"Race," racism, leadership and practice

Rasheed Pendry, Director of Childrens Services, Solihull Council, 12.2.26
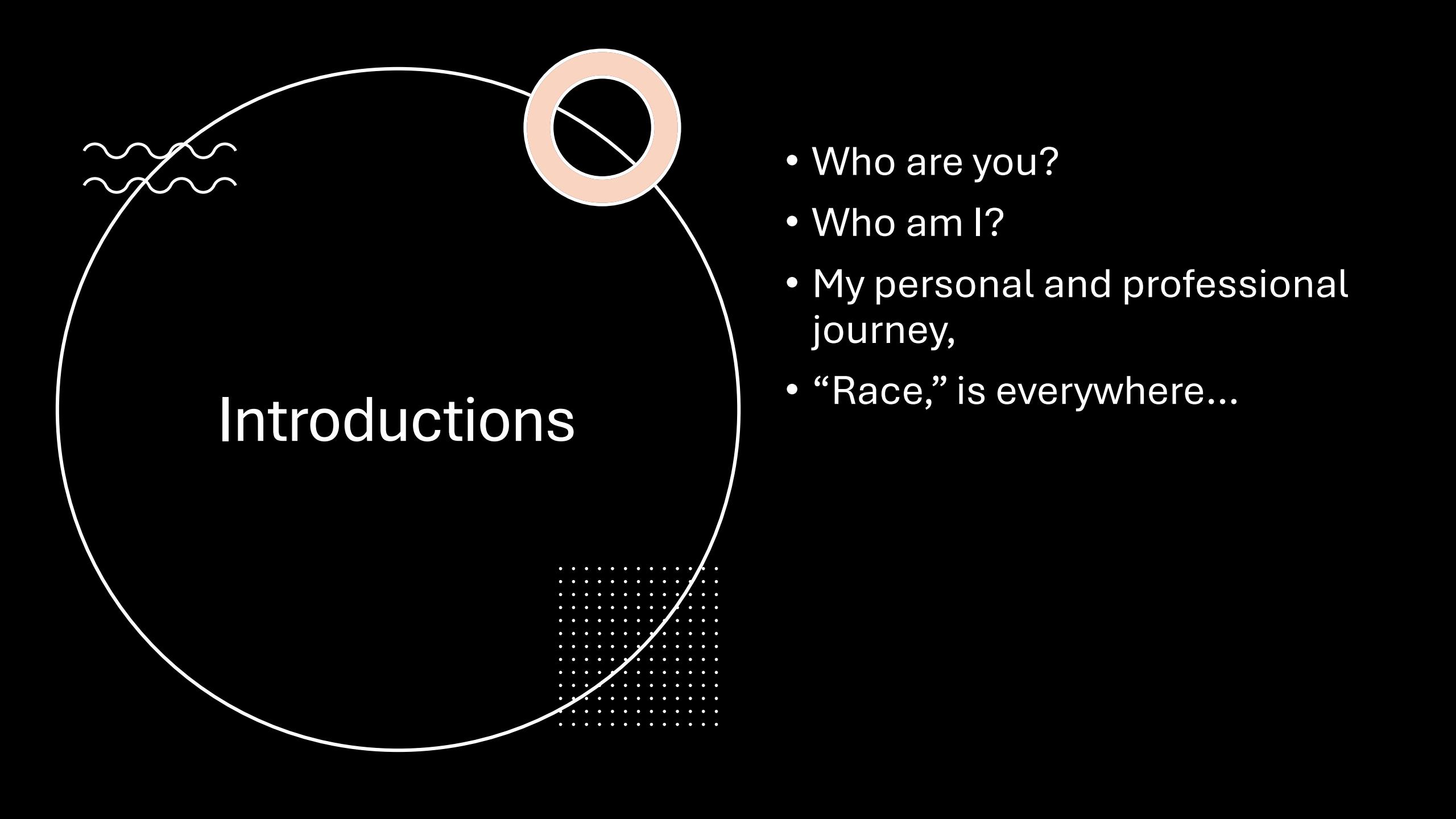
Introductions

- Who are you?
- Who am I?
- My personal and professional journey,
- "Race," is everywhere...

"Race," - Setting the context...
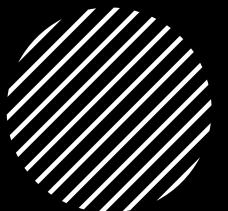
- "In this country American means white. Everybody else has to hyphenate." **Toni Morrison,**

- "Yeah, I love being famous. It's almost like being white, y'know?" **Chris Rock,**

- "The worst moment in my life was when I was seven years old and I discovered that there was a thing such as racism. You don't know you're different until someone lets you know." **Sanjeev Bhaskar,**

- "Race doesn't really exist for you because it has never been a barrier. Black folks don't have that choice." **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah, Chapter 38*.**

"Race": a political and social construct
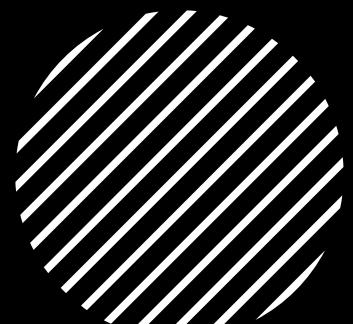
- In modern thought the idea of "race" as a human construct has gained ascendancy: biological distinctions between groups defined as "races" have been found to be trivial,

- What is left is a social construction, but one that draws upon a biological discourse, which leads people and institutions to act as if "race" is a fixed, objective category (Solomos, 2003).

- The concept of "race" seems to be best understood as a political and social construct, an organising discursive category around which has been constructed a system of socioeconomic power, exploitation and exclusion (Gunaratnam, 2003).

"Race": a descriptor of people
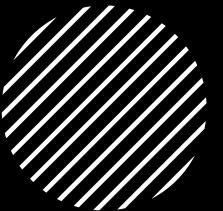
- Constructed entity built around skin colour: increasingly religion, culture, language might be seen as markers of racial difference, which is then confirmed by a difference in skin tone,

- A way of describing people that has an organising effect on the lives and relationships of us all - particularly felt by those without, "white (skin) privilege," (McIntosh, 2008),

- This dominant understanding of the idea of "race" is clear - use of the terms "black," and "white," to classify people.
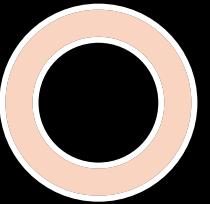
"Race," and racism matter...

- Now more than ever: the evidence is overwhelming, the reality is stark in our practice system and within the societal context in which it is embedded,

- "Race," is a major organising principle in everyday life (Hardy, 2008),

- A study from 2000 showed that a hefty chunk of white participants across western Europe held overtly racist views, strongly agreeing that ethnic minorities in their countries were inferior to white people. In France this figure was 26% of participants; in the Netherlands 30%; in Germany 38%, and in the UK a staggering 41% (The Guardian, 15.1.25).

"Race," in leadership
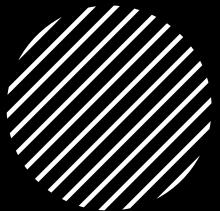
- A leader of colour or a leader who is a person of colour?

- Clarity of ideas and vision,

- Meeting expectations: of colleagues, of peers, of managers,

- Dilemmas, obstacles and the importance of developing resilience!

- When to speak up and when to stay quiet...

Building resilience
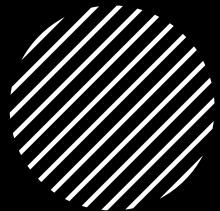
- Find your allies,
- Speak your truth,
- Ensure there's time to resource yourself,
- Don't underestimate the impact upon yourself.

Making change in policy and practice
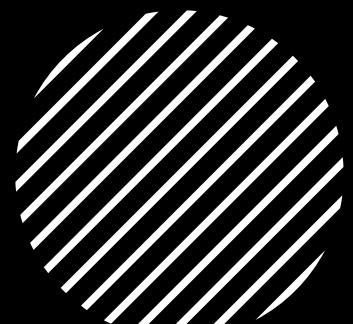
- Use the data – remember the existence of racism is a fact and undisputed scientifically,

- Organisations cannot not reproduce racist outcomes,

- Make a plan,

- Be clear about your rationale,

- Be brave where possible!

The importance of relationships
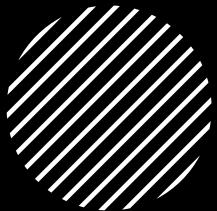
- Relationships are all important,
- Find connections, and use them,
- We are all relational beings,
- Use your "self,"
- Hold your authenticity.

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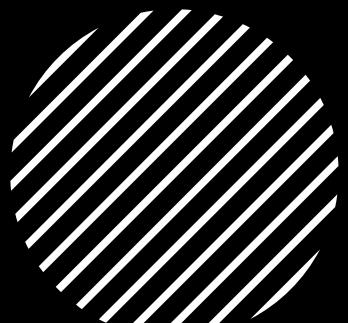
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