

# What is white privilege?

Without an understanding of what white privilege is, it is more difficult to address the root causes of racism. However, in recognizing white privilege it is important to center the experiences of other racialized and marginalized folks.

- Inherent advantages possessed by a white person on the basis of their race in a society characterized by racial inequality and injustice.
- “Having greater access to power and resources than people of color [in the same situation] do.”

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# Peggy McIntosh's “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack.”

Peggy McIntosh published a groundbreaking essay on white privilege in 1988. In her work, she uses the metaphor of an invisible knapsack to describe white privilege as subconscious, invisible and unintentional.

McIntosh explains that prejudice is perpetuated by white people's lack of awareness that they hold this power/privilege.

Some examples of white privilege (as defined by McIntosh):

- Being able to turn on the television and see people of your race widely represented.
- Walking into any hairdresser and finding someone who can work with your hair texture.

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# White privilege as a conscious weapon

- McIntosh's understanding explained the unconscious and unseen advantages of white privilege. However, it overshadows many people of color who have outlined white privilege including the after-effects of conscious choices.
- White privilege is not as simple as cosmetic and entertainment representation but also has the ability to influence systemic decisions.
- White privilege is both a cause and a repercussion of racism. It exists because of historic and enduring racism and biases.

**“White privilege is both unconsciously enjoyed and consciously perpetuated. It is both on the surface and deeply embedded into American life. It is a weightless knapsack—and a weapon.”**

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# Three Facets of Power

To explain white privilege more clearly as both unconscious but consciously perpetuated we explore its three facets of power:

## Power of Normal

- The examples often used to explain white privilege as having the power of normalcy is:
  - Band-aids for the past several years only selling “skin-coloured” Band-aids that match the skin tone of white folks.
  - This is often an easy and digestible introduction to white privilege as it defines white privilege as minimally damaging and subconscious.
  - However, these privileges are symbolic of “the power of normal.”

**“White people become more likely to move through the world with an expectation that their needs be readily met. People of color move through the world knowing their needs are on the margins. Recognizing this means recognizing where gaps exist.”**

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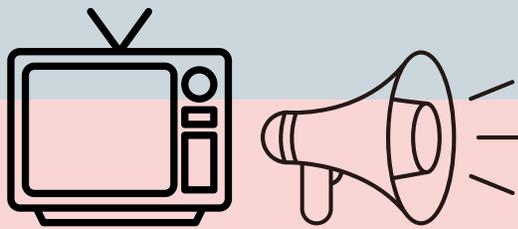


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# Power of the Benefit of the Doubt

White people are more likely to see positive representations of themselves in film, TV, radio and the news. This means they are more likely to be treated as individuals rather than understood through stereotyped racial identities - and are thus more likely to be given the benefit of the doubt.



**For example:**

- White people are less likely to be randomly stopped, interrogated or searched by police officers on the basis that they look “suspicious”.
- While to many white people it may seem logical that every human being receives compassion and humanity, this is not a privilege afforded to people of colour.
- People of colour are more likely to be victims of racial profiling, and face the deep and lasting consequences of negative stereotypes and policies.

**“Just as people of color did nothing to deserve this unequal treatment, white people did not “earn” disproportionate access to compassion and fairness. They receive it as the byproduct of systemic racism and bias.”**

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# Power of Accumulated Power

White privilege can be seen through the accumulated power afforded by systemic racism that has been compounded over time.

## For example:

- Wealth inequalities and its ties to racial stereotypes.

**This accumulated power is “also the power to remain silent in the face of racial inequity. It’s the power to weigh the need for protest or confrontation against the discomfort or inconvenience of speaking up. It’s getting to choose when and where you want to take a stand. It’s knowing that you and your humanity are safe. And what a privilege that is.”**



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When people understand anti-racism and have the language to discuss race, gender, class, and oppression, but are not willing to give anything up, including the space, power, platforms, etc that they occupy, this is arguably the most destructive pattern of behaviour of our time

-Dhakshy Sooriyakumaran

**Centring marginalized and racialized voices and experiences is key in any attempt to understand the ways in which society perpetuates racism. An important example of this is the widening of the definition of white privilege to include conscious acts of racism.**

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# Check out these Ontario-based community organizations involved in racial justice work on Instagram!

- Urban Alliance on Race Relations (UARR)  
[@uarrtoronto](#) - non-profit organization working to address inequality with educational programs, advocacy & research
- Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators (ONABSE) [@onabse\\_org](#) - an organization that works to promote equity for African Canadian students, educators, and professionals at all levels in schools
- The National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM) [@nccm\\_community](#) - an organization that protects Canadian human rights and civil liberties, challenges discrimination and Islamophobia, builds mutual understanding, and advocates for the public concerns of Canadian Muslims
- Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter (CCNCTO) [@CCNCTO](#) - an organization working to promote equity, social justice, inclusive civic participation, and respect for diversity.
- The Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA) [@cassaonline](#) - an umbrella organization supporting and advocating for the needs of the Canadian South Asian community

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# Works Cited

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