

Robin DiAngelo: I mean, let's be honest, most white people go cradle-to-grave with no black friends of any depth, with no sense of loss. In fact, you know, we measure the value of our schools and our neighborhoods by your absence.

Sam Fuqua: That's Robin DiAngelo, and this is, Well, That Went Sideways! A podcast that serves as a resource to help people have healthy, respectful communication. We present a diversity of ideas, tools, and techniques to help you transform conflict in relationships of all kinds. In this episode, we talk with Robin DiAngelo about seeing whiteness. She is an educator, author, and consultant with over 20 years experience working on issues of racial and social justice. She teaches in the education department at the University of Washington. Her 2018 book, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*, was a New York Times bestseller, and it's been translated into 13 languages. We spoke with Robin DiAngelo at the 2024 White Privilege Conference in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

I'm Sam Fuqua, co-host of the program with Alexis Miles. Hi, Alexis.

Alexis Miles: Hi, Sam.

Sam Fuqua: It's good to be here at the White Privilege Conference 2024. With us is Robin DiAngelo. Hello and welcome.

Robin DiAngelo: Thank you. Thrilled to be here.

Sam Fuqua: To start with, give us a definition for the term *White Fragility*, a term you coined, and how you came to that phrase.

Robin DiAngelo: So, white fragility is meant to capture how defensive white people get whenever challenged around race. So, the fragility part is meant to capture how little it takes to get us, uh, defensive. Just suggesting that white-ness has meaning can cause white fragility. But it's not fragile. We're not fragile in the sense of being delicate. Our sensitivities are delicate. But we're fragile like a bomb is fragile. You better hold that bomb real carefully, because if you don't, it's going to explode and people are going to get hurt. And so, there's, there's a lot of power behind that defensiveness. And, I think that white fragility functions as a kind of everyday white racial bullying, where we make it so punitive and miserable for, for, in particular people of color, to challenge us, to challenge our privilege and our entitlement and our unaware assumptions and our general racial obnoxiousness. We make it so difficult that, more often than not, they decide not to. And we can also do that to other white people, too. I think any white person listening can probably think of a time when they were taken aback at something racist another white person said, but knew it would ruin the dinner. So, it's a very effective way to keep us in our place, which means white people on top and other folks on the bottom.

Alexis Miles: Robin, you talk about whiteness. I talk to people even now in the 21st century who cannot get a feeling or sense of whiteness, or what it means to be white. And they say things to me like, "When I look in the mirror, I just see a human." So, I'm curious about how people might take offense at the term white fragility. Um, those people who, who don't even see whiteness.

Robin DiAngelo: Which is so a classic example of white fragility to be offended by a very, the very term, right? The very suggestion. No, I mean, part of being white is to be normal. You have race, I don't have race, right? I mean, that's how I was raised to think about it. So, if, if we're going to talk about race, aren't we going to be talking about you? Why, why would we be talking about me? Uh, I wasn't taught to see race as a relationship between you and I. There's no lesser without better. I was taught to see it as something that happened to you. Sorry, I'm just glad that I have nothing to do with it. Right? So, to suggest that being white has meaning, it interrupts some really precious ideologies that only white people have access to. One of them is meritocracy. So, if you're going to suggest my whiteness has meaning, that's going to suggest that it wasn't just my hard work that got me where I got, where I am. You're going to challenge individualism. Right? You're not going to let me be an exception, because I'm going to want to tell you why I'm different and special from all the other white people you know. You know, and on a really deep level, on a level that's harder for us white people to admit, you're going to challenge my position of superiority. And, that's like at the core of who I am and how I see myself. And, uh, if you ever wondered, like, I'm trying not to use the word crazy because I want to be thoughtful, but if you've ever wondered why people are just crazy! There's a kind of contradiction. On the one hand, we really don't see it. We really are raised not to see it. And on the other hand, oh, we know. We know, but we cannot admit that we know. When you put those two things together, it makes us very irrational. And, that irrationality functions to protect our positions.

Alexis Miles: Is that irrationality a part of the anti-woke movement, so that people are so adamantly against what's known as the critical race theory, for example?

Robin DiAngelo: Well, Carol Anderson argues in her incredible book, um, *White Rage*, that every inch of black progress has been met with a backlash of white rage. And, we see what happened, it's, it's been just four years since the summer of 2020 where there's that incredible racial reckoning, four years. And it's literally illegal to have the conversation we're having right now, in certain educational contexts, in certain states, illegal to teach black history, I mean it is swift, and it is powerful. And, um, critical race theory, it was just the most convenient boogeyman for people whose agenda was, it's not about critical race theory, it's a stand in for, don't rock the racial hierarchy, right? Don't rock, uh, uh, question the racial order. So, those kinds of words like woke and CRT, they're just really handy to, uh, silence the conversation.

Sam Fuqua: Some friends of mine who don't come from academic backgrounds tend to, uh, react negatively to anything that sounds academic, sounds confusing, sounds maybe threatening because they don't understand it. Academic language can be obfuscating in some ways.

Robin DiAngelo: Yeah. It actually is interesting because I first, um, published *White Fragility* as an academic article in a journal in 2011. And, uh, I was trained in academic speak. I, I know how to do it, fairly convoluted, all of that, um, and yet it went viral at some point, and it went viral globally. I started to hear from people, seriously, from around the world, who said, "You put language to an experience." And I realized, you know, I, I've got to make this more accessible. Clearly there's an interest and a need. And so, for the first time I moved out of academic publishing and went to a mainstream publisher and wrote *White Fragility* to be accessible. And I kept telling myself, how do I say this so my sister would understand it? She still says it's a little over-written. But, so yeah, it's not meant to be accessible. There's a lot of performance in the way, um, but, but I think if you, if you really have integrated it, you can explain it to somebody in language that's accessible to them.

Sam Fuqua: Yeah, so I wonder if we, if we had something that wasn't called critical race theory, but was put in more plain language, if it would have been less threatening, I don't know.

Robin DiAngelo: I don't think critical race theory was threatening until they made it threatening because now they've moved on to, to DEI and, and they've also been really clear we want anything with social justice in the title or the orientation to be gone. So, so, you know, I actually think they, they, they're gonna get us no matter what it is.

Sam Fuqua: Wouldn't have made a difference.

Robin DiAngelo: Yeah.

Alexis Miles: And, you talked earlier about the backlash. That there is always one step forward, a couple of steps back. Um, that whenever some progress is seen to be made, there's a big backlash. And so, have you seen this cycle repeated?

Robin DiAngelo: I'm really clear that unlike the way I was taught, right, I was taught to think of progress, right, we're always progressing, we're always moving forward, and you guys can't see my hands right now who are listening, but up, up, up, always going up. And clearly it's more like a power struggle, right? So, it's more like a push and a pull, right? Get a little bit, go, go back the other way. And, that is why we, those of us who are white can never be complacent. That's why I say there isn't a choir. None of us have arrived. Uh, I have not arrived. The moment that, that I think I have, I'm going to get complacent. And, I don't think I'm naive about systemic racism and white supremacy, but I did not think we could be where we are right now. I didn't think that we could go that far back. We've lost the Voting Rights Act. We've lost Affirmative Action. It's illegal to teach black history. And there's bans in 17, I mean, I, I just didn't think we could. But, on the one hand, we obviously got far enough to cause that much of a threat.

Alexis Miles: I am so curious about what keeps you going. You are a white person. Um, what keeps you involved in this kind of a struggle?

Robin DiAngelo: I mean, there's certainly things in my own story, my own history. But once you see it, I mean, you are not in your integrity if you, if you don't keep going, right? Who am I? How do I sleep at night and live with myself if I'm not aligning what I profess I believe with how I'm actually behaving, then I'm a fraud. And that's just not something acceptable to me. One of the ways that white people are socialized is to be comfortable in a segregated life. To me, that's the deepest message of white supremacy, is that there's no inherent value in knowing or loving or caring about black people. I mean, let's be honest. Most white people go cradle-to-grave with no black friends of any depth, with no sense of loss. In fact, you know, we measure the value of our schools and our neighborhoods by your absence. Let's be honest, right? That is deep, right? That's deep within me. And so, once you start to see that and understand that and try to address that and start to build relationships, well then you see the humanity. I just have to picture my beloved friend Anika's face. Even though she's not in the room, I think, ah, if Anika was watching me right now, she'd be real disappointed. You know, I've seen her face crumble in, in grief. I've seen her cry. I've borne witness to the pain of racism on black people in a way that I was never meant to bear witness. All of those things sustain you. And then you have your own history of oppression and other ways that, that help

you as a way in, not a way out, but as a way to say, wow, if that's what that felt like for me, it's unbearable to think I caused anything close to that for somebody else.

Alexis Miles: Now earlier you talked about being working class. Is that one of the things you're talking about when you say a way in?

Robin DiAngelo: Yeah, and working class was a little bit later in life. I actually grew up in poverty. So, periods of homelessness. Periods of living in our car. Incredible shame. Oatmeal, the only food in the house. My sister not having shoes to go to school. I mean, really kind of poverty. And the shame around that, you know, I mean it's, it's, it's deep. Now, I'm very clear that I'm white and I was always white and that, that, that intersects with that. And so, when you meet white people who say, well, you know, I don't have privilege, I grew up poor, please send them to me, okay? Because, you know, look me in the eye and say it's the same thing to be black and poor as it is to be white and poor. But that, that's one key. I was also female and Catholic. Right? Silence, submission, sacrifice, suffer, uh, service, and disappear. Right? It was never reinforced about my brain or my thinking or, or anything like that.

So, so there are ways I have in, but again, I was also a white woman. So, I can't proceed as if you and I, for example, have a shared experience, because we don't. Um, but I can certainly access it. And, in fact, when, I, because I'm, I proudly identify as a feminist, angry feminist. Why, why would you not be angry if you're paying attention? But when there's a piece of feedback, perhaps you give me some feedback and I'm not getting it, and I'm thinking, mm mm, I just switch the roles and I imagine that, I've just said to a man what you said to me, and he's thinking what I'm thinking, and then I go, oh, I got it. Okay. All right. Yeah. And so, when white people say they need to feel safe in order to talk about race, I just imagine a white man saying to me, I need to be safe before I can talk with you about misogyny, and I would basically say, F you. I would immediately get what's off about that. And so, that helped me kind of figure out, oh, well, that's the same move white people make.

Sam Fuqua: So, coming back to some of this earlier conversation. If a white person says to you, well, I don't see color, what is a, not a safe response, but a response that can open up a conversation rather than shut them down?

Robin DiAngelo: Well, a couple things. One, always point your finger inward not outward. So, just start with a story of your own. You can say I can totally relate. You know, for a long time I, I didn't think I saw color, and then, and then, and then tell how you've come to see it. They can't really argue with your experience. You're not telling them to have it. You're not telling them they're racist. But I could also tell a story about one time I was co-leading with a black man, and a white woman in the front row said, "I don't even see you as black." And then he said, "Well, one, is there anything wrong with your eyes? Because I am black. And of course, you do see it or you wouldn't have said you don't see it. Uh, but two, then how are you going to see racism? Because I, I, I'm black. I have a different experience than you have. So, if you're saying you don't see me as black, you're basically assuming I have the same experience you do. So, you're erasing me in my experience." So, so I might share that story, right? I'm still not pointing my finger at the person who, who asked it, but, but I am offering a counter-narrative. And I think that's really important. And then maybe the last thing I always offer to white people around this one is, do it for your own healing, right? Like, I hope that person shifts as a result of my response, but I, I have to do this to be in my integrity. I have to break with the ways I've been socialized to be complicit. And one of those is, is white solidarity. One of those

ways I've been complicit is the, the unspoken agreement between you and I that we'll keep each other's racism protected, we'll help each other save face. And so, when I break with that I'm, I'm healing myself.

Alexis Miles: Can you tell us the story of when you consciously became aware that you're white and that that had meaning?

Robin DiAngelo: Yeah, and you know, it's a lot like water dripping on a rock, right? You see it and then, and then it goes away again. And that's the other thing, right? Like you're at a conference like this and everything here is to help us see it and then you go, you leave the conference and everything out there wants you not to see it. And actually, there are penalties for you seeing it. That's why we can't be complacent. But actually, it's a perfect question because it was reading Peggy McIntosh's white privilege article, which I know inspired Eddie Moore to found this conference. I can tell you where I was sitting. I had like a little bit of an outer body experience. I almost felt dizzy. I, it was just, I still have goosebumps thinking about it. And it, it was, I, I just felt white for the first time in my life. Like I, I knew that it, I think all white people know at a very early age, it's better to be white. There's all that. But, but we don't move through the world feeling white. And man, I actually didn't want to go outside. I'm like, "Oh my God! Everyone can see I'm white." I felt like I was just blasting white from reading that article. So, that would probably be the turning point.

Alexis Miles: And you've talked about values and integrity, that you would not be seated in your integrity and in your values if you didn't take certain actions. Can you say more about what those values are?

Robin DiAngelo: Well, um, the status quo is racism. So, we're all living in a society in which the default is racism and the reproduction of racism. And, and white people have to recognize that we are comfortable in a racist society. Like, I moved through the world in racial comfort. It's an exception to be uncomfortable racially, and one that I can choose and have been warned most of my life. Do not go out of your racial comfort zone, right? So, we start there. That niceness is not interrupting the status quo of racism, right? And Ibram Kendi says, "There's no not racist." And Beverly Tatum, it's like being on a moving walkway at the airport. To do nothing. To just carry on and smile and be friendly and to be nice, does not interrupt that status quo. You have to actively seek to break with it. So, it's how do I do that? And, I want to caution white listeners, the number one question I get is how do I tell some other white person about their racism? And I always just look that person in the eyes and say, "Well, how would I tell you about yours?" Because it's, it's always somebody else's, right? Um, and so this isn't all about I'm going to speak up all the time. There's a lot of internal excavation we need to do and honesty we need to get in touch with, and it's, it's a multifaceted.

Alexis Miles: What I'm thinking is, it is possible for you to go through life without ever talking about race. And you talked a little bit about there's a comfort level in being able to do that. What's in it for you?

Robin DiAngelo: Well, there is integrity. There's also the depth of relationships I never would have had. To be able to recognize another's humanity is to, is to gain more of your own humanity. I think any, any society in which somebody is less than, um, can't, can't serve the society, right? The loss is just really significant. But I, I don't like to get into the kind of like economics or whatever. For me, it's really about humanity. Yeah, it's just, it's just not okay.

Sam Fuqua: Well, one question we always ask our guests, picking up on the title of the podcast is, uh, tell us about a time or two when things went sideways for you, uh, what you learned, how you responded.

Robin DiAngelo: Whew. Okay, so I was asked to give a, a keynote at a con, it was some religious organization within Christianity. I don't know if it was Methodist. It was something like that. And so, it was this huge auditorium and I was told, you're going to be on a jumbotron. Like that's how many thousands of people were in this. And they, the bishop kept wanting to see my slides and I'm like, nope, you, you know, you, you asked me to talk. You either turn it over or not, but I'm not giving you my slides that you can go through them. Are you kidding? No. So all day long, I'm listening to people testify up at the mic about, you know, you know, like there was a flood and my neighbors died, but God is great because I didn't, and stuff like that. Like I did have some attitude about it. I'll be honest. So, I finally get up there and I do what I do. And I'm like, okay, there's, there's nothing they can do. I mean, I'm on a stage, there's thousands of them. But, following that keynote was the workshops. And I'm like, that's where it's going to happen. And sure enough, right. My workshop was spilling out. I mean, it was packed to the gills. People standing, people, no, some of it was the first time anyone had brought that topic to this group, right? And there weren't very many black people, but whatever ones were there were in that room.

And I probably was three minutes intact. Just beginning, and it just erupt with people. I mean, every hand going up, people wanting to say things, and finally there was this man, this white man in the middle of the row, and I called on him, and he, he, he just started shouting biblical verses at me. You know, he had that kind of where you're, he's so angry that his neck, his veins are popping out, and he starts shouting, "John 7:9," or whatever, I don't follow it, says, whatever he says, you know, and then, "Are you saying Jesus was wrong?" Okay, right, no, okay, no. What I'm thinking is, well, I guess it depends on how you interpret it, but, but, right, like, right, I'm gonna stand here right now and say, yes, Jesus Christ was wrong. And I, I'm here to say it in front of this religious group. So, no. But it was so, I think I actually went like this, "Ha ha ha ha ha." I think I was just like, "Ah, oh my God. Oh my God." And the room, of course, was just vibrating. I said, "Let's all just take a deep breath," like just bring it down. So, and, and I did, and that helped, and don't ask me where this came from, but I said, "No, Jesus wasn't wrong. And I'm not saying that Jesus was wrong, but we don't live on the spiritual plane, we live on the physical plane, in the here and now. And in the here and now, there's racial injustice. So, if we want to usher in the, the world that Jesus came to proclaim, we have to address the inequality in the here and now." Okay. Seemed to work. It certainly calmed that down.

This went on for a while and then there was a white man in the front row that had had his hand up for a long time. And I finally, it was like three minutes before the end. So, I called on him and I said, "Okay, would you like to have the last word?" And he said, "Well, yes, I would." And then I thought, oh my God, I just gave the last word to a white man. Of course he wants it. All right, so I'm inside, I'm just going, oh my God, how did I do that? And so this, this man, this white man, stands up and says, "May I lead us in prayer?" Okay, and the room, yes, okay. And I'm just like looking down. And then he launches into, "Dear God, thank you for bringing this righteous woman to give us the message we need to hear. Thank you God for..." And he, he goes on thanking God for my message. And the whole room has to thank God with it, has to thank God for me. And so it was like, oh, that actually turned out to be the right person to call on. I was so kind of blown away by it, given that how intense and how angry and how much stuff was in the room. And when he finished this just beautiful, I had to go hug him. So, I went up to him and he grabs me around the waist and he goes, "You know, you just keep speaking truth to power." That's a big wow. Uh, and I ran to the cab and I got, I was shaking when I got out of there, but I was also like, how did that turn out like that? I don't know.

Sam Fuqua: Oh, yeah. Divine Providence.

Robin DiAngelo: And I'm not religious, but it would be kind of, kind of appear to be.

Sam Fuqua: Yeah. Wow.

Robin DiAngelo: But maybe just to unpack what I do. First of all, I, by taking the breath, I slowed everybody down, including me. The truth is I'm an atheist, and I, I don't share that often, I've now just said it on, on the recording. But, but I used language that he could understand, that could connect, but was still true to what I believe. Because being an atheist doesn't mean you don't believe in, you know, spirituality. So, those are just two pieces I think that really made a difference. And the other one was just a fluke. Just luck of the draw.

Alexis Miles: Well, I actually like how you said that you believe that the world Jesus wanted was a world of equality, of justice. And I think everybody can agree with that.

Robin DiAngelo: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I know enough to be able to know that. Right? Like, oh, if we really followed what Jesus preached, I'd be fine. It's the religion, you know, around it that's off, a bit off often. That was a time when maybe the group was a little bit out of control, but I can share a time that I really stepped in and it was here at the White Privilege Conference. So, it was a year that the two keynotes were Glenn Singleton in the morning and Michael Eric Dyson in the afternoon. So I, I was there all day and then I had just come from Michael Eric Dyson's keynote and he, if you ever heard him speak, he's just, oh, fantastic. And I was just buzz, and he gave me a shout out. So I was just pumped, right? And I'm walking down the hall, uh, afterwards and this, these two people come towards me, a black man and a black woman, and they smiled at me. Hi, Robin. So, okay, clearly I know these people, but to be honest, I did not recognize them. I don't know who they are. But I'm pretending that I do, and they're chatting with me all friendly and they're referring to some talk I'm going to give for them or something and I'm kind of just faking it along. And then I, I go on about, "Oh my God, did you hear Michael Eric Dyson's keynote? Wasn't it incredible? Oh, he was so amazing." And then the man, he reaches down and I actually, my memory is that it was in slow motion. He reaches down and he gets his name tag and I realized, okay, he knows that I, I don't know who this is. And he takes out his name tag and he puts it on and it's Glenn Singleton, who also gave a keynote.

Alexis Miles: Ouch.

Robin DiAngelo: And I freaking didn't, and I watched him on a big screen and I didn't recognize him. And I went, "Oh, your speech was amazing too." It was awful and awkward and I just got out of there. And then I, I ran and found my friend Christine Saxman, uh, another white person because I was very freaked out. But of course, I didn't want to run that at another black person. And I was like, "Oh my God, you won't believe what I just did." And I told her and she gasped. Okay. I'm like, "Oh, thank you. You're not making me feel any better." But she was like, "Oh my God. You really messed up." And I cried. I just felt so humiliated and I had a good cry and once, you know, once you cry, like, oh, okay, I could think now. And then Christine and I put our heads together and we're like, okay, so let's just be really clear. 'Cause I'm like, I have to repair that. So, let's be clear about what were the aspects of that that were really racist, basically, and racially harmful. And so, with our best thinking, I kind of got clear about it. And then, the next morning, I went and sought

him out. And I approached him, and I said, "Glenn, would you be willing to grant me the opportunity to repair the racism that I perpetrated towards you yesterday?" And I very deliberately put it that way so that he would know that I was going to own it, rather than explain it. Would you grant me the opportunity means he has a choice if he, if he said no, I would have accepted it. And he said yes, you know, and I'll give it to him, he didn't say don't worry about it. I said yes. And then I named all that I understood about it from we don't even see you or recognize you or and any what he said to me was, "This happens to us all the time. What you're doing right now doesn't happen. So, I appreciate it and we're good."

And then I went to Andrea, who was the person he was with, and did this, made the same repair. And from that and one other incident, I have my model that I do share with about repair. And, one of the things I always ask is, "Is there anything else that needs to be said or heard that we might move forward?" And, in the incident that I read about in *White Fragility*, the woman said to me, "Yeah, there is something else. If we're going to work together, you will run your racism at me again. So, the next time you do, would you like your feedback publicly or privately?" Which I just think is so fabulous. It's so radical, right, to say that to a white person, right? And I, I, I understood it. She was saying, you're white. You, you have it. You will run it. So, I'm going to be very generous and give you a choice. How do you want your feedback? And I just thought it was so cool. And I said, "Please, publicly. Especially if it happens publicly, because other white people need to see that I'm not outside of anything I, I, teach, and it'll give me the opportunity to model how to receive that feedback without defensiveness." Okay. All right. Are we good? We're good. We're fine. We're fine. That's the key. I don't think it's that we step in it. It's that, where can you go from there? And I've had a lot of black folks say to me, if we can't go there with you, that's when we don't have authentic relationships. We don't expect you to be free of your conditioning.

Alexis Miles: How do you receive feedback without defensiveness?

Robin DiAngelo: I, I think once you understand systemic racism, you understand that there is no way to be outside of it, so that, that like is foundational. If you don't understand systemic racism, you will get defensive because the only, the only paradigm you have is good people versus bad people. And if you're a good person who cares, you couldn't be racist based on that paradigm, so you've just guaranteed defensiveness. When you understand systemic racism, you understand it's inevitable that I, that I did step in it. I mean, um, all this work will cause me to do it less and have better skills when I do it, but it's not gonna ever totally free it. And so, you realize, you know, it's about me, but it's not about me. You remember that, you can tell me if this is for you, Sam, too, but the, the deepest growth you've had around this journey is when you messed up. Like, we don't tend to learn from a comfortable place. And I think that's why the people of color in my life that are with me still, haven't given up on me. Because rather than do what a lot of white people do, it's just, well fine then. I mean, if I can't say anything right, I'm not saying anything at all. I don't, I don't ever do that. I just, okay, what can I learn from that and do better next time? Or if I feel defensive, it's not like I never feel defensive, but you go take it somewhere else, work it through, and then come back.

Alexis Miles: I'm just curious here. Do you have friends of color, or let's say black friends, with whom you can say, "I'm feeling defensive right now?"

Robin DiAngelo: I, I believe that I could. I could say, "I'm feeling defensive, and I don't want to run that at you, um, so give me a little time. I will come back." I did something similar to that. I got some pretty deep feedback from a friend, and I said, "I'm feeling really flooded, and so I'm just not going to be able to engage

and I'm going to sit with it, but I will come back." And then you do come back, right? And, and so far people are like, I understand. Take your time, but, you know, then I want to see what, what change there is.

Alexis Miles: In my observation, that's one of the hardest things for people to do, is to sit with defensiveness, or acknowledge it, or even to allow themselves to recognize that, I, in this moment, I'm feeling defensive. Because I, I think we're so dis, well, in this country, so disembodied, so out of touch.

Robin DiAngelo: Yeah. I'm glad you mentioned disembodied because usually whenever the, um, say you gave me the feedback, and you've barely finished your sentence, and I'm responding that like super fast, that's usually defensiveness. And then, there's no, um, quiet space between us. I keep filling it with my explanations or that kind of thing, that's usually a red flag that you're feeling defensive. So sometimes if I'm maybe facilitating or mediating, I might say, just hold it, just sit with it, just sit with it. Even if you think you were misunderstood, just sit with being misunderstood. And honestly, you probably weren't. You probably just don't understand how, how that was off. So, and if I'm in a white affinity group, I sometimes will say, just to allow yourself to be misunderstood is a really powerful interruption to white superiority.

Sam Fuqua: I am relating to what you're saying, and I can recognize it, and I can sit with it. It's what I, what happens after that that's sometimes a challenge for me. It's sort of like moving on, or "letting go," but not really letting go of it.

Robin DiAngelo: Yeah, well, I think if you, if you go, come back and say, this is what I have come to understand from the feedback you gave me. One, that goes a long way for a repair. Like, if you just say, I'm sorry. Well, that's better than nothing, but like, you haven't shown me that you, you understand why that was hurtful. But when you say, this is how I understand that was, that was off... And I actually once, I, I just taught the repair model and I had a white man make a repair with me based on it. So, I got to be on the receiving end of it 'cause he had been, kind of around sexism, he had cut me off or whatever, and when he mapped out the various ways he understood that that was sexism, I was just like, well, if you got that out of that, no problem. I would have never had a man break it down and, and, and acknowledge and see that, that much nuance in sexism. So I think, usually that, that's the piece. I bet you if you came back and you said, I just want to, just to put closure there, I, I just want to check my understanding. You probably would get more closure than you think, right, if, if you were able to do that. And the person was like, yep, you got it. Or, no, no, no, that's not, you know, or they get to recalibrate you a little bit if you missed a piece.

Alexis Miles: I'm sitting here listening to you and I'm thinking, yeah, there is a power in being seen. There's an intimacy in being seen that allows space for that kind of coming together. That's far different from just a conceptual conversation, you know. It's, well, it's that word, it's embodied. When something is embodied and deeply understood, and people can't see us, but we're looking in each other's eyes right now, makes a huge difference. As you look around this country, in particular, at all of the backlash, at everything that's going on related to race, what gives you hope?

Robin DiAngelo: So I, I would be disingenuous if I said I had a lot of hope. But I'm also really conscious that right now I'm looking in the eyes of a black woman, and that for a white person to say I feel hopeless is really problematic, right? And that's an example where I could say if a, if men say to me, I feel hopeless that patriarchy will ever end, I'd be like, well, that serves you, doesn't it? So, I try not to express that, um, around my friends of color. And I, and I, I also know that I, I just can't give up and be in my integrity. You,

you just can't. You don't get to. So, it's in such an incredibly adaptive system. Look how it adapted. It's 2020. Look how it adapted to the challenges of 2020. It's kind of stunning, isn't it? And so, we have to be adaptive, and hang in there. And one of the things that, um, helps me have a perspective is, I don't believe racism is going to end in my lifetime. Actually, I very strongly don't believe it's going to end in my lifetime. But I, I am confident that I do less harm as a result of the work that I've done, and that I might have impacted other white people to do less harm, and that that's not small. Because less harm could be one more hour on your life. That you didn't take all the nonsense home with you and agonize about whether it was worth it to talk to, you know, how do I do it? Should I do it? Is it worth doing it? Was it me? Did it happen? You know, all the things that weather black people and other people of color. All the things, the gaslighting and the high blood pressure and the heart rate and the things that cause for shorter lifespan. Those are often not those big policy changes, they're, they're those interactions with your co-workers or, you know, those are the, the theme of exhaustion from people of color, you know, around white people, I hear all the time. So, me doing less harm isn't small and that much I can say. And so, you kind of go for those little goals. You know, well, of course, I'm an educator, so thank goodness there are activists who go for the big policy stuff, and that's not my gift, so, you know, that's okay.

Sam Fuqua: Robin DiAngelo, it's great to spend time with you, and thank you for doing that and for your work.

Robin DiAngelo: Oh, you're so welcome. It was really rewarding.

Alexis Miles: Thank you. It was wonderful spending this time with you.

Sam Fuqua: Robin DiAngelo is an educator, author, facilitator, and consultant. You can find her online at robindiangelo.com. We spoke with her at the 2024 White Privilege Conference. Robin DiAngelo will be a keynote speaker at the 2025 White Privilege Conference. It's happening March 26th through the 29th in Hartford, Connecticut. You can find out more about the conference at theprivilegeinstitute.com.

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