



## Identity Fragility Fast Facts Sheet<sup>1</sup>

### 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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<sup>1</sup> 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”*