

Multiracial Interview #4 (Chris)

Female Japanese/European American Adoptee - *Chris*

I interviewed a biracial adoptee woman who lives in a racially diverse city in California (I will refer to her as SI). When I asked SI to describe her race/ethnicity, she said she was “half Japanese and half white.” Her birth mother was a Nisei who was interned in the war relocation camps and her birth father was a white American (she thinks Dutch American). Her adopted parents are both Japanese Americans (Nisei). She was born in the U.S. and adopted at a very young age. She grew up in northern New Jersey in a predominantly white town.

I discussed many issues pertaining to race, ethnicity, adoption, and identity with SI. I found that the most interesting conversation points were about race and identity. She described her race/ethnicity as “half Japanese and half white” at the beginning of the interview. However, when I asked her how she responds to the question “What are you?” she replied, “I say I am hapa, or biracial Asian, or ‘half Japanese and half I-don’t-know-what’.” Her “white” part of herself has now become “I-don’t-know-what.” When I asked about her cultural upbringing, she said that she grew up in a fairly culturally Japanese household. For this reason, she later in the interview said she more accurately considers herself “3/4 Asian” since three out of her four parents (two birth, two adopted) are Japanese. SI appears to have a strong self-chosen Asian/Japanese racial identity: “I feel like identify with Asian-Americans and Japanese Americans specifically. If I see a picture of a group of AAs, I feel like I “belong” there. I feel comfortable with Asian Americans. When I see other Asian Americans, I feel a sense of connection with them. Even if I don’t like the actions of specific AAs who might be rude or unwelcoming, I still feel they are my community.”

This is where the issue of ascribed racial identity, as Tashiro describes in his article *Considering the Significance of Ancestry*, comes into play. SI recalled a couple instances where she was treated very rudely by other Asians and told she wasn’t really Japanese. Among blacks and Latinos, SI was seen as Asian, but among whites, she was seen as white. Apparently, SI was white enough to “pass” as white to whites, but “exotic” enough to pass as a minority to people of color. Although she has experienced these different circumstances, SI still prefers to identify as either hapa or just Asian/Japanese American. Her cultural upbringing has made her identify as Asian/Japanese even if a few Asians have told her she isn’t really Asian.

In terms of her adoption, SI said it was the single most important issue in her life, even more so than being biracial. She said that she has been very warmly

received within the adoption community and has a career in the adoption field. She considers herself a transracial adoptee, which is interesting considering that she identifies as “3/4 Japanese.” The white part of herself is what makes her a transracial adoptee. When I asked her if she ever felt the need to immerse herself into her “whiteness,” she replied yes, to the extent that she wanted to find her birth father. She regarded that as the only way to connect to the white part of herself. Having failed in this endeavor, she stopped trying to connect to her white heritage and just concentrated on being more visibly hapa or Asian/Japanese. She never felt that her adopted parents made an issue of her racial heritage, but that she always felt different because she didn’t “look as Japanese as they did.” To SI, being multiracial doesn’t hold that much meaning within the adoption community because being a *transracial* adoptee is the most important and salient aspect.