

White Fragility

- All white people are invested in, and collude, with racism. It is the way you were raised, where you raised and how you have been socialized into the racist culture in which you were born. Once you get over denying it, you can be eager to understand your collusion and how to stop colluding. If you are white, you are racist and without a lifetime of conscious effort you always will be.
- The definition of racism includes the acknowledgments that whites hold social and institutional power over people of color.
- Racism is a white problem.
- Align your professed values with affirmative action.
- Two ideologies make it difficult for white people to fully explore their experience:
 1. Individualism and the idea that each of us is unique and stand apart from others even those within our social groups.
 2. Objectivity, and being told that it is possible to be free of all bias.
- Guilt protects ignorance and it protects things the way they are unless it's used for change.
- Set your sense of uniqueness and ask, "I am white, and I have had X experience. How has X shaped me as being white?"
- If your definition of being racist is someone who holds a conscious dislike of people because of race, then it is true you are not racist. However, that is not the definition of racism. Ask how this new lens might change my definition.
- Under the skin there is no such thing as race..
- Colonization = all men are created equal
 1. America was built on slaves
 2. Indigenous people were killed as genocide
 3. Land from Mexico annexed
 4. Women not able to vote
- Jefferson asked "**why** are blacks inferior" and set the stage vs asking the real question to help end the debate "**are** blacks inferior".
- American courts decided who was white: people who are white got to decide who was white.
- Irish and Italian weren't originally considered white but got assimilated.
- Race is a product of social forces – and has divided itself along working classes:
 1. This meant that poor white people weren't considered white in the beginning
 2. Poor whites were brought into the class of white to take the focus off the rich
- If there is social group that exists, I will gain information about that group from society around me and this information helps me make sense about that group.
- We are taught that prejudice is bad, therefore we deny the reality. To say we have prejudice means we are bad and we should be ashamed and defend our character vs being curious about the racial prejudices we have absorbed through the society around us. So that we might change them. This means we protect our own prejudices.
- Prejudice = discrimination or discomfort. Everyone has prejudice and everyone discriminates
- Racism is structure not an event – think about struggles of women. Men had to grant suffrage to women. Backed up by law and society.

- Ideology is reinforced through schools, churches, advertising
 1. Individualism
 2. Capitalism
 3. Democracy
 4. Consumerism
 5. Meritocracy
- “Those who don’t work as hard aren’t as successful” – dichotomy even when the structure works against people succeeding.
- Only white can be racist because whites hold all the power to hold back people of colour.
- Racial disparity makes it hard to remove these systems.
- Bird in a cage – interlocking systems prevent the bird from escaping but we are pressed up against the bird cage and can’t see the bird cage....we need to step back.
- Individual whites are against racism but they still benefit from systems that benefit from whites as a group.
 1. A system of advantage based on race.
 2. These advantages are known as white privilege.
 3. Taken for granted by whites – schools, government, community, workplace
- White people face barriers but not the same barriers as people of colour.
- Whiteness and access to resources = self-worth, visibility, positive expectations, psychological freedom from the tether of race, freedom of movement, belonging and sense of entitlement.
- Jackie Robinson – first man good enough to play major league baseball or the first man whites allowed to play baseball? Whites controlled the institution of baseball and if they didn’t allow it, he never would have played.
- Black History Month – means white history is the norm
- **White Supremacy** - describes the culture we live in; the deeper premise that supports the idea whites are normal human and people of colour are less
 1. Deep south killing people based on colour, marching with torches and far right rebelling against the removal of statues
 2. An alternate definition doesn’t focus on individuals and their actions
 3. Overarching political, economic and political system of domination
 4. Racism is a structure not an event – associating white supremacy with the historic imagery of the individuals with torches allows racism to exist
 5. Invisible term and it’s not studied, never acknowledged, therefore supposedly doesn’t exist
- Whites control the systems:
 - 10 Richest Americans = 100% white (7 of which are global top 10)
 - US Congress = 90% white
 - US Governors = 96% white
 - Top US Military Advisors = 100% white
 - US President and VP = 100% white
 - US House Freedom Caucus = 99% white
 - US Presidential Cabinet = 95% white
 - People who decide which tv shows we see = 93% white

- People who decide which books we read = 90% white
- People who decide which news we see = 85% white
- People who decide which music we listen to = 95% white
- People who directed the 100 top grossing films of all time worldwide = 95% white (99% men)
- Teachers = 82% white
- College professors = 84% white
- Owners of NFL football team = 97% white
- White supremacy originated in the west but has been adopted globally.
- White dominance is taken for granted and norms are reinforced to support those systems
- Did your parents teach you everyone is created equal? Did your parents have black friends? Did black people live in your neighbourhood? Did you sit together in the cafeteria? Have you ever had a black teacher?
- Race is encoded in geography – and can tell you if the neighbourhood is going up or down. Why do we live in different neighbourhoods and go to different schools? White neighbourhoods are described as safe, clean, social and black as bad, crime ridden, dangerous.
- How do we interact across geographical lines?
- Supermarket and a child and mom shopping see a black man across the aisle. The child shouts “mommy, that man’s skin is black” and the mom immediately feels anxiety and tells the child to shush. But if that same child had said the same man is handsome it would have gotten a chuckle. Why do we shush our kids when explaining race? This is racial socialization where the child learns:
 1. It is taboo to talk about race
 2. To identify aspects that are different from our own and sometimes less than (ie wheelchair)
 3. We lower our voice when we use the word Black as if it’s a bad thing
- Colour-blind racism exists because it changes over time. The President said “there are very fine people on both sides”. Systems of oppression are deeply rooted and will not go away with legislation. Inequitable distribution of resources still exists. Colour-blind racism adapts to cultural changes. If we pretend there is no racism, then there can be no racism. During MLK it was acceptable to admit you were a racist, until it was televised and people witnessed people being disbursed with firehoses during peaceful protest and beaten at lunch counters legislation was passed. After the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964 it was less acceptable for whites to admit to racial prejudice. Whites didn’t want to be associated with what they saw on tv.
- MLK – “I want to be judged upon the content of my character and not the colour of my skin.” White public jumped on this as a way ease tensions and pretend we don’t see race. Reducing King’s work to this simplistic idea is an example of how movements for social change are coopted, stripped of their initial challenge to be used against the cause from which they originated.
 1. If you say “race matters” you are supposedly racist therefore, it’s racist to acknowledge race...this is the trap
 2. Consider colour-blind ideology from the viewpoint of someone from colour. When you say “I don’t see you as Black” means you don’t understand the different experience in life and is not helpful in any way. If you are going to acknowledge racism you need to acknowledge this reality, don’t project your reality onto someone else i.e., I feel welcome at work so you must too.

3. Racial bias is real and it's denial means we're not dealing with it. Pointing out to a colleague that their hiring practices are discriminatory would be met with denial, hurt and shame. This defensiveness means we think discrimination can only be intentional.
 4. We deny we have cross-race relationships at schools, work, life.
- Saying this is a bad neighbourhood means it's a Black neighbourhood and points out the racial boundaries between "us" and "them".
 1. Safe from what? Sheltered from what?
 - Our educational institutions were designed to reproduce racial inequality. Cultural racism and superiority starts in kindergarten even though they're being taught to see everyone as equal.
 - Millennials are committed to colour-blindness without knowing it.
 1. 41% feel that government pays too much attention to minorities
 2. 48% of people think it's as big a problem to discriminate against whites as people of colour
 3. Most think the election of Barack Obama means we're passed racial post-racial.
 4. After a racial joke, "relax it's only a joke"
 - Example, parenting class:
 1. Parenting class where you form your network, all white attendees.
 2. Your doctor is white, the nurses at the hospitals are white.
 3. Videos you watched were about white babies being born.
 4. People who do the laundry at the hospital, staff the cafeteria, maintenance staff are people of colour.
 - 100 Most Beautiful People – are mostly white.
 - Heroes and heroines of history are white in our textbooks and on the walls within the schools
 1. Makes you feel like you belong.
 2. Sets the tone for what you reach for in life.
 3. All the books you had to read as a kid – all white writers – reinforce norms as these books are common to all of us.
 4. Any representation of human – flesh coloured make-up, emojis, Adam and Eve, Jesus, anatomy of human body.
 - Make America Great Again. The good 'ol days = the past was great for white people, not for others.
 - Desegregation included bussing school kids into other neighbourhoods – but it was always Blacks being bussed into white neighbourhoods.
 - **White Flight** – if too many Black people move into a certain neighbourhood then there is a fear that crime will go up.
 1. Studies show it kicks in at 7%
 2. Reversed when real estate is short i.e., Brooklyn
 - **White Privilege** – legitimization of entitlement to ones resources and become defensive if we are not provided or being challenged to honouring those rights.
 1. Getting whites to realize that their race provides advantages is a huge effort and brings in defensiveness and denial
 2. Acknowledgment is only the first step, need to do something about it
 3. White racial innocence = people of colour should teach white people about racism.
 4. To ask people of colour about racism without first building a relationship and meeting them half-way by being vulnerable shows that we are not racially aware.

- Rather than change public education to be equal to all, we allow other people's children to be subjected to situations that are not acceptable to our own.
 1. Test scores from schools dictate funding.
 2. Low test scores are coded as being not white.
- Parents didn't make the effort to help make and keep black friends from my childhood.
- **Good/Bad Binary** – assumes only bad people are racist, from the south, dislike because of race, old, uneducated, ignorant, bigoted, whites.
 1. Making racism bad means you can't call anyone racist without it having deep and hurtful meaning which leads people to defend themselves rather than listen and learn.
 2. Means we can't discuss dynamics to understand.
 3. Racism is a system.
- If you're white, you are seen as white and treated as white, you have a white world view and white frame of reference = our race profoundly shapes us. We must understand how race has had an impact on our lives.
- I am not a racist therefore it is not my problem. And there is nothing more that I need to do.
- I should be using my position to understand, question and challenge racial inequality.
- **Colour Blind/Colour Celebrate** – claims that function in a similar way and exempt the person from any responsibility of/or participation in the problem. They take race off the table. They close rather than open any further exploration. This protects the status quo. For example, I can't be racist because:
 1. "I have friends that are Black".
 2. "Employees that are Black".
 3. "I married someone Black".
 4. "I have Black children".
- Think iceberg and look what is below the waterline as racism goes deep.
- Teaching your kids that everyone should be treated equal missed the point as there are different needs for different people.
- We have different experience from a gender perspective – but why not race?
- Many whites believe if friends of colour are not talking about racism that it isn't at play. This silence is the way that it manifests. Many people of colour try to talk about racism with their white friends but their friends got defensive (I have lot of Black friends so I'm not racist) or invalidated their experiences so they stopped sharing their experiences.
 1. "I was taught to treat everyone the same" which stops you from going deeper.
 2. "I marched in the 60's therefore I cannot be racist" but back in the 60's racism was said to be biological. How many people from the 60's had cross racial relationships?
 3. "I was the minority at my school so I was the one who experienced racism" while a white person can be picked on and experience race prejudice and discrimination not racism. If you group the two terms together then you minimize racism.
 4. "My parents were not racist and taught me not to be racist" but your parents could not have taught you because it's not possible as it's imbedded in the system. You still lived a segregated life (there are degrees).
 5. "Children are so much more open" but research shows that children internalize their environment to create a hierarchy – experiment shows children are openly prejudice to a certain age and then they knowingly hide it.

6. "Focusing on racism is what divides us" but not talking about it doesn't make it go away and help white people hold white racial power. Whites insist on not talking about race to preserve unity. Challenge rather than protect racism.
 - It's impossible not to be prejudiced as the human brain doesn't work that way.
 - Better to teach your children how to recognize and challenge prejudice rather than deny it.
- In the 60's people compared themselves against the people in white hoods, today it's the far right marching in SC.
- Move from am I or am I not racist...to....am I actively seeking to interrupt racism in this context and more importantly how do I know?
- My stereotypes about Japanese people are not the same as my stereotypes of Chinese.
- Examine your feelings when you see Black people on the opposite side of the street, on tv or as a punchline in a joke.
- White people need Black people so white people can stand up their ideal of privilege and rise.
- **Affirmative Action** – misunderstood and miscommunicated.
 1. Hiring practices are not based on quotas but rather people of colour get an equal opportunity to apply.
 2. White women have been the biggest beneficiary of Affirmative Action.
 3. Blacks are the least represented in the corporate world.
- Kneeling during the anthem at NFL games was turned into a flag issue by the President and given legitimacy by comments of players being lucky not to be "shot in the head" if they lived in North Korea.
- Blindside – story about Michael Orr is popular among whites but hated by Blacks due to the stereotypes surrounding Michael. Good/Bad Binary. White Privilege. Colour blindness. This movie has them all.
- Educating whites on racism is often met with the response of withdrawal, anger, emotional incapacitation, guilt, argumentation and cognitive dissidents all of which force the facilitator to soften the message on racism. Others claim that they've already had this training or that they already know this.
- **Habitus** (Anthropologist explanation) = The Socialization of cultural norms.
 1. When messages are repeated over and over again they become norms. Equilibrium of field (situation), Capital (perceived power) and Habitus (internalized view of status).
 2. These are a set of rules that are not necessarily taught but sometimes formed over time.
 3. If someone disrupts the equilibrium and brings discomfort we will do our best to readjust by going back to our familiar ways.
 4. We don't respond consciously but rather unconsciously.
 5. Using school as an example, Field can be explained by location of person for example teacher staff room or playground. Capital can be explained by position within the school such as maintenance staff versus receptionist.
 6. When a white person is challenged on actions and behaviors being racist habitus takes over until equilibrium is restored. Defensive mechanisms take over including the feeling of guilt, denial, silence and leaving the situation.
 7. A great example is when a person of color not protecting white peoples feelings about race when explaining the situation. Or a challenge to individualism. Or a reluctance for a person of color to talk about their experience with racism.

- We have to “shift” our definition and understanding of racism. This reluctance maintains white power. Because the ability to determine which narratives are authorized and which ones are suppressed is the foundation of cultural dominance. Without re-examining white perspectives and listening to black perspectives we are just reaffirming our white perspectives.
 1. **White Privilege** – legitimization of entitlement to one’s resources and become defensive if we are not provided or being challenged to honouring those rights.
 2. **Bullying** – white people’s ability to sustain challenges to our racial positions is limited and in this way “fragile”. The effects of our responses are not fragile at all, they are quite powerful because they take advantage of historical and institutional power and control. We wield this power to control situations ie., kneeling and the flag. Idea is to make it so uncomfortable that you back off and give up. This is the socialization of dominance and white supremacy.
- What would our world look like if Black people could give white people feedback and we could graciously accept that feedback and work to change the behaviour. Niceness is not courageous we need is courageous to get racism off the table.
 1. We will never get there if we come at it from a dominate point of view that only intentionally mean people can participate in racism.
 2. We need to lose the thought that if we are good we are not racist.
- Navigating White fragility is survival to people of color. Today, feedback to whites on racism means without causing white fragility is to not give feedback at all. Therefore, to not upset anyone white people want you to follow these white rules:
 1. Do not give me feedback on racism under any circumstances. If you insist, please follow the additional rules.
 2. You need to use proper tone and it must be given without emotion.
 3. There must be trust between us i.e., you must trust that I am not racist before giving me feedback on my racism.
 4. Our relationship must be issue free. If there are issues between us you cannot give me feedback on racism until these unrelated issues are resolved.
 5. Feedback must be given immediately. If you wait too long, the feedback will be discounted because it was not given sooner.
 6. Give me feedback privately, regardless if the incident happened in front of other people. It’s up to you to protect me.
 7. You must be as indirect as possible. If you provide direct feedback you will be the aggressor and then it’s up to you to make the repair.
 8. As a white person, I must feel completely safe at all times during discussions about race. Having any discussion about racist assumptions or patterns will cause me to feel unsafe. So, you will need to rebuild my trust by never giving me feedback again. Note, safe means comfortable!
 9. Highlighting my racial privilege invalidates the privileges that I experienced. For example, classism/sexism/heterosexism/agism/ablism/transphobia. Therefore, we will have to turn the discussion about how you oppressed me.
 10. You must always acknowledge my intentions (always good) and agree that my good intentions cancel out the impact of my behaviour.

11. To suggest my behaviour had a racist impact means you misunderstood me. You will need to allow me to explain myself until you understand it is your misunderstanding.
- What feedback needs to be about:
 1. How, when and where you give me feedback is irrelevant. It is the feedback I want and need. Understanding it is hard to give I will take the feedback any time it is given. If this feedback makes me feel uncomfortable it is up to me to build my racial stamina so I can accept this feedback.
 2. Saying thank you. I did not set the system up but I have used it to my advantage. It is up to me to interrupt the system. I need to work hard to change my role within this system but I can't do it alone. This leads me to gratitude when others want to help me.
 - Comes down to this, you need to trust that I am not racist before I can work on my racism. Whites want you to consider the following guidelines to build trust including - don't judge, don't make assumptions, assume good intentions, speak your truth, respect, be nice.
 - When we accept that the ubiquitous power of white supremacy cannot be avoided and has nothing to do with intention, it is freeing. We can focus on how not if our racism can manifest. Move beyond the good/bad binary we can become eager to identify our racist patterns. Because interrupting those patterns becomes more important than how we think we look to others. Stopping the racist patterns must be more important than trying to convince others that we don't have them. We do have them and people of colour know we do have them!
 - **White tears** – how whites think racial injustice impacts white people. White woman's tears trigger feelings in Blacks about the murder of Emmett Till...when a white woman cries a black man gets hurt. When a white woman cries in the room all the energy and attention goes to her and not the issue being discussed and once again the Black people in the room are being abandoned and/or blamed. For males, we show up with dominance and intimidation:
 1. Speaking first, last and most often.
 2. Arrogant and disingenuous invalidation of racial inequality with "just playing the devil's advocate".
 3. Simplistic view of how to solve issues.
 4. People just need to.....
 5. Hostile withdrawal.
 6. Channel switching.
 7. I recommend this book.
 - Interrupt racism:
 1. Minimize defensiveness.
 2. Demonstrate our vulnerability.
 3. Demonstrate our curiosity.
 4. Allow for growth.
 5. Stretch our world view.
 6. Demonstrate action.
 7. Build authentic relationships and trust.
 8. Interrupt comfort.
 9. Interrupt superiority.
 - Do the research and get informed. Treat it as life and death diagnosis from your doctor and the research you would do after receiving a diagnosis.

- Recognize that you can't understand all the nuances as you are not Black but build a bridge to understand the dynamics. Ask how to move forward and take action.
- Breathe. Listen. Reflect.
- Goal is to break with your own white solidarity.
- The number one question this author gets is "how can I alert someone about their racism without enacting white fragility?" It's the same as how I would ask you about racism without enacting your white fragility. Some suggestions:
 1. Try to affirm a person's perspective before providing yours.
 2. When you do share your point of view, point the finger inward not outward ie "from my own experiences I have come to understand....."
 3. Let go of the desire to change other people. Make this about your own journey breaking with past socializations.