



INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT | JENNIFER HARVEY | OCTOBER 9, 2018

DR. ANNE HALLWARD: Please go ahead and tell me uh your name, maybe where you are. Yeah, if you let me know where you live and work and then what you do and what you've published would be great.

JENNIFER HARVEY: You bet. So my name's Jennifer Harvey and I teach religious ethics at Drake University and that's where we're recording today. I'm in Des Moines, Iowa. I've taught at Drake for 14 years and I do a lot of public speaking and writing on whiteness and anti-racism. And in the course of that journey I've published four books. The book I'm most excited about and working with a lot right now in my life is the book *Raising White Kids: Bringing Up Children In A Racially Unjust America*. And in addition to that work I've done some writing, I've been published in The New York Times. I've been published at CNN.com, and I'm continuing to think out loud with, especially white Americans, about how we step it up in terms of anti-racism.

HALLWARD: Great, thank you. Well, I'm so glad to be able to talk to you about this. I wondered if we could start by defining our terms and if you could please start by just telling me what is your working definition of race?

HARVEY: Well, that's such a good question because terms get us tripped up a lot in this country. So my working definition of race is that race is a social phenomena that has to do with the way our physical bodies and our genealogies — who we come from, where we come from — how that shows up in social spaces and gets marked as black or African American or as white or as Latino or Latina. And so race for me it's built. It's a social construction, sort of like my house is constructed. It's not something that's literally in our bodies. It's something that our society gives meaning to the way we might build a house in certain ways, but it is something that we then live out in terms of our identity, in many cases, just like my house or my home becomes a part of who I am in the world. And so that's what I think of when I think about race. It references bodies, but our bodies isn't the sum total of it.

HALLWARD: So if we think about the whole nature nurture debate, what I hear you saying is it race is much more about nurture than it is about nature.

HARVEY: Yes. It's absolutely about nurture. And nurture in wonderful ways and in really awful ways too. You know, to the extent it's about nature it's deceptive in that you know nature is what we're born with. And so we are born looking a certain way. But how we look isn't in and of itself race. How we're nurtured because of how we look, right? How people treat me on the street. What kind of access I get to a certain school systems. All these other things. That's where race then starts to show up and be a category that becomes meaningful in people's lives.

HALLWARD: Thank you. And what is your working definition of racism? How would you explain racism even maybe to a child?

HARVEY: So my favorite definition of racism comes out of the work of Beverly Daniel Tatum, who is an amazing African American psychologist. And she says that racism is a system of advantage and disadvantage based on race. And what I like about that definition is it helps us think about, OK, if I'm born as a white American, where are the systems of advantage that I get plugged into simply by virtue of the fact that I was born white and came into a particular family system or came into a particular moment in history where white people have been given an advantage through laws and other kinds of social practices because of how we've been categorized by our race? And so racism is that structure where some people get disadvantaged because of what their racial category is. And I like that definition because it is very clear and it also shows us — and this is really important — that racism is not only about how we think about other people. That is important. Stereotypes and how we make assumptions about people, that matters. But where the rubber really hits the road in terms of racism is the system of advantage and disadvantage.

HALLWARD: OK. Thank you. That's really clear. So you have immersed yourself in the study of how white

parents can talk to their kids about race and racism. What inspired you to study this?

HARVEY: Well probably the most significant thing that inspired me to start studying this and thinking about this hard was that I became a mom. And so I have two young children. And I have spent probably almost 20 years of my life working on that question as an adult. What does it mean for me as a white adult to commit to anti-racism? What does it mean for me as a white adult to figure out when I'm feeling white guilt? What I do with that and how do I still show up in support of people of color in public spaces or in political movements? And so I've been working on that for a very long time and will do so for the rest of my life. And then I became a mom. And I discovered this hard thing which was, well, I might think about these issues in really sophisticated ways and have worked on this as an adult. But all of a sudden my three year old is singing a song that I know has racialized or racist history behind it and I don't know how to explain to her why she can't sing that song. And I realized that breaking down race and racism for a three year old is really different than talking about it with other 35 year olds, or learning to understand it differently myself. So that really prompted me to want to work hard on this. And then, as I started to do that, I also discovered that many many white adults that I was in conversation with who were trying to grow their own anti-racist capabilities, they also were asking questions about how they worked with their own kids. And so I realized there was a huge gap in this conversation.

HALLWARD: And why is it important that white parents talk to their white kids about race and racism?

HARVEY: So the reason it's really important that white parents talk with their kids about race and racism is because even the best intentioned white parent who tries very hard to teach their child to value others, to see the humanity of others, no matter how strong are good intentions, the reality is if we are living in a country where racism is like smog in the air which is what Dr. Tatum, to go back to her, calls it. Smog in the air that we're all breathing in all the time. That unless we are actively equipping our children with anti racism as a kind of breathing mask they're going to breathe in notions of white racial dominance just from the air that they're living in and taking in every single day in this country. And so for the well-being of our children and for the ability of white children to be good allies and show up in relationship and in a commitment to justice to children of color and teens of color and 20 somethings of color, white parents have to work with their children on this.

HALLWARD: And could you give me some examples of what that smog includes? What are the kinds of things that children, even starting young, are observing and taking in from around them that might lead them to form racist ideas or conclusions?

HARVEY: Sure. So, for example, many many white Americans live in very segregated spaces whether we realize that or not. And it's a fact of the way we've been over time, sort of cordoned off into different um parts of our social life. So for example, if I take my young young child to the doctor's office over and over and over again, as we all do when our children are young, and she only ever sees doctors who are white. But she also sees that all the janitorial staff is Latino or African American — she sees that every time she goes to the doctor's office — and I am not actively talking with her in a number of different ways about difference in racism and anti-racism, she will start to draw conclusions about why all the doctors are white and why all the janitorial staff are people of color. And she will very likely conclude, because it's part of the smog that, well white people are the doctors. Period. And I don't have to intentionally have ever made a statement like that to my 3 year old or 4 year old before she has taken in the environment and interpreted what's going on, in ways that I don't want to interpret but if I'm not talking to her about it are — are almost certain to happen. So that's an example of the smog. We of course could talk about the media that kids take in, the messages and the, the words they hear adults in their family networks say. We know lots of white families have complicated ways that adults talk about race and racism or don't talk about it. And kids pick up on all of that stuff and all of that would be part of the smog as well.

HALLWARD: Yeah. That's a really powerful example. Um, sadly it feel like it's all too common. You may have already answered this, but I'm gonna ask in a slightly different way again just because this is so important. What is the risk if we don't as white parents talk to our children about race and racism?

HARVEY: So there's many many risks. And I think I want to name two that feel um in some ways the most urgent to me, in this moment. One is that for white parents who are indeed wanting their kids to value diversity, to see difference as a social good. And I think — I do believe there are lots of white parents out there who want that for their kids. One of the risks if we don't actively engage with young children about racism and anti-racism is that we know that even kids raised in families where their parents value diversity and put them in contexts perhaps where they're going to be around um diverse, diverse kids, those kids will often make friendships easily across racial lines when they're young. But we have lots of studies that show us that over time usually by middle school, kids start to self segregate. And so white children's friendship networks will get whiter and whiter

even if they have parents who have wanted them to maintain diverse friendships. So that's one of the risks, is that over time white children if they're not talking about race and racism in their families and getting some equipping on that the way that kids of color are almost always getting from their families, white youth become unable to identify with kids of color and so the friendships just get shallow and eventually wither up and die. And that's a very serious consequence for the long term ability of white children who become adults being able to sustain meaningful relationships across lines of racial difference. Very few white adults can do that. So that risk is very very big in my mind. And I think a lot of white parents really care about that.

And the other risk that I feel really concerned about right now, especially in the current racial climate in the country, is the other thing that happens for white kids who are being raised in contexts where parents or teachers are saying, "We value diversity, we value diversity" but who are not hearing or being supported in understanding what that means in terms of being white. What happens to those kids is there spaces where the, the conversation is: we need to value difference and we need to value African American culture and we need to respect Latino culture. But there's an elephant in the room which is when we're talking about diversity we're not talking about quote unquote valuing white culture. Right? This is a different— this is a different problem altogether. And so what happens is I see a lot of white youth who know they're supposed to value diversity but they don't know what to do with the fact that they are white. And I actually think those young people are quite vulnerable to messages that are being more and more put into the political environment right now that like, you shouldn't have to feel bad about being white. How can we can never talk about being white?. We need to celebrate that too? Those kids quite honestly are very vulnerable because they haven't been supported in navigating white identity to being um responsive to messages of some of the most um, I would say kind of white nationalist types of messaging that are more and more on our airwaves right now in this country. And that concerns me greatly.

HALLWARD: Right. So almost almost in the vacuum of any messages about what they can feel good about about their whiteness they may uh be drawn to something that lets them off the hook as it were. Or lets them celebrate something in an ultimately violent way.

HARVEY: Yeah. Because, you know, I think lots of people who are white and who are the kinds of folks trying to lean into these conversations about hard topics that we want to do well within our parenting, many of us are familiar with that sort of notion — like that feeling of white guilt. Like, "OK I want to be a diverse minded person. I want to be committed to equity and I know we have a problem this country. I feel guilty about that. I don't always know what to do about that." And the problem with white guilt is if it doesn't eventually get transformed into something else, it can very easily harden and become a kind of anger that gets taken out on communities of color. Instead of being constructively and productively turned into anti-racist ally-ship. And that's what worries me a lot about how difficult this, this topic is and the moment we're in as a country.

HALLWARD: Can you tell me a little bit more about how that happens and what can prevent that? Or what, what the alternative is to that?

HARVEY: Yeah yeah. So how that happens, I think, is that you know there, there is a truth that if you either have been told that equality and and equity is of value or if you deeply believe that as a person in this world, right. I believe in equity. I believe all people should be treated with fairness. I believe difference is a good to be celebrated. That's what I mean when I think about like diversity talk. If you're a person who shows up there in the world. Right. But you're living in a society where the structure is such that the, the very identity that you happen to embody in the world—like in my case I'm a white, U.S. American. I'm equity minded, justice committed, but I show up in the world as a white person who is, whether I like it or not, unjustly advantaged. Right. That is the racism definition we started with. And that puts me in a real moral cognitive dissonance with myself. I believe in equity and justice, but everyday I walk in the world and I'm getting unjust access to goods and resources that other people um are not getting access to. And in the case of my children, my kids are getting access to things that other people's children are not getting access to. That can cause the sort of guilt moment.

And what happens is, it starts to harden when we live in that place for a really long time. It's a really lousy place to live. It doesn't feel good. Guilt feels like a stuck point. And so even though it's a normal part of white US American development if we're on a journey around recognizing race and racism and you know trying to understand our role in that, if we get stuck there, it's such a bad feeling place that if we don't eventually kind of find our way through um it can really just frankly kind of you know, piss us off. Like it feels really— it makes me mad to feel bad about something that then my brain starts saying, "I can't really control this and I can't fix all of it. And I was born into this. I didn't ask for all of this. This really makes me mad that I walk around feeling this bad all the time. I'm a good person." Right. And so that's where the hardening moment can start and become a

sort of anger point where maybe I'm going to go, "Oh I'm really mad at sort of the racists that set this whole system up." But just as likely I'm going to say, "You know what? To heck with this whole diversity and justice thing. I can't get it right anyway and I'm tired of being made to feel bad. And so you know forget it. I'm done." That's, that's the hardening moment.

I think that one of the places that we can help one another move through that, and I've seen it happen in lots and lots of communities, is a process that can happen. But what we have to do is we have to, as anti racist, committed, white folks, we have to sort of model that and show other white people what we've learned or know if we've journeyed through that point about how that can happen. So for example, rather than stay stuck in guilt, I could actually show up um when the NAACP is doing canvassing in neighborhoods where there's less voter turnout for a whole host of reasons, including that folks don't feel like they have access to the polls, right. And so instead of feeling guilty, I go, "Oh here's a constructive thing I can do that shows my commitment to justice and equity. And you know, costs me something in terms of my time and energy." It's a small cost, but it's a cost. And that is actually an amazing antidote to white guilt. Instead of sitting and feeling white guilt, I can go actually plug in with other people who are trying to challenge and change the system for the, for the um broader social good and for social justice. So that's an example of how one way we move through guilt is by learning to take action.

HALLWARD: Either way it's sort of like there's a lot of energy and it gets channeled powerfully into something whether it's anger or constructive action.

HARVEY: Right.

HALLWARD: Can you give me an overview of the different ways that well-meaning white parents have tried to talk to their kids about race and racism and sort of how our thinking about that has changed over time?

HARVEY: Yes, that's such a good question. So one of the most prominent ways and it's still very prominent, even though it's beginning to um become less popular than it has been to this point, is in what we might call like colorblindness. Right, so-called color blindness. Where we say to kids— either we say something like, "You shouldn't notice difference. We're all just human, after all." Or colorblindness actually can also um be deceptive because sometimes we'll say, "We're all just human after all so let's just celebrate people's differences." Um, "but underneath we all bleed red" or you know "underneath our white skin and our brown skin we are all just people. Um and we're all fundamentally the same." And so lots of well-intentioned white families use this way of talking to children about how they should see one another. And the reason we do that is because we are wanting to give them a message that they shouldn't have racial bigotry. Um you know or they shouldn't have negative stereotypes about people who are different from themselves. So that's one model.

The second model is — I would call the diversity model and I think that's increased a lot especially in school systems. And I think in, in more and more white families. But in the diversity model we say to kids — we, we really emphasize the differences are to be celebrated. Like you should be really um excited to participate in Black History Month activities at school. And I want you to have diverse friends who have different cultures and different racial identities. And we tell our kids that differences are good. It's a social good. And so that model is a much improvement in my mind in terms of the outcomes for kids than colorblindness model, but it's not quite a justice model.

And so the model I think that gets us closest to a justice model, is a model of thinking about race with our kids that folks call race consciousness. And so in this way of talking about race and racial difference, we're not only saying we want to celebrate and value difference. That is part of it. And I want to say to my kids, "Yes like you're not colorblind. Like look, people are made in all different kinds of ways and that group of people identifies as black. And that group of people identifies as Guatemalan. And that group of people identifies as Asian American. And here's why. We do that. But we also teach our kids about the social differences that race creates. So in other words we teach our kids what racism is. And we do that because the only way we can have children we raise to be anti-racist is if they also first understand what racism even is. And so race consciousness recognizes diversity but also doesn't pretend that we're living in a society that we're all on an equal playing field in terms of the social structures.

HALLWARD: So I think— so many white parents of kids who are still living at home today were raised by wh—you know colorblind parents, who were giving them messages about equality and everyone's the same. And we don't— we don't see race. Everybody, you know we're all human.

HARVEY: Right.

HALLWARD: What would you say the consequences are for people who are raised in a well-meaning, you know colorblind culture being told not to see race? What are the consequences of that for the child?

HARVEY: Yeah. Two very significant consequences. One, I'm just going to sort of names straight from a study that was done, where a study looked at 100 white families who taught colorblindness took a colorblind approach to their parenting. And they taught their kids actively like, "Everyone's equal. We're all the same." And they were doing that because of an—you know desiring, you know wanting not to have their kids have racial bias. And researchers interviewed the kids of those families when their parents weren't in the room and asked them, "So do your parents like black people?" And 38% of those children who were being told, "Be colorblind. Everybody is of equal value," 38% of those kids said, "I have no idea." And 14% of those kids in those families said, "Nope. My parents don't like black people." And so what that tells us is that when—we when we just silence the conversation on race, which is really what colorblind teaching does. It silences the conversation. Our kids are vulnerable to just picking up negative messages, not only about other people but also in terms of what they think we think about other people. Because we're never having the conversation so they're just soaking in other stuff they get from out—you know, in society. So that's one consequence.

The other consequence that's just as dangerous, I think and as lasting, but we don't talk about as often, or if we do, I don't think we've understood as well is that, if I never talk about race in a way that's accurate to the social environment. So for example, my value might be we are all valued equally regardless of our race. But the society I live in, the actual society isn't structured that way. So if I've only had the value conversation but I've never been supported in having the conversation about what society is actually like, I basically don't ever learn to talk about race and difference in an accurate way. And so the long term impact of that is that when I engage across racial lines, so in my classrooms where I teach college with 20 year olds, students of color come into the classroom and I say, "We're going to talk about race and racism." And they're like, "Great. Let's go. We're ready. We are so eager to finally have that conversation." And my white 20 year old students have developed no language to have that conversation. And so they look like deer in headlights. And they feel afraid to talk in that space because no one's helped them develop the language to talk about it. And the crisis of that is not only that they've been developmentally unsupported in developing language we all need to have in a society that's as diverse as ours is, but it's also then that what their peers of color hear is like, "Oh great here we go again. We were ready to talk about racism and these white people don't have anything to say about it." And it's because these 20 year old white people haven't been having that conversation for 20 years of their life, whereas an African American young person who's 20 years old almost surely has had that conversation um throughout the course of their 20 years. And so those conversations can leave us more racially alienated than we started with because we're just—it's sort of like um students of color have learned calculus and white students have not been— unable to learn basic addition. And so when we don't talk with our young children about race we are depriving them of a language that they need in order to be you know functioning members of the society, with all of its racial pluralism.

HALLWARD: This is really persuasive. I mean I think so often when we don't talk about something, the child learns that that thing is shameful. Like there's something bad about it.

HARVEY: Yes. Exactly.

HALLWARD: And it makes sense that these kids as you are describing them have the sort of the deer in the headlights look because it's frightening and it's shameful somehow.

HARVEY: Yeah. And I say to them, you know, now I've learned teaching college students — now I start those conversations and I say to them what I just said to you. I say, "OK we're going to start on the topic of race today and here's what's about to happen." And I tell them, "You know this is how we're coming in differently equipped and that creates a lot of pain and a lot of misunderstanding." And I say to all of the people in the room, "That's not your fault. It's the fault of my generation and the generation you know before me. But now we've got to figure out how we navigate that in an, in an interracial way that doesn't make this dialogue worse than it was when we came in this classroom together."

HALLWARD: I remember even just feeling like bringing up the fact of whiteness was almost like breaking a huge taboo. I mean even naming it. Even today, you know a-a-ss someone who's taught about race and racism for years, I can still feel that like little feeling of like, "Oh. Is it OK to say this? Can we actually go there?" But it so deep.

HARVEY: Yeah. Yeah it does go deep. It goes deep for me too. And like you I've been talking about this for

decades now but I feel it too. So much white silence really developmentally, it really does impact how we show up in the world later.

HALLWARD: So you said that the second phase in sort of white parents' intention about how to talk about it. The first phase was colorblind, the second one you described as sort of diversity or celebration of differences. What are the consequences of talking about race and racism in those terms?

HARVEY: So the consequences of using diversity but not talking about racism and anti-racism is that white kids are kind of encouraged to focus only on others and not on themselves. And so for example, when I was writing my book there was a story, a white parent shared with me about her kid having come home from Martin Luther King Jr. Day. And her daughter was white and this parent is also a teacher and so she was kind of nervous if the school would do a good job. This was a second grader. And this, this child came over Martin Luther King Jr. Day and said—was telling her all about it and the mom was happy because the school had done a really good job and hadn't sugarcoated things. And then the um the daughter of the second grader turned to her and said, "Oh my gosh mom. I'm so glad we're white." And um, and the mom was sort of stunned and thought to herself like, "Oh my god. Do we say that? Are we allowed to say that? What does that mean?"

And what was telling to me about that is not so much that that second grader said that, because that's actually a pretty age appropriate thing to say if you've been studying, you know injustice and you notice that you're part of the group that's not being poorly treated. What struck me about it is that you know the longer term implications of what happens for that child if the conversation about difference in the United States doesn't also grow into an investigation of: what is the role of white people in being allies? Or when have white people acted against racism? Or um if we only ever talk about racism or diversity in terms of people of color it can range—anything from white youth thinking, "Well racism is a social problem but has nothing to do with me because it's only about people of color," to um the you know moment where white high schoolers are like, "Oh great. You know we're going to do the diversity thing again but I don't have any way to plug into this conversation because again this is all about people of color." And so it just creates almost like a two legged stool where we need four legs. Um and why you sort of understandably kind of check out because diversity just doesn't sort of give them an on road into the you know justice anti-racism project. And that's what they need. If they're going to develop in what I would call, healthy ways relative to their own racial identity.

HALLWARD: Well it's almost like whiteness is invisible. It's, it's taken as the reference point and so you don't even think about it as a form of diversity in itself.

HARVEY: Yes. Yeah it is. It becomes invisible. But it also creates this clunkiness for white youth because um there was another—another study that uh uh, someone did in a high school where she was interviewing on this precise question like, "What do, what do white teenagers do with their white identity in a context of diversity?" And this high school was very multiracial and they had a multiracial curric—multicultural curriculum and so they were teaching the value of diversity. And when she would interview students, all students, um she would ask them their name and their gender and their grade and their race. And the white teenagers in the study, almost to the one could not just say, "Oh I'm white." Without pausing and going, "Oh well I'm white, I guess." Or "Oh I'm white" and kind of whispering like it was something bad. Or making fun of it and saying things like, "Well I'm the whitest of the white boys." And and she noticed they had all these strange ways they could say what their gender was very comfortably but as soon as they had to say their race they got really—they got you know kind of unease about it. And she realized that what it was was this um way they'd been taught that diversity was something that they were supposed to embrace and love but they were running around this high school where they couldn't talk about their own racial identity. There was no models of what that might be that was positive. And there was this narrative among all the kids, including kids of color, that like the white kids were the uncool ones, right. So that was this high school narrative that was quite painful to some of these white youth. And so their whiteness wasn't exactly invisible to them but it was like this clunky thing that they didn't really know what to do with and they couldn't sort of—they had no way to sort of embody in a way that felt productive and constructive. And it certainly didn't make them closer in terms of being able to hold relationships with kids of color in their school.

HALLWARD: So in the example that you just gave, this child goes to this Martin Luther King Day teaching of some kind, learns about racism in some ways for the first time directly or explicitly, comes home and says, "I'm glad I'm white." What would be the ideal way for a parent to respond in a situation like that?

HARVEY: Yeah. So the first ideal way is if a parent in the moment is panicking about what to say, like take a breath. And go, "OK I don't have to have the exact answer right now. And even if I need to come back in a couple of hours I can still do that." So one of the white fears—fears we have is white parents is that we've got to

exactly get it right each moment. Um I want to you know, warmly say that we don't. We have to stay brave and committed to revisiting the conversation. But some of the responses I think would be great responses um in the moment would be to say, "Yeah, you know what? I'm really glad we are who we are too. Um, and I'm wondering do you think other kids in your class who are African American, do you think when they studied Martin Luther King today they felt really proud of being black today?" That would be a great conversation opener to sort of just nuance and tease out the conversation. A different response might be to say um, "Yeah I'm really— I'm really glad that we are who we are too. And you know, but I'm wondering um, when you were studying Martin Luther King, if if white people in that story were doing mean things to black people. And, if so I'm wondering if we could you know think together about how we— since we're white— could think about not— you know being a different you know— OK so that's stumbly. Bleh. Ok.

HALLWARD: No, that was sounding pretty good to me. [laughs]

HARVEY: Ok sorry!

HALLWARD: I mean really, so you're basically inviting them to notice that the white people were behaving in really really unfortunate ways and like how does that feel? And asking the child how they feel about that?

HARVEY: Yeah. Ask them to talk. And like what do you like about being white? Right. And then who knows what that conversation might um unfold. And then in some point—at some point in that conversation or a later conversation what, what our kid is noticing when they say "I'm so glad we're white" is they are noticing inequity. And in that moment, you know a second grader is having the um, I think it's a positive experience, she's not worried about saying that to her mom. We're always better off when we know and our kids are willing to tell us what they're thinking. And for the mom to not shut her down but to use that to say, "Yeah let's keep talking about what is it that makes you proud or glad to be white."

And then at some point the mom can say, "And I'm really sad that um you know in Martin Luther King Jr.'s Day, you know African American people were treated so poorly. And I'm glad they stood up and fought for their rights. And you know what. There were some white—white people that fought with them." Or a conversation where we end up saying, um you know let's go study some of the white people that decided to show up and support Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. or those kinds of of of responses that help us continue a long term conversation with our child. A lot of times in the moment, our panic about exactly fixing what they've just said, we'll just say like, "Sh. Oh don't say that. It's not good to say that. Or something like that." And pretty soon they're not going to talk to us about what's going on in their thinking anymore. And that is-is the thing we want to most avoid.

HALLWARD: That makes a lot of sense. it sounds like you're recommending intentionally giving white kids examples of white people really doing the right thing so that they can have white people they can feel proud of.

HARVEY: Right. Right. And that's, that's not so that um we overstate what white people have done historically or are doing right now. But I don't think we've thought through the implications of telling white kids and youth that they're supposed to care about justice and be part of building an equitable world. But we don't ever show them models of folks who look like them who have actually put some real skin in the game doing that. And on the sort of parental side of that, a lot of times that's because we ourselves don't know who those people are. And so, you know again it's why you know maybe not with a second grader, although maybe the conversation is, "You know what? Let's go figure out who are some of the white heroes that showed up with Rosa Parks together. Let's figure that out together." And you know that conversation can also be, "Now let's look around in our own community. Who in our world right now, um what black people and Latino people are working for justice right now? And where the white folks? The, the smaller number but the white folks—folks who are there also working alongside of them, are having their backs while they do that. Can we find those people? Because that's the kind of people we want to be. You know, that's who I want to be as a white person. And a second grader's going to say, "Yeah that's who I want to be too."

HALLWARD: Yeah. that makes sense. It's like this is also an antidote to white guilt because there's the idea that it's not just that white people are bad and we're all responsible for racism and we're all responsible for benefiting from it and therefore it's really all our fault. Which can be—is how it can feel a lot of the time. But it can give us a sort of a twig of hope that we can be part of the solution.

HARVEY: Yeah. I think about it as inviting our kids to use their moral imagination to imagine that they have a moral contribution to make. And it's almost like uh a muscle we have to help them develop. Um, and a lot of us who are adults, It's a muscle we ourselves need to develop. Yeah it's like allowing them to imagine the

possibilities of who they could be in the world and um as many, you now openings as we can make for that, the better.

HALLWARD: I know you do a lot of public speaking to white parents about how they can talk to their kids about race and racism. What are some of the fears and questions that white parents most bring to you about how to do this well?

HARVEY: So white parents express a lot of fear about feeling that they are equipped to do it. They're not sure that they're going to say the right thing, they might even be afraid that they're going to say something that makes their kid worse in terms of this set of difficult topics. That's one huge fear.

Another is they're worried that if they're talking about race with their kids, that their kids are going to go out in the world and say things that people of color might overhear them saying, that are offensive or hurtful. Another thing that they worry and wonder about is, given how much racial violence we are living with this in this—we are living with in this country, how do they know how much to say? How much to expose their kid to or not?

Another one is they worry about making their kid feel bad about being white. Like am I going to hurt my kid's self-esteem if I talk about all of the horrible things that white people have done historically? I think another is uh white parents express a lot of fear around having these conversations with their children. But also then knowing their kids are going to bump into family members who express racist views and beliefs. And what's going to happen when that encounter happens? White families have a lot of that kind of fear dynamic going on when there's kids in the room.

HALLWARD: Yeah. That, that makes a lot of sense. So I'm hearing you say five things: They don't want to say the wrong thing that actually feeds racist imagery. They don't want to have their kids go out and talk in public about race and racism in ways that might be offensive coming through the mouth of a child. They're concerned about risking uh that exposing their child to violence and maybe frightening them.

HALLWARD: They don't want their kids to feel bad about who they are as a white person. And lastly they don't want their child to step on a minefield at Thanksgiving with their relatives.

HARVEY: Exactly.

HALLWARD: OK. So can we talk a little bit about each one of these. I think—and I'm going to ask us—let's see if we can do it as concisely as possible, but I think it's really worth us addressing each one of these five. So we'll take them in order if that's alright?

HARVEY: Yep.

HALLWARD: So, in a way what I think I'm going to do is ask you to almost like pretend I'm a parent and one of these events coming to you and saying—and maybe I'll even voice each fear. And ask you to talk to me like you— like you're teaching me as a parent what to do.

HARVEY: Ok, cool.

HALLWARD: So particularly with young children, you know kids really don't know much about racism yet. And they might not have stereotypes of inequality in our culture. And if I talk to them about racism is it possible that I'll instill categories in their mind that weren't already there? That it'll actually feed prejudice.

HARVEY: Yeah. So we do have to worry about this. But there's ways to um learn to do this well and better than some other ways. So straight up, I always think even if there is risk of s-teaching our kids to notice something and then they're not going to do the right things with it. It's still better to break silence and start to have the conversation so that our kids know that they can come to us with the conversation. So right off the bat, I want to say to parents it's still worse to be silent even if you don't do it well.

HALLWARD: Right. So being a perfectionist about this is not required.

HARVEY: Exactly. Exactly.

HALLWARD: Thank goodness. Because we're all trying to figure this out, you know and we're all gonna screw it up in ways that we don't even intend to.

HARVEY: That's all of us, often parenting. And so I try in my own parenting to take this on the same way I do other hard things. When I'm figuring out how do I get my kids to eat peas? How do I m-make, make a good decision about whether or not my child gets to wear X to school or not? And so in the moment when my kids says something or a topic has come up that I feel like I can't quite navigate, I just want to encourage all of us to think like, OK. I can say to my kid, "You know. I'm not exactly sure what to say about that. And so I want to come back to that." And so one of the strategies I will use is I'll say something like that and then I'll give myself some time. And I will think about it more. I might do a little bit of reading online. There's lots of parents blogging about how we talk about race with kids. And I also let myself kind of catch my breath and not worry that I've got to get it 100% right this time and then I'll come back a little while later and I will sort of practice out in my mind. Maybe I'll pick up the phone and call a friend who is also committed to these issues and talked through it with them. And I will sort of circle back to the conversation later. And even then it might not go perfectly. But I know that if I do that with my best intention that what I'm continuing to do is to build a communication channel. And in the next day if I realize, I didn't say that quite how I wanted to, I can say to my seven year old, "You know what? You know that thing I said yesterday? I think I was wrong. I want to talk about that again. " And lo and behold we're building a really um beautiful journey of being able to nuance and grow together as parent and child in this journey.

HALLWARD: I remember the moment as a parent when I— when I realized that that was actually an option.

HARVEY: Yes.

HALLWARD: That your child could ask you a question and it was actually OK to say, "You know let me think about that. Let's come back and talk about that a little later." It was like, huh! You know, freedom! [laughter]

HARVEY: Yeah, it's the best thing ever.

HALLWARD: It was such a relief from this feeling of like, you're supposed to know the exact right things to say at all times. So stressful.

HARVEY: And, I also think—I think white adults we need to um have a little compassion for ourselves because what I realized when I started working on this in my own life in more explicit way is that so many of us haven't practiced explaining racism to adults when racist things happen, right? Like I don't exactly know how to tell my friends why the Cleveland mascot is a problem. And so how on earth do I explain that to a five year old? And so part of this is too, knowing that when we take the risk and try even if we don't per—do it perfectly we actually are going to get better and better at it, the more often we do it. We will grow at it if we keep at it. That has been true in my life. And I see it in the lives of other people who I'm um in relationships with.

HALLWARD: Right. It's ok to be a learner. It's ok.

HARVEY: Yeah.

HALLWARD: Um, so another concern you mentioned was parents fearing that their white kids will go out and start talking about race and racism in public because they now know it's a thing we can talk about but they might do it in a thoughtless way or they might do it in an offensive way. How do you address that concern?

HARVEY: So I want to address that concern first, by acknowledging it. That it's a real fear and it's a legitimate fear because we are living in— you know we live in—with lots of racial tension in our society. And so you know, if I'm talking the language of race with my kids and they point at someone in the grocery store and say, "Oh look that woman is black." It's very understandable. I'm going to be afraid that they have caused her harm or offended her in some way. And maybe they have. But maybe they haven't. And what I think adults need to realize is that we need to treat teaching our kids about race the same way that we do all kinds of children — you know child behavior that needs redirection. Um, the adults in that scenario in the grocery store might feel some discomfort or anxiety because we know race is so loaded. But my three or four year old who has just pointed doesn't know that yet. And it's an opportunity for me to say to her, "You know what? Yes that woman is—looks like she's probably African American. But honey it's rude to point at people." Just the same way I would handle it if my child was given a gift and didn't say thank you. I wouldn't panic about it. I would say to my child, "You know what? We say thank you when people give us a gift" and I would redirect her.

And so um I think sometimes our kids doing and saying um offensive and harmful things, um it's partly—it goes with the territory. But I think we need to remind ourselves that wh— it's the adults carrying much more anxiety

about that than our kids typically are. And that learning to treat that the way we do other kinds of parental teaching is just exactly what we need to do. And it's still preferable to white silence.

HALLWARD: I mean that story feels like such a legacy of the kind of silencing of colorblindness as an ideal. Because of course a child sees color and notices it and might want to comment on it, just like that might comment on any color, You know, it's the adult's anxiety that makes it so charged. But it's it's not a value judgment.

HARVEY: That's right. And usually, frankly— it's usually, I would risk saying I don't have any scientific studies on this — but I think it's white adults that feel much more anxious about that moment than um than very likely the person of color who might be in that particular moment in any way—in any case.

HALLWARD: Right now there's a lot of very frightening, racially motivated violence going on — particularly police brutality. And a lot of young children are scared of violence. They really want to feel safe. And parents can feel pretty protective about exposing their kids — kids of color or white kids — to stories that would be frightening to them. How do you recommend that white parents talk to their young children about the reality of violence—of racially motivated violence.

HARVEY: Yeah. This is a really hard question and it's a really important one. And I want to say — to preface my response — that there's not one answer for that for every family. And for every child. And as you, as you noted I don't think there's necessarily widespread agreement among parents of color, for example, like when you sit down and have the talk? How explicitly do you talk about um you know African American men, women and children being killed by police? Um and so what I can say is in my own experience I think being really mindful of our — as we are with so many things our children's different sensitivities to violence. That has to factor into the mix.

But I do believe that — and in my own parenting I have opted to be explicit with my kids even when they were young about the truth that black people are being hurt unfairly and physically by police officers. And for example, I started taking my children to protests against police violence very very young. And after Michael Brown was killed, I did that. And I knew going at that point that they were old enough, at least the older of them, that she might hear that he had been killed. And so I chose not to tell her that. I told them that he — that a young African American child had been hurt badly. And that we were going to be with others who were standing up to the government, to tell the government we wanted everybody to feel safe and be safe in their communities. But I emotionally prepared myself for the possibility they would hear that Michael Brown had been killed. Um, and I decided to take that risk because I feel clear that white children get so many messages for example, about the world is good, and the world is safe, and police officers are good and everything is great. Um because for lots of white kids, all of that is true. That the, the risk of them being a little bit afraid is worth the longer term need to work against their experience telling them that everything's fine. And so when they're 15 and teenagers of color are marching in the streets, they don't believe how much violence there is because they've never heard it or seen it before. And so that's the choice that I've made as a parent is to error on the side of exposure but not in an explicit and graphic way. And then to kind of, you know take a deep breath and know that this is part of the cost of living in a white supremacist nation, is that people really do get hurt. And I have to teach my kids that or they will not be ready to be really good allies to you know, their 12 year old, 14 year old 15 year old, black friends who know that police are dangerous.

HALLWARD: Do you hear white parents telling you that their white children are having nightmares or are feeling anxious about it after they've been exposed to stories about say, police brutality?

HARVEY: You know I don't. I honestly don't recall any white parent telling me that, which is not to say that it doesn't happen. And I want to emphasize — I really do again — that I've heard lots of parents of color and educators of color say that they are — they wait to talk about the death part longer maybe. But I haven't really heard that. And I think about my own, now seven year old, it's interesting because she's heard since she was, you know before she could even understand the concepts about the risks um that African Americans face um in in, you know by way of police. And she still will say things like, "Oh the police are good. And I know Mama, I know Mama. Sometimes you, you feel mad at police." But you know she—and it's—the messages they get about how safe they are in the world are really strong for many white kids. Now that's certainly more true for middle class white kids, than for low income or working class white kids. But it's amazing how safe our kids feel in the world. And so it takes a lot — at least in the case of my kids to really shake them a bit. And the other thing is when I'm talking with them about um racial violence they already know that what I'm talking about is never about violence against them.

And so I think they're less predisposed to um have nightmares that are rooted in that I think. But you know I really — you know I really want to exercise respectful caution because I know all kids are different. And different families are different. So — but that's what it's looked like in my own life. I have not—and my oldest is a pretty sensitive kid who has nightmares, she is not even ever talked to me about nightmares about that.

HALLWARD: I know this is a really kind of sweeping question, but it comes up often. Do you have a set of kind of guidelines inside about age appropriateness, sort of at what age you talk about what to kids about, about violence in particular? Or even a way for parents to think about it. Like is my child old enough to know this or even understand this idea? How can parents even make that assessment?

HARVEY: So, I think the way I, I make it as a parent and I would encourage parents to think about it, is um it's sort of like scaffolding. If I have young kids— even when they're like two and three I'm talking to them about being kind. For example, I'm talking to them about why we need to not be mean to others or how we stand up for other people if people are being mean to— you know if we're—if we see someone being mean. As soon as we're using language like that with our kids, there are then I think developmentally appropriate ways to then sort of pivot that language to say, for example to my two year old or three year old, "Sometimes police officers are mean to black—black American people. Sometimes you know, Latino peoples are not treated with kindness. And so the government is talking in very mean ways about Latino people right now who are trying to cross the border and feed their families."

And so I'm actually talking about racial violence when I say those things but I'm not talking in graphic ways about um children being separated from their parents and put in cages. But I am talk— I'm using racial language to talk about kindness and meanness. So that would be in my mind a developmentally um appropriate way to start talking about racial violence with a two or three year old. I wouldn't use the language of killing or something graphic but I would talk about kindness and mean— meanness in racial ways. I think then as our kids get older we will start to see, you know as soon as our kids can talk about something like um, you know George Washington and the Revolutionary War, which we teach very early um to kids. They're talking about war. They're talking about the United States is a country that came into being by you know, some people killing other people for war. We can use similarly um, you know language about violence that sort of is on that scale to bring in the conversation about um how black people have been treated in the country, how Native peoples have been treated, or how such peoples are treated today. And so again we might—might not be saying um, "You know a police officer shot a 15 year old yesterday" but we're starting to make sure that when we talk about um violence and and we talk about other things without worrying or hurting our kids sort of intellectually or emotionally, that we can also racialized that too and sort of point that out for them.

So I don't know if that's um completely answers the question but I think that's the way I've sort of moved through it as I have, you know um sort of journeyed with my kids their own development—is to sort of recognize, if they're watching Star Wars, they're seeing people kill each other. That means they are able to handle some kind of conversation about killing. That is you know, explicitly brings in the language of race. Not for the purpose of scaring them for the purpose of saying to them, "Hey. There's a struggle for justice going on in this country. And guess what. We're the kind of family that is committed to helping that struggle because we want everyone to feel safe in their own community. And so that's the sort of, sort of markers I think I would use to navigate that.

HALLWARD: That's super helpful. Right. The clues are already there in the language the kids are already using. Or the ideas that kids are already immersed in.

How do you address white parents concerns that learning about racism will actually make the child feel bad about themselves as a white person and hurt their self-esteem.

HARVEY: Yeah. So this one is really important because one of the things that we often don't realize as white adults is that when we talk about racism and we talk about things like um children internalizing racist messages very very young and all the many many ways that we know that's the case, um we—it might be easy to imagine how our children might internalize false negative perceptions of people of color. But what we don't necessarily realize is that that also means they're internalizing false superiority messages about themselves.

And so on the one hand, I want my children of course to feel good about who they are in the world and to feel like um they have a capacity to you know, uh constructively participate in community and all these wonderful things. But what I don't want is to accidentally uh double down on the false racial superiority messages that they're getting all the time. And so, I don't worry that much about feeling um, white kids' self-esteem around their own racial identity gets positively reflected back on them all the time in ways that are very harmful to their ability to become anti-racist. And so I actually think that it's not a concern um to make white children feel bad

about being white. If at the same time we are also modeling for them and introducing them to models of white people who are engaged in anti-racism, which is behavior and activity that they have every right to want to emulate and then want to be proud about, right.

So um it's actually kind of important, for example that we — you know it's ok, if a second or third grader feels a little bit of white guilt. In fact I think it's really better for a second or third grader to feel some white guilt than for them to start feeling it when they're 25. Because if they're in second and third grade they're moving through towards a healthy racial identity development at a much more appropriate pace um in terms of what they'll be capable of then as a teenager and adult, then if white kids you know don't suddenly start to feel guilt until they're 25 and discover that racism is a thing. And so I just don't think, as long as we're showing our kids anti-racist models so they know that there are ways to show up in the world in which they don't just have to feel bad about being white— I think it's actually important that kids— white kids hear that white people have done a lot of really bad things. And that white people continue to do really go- really bad things. And we are constantly able and need to make a choice about what kind of white people we want to be.

HALLWARD: It sounds to me like one of the, the solutions you're suggesting to this concern is: better make sure you're doing something about racism yourself so that you can be a model for your kid.

HARVEY: Yes. Yes. Yes.

HALLWARD: So, in some ways the answer is less about what you say and more like, what are you doing?

HARVEY: What are you doing? Right. Yeah.

HALLWARD: Yeah, yeah.

HARVEY: That's true. As in so much of parenting.

HALLWARD: Right. Right. It's less about what we tell our kids and more about who we are, which is of course very sobering.

HARVEY: But like when uncle says something racist at the Thanksgiving table, do they see us challenge and engage that? Or do they watch us not say anything so we don't rock the boat? You know that—they learn more from that than what we tell them that we should believe, right?

HALLWARD: What do you say to a white parent who was concerned that if they talk to their kids about racism that the child is going to bring up something really awkward at the dinner table when they go home to their relatives?

HARVEY: So I say, "Welcome to the amazing and really uncomfortable world of trying to grow our own anti-racism as adults." Right. Because if I'm doing my work well my child is going to say something like that at the Thanksgiving dinner table. Um, most of us who are part of white families have— most of us not all— but most of us have racism that pops up in our larger family systems. That's just how this goes. And so part of the reason that that continues is because so many of us have for lots of reasons decided to stay silent and not rock the boat ourselves. Um, or haven't known there was a boat to rock until much later in our life and so hadn't—haven't developed the skill set yet to, to rock the boat. And so, I think these larger family networks are the places where this can feel most scary. And I totally get that. For me, it's the scariest part. Absolutely.

And what I say to um parents who ask this question is like, "You know what? We need each other. Because it's hard and there's no way around this being one of the most difficult things for white families." But I remind them that um if we want to claim to be um allies to people of color or if we want to claim that we want to build a different world than the one that we inherited, then that's one of the places where the rubber really hits the road in terms of what we show our kids is possible or what we support them in if they say the awkward thing and grandma or grandpa tries to say to them something that sort of shuts down their anti-racist commentary, right? And so, I really just acknowledge that it's scary and that it's uncomfortable um but that it's a kind of discomfort that is in—for the good of the flourishing of all um, all of our children. If we can sort of join our kids in being that brave at the Thanksgiving table.

HALLWARD: Right. So in fact it actually isn't a problem. It's just uncomfortable.

HARVEY: Right. Right.

HALLWARD: What if I'm just hearing you for the first time and I'm thinking, "Oh no my child is already a teenager. Is it too late? What can I do to catch up? Is it, you know, what would you say to parents who didn't do some of the things you're talking about starting when their child's were — their children are two or three. How can we make up for lost time?"

HARVEY: I'm so glad you asked me that because I want to say if that's you and you have that teenager already, it's not too late. It's not too late. So some of the things I might try if that was me is I might try beginning by saying, "You know what? I just listen to this really interesting radio program and they were talking about what white teenagers know or experienced or believe about race. I never thought to talk about that with you. Like, do you think about race? And you know, depending on the nature of the relationship, parents with teenagers might be shocked what their teenager already says or knows or thinks they know about race and racism. And so just that might be a great starting point."

Another thing that a parent who already has a teenager can begin to do is it's—you know it's not a bad idea at all to sort of, you know pick a couple of books. There's lots of young adult fiction. Everything from like zombie apocalypse stuff. I'm not kidding, you know that takes on issues of race and enslavement to a book like *The Hate You Give*, this amazing young adult novel that is recently out and is about to be a movie about a young woman navigating her friend being shot by police. And like, read it, with your teenager. And if they hate reading say, "Guess what? We're going to read it together anyway. And I'm going to read it out loud to you and we're going to talk about it." And just sort of in a loving open hearted way um show up and say, "I'm want—I'm interested in this conversation because I'm realizing we've never talked about this." I would just warmly encourage parents to try that because I think our youth, even if we have not talked about these things with them, it's almost nowhere that white youth are not aware that we have a real crisis. However they understand the crisis in the country relative to race and racism, they have some awareness.

And so to just find a way to get them talking and let them hear that you actually are interested in what they're thinking about and what they've observed. Um, just I would say dive in and do it. And not, not to dive in and say, "Hey I want to tell you all these things I just learned about what you're supposed to know about racism or not." No, not that. An invitational question that asks them what they think. And sort of partners with them wherever they are in their thinking, so that you can journey together as opposed to you're going to show up and sort of tell them what they should know, right. That's the way I would encourage parents, to move if they have older kids they haven't begun these conversations with.

HALLWARD: I'm so glad I'm talking to you, Jennifer. You're helping me. I think that I have asked almost everything I wanted to in terms of the ad—in the advice category. Oh, I want to ask you one other thing. What is the cost of racism to white people? Why should we care about it?

HARVEY: The costs are so high. You know in our individual and our sort of more personal lives I think the cost is um a lack of the incredible experience of having truly meaningful and diverse relationships in our lives, relationships with all kinds of different people, um relationships where there's not a whole bunch of silence. Like there's, there's lots of friendships between white people and African American people or Latino people that if you asked each of the friends in the relationship what the friendship was like one of them might say, "Oh yeah we're friends" and the other would say, "yeah we're friends but we're not like friends." Right. And so one of the costs is we don't really have — we're we're less likely to have friends who really have authentic deep connections across lines of difference and that's a real cost I think.

Another cost I think is that we uh many of us live lives um where we are aware that we are living in a kind of moral cognitive dissonance with our own values. And even if we don't quite describe it in that way, in my experience there are a lot of white people walking around this country who believe in the vision of equality and believe in a vision of justice and who feel ill at ease and yet feel really um um stuck about it with their own sort of participation in a system that is deeply unjust. And I think the costs over time of that are —there really like soul costs, they're not necessarily quantifiable, but when you start to actually notice them and you start to have these conversations you start to see and feel them more and realize, wow, I've been living with a part of myself that's just kind of malformed and, and when I get in touch with it it doesn't feel good. Um and I think that cost is very real.

And then I also think um there's really big picture costs which is you know racial tension in this country is not going to get better um because— it's not going to get better until more and more white people who do believe in equity and justice start to speak up and stand up and raise our children in a different way. And if we do that when I imagine a country where all of our kids flourish, I just— I mean it makes my heart glow imagining that

place. And when um I allow myself to imagine that what if that never happens? I just feel like — all the oxygen leaves my body. And so it's a really great cost to sort of live in a place where I think we couldn't all flourish. And I think that's probably true for lots of white people that if we um, that we're living with the cost of of sort of not seeing how we get from here to there but that we— when we start to imagine "Oh. But if I dive in and face some of those fears I could be part of helping create a nation where everybody can flourish," like suddenly this like oxygen just sort of infuses my body. And I think that uh the same is true for lots of white Americans who've decided to sort of get off the sidelines and really start to sort of do some of the scarier things that frankly become a little less scary the more we do them. So, those are some of the ways I would describe the costs.

HALLWARD: Thank you! That's really helpful.