

**Chapters 10 and 11:
White Fragility and the Rules of Engagement
White Women's Tears**

Summary:

From her experience as a racial awareness facilitator, DiAngelo has picked up on an unspoken set of rules fragile white people put forward when it comes down to talking about race (123):

--Do not give feedback on my racism under any circumstances

And if you break that first one, then the following unspoken rules are pushed for (124):

--Feedback must be given calmly

--A level of trust or rapport must be established

--The relationship between the two parties must be issue free

--Feedback must be given immediately because it will be dismissed if you wait too long

--You must give feedback privately

--You must be as indirect as possible because being more direct is insensitive

--The need to feel safe

--Highlighting one's racial privilege then invalidates any oppression (classism, sexism, transphobia, etc.) that person experiences

--Intentions must be acknowledged so that the impact of the behavior gets ignored

--Suggesting my behavior had a racist impact is simply a misunderstanding

The purpose of this set of unspoken rules is to "obscure racism, protect white dominance, and regain white equilibrium" or habitus (124). DiAngelo says the correct response white people should have toward feedback is "From my position of social, cultural, and institutional white power and privilege, I am perfectly safe and I can handle it. If I cannot handle it, *it's on me* to build my racial stamina," and "thank you" (125). She goes on to explain how this set of unspoken rules exist because white people don't want others to think they're racist. Yet in order to stop our racist behaviors, conscious or not, we have to remove the emphasis on trying to convince others we don't commit racist behaviors (129).

DiAngelo then includes a chapter explaining how white fragility manifesting itself as the tears/external emotions of white women carries a heavy significance. Because of a history of white women's tears being weaponized against Black men (the example given was of Carolyn Bryant, a white woman who accused Emmet Till of excessive flirtation to her husband, who then got together with his half-brother to abduct, kill, and mutilate Till), whenever white women cry after being called on their racist behavior their tears perpetuate the narrative of an

innocent white victim being violently attacked by a Black man. Whether those tears are intentional or not, a white woman crying over an aspect of racism will pull all the attention, time, energy, and other resources to comfort her. As a result, the real victim of the racist behavior is ignored and/or blamed.

DiAngelo's solution to overcoming the emotions surrounding guilt is to make a conscious commitment to get racially uncomfortable and examine the consequences of our actions without indulging in the emotions or actions we feel. To indulge in our reactions is to be narcissistic and leads to no positive change or growth. So in order to prevent these moments, we need to be aware of what we're feeling and then reflect on why we're feeling that way.

White men play a role in this dance, too. Since white men designed our culture, they hold the highest place in the race and gender hierarchy. As such, when white men give attention and resources to people they are determining who is valid and what experiences are valid. So when white men come to the defense of white women during cross-racial interactions (such as a racial awareness workshop) their actions validate the experience of the white women, not the experiences of people of color.

Analysis & Commentary:

When DiAngelo gives that set of unspoken rules she's pretty much saying that white people are demanding the safest possible space/setting for them to hear they've done something wrong. Yet even if all of that is given to a person it's still possible for them still deny everything they've done. Kind of makes it sound like a losing game.

Enter "white caucuses." A white caucus is a space for white people to come together to unpack, explore, and talk about racism without fear of looking like an offensive buffoon in front of people of color. The caucus hits on some of these unspoken rules like the need to feel safe, establishing trust and relationships with other participants, and having a set of norms to allow for effective communication. These settings have white moderators who are there to keep other white people honest—there is no beating around the bush with indirect feedback. The quality of the moderator(s) will make or break the white caucus.

Note: For more information on white caucuses, please see the resource attached to the White Fragility page.

You may be wondering "doesn't a white caucus go against DiAngelo's assertion that in order to grow we can't have safe spaces because society is already a safe space for white people?"

While it's true white people are the safest in white society and there really is no need for a safe space like a white caucus, there's something to be said about having a place where you can process all of this out loud with other people and say and practice things without fear you're going to piss off a person of color. If it takes wearing "kiddie" gloves to bring positive social change then we should be all for it.

Regarding the chapter on white women's tears, there are a couple of points to this that need to be made clear. The first point is that not all white women's tears are being consciously used as a decoy or diversionary tactic away from being held accountable for one's racist behavior. To suggest that all instances of white women crying in this context is to create a diversion is highly cynical. Rather, the point of emphasis here is a lot of social capital and resources will be diverted to a crying white woman. Most men in our society are taught some form of the old chivalry code and will come running to give the woman aid. Mind you, the gender roles in this example go on to perpetuate patriarchy with the man being the one in shining armor coming to the rescue of the damsel in distress. Gentlemen, you may think you're being polite, but make sure to read the room. As DiAngelo points out, by coming to the side of the crying white woman you're invalidating the pain and experience of real victims of racist behavior.

So, what should be done in this situation? First, be aware of your emotions. If you're going to cry, request a moment to take a step outside to collect yourself and then return when you're ready to take responsibility for your behavior. To release your emotions in the room is a narcissistic move because it points all the attention on you. Don't be that person. For others in the room, be conscious of who the actual victim is.

As for the second point that needs to be addressed, there are some white women out there that will use tears consciously as a form of leverage to gain more attention or social capital. And there are some white women who will use tears as a weapon to bring retribution on someone else, particularly people of color. DiAngelo uses the example of Carolyn Bryant exaggerating a story to her husband in order to get him to punish Emmet Till for only God knows why. There are countless stories of lynchings beginning in this manner: the word or tears of a white woman over a person of color, and the instantaneous assumption of violence from the person of color.

Unfortunately this still happens today, the most timely example being white woman Amy Cooper calling the cops on birdwatcher Christian Cooper after he called her out for having her dog off a leash in a protected habitat. The key phrases Amy Cooper uses in her attempt to bring retribution are "African-American man" and "threatening me." The original incident wasn't even about race (rather, a dog off-leash), but since a Black man had called her out she became aggressively defensive in her white fragility and attempted to leverage her white privilege to

punish Christian Cooper with the force of the NYPD, an institution known for brutality against people of color.