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Ethnic identity concealment and disclosure: Contexts and strategies

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Ethnic identity concealment and disclosure: Contexts and strategies

Ethnic minority group members' responses to their prejudicial treatment can take several forms. One involves identity concealment (e.g., 'passing'). In order to understand such a response, we must explore participants' understandings of the interactional context before them, their meta-perceptions of the identity others ascribe to them, and the varied meanings that identity concealment/non-disclosure may have in that context. Our analysis of interview data (N = 30) obtained with Roma in Hungary reveals diverse forms of, and motivations for, the concealment of their Roma identity. Some participants reported examples of proactive identity concealment, others reported more reactive forms (in which they went along with others' mistaken assumptions concerning their identity). The motivations for identity concealment (whether proactive or reactive) included the desire to: secure material benefits; avoid conflict; take pleasure from seeing others' assumptions blinding them to the reality before them; test (and expose) majority group members' attitudes; allow themselves opportunities to experience the world in new ways. Our analysis highlights the importance of social identity researchers recognizing the diverse motivations for ethnic identity concealment: From the actors' perspective concealment is not always assimilatory, and in some contexts can be experienced as empowering.

Passing, covering, identity disclosure, interaction management, negotiating prejudice, Roma,

Minority group members routinely experience stigma (Major & O'Brien, 2005) and everyday 'micro-aggressions' (Nadal, Griffin, Wong, Hamit, & Rasmus, 2014; Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007). In response, they may collectively protest their treatment (e.g., the Stonewall Riots, Black Lives Matter), adopt diverse ego-protective responses (Major & O'Brien, 2005), or deploy various interaction management strategies (Goffman, 1963; Swim, Cohen & Hyers, 1998). Sometimes these latter involve asserting an identity (e.g., middle-class Black Americans may self-consciously dress to display their class to legitimate their presence in expensive shops: Feagin, 1991), or concealing an identity (e.g., gay men and women may navigate everyday homophobia through passing as 'straight': Button, 2004; Yoshino, 2002).

Our knowledge of identity concealment/non-disclosure is based on research conducted with people with concealable stigmatised identities and ethnic minority group members' responses to inequitable hierarchy. We review such work and present an analysis of identity concealment/non-disclosure as reported in interviews conducted with a highly stigmatised ethnic community (Roma in Hungary). Our analysis suggests that the traditional image of identity concealment/non-disclosure apparent in the social identity literature (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979) is partial. We show that in addition to considering individuals' identity concealment intentions, research must consider how identity performances develop in interaction such that ethnic identity concealment/non-disclosure can be reactive (shaped by the interaction partner's mis-categorisation of oneself). We also show it can be motivated by diverse concerns and that identity concealment/non-disclosure is not necessarily assimilatory in nature. .

Managing discrediting information

Much work addresses the experiences reported by those with concealable stigmatised identities associated with their psychological functioning or medical diagnosis (Chaudoir &

Quinn, 2010; Cook, Crane, & Bourne, 2021; Pearson & Rose, 2021), or sexuality (Chrobot-Mason, Button & Declimenti, 2001; Croteau, Anderson, Van der Wal, 2008; Ragins, Singh & Cornwell, 2007). The burden of stigma is significant (Beals, Peplau, Gable, 2009; Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009; Quinn & Earnshaw, 2013) and concealment can bring benefits (Ragins, Singh & Cornwell, 2007). These include protection from social rejection (Smart & Wegner 1999) and access to otherwise limited opportunities (e.g., employment). Moreover, to the degree concealment frees one from concerns about the other's judgements, one's performance may improve (Farina, Gliha, Bourdreau, Ale, & Sherman, 1971).

However, as concealment requires the monitoring of one's behaviour, it can be psychologically demanding (Smart, & Wegner, 1999), contribute to shame and guilt (Barreto & Ellemers, 2003), reduced self-esteem (Plante, Roberts, Reysen & Gerbasi, 2014), decreased self-confidence (Barreto, Ellemers, & Banal, 2006), and decreased interaction quality (Newheiser, Barreto, Ellemers, Derks, & Scheepers, 2015). Such experiences can be compounded by one's uncertainty as to others' knowledge of one's identity (Ragins, 2008; Smart & Wegner, 1999). Concealment can also result in isolation from others who could provide social support and self-verifying feedback (DeJordy, 2008).

Such outcomes can be affected by individuals' regulatory focus (Newheiser, Barreto, Ellemers, Derks & Scheepers, 2015) and the degree to which others' responses are supportive (Beals, Peplau, Gable, 2009; Chaudoir & Quinn, 2010). They also likely depend on the identity involved. For example, those with cerebral palsy must balance the benefits of being labelled in terms of accessing services against the costs associated with losing recognition of their individuality (Read, Morton & Ryan, 2015).

Research describes a diversity of identity concealment practices. 'Passing' involves presenting oneself as a member of a category to which one does not belong. 'Covering' entails the attempt to minimise the salience of a stigmatised identity. According to Goffman,

covering is a strategy adopted by persons who are ready to admit possession of a stigma but “nonetheless make a great effort to keep the stigma from looming large” (Goffman, 1963, p. 102), e.g., Muslim passengers may seek to downplay the prominence of their Muslim identity at airports (Blackwood, Hopkins, & Reicher, 2015) and homosexual office workers (whose sexualities are known by their colleagues) may refrain from kissing their partner when the latter visits the office to “de-emphasize that aspect of identity in a specific situation” (DeJordy, 2008, p 513). Others use ‘covering’ in a broader sense to refer to any attempt to limit the disclosure of identity-revealing information. Indeed, differentiating such strategies can be difficult: The same behavior by the same individual may be characterized as ‘passing’ or ‘covering’ depending on the audiences’ knowledge of the individual (Yoshino, 2001).

Given these complexities, many now refer to a continuum of concealment practices that are used in combination (Button, 2004; Chrobot-Mason, Button, Declimenti, 2001; Croteau, 1996). Some find it useful to differentiate between fabrication, concealment, and discretion (Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005; Herek, 1996). Fabrication involves the purposeful presentation of false information about oneself. Concealment entails the active control of what information about one’s identity is revealed. Discretion resembles concealment in that it refers to managing the flow of information about one’s identity but differs in the degree of subtlety involved (e.g., the careful avoidance of certain conversational topics, the use of ambiguous language, etc.).

The social context of concealment/non-disclosure

One’s beliefs as to how others judge one’s identity (i.e., one’s meta-perceptions) have important psychological and behavioural implications (Vorauer, 2006). As almost any identity can become ‘discreditable’ (DeJordy, 2008) it follows that majority group members may also conceal identity-relevant information (as when those with higher education seek to conceal such privilege: Goffman, 1963). However, there is a significant asymmetry between

minority and majority group members' interactional concerns: Minorities are particularly concerned with what more powerful others think of them (Lammers, Gordijn, & Otten, 2008) and ethnic minority group members routinely anticipate being targets of prejudice (Shelton, Richeson & Salvatore, 2005; Trawalter, Richeson, & Shelton, 2009). Accordingly, the level of identity management work undertaken by minorities is a "burden of work largely unknown to those from dominant majority groups" (McLaughlin, p. 73).

The processes involved in identity concealment/non-disclosure have been conceptualized differently according to the identities involved. Analyses of those stigmatized on the basis of their mental-health history, medical diagnosis, or sexuality, tend to address the circumstances in which people divulge personal information and so focus on factors internal to the individual such as their desire for this aspect of their selves to be recognised and valued, their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Foster & Talley, 2020), and the degree to which the personal or institutional environment is judged supportive (Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005; Croteau, Anderson, & Van der Wal, 2008; Ragins, 2008). An obvious benefit of disclosure is the opportunity to link with supportive others.

A rather different perspective is brought by research concerning the strategies adopted by those with devalued 'racial' or ethnic identities in highly hierarchical societies. Here the issue is less to do with disclosing personal information to supportive others and more to do with the everyday negotiation of hierarchy and the derogation of one's community. One strategy is identity concealment: Light-skinned escaped slaves in the US antebellum period sought to avoid capture through passing as white (Cutter, 2016; Hobbs, 2014; Khanna & Johnson, 2010). This strategy continued into the 20th century and was a prominent feature in US fiction (e.g., James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, 1912). However, as Black Americans' economic and social conditions have changed, such passing has declined (Fikes, 2014) and social psychological research has focused on minority group

members' assertion of their social identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Indeed, the Civil Rights movement and anti-colonial struggles of the 1960s prompted interest in the 'social creativity' strategies through which minority group members achieved a sense of positive distinctiveness, and the 'social competition' strategies through which they changed their group's conditions of existence through collective action.

As is well known, the social identity tradition links the adoption of these different strategies to minority group members' beliefs concerning the social structure (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; see too, Blanz, Mummendey, Mielke, & Klink, 1998; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002; Taylor & McKirnan 1984). When the hierarchy is judged stable and group boundaries permeable, individuals likely identify with the majority (e.g., Ellemers, Van Knippenberg, & Wilke, 1990) and collective action is discouraged (Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990). When the permeability of the boundaries between low- and high-status groups is limited and the status hierarchy is judged unstable and illegitimate, collective social change strategies are predicted (see: Ellemers, 1993; Ellemers, Wilke, & van Knippenberg, 1993; Ellemers, van Knippenberg, & Wilke, 1990; Jackson, Sullivan, Harnish, & Hodge, 1996; Plante, Roberts, Reysen & Gerbasi, 2014). One corollary of this focus on social change is that the social identity tradition has less to say about ethnic minorities' individualistic strategies in general (Ellemers & van Rijswijk, 1997), and identity concealment is particular.

The dimensions to this neglect are several. First, the tradition's emphasis on group members' wider beliefs about social hierarchy (e.g., its legitimacy, stability and the permeability of group boundaries) facilitates a neglect of their understandings of the immediate interactional context before them and the particular costs/benefits of concealment/non-disclosure in different encounters.

Second, and as corollary of the focus on minority group members' broad social beliefs, there is little consideration of the ways in which the interaction partner's behaviour in

specific encounters shapes the opportunities for particular identity performances. For example, non-disclosure can arise because an individual is mis-categorised by the interaction partner and decides “to go along with the audience – and hence pass reactively – rather than contest the mis-categorisation” (Renfrew, 2004, p. 486). Indeed, drawing on the interactionist approach to identity, Renfrew observes ‘reactive’ passing can arise because “plausible selves emerge as others actively construct definitions of the situation, and this definition largely depends on who others’ cognitive templates allow us to be” (Renfrew, 2004, p. 489). Anticipating the argument that addressing such interactional dynamics stretches the concept of passing too far, Renfrew counters that the traditional conception ignores “a great deal of important identity negotiations” (Renfrew, 2004, p. 486).

Third, the emphasis on collective social change contributes to an overly judgmental attitude to identity concealment: Set against the transformative potential of social change activism, identity concealment is all too easily and unfairly presumed to be problematic. Indeed, Derrington (2007) attributes to Tajfel the assumption that passing “is essentially a maladaptive coping strategy as its roots are in denial and repression, which may have negative psychological consequences” (p. 365). However, the characterization of identity concealment as inevitably a form of group betrayal is misguided (Kanuha, 1999; McLaughlin, 2007). For example, we know from Kanuha’s (1999) research with gay respondents that some forms of heterosexual role performance function to ridicule conventional identity definitions.

Hungarian Roma: Stigma and strategy

In the work reported here we analyse interview data obtained with a sample of relatively privileged members of the Hungarian Roma community. We focus on their accounts of occasions in which they concealed/disclosed their Roma identity and their

motivations in doing so. This sample and method are particularly appropriate for investigating the diverse forms and motivations for ethnic identity concealment.

First, Hungarian Roma are routinely depicted in animalistic and de-humanising terms (Kteily, Bruneau, Waytz, & Cotterill, 2015, study 4; Pérez, Moscovici, & Chulvi, 2007) and as a racialised other (Kligman, 2001; Tileagă, 2007, 2015) threatening the social order (Kende, Hadarics, & Láštiová, 2017; Loveland & Popescu, 2016). Despite the horrors of the *Porajamos* or Roma Holocaust (1939-1945), such characterisations remain (Ljujic, Vedder, Dekker, & Van Geel, 2012) with Roma stereotyped as lazy, intellectually weak, and crime-prone (Csepeli & Simon, 2004; Orosz et al., 2017). The normative acceptance of anti-Roma sentiment (Vidra & Fox, 2014) - even in apparently liberal media - has resulted in what van Baar (2014) terms ‘reasonable anti-Gypsyism’.

Second, if Roma must anticipate the need for protective interaction management strategies (Bigazzi & Csertő, 2016), those with lighter skin tones or counter-stereotypical educational and career success have greater opportunity for everyday identity concealment. Sometimes this might be proactive. However, sometimes it might be reactive (as when one’s career successes leads to one’s mis-categorisation by others, and one ‘plays along’ with the others’ assumptions).

Third, interviews are particularly appropriate for our research question. Whilst survey and experimental research provides insight into the internal factors (e.g., level of identification) and external factors (e.g., others’ supportiveness) shaping the likelihood of identity concealment, they are less suited to understanding the unfolding dynamic to social interaction. Researching any spontaneous live intergroup interaction in everyday settings is difficult (practically and ethically) but much may be gained from participants’ retrospective accounts of their experiences (Feagin, 1991; Hopkins, 1994). In addition, and as Renfrew (2004, p. 489) observes, passing presents particular research challenges: “since its *raison*

d'etre is to go undetected, passing escapes observational methodologies” with the corollary that interviews again allow insight into otherwise invisible phenomena. Moreover, when researching identity concealment, interview research has the distinct advantage of allowing participants to report their beliefs about how others saw them (i.e., their meta-perceptions: Vorauer, 2006) and the interactional concerns that shaped their identity presentation (Dobai & Hopkins, 2020; Hopkins & Greenwood, 2013; Hopkins, Greenwood, & Birchall, 2007).

Method

Participants

30 Roma (18 = male, 12 = female; age = 20 to 65) were interviewed (face-to-face). 28 were recruited via Roma associations, two through personal acquaintance. 23 had a university degree or were currently students. 15 were actors/writers, journalists, or political activists, five had professions performing Roma music/dance (one of whom was also an activist). Others worked helping disadvantaged Roma children etc. One was Romanian living in Hungary. Interviews were conducted throughout 2014-2015 in Budapest (or surrounding towns) and in Debrecen. Participants were not compensated for participation. Our sample is not representative of Hungarian Roma and it would be wrong to assume a less privileged sample have the same opportunities or motivations for identity concealment/non-disclosure. However, our purpose is not to estimate the likelihood of such behaviour but to explore something of its diverse forms and motivations.

Interviews

The interviews were semi-structured, lasting 14 to 100 minutes (average = 64) and conducted by the first author (white, Hungarian, female) who explained she was interested in their experiences of prejudice. Interviewees raised the issue of identity concealment/non-

disclosure in response to a range of questions, e.g., “Can you recall any personal experience when you felt being the target of prejudice as a Roma? How did you feel? What did you do? Would you act differently if it happened to you now? Do you sometimes try to prove that the stereotypes others hold about Roma do not apply to you? Do you sometimes feel that it would be good not to be seen as a Roma? How important is it for you personally to be recognized as a Roma/Hungarian? What does being Roma/Hungarian mean to you? Are you sometimes put in the position of being a community representative? How does that feel? What kind of behaviour does it require?” Other questions concerned the apparently positive stereotype of Roma musicality and their use of humour in interaction management.

The research was approved by the University of Dundee’ Research Ethics Committee. As the data are qualitative and may therefore allow identification of the interviewee, our data are not publicly available but interested parties may contact the authors to discuss the analysis.

Analytic approach

All data were entered into *Nvivo*. Given our interest in identity concealment, we identified extracts in which the public expression / concealment of identity was discussed. These were then subjected to a more focused reading which involved comparing them with each other in an iterative process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Throughout, we treated interviewees’ accounts of their interactions as providing insight into their understandings of the context and their motivations for identity concealment/disclosure in that context. Accordingly, our analysis does not address what these accounts may have accomplished in the context of the interview itself (cf. Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998). As far as possible, we kept to the explicit meaning our participants gave to their experiences. The result is an inductive categorisation of the different scenarios in which participants reported engaging in identity concealment/disclosure, and the motivations behind their behaviour. Following

Elliott, Fischer, and Rennie's (1999) advice on how to ensure quality in qualitative research, our analysis is grounded in multiple examples. When reporting these data, open brackets – [] – mark text that has been excluded for reasons of space. Text inside such brackets is to aid comprehension.

Analysis

In the first section, we highlight the role of the audience in ascribing identities to our participants and consider how this may make identity *disclosure* a complex interactional accomplishment. In the second, we explore participants' diverse reasonings as to whether and when to conceal their identity (whether proactively or reactively).

Negotiating others' assumptions

Extract 1 shows one's categorisation can depend on others' stereotypes and result in one's mis-categorisation (regardless of one's intentions). Interviewee #22 (female, lawyer) referred to the image of Roma women as poorly educated, unemployed, having a large family etc., and explained that as she differed from this image, she was routinely mis-categorised:

Extract 1

Interviewee: My experiences show people don't like facing that somebody can be different from their prejudiced notions, that somebody can be different than they've been hearing from their families for decades.

Interviewer: So, you think that this is disturbing for people?

Interviewee: I'll tell you a good example, people regularly think that I'm a foreigner. So it's easier to say that this girl must be from India or Pakistan than to say that she's Gypsy, and then we would destroy a stereotype in ourselves, or we would start destroying it by admitting that she's educated, she works, she doesn't have 33

children but only one. So, this is not a classic thing, or I don't know how to say, this is not a popular thing to do. And I have to say that this is totally embedded in the Hungarian social attitude that we are such and such.

Interviewee 22

Here the interviewee describes her belief that her distance from the Roma stereotype resulted in her mis-categorisation. Moreover, it is clear she believed this said much about others' culturally ingrained prejudices. Such mis-categorisations raised practical dilemmas for those involved: Should they play along (reactive passing) or should they correct the other's error?

Before exploring our interviewees' accounts of their (diverse) approaches to this question, it is appropriate to note that ethnic identity disclosure can itself be a complex interactional task. This is hinted at by this same interviewee when she described a positive experience of negotiating others' stereotypes of Roma:

Extract 2

My son has attended nursery for two years now. In addition, this is a nursery where there is an Italian kid, and a German, and a half-Romanian half-Hungarian, and half-I don't-know-what, and it's not a big issue that I am brown but my son is white. But I made the parents and the head of the nursery realize that it's not foreignness but Gypsiness. And in this way that they know this is me, and they know they can have fun with me on the playground, and we give 'gummy bears' to each other's child, and they can count on me in situations, this takes me out of the box a little. And it's not up to me anymore. It's obviously me, because it's me who has to initiate this process at some level, but there it's a little more open, because there is a little compulsion in the

whole thing, because the child is there, and if we meet on the corridor they won't turn their head away, if they are cultured enough for that.

Interviewee 22

Again, there is reference to the importance of others' assumptions about one's identity: Although she has a dark skin, others assumed she and her son were foreign rather than Roma. However, what is of interest here is her understanding of the opportunities for self-disclosure in this context: The relationships in the nursery allowed her to disclose her Roma identity with a degree of confidence as to the others' reaction. Although she had to initiate the process of disclosure and work to develop the relationships ("it's me who has to initiate this process"), she believed the social context meant others were likely to feel constrained to receive her disclosure positively ("there is a little compulsion in the whole thing, because the child is there, and if we meet on the corridor they won't turn their head away").

These two extracts suggest that individuals' understandings of the immediate social context are complex. They include beliefs about others' stereotypes and what they mean for one's categorisation, and the social constraints upon others' responses which may make identity disclosure possible. The wider point is that both minority ethnic identity concealment *and* disclosure involve calculation and work.

To conceal or disclose?

Our participants' considerations concerning identity concealment/disclosure (both proactive and reactive) were diverse, reflecting their understandings of the context they faced.

Material concerns

Extract 3 provides an example of passing undertaken out of material interest. More specifically, it illustrates how reactive passing in the pursuit of employment may arise.

Interviewee #7 (male, housepainter) described a situation in which he and his brother were working with others renovating a house. The interviewee reported having a lighter skin tone than his brother and that the house owner approached him to ask that his brother discontinue his work:

Extract 3

Interviewee: We worked at Buda for a doctor couple, and the lady said: “[Name], come here, I would like to tell you something.” I thought it was about the work we’d done. She said: “Look, if it’s possible, it would be great if you don’t bring that person tomorrow.” I asked: “Which one?” She says: “This tall slim guy.” [i.e., his brother]. Well, I tell you honestly, that I felt remorseful, because we worked and earned our money, and we all did our job properly, we didn’t get the money for free. I told her: “OK, I won’t bring him tomorrow, but he’s really trustworthy.” Indeed, I lied, because I told something stupid like his father was a military officer, or I don’t know. I don’t know how I came up with that, I just wanted to say something that his father was not a simple worker. And she said she believed me, but she didn’t want a Gypsy to work for her.

Interviewer: This must have been a very strange situation

Interviewee: It was strange, strange. I tell you that this didn’t happen recently, this happened more than 10 years ago, or even more if I think about it, and I still have a remorse today that because of financial reasons, in order to keep that job, he didn’t come the other day.

Three aspects of this example stand out. First, the interviewee reports a scenario in which he is mistakenly assumed to be non-Roma. Second, rather than correcting the mis-categorisation (e.g., explaining his fellow worker was his brother), he engaged in identity concealment. Third, he actively accommodated to the customer's prejudice through depicting his workmate to be an exception to the negative Roma stereotype (fabricating an account of family heritage that vouched for his brother's trustworthiness and respectability). He continued:

Extract 4

I still have remorse today because of what happened more than 10 years ago. Because I would have rather said that: "Dear lady, he's my brother" – I could have even made a joke, that – "he can't help that he happened to be black." And then I would have told her that: "Look, if you don't want us together as we work, then thank you very much." So after more than 10 years, this may stay with me for the rest of my life. My brother did not take it as an offence from me, because it wasn't from me.

Interviewee 7

Taken together, extracts 3 and 4 echo elements of the traditional image of passing: The interviewee reports gaining individual benefits (in this case material benefits which could otherwise be withdrawn) which are gained at some emotional cost. Moreover, they show these features can be found in reactive passing.

Avoiding conflict and prejudice

Another scenario for concealment involved interviewees witnessing anti-Roma prejudice when they believed they themselves were not categorised as Roma. Extract 5 (interviewee #29, female student) illustrates such a scenario and the dilemmas involved:

Extract 5

Interviewee: I was travelling on the train last time, and it was very interesting. I got the train in Nyíregyháza¹ and migrants got on in Debrecen², and imagine they had to get off the train, even though they had tickets. [] And then a woman asked the Controller, what that situation was about. And the Controller said they're not allowed to travel by Intercity, because whatever, and they should go away from this country anyway and things like that. And he made them get off. And then another woman sat beside us, and they started to talk about migrants. And they couldn't categorize me anyhow as I was just sitting there and staring. There were a couple of brown-skinned people staying around us, and they [i.e., the majority group women] thought I was a migrant too. And this was the case when I didn't talk. And they scolded them in many ways, and they had a really good time, they really got into the mood. I thought I certainly wouldn't change the world here. And then they started to talk about segregating the children in Nyíregyháza.

Interviewer: You mean the Roma Children?

Interviewee: Yes. Then I certainly knew that I was incognito, and they really didn't suspect something. And they said very interesting things, shockingly horrible things. It was awful. If there'd been someone with me, I would've seen the point to go

¹ A city in north-eastern Hungary

² A city 50 Km from Nyíregyháza

into an argument with them but being alone I didn't. To travel three hours arguing with two people who are really convinced about their opinions, and they represent them very powerfully - No.

Interviewer: It must have been terrible to listen to them.

Interviewee: It certainly was. But it's like you have to live with this unfortunately.

Interviewee 29

Believing she was doubly misrecognised (non-Roma, non-Hungarian) the interviewee faced the dilemma of whether to respond to a racist diatribe (about migrants and Roma) through disclosing her identities (Hungarian, Roma). She reports she remained silent and that this was because she believed little was to be gained through engaging in an argument with people so set in their opinions. Yet, if her silence allowed her to avoid the frustration of a lengthy (and apparently pointless) argument, it was not without cost. However, in contrast to extract 4, the cost is not one of guilt or shame. Rather it is that she could not escape witnessing her fellow passengers' prejudice. That is identity concealment was only partially protective.

Whilst extract 5 underlines the importance of exploring participants' understandings of the immediate situation and the potential for identity concealment to protect one from various interactions and some forms of hurt, our next extract shows that in some situations the benefits of disclosure likely outweigh the costs. If extract 5 refers to a scenario where the interaction was limited in duration and intimacy, extract 6 describes one in which the relationship with the non-Roma other had a different quality, resulting in a different cost/benefit calculation. The interviewee (#13 female, activist, originally Romanian) described the pain of forming friendships with others who were unaware of her Roma identity and who then proceeded to repeat hurtful Roma stereotypes: "I meet a lot of people, and I see in the beginning, ah, they are good, they are friends with me, we go and after, when I see that

they have some stereotypes, for me it is disappointing.” In turn, she explained that whilst her non-Roma appearance meant she did not suffer the direct discrimination that her family members experienced, it left her vulnerable to hearing others’ (uncensored) prejudices:

Extract 6

Interviewee: Because I don’t look Roma, I don’t have this problem [direct discrimination], but I see with my brother, I see with my cousin, I see with my family, I see with my friends.

Interviewer: Is it disturbing for you that you are accepted because you are not seen as a Roma?

Interviewee: Yes, of course. And I am more like, I told when I went to the university in the beginning, to my colleagues and the teacher that I am Roma, because I don’t want to stay with them, and they begin to talk bad things about Roma, I don’t feel comfortable in the first place, and after I fight with this, and I am like, if you talk bad things about Roma, you talk about me. It’s like, directly.

Interviewer: When you meet someone, when you become friends, is it important for you to tell them that you are Roma?

Interviewee: Yes, and I tell you why. Because, I don’t want to feel uncomfortable, you know. In my mind I make a personal idea about the person, and afterwards to see that she is racist is hard for me have them as a friend. And it’s important to tell them that I am Roma. But the first reaction is, what? You are a Roma?

Interviewee 13

This extract illustrates the potential costs associated with others not recognising one’s Roma identity: One is vulnerable to the pain of hearing anti-Roma sentiment from those with

whom one has an established relationship (“to see that she is racist is hard for me have them as a friend”). Indeed, given such pain, the interviewee describes adopting a strategy of early identity disclosure (“I am more like, I tell”, “it’s important to tell them that I am Roma”).

Two general points arise from extracts 5 and 6. First, ethnic identity concealment can be a strategy to avoid greater hurt (extract 5) or it can leave one exposed to greater hurt (extract 6). Second, participants’ understandings of the likelihood of such outcomes appear to be a function of the relationship involved (stranger vs. known other) and the prospective duration of the relationship. Again, the implication is that in addition to exploring minority group members’ wider social beliefs concerning the social hierarchy (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), analyses of ethnic minority strategies must address their understandings of the immediate interactional context and social relationships before them, and how these impact their cost/benefit considerations.

Playing with the other

In the examples above, the cost-benefit calculation concerning identity non-disclosure revolved around how best to protect oneself from anti-Roma prejudice. However, we also found interviewees reporting their decisions to be informed by the opportunity to use their mis-categorisation as non-Roma to play with the other and their assumptions.

Take for example, interviewee #26 (male activist) who explained that they would not proactively pass as non-Roma (“No way would I deny it, I cannot deny that I’m Roma”) but explained: “It is true that I too have been seen as a foreigner many times, and I was spoken to in English at the university, they asked whether they could sit beside me, and they asked that in English, and [I] answered [in Hungarian]: ‘Sure, please have a seat’, but he asked me in English.” He then continued:

Extract 7

And we used to go to the gym with a friend, and many times we were talked to in English, because why would a Gypsy ever go to the gym? And then I told my friend, just for fun, to remain silent, to make them believe that we were foreigners. But obviously I wouldn't deny that I am a Roma to get advantage. I could not really do that.

Interviewee 26

Here, the playful performance of being foreign is not motivated by a desire to avoid prejudice or “get advantage” but rather to position the other as a victim of their own stereotypes (in this case concerning leisure activity: “we were talked to in English, because ‘why would a Gypsy ever go to the gym?’”). Another interviewee (#29 female student) reported a similar pleasure at playing on others’ stereotypical assumptions through identity concealment. Asked if they were often misperceived as non-Roma, they replied:

Extract 8

That is absolutely the case at the university. It doesn't even cross students' or lecturers' minds that the girl in front of them could be Roma. So, it's something that their brain can very hardly accept, that there could be one at a famous university listening. So, it's easier to say that she's a student from the Erasmus programme.

Interviewee 29

When asked if this experience disturbed her, she continued:

Extract 9

Interviewee: No, I find it rather funny. Of course, humour always has something hidden behind, what we want to conceal. So of course, it's a bad feeling that they can't imagine that I, coming from my environment, could be there, could do the same as my classmates, and studied just as hard as they did. Why can't they accept that, or why doesn't it cross their mind in the first place? But sometimes I just laugh at it. In shopping centres I'm often talked to in English. And then I answer in English. If it's easier for them, then....

Interviewer: Do you leave them in their beliefs?

Interviewee: I do. But I usually laugh at that though, when we're talking with my friend in Hungarian, and one starts talking to me in English. [How is it possible] to blur our own mind so much, that I'm talking in Hungarian, and they talk to me in English? Never mind. If it's easier for them in this way then OK, I won't see them anymore.

Interviewee 29

Here again we see something of the frustration noted above in extract 1 concerning people's (perceived) inability to properly recognise the diverse (counter-stereotypical) qualities associated with the Roma community. However, despite such hurt, the interviewee played along with the other's assumptions, laughing at the non-Roma other's inability to see beyond their stereotypical assumptions ("I usually laugh at that though, when we're talking with my friend in Hungarian, and one starts talking to me in English").

It is important to note that these decisions to play along with the other's prejudices did not necessarily entail the public humiliation of the other (for examples of public ridicule see Dobai & Hopkins, 2020). Rather, one gets the sense of an individual taking pleasure in observing the other being blinded by their own assumptions. As before, it is probable that the

decision to derive such pleasure is more likely in some situations than others. Most obviously, it is more likely when the minority group member has little investment in the relationship (e.g., in extract 9 the interviewee explained: “If it’s easier for them in this way then OK, I won’t see them anymore”).

Testing the other’s assumptions

In addition to describing reactive passing, some interviewees explained they proactively encouraged their mis-categorisation as ‘foreign’. One reason was that such concealment allowed the investigation of others’ intergroup attitudes. For example, interviewee #15 (male activist) explained that in his campaigning as an activist he routinely concealed his Roma identity and would quietly listen to what the other said about Roma:

Extract 10

I’m switched off, and I’m just smiling and nodding. Not everybody can do this. Sometimes I also wish to get up and throw the table at his face, because he says such things, and he’s confident that he’s right. But in order to get him to talk and then to be able to prove that, I have to put on that mask unfortunately. And then I am in that nodding dog role [] But I need this for my job, in order to make people say things out loud, because it always comes out somehow. [] So really, sometimes we need to manipulate in order to get to know. This is important, because when one puts on a mask and starts talking about something, then one gets to know the other’s viewpoint and then I can argue with that. “Look, you said this, but here is my opinion”.

Interviewee 15

He continued that his manipulation was active, involving the use of (stereotype-inconsistent) sophisticated language (he explained, to “manipulate them somehow, I minced my words deliberately”), and observed:

Extract 11

Manipulation is basically a bad thing, but this is how you can get people talking. So, I use this in my work. And at the university it was good for getting to know, it's a good tool to get to know how people relate to me. Either to me as a person or to Gypsies too. Sometimes I throw in a stereotype. Someone tells something [negative about Roma] and I go like: “Oh, the stinky Gypsy!” And I watch how he reacts to that as a non-Gypsy. So, I put *him* in a situation where *I* watch how he reacts. I know this isn't fair, but...

Interviewee 15

Here, identity concealment is not a means to avoid prejudice but rather to elicit otherwise potentially hidden attitudes which can then be challenged. Indeed, his identity performance goes so far as to sometimes include what could be described as entrapment (“Sometimes I throw in a stereotype [] “Oh, the stinky Gypsy!””). Whilst this strategy comes at some cost (e.g., he describes his desire “to get up and throw the table at his face”), it changes the experience of social relations (“I put *him* in a situation where *I* watch how he reacts”) and affords the opportunity for counter-argument (“then one gets to know the other's viewpoint and then I can argue with that”).

Being free of others' assumptions about Roma

Always being perceived in terms of one identity (even if it is valued) is constraining, and some spoke of the pleasures in being freed of their categorisation as Roma. For example, interviewee #22 referred to the pleasures of being abroad and being categorised “a foreigner”:

Extract 12

Interviewee: Here at home I’m a Gypsy, elsewhere I’m a foreigner, and a human. I put my feet out of the country and from then on, I’m a woman who may not speak the language of the country, but not a Gypsy who is assumed to have a list of such and such bad qualities.

Interviewer: Is it liberating to be abroad?

Interviewee: Absolutely. It’s liberating. Relax.

Interviewee 22

Extract 12 comes from the same interviewee quoted in Extracts 1 and 2, and taken together, these quotes illustrate the complexity in interviewee #22’s experience of others’ assumptions about her identity. In extract 1 there was frustration at being misrecognised as foreign in Hungary because her educational and career achievements did not fit with the Roma stereotype. In contrast, extract 12 captures the “liberating” pleasure of being categorised as “a foreigner” when “I put my feet out of the country”. In this latter context, such a categorisation says less about the hurt of the stereotypical misrecognition of Roma (extract 1) and more about the pleasures of being free (“It’s liberating. Relax”) from the burden of others’ negative assumptions about her identity (i.e., that she is defined by “a list of such and such bad qualities”). Furthermore, she describes how it affords her the opportunity to be recognised in terms of her other identities (e.g., as a human, a woman).

Such sentiments were repeated by interviewee #6 (male, political representative) who explained that whether in Hungary or abroad, he tried to avoid making others aware of his Roma identity and that he did so in order to be free to think and act in new ways. He explained that after he left the Roma settlement where he grew up, people “did not even know my name, where I am from, they didn’t know anything about me”, and continued:

Extract 13

I had the opportunity to invent myself again. And in the high school as well. And at college and so on. And everywhere a little bit. I didn’t start with like “Hi, I am [name] from the Gypsy settlement, and I have one pair of trainers that I am wearing now”, but there you could really re-create yourself. And it was the same when I went to London as well. Since nobody knew me, I dared to be different or to try out a different aspect of me, or just simply let the external stimuli shape me. When somebody is strongly discriminated against, one may not have the courage, the self-confidence for doing so. But it can be a remedy for discrimination, when we put one into an entirely new environment like “Hello, let’s figure out yourself again, you are not Kolompar Janos³ now, but a guy who is just learning about things.”

Interviewee 6

This quote highlights the potential for ethnic identity concealment to facilitate an individual’s exploration of the rich complexity to their identity. Indeed, there is a sense in which identity concealment creates a context in which a degree of autonomy and exploration is possible. More specifically, whereas discrimination is understood as undermining one’s confidence to experiment with one’s identity, identity non-disclosure/concealment is

³ A stereotypical Roma name (and not the interviewee’s real name)

conceptualised as creating the context in which such experimentation (and confidence building) is possible.

It should also be noted that this interviewee did not regard the opportunity for such identity exploration to be an individualistic indulgence. Rather, it was an empowering learning experience that he sought to provide for others (disadvantaged Roma children) in an intervention programme:

Extract 14

We often take poor children for holidays. And that's a totally new environment for them, like Balaton⁴, and we are there for two weeks, and those who see us there, who see our children, they don't say like "the Gypsy children have arrived", but they say that "the kids have arrived". Some of them are whiter, some of them are browner, but we usually go there wearing new slippers, new shorts, new skirts, and things like that. You cannot see them dirty or in torn cloths, the only thing you can see that they have a different [skin] colour. And there the children have the opportunity to figure out themselves and reevaluate themselves again. And when they come back, you can notice that this environment [their everyday environment] started appearing strange to them, or maybe not strange, but they still have something from the holiday experiences.

Interviewee 6

Here again, there is reference to the significance of being freed from the burden of a Roma categorisation. So too, there is reference to the efforts taken to ensure that the children are freed of such a labelling (such that the locals don't say "the Gypsy children have arrived",

⁴ A freshwater lake in the Transdanubian region of Hungary

but rather that “the kids have arrived”). Furthermore, the purpose of avoiding the categorisation as Roma is reported to be his desire to create the opportunity for the children to experience the world from a different vantage point from usual such that they could regard their everyday reality in a new light and “have the opportunity to figure out themselves and reevaluate themselves again”. Again, the wider point is that when considering the potential benefits of ethnic identity concealment, researchers need to be sensitive to how in some contexts it might be motivated by a desire to liberate the imagination and win some autonomy and agency in self-definition. At present, social identity researchers all too often tend to assume that ethnic identity concealment/non-disclosure is a manifestation of minorities’ limited agency rather than a means to achieve such agency.

Discussion

Throughout this paper we have sought to show that within one disparaged ethnic minority we found various motivations for identity concealment/non-disclosure. They included: securing material benefits (extract 3); avoiding conflict (extract 5); taking pleasure from seeing others’ assumptions blinding them to the reality before them (extracts 7 and 9); testing (and exposing) majority group members’ attitudes (extracts 10 and 11); allowing group members to experience the world in new ways such that they can come to view their usual conditions of living in a new light (extracts 13 and 14).

Future research could extend our understandings of the motivations for, and forms of, identity concealment/non-disclosure and explore how these depend on the individual’s relationship with the other (stranger vs. known other), the prospective duration of the relationship, the availability of social support to pursue other strategies, etc. Moreover, given the non-representative nature of our sample, such research could address how such decision-making varies according to participants’ social class, social capital, geographical segregation from the non-Roma majority, etc. (Bigazzi & Csertó, 2016). Future research could also

employ other paradigms. Our data are self-report and may be subject to a variety of impression management considerations at play in the interviews themselves. Moreover, we cannot be sure whether the reported strategies accomplished what participants intended. Future research conducted within the tradition of ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967) could address some of these shortcomings and shed light on the accomplishment of particular identity performances. However, if such work remains, we can begin to widen our theorisation of identity concealment.

First, alongside consideration of internal factors (e.g., level of identification) and external factors (e.g., the level of social support available) identified in the literature on concealable stigma (e.g., Clair, et al., 2005; Croteau, et al., 2008; Ragins, 2008), and the wider social beliefs identified in the social identity tradition (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), analyses of ethnic identity concealment/non-disclosure must factor-in the role of the interaction partner in the ethnic categorization process (Renfrew, 2004). The latter's assumptions about one's ethnicity creates conditions for concealment that may not have been envisioned, and how an individual responds will depend on a broad range of situation-specific considerations (e.g., whether it would allow them to avoid hurt, result in their exposure to prejudiced attitudes, learn about the others' inter-group attitudes, etc.).

Second, we need to widen our conceptualisation of the considerations guiding ethnic identity concealment/non-disclosure. The social identity tradition implies concealment/non-disclosure is likely a function of low ingroup identification. However, even when an identity is highly valued, its hyper-prominence to others can be burdensome (Blackwood, Hopkins & Reicher, 2013; Osbourne, Barnett & Blackwood, 2021). Most obviously, it can result in one having to orient to others' assumptions about one's identity which limits one's autonomy in self-definition. Indeed, to the degree that one is defined by others in terms that are not one's own, there is enormous potential for the misrecognition of one's other (valued) social

identifications (Dobai & Hopkins, 2021; Hopkins, 2011; Hopkins & Blackwood, 2011). Our own data hint at participants' desire to experience the world without the limitation of always having just one of their identities foregrounded without regard to their own wishes. As we come to appreciate the importance of minority group members having some control over when their various identities are socially relevant, so it is apparent that some forms of identity concealment may be liberatory and create social contexts in which one has a greater degree of autonomy in self-exploration. Future research could more explicitly consider how the concealment/non-disclosure of one identity may be motivated by the desire to be seen and treated in terms of another of one's identities that one regards as more situationally relevant. This implies that rather than assuming concealment/non-disclosure entails deception (through presenting as a member of a group that one is not a member of) we should be alert to how it could allow interactions in which the recognition of one's other valued identities is possible. Such a perspective encourages us to realise that as McLaughlin (2007, P. 72) puts it, "there is little existential difference between disclosure behaviours and the prioritisation or claiming of some but not other aspects of one's potential social identities in some settings but not others". Some of these issues are illustrated in research showing that those with 'bi-racial' identities may sometimes accent (or draw attention to) particular features of their heritage rather than others (Khanna & Johnson, 2010; Yang, 2006).

Third, we should be cautious about assuming that ethnic identity concealment is necessarily assimilatory (Tajfel, 1981). Undoubtedly, some forms are, and have the wider effect of reinforcing the belief that some identities have greater worth than others (see Sasson-Levy & Shoshana, 2013). Yet, it can also be associated with laughter at the other's inability to see beyond their prejudices (extracts 7 and 9) and testing, exposing, and challenging majority group members' attitudes (extracts 10 and 11). Such actions are different from the collective protest typically explored by those interested in social change

(e.g., Ayanian et al., 2020; Thomas, Zubielevitch, Sibley, & Osborne, 2019). However, individuals' everyday performances should not be overlooked because of *a priori* conceptualisations of how ethnic minorities should engage with hierarchy. Indeed, some of the examples of ethnic identity concealment/non-disclosure reported by our participants may be conceptualised as constituting what Scott (1985, 1989) refers to as 'weapons of the weak' in everyday encounters. Again, future research could widen the analysis of social change activism to include more explicit consideration of the apparently 'small' everyday acts of individual resistance.

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