

# Monoracial Interview #3 (Lily)

Female Vietnamese American Adoptee - *Lily*

For the sake of protecting the identity of my interviewee, I will refer to her by the pseudonym LF. LF was adopted as an infant from Vietnam, and grew up as an only child in a small town in Connecticut. Her adoptive parents are from a mixed European American ancestry, and the neighborhood she grew up in reflects a similar demographic. LF is thirty-three years old, and works as a free lance writer and bartender. I asked her how she identified, in which, she responded Asian American: despite feeling more American than Asian. She did not feel that she had much of a connection with the Asian American community, and believes that was a result of her white upbringing. As an adoptee Laura looks Vietnamese, but does not speak the language and is not versed in the ethnic traditions. She admits that her insight into Asian cuisine is not any more authoritative than her white friends and family.

Daily, she is asked, "What are you?" And "where are you from?" She responds differently depending on the context. If the person asking her is a friend of her friends or family, she will say "I am Vietnamese, and adopted". However, strangers or other Asians who ask will get "I am Vietnamese". LF finds these questions to be so common place in her life, she responds as if she's being asked about the weather. The context with whom LF is talking with, directly affects how she chooses to identify. If she is comfortable with you, she will divulge more information describing her background and identity, however, if she is not comfortable you will get I am Vietnamese. She chooses the latter response because she knows it will fulfill the expectations of the person asking in hopes it will discourage further inquiries about her identity. If people inquire further, she becomes offended because she finds it invasive. Why should the way she looks allow people to inquire into her personal life? Her white friends empathize with the day to day inquiries, yet, despite all of the similarities she shares with them; her ascribed identity (Tashiro) powerfully reinforces other people's perceptions of her identity.

When I asked LF if she faced any challenges as an adoptee? She reflected on how as a child and teenager, she had felt being Asian was bad. LF's early experience shaped her ideas of race, which reveals how deeply embedded it is in the American culture and institutions (McRoy and Grape). She did not want to be different from her peers, and was successful in being popular in school by reinforcing the fact that she was adopted. To LF being adopted meant she had the credentials for being just as white as her peers and family: not Asian. Maria P. Root would consider LF's rejection of being Asian as a negative differentiation, because she identifies by what she is not-a distancing from

feared association with the other. However, the Asian community's response to her adoptee status deems her as not one of them, makes it difficult for her to assume an Asian identity if she is not accepted by the community. LF's racial and adoptee experiences challenges the traditional identification boundaries, and her choice to distance herself from being Asian should be understood within the context of her environment. Root's use of the term negative differentiation is not compassionate towards LF's personal experience, and it implies she has made the wrong choice. LF is content with her choice of not connecting with the Asian community, because she feels more comfortable with the white community she was brought up in. The strict boundaries which establish in group status within the Asian American community are founded on the principles of phenotype, cultural attachment, and language among individual Asian ethnic groups (Suyemoto). As an adoptee LF is an outsider because she can only fulfill the phenotype qualification, and she needs to have all three to be accepted into the Asian American community. LF jokingly used the term banana, which refers to being yellow (Asian) on the outside and white on the inside. Although, she made the comment light heartedly, some might interpret her use of that term as reinforcing the negative stereotypes used by the Asian community to establish its' boundaries. As a result, LF could be seen as aiding the dissonance (Kich) between adoptees and the Asian American community.

LF feels more comfortable in white society because of her adoptive family's heritage, and has found that because whites see her as Asian: that is how she must define herself as. LF's interview will be intrical into understanding how differently multiracial adoptees and monoracial adoptees negotiate their identity. For LF, being adopted and Asian were equally strong influences on how she identified. As an adoptee she found she personally identified with the dominant white culture because of her family upbringing, meanwhile, she felt she had no choice in accepting the dominant society's ascribed Asian identity. This contrasted the interview with my multiracial adoptee, because the multiracial aspects of Bart's identity greatly overshadowed the influences of being adopted. LF's adoptee experience strongly shaped what community she interacted with, however, the social construct of her race forced her to identify as Asian. There is no wrong or right way to identify, and that is why these interviews are important into understanding how different experiences influence the identity of monoracial and multiracial adoptees.