White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard to Talk to White People about Racism by Robin J. DiAngelo

A groundbreaking book exploring the counterproductive reactions white people have when discussing racism that serve to protect their positions and maintain racial inequality.


About the Author: Robin Diangelo is an academic, lecturer, and author and has been a consultant and trainer on issues of racial and social justice for more than twenty years. She formerly served as a tenured professor of multicultural education at Westfield State University.

Questions for Discussion

1. Identify a passage from Chapter 1 that invokes any sense of discomfort. What does this passage reveal about your socialization into the white racial frame? Does your discomfort shift over time? If so, what supported that shift?

2. How can we make generalizations about what it means to be white when we don’t know each person’s individual story?

3. What does it mean to say that race is “socially constructed”? What is the difference between racial prejudice, racial discrimination, and racism?

4. What is color-blind racism and why is it problematic? How did racism change and adapt after the civil rights era? Consider attitudes as well as behaviors.

5. The author traces some of the specific ways that her life has been shaped by racism. Consider your own socialization. In what specific ways has your life been shaped by racism? (If you are white, try to answer this question without mentioning people of color).

6. In what settings have you experienced the expectation of white solidarity/racial silence? How has that expectation been communicated to you? How have you responded? What consequences have you faced or fear you will face by breaking with white solidarity? If you are a person of color, how have you witnessed white people enacting white solidarity?

7. The author suggests that one of the most effective barriers to talking about racism with people is the good/bad binary. How have you seen this binary underlying common white responses to charges of racism? How might you respond when the binary surfaces in discussion about racism?

8. How can a white person still enact racism in a close relationship with a person of color? Doesn’t the close relationship itself prove that the person is not racist? Explain how and why enacting racism in a close relationship with a person of color is not only possible but inevitable.

9. What does it mean to say that anti-blackness is present across all communities of color, even within
10. What are some of the misunderstandings about affirmative action and what do these misunderstandings reveal about anti-blackness?

11. Why are questions such as “What is the right thing to say?” or “What am I supposed to say?” the wrong questions? How might you respond the next time you hear these questions?

12. In your own words, what is problematic about common guidelines for building trust in discussions about racism (e.g., “don’t judge”)? How do these guidelines function? Who are they for? Whose comfort do they protect?

13. If we accept that racism is always operating, the question becomes not “Is racism taking place?” but rather “How is racism taking place in this specific context?” How does awareness of that change how we think about our lives and our actions?

14. Discuss the suggestions for continuing the work of antiracism. Which are the most challenging? How can you meet those challenges?

(Questions provided by the publisher)