WHITE FRAGILITY

by Robin DiAngelo

[4] Mills, C. (1999). The racial contract. NY: Cornell University Press; Feagin, J. R. (2006). Systematic Racism: A theory of oppression. New York: Routledge.

[5] McIntosh, P. (1988). White privilege and male privilege: A personal account of coming to see correspondence through work in women's studies. In M. Anderson, & P. Hill Collins (Eds.), Race, class, and gender: An anthology (pp. 94-105). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

[6] Frankenberg, R. (1997). Introduction: Local Whitenesses, localizing Whiteness. In R. Morrison, T. (1992). Playing in the dark. New York: Random House.; Tatum, B. (1997). "Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?": And other conversations about race. New York: Basic Books.

[7] Allen, D. (1996). Knowledge, politics, culture, and gender: A discourse perspective. Canadian Journal of Nursing Research, *28*(1), 95-102.

[8] Frankenberg (Ed.), Displacing Whiteness: Essays in social and cultural criticism (pp. 1-33.). Durham, NC: Duke University Press; Frankenberg, R. (1993). The social construction of Whiteness: White women, race matters. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

[9] Fine, M. (1997). Introduction. In M. Fine, L. Weis, C. Powell & L. Wong (Eds.), Off White: Readings on race, power and society (p. vii-xii). New York: Routledge; Dyer, R. (1997). White. New York: Routledge.; Sleeter, C. (1996). White silence, White solidarity. In N. Ignatiev, & J. Garvey (Eds.), Race Traitors. New York: Routledge; How White teachers construct race. In C. McCarthy & W. Crichlow (Eds.), Race identity and representation in education (pp 157-171).

Universalism & Individualism

Whites are taught to see their perspectives as objective and representative of reality[15]. The belief in objectivity, coupled with positioning white people as outside of culture (and thus the norm for humanity), allows whites to view themselves as universal humans who can represent all of human experience. This is evidenced through an unracialized identity or location, which functions as a kind of blindness; an inability to think about Whiteness as an identity or as a "state" of being that would or could have an impact on one's life. In this position, Whiteness is not recognized or named by white people, and a universal reference point is assumed. White people are just people. Within this construction, whites can represent humanity, while people of color, who are never just people but always most particularly black people, Asian people, etc., can only represent their own racialized experiences[16].

The discourse of universalism functions similarly to the discourse of individualism but instead of declaring that we all need to see each other as individuals (everyone is different), the person declares

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 expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress, leading to what I refer to as White Fragility. White Fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium. This paper explicates the dynamics of **White Fragility**.

that we all need to see each other as human beings (everyone is the same). Of course we are all humans, and I do not critique universalism in general, but when applied to racism, universalism functions to deny the significance of race and the advantages of being white. Further, universalism assumes that whites and people of color have the same realities, the same experiences in the same contexts (i.e. I feel comfortable in this majority white classroom, so you must too), the same responses from others, and assumes that the same doors are open to all. Acknowledging racism as a system of privilege conferred on whites challenges claims to universalism.

At the same time that whites are taught to see their interests and perspectives as universal, they are also taught to value the individual and to see themselves as individuals rather than as part of a racially socialized group. Individualism erases history and hides the ways in which wealth has been distributed and accumulated over generations to benefit whites today. It allows whites to view themselves as unique and original, outside of socialization and unaffected by the relentless racial messages in the culture. Individualism also allows whites to distance

er 2 (22-34). Washington, D.C.: A.K. Rice Institute.

Yamamoto, G. (2001). Something about this subject makes it hard to name. In M. Andersen, & P. H. Collins (Eds.), Race, class and gender: An Anthology (pp. 89-93). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Footnotes

[1] Fine, M. (1997). Witnessing Whiteness. In M. Fine, L. Weis, C. Powell, & L. Wong, (Eds.), Off White: Readings on race, power, and society (pp. 57-65). New York: Routledge.

[2] Whitehead, K.A. & Wittig, M.A. (2005). Discursive Management of Resistance to a Multicultural Education Programme. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 1(3), pp. 267284; Horton, J. & Scott, D. (2004). White students' voices in multicultural teacher education preparation. Multicultural Education, 11(4) Retreived from http://findarticles.com/articles/mi_qa3935/is_200407/ai_n9414143/; McGowan, J. (2000). Multicultural teaching: African-American faculty classroom teaching experiences in predominantly White colleges and universities. Multicultural Education, 8(2), 19-22; O'Donnell, J. (1998). Engaging students' recognition of racial identity. In Chavez, R.C. & O'Donnell, J. (Eds.), Speaking the unpleasant: the politics of (non) engagement in the multicultural education terrain (pp. 56-68). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

[3] Hilliard, A. (1992). Racism: Its origins and how it works. Paper presented at the meeting of the Mid-West Association for the Education of Young Children, Madison, WI.

I am a white woman. I am standing beside a black woman. We are facing a group of white people who are seated in front of us. We are in their workplace, and have been hired by their employer to lead them in a dialogue about race. The room is filled with tension and charged with hostility. I have just presented a definition of racism that includes the acknowledgment that whites hold social and institutional power over people of color. A white man is pounding his fist on the table. His face is red and he is furious. As he pounds he yells, "White people have been discriminated against for 25 years! A white person can't get a job anymore!" I look around the room and see 40 employed people, all white. There are no people of color in this workplace. Something is happening here, and it isn't based in the racial reality of the workplace. I am feeling unnerved by this man's disconnection with that reality, and his lack of sensitivity to the impact this is having on my cofacilitator, the only person of color in the room. Why is this white man so angry? Why is he being so careless about the impact of his anger? Why are all the other white people either sitting in silent agreement with him or tuning out? We have, after all, only articulated a definition of racism.

References

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE). (1994). Teacher education pipeline: Schools, colleges, and departments of education. Washington, DC:

Casey J. Dawkins. (2004). Recent Evidence on the Continuing Causes of Black-White Residential Segregation. Journal of Urban Affairs, 26(3), 379-400.

Frankenberg, R. (2001). Mirage of an unmarked Whiteness. In B. Rasmussen, E. Klinenberg, I. Nexica, M. Wray (Ed.), The making and unmaking of Whiteness (pp. 72-96). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Macedo, D., & Bartolome, L. (1999). Dancing with bigotry: Beyond the politics of tolerance. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Snyder, T. (1998). Digest of Education Statistics. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Department of Education.

Van Dijk, T.A. (1993). Analyzing racism through discourse analysis: Some methodological reflections. In J. H. Stanfield, & R. M. Dennis (Eds.), Race and ethnicity in research method (pp.92-134). London: Sage.

Wells, L. (1985). A group-as-a-whole perspective and its theoretical roots. In A. Coleman, & M. Gellier (Eds.), Group Relations Read-

themselves from the actions of their racial group and demand to be granted the benefit of the doubt, as individuals, in all cases. A corollary to this unracialized identity is the ability to recognize Whiteness as something that is significant and that operates in society, but to not see how it relates to one's own life. In this form, a white person recognizes Whiteness as real, but as the individual problem of other "bad" white people[17].

Given the ideology of individualism, whites often respond defensively when linked to other whites as a group or "accused" of collectively benefiting from racism, because as individuals, each white person is "different" from any other white person and expects to be seen as such. This narcissism is not necessarily the result of a consciously held belief that whites are superior to others (although that may play a role), but a result of the white racial insulation ubiquitous in dominant culture[18]; a general white inability to see non-white perspectives as significant, except in sporadic and impotent reflexes, which have little or no long-term momentum or political usefulness[19].

White people in North America live in a social environment that protects and insulates them from race-based stress.[^1] Fine[1] identifies this insulation when she observes "… how Whiteness accrues privilege and status; gets itself surrounded by protective pillows of resources and/or benefits of the doubt; how Whiteness repels gossip and voyeurism and instead demands dignity". Whites are rarely without these "protective pillows," and when they are, it is usually temporary and by choice. This insulated environment of racial privilege builds white expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress.

For many white people, a single required multicultural education course taken in college, or required "cultural competency training" in their workplace, is the only time they may encounter a direct and sustained challenge to their racial understandings. But even in this arena, not all multicultural courses or training programs talk directly about racism, much less address white privilege. It is far more the norm for these courses and programs to use racially coded language such as "urban," "inner city," and "disadvantaged" but to rarely use "white"

4

Whites invoke these seemingly contradictory discourses—we are either all unique or we are all the same—interchangeably. Both discourses work to deny white privilege and the significance of race. Further, on the cultural level, being an individual or being a human outside of a racial group is a privilege only afforded to white people. In other words, people of color are almost always seen as "having a race" and described in racial terms ("the black man") but whites rarely are ("the man"), allowing whites to see themselves as objective and non-racialized. In turn, being seen (and seeing ourselves) as individuals outside of race frees whites from the psychic burden of race in a wholly racialized society. Race and racism become their problems, not ours. Challenging these frameworks becomes a kind of unwelcome shock to the system.

The disavowal of race as an organizing factor, both of individual white consciousness and the institutions of society at large, is necessary to support current structures of capitalism and domination, for without it, the correlation between the distribution of social resources and unearned white privilege would be evident[20]. The existence of structural in-

Talking directly about white power and privilege, in addition to providing much needed information and shared definitions, is also in itself a powerful interruption of common (and oppressive) discursive patterns around race. At the same time, white people often need to reflect upon racial information and be allowed to make connections between the information and their own lives. Educators can encourage and support white participants in making their engagement a point of analysis. White Fragility doesn't always manifest in overt ways; silence and withdrawal are also functions of fragility. Who speaks, who doesn't speak, when, for how long, and with what emotional valence are all keys to understanding the relational patterns that hold oppression in place[52]. Viewing white anger, defensiveness, silence, and withdrawal in response to issues of race through the framework of White Fragility may help frame the problem as an issue of stamina-building, and thereby guide our interventions accordingly.

Many white people have never been given direct or complex information about racism before, and often cannot explicitly see, feel, or understand it[48]. People of color are generally much more aware of racism on a personal level, but due to the wider society's silence and denial of it, often do not have a macro-level framework from which to analyze their experiences[49]. Further, dominant society "assigns" different roles to different groups of color[50], and a critical consciousness about racism varies not only between individuals within groups, but also between groups. For example, many African Americans relate having been "prepared" by parents to live in a racist society, while many Asian heritage people say that racism was never directly discussed in their homes[51]. A macro-level analysis may offer a framework to understand different interpretations and performances across and between racial groups. In this way, all parties benefit and efforts are not solely focused on whites (which works to re-center Whiteness).

or "overadvantaged" or "privileged." This racially coded language reproduces racist images and perspectives while it simultaneously reproduces the comfortable illusion that race and its problems are what "they" have, not us. Reasons why the facilitators of these courses and trainings may not directly name the dynamics and beneficiaries of racism range from the lack of a valid analysis of racism by white facilitators, personal and economic survival strategies for facilitators of color, and the overall pressure from management to keep the content comfortable and palatable for whites. However, if and when an educational program does directly address racism and the privileging of whites, common white responses include anger, withdrawal, emotional incapacitation, guilt, argumentation, and cognitive dissonance (all of which reinforce the pressure on facilitators to avoid directly addressing racism). So-called progressive whites may not respond with anger, but may still insulate themselves via claims that they are beyond the need for engaging with the content because they "already had a class on this" or "already know this." These reactions are often seen in anti-racist education endeavors as forms of resistance to the challenge of internalized dominance[2]. These reactions do indeed function as equality undermines the claim that privilege is simply a reflection of hard work and virtue. Therefore, inequality must be hidden or justified as resulting from lack of effort[21]. Individualism accomplishes both of these tasks. At the same time, the individual presented as outside these relations cannot exist without its disavowed other. Thus, an essential dichotomy is formed between specifically raced others and the unracialized individual. Whites have deep investments in race, for the abstract depends on the particular[22]; they need raced others as the backdrop against which they may rise[23]. Exposing this dichotomy destabilizes white identity.

resistance, but it may be useful to also conceptualize them as the result of the reduced psychosocial stamina that racial insulation inculcates. I call this lack of racial stamina "White Fragility."

> *[*1]: Although white racial insulation is somewhat mediated by social class (with poor and working class urban whites being generally less racially insulated than suburban or rural whites), the larger social environment insulates and protects whites as a group through institutions, cultural representations, media, school textbooks, movies, advertising, dominant discourses, etc.*

Although mainstream definitions of racism are typically some variation of individual "race prejudice", which anyone of any race can have, Whiteness scholars define racism as encompassing economic, political, social, and cultural structures, actions, and beliefs that systematize and perpetuate an unequal distribution of privileges, resources and power between white people and people of color[3]. This unequal distribution benefits whites and disadvantages people of color overall and as a group. Racism is not fluid in the U.S.; it does not flow back and forth, one day benefiting whites and another day (or even era) benefiting people of color. The direction of power between whites and people of color is historic, traditional, normalized, and

Entitlement to racial comfort

In the dominant position, whites are almost always racially comfortable and thus have developed unchallenged expectations to remain so[24]. Whites have not had to build tolerance for racial discomfort and thus when racial discomfort arises, whites typically respond as if something is "wrong," and blame the person or event that triggered the discomfort (usually a person of color). This blame results in a socially-sanctioned array of counter-moves against the perceived source of the discomfort, including: penalization; retaliation; isolation; ostracization; and refusal to continue engagement. White insistence on racial comfort ensures that racism will not be faced. This insistence also functions to punish those who break white codes of comfort. Whites often confuse comfort with safety and state that we don't feel safe when what we really mean is that we don't feel comfortable. This trivializes our history of brutality towards people of color and perverts the reality of that history. Because we don't think complexly about racism, we don't ask ourselves what safety means from a position of societal dominance, or the impact on people of color, given our history, for whites to complain about our safety when we are merely ***talking*** about racism.

level. The goal is to generate the development of perspectives and skills that enable all people, regardless of racial location, to be active initiators of change. Since all individuals who live within a racist system are enmeshed in its relations, this means that all are responsible for either perpetuating or transforming that system. However, although all individuals play a role in keeping the system active, the responsibility for change is not equally shared. White racism is ultimately a white problem and the burden for interrupting it belongs to white people[46]. Conversations about Whiteness might best happen within the context of a larger conversation about racism. It is useful to start at the micro level of analysis, and move to the macro, from the individual out to the interpersonal, societal and institutional. Starting with the individual and moving outward to the ultimate framework for racism – Whiteness – allows for the pacing that is necessary for many white people for approaching the challenging study of race. In this way, a discourse on Whiteness becomes part of a process rather than an event[47].

deeply embedded in the fabric of U.S. society[4]. Whiteness itself refers to the specific dimensions of racism that serve to elevate white people over people of color. This definition counters the dominant representation of racism in mainstream education as isolated in discrete behaviors that some individuals may or may not demonstrate, and goes beyond naming specific privileges.[5] Whites are theorized as actively shaped, affected, defined, and elevated through their racialization and the individual and collective consciousness' formed within it[6]. Recognizing that the terms I am using are not "theory neutral 'descriptors' but theory laden constructs inseparable from systems of injustice"[7], I use the terms white and Whiteness to describe a social process. Frankenberg[8] defines Whiteness as multi-dimensional:

> *Whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a 'standpoint,' a place from which White people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, 'Whiteness' refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed. (p.1)*

Frankenberg and other theorists[9] use Whiteness to signify a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically and culturally produced, and

Conclusion

White people often believe that multicultural / anti-racist education is only necessary for those who interact with "minorities" or in "diverse" environments. However, the dynamics discussed here suggest that it is critical that all white people build the stamina to sustain conscious and explicit engagement with race. When whites posit race as non-operative because there are few, if any, people of color in their immediate environments, Whiteness is reinscribed ever more deeply[45]. When whites only notice "raced others," we reinscribe Whiteness by continuing to posit Whiteness as universal and non Whiteness as other. Further, if we can't listen to or comprehend the perspectives of people of color, we cannot bridge cross-racial divides. A continual retreat from the discomfort of authentic racial engagement results in a perpetual cycle that works to hold racism in place.

While anti-racist efforts ultimately seek to transform institutionalized racism, anti-racist education may be most effective by starting at the micro

Racial Arrogance

Ideological racism includes strongly positive images of the white self as well as strongly negative images of racial "others"[25]. This self-image engenders a self-perpetuating sense of entitlement because many whites believe their financial and professional successes are the result of their own efforts while ignoring the fact of white privilege. Because most whites have not been trained to think complexly about racism in schools[26] or mainstream discourse, and because it benefits white dominance not to do so, we have a very limited understanding of racism. Yet dominance leads to racial arrogance, and in this racial arrogance, whites have no compunction about debating the knowledge of people who have thought complexly about race. Whites generally feel free to dismiss these informed perspectives rather than have the humility to acknowledge that they are unfamiliar, reflect on them further, or seek more information. This intelligence and expertise are often trivialized and countered with simplistic platitudes (i.e. "People just need to…").

which are intrinsically linked to dynamic relations of domination. Whiteness is thus conceptualized as a constellation of processes and practices rather than as a discrete entity (i.e. skin color alone). Whiteness is dynamic, relational, and operating at all times and on myriad levels. These processes and practices include basic rights, values, beliefs, perspectives and experiences purported to be commonly shared by all but which are actually only consistently afforded to white people. Whiteness Studies begin with the premise that racism and white privilege exist in both traditional and modern forms, and rather than work to prove its existence, work to reveal it. This article will explore the dynamics of one aspect of Whiteness and its effects, White Fragility.

Printed and distributed with the permission of Dr. Robin DAngelo

Because of white social, economic and political power within a white dominant culture, whites are positioned to legitimize people of color's assertions of racism. Yet whites are the least likely to see, understand, or be invested in validating those assertions and being honest about their consequences, which leads whites to claim that they disagree with perspectives that challenge their worldview, when in fact, they don't understand the perspective.Thus, they confuse not understanding with not agreeing. This racial arrogance, coupled with the need for racial comfort, also has whites insisting that people of color explain white racism in the "right" way. The right way is generally politely and rationally, without any show of emotional upset. When explained in a way that white people can see and understand, racism's validity may be granted (references to dynamics of racism that white people do not understand are usually rejected out of hand). However, whites are usually more receptive to validating white racism if that racism is constructed as residing in individual white people other than themselves.

perspectives, they can only reinscribe white perspectives as universal.

However, an assertion that whites do not engage with dynamics of racial discourse is somewhat misleading. White people do notice the racial locations of racial others and discuss this freely among themselves, albeit often in coded ways. Their refusal to directly acknowledge this race talk results in a kind of split consciousness that leads to the incoherence Bonilla-Silva documents above[44]. This denial also guarantees that the racial misinformation that circulates in the culture and frames their perspectives will be left unexamined. The continual retreat from the discomfort of authentic racial engagement in a culture infused with racial disparity limits the ability to form authentic connections across racial lines, and results in a perpetual cycle that works to hold racism in place.

Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States (2nd ed). New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

[50] Smith, Andrea (2005). Conquest: Sexual violence and American Indian genocide. Cambridge, MA: Southend Press.

[51] hooks, 1989 [citation missing publication title + page number]; Lee, T. (1996). Unraveling the "model-minority" stereotype: Listening to Asian-American youth. New York: Teachers College Press.

[52] Gee, J.P. (1999). An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method. London: Routledge; Powell, L. (1997). The achievement (k)not: Whiteness and 'Black Underachievement'. In M. Fine, L. Powell, C. Weis, &.L. Wong (Eds.), Off White: Readings on race, power and society (pp. 3 -12). New York: Routledge.

Originally published in the International Journal of Critical Pedagogy, Vol 3 (3) (2011) pp 54-70

der what conditions are those truth claims clung to most tenaciously?

Bonilla-Silva[41] documents a manifestation of White Fragility in his study of color-blind white racism. He states, "Because the new racial climate in America forbids the open expression of racially based feelings, views, and positions, when whites discuss issues that make them uncomfortable, they become almost incomprehensible – I, I, I, I don't mean, you know, but…- "[42] . Probing forbidden racial issues results in verbal incoherence - digressions, long pauses, repetition, and self-corrections. He suggests that this incoherent talk is a function of talking about race in a world that insists race does not matter. This incoherence is one demonstration that many white people are unprepared to engage, even on a preliminary level, in an exploration of their racial perspectives that could lead to a shift in their understanding of racism. This lack of preparedness results in the maintenance of white power because the ability to determine which narratives are authorized and which are suppressed is the foundation of cultural domination[43]. Further, this lack of preparedness has further implications, for if whites cannot engage with an exploration of alternate racial

Triggers

White Fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to restate white racial equilibrium. Racial stress results from an interruption to what is racially familiar. These interruptions can take a variety of forms and come from a range of sources, including:

- Suggesting that a white person's viewpoint comes from a racialized frame of reference (challenge to objectivity);
- People of color talking directly about their racial perspectives (challenge to white racial codes);
- People of color choosing not to protect the racial feelings of white people in regards to race (challenge to white racial expectations and need/entitlement to racial comfort);
- People of color not being willing to tell their stories or answer questions about their racial experiences (challenge to colonialist relations);
- A fellow white not providing agreement with one's interpretations (challenge to white solidarity);

Racial Belonging

White people enjoy a deeply internalized, largely unconscious sense of racial belonging in U.S. society[27]. This racial belonging is instilled via the whiteness embedded in the culture at large. Everywhere we look, we see our own racial image reflected back to us – in our heroes and heroines, in standards of beauty, in our role-models and teachers, in our textbooks and historical memory, in the media, in religious iconography including the image of god himself, etc. In virtually any situation or image deemed valuable in dominant society, whites belong. Indeed, it is rare for most whites to experience a sense of not belonging, and such experiences are usually very temporary, easily avoidable situations. Racial belonging becomes deeply internalized and taken for granted. In dominant society, interruption of racial belonging is rare and thus destabilizing and frightening to whites.

Whites consistently choose and enjoy racial segregation. Living, working, and playing in racial segregation is unremarkable as long as it is not named or made explicitly intentional. For example, in many anti-racist endeavors, a common exercise is to separate into caucus groups by race in order to discuss issues

- Receiving feedback that one's behavior had a racist impact (challenge to white liberalism);
- Suggesting that group membership is significant (challenge to individualism);
- An acknowledgment that access is unequal between racial groups (challenge to meritocracy);
- Being presented with a person of color in a position of leadership (challenge to white authority);
- Being presented with information about other racial groups through, for example, movies in which people of color drive the action but are not in stereotypical roles, or multicultural education (challenge to white centrality).

In a white dominant environment, each of these challenges becomes exceptional. In turn, whites are often at a loss for how to respond in constructive ways. Whites have not had to build the cognitive or affective skills or develop the stamina that would allow for constructive engagement across racial divides. Bourdieu's concept of habitus[10] may be useful here. According to Bourdieu, habitus is a socialized subjectivity; a set of dispositions which generate practices and perceptions. As such, habitus only exists in, through and because of the practices of actors and their interaction with each other and with the rest of their environment. Based on the

specific to your racial group, and without the pressure or stress of other groups' presence. Generally, people of color appreciate this opportunity for racial fellowship, but white people typically become very uncomfortable, agitated and upset - even though this temporary separation is in the service of addressing racism. Responses include a disorienting sense of themselves as not just people, but most particularly white people; a curious sense of loss about this contrived and temporary separation which they don't feel about the real and on-going segregation in their daily lives; and anxiety about not knowing what is going on in the groups of color. The irony, again, is that most whites live in racial segregation every day, and in fact, are the group most likely to intentionally choose racial segregation (albeit obscured in racially coded language such as seeking "good schools" and "good neighborhoods"). This segregation is unremarkable until it is named as deliberate – i.e. "We are now going to separate by race for a short exercise."I posit that it is the intentionality that is so disquieting – as long as we don't mean to separate, as long as it "just happens" that we live segregated lives, we can maintain a (fragile) identity of racial innocence.

cation title + page number]

[44] Feagin, J. R. (2006). Systematic Racism: A theory of oppression. New York: Routledge; Flax, J. (1998). American dream in Black and White: The Clarence Thomas hearings. New York: Cornell University Press; hooks, b. (1992). Black looks: Race and representation. Boston, MA: South End Press; Morrison, T. (1992). Playing in the dark. New York: Random House.

[45] Derman-Sparks, L., Ramsey, P. & Olsen Edwards, J. (2006). What If All the Kids Are White?: Anti-bias Multicultural Education With Young Children And Families. New York: Teachers College Press.

[46] Derman-Sparks, L., & Phillips, C. (1997). Teaching/learning anti-racism: A developmental approach. New York: Teachers College Press; hooks, b. (1995). Killing rage. New York: Henry Holt & Company; Wise, T. (2003). Whites swim in racial preference. Retrieved from http://www.academic.udayton.edu/race/04needs/affirm20.htm.

[47] Nagda, B., Zuniga, X., & Sevig, T. (2002). Bridging differences through peer facilitated intergroup dialogues p. 115-132. In S. Hatcher (Ed.), Peer programs on a college campus: Theory, training, and the voices of the peers (pp. 25-41). San Diego, CA: New Resources.

[48] Trepagnier, B. (2006). Silent racism: How well-meaning white people perpetuate the racial divide. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers; Weber, L. (2001). Understanding race, class, gender, and sexuality: A conceptual framework. New York: McGraw-Hill.

[49] Sue, 2003; Bonilla-Silva, E. (2006). Racism without racists:

The language of violence that many whites use to describe anti-racist endeavors is not without significance, as it is another example of the way that White Fragility distorts and perverts reality. By employing terms that connote physical abuse, whites tap into the classic discourse of people of color (particularly African Americans) as dangerous and violent. This discourse perverts the actual direction of danger and violence between whites and others. The history of brutal, extensive, institutionalized and ongoing violence perpetrated by whites against people of color—slavery, genocide, lynching, whipping, forced sterilization and medical experimentation to mention a few—becomes profoundly trivialized when whites claim they don't feel safe or are under attack when in the rare situation of merely talking about race with people of color. The use of this discourse illustrates how fragile and ill-equipped most white people are to confront racial tensions, and their subsequent projection of this tension onto people of color[39]. Goldberg[40] argues that the questions surrounding racial discourse should not focus so much on how true stereotypes are, but how the truth claims they offer are a part of a larger worldview that authorizes and normalizes forms of domination and control. Further, it is relevant to ask: Un-

[34] Van Dijk, 1992 [citation missing publication title + page number]

[35] Marty, 1999; Van Dijk, 1992 [citation missing publication title + page number]

[36] DiAngelo, R. (2006c). "I'm leaving!": White fragility in racial dialogue. In B. McMahon & D. Armstrong (Eds.), Inclusion in Urban Educational Environments: Addressing Issues of Diversity, Equity, and Social Justice (pp. 213-240). Centre for Leadership and Diversity. Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto.

[37] Vodde, R. (2001). De-centering privilege in social work education: Whose job is it anyway? Journal of Race, Gender and Class, 7(4), p. 139-160

[38] Vodde p. 3

[39] Morrison, T. (1992). Playing in the dark. New York: Random House.

[40] Goldberg, D.T. (1993). Racist culture. Oxford, England: Blackwell.

[41] Bonilla-Silva, E. (2006). Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States (2nd ed). New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

[42] Bonilla-Silva p. 68

[43] Banks, 1996; Said, 1994; Spivak, 1990 [citation missing publi-

A cogent example of White Fragility occurred recently during a workplace anti-racism training I co-facilitated with an inter-racial team. One of the white participants left the session and went back to her desk, upset at receiving (what appeared to the training team as) sensitive and diplomatic feedback on how some of her statements had impacted several people of color in the room. At break, several other white participants approached us (the trainers) and reported that they had talked to the woman at her desk, and she was very upset that her statements had been challenged. They wanted to alert us to the fact that she literally "might be having a heart-attack." Upon questioning from us, they clarified that they meant this literally. These co-workers were sincere in their fear that the young woman might actually physically die as a result of the feedback. Of course, when news of the woman's potentially fatal condition reached the rest of the participant group, all attention was immediately focused back onto her and away from the impact she had had on the people of color. As Vodde[37] states, "If privilege is defined as a legitimization of one's entitlement to resources, it can also be defined as permission to escape or avoid any challenges to this entitlement"[38].

previous conditions and experiences that produce it, habitus produces and reproduces thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions. Strategies of response to "disequilibrium" in the habitus are not based on conscious intentionality but rather result from unconscious dispositions towards practice, and depend on the power position the agent occupies in the social structure. White Fragility may be conceptualized as a product of the habitus, a response or "condition" produced and reproduced by the continual social and material advantages of the white structural position.

Omi & Winant posit the U.S. racial order as an "unstable equilibrium," kept equilibrated by the State, but still unstable due to continual conflicts of interests and challenges to the racial order[11]. Using Omi & Winant's concept of unstable racial equilibrium, white privilege can be thought of as unstable racial equilibrium at the level of habitus. When any of the above triggers (challenges in the habitus) occur, the resulting disequilibrium becomes intolerable. Because White Fragility finds its support in and is a function of white privilege, fragility and privilege result in responses that function to restore equilibri-

Psychic freedom

Because race is constructed as residing in people of color, whites don't bear the social burden of race. We move easily through our society without a sense of ourselves as racialized subjects[28]. We see race as operating when people of color are present, but all-white spaces as "pure" spaces – untainted by race vis à vis the absence of the carriers of race (and thereby the racial polluters) – people of color. This perspective is perfectly captured in a familiar white statement, "I was lucky. I grew up in an all-white neighborhood so I didn't learn anything about racism." In this discursive move, whiteness gains its meaning through its purported lack of encounter with non-whiteness[29]. Because racial segregation is deemed socially valuable while simultaneously unracial and unremarkable, we rarely, if ever, have to think about race and racism, and receive no penalty for not thinking about it. In fact, whites are more likely to be penalized (primarily by other whites) for bringing race up in a social justice context than for ignoring it (however, it is acceptable to bring race up indirectly and in ways that

um and return the resources "lost" via the challenge - resistance towards the trigger, shutting down and/ or tuning out, indulgence in emotional incapacitation such as guilt or "hurt feelings", exiting, or a combination of these responses.

reinforce racist attitudes, i.e. warning other whites to stay away from certain neighborhoods, etc.). This frees whites from carrying the psychic burden of race. Race is for people of color to think about – it is what happens to "them" – they can bring it up if it is an issue for them (although if they do, we can dismiss it as a personal problem, the "race card", or the reason for their problems). This allows whites to devote much more psychological energy to other issues, and prevents us from developing the stamina to sustain attention on an issue as charged and uncomfortable as race.

natiev, & J. Garvey (Eds.), Race Traitors. New York: Routledge.
How White teachers construct race. In C. McCarthy & W. Crichlow (Eds.), Race identity and representation in education (pp 157-171). New York: Routledge.)

[27] DiAngelo, R. (2006b). My race didn't trump my class: Using oppression to face privilege. Multicultural Perspectives, 8(1), 51-56.; McIntosh, P. (1988). White privilege and male privilege: A personal account of coming to see correspondence through work in women's studies. In M. Anderson, & P. Hill Collins (Eds.), Race, class, and gender: An anthology (pp. 94-105). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

[28] Dyer, R. (1997). White. New York: Routledge.

[29] Nakayama, T., & Martin, J. (1999). Whiteness: The communication of social identity. Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage.

[30] Tatum, B. (1997). "Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?": And other conversations about race. New York: Basic Books.; Doane, A.W. (1997). White identity and race relations in the 1990s. In Carter, G.L. (Ed), Perspectives on Current Social Problems, edited by (pp. 151-159). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

[31] Clark, K.B. (1963). Prejudice and your child. Boston: Beacon Press; Derman-Sparks, L., Ramsey, P. & Olsen Edwards, J. (2006). What If All the Kids Are White?: Anti-bias Multicultural Education With Young Children And Families. New York: Teachers College Press.

[32] Marty (1999) [citation missing publication title + page number]

[33] Marty p. 51 [citation missing publication title]

Those who lead whites in discussions of race may find the discourse of self-defense familiar. Via this discourse, whites position themselves as victimized, slammed, blamed, attacked, and being used as "punching bag[s]"[36]. Whites who describe interactions in this way are responding to the articulation of counter narratives; nothing physically out of the ordinary has ever occurred in any inter-racial discussion that I am aware of. These self-defense claims work on multiple levels to: position the speakers as morally superior while obscuring the true power of their social locations; blame others with less social power for their discomfort; falsely position that discomfort as dangerous; and reinscribe racist imagery. This discourse of victimization also enables whites to avoid responsibility for the racial power and privilege they wield. By positioning themselves as victims of anti-racist efforts, they cannot be the beneficiaries of white privilege. Claiming that they have been treated unfairly via a challenge to their position or an expectation that they listen to the perspectives and experiences of people of color, they are able to demand that more social resources (such as time and attention) be channeled in their direction to help them cope with this mistreatment.

Studies, 6(1) . Retrieved from http://escholarship.org/uc/item/5fm4h8wm

[18] Dawkins, 2004; Frankenberg, E., Lee, C., & Orfield, G. (2003). A multiracial society with segregated schools: Are we losing the dream? The Civil Rights Project. Retrieved from http://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/seg03/reseg03_full.php.

[19] Rich, 1979 [citation missing publication title + page number]5

[20] Flax, J. (1998). American dream in Black and White: The Clarence Thomas hearings. New York: Cornell University Press.

[21] Mills, 1997; Ryan, 2001 [citation missing publication title + page number]

[22] Flax, J. (1998). American dream in Black and White: The Clarence Thomas hearings. New York: Cornell University Press.

[23] Morrison, T. (1992). Playing in the dark. New York: Random House.

[24] DiAngelo, R. (2006b). My race didn't trump my class: Using oppression to face privilege. Multicultural Perspectives, 8(1), 51-56.

[25] Feagin, J. R. (2006). Systematic Racism: A theory of oppression. New York: Routledge. p. 33

[26] Derman-Sparks, L., Ramsey, P. & Olsen Edwards, J. (2006). What If All the Kids Are White?: Anti-bias Multicultural Education With Young Children And Families. New York: Teachers College Press.; Sleeter, C. (1996). White silence, White solidarity. In N. Ig-

organize their identity around a denial of the racially based privileges they hold that reinforce racist disadvantage for others. What is particularly problematic about this contradiction is that white moral objection to racism increases white resistance to acknowledging complicity with it. In a white supremacist context, white identity in large part rests upon a foundation of (superficial) racial toleration and acceptance. Whites who position themselves as liberal often opt to protect what they perceive as their moral reputations, rather than recognize or change their participation in systems of inequity and domination. In so responding, whites invoke the power to choose when, how, and how much to address or challenge racism. Thus, pointing out white advantage will often trigger patterns of confusion, defensiveness and righteous indignation. When confronted with a challenge to white racial codes, many white liberals use the speech of self-defense[34]. This discourse enables defenders to protect their moral character against what they perceive as accusation and attack while deflecting any recognition of culpability or need of accountability. Focusing on restoring their moral standing through these tactics, whites are able to avoid the question of white privilege[35].

Factors that inculcate White Fragility

Segregation

The first factor leading to White Fragility is the segregated lives which most white people live[12]. Even if whites live in physical proximity to people of color (and this would be exceptional outside of an urban or temporarily mixed class neighborhood), segregation occurs on multiple levels, including representational and informational. Because whites live primarily segregated lives in a white-dominated society, they receive little or no authentic information about racism and are thus unprepared to think about it critically or with complexity. Growing up in segregated environments (schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, media images and historical perspectives), white interests and perspectives are almost always central. An inability to see or consider significance in the perspectives of people of color results[13].

Further, white people are taught not to feel any loss over the absence of people of color in their lives and in fact, this absence is what defines their schools and neighborhoods as "good;" whites come

Constant messages that we are more valuable – through representation in everything

to understand that a "good school" or "good neighborhood" is coded language for "white"[14]. The quality of white space being in large part measured via the absence of people of color (and Blacks in particular) is a profound message indeed, one that is deeply internalized and reinforced daily through normalized discourses about good schools and neighborhoods. This dynamic of gain rather than loss via racial segregation may be the most profound aspect of white racial socialization of all. Yet, white discourses about what makes a space good are tacitly understood as racially coded, this coding is explicitly denied by whites.

Living in a white dominant context, we receive constant messages that we are better and more important than people of color. These messages operate on multiple levels and are conveyed in a range of ways. For example: our centrality in history textbooks, historical representations and perspectives; our centrality in media and advertising (for example, a recent Vogue magazine cover boldly stated, "The World's Next Top Models" and every woman on the front cover was white); our teachers, role-models, heroes and heroines; everyday discourse on "good" neighborhoods and schools and who is in them; popular TV shows centered around friendship circles that are all white; religious iconography that depicts god, Adam and Eve, and other key figures as white, commentary on new stories about how shocking any crime is that occurs in white suburbs; and, the lack of a sense of loss about the absence of people of color in most white people's lives. While one may explicitly reject the notion that one is inherently better than another, one cannot avoid internalizing the message of white superiority, as it is ubiquitous in mainstream culture[30].

New York: Routledge; Van Dijk, T.A. (1993). Principles of critical discourse analysis. Discourse and Society, 4(2), 249-283.

[10] Bourdieu, P. (1993). The Field of Cultural Production. New York: Columbia University Press.

[11] Omi, M. & Winant, H. (1986). Racial Formtion in the United States. New York: Routledge 78-9

[12] Frankenberg, E., Lee, C. & Orfield, G. (2003). A multiracial society with segregated schools: Are we losing the dream? The Civil Rights Project. Retrieved from http://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/reseg03/reseg03_full.php.

[13] Collins, 2000 [citation missing publication title + page number]

[14] Johnson, H.B. & Shapiro, T.M. (2003). Good Neighborhoods, Good Schools: Race and the "Good Choices" of White Families. In Doane, A.W & Bonilla-Silva, E. (Eds). White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism (pp. 173-187). New York: Routledge.

[15] McIntosh, P. (1998). White privilege and male privilege: A personal account of coming to see correspondence through work in women's studies. In M. Anderson, & P. Hill Collins (Eds.), Race, class, and gender: An anthology (pp. 94-105). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

[16] Dyer, 1992 [citation missing publication title + page number]

[17] DiAngelo, Robin J. (2010a). Why Can't We All Just Be Individuals?: Countering the Discourse of Individualism in Anti-racist Education. InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information

What does White Fragility look like?

A large body of research about children and race demonstrates that children start to construct ideas about race very early; a sense of white superiority and knowledge of racial power codes appears to develop as early as pre-school[31]. Marty[32] states,

> *As in other Western nations, white children born in the United States inherit the moral precedament of living in a white supremacist society. Raised to experience their racially based advantages as fair and normal, white children receive little if any instruction regarding the predicament they face, let alone any guidance in how to resolve it. Therefore, they experience or learn about racial tension without understanding Euro-Americans' historical responsibility for it and knowing virtually nothing about their contemporary roles in perpetuating it[33].*

At the same time that it is ubiquitous, white superiority also remains unnamed and explicitly denied by most whites. If white children become adults who explicitly oppose racism, as do many, they often