

Let's Talk About Racism

Book Review and Discussion of
"White Fragility" by Robin DiAngelo

Facilitated by:

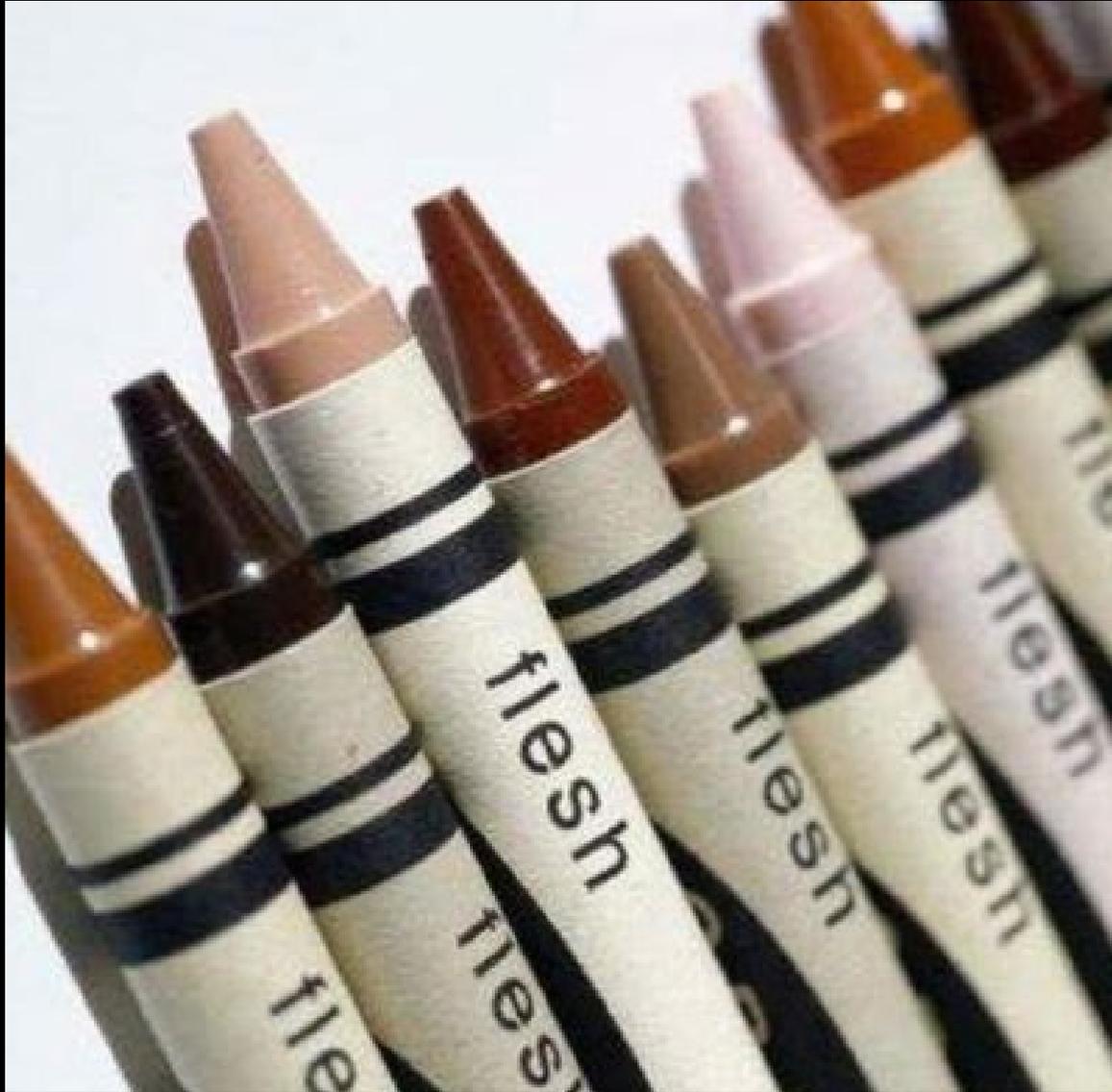
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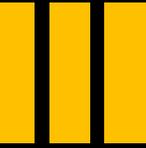
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Safe Zone

Some of us may feel uncomfortable talking about racism. This discomfort is necessary for us to move forward in our path to creating a more inclusive environment.



Why is it hard
to talk about
race?





Why “I’m not racist” is only half the story

Downloaded with
permission of Dr. Robin
DiAngelo:
<http://robindiangelo.com>



White Fragility

- White people in North America live in a social environment that protects and insulates them from race-based stress.
- This insulated environment of racial protection builds white expectation for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress.
- White Fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable triggering a range of defensive moves, i.e. *anger, fear, guilt* and behaviors such as *argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress inducing situation*.
- These behaviors in turn function to reinstate white racial equilibrium. (*Dr. Robin DiAngelo*)

Discussion Guidelines

- A strong opinion is not the same as informed knowledge.
- There is a difference between agreement and understanding. When discussing complex social and institutional dynamics such as racism, consider whether “I don’t agree” may actually mean “I don’t understand.”
- We have a deep interest in denying the forms of oppression that benefit us. We may also have an interest in denying forms of oppression that harm us. For example, people of color can deny the existence of racism and even support its structures. This denial may keep them from feeling overwhelmed by the daily slights or protect them from the penalties of confronting white people on racism. However, regardless of the reason, this denial still benefits whites at the group level, not people of color.
- Racism goes beyond individual intentions to collective group patterns.
- We don’t have to be aware of racism in order for it to exist.
- Our racial position (whether we identify as white, a person of color, or multiracial) will greatly affect our ability to see racism. For example, if we swim against the “current” of racial privilege, it’s often easier to recognize, while it’s harder to recognize if we swim with the current.
- Putting our effort into protecting rather than expanding our current worldview prevents our intellectual and emotional growth.

First Impressions

- What insight stays with you after reading the book *White Fragility*?
- What did you find surprising? Challenging? Liberating? Hopeful?
- How can reading and discussing this book lead to change?
- What changes are you hoping to make as a result of reading and discussing this book?

Discussion Section 1

Chapters 1 - 4

“Yet our simplistic definition of racism—as intentional acts of racial discrimination committed by immoral individuals—engenders a confidence that we are not part of the problem and that our learning is thus complete.” (p. 9)

QUESTIONS

- Identify a passage from Chapter 1 that invokes any sense of discomfort.
- What is most uncomfortable to you when discussing race? Why? When did you first notice that talking about racism is uncomfortable?
- How does race impact my life? If you are struggling to answer, why?
- What is color blindness and how does the author challenge it?
- How does racial belonging play out at your institution? Do your faculty/staff/students feel they belong? How do you know?

— Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility*

Discussion Section 2

Chapters 5 - 8

“In my workshops, I often ask people of color, ‘How often have you given white people feedback on our unaware yet inevitable racism? How often has that gone well for you?’ Eye-rolling, head-shaking, and outright laughter follow, along with the consensus of rarely, if ever. I then ask, ‘What would it be like if you could simply give us feedback, have us graciously receive it, reflect, and work to change the behavior?’ Recently a man of color sighed and said, ‘It would be revolutionary.’” (p. 113)

QUESTIONS

- Have you ever been called a racist? How did it feel? If you haven't, how do you think it would feel? How might these feelings function to actually uphold and protect racism?
- How does your living and working environment reinforce your racial frame and ability to handle racial stress?
- What strategies do you have to remain engaged when racial stress is triggered?
- How do we create conditions for sustained engagement in uncomfortable conversations about race and racism, without centering white needs for comfort?

— Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility*

Discussion Section 3

Chapters 9 - 12

“White people are receptive to my presentation as long as it remains abstract. The moment I name some racially problematic dynamic or action happening in the room in the moment... white fragility erupts.” (p. 117)

QUESTIONS

- When have you seen white fragility in action? How did you respond?
- Review the rules of engagement starting on p.123 How many of those rules have you heard or used – even implicitly – when in cross racial dialogues about racism? Why were they necessary conditions for engagement?
- What do you think white people mean when they say they need to “build trust” before engaging in a conversation about race? Based on the ideas in the book, how might you challenge that perceived need?
- Whose tears over racism matter and whose don't?

— Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility*

Closing Discussion & Remarks

QUESTIONS

- What was the most significant learning that you experienced reading this book?
- How can you make use of the information from this book in your role?
- What are the action items you are leaving with that would have an impact at your institution. How will you ensure you enact them

— Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility*

CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

- White Fragility Discussion Guide

<https://beacon.org/assets/pdfs/DiAngelo-EducatorsProfDevGuide.pdf>

- White Fragility Reading Guide

<https://www.beacon.org/assets/pdfs/whitefragilityreadingguide.pdf>

BOOK SUGGESTIONS

