

Butch's Story 5

Who Am I?

Developing racial identity can be complicated for individuals because they must balance self-perceptions, stereotypes and biases, and socialization processes. Racial identity development is more difficult for people with multiple or mixed racial backgrounds. Biracial individuals are the offspring of parents with differing racial heritage. *Interracial* is the term given to describe the marital process, and *multiracial*, a newer term, describes individuals from two or more heritages (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). The idea of the existence of mixed racial heritage has been troublesome. The prevailing notion was—and still is today—that individuals from mixed racial heritages, particularly Whites and Blacks, would have difficulty functioning. It was also believed that mixing the races would “dilute” Whiteness, leading to an inferior race or group of people. In the early 1800s, interracial marriages began to be outlawed, and it was not until 1967 that the Supreme Court ruled these laws were unconstitutional (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995).

Complicating the identity process were laws that defined the notion of race, which varied from state to state, including the “one-drop rule” for individuals with African heritage, which stated that a person with any African ancestry was categorized as African or African American (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003). The consequences of the negative reactions to racial mixing included the development of a social status classification system, leading to intragroup differences and judgmental attitudes. Biracial individuals were often forced to choose a racial group, but some biracial people attempted to “pass” and be accepted as Whites. The tragic mulatto syndrome, personified in the movie *Imitation of Life*, was a by-product of the attitudes toward biracial individuals; it includes the dilemma of having to choose a racial identity, often as a result of denying a part of one’s racial heritage (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). It should be noted that this process included not only the denial of part of one’s own heritage but also a denial of family members or associates.

The 2000 U.S. Census data show that 6.8 million individuals, or 2.4 percent of the population, reported a multiracial heritage, the majority of whom reported two races in their background (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001). The majority of individuals indicating more than one race included White as one race (about 80 percent), followed by “some other race,” Black, Native American, or Asian. (For more information, visit www.census.gov). Hispanics are counted as an ethnic group and can have a variety of racial designations, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Although historically more attention has been given to White–Black intermarriages, it is clear that the multiracial category is expanding, and clinicians may be confronted with more biracial and multiracial clients. It is more acceptable today to claim multiracial heritage; however, individuals still need to engage in the complex task of identity development. Butch’s story describes this complex process, which occurs with people of mixed racial heritage. The reader should pay close attention to the negotiation process that must occur with each component of Butch’s racial background, including acceptance from various racial groups, pressures to accommodate to particular racial groups, and intragroup oppression from racial groups.

Butch’s Story

Who am I? What race am I? What nationality am I? Where do I fit into American society? Where can I find total acceptance? For most of my 47 years, I have struggled to find answers to these questions. I am an American of multiracial descent and culture. In this aspect, I am not very different from many Americans. The difference for me is that I have always felt an urge to feel and live the intermingling of blood that runs through my veins. American society has a way of forcing multiracial and biracial people to choose one race over the other. I personally feel this pressure every time I have to complete an application form with instructions to check just one box for race category.

My own racial and cultural background consists of American Indian from two nations, Lakhota and Creek; African American; Italian American; and Puerto Rican. I am Spanish-speaking, with some knowledge of the Lakhota language. Possessing such a diverse background has often placed me in a position to hear many insensitive and racist remarks from one group or another—obviously, I have often been the target. In the eyes of White Italian people, I am viewed as a Black person. Blacks often view me as a weak and tainted half-breed. American Indians have either cautiously accepted or rejected me. The Puerto Rican community has offered the most acceptance.

A family tree would be next to impossible in our family, largely due to secrets (skeletons in the closet), question marks, and taboo subjects. The matriarch of our family was my maternal grandmother, Anna, who was half Black and half Creek Indian. My paternal grandfather was Oglala Lakhota from the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. He was called Jimbo, which was short for Jim Bull. I am told that my mother’s father was an Italian immigrant who lived

in a "little Italy" neighborhood. My father's mother was Black. Her husband, Jimbo, called her Pipe because she always smoked a pipe. So when all of this was finally sorted out, it looked liked this: My mother, Laura, is one fourth Black, one fourth Creek, and half Italian. My father is half Black and half Oglala Lakhota.

The Italian side of our family was—and to a large extent remains—a mystery seldom discussed in our family. My mother and her siblings were born and raised in a "little Italy" neighborhood. At about the age of 12 or 13 years, I learned of our Italian ancestry. I received this information through one of our family historians, or storytellers, our Aunt June. Aunt June was one of my mother's younger sisters. Aunt June was very fair-skinned, with dark eyes and hair. She never had children of her own, and she also had a drinking problem, which I realized after I was grown. While I don't believe she told us everything about the family, she did let us in on many family secrets. Probably because she never had children of her own, it seemed like she really enjoyed spending time with my siblings and me.

We have fond memories of Aunt June babysitting for us on the weekends. She loved to watch horror flicks with us, which we thought was very cool, since no other adult we knew did. We would all lie down on the floor together, eating popcorn and enjoying all the old, original *Frankenstein*, *The Wolf Man*, *Dracula*, and *The Mummy* flicks. After the movie, Aunt June would tell us old family stories of when she and her brothers and sisters were young children. Sometimes after drinking a few beers, Aunt June would cross the forbidden line and tell us things that my mother and her other sisters had secretly kept hidden in the closet. I can remember my mother and her other two sisters pulling Aunt June in the bedroom, closing the door, and scolding her about talking too much. (Of course, as many children do, we eavesdropped.)

Well, one day, Aunt June pulled out this old wallet-size photo of a dark-haired White man with a Hitler-style moustache. She said to me, "This is your grandfather, my father. You can keep this picture, but don't let my sisters know." Aunt June later went on to tell me that my grandfather was an Italian immigrant from Calabria, Italy. Aunt June didn't seem to know much more about him. With a very sad face and with tears welling in her eyes, she told me that she never knew her father. Even though I never asked her, I always wondered why she chose me to keep the picture instead of my brothers and sisters. In some ways, learning about my grandfather helped me to make sense of some things. Between the ages of five and seven years, I began to perceive and question the differences in skin colors, which were quite evident in our family. My mother and Aunt June were very fair-skinned, while Candace, my mother's oldest sister, and Lily were brown and olive. Their brother, Tony, had black skin. So learning about my Italian grandfather took me back to a question I had asked my mother at about the age of seven years. I was gazing at a picture of my mother's brother, Tony, when I thought to myself, "If Tony is my mother's brother, then why are they virtually opposite colors?"

So, as a child, I popped this question to my mother: "If Uncle Tony is your brother, then why is he so dark, and you are so White?" My mother responded with a quick, sharp slap to my face and told me, "It's not your business, and Tony is my brother, and that's that." As I was to learn later in life, this was just the beginning of hard questions to come with no easy answers.

When I was about 11 years old, our family moved to an extension of the “little Italy” neighborhood. While the Italian community didn’t exactly throw a welcoming party for us when we first moved there, all in all we were not harassed. We had some Italian childhood friends, although I don’t remember being invited into many homes. Our family would go on living here for the next six years—years that would challenge our multiracial status like never before.

Ironically, the very neighborhood my mother had been raised in, “little Italy,” claimed me as a beating victim. One day, possessing an urge to visit my mother’s old neighborhood, I was approached by two grown Italian men who had been standing on their front porch stairs. One of the men appeared to be in his 50s, the other in his mid-20s, probably father and son. The younger man had a metal pipe in his hand. They asked me what the hell I was doing around here. At the time, I was 18 years old and had this feeling of invincibility. So, as they approached me, I stood my ground in defiance and proceeded to ultimately receive a beating that cost me 10 stitches on my head, along with numerous bumps and bruises, mostly on my arms, which I had used to ward off some of the blows aimed at my head. I was to learn later from the “Gents,” a Puerto Rican street gang, that they had been warring with some of the Italians. This, of course, explained why they had called me a dirty Puerto Rico Gent as I was being beaten. Somehow, after what seemed like an eternity, I was able to escape, and later was picked up, bleeding and dazed, by two plainclothes detectives. After showing the detectives the house where my assailants entered after the beating, I was driven to the emergency room. Shortly before leaving the hospital, I was told by the returning detectives that they couldn’t locate the perpetrators. It was apparent that I was the wrong person in the wrong place at the wrong time. It was this incident that created a deep hatred on my part toward Italians. In a sense, it was also the beginning of self-hatred for the Italian side of myself. Afterward, whenever anyone asked what my ethnicity was, I would not mention the Italian blood that ran through my veins.

I also had trouble with my African American heritage. As the neighborhoods in which we lived continued to become more Black, it became increasingly difficult to cope. My oldest brother, Landon, was forever getting beaten up. The Black girls thought he was gorgeous, which didn’t help to ease the hatred that the Black males had toward my brother. Landon was a star athlete in track, basketball, and baseball. Since Landon didn’t hang out in the neighborhood in which we lived, I was put in the uneasy position of trying to protect my younger brother, Paul. We were always getting socked on because we weren’t quite the same as our friends, according to them. I was, quite frankly, afraid to fight Blacks. The blacker they were, the more afraid I was to fight. I remember being told on numerous occasions that my family was physically weak because we were mixed.

There was one kid in our neighborhood who happened to be our friend, sometimes. But whenever he felt like beating up on two little light-skinned, curly-haired boys, there my younger brother and I were, ready to be someone’s doormat. One day, like so many others, he felt like taking his rage out on us, so he began beating me up. Paul ran home to get our mother. During the beating, I saw my mother coming, so I knew I had to find some courage to fight back, even though at the same time I was glad that my rescue was on the way. When my mother arrived, she shouted out to me, “Don’t you stand there and let him

beat you up. Fight back!" Well, I suddenly got this renewed energy and courage and began to try to turn the tide. Unfortunately, it was not to be. I was afraid. I was totally lacking in confidence. I was a victim, buying into the belief that, because of my mixed blood, I was not Black enough; I could not and would not overcome my adversary. It would be years before I would grow to understand and confront my fears.

Another incident that occurred when I was about 12 or 13 years old would leave another deep wound in my already shaken and mixed-up mind. My siblings and I had made friends with the new Black kids who had moved into the neighborhood. At first it seemed that they were very eager to make friends with us. We all seemed to get along well, and we hung out and played together often. One day I got into a fight, for reasons I don't recall, with this kid whom everyone else called a nerd. Franky, as he was called, certainly wasn't very popular; he wasn't even part of our little group that regularly hung out together. As I was pinning him down to the ground in a straddle position, I couldn't actually believe it, but it appeared I was winning the fight. Franky meanwhile was swearing at me, telling me that as soon as he got up he was going to kill me. Suddenly, my friends (or so I thought), who had been standing in a circle around us watching, began shouting, "Get up, Franky! You can beat this little light-skinned nigger's ass any day!" At that point, the little confidence and courage I had gained was quickly destroyed. As they continued urging Franky on, I began to panic, and Franky started to sense my panic. He began struggling even harder, even though my growing fear was the only thing that gave me strength to keep Franky subdued.

When I looked up at what had turned into a mob, all I could see was hateful faces, salivating for my ridicule and defeat. In desperation, I scanned the crowd for a sympathetic, helping face. And then, bingo! There it was—the face that seemed to say, "Pity you! What can I do?" Speaking low, hoping that the mob wouldn't hear, I asked this person if he could go and bring my mother back. The person nodded slightly, indicating that he would. At the same time, some of the other kids had heard my request and began to tease me and laugh at me. Unfortunately, my would-be messenger was physically threatened and ordered to stay put. About that time, my mother stepped out on the terrace and saw the incident. She rushed down to get me. My ordeal was over, though the fear, pain, and humiliation were for me very real. I was in shock—I really thought they were my friends. After the incident, I stayed inside for about two weeks. I was very hurt and embarrassed. But eventually I would go back out and try to be part of the group. I knew I needed to try to fit in some way. It would be difficult because I certainly couldn't change my looks. Why did I go back to these kids, who I knew hated me for who I was? Simply put, I had no choice. It was either adapt or stay locked up at home. I wanted and needed to be accepted. It was at this point in my life that I really wondered why I couldn't have been born Black—Black meaning black in skin color, hair texture, facial features, everything.

From this point, it was pretty much open season on my family and me. At times, things seemed to go well with my friends. Friends? We would play basketball, softball, and follow-the-leader, and sometimes we would just hang out on each other's front porches. But when things got boring or the right situation presented itself, my family would become a target again. I remember one day

we were all sitting out on the front porch, and my mother was walking down the street. As she was going up the stairs to our apartment, one of the guys asked, "Hey Butchie! Ain't your mother White?" Knowing that I needed to fit in, I answered back, "No!" They all laughed in response to my answer and said I was lying. Being very sensitive, I lowered my head and went home.

In the fall of 1963, I began my freshman year at a high school that had a Black student population of about 95 percent. There were six or seven White students, about five Asian students, and approximately 15 to 20 Puerto Rican students. Academics aside, the school was primarily known for its top athletics teams. It was also known for its violence. With my shy, sensitive, introverted personality, I felt even less than a number. During my entire four years of high school, I was never able to fit in. My freshman year, I decided to take Spanish. I was already partly fluent due to our family's early experience with the Puerto Rican culture. I began learning Spanish at the age of six from my mother's fiancé, who had moved to the States from Puerto Rico. I did so well the first year that I was immediately placed in honors Spanish for my remaining three years of high school. I struck up a friendship with another student in Spanish class, Sue. Sue was racially mixed, part Dominican, part Santee Sioux, and part Black. We were the most fluent speakers in honors Spanish and often shared our experiences of trying to fit in. Needless to say, our experiences mirrored each other.

By my junior year, I was able to make friends with a Puerto Rican student, Rosa. Rosa in turn introduced me to the Puerto Rican connection, or body of students. I was received very graciously, with open arms. Like myself, the other Puerto Ricans had been beaten up and harassed on the way to and from school. They told me to walk with them to school and invited me to sit at the two lunch tables they had assigned themselves to. Sometimes, I would go out for lunch. There was a small family-owned restaurant that served Puerto Rican food, Mexican food, and the traditional student's fare: hot dogs and hamburgers. The owner's stepdaughter, Cristina, a student from my school, also helped out part-time. I began eating there frequently. Cristina and I seemed to be attracted to each other, began dating, and moved in together. We would later become common-law husband and wife, living together for 16 years. By the time I began dating Cristina, I was totally immersed in the Puerto Rican culture but still tried to relate to the African American side of me.

In my second year of living with Cristina, I began looking for something to connect to. This was a time of soul searching for me. Politically, there was a lot going on. The late 1960s and early 1970s was an era of civil strife and unrest. There was the Black Power movement, the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the Weathermen, the second battle of Wounded Knee in South Dakota, and the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy. The list goes on and on. The drug culture was also in full bloom. I had started to affiliate myself with the Black Panther Party and the Young Lords, a Puerto Rican revolutionary group. I would sometimes go to their meetings and help pass out revolutionary literature. It was also a time of the Back to Africa movement. Afros and Dashikis were commonplace. We were all sporting huge Afros. In the 1970s, the African movement struck me as very exciting. I actually felt more of a closeness or kinship with Africans than I did with American Blacks. To me, African Americans were a lost and deculturalized people, segregated from everyone else for so long that anyone different was deserving of being set upon.

At any rate, the African thing was very exciting to me. Cristina and I began wearing African clothes and sporting big Afros. I went out and bought a bunch of African records. Later on, I purchased two congas and would go out and beat them with a group of drummers who would congregate in the summer at various beaches. I even wound up giving some of my children African names.

Sometimes, we would visit some of my cousin Roy's closest friends to smoke weed and listen to African music. At first, everything would seem fine. But after a while we would get little side cracks thrown our way, things like "You guys aren't Black enough! If you moved to Africa you wouldn't be accepted." One of Roy's friends, Tim, had a girlfriend named Kenya who saw herself as the African spokesperson (whatever that's supposed to mean). Kenya was very black, with a very short natural hairdo, and she actually looked like she was Nigerian. She would always make some negative comments about Cristina. Kenya would ask Cristina why she was wearing an Afro since Cristina was Puerto Rican. Cristina's shyness exceeded my own, so I usually had to talk up for her. I explained that Cristina's father was dark-skinned Puerto Rican. I also told how African slaves had been taken to Puerto Rico and other Caribbean islands. Afterward, Kenya, along with other members of the group, would tell us not to speak Spanish. (Cristina and I would speak Spanish to each other at times.) Eventually, the negative comments escalated. One day, Kenya told Roy to tell me not to bring Cristina to the group since she wasn't Black. When I angrily called Kenya up to question her about the comment, she added, "You and your cousin Roy are lucky we let you half-breeds in." When I told Roy what Kenya said, he passed it off by saying I was too sensitive, saying Kenya was just joking. Well, that was the last time Cristina and I set foot in their house. But apparently I hadn't learned my lesson.

There was a new revolutionary group of Blacks who were conducting educational and revolutionary seminars. My cousin Roy had attended a few of these meetings and was very excited. One day he asked me to go with him. It sounded very appealing, so I brought a friend of mine named Ricardo. Ricardo was from Puerto Rico and had been in the United States about a year. Ricardo spoke very little English, although he understood more than he could speak. As we entered the building and were waiting in line to be searched, I was explaining to Ricardo in Spanish what the meeting was about. Just then, one of the security guys pointed to Ricardo and said to me, "This guy can't come in!" When I asked why, he told me "This is only for Blacks." I then tried to explain that Ricardo was Puerto Rican with some African heritage. The security guard responded by saying, "You have to be all Black to come in here!" I responded by saying that I wasn't all Black, so I wouldn't go in either. Roy and a couple of his friends went inside, while Ricardo and I waited in the front lobby. Since we all had all ridden in the same car, we had no choice. Not long after, Roy's older brother, Randy, showed up. Randy was concerned about our interest in these revolutionary groups and had decided to follow us. When we explained why we were sitting outside, Randy immediately went into the meeting, interrupting the speaker, by calling them Black racists who were no better than White racists for refusing Ricardo admittance. Roy, of course, disagreed with his older brother and told Randy that he was off base. Randy thought Roy was completely wrong to have entered the place when Ricardo, our friend, was not allowed in. Randy then told his brother that he was a sucker for punishment,

that he was nothing but a mixed-breed, high-yellow chump who would never be accepted by Blacks. I agreed in heart.

It was about this time that I began to minimize my social contact with Blacks. I was bewildered, rejected, and abused. On top of all of this, I was quite simply tired of the mistreatment. I began to take a close look in the mirror. Here I was telling Blacks that I was the same as they were, with no takers. They saw me as different. I thought to myself, "If they see me as different, then maybe I am different." It hit me right in the face. The coffee was there for me to smell. From that point on, I was never to refer to myself as a Black person. If someone were to ask if I was Black, I would answer by saying, "No. I'm brown. I'm a person of color," or "I'm multiracial." I was comfortable with this. I knew at that point that I would no longer allow someone else to tell me who I was. As a human being, I felt it was my God-given right to say who I was. Unfortunately, what I knew right then was that I certainly didn't feel Black anymore. The negative experiences I suffered had pushed the Black side of me to the farthest recesses of my mind, body, and soul, and at the time I wasn't sorry for it.

My very first Indian contact began with my maternal grandmother. We always referred to her as simply "Mama." On the other hand, we called our mother, Laura, by her name. Because our grandmother lived with us from a very young age, we more or less copied our mother and her sisters when referring to our grandmother. Grandmother Jenna was half Black and half Muscogee Creek. Mama's physical appearance pretty much typified a Black woman, although her demeanor was very Indian. Mama often talked of her father, who was of the Eastern Band of the Creek Nation. The Creeks were originally from the southeastern portion of the United States, particularly Georgia. Somehow my grandmother's father settled for a time in Kentucky, although he later went to live with his disconnected relatives in Oklahoma.

I can vividly remember the various American Indian foods my grandmother would make, food that today is commonly referred to as soul food. Corn pones, hominy soup, succotash, grits, okra, sassafras tea, Indian sumac lemonade, and wild mustard greens are just a few of the dishes my grandmother made that originally came from the Indian nations of the South. I am often surprised that many African Americans who to this day still eat many of these foods are unaware that they are gifts borrowed from Indian America.

While my grandmother viewed herself as Indian and Black, neither my mother nor her three sisters did. I think to this very day they have more or less seen themselves as Black, which in my opinion complicated their lives in regard to the racial prejudice and harassment they endured. In contrast, my mother's lone brother, Tony, also viewed himself as Indian and Black. Uncle Tony was the first male figure in my life who inspired me to dance. Because Tony was always traveling across the country, we rarely got to see him. But when he visited, he always performed powwow Indian dances for us. There was one dance he would perform called the stomp dance, which, according to him, originated from the intermarriage of Creeks and Black runaway slaves. This was my first inspiration to dance. Uncle Tony was my second inspiration and influence in regard to the Indian side of our family.

The other person who was very influential in instilling Indian culture in my life was my paternal grandfather, Jim Bull, otherwise known as Jimbo. Jimbo was a member of the Oglala band of Teton Lakhota, otherwise known as Sioux.

Jimbo was born on the Pine Ridge Oglala Reservation around the turn of the 20th century. I was told by a cousin that his tribal name was Short Bull, although the name *Short* was taken out somewhere along the way. My grandfather's agency name was Johnson. An "agency" name for Indians is like a plantation name for African American slaves. My grandfather actually lived between three homes: Pine Ridge, South Dakota; Wisconsin; and Chicago. Jimbo in stature was a short man, with olive skin and black wavy hair, which, on the few occasions I saw him, he usually wore in a single ponytail. Because of family infighting, I can count my visits with him on two hands. Even still, the impression he left on me was obviously very strong.

Once when my mother was in the hospital, I remember my grandfather taking me up by Oshkosh, Wisconsin. I can remember us going to a lake, where he baited some fishing lines, and after throwing them in, began to walk through the fields gathering plants, which I was to later learn were for medicinal purposes. Before gathering, he always prayed in his language and left some tobacco. Many tribes use tobacco as an offering to God. I didn't know what I was gathering (I was only eight or nine years old at the time). I simply gathered the plants he pointed out. What was amazing was what occurred years later when I was a young adult. I had always enjoyed the outdoors. When I was about 19 years old, I got this incredible interest and urge to gather and use medicinal plants. Once my own children were old enough, whenever we would go to the woods, I would have them help me gather as well. I continued through the years to follow my urge for medicinal knowledge by studying tribal medicinal lore. To this very day, at the age of 47, I continue to forage for wild plants. For each of the four seasons, there are different plants to gather. And just like my grandfather and grandmother, I carry on the tradition of always leaving an offering of tobacco. Foraging for wild plants is cathartic; for me it is equal to worshipping at a church. There is an inner feeling of peace connecting me to a closer understanding of the creator of life. The physical act of gathering brings on a sense of spiritual and physical healing.

When I was about 35 years old, it suddenly occurred to me that I was continuing this tradition of gathering left from my grandparents because I had received a calling. Of all my brothers, sisters, and cousins, why me? In fact, neither of my grandfathers told me that I was the one to carry the torch, and yet now when I gather, it's as if I can sense their approving presence. I would soon learn that this was just the beginning of reconnecting with the disconnected Indian side of our family.

Because my cousin Randy was about three years older, he got an opportunity to spend more time with our grandfather. In this way, Randy was able to pass a lot of the wisdom and knowledge from our grandparents to me. Randy was very aware of his position as an older grandson. Strangely enough, Randy and I, of the grandchildren, were the only ones who tried to stay connected to our Indian family. We saw ourselves as Indian. The rest of our brothers, sisters, and cousins were very aware that we were part Indian, but they simply thought of themselves as Black. Randy, in a sense, inspired me to stay connected. During our teen years at summer camp in Indiana, Randy and I performed dances for the campers at night around a fire. We put on our homemade dance regalia and even painted our horses, which we rode into camp bareback. After our camp days, I started to drift away from things Indian; of course there were lots

of distractions. I graduated from high school, started working, and was busy raising a family.

I was also experimenting with drugs while at the same time involving myself with the antigovernment, civil unrest scene, which occupied me into the late 1970s. I'll never forget the date: November 1979. That was the year I reconnected with my Indian self.

It was a Friday afternoon. I was at home with my children when my cousin Randy stopped by. My children were five, seven, and eight years of age. Randy said, "Come with me and bring the kids. I want to show you something." We got in the car and drove to the National Armory. When we entered the armory, I was completely awestruck. I had never seen so many Indians in one place in my life.

Randy had taken me to the American Indian Center Powwow. My children and I stood for a long time and watched the various dancers dance around the arena. As I watched, it seemed as if I were dreaming. I immediately thought of my grandparents. I suddenly felt their presence. It felt as though I had been lost for many years and had finally found home. I had arrived at the circle. Randy and I looked at each other. He had brought me here because it was his duty to do so. We didn't need to say anything to each other. We knew that our grandparents had entrusted in us the responsibility of not allowing our Indian family to wither away and die. By the enthusiasm I saw in the faces of my children, I sensed that they, too, felt a strong relationship to the dancers, the sacred drummer, and the circle.

When we left the armory that night, I knew right then that the cultural and spiritual aspects of my life would be greatly affected. Through my cousin Randy, I found out about the American Indian Center (AIC). The AIC was created to address the needs of American Indians who were relocating from reservations. At the monthly fundraiser powwows held at the AIC, there was also a potluck dinner where various participants brought dishes from home. For about two years, I brought food for the potlucks. The meals were usually eaten before the dancing. Afterward, someone from the powwow committee publicly thanked all the people who brought food or helped to serve. It wasn't long before I noticed my name was never mentioned. At first, I thought maybe I was accidentally overlooked. But after about six or seven months of attending the fundraiser, it became apparent that the snub was intentional. At that point, I began to feel a familiar sense of rejection very similar to the rejection Blacks had tossed my way—except there was one difference in the style of the rejection. The Blacks had rejected and harassed me openly and directly. They were vocal in their feelings toward me and right to the point. In contrast, many of the Indian people at AIC rejected me silently. Usually nothing was ever said directly to my children or me. This in itself was not surprising or new to me. It was the type of stony silence and penetrating looks I can remember from my grandparents. They didn't need to physically discipline us when we stepped out of line. We knew what the look and silence symbolized. But I quickly realized how naive I had been to enter into the Indian community as a mixed-blood, thinking that they would be waiting to accept me with open arms. It was indeed another painful eye-opener for me.

As in the past, instead of confronting the resistance, I slowly began to retreat. There were some people who never spoke to us—some of the elders included—although I remember other elders who didn't have too much to say but would occasionally give me an approving nod when my children would dance. One

of the AIC employees, Ron, a Vietnam veteran and a member of the Mesqualic (Sac & Fox) tribe of Tama, Iowa, turned out to be one of my biggest supporters.

Ron began telling me more about the tribal conflicts that had been going on for years at the center. The vast majority of the people who frequent the center are from the Midwest—generally Ojibwa, Winnebagos, Menominees, Potawatomes, and Ottawas. At any given time, other tribes come from more distant locations, such as Lakhotas, Mesquakie, Choctaw, Iroquois, and Navajos. But according to Ron, it had always been the Ho-Chunks, or Winnebagos, who controlled the center, to the disdain of the other tribes. In fact, he said that the Ho-Chunks, as far as he could remember, always had this aura that they were better than other Indians. According to Ron, the Ho-Chunks' way of thinking was "We're more Indian than you, and we have a monopoly on everything that's Indian. Our ways and customs are more sacred than yours." After receiving this information, I began to notice that many of the people from the center who had given my family a cold shoulder indeed were Ho-Chunks. Ron told me as he ended our conversation, "Don't think the Ho-Chunks dislike you and your family because you're of mixed blood. Those people are prejudiced against anyone who isn't Ho-Chunk." Like Whites who romanticize Indian people, in a sense I too learned that I was also guilty of romanticizing the Indian side of our family, wondering why I couldn't have been born a full-blood, naively thinking that maybe Indian people were perfect, without blemish or flavors. My yearning for Indianness was not one of nostalgia, but very much like a homeless person searching for a niche in society. It was what I felt the strongest. Likewise, when the door was slammed in my face, the hurt and pain ran deep. Reality, however, boldly revealed that Indians, like all people, are indeed not perfect. Nor were Indian people perfect before the coming of the White man to these shores. That Whites conquered, and Indians became conquered, is proof enough of imperfections on both sides. On the other hand, it would be safe to say that Indian peoples had fewer imperfections before the White man's arrival. The broken treaties (lies), theft of ancestral lands, the rape and plunder of villages, the implementation of the reservation system, genocide, and the deculturalization process of Indian peoples certainly adds up to just one word—colonialism. The results of colonialism produced things that had never before been recorded, seen, or heard: alcoholism, tuberculosis, fetal alcohol syndrome, unemployment, incest, domestic abuse, child abuse, tribal infighting, fatherless children, reservation and street gangs, and the list goes on. So, with all this in mind, the AIC—indeed, the Indian community—is heir to the results of colonialism from its inception. As I began to learn more about the history of my Indian and African American ancestors, I became less bitter but not less hurt.

Content Themes

Butch's journey demonstrates several important components of racial identity development. There are moments that are quite painful in his story, suggesting that identity development is difficult for biracial individuals. The first component is the importance of examining the multiple contexts

in which identity development occurs. The second component is the role of the family, particularly the role of socialization and the family's role in confronting and dealing with oppression. The most important component of Butch's story is the nature of intragroup differences. This includes the importance of the sense of acceptance from individuals and cultural groups on identity development and psychological functioning.

CONTEXTUAL DIMENSIONS

Butch's story illustrates the importance of examining the context of development. The ecosystem framework developed by Bronfenbrenner (1977) is a useful model for understanding the multiple influences. The first level, the individual level, represents the intrapsychic component of identity and includes temperament, personality traits and characteristics, and cognitive processes. The second level, the microsystem, includes all the immediate influences on individual development, including the nuclear family, peers, and the school system or work community. The mesosystem includes the interactions between the individual and the microsystems. The macrosystem includes more distal systemic influences on development, including immediate and extended family relationships, the neighborhood, legal systems, social services, the community, and community organizations. The exosystem, the next level, includes broader societal influences, including cultural and sociopolitical ideology. Finally, individual development needs to be examined within the particular time perspective, or the chronosystem. Butch's development is reflective of the process outlined in the model. Throughout his childhood and adolescence, experiences with the microsystem were prominent. He and his siblings were consistently teased by neighborhood children and were the victims of physical violence, allegedly due to race. Butch was accused of not being "Black enough" by both neighborhood children as a child and then by members of an organization as a young adult. These experiences contributed to feelings of shame and doubt about his racial identity. His family seemed to have a more tacit influence on his racial identity. Although his mother was aware of the teasing and violence against him, her response seems to have been more related to his self-defense and protection rather than to messages about his race. The family, according to Butch, did not have overt discussions about race and culture. In fact, the discovery of his Italian heritage was cloaked in secrecy. It is also not clear whether his mother helped to intervene with his sense of isolation in high school. The active components within the microsystem seemed to contribute to Butch's difficulties in identity development.

The school system, particularly the high school, reinforced mainstream values, and Butch continued to struggle with experiences of oppression

within the school, along with feelings of isolation and rejection from her peers. Community organizations, AIC, had more influence on Butch's adult identity though, again, in a negative fashion. It is also important to understand Butch's development in light of the current events of his time and the cultural ideology within society, the exosystem and the chronosystem. Butch experienced adolescence and young adult development during the era of the civil rights movement. Butch was able to experience the sense of liberation and racial pride and made attempts to take pride in his Black heritage. Ironically, during the time that he was attempting to be empowered, he experienced intragroup oppression and was accused of not being truly Black and therefore not worthy of participating in the movement or empowerment. His story reminds us of how important it is to consider the context in identity development and psychological functioning of individuals.

FAMILY SOCIALIZATION PATTERNS

The role of the family is an important consideration in examining the role of race in people's lives and is often critical in understanding the identity functioning of biracial individuals. Butch's story provides an example of the complications that can occur when families have not only different racial backgrounds but also differing values. Butch has made attempts to be reconciled with and integrate each of the components of his background into his identity. His family did not have overt discussions about racial heritage. Butch learned about his Italian side from an aunt who secretly told him about his grandfather. For Butch, this answered several questions, particularly the variation in skin colors. When he tried to follow up with questions, however, his mother slapped him, ending his questioning. Butch felt that he could not continue to pursue further questions on this topic. It also seems as if the family did not have overt conversations on his Native American heritage. His cousin introduced him to the Native American culture and encouraged him with his dancing. Yet it seems as if he and his cousin are the only ones interested in learning about the heritage and the culture.

What is interesting about Butch's story is that acts of physical violence occurred due to racial differences. Yet although his mother was aware of the fights, there was no indication that overt discussions about racial issues took place. Butch experienced some very real threats and a sense of social isolation. Neither the nuclear nor the extended family engaged in a socialization process that may have served as a buffer against some of the discrimination. One wonders if Butch would have been so vulnerable if he had been shielded from some of the oppression or given coping mechanisms or resources to deal with them.

INTRAGROUP DIFFERENCES

Due to historical factors around multiracial heritage, a caste system has developed involving race and racial group membership. Biracial or multiracial individuals often have to choose a racial identity or affiliation, sometimes at the expense of neglecting or denying another. Because outward appearances are often our first connection to racial group membership, this choice is often reinforced in families through favoritism based on skin color; hair color, texture, and length; or facial features. When Butch began to recognize and understand his multiracial heritage as a child, it seemed linked to the physical differences within the family. It is not clear whether siblings were more favored in Butch's family because of physical appearance, but Butch's skin color led to some of the neighborhood fights. Because of the physical differences between Butch and other family members, he became an easy target for intragroup oppression. African American children teased him because his mother appeared White and because he was not "Black enough." The caste system and forced racial group affiliation led to intragroup differences. For example, during the period of slavery in America, mulatto children, the offspring of slave owners and slaves, experienced preferential treatment and did not have to labor as hard in the fields (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003). Issues of superiority were established as people who were closer to White in terms of racial mixing and skin color and features were given more status and clout. The intragroup difference affected identity for people because both physical and psychological characteristics were used to determine group membership. One example of this consequence is the brown paper bag test that African American civic organizations used to determine membership. Even today, notions still exist of what constitutes membership within certain groups and the concept that people have to meet various criteria to belong to a race. Butch was certainly caught up in this phenomenon. As a child, his and his mother's skin color became the benchmark for group membership as African Americans. Because his mother appeared to be White, and Butch was biracial, this precluded his true membership. Butch could have theoretically compensated for the skin color issues through his behaviors, but he was also judged as not behaving Black enough. He did not receive socialization and encouragement from his family to learn to connect to his African American heritage and connect with his peers. Butch continued to be judged harshly when joining Black groups as an adult. When Butch joined the AIC and attempted to reconnect with his American Indian heritage, he experienced similar rejection based on his multiracial heritage. Only the Puerto Ricans in his high school accepted him openly, which may have led to his marriage to a Puerto Rican woman.

SELF-IMAGE

The development of identity is complex for everyone, but more so for multiracial individuals. Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995) developed a model of identity development for multiracial individuals based on research. The first stage, preschool, includes low salience to racial heritage as a component of the self. Although Butch was confused about skin color as a child, he did not base his sense of self solely on racial group membership. Children in this stage are aware of physical differences in their parents. The second stage, school-age, occurs as individuals feel compelled to select a racial group for membership. Children in the school-age stage are often asked to identify their heritage and select a response usually based on parental messages. Butch's journey through identity development reflects this stage as he, one by one, almost in a sequential fashion, attempts to explore his heritage and integrate it into his self-concept. Preadolescence and adolescence, the third stage, are characterized by growing awareness of the social connotations of race and are usually triggered by specific environmental circumstances. Butch experienced rejection from Italians, African Americans, and American Indians. This rejection led him at some points in his life to deny his Italian and Black heritage and to feel angry with members of these groups. What complicated this process for Butch was his exposure to the negative stereotypes and biases against certain groups. Butch appears to have internalized the stereotypes, sometimes leading him to be more vulnerable to assault. For example, regarding fights with neighborhood children, he reports that he did not have the confidence to fight them because he thought Blacks were stronger. This of course denies a part of his own heritage. The internalized oppression may have made it easier to reject parts of himself.

The fourth stage in the model occurs in college and young adulthood, as individuals continue with immersion in one culture due to rejection from another. Butch continued the exploration of his identity after high school and into early adulthood. Adulthood, the final stage, is characterized by the continuing integration of identity and an appreciation of a variety of cultural groups. Butch seems to have moved in this direction as he proudly proclaims his multiracial status and acknowledges all of his parts.

Clinical Applications

This section explores the clinical applications from Butch's story for counselors, including assessment, techniques and interventions to use in treatment, and countertransference concerns.

ASSESSMENT

The assessment of racial issues for multiracial individuals is similar to the concerns for individuals with a single racial heritage. Therapists should examine racial identity stages and understand how race intersects with other cultural variables, including social class and gender. More specific information should be assessed to determine how each racial group heritage influences identity development. The following questions are suggested:

What messages did you receive on each of your racial heritages?

Did you experience pressure to accept or deny any of your racial heritages from family members or peers?

Did you feel more accepted by one or more particular groups?

What historical information did you receive on your racial heritage?

What were the societal messages you received about your racial heritage?

TECHNIQUES AND INTERVENTIONS

Myths About Multiracial Individuals

There are three myths associated with being multiracial that should inform treatment and therapy (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995). The first myth is that of the tragic mulatto, the notion that multiracial individuals live marginalized lives because they are not fully accepted by any cultural or racial group. Butch's story is a good example of this perspective because at each developmental time period in his life, he attempts to reconcile his racial identity and is denied by each racial group. He reports feeling isolated and marginalized in his childhood neighborhood, in his high school, and by community organizations. Many biracial and multiracial individuals, however, are able to find acceptance and understanding from family and friends and are able to integrate each dimension of their heritage into their identity. Therapists should facilitate the integration of identities into self-concept as a goal with clients. The goal of clinicians should be to help clients acknowledge and honor each racial heritage (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003). Although therapists may not be able to foster acceptance by others, they can be instrumental in helping clients find appropriate support groups and resources. For example, when Butch felt rejected by members of the AIC, one of the leaders took him aside and explained the reactions of some of the members, thus depersonalizing the issue. Counselors may also be able to help clients find support groups for individuals of multiracial descent. The second myth is that biracial individuals

must choose one racial group. Historically, many were forced to choose one racial group by denying their racial heritage or by choosing a minority race and being rejected by Whites. Dominant society encouraged individuals to associate race in a dichotomous fashion (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003). Until the 2000 U.S. Census count, individuals were asked to check one, and only one, race. Today, the option exists of identifying with and associating with various groups. Clinicians can help clients to research and understand the cultural heritage of both groups, working as cultural brokers (McGoldrick & Giordano, 1996). Clients can be encouraged to participate in and share rituals from one heritage with family members of the differing racial groups. The third myth is the notion that multiracial individuals do not want to discuss their cultural heritage. Butch's story highlights why the opposite view is so important. Many multiracial children have questions about their heritage, particularly because the values, beliefs, and lifestyles of each racial group differ. This was not evident in Butch's story, but often child-rearing difficulties arise based on different cultural values. While courting, a couple may agree to certain principles, child-rearing techniques, and values, but the actual birth of the children may change the priorities and focus. Families often experience more pressure from extended family members to maintain traditional cultural and racial activities (McGoldrick & Preto, 1984). Children often find themselves caught up in the cultural struggles, which may influence identity development. Many multiracial children look for opportunities to discuss their racial heritage in an attempt to solidify their development. Rockquemore and Laszloffy (2003) recommend a relational-narrative approach to therapy to allow clients to be able to process and tell their stories.

Family and Racial Socialization Processes

Racial socialization is the process of helping racial minority children to develop positive self-images within an oppressive community. The racial socialization process is even more critical for people of multiracial descent. Therapists should be encouraged to discuss and dialogue with their clients about their racial heritage. The process is more complicated with multiple racial backgrounds because individuals need to be socialized to each of the cultural groups to which they belong. Individuals also need to understand the historical influences on and societal messages about interracial marriages. Finally, clients need to be socialized on intragroup oppression.

COUNTERTRANSFERENCE

There are two areas in which countertransference may occur when working with multiracial clients, myths of multiracial persons, and client

self-hatred. As in any other area, it is important for clinicians to monitor the personal reactions that arise when working with clients. Therapists should consider their own perspectives on interracial relationships before working with multiracial clients.

Myths and Misperceptions

One area of countertransference for clinicians working with multiracial clients is to become caught up by the complexity of identity development. It is important for therapists not to make the assumptions that their clients are experiencing the tragic mulatto syndrome, that clients live marginalized lives, and that they are not accepted by any group. It is true that multiracial clients may face rejection from racial groups. One reaction of Butch's story is to be moved and feel pain from the rejection that he faces and to be anxious about the violence he experienced. One reaction that therapists may have is to alleviate the pain clients experience from the rejection. This can lead to minimizing the rejection or attempting to make excuses for the other behaviors. Therapists may also be concerned that clients are forced to choose one group over another. Therapists may inadvertently encourage clients to choose one racial group to protect clients from the pain of rejection from another racial group. Although it may be a temporary solution to encourage clients to choose a nonrejecting group and to cut themselves off from groups that are rejecting, this has the long-term effect of clients' denying a part of themselves. Clinicians must monitor the sadness they feel for their client so that they engage in empathy and not sympathy.

It is often believed that multiracial individuals do not want to discuss issues. In fact, multiracial individuals often have the experience of strangers asking, "What are you?" and having to explain their backgrounds. It is critical for multiracial clients to talk about their backgrounds because it influences their identity and functioning. Similar to individuals with single racial backgrounds, multiracial individuals may not discuss racial issues unless therapists initiate the discussion. Avoiding racial discussions may be one way that therapists protect themselves from the secondary pain and discomfort of their clients. These conversations are even more important for therapists who are part of a rejecting racial group and for therapists with multiracial or multiethnic backgrounds.

Issues of Self-Hatred

Finally, therapists may be concerned with levels of self-hatred that their clients possess. When clients enter with depressive symptoms, including low self-esteem, resolving issues of self-hatred may be easy to introduce as a treatment goal. However, there may be times when the clients are not able to acknowledge their feelings. For example, when Butch is rejected by the

African American group, he decides to reject that part of his heritage. If he were to enter treatment at that point, he may not recognize his rejection as being linked to internalized oppression or self-hatred. The therapist would then be caught in the dilemma of identifying a potential treatment goal that the client may not be willing to accept. Clinicians have to reconcile the ethical requirement of not imposing their own values and standards on clients with the need to promote optimal functioning for their clients.

TOOLBOX ACTIVITY—BUTCH		
<i>Resources Suggested Readings</i>	<i>Activities</i>	<i>Discussion Questions</i>
<p>Kandel, B., & Halebian, C. (1997). <i>Growing up biracial: Trevor's story</i>. New York: Lerner.</p> <p>Katz, K. (2002). <i>The colors of us</i>. New York: Henry Holt.</p> <p>McBride, J. (1997). <i>The color of water: A Black man's tribute to his white mother</i>. New York: Riverhead Books.</p> <p>Nakazawa, D. J. (2004). <i>Does anybody else look like me? A parent's guide to raising multiracial children</i>. New York: DaCapo.</p> <p>O'Hearn, C. C. (1998). <i>Half and half: Writers on growing up biracial and bicultural</i>. New York: Pantheon.</p> <p>Rockquemore, K. A., & Brunson, D. L. (2001). <i>Beyond Black: Biracial identity in America</i>. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.</p>	<p>Construct a multiracial genogram, using Butch's story or the story of a famous multiracial individual (Joan Baez, Mariah Carey, Barack Obama).</p> <p>Trace the racial heritage and status of each group represented. Write an essay on the influence of heritage and racial history on the person.</p>	<p>Content themes What other themes do you see emerging in the story that the author did not identify?</p> <p>Assessment Are there any questions you would like to ask?</p> <p>Interventions What other interventions could you propose with Butch?</p> <p>Countertransference What countertransference reactions were emerging in yourself as you read this story?</p> <p>Other scenarios What would have occurred if Butch had been female? What would Butch have been like if he were only biracial instead of multiracial?</p>

