that her Chineseness would simply be gone, and even more invisible (see the paper by (Garrett 2025) in this SI, on the loss of family members, and how mixed people could engage in the renegotiation of their identities, in order to resist monoracial paradigms).

In the US study, Corey (Black-White, 28F, discussed above) spoke of her and her (Black-White mixed) husband's surprise over their son's White appearance. It was clear that the lack of racial resemblance between them (as parents), and their White-passing son, was awkward, and elicited unwelcome curiosity and remarks from others:

> 'Oh god, it was so annoying at the beginning. We didn't talk about it much, but my husband and I thought he'd be kind of... like us [in appearance]. But I hadn't really considered that he could be really pale. I was kind of surprised when he was born. His hair was browner but then it became blonder over time. And people talked about it so much... Strangers too: where did the blonde come from?'

It was evident that Corey found this discussion difficult, and I appreciated her openness with me. I had the strong sense that she was underplaying her reaction when she saw her son's appearance: 'I was kind of surprised when he was born'. Given the many interviews I have conducted with mixed people in the UK and US, I got the strong sense that most people feel uncomfortable about reporting negative feelings about their children's racial appearances, because such utterances are considered taboo. In other words, the socially acceptable script is one where one's racial appearance does not or should not matter, but in reality, having a White-looking child made it much more difficult for a mixed parent (with a non-White appearance, and a non-White partner) to assert a shared minority 'family race' (Liebler and Song 2025). Given the painful and traumatic history of enslavement in the US, and the rape of Black women, the resonance of a child's White appearance could be difficult for parents who wanted to cultivate a shared identity as a Black family, who was positive and proud of their Blackness. A White-passing child disrupted this narrative and made them vulnerable to unspoken and spoken challenges to their child's identity (and their child's very relatedness to them).

As parents, part-White multiracial people also ponder not only their own White and minority ancestries, but the racial backgrounds of their children's partners—and the implications of those choices for their grandchildren. In her study of multiracial people with White heritage in Britain, Song (2017) found that some (multiracial) parents expressed the wish that their children would find partners who would revitalize their ethnic minority heritage. For example, Abike (Black-White, 58) spoke of her son's long-term White Irish partner. Abike admitted that she would find it "odd" or "weird" and perhaps a bit sad to think that if her children, who had a White father, partnered with White people, their children would be 'completely white' (p. 131).

When asked if Corey (Black-White, 28F) had a preference for whom her son would partner with in future, she replied: 'We both hope that he doesn't end up with a White person. That's about it [sounds a bit embarrassed]'. When asked why she felt that way, Corey said:

> 'Yeah, why is that... Me and [husband] are both kind of negative about Whiteness, generally. I just really hope [son] doesn't try to pass as White. Or becomes totally disengaged with his race and racial background and racial politics. I'm more worried about him ending up with a White person that signals that he doesn't want to deal with diversity or Blackness...also, if he's into women, I think I'd feel feelings if he repeatedly dated White women'.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

In recent years, there has been considerable debate about the growth of multiracial people with White ancestry, and what this growth portends for the racial landscape in the United States. The continuing growth of part-White multiracial people in the US (and other countries, such as the UK) provides an opportunity for scholars to think about how the workings of White privilege for multiracial people and families may differ from those associated with traditional understandings of Whiteness. In this exploration of how White ancestry and proximity to White people is experienced by part-White multiracial people, I first review various bodies of literature to address this question, and second, I draw upon examples from my research on part-White mixed people in both the US and Britain.

There are undoubtedly many benefits that accrue from 'white privilege by proxy' (Waring 2023), whether it is manifest in terms of a White (or light-skinned) appearance, or having White parents or partners. Such benefits accrue in terms of societal treatment, such as one's treatment in public places, how attractive one is deemed in the dating market, or how teachers assess one's academic potential. However, I have focused more on the double-edged nature of how White ancestry can be experienced, and the often complicated and ambivalent feelings that mixed people can have about their White lineage. Such double-edged feelings can be especially marked for mixed people who value and are attached to their minority families and backgrounds. Gaining membership in those minority families and communities can be difficult to negotiate and navigate, especially if those individuals look White, or racially ambiguous—across a range of people with disparate mixed backgrounds.

Drawing on findings from two studies of mixed people with White ancestry, one in the US, and one in Britain, I discuss three ways in which mixed people with White ancestry found their White ancestries problematic or complicated: (a) White ancestry could constitute a barrier to minority membership; (b) a White parent or partner could be a liability, or limited in their understanding of the mixed person's lived experiences; and (c) having White-appearing children could be emotionally difficult, and engendered concerns about generational 'dilution' and loss. By drawing on disparate types of mixed people with White ancestry in each of these studies, we gain further insights into the variable experiences of mixed people with White ancestry.

There are many similar dynamics between disparate types of mixed people with White ancestry. For example, mixed people with White ancestry rarely report an interest and attachment to their White ancestries—though it is possible that they may feel sheepish or uncomfortable about doing so. For many mixed people, especially Asian-White and Native-White people in the US, their White ancestries could be seen as barriers to their minority group's membership, given the widespread circulation of discourses about monoracial authenticity. Despite these similarities, Black-White mixed people (in both the US and the UK) and Native-White people (in the US) were especially attuned to the negative or problematic resonance of White ancestry, given the distinctive histories of enslavement and conquest experienced by Black and Native people.

Despite some assimilation theorists' emphasis upon the socioeconomic benefits associated with whitening, and the presumption that mixed people with White ancestry will embrace their Whiteness, this review article has shown that there is much more variation in the attitudes and aspirations of mixed people with White heritage. As illustrated in this article, the fact that mixed people can feel ambivalent or even negative about their White ancestries points to how problematic it is to conceive of mixed people as an extension of the wider White population. Many mixed people demonstrate a strong attachment to their minority ancestries and aspire to forge meaningful ties for themselves and their children with their minority communities. Given the growing diversification among mixed

people, with first- and multi-generation mixed people, we should avoid linear predictions about mixed people's attachments to their White and minority ancestries. Much more research on later-generation mixed people (for example, people with mixed parents) is needed. Furthermore, in our critical examination of White privilege and Whiteness, as experienced by mixed people with White ancestry, it is increasingly difficult to talk about White people and Whiteness in a homogenized, monolithic way. White parents and spouses vary significantly in their stances, consciousness, and practices.

With the continuing growth of mixed unions (involving White people) and mixed people with White ancestry, future research needs to continue investigating 'white privilege by proxy' (Waring 2023), and further explore the meanings and experiences attached to Whiteness for people with diverging class and educational backgrounds. Since most research on mixed-heritage people is based upon the experiences of a limited set of people—highly educated, professional individuals with some White ancestry—we know very little about what it means to be mixed-heritage and working-class, or about the experiences of those without any known White ancestry. As such, more detailed information about family ancestry and socioeconomic background will need to be collected. Furthermore, regional variations in how racial mixing and mixedness is regarded, in increasingly diverse countries such as the US and UK, point to the importance of examining regionally specific historical cultures and institutions, as well as racial demographics, in different parts of these countries.

Funding: This article drew on research funded by the Russell Sage Foundation. Racial Identities and Life. Choices among Mixed-Heritage People in the USA (grant 4443) to Carolyn Liebler and Miri Song.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Note

[1] According to a Pew Research survey, 74% of Black adults say being Black is very important to how they think about themselves, including 52% who say it is extremely important. About six-in-ten Hispanics (59%) say being Hispanic is extremely or very important to their identity, and 56% of Asians say the same about being Asian. In contrast, 15% of Whites say being White is as important to their identity; 19% of Whites say it is moderately important, while 18% say it is only a little important and about half (47%) say their race is not at all important to how they think about themselves (Horowitz et al. 2019).

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