

# Multiracial Interview #3 (Lily)

Male African/European American Adoptee - Lily

For the purpose of keeping the identity of my interviewee anonymous, I will refer to him as Bart. The terminology used to talk about the socially constructed notion of race is not finite, and may be loosely interpreted. Bart was born in 1965 to a white mother and African American father, and was later adopted by an Irish American couple. Interestingly, when I asked him how he identifies himself he said his self-identity changes depending on the context. He identifies as African European American because that is his heritage, and because he grew up in an Irish American family. Bart identifies as African European America in the multiracial community because the level of understanding about the complexity of race dynamics is implied within the multiracial community, therefore, making for a comfortable dialogue instead of explaining ones identity. In addition, he identifies as African American in settings that are predominantly African American or European American, because for him that identity assumes there is mixed heritage in the family tree. The way Bart chooses to identify is problematic to the assumption that a single identity status can be achieved by ruling out the possibility for negotiating developmentally and/or contextually with a multiple identity choice (Root, Suyemoto). Bart wants to affirm the mixed heritage aspect of his experience without having to do extra work by explaining his identity to others. The problem is not how Bart identifies, but rather, how others think he should.

I asked Bart if his adoptive parent's racial background had an affect on his relationship with them, and he responded yes. The communities and times in which his parents grew up in have limited the amount of open dialogue surrounding the subject of his identity. During Bart's childhood, race and identity issues were not talked about, however, as he has gotten older he and his parents have begun to discuss their experiences more explicitly. When I asked Bart if being culturally white has affected his relationship with the African American community, he responded, that simply being a person of color makes you unable to be culturally white. Bart made a clear distinction between extensive white socialization versus being white culturally as two different things. As an adoptee not all of who he was could be accepted as white within the white culture due to his black phenotype, despite his experience of extensive white socialization. The legacy of slavery, anti-miscegenation (interracial marriages), and hypodescent makes Bart's experience culturally black, therefore, it is not possible for him to be "culturally white". Hypodescent is a system that assigns mixed race people into the lowest social value, and is a currently agreed upon system (Root).

I asked Bart, what did it mean to identify as multiracial in the adoptee community? He did not feel there was much of an adoptee community, which made answering this question difficult. Bart spent a lot of his energy trying to understand what it meant to be multiracial in America, and had not negotiated his multiracial identity with his adoptee identity. In addition, Bart's lighter skin and more Caucasoid phenotype deemed him adoptable versus if he were darker skinned. His experience as a light skinned multiracial adoptee is explained with Mcroy and Grape's claim that, "White families looking to adopt minority children preferred a biracial child, because of the ease of explaining a more ambiguous looking Child's origin to their other family members, friends, and neighbor". His adoptable status as a light skinned multiracial was due to the social attitudes surrounding race in 1965, during time Bart was adopted. I also asked Bart what types of experiences he had in different racial groups, in which his story about a work situation really hit home. When Bart talks to people over the phone, his last name and the way he speaks (not stereotypical black) is consistent with his Irish last name, however, when people meet Bart they are surprised to meet a black man. This experience is a common occurrence for Bart when dealing with people from various racial communities. I learned how negotiating names for adoptees acts as a mechanism for others to ascribe their identity (Tashiro).

Through my interview with Bart I learned that Bart's multiracial adoptee status did not force him to negotiate between being an adoptee and being multiracial, instead, developing his understanding of being multiracial had been central in his identity development up to his point in his life. Bart's interview taught me first hand how the vocabulary we use to discuss different identity and race experiences cannot be applied to everyone's experience. I learned from Bart's experience that being a mixed black and white man had social implications that ascribed him a black identity regardless of being adopted into a white family. According to Wejisinghe, physical appearance and social and historical context influence the black community's identity, this is an assumption that holds true even for adoptees. The lack of unity within the adoptee community is unlike other communities which are connected by a shared culture, ethnicity, or phenotype. Bart's interview taught me how adoptee experiences of being different from their adoptive families are similar to multiracials outside status from minority and/or majority groups. Multiracial adoptees have three separate possible identities to negotiate: minority, majority, and their family. Bart's interview proves that the individual has the power to choose how they want to identify, and that there is no absolute identity for mixed race adoptees. In addition to negotiating multiple races, adoptees may have difficulties relaying their marginal experiences with their adoptive families. The things I learned from Bart's interview will be instrumental in understanding the multiracial individual within the adoptee community, because Bart's experience will help highlight any overarching similarities

between multiracials and monoracials in the adoptee community. Our findings may reinforce and/or dispel some of the assumptions made about identity