



WHAT IS... WHITE FRAGILITY



DEFINITION:

WHITE FRAGILITY describes the defensiveness that many white people display when they are reminded of their race and privilege. The term was coined by the sociologist Robin DiAngelo in her book by the same name. According to DiAngelo, white people avoid conversations about race because they lack what she calls "racial stamina."

Racial stamina results from the discomfort of repeatedly engaging in conversations about race. Many whites are not practiced in facing their privilege and engaging in these types of discussions because they live in an environment that protects them from the stress of discussing race. Furthermore, they are terrified of being called racist. The fact that "good white people" abhor this accusation is an understatement. They will fight vehemently to uphold their self-understanding of being nonracist, but often refuse to explore the basis of the judgment.



BIBLICAL/SPIRITUAL/THEOLOGICAL FRAMING OR REFERENCES:

THE MINISTRY OF PRESENCE is so powerful that when Jesus selected the Twelve, they are first appointed to a ministry of presence. "And he appointed twelve, who he also named apostles, to be with him..." (Mark 3: 14). Presence provides not only mutual openness in difficult circumstances and conversations, but comfort and support. The strength to endure difficult discussions and hurt feelings is clear in God's faithful accompaniment of Israel, despite the pain God realizes when staying in relationship with her. We also see this resilience in the power of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, who walks among us, experiencing all our emotions.



EXAMPLE(S):

EXAMPLES OF WHITE FRAGILITY INCLUDE:

This story related by Jeannette Espinoza illustrates white fragility.*

During a conversation with a white friend, the question of educating young children about racism was raised. Her friend said that it might be too traumatic to introduce the concept of racism to young children.

"I know you have to have 'the talk' with your children, but I want my children to have a childhood free from harsh realities," the white woman said.

Jeannette responded, "So it's okay for Black children to have their childhoods cut short?"

"That's not what I meant. It's just that Black people are more used to that kind of discussion. You guys are stronger than most of us white people."



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REFLECTION:

QUESTION #1

How might the interaction between Jeanette Espinoza and her friend ended differently if her friend chose to engage the conversation with Jeanette?

1

QUESTION #2

How does white fragility promote racism?

2

QUESTION #3

What are the benefits of white people accepting their privilege? How can acknowledgement of privilege help us engage in meaningful discussion and curb racism?

3



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT WHITE FRAGILITY (FROM JESSICA CAPORUSCIO)

www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/white-fragility-definition

DECONSTRUCTING WHITE PRIVILEGE W/ DR. ROBIN DIANGELO (FROM GCORR)

r2hub.org/library/vital-conversations-racism-dr-robin-diangelo

BOOKS:

- *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* by Carol Anderson (Bloomsbury, 2016)
- *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018)
- *White Tears/Brown Scars* by Ruby Hamad (Boston: Beacon Press 2020)



EXAMPLE(S) CONTINUED:

"The fact that you even suggest Black people are 'used to' talking about racism and that it's ok for our children to face hard conversations lets me know exactly where you stand."

The white woman burst into tears. Subsequently, the conversation ended abruptly.

This story illustrates how white fragility seeps into everyday conversation. Great harm is done by vehemently denying white privilege, abandoning the discussion, and perpetuating the racist behavior.

*Source: Espinoza, Jeanette C., "When Your Fear of Being Called a Racist Supersedes Fighting Racism," <https://aninjusticemag.com/when-your-fear-of-being-called-a-racist-supersedes-fighting-racism-6ca7a38ebec3>