

**BREAKING WHITE SILENCE
NORTHWEST**

TOOLKIT FOR STUDY GROUP FACILITATORS

FALL 2021

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INTRODUCTION

We need you defecting from white supremacy and changing the narrative of white supremacy by breaking white silence.

Alicia Garza, co-founder of the Black Lives Matter network and Special Projects Director at the National Domestic Worker Alliance

Breaking White Silence Northwest is an all-volunteer project that aims to help white people gain white racial literacy, which we believe to be a keystone step—one of countless steps—in the lifelong process of building personal and collective capacity to take effective action toward racial justice. Our project plays a modest part in a vast network of activists, projects and organizations collectively working toward dismantling white supremacy.

We support the formation of free, facilitated groups of white people studying the writing of whiteness scholar Robin DiAngelo (primary text: *What Does It Mean To Be White? [Revised Edition]*). Each group functions as an incubator and springboard, providing brave space for white people to begin to understand their own positioning within white supremacy and to gain key resources to sustain meaningful antiracist action.

We also provide training and support for study group facilitators, helping them to build skills for personal and collective inquiry into systemic racism and white peoples' complicity with and responsibility to dismantle white supremacy.

The Breaking White Silence Northwest Leadership Team is committed to holding an affinity space for each other to address our whiteness: to bolster both our individual capacities, and that of Breaking White Silence Northwest to address white supremacy.

Finally, we strive to prepare study group participants to self-organize into long-term leadership teams in order to continue growing individual and group capacity to understand and address white supremacy; to engage in ongoing learning about systems of oppression; to build authentic

cross-racial relationships; and to sustain a practice of learning from and taking action with BIPOC leaders to advance racial justice.

The project grew out of a Phinney Neighborhood Association-sponsored free series in 2015, discussing the social construction of race. One of the speakers was Dr. DiAngelo, a race and social justice educator whose New York Times' bestselling book *White Fragility* (2018) has become an important part of the national discussion about race. Moved by the challenging but relatable way she communicates her powerful message, volunteers formed an affinity/planning group in November 2016 to launch this study group project, taking DiAngelo's book on white racial literacy as the central text for discussion. Breaking White Silence was a project of the Phinney Neighborhood Association until October 2020, when we transitioned to an independent community project. We were inspired by a comment that Reverend Harriet Walden, co-founder of Mothers for Police Accountability, made to one of our Leadership Team members, Karen Schneider, at a Black Lives Matter rally in 2014 that was organized in response to the killing of Michael Brown (an 18-year-old unarmed black man from Ferguson, Missouri) by a white police officer: "I appreciate your being an ally, but the best way you can help my people is to go back into your community, talk to white people and change their hearts and minds about racism." It is in this spirit and with this sense of accountability that we pursue our project of Breaking White Silence. Our name comes from the words of Alicia Garza, co-founder of the Black Lives Matter network: "We need you defecting from white supremacy and changing the narrative of white supremacy by breaking white silence."

We held our first meeting for volunteer study group facilitators at the Greenwood Senior Center in January 2017, sharing a suggested group framework and discussion guide to support facilitators in forming their groups. Breaking White Silence groups began to meet in homes, churches, synagogues, and Greenwood/Phinney community spaces to raise consciousness about racial inequity, white racial identity, and the ramifications of white people's silence in the face of injustice. About two-thirds of the groups have been formed through private invitations made by the facilitator, while about one-third have been groups open to the public (advertised through PNA's *Review*). We held a second meeting for facilitators in September 2017, which led to the formation of another ten groups (four of which were open to the public). Since then, we have held Facilitator Training sessions once or twice each year and community groups and public

groups have continued to be created. Approximately 300 people have participated in our study groups in the past four years, with an age range from 20s to 80s. Many groups have continued to meet informally after the official end of their study of DiAngelo's book, as people have felt connected and inspired to further their learning and their support for each other in taking action toward racial justice.

There are two general categories of Breaking White Silence Northwest groups for people to join or facilitate. ***Sponsored Study Groups*** are led by facilitators officially vetted by the Breaking White Silence Northwest Leadership Team. They may be held in a Phinney Neighborhood Association facility or other publicly accessible space and are promoted by the PNA's quarterly newsletter, *The Review*, email newsletters and announcements, the PNA and Phinneywood Facebook pages, and flyers (posted and/or distributed). ***Community-initiated Study Groups***, on the other hand, are groups that are organized and promoted independently by facilitators, without our Leadership Team vetting or sponsorship. These community-initiated groups may be "private," meaning the facilitators open them only to select individuals or to members of select communities; or the facilitators may open them to others through more public forms of promotion.

All Breaking White Silence Northwest groups are run with no charge to participants. Thanks to a donation to the project of 50 copies of *What Does It Mean to Be White?*, we usually have copies of the book available that can be borrowed for the duration of a study group, although we do encourage all Breaking White Silence study group participants to purchase the book themselves. Arrangements can be made to pick up a book by contacting info@breakwhitesilencenw.org.

The support we provide to the study groups comes from a position of ongoing experience, rather than from presumed expertise. We offer guidance by organizing occasional gatherings for facilitators (sometimes for the whole community), sharing our considered reflections on what we've learned about what practices work best in creating and facilitating a group. We also disseminate a range of printed and online resources that people can use for convening, designing, and running their groups. In addition to our private Facebook group, Breaking White Silence

Northwest, we provide the contact information of Leadership Team members, who are available for phone (or possibly in-person) consultation and mentoring. And although we don't supervise or monitor study groups, we do ask facilitators and participants to fill out surveys when their groups end. Our goal with these surveys is to get a sense of who has been involved in our study groups and what these experiences have been like for people, so that we can continue to improve our work in the future.

This Facilitator Toolkit is a work in progress. Much of it is presented in the form of responses to a series of frequently asked questions. In these answers, we further explain our project and make suggestions about how to become a facilitator and set up a study group. We share guiding principles and practices to help to create *brave spaces* and deepen everyone's learning. The toolkit also includes concrete examples of how past facilitators have invited participants to their groups and have structured and conducted their sessions, as well as examples of handouts, resource and book lists, and audio/video links.

Just as each participant in our Leadership Team continues to learn and refine his or her own style of facilitation, we hope facilitators will find their own facilitation styles and approaches as they do this work.

Referenced Resources

- Robin DiAngelo. *What Does It Mean to Be White? Developing White Racial Literacy (Revised Edition)*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc. 2016.
- Robin DiAngelo. *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2018.

Breaking White Silence Northwest Leadership Team Members Fall 2021

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why do we focus on the text *What Does It Mean to Be White?* by Robin DiAngelo?

We have found this book to be particularly helpful in "connecting the dots" and walking white people step-by-step into a deeper understanding of our socialization into white supremacy. Robin is a sociologist and *What Does It Mean to Be White?* is a textbook that is a synthesis of her own experience/thinking and the experience, ideas and research of many BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) scholars. We strongly believe, along with many Black thinkers, such as Ibram X. Kendi, Michael Eric Dyson and Resmaa Menakem, that there is great value in gaining white racial literacy in a group with other white people studying Robin DiAngelo's text. We emphasize the need to also read the works of Black writers (and other BIPOC writers). We recognize that Black people are not a monolith and some Black people (and others) question the value of Robin's work, in large part because she is white. Our approach is intended to be a small step; our goal is for every person who completes a study group to join us in a lifelong journey of learning from BIPOC scholars and activists and lifelong action on behalf of racial justice.

Is Robin DiAngelo personally involved with this project?

Robin DiAngelo has been supportive of and informed about the Breaking White Silence Northwest project from the beginning. She has been generous with her time offering pro bono Q&A's each year since 2017 to gatherings of Breaking White Silence Northwest study group participants. These events have been very well attended and have strengthened our sense of ourselves as a community of solidarity. Offering to be someone our project turns to for accountability, Dr. DiAngelo has made herself available to occasionally answer our questions via email or telephone and has given us suggestions and referrals, as needed.

Why are white people meeting alone instead of in cross-racial groups to talk about race?

Being white has allowed us to get along in this society with little understanding of racial dynamics and with little emotional resilience for discussions of race. This might give us pause about getting together alone as white people to talk about race: there seems reason to worry that discussing race from our well-meaning but limited, dominant perspective might inadvertently perpetuate the dynamics of racism, white privilege, and white fragility that we mean to undo.

On the other hand, because of the ways we have been so deeply shaped by our position of privilege, we think there are also very good reasons to create a space for all-white discussions of race and racism to the extent that these discussions are informed and guided by a text like DiAngelo's, which decenters and deconstructs our white racial frame.

Many activists and writers of color hold to the conviction that white people need to educate themselves about race. [See references below for examples.] One reason for this is that discussing race and racism with white people who are in the early stages of examining these issues often ends up being harmful to people of color. In her article, "Why People of Color Need Spaces Without White People," Kelsey Blackwell, a writer of color, describes her experiences discussing race with white people in these early stages of learning:

Being in a space where white people are starting to wake up to their white cultural conditioning is heartbreaking for me. It is a pain that is felt deeply. I ache for my ancestors and my ancestors' ancestors. A sadness comes welling up, and it feels like drowning.

White people, seeing ourselves as "innocent" about race, often engage in cross-racial discussions of race expecting and relying on people of color to do the work of educating us, thus unfairly placing an extra burden on them to fix our problem. This burden is made even heavier by the common tendency of white people to become opinionated and argumentative when confronted with ideas that challenge our way of seeing things -- even, or especially, when we lack basic information about race.

Educating ourselves on racism in an all-white group, with the help of a well-vetted text like the DiAngelo book, then, can be a good way to mitigate these unnecessary harms. It gives us a space

in which to do the critical work of bringing out our complicity in white supremacy [see DiAngelo's article, linked below, on the importance of using this term] and white fragility, so we can own and counter it without subjecting people of color to potential harm by our lack of awareness and understanding, our frank revelations about our own problematic thoughts and behaviors, or our defensiveness as we engage in this process.

Creating an all-white space to educate ourselves about race and racism also acknowledges and makes a pragmatic concession to the challenges and vulnerabilities that white people usually experience while interrogating their own complicity in and privileges under systemic racism. As Blackwell goes on to say in her article:

I also don't believe that the presence of PoC [People of Color] is helpful to white people doing this work. Dictated social niceties make it hard to get into these dark places even among those who share your race. Having a person of color present for this means meeting a fairly solid social barrier (that you're going to say something that will hurt someone else or make you look bad) that's hard for anyone to confront, let alone someone just beginning this work. It's generally best if we're out of the room.

Real progress in the dismantling of racism requires us to do our own internal work to uncover and deconstruct the ways our own attitudes and behaviors have been shaped by living in a racist system as privileged white people. But doing this kind of work often moves us into feelings of shame, guilt, and fear, making it especially hard in mixed groups for us to speak honestly about our feelings regarding race. Working in all-white groups allows us to lower our resistance to admitting and looking at what is true about our own racial feelings and experience. Having taken the first step of gathering as white people, we can then enter into cross-racial groups or settings with the beginnings of racial literacy and hopefully less fragility.

We take to heart the standpoint expressed by Blackwell when she writes in her already-cited article:

The only thing I want to hear from white people about race is, I'm sorry. I didn't see. I didn't listen. I'm working to see and listen now.

If you want support on this journey, there are white people who have worked hard and are further down this path who you can talk to. You don't need people of color in the room for every conversation about race in order to come to realizations about racism. You can do this work yourself and be liberated by it.

Referenced Resources

- Kelsey Blackwell. “Why People of Color Need Spaces Without White People.” *The Arrow*. August 8, 2018. <https://arrow-journal.org/why-people-of-color-need-spaces-without-white-people/#.W3WLM18xTic.facebook>
- Michael Eric Dyson, *Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2017.
- Reverend Dr. William J. Barber II with Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *The Third Reconstruction: How a Moral Movement Is Overcoming the Politics and Division of Fear*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2016.
- Ijeoma Oluo. *So You Want to Talk About Race*. New York: Seal Press. 2018.
- Robin DiAngelo. “No, I Won't Stop Saying ‘White Supremacy.’” *YES! Magazine*. June 30, 2017. <https://www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/no-i-wont-stop-saying-white-supremacy-20170630>

How is this group accountable to people of color?

Although Breaking White Silence is a project launched by white people and carried out through all-white discussion groups [see [Why are white people meeting alone instead of in cross-racial groups to talk about race?](#)], we recognize that, whatever our intentions, relying solely on our own perspectives to guide our anti-racist work is inadequate. Our perspectives as white people are highly limited, shaped as they are by both systemic racism and personal defenses in ways that often can't be detected from the inside. We, therefore, understand the necessity of finding ways to hold ourselves accountable to the needs and perspectives of people of color in our work, and have sought input from outside -- both from people of color and from whites who are more experienced in anti-racism work -- to check and revise our own judgments as we proceed.

There are, however, challenges in figuring out how to put this commitment to accountability into practice. We are sensitive to concerns raised in a paper [see link below] by members of the AWARE-LA (Alliance of Anti-Racist Whites Everywhere-Los Angeles) Leadership Team regarding “one-sided” forms of accountability, in which people of color “carry the burden of

monitoring white people’s anti-racism work within the white community.” (p. 2) Not only does this put extra work on people of color, but it also has the potential to create various unhealthy dynamics amongst people working against racism. [See their paper for thought-provoking reflections on this issue.] Also, completely outsourcing our accountability to certain people of color would run the risk of falsely treating the perspectives of people of color as if they were monolithic and could be reduced to the particular voices we have selected. So, even as we consult with others in carrying out this project, we believe it is ultimately our responsibility to hold ourselves accountable.

That said, we believe an essential aspect of this accountability is for each of us to develop sustained, honest, meaningful dialogue with BIPOC about racial justice and our project’s efforts. Our Leadership Team members are involved in cross-racial groups, including The Poor People’s Campaign: A National Call for a Moral Revival, Project Pilgrimage, and Racial Justice Healing Circles. We also attend trainings led or co-led by BIPOC. Examples include The Racialization of Power and Privilege; The People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond training on systemic racism; the White Privilege Conference; Unpacking Cultural Differences: Tools for Greater Effectiveness; The Work of Racial Justice: Deepening Our Capacity; and Cultures Connecting: Foundations of Cultural Competence. While in these contexts, we actively seek opportunities to receive feedback on the effectiveness of the work we are doing through Breaking White Silence and beyond.

As Breaking White Silence Northwest study groups prepare participants to engage in respectful, mutual alliances with organizations and projects led by BIPOC, we encourage participants to make such connections and seek feedback on their own. Breaking White Silence study groups also provide participants with the opportunity to share and discuss experiences from their everyday lives and, in this way, hold themselves and each other accountable. Many groups have decided to continue meeting regularly after the official end of their study group, not only as a way for participants to deepen their study of race and racism, but also so they can use the *brave space* they have created as a forum for ongoing accountability. Indeed, we set aside time for affinity/accountability at each of our Leadership Team meetings.

While we are doing our best to approach the issue of accountability with integrity, we ultimately recognize the possibly irreconcilable complexities involved in fighting against systemic racism from our privileged position as white people within this system. We therefore see questions of accountability, along with the creation of deeper and more authentic connections with people of color, as significant and necessary areas of ongoing learning and growth for our project, and we pursue our work with the same unsettled, but hopeful and determined attitude DiAngelo expresses regarding her own efforts as a white person writing about race:

While my goal is to interrupt the invisibility and denial of white racism, I am simultaneously reinforcing it by centering my voice as a white person focusing on white people. Although some people of color appreciate this, others see it as self-promoting and narcissistic. This is a dilemma I have not yet resolved, but at this point in my journey toward greater racial awareness and antiracist action, I believe the need for whites to work toward raising their own and other whites' consciousness is a necessary first step. I also understand and acknowledge that this focus reinforces many problematic aspects of racism. This dilemma may not make sense to readers who are new to the exploration, but it may later on. (What Does It Mean to Be White?, pp. 6-7)

Referenced Resources

- Shelly Tochluk and Cameron Levin. “Powerful Partnerships: Transformative Alliance Building.” 2014. Alliance of White Anti-Racists Everywhere – Los Angeles. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/581e9e06ff7c509a5ca2fe32/t/588d5094197aeae36a5fbd5b/1485656213150/Powerful+Partnerships+-+Transformative+Alliance+Building.pdf>
- Robin DiAngelo. *What Does It Mean to Be White? Developing White Racial Literacy (Revised Edition)*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc. 2016.
- [10 Ways White People Can Be Accountable to Black Indigenous Peoples of Color Robin DiAngelo](#)

Does this group do anything to acknowledge the fact that Seattle/Greater King County is occupied indigenous land?

Along with many other groups concerned about social justice, we encourage you to start your meeting with a *land acknowledgement* – a formal statement that pays tribute to the original indigenous inhabitants of this land we now occupy. This acknowledgment should be based on

your own learning of the First People of your region and its meaning will deepen as you continue to learn. In our own Puget Sound region, a 1999 essay at historylink.org states,

Major groups or tribes of local Native Americans include the Suquamish, Duwamish, Nisqually, Snoqualmie, and Muckleshoot (Ilalkoamish, Stuckamish, and Skopamish) tribes. They evolved complex cultural, social, and economic structures, which the invasion of non-Indian settlers in the mid-1800s almost erased, but which continue today as the tribes struggle for their survival, respect, and renewal.

Here are several examples of land acknowledgements. We invite you to write your own and begin each study group with it:

I want to acknowledge with respect the land itself, the ancestral homeland of the Coast Salish people. In particular, I acknowledge the Duwamish, the First People of Seattle and much of King County, who are still here and continue to embody and practice the strengths of their Indigenous culture, teachings, and values. We need to protect and honor the history and people of this land.

I want to acknowledge with respect the land on which we work and live. I recognize that we are on the land where numerous indigenous communities have lived since time immemorial. I honor the Coast Salish peoples of this land, who are still here and continue to embrace their indigenous culture, teachings and values. I acknowledge the land which touches the waters of all tribes and bands within the Duwamish, Suquamish, Tulalip and Muckleshoot Nations and honor their respective histories and peoples.

The purpose of these statements is to show respect and gratitude for indigenous peoples and recognize their enduring relationship to the land. Practicing acknowledgment can also raise awareness about histories that are often suppressed or forgotten. A free guide to land acknowledgment can be downloaded from <https://usdac.us/nativeland>.

As a side note, some folks might want to make rent payments to the Duwamish tribe as a way to stand in solidarity with them as they continue their long fight for federal recognition and to help support the vitality of the Duwamish tribe. See <https://www.realrentduwamish.org/> for more information.

Kenneth Greg Watson, “Native Americans of Puget Sound—a Brief History of the First People and their Cultures, 6/19/1999, HistoryLink.org Essay, <https://www.historylink.org/File/1506>

David M. Buerge, *Chief Seattle and the Town That Took His Name: The Change of Worlds for the Native People and Settlers on Puget Sound*. Seattle, Sasquatch Books, 2017

U.S. Department of Arts and Culture. *Honor Native Land: A Guide and Call to Acknowledgment* (a guide is available to download). <https://usdac.us/nativeland>

FIRST STEPS

Do I need previous facilitation experience?

Facilitating productive group discussion requires skill. This is true even when the topic of conversation is fairly uncontroversial. Among other things, a facilitator needs to be able to ensure that key questions are addressed, draw out important points, keep the discussion on track, and make sure that everyone in the group has the chance to be heard and that no one overly dominates the conversation.

While inexperienced facilitators may be successful in leading more casual group discussions, Breaking White Silence Northwest groups are study groups, rather than casual book groups. If this is your first experience as a facilitator, you are likely to find the experience to be quite challenging. Given the weight, complexity, and unique challenges of the material covered in Dr. DiAngelo's book, the success of a study group discussion can depend heavily on the skill and experience of the facilitator. In particular, the success of Breaking White Silence discussions generally depends on the ability of a facilitator to create a *brave space* for participants to explore together the privileges and implications of their white identity, as well as on the facilitator's ability to skillfully handle the potentially heated conflicts and various forms of white fragility that may arise. [For more on brave spaces, see [What is brave space?](#) and [How can I create a brave space for group discussion?](#)]

For this reason, we strongly recommend that you have previous experience facilitating some other group before you facilitate a Breaking White Silence Northwest study group on your own. For a more complete description of our recommendations, please see [What steps should I take if I want to become a facilitator?](#)

What steps should I take if I want to become a facilitator?

Although we do not vet people who want to facilitate community-initiated Breaking White Silence Northwest study groups, if you are new to Breaking White Silence Northwest and interested in facilitating a group, we suggest that you take at least several of the following steps before facilitating a Breaking White Silence Northwest study group of your own:

Join a facilitated Breaking White Silence study group as a participant

This will give you an opportunity to get familiar with the content of DiAngelo's book, as well as with how group discussion of the book is facilitated by an experienced facilitator, and to develop or strengthen your own white racial literacy. It's not necessary to have read the book prior to signing up for a study group.

Note: If no study group is available in your area or when you can make it, it's possible to read the book on your own or in a small private study group you initiate with other people you know.

Once you have participated in a study group, join the Breaking White Silence Northwest mailing list and participate in the private Breaking White Silence Northwest Facebook group

The mailing list will insure you receive announcements of any events sponsored by Breaking White Silence Northwest, including our yearly Q&A with Robin DiAngelo. The Facebook group will give you a forum to connect with other Breaking White Silence Northwest participants and facilitators, learn more about people's experiences in grappling with and discussing DiAngelo's text, share your own experiences, ask and answer questions, and help to build our extended community for antiracist whites. The Facebook group often includes posts that suggest local or virtual events related to racism and racial justice as well as links to articles, books, podcasts, etc. If your location or availability makes it difficult to attend Breaking White Silence Northwest events in

person, joining our Facebook group can be an especially useful option to connect virtually with others who are doing this work.

Attend a Facilitator Orientation session (offered in the Spring and Fall each year)

This will introduce you in a more structured way to the principles, practices, and resources that have guided our work and that we have found most effective in creating brave space for discussion of this challenging material. It will also give you the opportunity to ask questions of experienced study group facilitators and make connections with others in our growing, supportive Breaking White Silence facilitator community.

Note: If it's not possible to attend an orientation in your area, you can use the facilitator toolkit and consultation/mentoring with an experienced facilitator (by email, text, Zoom, phone, or in person) to guide you in facilitating a study group. As explained in the answer to the previous question, it's very helpful to have previous facilitation experience. This is especially true if you want to facilitate a Breaking White Silence Northwest study group without having first attended a facilitator orientation.

Ask to be paired with a mentor (an experienced facilitator who is part of our mentoring team)

Contact info@breakingwhitesilencenw.org to request a volunteer mentor to help you cross the “confidence hurdle” and get support designed to your needs as you develop, promote, and facilitate your first study group. This offers weekly, every-other-week or as-needed support while your study group is forming and in session (via Zoom, phone, text, email or in person).

Join a small facilitator support/consultation group led by experienced facilitators

This is an opportunity that will occasionally be offered (the first time will be in Winter, 2022, if there is enough interest) and will be available at no charge to those considering forming or currently facilitating a study group.

Co-facilitate with an experienced facilitator

When this option is available, you work side-by-side with an experienced facilitator and get great practice in all aspects of planning and running a Breaking White Silence Northwest study group, while knowing there is someone reliable to guide, support, and share the responsibilities with you along the way. Although we are always learning and improving, seeing how a more experienced facilitator interprets the text and handles certain questions and complications is invaluable for your own growth and can give you great insight into what works for you as you develop your own personal style as a facilitator. This is an especially good step if you have not had previous facilitation experience.

Note: If an experienced facilitator is not available, it's possible to co-facilitate with another new facilitator. It's certainly possible (and sometimes preferable) to facilitate alone the first time you facilitate a study group. It is very helpful to seek the support of a mentor and/or join a facilitator support/consultation group if you do facilitate alone or with another new facilitator). Our toolkit gives our sense of the best options but recognizes that each facilitator's situation is unique and may require adaptation.

What options are available to me as an experienced facilitator?

Since dismantling racial oppression requires ongoing internal and systemic work, there are always further ways you can develop and apply yourself once you have gained some experience as a Breaking White Silence Northwest study group facilitator:

- You can continue to facilitate either private or public study groups that you initiate on your own or with a co-facilitator (what we call *community-initiated* groups).
- You can have a discussion with the Breaking White Silence Leadership Team (contact info@breakingwhitesilencenw.org or someone you know personally from the Leadership Team) about what steps you can take to facilitate a study group sponsored by Breaking White Silence Northwest. Experienced facilitators for study groups we sponsor are very welcome, although each facilitator needs to first be vetted and each group approved by the Leadership Team.
- You can make yourself available as a resource/mentor to new facilitators via Zoom email, by phone or in person. We welcome experienced facilitators to join our small mentoring team! Contact info@breakingwhitesilencenw.org, if interested in this possibility.
- We assume you will continue your own learning and activism toward racial justice, especially attending trainings and/or joining activist groups led or co-led by Black people, Indigenous people or people of color. [LEARN and ACT FOR RACIAL JUSTICE](#)

GETTING UNDERWAY

What is the difference between a *Sponsored Study Group* and a *Community-initiated Study Group*? How to invite participants?

Groups may be formed in a number of ways, depending, first of all, on whether the group will be *Sponsored by Breaking White Silence Northwest* or *community-initiated*. *Sponsored study groups*

are facilitated by experienced facilitators, with each facilitator and each group approved by the Leadership Team.

You can take steps through the Breaking White Silence Leadership Team (contact info@breakingwhitesilencenw.org) to see if it is possible for you to facilitate a study group sponsored by Breaking White Silence Northwest. If a specific facilitator(s) and group are approved, our Leadership Team will help you find out whether a PNA facility can be reserved for the group (and, if not, help you explore other options). We will help to promote the group publicly, through PNA's *The Review*, email newsletters and announcements, the PNA, PhinneyWood and Breaking White Silence Northwest Facebook pages, perhaps posters in appropriate settings -- as well, perhaps, through small flyers handed out during pertinent events (such as Breaking White Silence trainings). Most facilitators of sponsored groups supplement these official promotions with their own promotional efforts, in order to insure the group is full.

Study groups can be promoted in various ways. Many facilitators have reached out to neighbors in person or by dropping off flyers in local establishments. You might also consider posting announcements on notice boards, in newsletters or through social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, NextDoor). For one previous public group, the facilitator put flyers in the mailboxes of people who had signs sympathetic to antiracism, such as a "Black Lives Matters" sign. If you are trying to publicize a public group, it's helpful to carry flyers with you, so you can hand them to people you meet who might be interested.

Facilitators who wish to start a Community-Initiated Study Group must decide if they want the group to be private (open only to select individuals or to members of select communities) or advertised more widely. This decision determines how the facilitator will go about recruiting participants. *Our Leadership Team will not participate in helping to promote Community-initiated Study Groups.*

Facilitators can invite friends, co-workers, neighbors, or other people connected to them to join a private group. For these private groups, a facilitator first makes a decision about the setting and size of the group. Settings have varied, from the living room of a private home, to a coffee shop,

to a meeting room in a church or synagogue, to a conference room in a large agency (during lunch hour). Virtual study groups via Zoom or other digital platform are also an option. Settings determine who to invite and how large a group makes sense.

In the past, some facilitators have formed private groups by bringing the idea up with friends as something to do together for personal growth. Others have announced the formation of a group in their faith communities or in community or volunteer organization during an event, through a newsletter or via email. [See example of an invitation email, linked below]

Unless your group is completely private, it's helpful to try various forms of recruiting to insure your group fills. Many, if not most, groups are formed by facilitators recruiting participants from multiple sources, including word of mouth.

Once you have put out the word, anyone interested in joining your group would then email you, at which point you would add them to a growing list until the group is full (with perhaps one person placed on a waiting list).

What if BIPOC (Black, Indigenous or People of Color) want to join the group?

The Breaking White Silence project encourages white people to take responsibility for overcoming our own racism. Therefore, we are not asking BIPOC to do this work for us, and do not invite or encourage BIPOC to join our study groups. We do not want to place them in the often painful position of educating white people about the many ways they participate in racist systems and contribute to the oppression and marginalization of BIPOC. However, occasionally BIPOC have chosen to participate with the understanding that the focus is on what it means to be white and gaining white racial literacy. In this circumstance, it's essential that the facilitator insure that they are not put on the spot and expected to "speak for BIPOC" or educate the white participants about racism. For more on this issue, see [Why are white people meeting alone, instead of in cross-racial groups, to talk about race?](#)

What is the optimal size of a study group?

We have found the optimal number to be between six and ten, including facilitators. However, a study group can work with as few as three people and as many as twelve. With groups larger than six it is often helpful to break into smaller groups for some of the discussions, so that all participants have time to share their personal experiences, and participants who are less vocal in the full group can feel more comfortable to speak in the more intimate context. Our sponsored study groups are usually limited to eight participants plus facilitator(s).

Note: An alternative form that worked well in one work setting -- when an unexpectedly large number of co-workers wanted to participate in the study group -- was to recruit additional facilitators, so that each of four facilitators worked with a smaller group of six to ten participants.

How does a study group differ if on Zoom or another digital platform? What have you learned that will help this be more effective?

We have had good experiences holding virtual groups during the COVID-19 pandemic. We find that all of us who have used Zoom for these groups have our own style and own sense of what works best. You will need to have a Zoom account that allows you to have multiple participants in different locations. The free Zoom account only allow 40 minutes for such sessions, so you will need to purchase a Zoom account at a modest amount for the duration of your study group.

Here are some ideas:

- Invitations: some facilitators prefer to send a single Zoom invitation that is used for all the meetings. Others prefer to send out a new invitation 10 minutes before each meeting is to begin.
- Some have found that it works best to ask people to raise hands to speak during the first meeting. This can be relaxed over time as the group finds its rhythm.

- Many facilitators prefer to ask participants to use mute when they're not speaking.
- It is preferable to request that all participants use Gallery View (rather than Speaker View) so that all participants can see everyone else on one screen.
- Some facilitators prefer the use of breakout rooms and others do not. Those who do find that breakouts allow more people to share vulnerable stories and feelings related to race. Those who prefer keeping the conversations in the whole group find that it supports the bonding of the large group. Generally, the larger the group, the more helpful breakout rooms can be. Before using breakout rooms, we suggest that you first practice this with friends. Zoom provides instructions on how to use breakout rooms.
- At those time where you want every participant to speak, it can be difficult in Zoom to go around in a circle. A Zoom variation is to use an invitational approach where one person speaks and then directly invites another person to speak and that person then invites another person to speak and so on.

Zoom offers a number of virtual tutorials to show new users how best to use it. Practicing with friends beforehand is a good way to “learn the ropes.” It’s helpful to co-facilitate (or consult with) with another person who is familiar with Zoom the first time you facilitate a study group.

How many times should study group meet?

Many experienced facilitators have found six sessions to be optimal. Five to seven sessions give enough space for participants to share some personal experiences with racism as they discuss the material and develop their white racial literacy. A six-session variation is that the facilitator meets with the study group the first five sessions and the study group meet a sixth session, without the facilitator present (or present only for the first 45 minutes), to discuss intentions and actions for further anti-racist learning and action (as individuals and perhaps as a group that continues to meet as a self-directed study group). Please note the Facilitator Checklist for the final two sessions in Appendix 1, as it gives detailed suggestions for these final sessions.

Related Resources (Appendix #1)

[Examples of Study Group with Faith Community by Jan Thomas](#)

[Five-Session Study Group Format by Mary Holscher](#)

[Five Session Study Guide by Paul Finley](#)

[Five-session Annotated Study Guide by Mary Holscher and Paul Finley](#)

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- [Introduction to Karen's 6-week Study Guide](#)
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- [#4 Study Group](#)
- [Email for #4 Study Group](#)
- [#5 Study Group](#)
- [Email for #5 Study Group](#)
- [#6 Study Group](#)
- [Email for #6 Study Group](#)

[Seven-Session Study Guide by Walter McGerry](#)

[Facilitator Checklist for Final Two Sessions](#)

How regularly should a study group meet?

Some experienced facilitators have found it optimal to meet every other week, in order to give participants enough time to read and reflect on the material as it relates to their life experiences. Others have found meeting weekly to work well. Meeting less frequently than every other week is usually not enough to sustain momentum and continuity when a study group is reading *What Does It Mean to Be White?*

What is the optimal length of a study group session?

The optimal length range is between an hour and forty-five minutes and two hours.

Note: One group successfully met for an hour each time (a lunch hour in a work setting), by dividing a five-week reading schedule into ten weeks.

GROUP PROCESS

What is *brave space*?

We believe that white people need to get comfortable experiencing some discomfort when discussing race and racism. Therefore, rather than working to create “safe space” – with its connotations of comfort – for our group discussions, we seek to create a supportive but more challenging “brave space” for our discussions. We are guided in this approach by the reasoning and suggestions of the Alliance of White Anti-Racists Everywhere—LA in their “Communication Guidelines for Brave Space,” which begins with the following explanation:

In 2013, Kathy Obear (a leading white anti-racist diversity trainer) suggested that we use language highlighting the need for a “brave space.”

Our understanding is that the movement toward “safe space” began out of trauma work. Over time, perhaps recognizing the link between the history of racism and trauma, people working in diversity, inclusion, and equity efforts adopted the “safe space” language.

Unfortunately, many noticed that in dialogues investigating issues of race, there was a tendency for white people to claim that a space was not “safe” if they were challenged, became uncomfortable, and felt that their opinions were not validated. This also tended to occur as a reaction against the testimony of people of color.

As white people working to cultivate a culture of anti-racism, we are called to create a “brave space” where we accept the likelihood that we will be uncomfortable when investigating issues of race, privilege, and oppression and our roles within them. We recognize that this works because we meet as a racially-caucused group, as asking people of color to be “brave” in multi-racial dialogues can be problematic.

Referenced Resource

- Alliance of White Anti-Racists Everywhere – Los Angeles (AWARE—LA). “Communication Guidelines for a Brave Space.” <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/581e9e06ff7c509a5ca2fe32/t/58f25fa937c58130853337df/1492279209799/04+AWARE-LA+Brave+Space+Guidelines+and+History.pdf>

How can I create a brave space for group discussion?

We've found the most success in creating brave space when we explain the idea of brave space to participants and ask them to embrace the following principles and practices in study group discussions:

Give space/take space

Invite participants who would usually speak more to “give space” and those who usually speak less to “take space.” Practices that invite each participant to speak in turn around the circle are also helpful (e.g., brief check-in, respond to an opening question). Another suggested practice is to request that each participant refrain from speaking a second time until every participant has had a chance to speak.

Accept that discomfort is part of engaging meaningfully with difficult topics

Since we are challenging assumptions that are deeply enculturated in each person, exposing and changing those assumptions will produce discomfort. Speaking honestly about race is breaking hidden social rules. “Discomfort” is not the same as lack of safety, it is simply a necessary part of engaging in the work of white racial literacy.

Accept non-closure

A study group is intended to begin (or be one of the steps along the way) the lifelong process of becoming racially literate and able to work effectively toward racial justice. Participants need to allow for complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty and accept that many questions will remain unresolved.

Listen

Encourage participants to practice listening without thinking about how they are going to respond. Connection with others, as well as personal transformation, comes when people are careful not to lose the opportunity to just listen.

Speak from experience, not position

We invite participants to speak in terms that emphasize their own experience – for example, “I find myself thinking...” or “I find myself wondering...” or “I notice that I feel...” -- rather than in terms that presume they know better – for example, “You don’t understand...” or “The book is wrong about...” or “I disagree that...”

Some facilitators also include:

Confidentiality

We encourage participants to share their own personal experience and learning in the study group with others and ask that the content of others’ personal sharing be kept confidential.

In the spirit of creating brave space, in which privileged voices are more willing to accept the discomfort of examining their privileges and marginalized voices can hopefully feel more welcome to share their realities and experiences, we also encourage you, in your facilitator role – particularly if you identify as *cisgender* (i.e., your gender identity matches the sex you were assigned at birth) – to state your preferred gender pronouns when you introduce yourself to your study group. To avoid putting people who are transgender and/or gender-nonconforming on the spot, it can be best to leave it up to participants whether to follow your lead rather than explicitly suggesting that they do so. But when people who are cis-identified adopt the norm of stating their preferred gender pronouns, they are prompted to check their gender privilege, in an attempt to mitigate the marginalization of people who are transgender and/or gender-nonconforming and make it easier for them to identify themselves. This has become common practice in groups fighting for social justice and equity, and we agree that it is an important piece in a multi-faceted effort to dismantle oppressive systems.

How can I help participants focus on their white identity, rather than on marginalized aspects of their identity (e.g., female, LGBTQ, working class, person with a disability)?

Fighting systemic racial oppression is often very humbling, disorienting, and painful work for white people. As white people we need to be aware of our tendency to protect ourselves from the feelings of guilt, shame, and fear that such work can trigger. Diverting attention away from our

white identity to the aspects of our identity that are marginalized is a common defense mechanism that prevents us from doing the internal work required to counter systemic racism. The most common way this manifests in a study group is for someone to talk about their experience as a member of a marginalized group (e.g., woman, lesbian, old person) as a way to avoid recognizing the impact of our whiteness. As Robin DiAngelo says in a July 2018 KUOW radio interview, “We’re not saying you [white people] haven’t faced barriers or struggled, what we’re saying is that you have not faced *this* barrier. And it does help you navigate the barriers you *do* have.” [See linked interview below.]

While it is important to acknowledge the intersectionality of our social identities and to recognize that the fight against oppression must be multifaceted, the work of dismantling racism internally and systemically requires us to dedicate time, attention, and effort specifically to our white identity. In the words of Kyana Wheeler from Racial Equity Consultants, LLC, during the same KUOW interview, “The amazingness of whiteness is its invisibility.” A fundamental purpose of Breaking White Silence is to give white people an opportunity to make the invisible visible. We all support each other in doing this. In the context of a Breaking White Silence Northwest study group, it is our racism that must take center stage and our dominant white identity that is the focus of self-examination. We believe that Kyana Wheeler (who is a biracial Black woman) is making a deeply important point when she adds, “I’m not asking you to understand what it’s like to be a person of color. I’m asking you to understand what it’s like to be white.”

In fact, learning to counteract our defense mechanisms and keep our white dominance and privileges at the center of our attention is a crucial skill in grappling with systemic racism. It is a difficult skill to learn and one we continue to strengthen. So, when a participant does appear to be shifting their attention away from their dominant white identity to their marginalized identities, they are actually providing the group with a valuable learning opportunity. As the study group’s facilitator, you can help participants make the most of this opportunity. Here are some ways to do that:

- Encourage participants to notice and name this shifting of attention when it happens without shaming the person, remembering defensive strategies do not indicate

individual “badness” and are a manifestation of the way systemic racism works to keep whiteness invisible.

- Help participants reflect on how — regardless of intention — this attention shifting can disrupt our much-needed efforts to examine our privileges as white people and the ways we unwittingly help sustain white supremacy
- Help students understand and appreciate the fact that, in Ijeoma Oluo’s words (in her book *So You Want to Talk About Race*), different forms of oppression are “...different issues with...different treatments, and they require...different conversations.” (p. 18) This means acknowledging that having substantial advantages as a white person does not negate the ways participants may be disadvantaged through their marginalized identities, but also helping them see that this study group is not the time or place to focus on these other forms of oppression.
- Refer students to DiAngelo’s discussion in Chapter 11 of *What Does It Mean to Be White?*, where she talks about using our intersectionality to reflect on how each of our marginalized identities “has socialized [us] to collude with racism,” and how all our group identities “function together to hold racism in place.” In a discussion that is both powerful and instructive, DiAngelo draws on her experiences growing up poor and white to explore the question: “How did I learn racism *specifically through my class oppression?*” (p. 216)

The more practice we get noticing and reflecting on our defensive tendencies, the better able we will be to see and counteract our white fragility when we are out in the world and called out on our racism or white privilege. And because it is so difficult to do the hard work of making our white identity *salient* and available to reflect upon, practicing this work increases compassion for those we encounter who have no interest in or are not yet good at making this shift in focus. Developing our compassion in such ways is particularly important because it helps keep us out of the good/bad binary, which is a cornerstone in the construction of racism and white supremacy. [For more about the good/bad binary, see [Why is the good/bad binary such an important concept in our work?](#)]

Referenced Resources

- Bill Radke and Alison Bruzek. “Why Is It So Hard for White People to Talk About Race?” *KUOW: The Record*. July 12, 2018. <http://archive.kuow.org/post/why-it-so-hard-white-people-talk-about-race>
- Ijeoma Oluo. *So You Want to Talk About Race?* New York: Seal Press. 2018.

Related Resource

- Robin DiAngelo. “My Class Didn’t Trump My Race: Using Oppression to Face Privilege.” *Multicultural Perspectives* 8(1). 2006. pp. 51–56. <https://robindiangelo.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/ClassTrumpRace.pdf>

Why is the good/bad binary such an important concept in our work?

Society teaches us that racism consists of conscious attitudes of racial superiority and individual acts of meanness, and that those who engage in such bigotry are “ignorant” and “bad” people -- to be sharply distinguished from the rest of us “good,” “educated,” “open-minded” white people, who harbor no such ill-will toward people of color. This racist=bad/not racist=good binary sets us up to feel personally attacked when we are called out for saying or doing something racist and can bring about defensiveness. The good/bad binary causes us to think that since only bad people can be racist, I cannot be fairly accused of racism because I am not a bad person. It therefore grounds our white fragility, sensitizing us to any suggestions that something we have said or done might be racist. Even more problematically, it makes us think that, since I am a “good,” “non-racist” person, racism is not a problem that implicates me, and there is no further action that I need to take

We need to challenge this binary and develop a deeper understanding of racism from a wider perspective that centers the perspectives and experiences BIPOC. As we deeply understand that every white person in American has been saturated with messages of white supremacy and white racial superiority since birth, that this is inescapable and is not any individual’s fault, we understand that racism goes beyond individual intentions. The more we understand it is not our fault or any individual’s fault to be saturated in this way, the more capable we become of taking responsibility for “making the invisible visible” and to gradually and diligently work toward becoming antiracist. If we focus on isolated individuals and fail to acknowledge and examine the interpersonal, cultural, historical and structural dimensions of racism – as well as our own relationship to them -- we cannot effectively challenge the racist status quo. Robin DiAngelo emphasizes that the Good/Bad Binary is an excellent means to hold systemic racism in place.

Because falling into Good/Bad Binary thinking is one of the primary barriers well-meaning people have to understanding racism, it is an essential focus of our study groups.

How can I deal with the good/bad binary “showing” itself in our discussions?

Given that the good/bad binary pervades white people’s thoughts and feelings about racism, it’s no surprise that this binary frequently manifests itself within Breaking White Silence study group discussions.

Here are some of the more common ways you’re likely to notice it:

- Someone points out the racism in someone else (e.g., a friend, a co-worker or boss, a relative, a political party, a politician) in a way that places racism outside the speaker, as if they haven’t also been permeated with white supremacist ideology that needs to be examined
- One participant points out another participant’s *white racial frame* in a way that seems unnecessarily condescending and shaming
- Someone bristles when reasonably challenged to consider that something they said seems to reflect their white racial frame
- Someone reacts with shame and self-flagellation when they realize that something they said reflects racist assumptions

When the good/bad binary emerges during a Breaking White Silence discussion, you have the opportunity to help participants become more adept and comfortable at noticing, acknowledging, and appreciating the pervasiveness of this binary in their own thinking. It’s very helpful, therefore, not to let these manifestations go by without comment. When the binary shows itself, point it out. Encourage the group to interrogate the ways that it might be functioning within the current conversation to disguise or distract people from our own racist thinking and the underlying system it sustains.

It can be especially effective to acknowledge your own susceptibility to the good/bad binary. For example, you can describe times when you have pointed the finger elsewhere, only to later discover the same racist tendency within yourself, or times when you have felt shame and even reacted defensively when your implicit bias was pointed out.

More generally, any comment that emphasizes how pervasive (and often invisible) structural and systemic racism is and how all white people (including us!) have been deeply conditioned to see ourselves as superior and entitled (usually without realizing it) helps to deconstruct and counteract the good/bad binary. Disrupting this binary in our own thinking about racism is one of the most important and ongoing ways that we challenge ourselves in our study groups.

Related Resource

- Robin DiAngelo. “Nothing to Add: A Challenge to White Silence in Racial Discussions.” *Understanding and Dismantling Privilege* 2(1). 2012.
[http://www.wpcjournal.com/article/view/10100/Nothing to add: A Challenge to White Silence in Racial Discussions](http://www.wpcjournal.com/article/view/10100/Nothing%20to%20add%3A%20A%20Challenge%20to%20White%20Silence%20in%20Racial%20Discussions)

How should I use the book in the study group?

In structuring discussion of the material covered in the book, many facilitators have found it helpful to draw on some of the discussion questions conveniently included at the end of each chapter (in the *Revised Edition* only), as well as to ask participants to prepare for sessions by picking out one or two passages from the reading for the given week that they find especially powerful or interesting and would like to discuss. For more detailed examples of how different Leadership Team members have structured discussion in the study groups they’ve facilitated, see the documents linked below (also referenced in [How many times should study group meet?](#)). While we offer these pointers and models, we encourage you to explore alternatives as you figure out an approach that works well for you and the participants in your group.

It is important to emphasize that our intention in Breaking White Silence Northwest study groups is to grapple with *this* book: to ground our dialogue in specific references and passages in *What Does It Mean to Be White?* In the first session it’s helpful to read the attached passage from the book about “grappling,” which “...means to receive, reflect upon, practice articulating, and seek

deeper clarity and understanding. Grappling is *not* rejecting out of hand, refusing to engage, debating, or playing ‘devil’s advocate’.” (p. 22). [See handout, linked below.]

We also suggest that participants ground their questions and responses with quotes from the book, to keep the discussion focused on the book. We ask each participant to bring their book each time (and to be sure it’s the ***Revised Edition*** so that everyone can find the quoted page easily).

Related Resources (Appendix #1)

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How do I deal with someone who doesn’t read the material?

In the introductory email to participants the facilitator should state clearly that group members will be expected to do the reading, as the quality of the discussion will depend on it. That email will emphasize that it’s important for participants to have the ***Revised Edition*** of the book and will give the first reading assignment (to be completed before the first group session). Before and again at the first session, the facilitator should emphasize the importance of reading the relevant material

before each meeting. At the end of each session, state the reading assignment by chapters for the next meeting. Shortly after the session, send an email to participants as a reminder of the next reading assignment. In this email you might also give selected, suggested study questions from the questions at the end of each chapter or ask people to pick out one or two passages from the reading to discuss with the group.

Suggest to participants that if they haven't done the reading for a session, it will be helpful on several levels if they de-center themselves and take the position of a listener, unless it is to ask for clarification or to ask a question that might help the group better examine and understand the text.

How do I deal with someone who misses a session?

Ideally, participants should only sign up if they are reasonably sure they can attend every session. It is good to state this clearly in the promotion and invitations.

When a participant misses a meeting, not only are they left out as the rest of the group gets to know each other better, but the other participants might also begin to wonder about the absent person's commitment to the work of the group and whether this participant has adequately familiarized themselves with the important claims and concepts covered in their absence. Missed meetings, then, can negatively affect group cohesion and the development of *brave space*.

With this in mind, if a participant knows in advance that they will need to miss the first session or miss more than *one* other sessions, it is best for them to sign up for a study group at a later date. We have found it *essential* to have everyone present for the group's first meeting. We have found through experience that missing the first session or more than one later session is problematic for the group as a whole, as well as the individual who misses the session(s). We do recognize, though, that a last-minute emergency could make someone miss the first session. It is strongly suggested that if this happens the facilitator arrange to meet with the person to go over the content of the first session before the second session and have another round of introductions during the second session to help welcome them into the group.

Sometimes, a participant and facilitator can make a specific plan ahead of time about how a later missed session will be handled (or, in the case of illness or emergency, arrangements can be made

after the missed meeting). Some facilitators like to meet with the participant after the session they missed or ask the participant to arrange to meet or have a phone call with another participant before the next session. This one-on-one meeting can be used to make sure the participant has been introduced to the material covered in the first meeting, to fill them in on what happened in that meeting, and to check on their commitment to attending the remaining sessions. In any event, it is the participant's responsibility to complete the reading for a missed session (and take time to consider the discussion questions, if that is your approach).

How do I deal with someone who talks too much?

Everyone has their own way of working with this issue. The main thing is to find ways to help everyone in the group contribute and to do so without shaming those who tend to be quiet or those who like to talk.

You can begin to find this balance from the first session. As part of setting the norms for the group, you can state a general expectation that people keep their comments succinct and that when they've spoken once, they should leave space for those who have not yet spoken. Also, in describing the idea and importance of *brave space*, you can encourage participants who would usually speak more to "give space" and those who usually speak less to "take space." Point out that this means participants should also be aware of their privilege before they speak. If they are members of a dominant group (e.g., a man, or someone without a hearing disability, or someone who processes information very quickly), are they making space for those of marginalized groups (e.g., women, or those with hearing loss, or those who take more time to process what has been said)?

There are also various ways you can set up and structure the discussion of a particular chapter or question to encourage more balanced participation. For example, instead of using a "popcorn" style approach for a discussion – where participants contribute at will, as they have things they want to say – you can "go around the circle," with people taking turns speaking, one at a time around the circle, so that each person is invited to speak or to pass, and no one is put on the spot. Breaking into two or more small groups to discuss a particular question is another great way to allow everyone more time to talk and often makes it easier for more introverted or marginalized participants to "take space." And both of these strategies work well when combined with timed

contributions, where each person is given a fixed amount of time to speak. Even simply indicating up front how much time you have allocated for the group to discuss a particular chapter or question can be effective, since it helps participants take into account how much time is available per person for that discussion.

If, despite your efforts to preempt excessive talking by a few dominant participants, you still find that there are problematic imbalances in group discussions, you should feel free to intervene accordingly, while doing your best to avoid shaming people in the process. This may include inviting those who haven't spoken to share their thoughts or reminding the people who talk too much of the importance of making space for other voices. People will usually understand that this is part of your role as facilitator, especially if you state in the first session that, as facilitator, you will intercede as needed.

Related Resource:

[Redirecting Participants to Keep Them on Topic](#) (Appendix 2)

How do I deal with someone who argues?

Since the material covered in DiAngelo's book directly challenges many of our ingrained ways of understanding race and racism, it can be tempting for some participants to respond by objecting to her points or even by arguing with others in the group. However, our purpose in Breaking White Silence groups is to support each other's process of understanding the content of this book, not to convince each other of our opinions.

This is not to suggest that participants must blindly endorse everything DiAngelo says. Rather, we ask participants to join us in *grappling* with the content of this book, where, in DiAngelo's words, grappling "...means to receive, reflect upon, practice articulating, and seek deeper clarity and understanding. Grappling is *not* rejecting out of hand, refusing to engage, debating, or playing 'devil's advocate'." Our priority is on better understanding and appreciating how things look from a perspective that centers the experiences of people of color, not on rushing to the defense of our white racial frame whenever we encounter an idea that runs counter to our beliefs and experiences as white people.

To preempt people's inclination to argue, make sure to establish in the first meeting that the purpose of group discussion is to help each other better comprehend and grapple with the text and that, as facilitator, you will interrupt argumentation. If at some point later participants then start arguing with the text or with each other, you can intervene accordingly, reminding them of your stance on argumentation and steering them back to a focus on comprehension and grappling.

FURTHER STEPS

What if participants want to keep meeting after the formal study group ends?

Many study groups continue to meet after the original study group ends. These continuing leadership teams may have a rotating facilitator or no formal facilitation. If the group's original facilitator continues to be involved, they may remain in the role of lead facilitator or may participate as simply one more member of the group. It is helpful to make time available in the final facilitated session to discuss this possibility or to schedule an additional session without the facilitator after the formal study group to discuss it.

Some of the models that have been working well are groups that meet monthly or quarterly to discuss articles, movies, radio interviews, video presentations, or other books related to racial justice education.

A number of these leadership teams go further in supporting participants' continued growth, by functioning as spaces of mutual accountability for members, as they explore the racism they see in themselves and the world and seek feedback about their efforts to take meaningful action for racial justice.

What else can I or other group participants do to fight racism?

Our project has a particular (and limited) purpose: to support white people in gaining white racial literacy. There are many resources available to offer guidance and suggestions on steps you can take to fight racism. [See the resources referenced below, as well as the [General Resources](#)

section, for examples.] Advocacy is an essential goal of our work. But be wary of the desire in yourself and your group to move immediately into action, without first spending adequate time reflecting on the (usually unintentional) ways we reinforce racism, sometimes even in our very effort to fight it. Once you have completed an initial study of *What Does It Mean to Be White?* and have made progress toward white racial literacy, you will be better prepared to take further steps. The following is a brief, consolidated summary of the valuable suggestions made by Michael Eric Dyson (in his book *The Tears We Cannot Stop*) and Reverend Dr. William J. Barber II (in his book *The Third Reconstruction*) for ways that white people can contribute to the fight against racism:

- Educate yourself. Recognize the centrality of race and the distinction between the heritage of immigrants vs. that of slaves. Make Black friends and visit Black people and institutions. Learn to see and oppose how black people are made into the cultural “other”. Educate other white people.
- Participate with Black people in nonviolent, indigenously-led grassroots organizing that is designed to change the conversation and consciousness.
- Build a stage from which to lift the voices of everyday people impacted by immoral policies. Speak up against injustice. Use moral language to frame and critique public policy, regardless of who is in power. Make a serious commitment to academic and empirical analysis of policy.
- Make your own reparations by transferring some of your wealth to people who are struggling because of the U.S. history of racism.
- Resist the “one moment” mentality: we are building a movement! Build broad, diverse, and transformative long-term coalition relationships rooted in a clear agenda that doesn’t measure success only by electoral outcome. Include moral and religious leaders of all faiths. Intentionally diversify the movement with the goal of building unlikely allies. Include the cultural arts, voter registration/education, and a strong legal strategy in your work.

Our Breaking White Silence Northwest project is part of the first step: educate yourself!

If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. If you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.

Lilla Watson, Aboriginal elder, activist and educator from Queensland, Australia.

Referenced Resources

- Michael Eric Dyson. *Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2017. pp. 197-212.
- Reverend Dr. William J. Barber II with Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. *The Third Reconstruction: How a Moral Movement Is Overcoming the Politics and Division of Fear*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2016. pp. 127-30.
- [75 Ways to Work for Racial Justice](#) (Appendix 2)
- James Mulholland, "Nine Steps to Becoming a Better Human Being," August 13, 2021. <https://notetomywhiteself.wordpress.com/2021/08/13/nine-hard-steps-to-becoming-a-better-white-human-being/>
- [LEARN and ACT FOR RACIAL JUSTICE](#) (Appendix 2)

GENERAL RESOURCES

Robin DiAngelo's website has links to a number of useful articles:

<https://www.robindiangelo.com/resources/>

Dr. Robin DiAngelo's Discusses White Fragility at the Seattle Public Library, June, 2018

Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45ey4jgoxeU>

Audio only:

https://www.spl.org/audio/18_06_28_RobinDiangelo.mp3

Thirty books suggested by staff librarians several years ago on the topic of "Interrupting Whiteness" (all available through the Seattle Public Library)

<https://seattle.bibliocommons.com/list/share/117997230/959184017>

A selection of more recently published books not yet on the "Interrupting Whiteness" list, but available through the library:

Claudia Rankine. *Just Us: An American Conversation*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Graywolf Press. 2020.

Ibram X. Kendi. *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Race in America*. New York: Bold Type Books. 2016.

Ibram X Kendi. *How to Be an Antiracist*. New York: One World/Random House, 2019.

Ijeoma Oluo. *So You Want to Talk About Race*. New York: Seal Press. 2018.

Reader's Guide:

https://www.hachettebookgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/so-you-want-to-talk-about-race_readers-guide.pdf

Isabel Wilkerson. *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*. New York: Random House. 2020.

Robin DiAngelo. *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*. Boston: Beacon Press. 2018

Related essay in *The New Yorker*:

Katy Waldman. "A Sociologist Examines the 'White Fragility' that Prevents White Americans from Confronting Racism." *The New Yorker*. July 23, 2018.

<https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/a-sociologist-examines-the-white-fragility-that-prevents-white-americans-from-confronting-racism>

Robin DiAngelo. *Nice Racism: How Progressive White People Perpetuate Racial Harm* Boston: Beacon Press. 2021

2015 Seattle Race Conference keynote address by Letitia Nieto, “Awakening to What Works: Practical Approaches to Deep Social Change”

<http://www.seattlechannel.org/videos?videoid=x59621>

Shelly Tochluk. *Witnessing Whiteness: The Need to Talk About Race and How to Do It, Second Edition*. Lanham, MD: R&L Education. 2010.

Workshop Series aligned with this book:

<http://witnessingwhiteness.com/workshop-series/>

APPENDIX #1: Session Outline Examples

[Examples of Study Group with Faith Community by Jan Thomas](#)

[Five-Session Study Group Format by Mary Holscher](#)

[Five Session Study Guide by Paul Finley](#)

[Five-session Annotated Study Guide by Mary Holscher and Paul Finley](#)

[Six-session Study Guide by Karen Schneider \(with examples of supporting emails\)](#)

- [Introduction to Karen’s 6-week Study Guide](#)
- [#1 Study Group](#)
- [Email for #1 Study Group](#)
- [#2 Study Group](#)
- [Email for #2 Study Group](#)
- [#3 Study Group](#)
- [Email for #3 Study Group](#)
- [#4 Study Group](#)
- [Email for #4 Study Group](#)
- [#5 Study Group](#)
- [Email for #5 Study Group](#)
- [#6 Study Group](#)
- [Email for #6 Study Group](#)

[Seven-Session Study Guide by Walter McGerry](#)

[Facilitator Checklist for Final Two Sessions](#)

APPENDIX #2: Handouts Related to Some Session Outlines

[LEARN and ACT FOR RACIAL JUSTICE](#)

[Handout of “Grappling” quotation from *What Does It Mean to Be White?* \(p. 22\)](#)

[The Cycle of Oppression](#)

[Frame of Reference Exercise](#)

[How Race Shapes the Lives of White People](#)

[Common Patterns of Well-Meaning White People](#)

[What Makes Racism So Hard to See](#)

[Rationales for White Silence and an Anti-Racist Challenge](#)

[Redirecting Participants to Keep Them on Topic](#)

[10 Ways White People Can Be Accountable to Black Indigenous Peoples of Color Robin DiAngelo](#)

[75 Ways to Work for Racial Justice](#)

[Now that you've \(nearly\) completed this Breaking White Silence Northwest study group...](#)