

UNCOMFORTABLE CONVERSATIONS WITH A BLACK MAN

BOOK DIGEST

PART 1: YOU AND ME

What do you see when you see me?

IMPLICIT BIAS

“Prejudice is an emotional commitment to ignorance. Nathan Rustein”

QUESTION

“WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BEST WAYS TO FIND AND GET RID OF YOUR IMPLICIT BIAS?”

The author starts the chapter by highlighting how the Google Photos app wrongly tagged black people as gorillas, because the algorithm had been disproportionately built with white faces in mind, as developers were coding and testing it. It did not come from overt racism, but it reflected that no one had thought to teach it how to recognize non-white folks. That is how implicit biases impact our actions.

Emmanuel Acho shares:

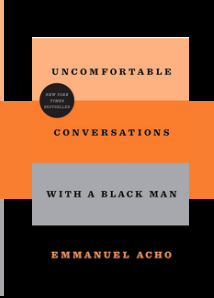
“Everyone has implicit biases, including me. They’re not just about race—they’re our knee-jerk judgments about every superficial difference between people.”

The goal is not to beat ourselves up over those, it is to take responsibility for them. Because we can make them **conscious**! And that’s how we get to unroot them.

“When an idea is conscious, you can change your mind.”

LET’S REWIND

A 2016 article showed that folks with white-sounding names were **TWICE** as likely to get a call-back after an interview. And that was the case even within pro-diversity companies. That’s a proof that what we say is not necessarily what we think, feel or do. Indeed, our prejudice and stereotypes can drive our behavior without us being even aware that they exist.



UNCOMFORTABLE CONVERSATIONS WITH A BLACK MAN

BOOK DIGEST

And the implications are colossal, as the author highlights, when your job impacts your ability to find housing, healthcare, and can support your self-esteem and mental health. And he invites us to wonder what it's like to walk in the shoes of someone who feels that something as basic as their name is the cause of their life's challenges.

Biases have also been shown as drivers of huge discrepancies between health outcomes for folks going to the hospital. That's how dangerous they can be. Black women die from preventable pregnancy-related complications at **THREE to FOUR times** the rate of non-hispanic white women. And **twice** as many black infants die in comparison to non-hispanic white infants. He writes about a process called "weathering" which stems from biological processes that originated because black women have been considered as able to endure more physical pain and tend to receive less careful and attentive healthcare and are often not treated with dignity by medical professionals. And if those disparities are not rooted in racism per se, they come from implicit biases that we must take responsibility to disempower. Indeed unconscious prejudices can lead to racist actions and that's why they're so toxic for us all.

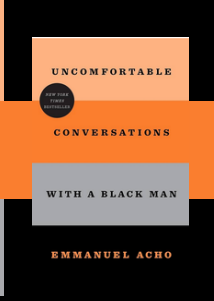
LET'S GET UNCOMFORTABLE

We need to look for our implicit biases and how they impact our decision-making and the way we treat non-white people.

To normalize their existence, the author shares how one of his implicit biases caused him to root against the only white contestant for the one hundred meter finals in a high school championship. But Matthew Boling did not only win, he ended up setting a new record.

"I'm sure talking about these things is uncomfortable for many of you. Especially for those of you who believe yourself to be a good person, who don't consider yourself a racist, who want to treat people fairly. But that's all the more reason to discuss your biases, to learn about them, critique them, to try to trace where they come from."

We all have biases... and he shares his **acronym DENIAL**: Don't Even Know I Am Lying. Especially if we value being empathetic and considerate people, we must uncover them in order to ensure that they cannot harm others against our will.



UNCOMFORTABLE CONVERSATIONS WITH A BLACK MAN

BOOK DIGEST

TALK IT, WALK IT

Google had to remove their app feature because they couldn't fix it. They're still working on it. Emmanuel Acho uses that as a powerful metaphor for how it can be easier to avoid bad PR than to fix the problem we face.

"In order for us to conquer our implicit biases, we have to speak openly and honestly about them."

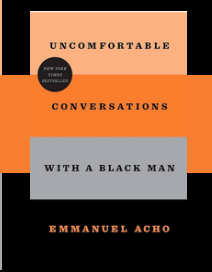
He also urges us to stop celebrating "color blindness" as we can only fix what we're willing to look at. Relying on color blindness not only invalidates the differences between what white and non-white folks experience, it also comes with the risk of letting our implicit biases unrecognized and unchecked. Instead of color blind, let's be introspective.

There is a test we can take: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/taketest.html>

He reminds us that the more stressed we are, the more likely our implicit biases are to pop up. And that a good rule of thumb is to avoid lumping people into groups, ever. It's better to affirm our unique particularities and differences as they make us human.

The invitation is also to be supportive of any measures towards diversity for any institutions we're a part of (job, school...) and to also support measures of accountability.

"It's like the New York subway: if you see something, say something."



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PART 1: YOU AND ME

The false start

WHITE PRIVILEGE

“Race doesn’t really exist for you because it has never been a barrier. Black folks don’t have that choice. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie”

QUESTION

“DO YOU BELIEVE THAT, WITH TIME, WHITE PRIVILEGE CAN BE ELIMINATED? ALSO, WHEN I THINK ABOUT WHITE PRIVILEGE, I FEEL GUILTY AND ASHAMED.”

If someone starts a race with a 200 meters head start, they’re going to win. The only way to change those odds is to either ask the one who started earlier to pause and wait, or to give a bike to the other contestant so that they can catch up. That’s the effect of white privilege in a nutshell. Hundreds of years of deferred freedom.

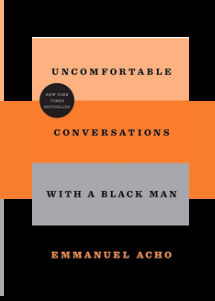
After slavery, there were differences in voting rights and ability to own land. In the early 1900s there were Jim Crow laws. The Civil and Voting Rights Acts only dates from the late 60s.

So what about white people who are poor or black people who are rich, ask the author? Well, once again, there’s no catching up in a race that started over four hundred years ago. And white privilege is not about our bank accounts, it’s about the color of our skins. He writes:

“White privilege is about the word “white”, not “rich”. It’s having advantage built into your life. It’s not saying your life hasn’t been hard; it’s saying your skin color hasn’t contributed to the difficulty in your life.

LET’S REWIND

The term predates her 1988 essay, but Peggy McIntosh was instrumental in bringing the concept of White Privilege to the forefront.



UNCOMFORTABLE CONVERSATIONS WITH A BLACK MAN

BOOK DIGEST

She defines it as:

“An invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks.”

Emmanuel Acho powerfully adds:

“For many white people, white privilege is the power of feeling normal.”

Here are examples of how it plays out as a white person:

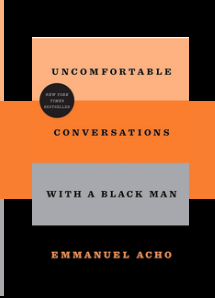
- The main displays of a store show products catered to me,
- People on TV look like me and are represented in all walks of life,
- The person in the corner office could have been me once upon a time,
- Never wondering if my name is “too white”,
- Talking in the way that news anchors and authorities model as “standard” or “proper”,
- Having Band Aids tailored to my skin color,
- Having mentors who can “see themselves” in me,
- Not being labeled as a gorilla by a Photo app.

He uses another sport metaphor to say that being white is like belonging to the hometown team anywhere someone goes. White folks are set up to win.

It's also knowing that you will always be awarded the benefit of the doubt. Not having to worry about how the police will perceive you, that someone won't trust you financially or that you're being profiled solely because of your skin color. It's relying on the presumption that we're seen as innocent until proven guilty. It's the picture chosen by the media to portray someone who committed a crime. It's knowing that the game is rigged in your favor.

The author reminds us of how one lie from a white woman, Carolyn Bryant Donham, was enough to justify the heinous crime of Emmett Hill in 1955, and how his murderers were then acquitted by an all white jury.

He shares how black men dread being alone with a white woman on a sidewalk or an elevator, how they have to monitor their behaviors and gaze in order to avoid making white people uncomfortable. How they alter the way they walk when the police are nearby. How they constantly wonder if they're being perceived as a threat just by being there.



UNCOMFORTABLE CONVERSATIONS WITH A BLACK MAN

BOOK DIGEST

Finally, he highlights that the average net worth of a typical white family is **TEN** times greater than that of a black family, even after adjustment on household's education, marital status, age or income. And those stats are not ancient. They were assessed in 2016.

LET'S GET UNCOMFORTABLE

Emmanuel Acho reflects on his own sources of privilege: being a man, able-bodied, coming from a middle-class family and having been a professional football player. Because one can be black and have privilege, of course. So he specifies:

“What I’m saying is that a white person’s skin color isn’t the thing contributing to holding them back, and that for all black people, their skin color contributes to what’s hard about their lives no matter what other privileges they might enjoy.”

The conversation is for sure hard to have when we believe in the American dream and that America is both a democracy and a meritocracy where our hard work and ambitions matter. But one doesn't erase the other and anyone reading this book will be convinced by this point that ignorance is not a viable excuse when it comes to the debilitating impact of implicit biases.

TALK IT, WALK IT

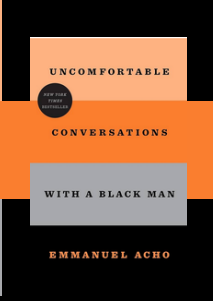
A four hundred year start cannot be erased and white privilege can only be unrooted if most white people become deeply aware of it.

He shares this invitation with white readers:

“Focus on what a person of color might be feeling. Learn when is the time to listen intently, when is the time to be a megaphone for the voices of black people, and when is the time to step in and speak up.”

“If white people are the problem, white people must also be part of the solution.”

He concludes by quoting Carl Lentz, lead pastor of Hillsong Church NYC who was having a conversation with another white man on whether white privilege exists or not. Carl highlighted how, in the end, if he was wrong that it was a thing, he would still have lived his entire life looking out for other people and making sure everyone had a fair chance to belong.



UNCOMFORTABLE CONVERSATIONS WITH A BLACK MAN

BOOK DIGEST

He also emphasized that if someone was wrong in believing that white privilege didn't exist, they would have spent their life stepping on the necks of others.

So Carl concluded:

“Even if I’m wrong, my wrong is better than your wrong. What do you have to lose?”

And that’s our author’s conclusion too.

“To all of my readers who are wondering whether white privilege is real.

I pose the same questions Lentz posed to the skeptical white man.

What do you have to lose by believing in it?”