

Raised By White Parents: A Black Adoptee Speaks

A discussion guide from Cam Lee Small, MS, LPCC

Our discussion guide will help your family think and talk about adoption, trans-racial adoption, race, culture, and birth family; challenging us to shift our thinking (and actions) about our personal and global participation in the adoption narrative. You're also encouraged to use this discussion guide as a launchpad for your personal reflections.

Below you'll find ideas that were shared throughout the interview with Angela. You can choose to watch the video and pause at each point, or watch the interview in its entirety and then engage in reflection/dialogue. Quotes are from Angela unless otherwise indicated.

Discussion Questions:

1. *"Where I fit in, where I feel like I actually belong, is with other trans-racial adoptees."*

- For other trans-racial adoptees, does that resonate with you? Who do you tend to "fit in" with, people who share the same race as your parents or those whose race matches yours? Does it ever shift? Or, were there points in your life when your answer would be different?
- Can you think of times when you felt like an outsider even with other adoptees? When was that? What other layers of (dis)connection/identity might have played a role? What was it like to hold or make sense of that situation?
- When you *do* feel that sense of belonging, notice who you're with, what's going on, what you're doing, what time of the year is it, what other factors are involved, etc. Are there patterns that extend beyond race?

2. “I don’t identify with black folks. Because I feel my own sense of fear... or illegitimacy is how I feel even sitting at this table with you, because I feel like you three are legitimate black people because you were raised by black people.”

- For parents raising children of a different race than them, how does this message challenge or affirm your experience?
 - The feeling of illegitimacy can be a heavy weight for a child to carry. As parents, what are some ways you’ve listened for that feeling in your family, how have you seen it come up (verbally or non-verbally)?
 - What do your children need when/if these feelings of illegitimacy do arise?
-
-
-

3. “It’s hard to walk around every day and have people see a black woman, but for me not to even feel like a black woman. And that conflict, that happens every single day, is a huge weight.”

- There’s a sense of daily struggle, daily conflict, perpetual dissonance, ongoing chronic tension in spaces outside the four walls of our homes. What’s that been like for you? What’s it been like for your family? What have been some of the biggest challenges as you think about that idea, that daily “weight”?
 - Research shows these stressors can manifest in somatic experiences (e.g., headaches, sore stomach, fever, compromised immune system, fatigue, irritability, etc.). What are some family strengths you’ve marshaled to help your children carry that weight? And where does there seem to be limitations, a need for more/adjusted support?
-
-
-

5. Tokenism as Racism: “...Always chosen to be on the college pamphlets, fetishizing me... touching my hair...” (read about microaggressions <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2009/02/microaggression>)

- As a trans-racial adoptee, micro aggressions can often be a daily occurrence; assaults, insults, and invalidations. How did you process these kinds of interactions with the people around you? What advice would you give to younger adoptees currently struggling with this? What do you wish you would have known?
 - As parents, this breaks our heart! It's an outrage and it points to the insensitivities and ignorance that comes at us from others. As your family navigates this, what's been most helpful for you? What's been most challenging?
 - How have you noticed our culture moving forward regarding racial transgressions, or racism in general? What frustrates you about how it hasn't changed? Thinking about neighborhoods, schools, medical facilities, your workplace, faith communities, public spheres, etc. where would you like to see more movement in a better direction? What are some steps you'd be willing to take to help us inspire that change?
-
-
-

6. “Not having other people to bounce these stories off of was really tough.”

- As an adoptee, have you had the chance to enter a space in which your story was welcomed, represented, validated, etc.? Where/when was that for you? Who helped you get there? What was it like for you when you found it? Can you describe the experience, feeling, sensations in your body, thoughts, etc.?
-
-

7. "...adoptive parents have commandeered the whole conversation and so unfortunately we rarely hear from adopted people themselves, because we often think about adoption as babies...but the reality is we grow up, and we are still adopted, and rarely do we hear from birthparents. Instead they're this amorphous, villainized, people that are always [Gammy: in the shadows, forgotten about...], they're scary..."

- Adoptees, what was it like for you to hear about your birth mother as you were growing up? How do you remember her, or how do you remember the narrative about her? How has that shaped the way you view unwed/single mothers?
 - Parents, Angela shares about a general pattern that exists in our culture. Namely, that adoptees are only now beginning to have a voice in the discussion. How does that resonate with your situation? Do you agree, disagree?
 - Can you think of ways you've personally seen that shift happening? Or, how have you noticed that dynamic playing out right now?
 - What inspired you to watch this interview and engage in this discussion? What brought you here? How did it meet or go beyond your expectations? Hearing from Angela, were there any parts of her story that especially stuck out to you?
-
-
-

8. "Everybody cares about you (the baby), getting you somewhere, but nobody cares about me (birth-mother)."

- This message touched on the culture we have of taking care of the newborn, but then Angela's mother walked back out onto the streets; homeless. What do you make of that? What are your personal reactions to that process and our current way of supporting birth-mothers?

9. *"How am I supposed to raise a black child if I don't know black culture?"*

- Around 11 minutes 30 seconds, Angela is responding to Gammy's message, "If you're trying to counsel other people on how to do it, counsel yourself!"
 - Gammy's main message is (in contrast to white parents) Angela would have an easier time moving into a black neighborhood and raising black children, embracing and participating in black culture.
 - Adoptees, what did you think about this idea? Do you agree? What were some thoughts that came up for you during this part?
 - Adoptive parents, what were your thoughts/reactions? Why would it be easier for a trans-racial adoptee to raise a child in their birth culture? Can you think of reasons why it could be more difficult?
-
-
-

10. *"We as black people, we can't keep asking white people to do things for us that we're not willing to do for ourselves. White people are in their comfort zones, too... and sometimes our biggest treasures, our biggest lessons are in the zone of discomfort." -Jada Pinkett Smith*

- How did this message sit with you? How does it empower (or not) each member of the "triad" differently, or comparably? What does it mean for you that, *"we can't keep asking white people to do things for us..."*? What have they been asked to do?
-
-
-

11. Regarding times/situations in which people ask questions or touch hair or engage in information-seeking behaviors that go beyond an adoptee's personal boundaries, ***"The trans-racial adoptee has to become a teaching tool."***

- This can sometimes feel exhausting for adoptees, especially when they haven't been given the choice to "become the teaching tool" as Angela was mentioning. What are your thoughts on this aspect of the adoptee experience?
 - How have you seen it come up in your family?
 - In response to Angela's father sharing about the positive aspects, such as being a teachable moment, Gammy adds, "It can be a step toward raising awareness but can also be burdensome on the child." As an adoptee, how have you managed or carried those burdens?
 - How about for parents, what's that been like for you, navigating the choice to "raise awareness" along with recognizing it's a heavy burden for a child to carry?
-
-
-

12. As she sits at the table, Angela's birth-mother is asked, ***"How do you feel right now?"***

"Hurt. I will forever hurt." -Deborah

- What were your reactions as you heard Deborah confess that? If you've seen the documentary, Closure, what's it like to see Deborah here at the table with Angela and her family?
-
-

13. "I had this unreasonable fear.... that I would be replaced." -Angela's mother

- That was Angela's mother describing how she might have felt as a younger mother, if Angela had wanted to search for birth family.
- For parents, are there parts of that fear that resonate with you? If so, how have you held or made sense of that? And how has it shaped the support you offer to your child?
- Also, if you don't have that fear, how would you speak to a parent who does? How would you counsel a fellow adoptive parent who feels that degree of fear about their child wanting to search for their birth family?

14. "She's her mother, I'm the vessel that God used to put her here." -Deborah

- This is Deborah's message regarding Angela's adoptive mother.
- What were your thoughts as you witnessed that affirmation? How does it speak to your family dynamic as you recognize various members of the adoption constellation in your personal story?
- Has does the awareness of language and titles shape the way you speak with your children about their adoption story? What have you found helpful?
- We honor Deborah and so appreciate her essential voice in this discussion.

Angela's closing message to her mother...🙏 *"We all know that you've done the best that you can. We truly want you to feel like you're part of our family. You not being able to parent me, doesn't give up your rights to not know who I am, know how I'm doing..."*

- What was this like for you? What were some main take-aways for you? What will you remember most from this discussion?
- Who's idea had the biggest impact on you?
- If you could sum up your experience with one word, what would it be?
- How did your perspective change?
- What did you learn? How did hearing/watching this dialogue enrich your understanding about adoption, trans-racial adoption, race, culture, and birth family?
- What would you have liked to hear more about?
- What questions would you ask if the family members hosted a Q&A?
- How were you challenged?
- How were you refreshed?
- What's one action you need to take after having watched the interview?
- What's one action your children need you to take after having watched it?
- Finish this sentence, "For me this discussion was _____ because_____."

A message from Cam:

Adoptees, it's truly a privilege to provide this discussion for you as you continue growing into your identity and engaging in dialogue about your life story. Parents, you're doing the best you can to serve and support us, and wherever you're located in the adoption constellation I'm so thrilled to serve as a helper along the way. We celebrate the constant work you're doing and are committed to supporting your leadership; not only within your own family system but toward the larger picture of a hopeful, thriving adoption community world-wide. Cheers!! -Cam

Cam, trans-racially adopted from Korea, holds a Master's in Counseling Psychology from University of Wisconsin-Madison and is a licensed professional clinical counselor. In addition, he is trained in biblical counseling, certified in non-violent crisis intervention and is a member of the American Psychological Association's Minority Fellowship Program. He loves to help individuals and families talk about and navigate the complexities of adoption, in whatever season they may be facing today.

If you enjoyed this discussion, you'll want to be a part of the 12-week **online** caregiver group where members bring their personal family narrative into the conversation and receive inclusive support from Cam and other adoptive parents; facilitated in a virtual space led by Cam. Apply at the website for your spot at our [Spring 2020 Campfire Workshop](#).

For counseling and consultation, visit <https://therapyredeemed.com/wordpress>

****If you're using this discussion guide for a group and want to hear from***
Angela Tucker directly, you can email her at angela@theadoptedlife.com
and schedule a live Skype Q&A*



For questions, contact Cam
at therapyredeemed@gmail.com
<https://therapyredeemed.wordpress.com>
Connect on IG: @therapyredeemed