

Your Adopted Children Aren't White By Osmosis

Adoptive parents need to open their eyes and listen



K-CULTURE WITH JAE-HA KIM

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To the white adoptive parents who are *offended* when adult adoptees or people of color tell you about some of the negative experiences they have faced growing up: *Why don't*

you want to hear what needs to be said?

This isn't about you. You do not know what it is like being treated as an other. You do not know what it's like to be told to *go back to China!* You do not know what it feels like to be *ching changed* when you are already speaking perfect English.

And, most of us *do not know* what it feels like to *not* know your family history.

You. Do. Not. Know.

Several years ago, Kira Omans' blog post, *Dear Adoption, I Climbed*, was all over social media and forums that I subscribed to. Omans shared some of her heartfelt thoughts about what it meant growing up as a Chinese adoptee in a white community in the United States.

In part, her post read:

I thought that school would be my next adventure, but socially thriving as the only Asian from a middle class family in a sea of rich children who were always given everything they wanted proved a challenge. My parents looked just like their parents, but I didn't look like *anyone*. I wanted so desperately to fit in. No matter how hard I tried, I became hyperaware of my differences.

Kids can be *cruel*.

Kids will announce to the class that you only get good grades *because you're Chinese*.

Kids will squint their eyes into slits to *"imitate you."*

Kids will butcher an Asian accent to *"sound like your ancestors."*

Kids will badger you *because you're not pretty enough*.

Kids will stop speaking to you *because being your friend makes them uncool*.

Kids will imitate your brother's mannerisms and call him names *to make others laugh*.

Kids will tie your brother to a fence and hit him *because it makes them feel powerful*.

Kids will ask *why your real parents didn't want you*.

Kids are capable of unimaginable racism and entitlement and violence. Being a kid should not excuse actions that are *wrong, and hurtful, and damaging*.

I remember that several mutual friends privately asked me if I would comment to a question from an adoptive mom, who asked: *Why did Omans equate America with whiteness?*

It was a fair question.

But because all this was posted on a personal page, I won't share her exact words.

However, I will post my reply:

My guess is if it had been a Black boy who tied her brother up to a fence, or a Hispanic kid who had made fun of the way Asians looked, then Omans would've addressed them in her blog post. But if her experience was anything like mine, then it was the white kids who made her feel *less than*. You can extrapolate from there that that's why she felt being white would've made her life easier.

That's not an *insecurity*. That's a survival mechanism for a child who doesn't want to get beat up for not being white. I know I felt that way when I was a kid.

I just re-read her blog post and if you read between the lines, her father was high up in his job, which probably meant that she grew up in an affluent area, which probably meant that she went to schools where the enrollment was predominantly white.

Part of what's going on now in pop culture is that minorities are demanding representation on TV and in films. That's part of what the whitewashing controversy is about. When I was little, and even when the blogger was young, there was very little Asian representation on television. During my youth, the Asian characters were played by white actors (like David Carradine in "Kung Fu").

I had hoped that times would change for the better. But I remember being a new mom taking my baby out for a stroll, and listening to a rotten little boy screeching at me to *go back to China*. I remember older boys calling my four-year-old son a

chink at our pool. And our local Boy Scouts had no problem making racist comments at us. Then there was the group of teenage boys who made *ching chong* noises at me and only stopped after I told them to *fuck off*.

And yes, they were all white.

The mom in question replied back that *her* Korean adoptee daughter doesn't *feel* less American than anyone else. It was *ackshually* her two grown, blond sons who were victims of racial slurs at work.

I have no idea what her sons went through and it's not my place to doubt her. Nobody was saying this mom was a bad parent. I didn't go into the differences between prejudice and institutionalized racism, because I didn't think she would care. I simply responded by saying:

With all due respect, this young woman shared what her experience was like growing up as an Asian adoptee in the U.S. I've shared my experience as to what it was like growing up Asian in a diverse city. And you still don't seem to get it. You are NOT an adoptee (neither am I!) or Asian (that I am!), and you are talking about how your daughter FEELS. You don't know how she feels. She is her own person. You know what she chooses to tell you. And children don't always tell their parents everything. I know I certainly didn't, mainly because I didn't want to worry them.

Your white sons should not have to endure slurs at work. I'm grateful that they are probably old enough to handle themselves and hope they deal with it appropriately via human resources.

I wrote a blog post a while ago that was culmination of decades of hearing people say that they had an ethnic friend, or they adopted an ethnic child ... and they personally never saw any of these horrible things happen. Racists generally don't reveal themselves when there are witnesses to put them in their place.

This did not sit well with her. She was offended at my *capitalizing* (her words, not mine) two words, but refused to acknowledge that her child has life experiences that are independent of hers and that she — as the mother — cannot possibly know what her child *feels*.

Not too long ago, I fell down and ripped the top layer of skin off my knee. As the wound started to heal, the scab, too, started to fall off. But enough of it was still dangling from my knee to be uncomfortable. To this woman — and others like her — I am that scab. My experiences, words and life are annoying reminders that life isn't always what you want it to be.

Being white does not mean that your child becomes white by osmosis.

And frankly, if the worst thing that you've experienced in life is some *capitalizing*, then you should be grateful.

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