

Preparation for G379 – Understanding White Fragility

White fragility is a phrase coined by author Dr. Robin DiAngelo, and is defined as “a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves.” According to DiAngelo, most white people “live in a social environment that insulates them from race-based stress,” due to their privilege as part of the cultural majority. In turn, says DiAngelo, whites are infrequently challenged and have less of a tolerance to race-based stress, causing them to be hostile, guilty, defensive, or fearful when confronted. This phenomenon is white fragility. In the end, white fragility ensures that conversations about race are derailed, and the status quo of white supremacy is upheld. ~Sarah Watts, Salon Magazine 7/18/2016

What is white supremacy?

Why “white supremacy” as the term here? It conjures up images of hoods and mobs. Here, we mean: “White supremacy as a set of institutional assumptions and practices, often operating unconsciously, that tend to benefit white people and exclude people of color.” In 2017, actual “white supremacists” are not required in order to uphold white supremacist culture. Building a faith full of people who understand that key distinction is essential as we work toward a more just society in difficult political times. From the [#UUWhiteSupremacyTeachIn](#)

Basic Tenets of Anti-racist Education

- Racism exists today, in both traditional and modern forms
- All members of this society have been socialized to participate in it
- All white people benefit from racism, regardless of intentions; intentions are irrelevant.
- No one chose to be socialized into racism (so no one is “bad”). But no one is neutral – to not act against racism is to support racism.
- Racism must be continually identified, analyzed and challenged; no one is ever done • The question is not “did racism take place”? but rather “how did racism manifest in that situation?”
- The racial status quo is comfortable for most whites. Therefore, anything that maintains white comfort is suspect. If you are white, practice sitting with and building your stamina for racial discomfort.

Further Exploration:

- [Why I Stopped Talking About Racial Reconciliation And Started Talking About White Supremacy. From the blog Feisty Thoughts](#)
- Robin DiAngelo Video: [Deconstructing White Privilege with Dr. Robin DiAngelo](#)
- [9 Phrases Allies Can Say When Called Out Instead of Getting Defensive](#)

Question:

1. Take a look at this list of Common White Patterns that obscure and protect racism from <http://robindiangelo.com>. Where do you recognize yourself? What do you need to work on?

Common White Patterns that obscure and protect racism

- Preference for racial segregation / isolation. Lack of a sense of loss about segregation / isolation
 - Lack of understanding about what racism is
 - Seeing ourselves as individuals, outside of racial socialization
 - Not understanding that we bring our group's history with us; history matters
 - Cultural appropriation
 - Assuming everyone is having/can have our experience
 - Lack of racial humility / unwillingness to listen
 - Lack of authentic interest in the perspectives of people of color
 - Inability to sustain long-term relationships with people of color
 - Believing we can be exempt from the power of racial socialization (because we have good intentions, experience another oppression, know some people of color, or took a class or workshop)
 - Taboos on talking directly about race and racism
 - Wanting to jump over the hard personal work and get to "solutions"
 - Confusing "not agreeing" with not understanding
 - Need to maintain white solidarity / save face / look good
 - Guilt which paralyzes or is an excuse for inaction
 - Defensiveness about any suggestion that we are connected to racism
 - A focus on intentions over impact
2. If you identify as a Person of Color, share experiences of being on the receiving end of Common White Patterns that obscure and protect racism.