



# WILL THERE BE ANYONE WHO LOOKS LIKE ME?

STARTING A CONVERSATION WITH HOMELESS  
CHILDREN ABOUT RACE AND PRIVILEGE



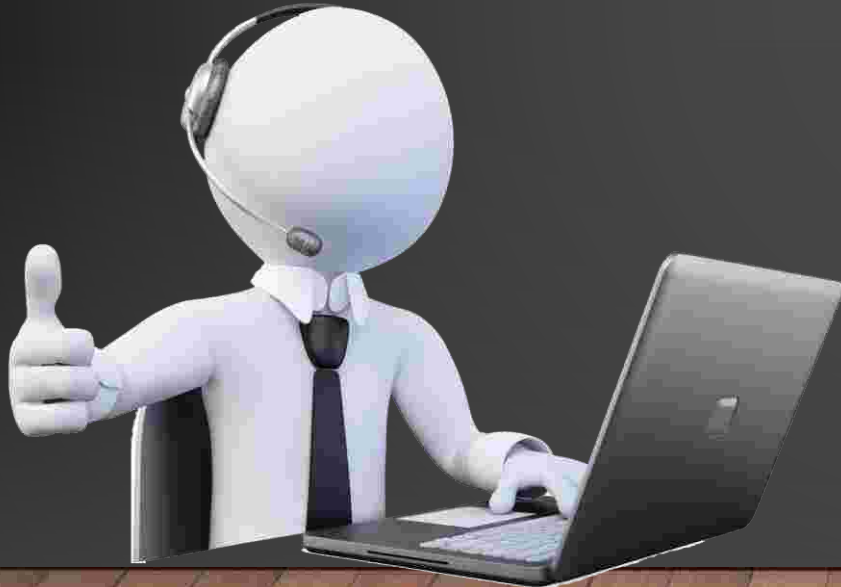
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# INDIVIDUAL IDENTITIES

- How do we understand the difference between
  - “Me” and “You”
  - “Us” and “Them”
- How we define the differences between those two can help us understand how attitudes, prejudice, race categories, and inequalities are formed
- Identities not just constructed between group sameness and difference
- Also wider dimension of where we fall in society
- Categories such as gender, race, and class



# SOMEONE WHO LOOKS LIKE ME

- Will there be anyone who looks like me there?
- Unaware of race until in an environment that are a minority
- Something that I had never considered before



# WHAT IS MY RACIAL-ETHNIC IDENTITY?

- When part of a dominant group, construct identity as “normal” and the standard by which “others” are measured
- With this definition, to be “normal” means not to be defined at all but to just “be”
- Difficulty understanding racial identity when part of dominant group
  - What does it mean to be white?



## STARTING THE CONVERSATION...

- Might need to acknowledge our general discomfort
- It can seem easier to say something does not exist rather than to call it what it is, and to deal with it
- We might try to be politically correct and say that everyone has the same opportunities and abilities; but this simply is not true
- It may make me uncomfortable to acknowledge that not everyone has the same privileges I was afforded based on the color of my skin or the neighborhood I grew up in



# UNDERSTANDING PRIVILEGE

- Often we look at “privilege” in simply economic terms
- Instead, it is certain things that a dominant group does not have to think about:
  - Gender
  - Class
  - Religion
  - Physical Ability
  - Sexual Orientation
- Best to think of it as unearned benefit or an advantage based purely on the nature of identity
- We receive it whether we want it or not; it’s just how it is.



# INVISIBILITY OF WHITE PRIVILEGE

- Most of us who are white are unaware that we are white
  - Or that it matters
- Unconsciously learned from society
- Most who have privilege, do not think about benefits received
- Assumption that is normal and available to everyone
- Idea of the individual versus systemic privilege
- Whites may not feel powerful
  - Disempowered due to gender, social class, sexual orientation, or religion
  - Other personal tragedies





# COLORBLINDNESS: WHAT IS IT?

- Denies the central importance of racial differences in the experiences of minorities
  - Racism
  - Discrimination
- Race is a social construct or the meaning that people give to race
- Claiming we don't see race doesn't change the situation that exists
- To get beyond racism, we must take account of race... there is no other way



# THINGS I TAKE FOR GRANTED DAILY

- “Invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day”
- I can go to a meeting or event with the knowledge that there will be people who look like me in the same room.
- If I get pulled over by the police, I probably won't be asked to drop my keys out the window before having to get out of the car to be questioned.
- When I go shopping with a friend, I won't be followed around the store regardless of how I am dressed.
- I can easily buy toys or books with characters who look like me.
- I can go for a run or a bike ride without thinking about needing to take my ID with me.



# WHITE PRIVILEGE: UNPACKING THE INVISIBLE KNAPSACK

- I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time
- I can turn on the television or open the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented
- I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group
- I can easily buy posters, post-cards, pictures, books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children's magazines featuring people of my race.
- I can be late to a meeting without having the lateness reflect on my race
- I can choose blemish color or bandages in "flesh" color and have them more or less match my skin



# IDEA OF RACE IS EMBEDDED IN AMERICAN CULTURE

- We often live segregated lives
  - Places we live
  - People we spend time with
  - Schools we attend
  - People we date and marry
- Whites receive little or no authentic information about racism
  - Unprepared to think critically or complexly about it
- Trivialize other's intelligence and experience
  - "people just need to..."
  - Internalized system that shapes all members of society



# CHILDREN ARE SOCIALIZED INTO COLORBLINDNESS

- Sometimes we talk a lot about color, but not about race
- Difficult conversations happen at home with non-white families
- Conversations about race can help children understand and appreciate the differences among people

“Most of the young white children in our study are helping to rebuild a racist society with their own hands with materials learned from the racial order of the adult world surrounding them.” (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001)





# NOT TALKING ABOUT RACE BECOMES PROBLEMATIC FOR CHILDREN EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN BILLY MOVES FROM A RURAL COMMUNITY WHERE EVERYONE LOOKS LIKE HIM TO AN URBAN SCHOOL WHERE HE IS ONE OF A HANDFUL OF WHITE STUDENTS?



# WHAT HAPPENS WHEN BILLY WANTS TO FIT IN?

- Some background
  - Billy's mom has moved to escape a domestic violence situation
  - The school and the shelter are both in an urban area
  - Billy starts to get into trouble at school
  - The social worker at the school does not know that Billy is experiencing homelessness
  - The white shelter staff recognizes that Billy is one of the only white students at the school
    - Do not feel comfortable talking with him regarding what it means to be white





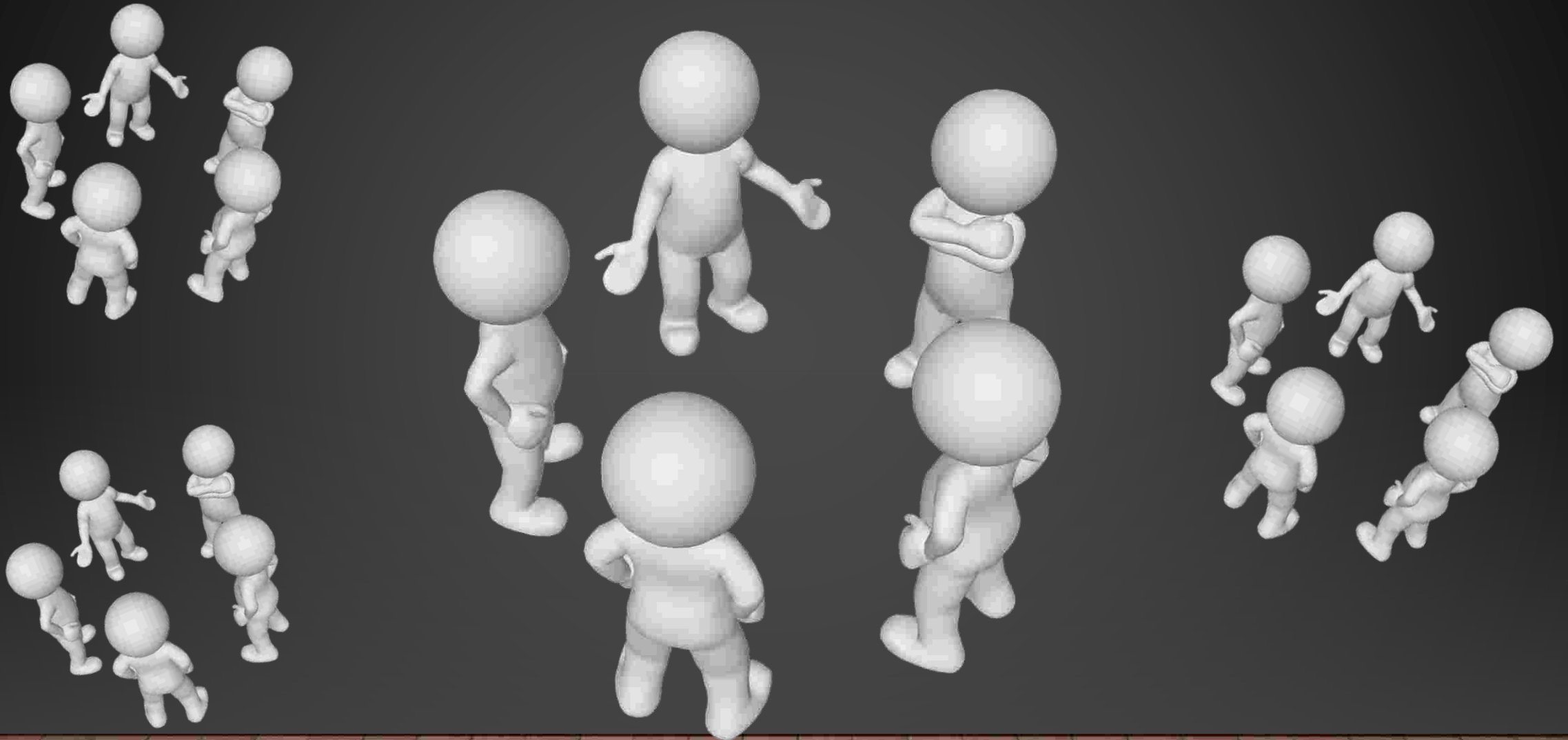


What  
would  
**YOU**  
DO



BILLY WANTS TO FIT IN WITH THE OTHER STUDENTS WHO  
ENCOURAGE HIM TO SAY THE N-WORD ON THE BUS.

WHAT THOUGHTS DID YOU HAVE?



## LETS TALK ABOUT ANOTHER SITUATION

- What similar types of situations have you come across through your experiences working with homeless students?
- How did you handle the situation?



# THE CURRENT STATE OF THE CONVERSATION



# DIALOGUING ABOUT RACE RELATED ISSUES

- For someone who is white, first step is to have a certain amount of comfort as to what it means to be white
- Being open to cultural differences and experiences
  - Develop authentic relationships with people of other races
  - Can you tell me more about that?
- Talking about race isn't racist. It's important!
- Our lives can be enriched through relationships with others from diverse races and cultures



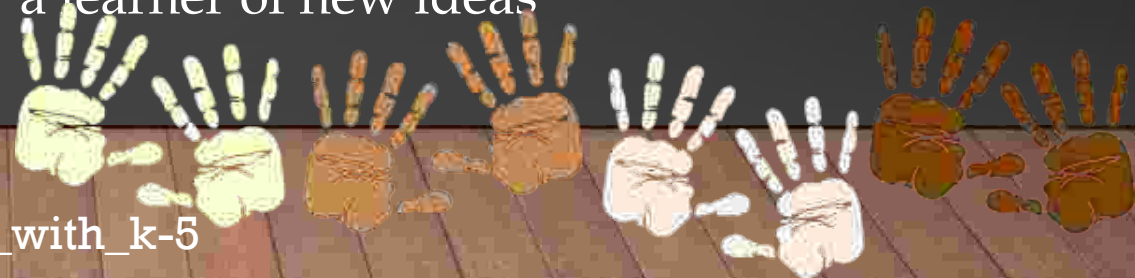
## BEFORE THE MOMENT

- Create an equal status space
- Use games and activities that allow students to share about their families and identities
- Let students hear you model open minded thinking
- Honor every comment or question about race
- The goal is to create more teachable race moments



# IN THE MOMENT: YIKES! WHAT DO I DO NOW?

- Model thinking out loud
  - When I hear you ask that question, my first response is...
- Empathize
  - That made me uncomfortable. Did you feel it too?
- Take your time
  - Let's come back to this. It's really important and I need to think about it.
- Yes, and...
  - Affirm the child's comment or question. Instead of saying "Yes, but..." and pointing out the mistake in the child's understanding of the world, consider that there may be a greater truth and respond as a learner of new ideas



## NOW WHAT... AFTER THE MOMENT

- Continue to create space for students to dialogue about race
- Talk with others about what happened
  - Process the experience
  - Ideas of other ways to handle it
- Be open to continued learning about dialoguing with students about race





## ANOTHER REASON WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT...

- Child homelessness unequal by race
- Prison boom accounted for 65% increase in black-white inequity in child homelessness (Wildeman, 2009)
  - Mothers who go to prison children end up in foster care
  - Fathers who are incarcerated increases risk of homelessness for children
- Adverse effects concentrated among children whose parents arrested for nonviolent crimes
- Largest effects are yet to come



## WHERE WHITES MIGHT BEGIN...

- Be willing to tolerate the discomfort associated with honest appraisal and discussion of your racial privilege
- Begin to challenge your own racial identity
- Begin to understand people of color's racial realities through authentic interactions
- Take action to address your internalized racism



## WHERE WHITES MIGHT BEGIN...

- Whites should speak up whenever and wherever we observe racism, overt or subtle, personal or institutional
- Silence is the only privilege that whites can voluntarily relinquish
  - The rest remain as a matter of living as a member of a dominant group



"If you have come to help me,  
you are wasting your time. But  
if you have come because your  
liberation is bound up in mine,  
then let us work together."

-Lilla Watson

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