

Chapter 1—The Challenges of Talking to White People About Racism

Summary Points

We Don't See Ourselves in Racial Terms

The first challenge white people face in building their racial stamina is naming our race.

Our Opinions Are Uninformed

Our simplistic definition of racism—as intentional acts of racial discrimination committed by immoral individuals—engenders a confidence that we are not part of the problem and that our learning is thus complete. 9

We Don't Understand Socialization

- **The next challenge** is understanding the process of socialization.
- To understand WF, we have to begin to understand why we cannot fully be either—objective and unique; we must understand the forces of socialization. 9

We Have A Simplistic Understanding of Racism

- The final challenge that needs addressing is our definition of 'racist.'
- “To increase the racial stamina that counters white fragility, we must reflect on the whole of our identities—and our racial group

identity in particular. For white people, this means first struggling with what it means to be white” 14.

Reflection Questions

We Don't See Ourselves in Racial Terms

1. *How does being created in the image of God interact with contingencies*?*

*think of contingencies as things that have happened that did not have to--e.g. I was raised by two parents instead of one; I am white instead of not white?

We Don't Understand Socialization

2. Based upon DiAngelo's description of individualism and how it teaches us to perceive ourselves—again, by “ourselves” she means the white collective—how does this play out ecclesially? Put differently, how does individualism teach us to view our salvation and consequently our church performance (also, how might this particular question be a white question)?

3. What culture/race/denomination takes precedence in your church, and how is that decided? (If you can identify how it shows up in your church, please offer it)

4. Our understanding of ourselves is necessarily based on our comparison with others (10). This is right on several levels, but consider what she might mean by this for the way white people understand themselves. Whiteness only means something precisely because of the way others are treated; our understanding of ourselves is set against an image of oppression and degradation. Theologically, what does this do to our being *one in Christ*? A more indirect theological question that hopefully assists in seeing how individualism masks group relationships is the following: did you crucify Christ? Analogously, are you racist? (The below example hopefully illustrates why we all have Jesus' blood on our hands.)

All Have Sinned	Christ was crucified by those who sinned	I have Sinned	I crucified Christ
-----------------	--	---------------	--------------------

5. In all honesty, what is your first inclination when experiencing the discomfort DiAngelo is talking about on p. 13 in reference to racism?

Recurring Questions

6. How has your understanding of whiteness progressed?
7. How do you sense God is calling you to respond?
8. What are your lingering fragile responses and why?
9. Are you sure you understand the Cross?

Explanation of Questions

Question #1

In other words, there must be some sort of experience that we all share—a *human* experience based on being created in God’s image, the *Imago Dei*. But if DiAngelo is correct, this means that we also have unique subjective experiences that others do not; I personally have a *white* experience. The question is, how do they both hang together? While it is true that in Christ there are no longer ontological distinctions (Galatians)—we are all *one*—it is also true that our subjectivities are not superfluous; being white *means* something. If the response to this—that we all share a universal a fundamental foundation in Christ, in the *Imago Dei*—is that *this* is a privileged statement, one that is the product of my whiteness, then it also means that everything DiAngelo claims is as well; her claim that we all “make sense of perceptions and experiences through our particular cultural lens...which is neither universal nor objective” is suspect exactly because *that statement* seemingly claims the objectivity that DiAngelo is fighting against. Christians do not think that we are Sartrean free--the account of freedom described by French Existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre. We are not abandoned to our own devices. Rather, we are a people unified and created foundationally similarly. But we also possess differences that *matter*.

Question #2

What I have in mind here is King Jr.’s comment that Sunday mornings are the most segregated time of day. Individualism has

convinced us that our own participation in church is *ours*; our salvation and such are dependent upon our own actions and performance, not the *state* of the community locally, but also at large. As DiAngelo states, “Individualism claims that there are no intrinsic barriers to individual success and that failure is not a consequence of social structures but comes from individual character. According to the ideology of individualism, race is irrelevant” 9. So understood, individual success—individual salvation—is not impacted by the complete racial isolation that we experience every Sunday morning. The question, I suppose, is how does the ideology of individualism reconcile itself—if possible at all—to Paul’s comments on the unity of the church? If one part suffers, the whole body suffers. Yet it is clear that we do not believe this by and large; parts of the body *are suffering*; “all lives matter” is one of the most fragile locutions whites have in their arsenal.

Question #4

Once group membership becomes intelligible, objectivity—the second ideology that interrupts our ability to read cultural lenses—crumbles. The individual objective experience becomes questionable in the group setting because we realize that our perspective is the product of that group, not our own.

Travis’ Thoughts

Food For Thought: for those who think that philosophy is inconsequential to Christianity, consider the following. Rene Descartes, the infamous father of modernity, ultimately put

forward the possibility to separate yourselves from all and every factor that may constitute your life. The only thing that Descartes thought was important was the fact that you are a thinking thing, one who stands apart from everything else through sovereign autonomy exactly because you have a mind that thinks for itself. Descartes essentially created the individualism that we enjoy(?) today. But this was *socialized*; “We are socialized into these groups collectively” (DiAngelo 10). Even if you do not think that philosophy impacts your lives, as if being a Christian necessarily isolates you from the world, you must acknowledge that the ability to think individually—at least as we experience it today—was made possible by Modern Philosophy. For a compelling Christian account of how socialization works, look at the work of Philosopher James K.A. Smith, specifically “Desiring the Kingdom,” and “You are what you love.”

Homework

While reading chapter two, go through and identify how your church can differ from other churches. This will help with week 2’s homework.

Element	My Church	‘Other’ Churches
Worship		
Speaking In Tongues During		
Type of music		

Body Posturing (do people stand, do people dance, are people on their knees)		
Spontaneous prayer		
Spontaneous Congregational response		
Videos Shown		
Creative elements (do people perform dances or paint or draw)		
Service Components		
Service Length		
Media Usage		
Communion frequency		
Roles		
Role of Men		
Role of Women		
Role of Children		
Role of Elderly		
Role of Youth		
Church Gatherings		
Food Served		

Racial Make up		
----------------	--	--

Start thinking about...

1. How have Christians assimilated to 'white' culture?

2. How has your church assimilated to 'white' culture?