Identity Fragility Fast Facts Sheet

What is Identity Fragility?
Identity Fragility is a Psychological Phenomenon Causing Personal Discomfort and Resistance When:

- Someone challenges our identity worldviews and we interpret that as statements against our character
- Others’ attempts to connect us to systems of inequity and bias unsettles us and we believe we are unfairly judged
- Deeper discussions of inequity and bias prompt us to respond with anger, fear, and guilt

*Identity fragility is not weakness--it is a powerful means of identity control and the protection of identity power advantage*

Identity Fragility is Triggered When Someone Challenges Our:

- Objectivity related to identities
- Solidarity related to identities
- Authority related to identities
- Valuing certain identities over others
- We utilize a lens of universalism (when we presume our experience is everyone’s experience)
- We defer to innocence related to topics of other identity forms

Identity Fragility is Triggered When People Who Traditionally Have Experienced Regular Bias and:

- Speak frankly about their own perspectives
- Don’t protect the feelings of people who hold dominant identities
- Are unwilling to share their stories or perspectives
- Are in positions of leadership

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1 Information drawn on Robin DiAngelo’s work, *White Fragility: Why It's so Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*
Identity Fragility Creates Identity Stress: Signs and Symptoms Include:

- When we resort to argumentation, silence, and withdrawal
- When our discomfort and anxiety mechanisms are triggered
  - To suggest someone’s oppressive identity behavior has a negative impact is to misunderstand them
  - Everyone must have complete trust between folks

Some Typical Behavioral Responses from People with Identity Fragility:

- Tears
- Reflexive denial
- Fleeing the situation
- Demanding a focus on intentions
- Emotionally withdrawing
- Seeking absolution
- Arguing
- Avoiding interactions with people with different identities than our own

Some Typical Verbal Response from People with Identity Fragility

- "You are judging me"
- "You don’t know me"
- "You are generalizing"
- "This is just your opinion"
- "Some people are always looking for something to be offended by"
- "I don’t feel safe"
- "I can’t say anything right"
- "I have suffered too"
Ending Identity Fragility:
Ways We Could and Should Feel When Others Provide Feedback or When They Call in Our “Oops”

- Gratitude
- Excitement
- Motivation
- Humility
- Discomfort
- Interest
- Reflection
- Apology
- Listening

Ending Identity Fragility: Some Good Boilerplate Responses

- “I appreciate the feedback”
- “This is helpful”
- “It is me who should resist defensiveness”
- “This is hard but important”
- “Oops”
- “I want to change my patterns”
- “I will focus on the message not the messenger”
- “I need to build my capacity to endure discomfort and bear witness to the pain of bias”
- “I have some work to do”