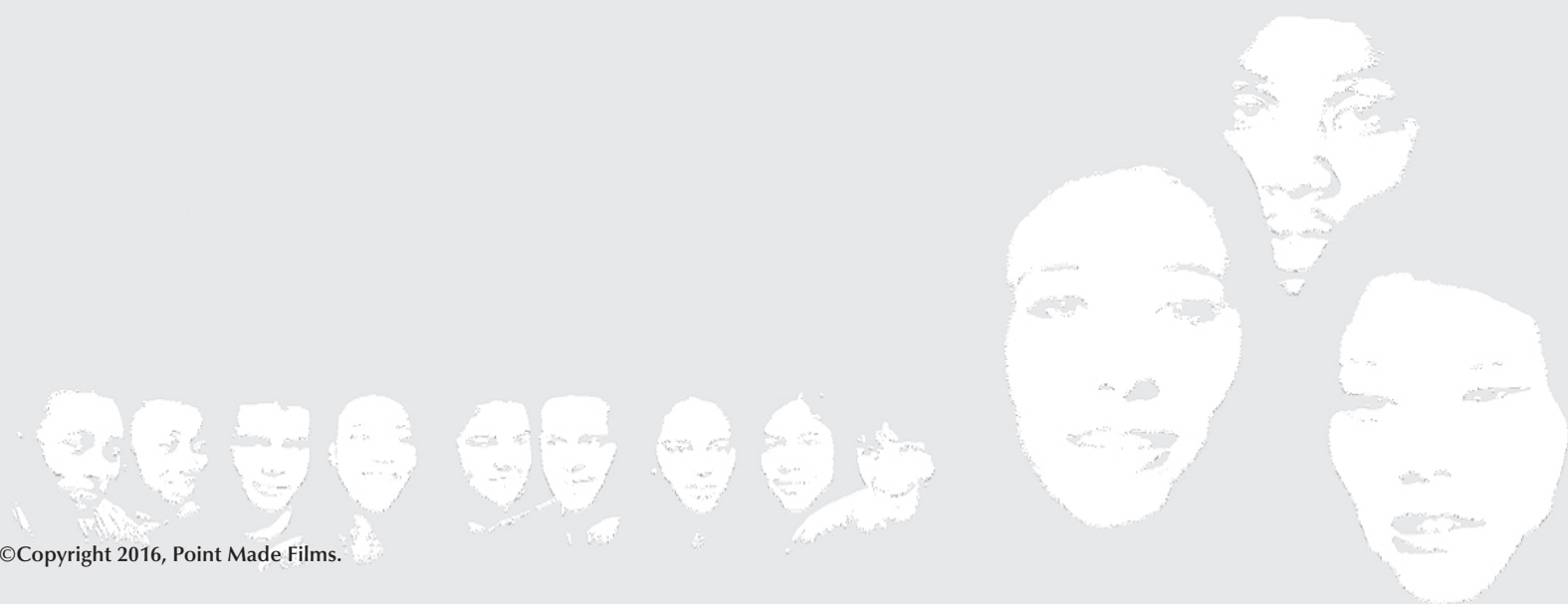


# INRAI Look Deeper

## I Wish I Were Black Discussion Guide

### Level II: Using Design Thinking



# INRAI Look Deeper I Wish I Were Black Discussion Guide, Level II

*How might we help American society nurture healthy racial identities across its population?*

## OVERVIEW

Cultural appropriation occurs when a person or group takes the cultural characteristics of another group to enhance their own identity. In the United States, cultural appropriation has become more and more commonplace with the growth of the mass media. At the same time, the effects of non-white assimilation into Western, or white, culture is not commonly understood.

As a way to look deeper into the complex issues related to identity development and cultural appropriation, watch this supplemental video - edited using bonus footage from **I'm Not Racist... Am I?** - and consider the questions below.

## OBJECTIVES

- To better understand racial identity development
- To help people think more deeply about how young people develop healthy identities around their own race
- To know more about the realities of different types of racial experiences

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is a healthy racial identity? How is racial identity development different for the white participants and the participants of color in the film? What are important factors in the development of a healthy racial identity? For white people? For people of color? What are similarities and differences?

2. Although Martha says “I wish I were black” at one point in the film, she undergoes a transformation during the Deconstructing Race Project. What factors cause Martha’s shift and growth during the Project as documented in **I'm Not Racist... Am I?**

3. To better understand identity and the effects of cultural appropriation, conduct the following exercise by having your group members fill in the blanks. The purpose of this exercise is to illustrate that people typically use one-dimensional thinking and make bad assumptions when they appropriate elements of race or culture.

· I wish I were \_\_\_\_\_ (choose a racial identifier; e.g., *Latino, white*) when \_\_\_\_\_ (choose a scenario; e.g., *applying to college, walking home late at night*).

· I wish I were \_\_\_\_\_ (choose a racial identifier; e.g., *black*) when \_\_\_\_\_ (choose a scenario; e.g., *applying for a job*), but not when \_\_\_\_\_ (e.g., *getting pulled over for speeding*).

· I wish I were \_\_\_\_\_ (choose a racial identifier; e.g., *Asian*) but if I was, I would \_\_\_\_\_ (choose a scenario; e.g., *be presumed to not speak English*).

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS, CONT'D

This activity should highlight complexities of racial identity. How we choose - or want - to identify ourselves might not always match the way we are labeled or viewed by others. Additionally, this exercise can help reinforce the point made by Hilary North in the video that race isn't only about appearances or fitting in; it's about power and status, and that Martha wanting to be black would be "like trading your ace for a two." Ask group members to count - and rank - on one hand, five important aspects of their identity (*e.g., woman, athlete, artist, black, gay, etc.*). Tell them that the identifiers or descriptors they choose can be anything as long as they feel it is important in defining who they are. Once they have done this, ask them to share and compare their lists with the group or perhaps someone who is sitting near them that is of another race.

- To illustrate a point about the role of race in identity, ask the larger group to raise their hand if their race was in their top 5 list of identifiers.

- To create interaction within the group, have people share a story about a time when they were proud to identify with one of the descriptors they chose for themselves. You can also have them share a story about a time when it was painful for them to identify with one of the descriptor in their list.

4. Constructions of identity are often misunderstood because we forget the lessons of history or neglect how cultural conditioning limits our ability to think about the dynamics of racial identity. In fact, there is more than one white identity in America, just as there is more than one identity for Black, Asian, and Latino peoples. For example, depending on culture and time period, Irish immigrants have not always been considered "white," Native American peoples could be considered Indian, Eskimo, or First Nations, and Latinos could be considered Mexican, Chicano, or Hispanic White. And more broadly, any one of these identities can be aligned with new characteristics that shift how they are understood.

What do people need to recognize and accept to avoid the tendency to think about race as a singular, uniform, homogeneous feature of identity? What characteristics are neglected in how different racial groups are defined by society?

5. Consider this twist on the title of the film – "If I'm not a racist, who am I?" In terms of identity, how might a white person describe their identity if they are not racist?

**Note to Facilitator:** Encourage group members to think about the ways white people might participate in current systems and power structures. They may not intentionally discriminate, but what other roles might they play - e.g., bystander, beneficiary - or strive to play - e.g., antiracist?

6. What do white people lose or give up in their identity in order to assume a position of privilege in American society? How does the desire to "fit in" or hold a position of privilege affect people of different races within society?

7. What are the limits of empathy in understanding race? What actions beyond empathy might help people engage in behaviors that help to fight against systemic racism? What attributes (e.g. ally, activist, anti-racist) might help an individual become a participant in the fight against systemic racism if claimed as a part of identity?