

10 Insidious Ways White Supremacy Shows Up in Our Everyday Lives

September 1, 2015 by [Kali Holloway](#)



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If there's anything our fraught national dialogue on race has taught us, it's that there are no racists in this country.

(In fact, not only do [multiple studies confirm](#) that most white Americans generally believe racism is over – just 16% say there's a lot of racial discrimination – it turns out that many actually believe white people [experience more](#) discrimination than black people.)

It's a silly idea, of course, but it's easy to delude ourselves into thinking that inequality is a result of cultural failures, racial pathology, and a convoluted narrative involving black-on-black crime, hoodies, rap music, and people wearing their pants too low.

To admit that racism is fundamental to who we are, that it imbues our thinking in ways we wouldn't and couldn't believe without the application of the scientific method, is infinitely harder. And yet, there's endless evidence to prove it.

For those who recognize racism is real and pervasive, it's also comforting to believe that discrimination is something perpetuated by other people, overlooking the ways we are personally complicit in its perpetuation.

But fruitful conversations about race require acknowledging that racism sits at the very core of our thinking. By something akin to osmosis, culturally held notions around race mold and shape the prejudices of everyone within the dominant culture.

People of color unwittingly internalize these notions as well, despite the fact that doing so contributes to our own marginalization. Most of us know the destructive outcomes systemic racism produces (higher rates of poverty, incarceration, infant mortality, to name a few). Accepting that implicit bias is happening at every level makes it awful hard to chalk those issues up to black and brown failure.

Here's a look at just some of the ways our internalized biases add up to devastating consequences for lives, communities and society.

1. College Professors Are More Likely to Respond to Students They Believe Are White Men

Despite universities frequently being described as bastions of progressivism and liberal indoctrination centers, a recent study found that [faculty of colleges and universities](#) are more likely to ignore requests for mentorship from minority and/or female students.

Researchers sent more than 6,500 professors at 259 schools in 89 disciplines identical letters that differed only in the name and implied race and gender of the fictitious student sender (like "Mei Chen" as an Asian female; "Keisha Thomas" as a black female; "Brad Anderson" as a white male).

The study found that regardless of discipline (with the sole exception of fine arts), faculty more consistently responded to perceived white males.

Two notable additional findings: 1) Professors at public institutions were significantly more likely than their private institution counterparts to respond to students of color, and 2) the students most discriminated against were perceived East Asian women, followed by South Asian men.

You can look at the numbers up close [here](#).

2. White People (Including Children) Are Less Moved by the Pain of People of Color (Yes, Including Children)

Three distinct studies support this finding.

[The first found](#) that **around age seven, white children began to believe black children are less susceptible to pain than white children.**

Another [study found](#) that emergency room personnel are less likely to give black and Latinx children pain medication, even when they're experiencing severe abdominal pain. [The same study](#) also found that even when the same tests are ordered, black and Latinx children face significantly longer emergency room stays.

A [third study found](#) that white people feel less empathy toward black people in pain than they do for whites experiencing pain.

3. White People Are More Likely to Have Done Illegal Drugs, But Are Far Less Likely to Go to Jail

A [2011 study](#) from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Data Archive found white people were more likely to use illegal and prescription opiates (heroin, oxycontin), hallucinogens, and cocaine than black and Latinx people by significant margins.

Black people [just edged out](#) white people on marijuana and crack use ([which incurred](#) disproportionate sentences for decades).

Yet a 2009 [Human Rights Watch](#) study found that each year from 1980 to 2007, black people were arrested on drug charges at rates 2.8 to 5.5 times higher than their white counterparts.

4. Black Men Are Sentenced to Far Lengthier Prison Sentences

A 2012 [study](#) by the United States Sentencing Commission found black men were sentenced to prison terms nearly 20% longer than white men for similar crimes.

To break those numbers down further, from [January 2005](#) to December 2007, sentences for black males were 15.2% longer than those of their white counterparts.

From December 2007 to September 2011, that number actually increased, with differences in sentencing growing to 19.5%.

5. White People (Including Police) See Black Children as Older and Less Innocent

A [UCLA psychological study](#) surveyed mostly white, male police officers to determine “prejudice and unconscious dehumanization of black people.”

Researchers found a correlation between officers who unconsciously dehumanized black people and those who had used force against black children in custody.

The study also found that white female college students saw black and white children as equally innocent until age nine, after which they perceived black boys as significantly older – by about four and half years – and less innocent than their white peers.

UCLA researcher Phillip Atiba Goff wrote, “Our research found that black boys can be seen as responsible for their actions at an age when white boys still benefit from the assumption that children are essentially innocent.”

Which leads right to our next stats.

6. Black Children Are More Likely to Be Tried as Adults

A [Stanford University study](#) uncovered this sobering [information](#):

[S]imply bringing to mind a black (vs. white) juvenile offender led [white study] participants to view juveniles in general as significantly more similar to adults in their inherent culpability and to express more support for severe sentencing.”

That is, when white respondents thought the child on trial was black, they were more like to endorse “sentencing all juveniles to life without parole when they have committed serious violent crimes.”

That might explain why, of the roughly 2,500 [juveniles](#) in the US who have been sentenced to life without parole, nearly all (97%) were male and (60%) black.

Interesting study note: For black kids, killing a white person was a good way to end up behind bars for their entire adult life. For white kids, killing a black person actually helped their chances of ensuring their prison stay would be temporary.

From [the report](#):

[T]he proportion of African American [juveniles sentenced to life without parole] for the killing of a white person (43.4%) is nearly twice the rate at which African American juveniles overall have taken a white person's life (23.2%). What's more, we find that the odds of a [juvenile life without probation] sentence for a white offender who killed a black victim are only about half as likely (3.6%) as the proportion of white juveniles arrested for killing blacks (6.4%)."

7. White People Are More Likely to Support the Criminal Justice System When They Think It's Disproportionately Punitive Toward Black People

That's right: White people agree with criminal justice outcomes more when they think race disproportionately targets black people for incarceration.

According to a [2012 Stanford study](#) conducted in "liberal" San Francisco and New York City, when white people were told that black people were unfairly impacted by punitive criminal justice policies like three-strikes laws and stop-and-frisk, they were less likely to advocate for criminal justice reform.

In a similar vein, researchers [found in 2007](#) that telling whites about racist sentencing laws made them favor harsher sentences. That is, racism made them like those sentences *more*.

The study authors write: "[O]ur most startling finding is that many whites actually become more supportive of the death penalty upon learning that it discriminates against blacks."

8. The More Stereotypical a Black Defendant Looks in a Murder Case, The Higher the Likelihood He'll Be Sentenced to Death

This is perhaps one of the most horrifying findings in a list of horrifying findings.

To quote [the study](#), "the degree to which the defendant is perceived to have a stereotypically black appearance (e.g., broad nose, thick lips, dark skin)" could mean the difference between a sentence of life or death, particularly if his victim was white.

[Read](#) the whole study. It's fascinating.

9. White People Falsely Recall Black Men They Perceive as 'Smart' as Being Lighter-Skinned

Here's another incredible, though not entirely surprising [study finding](#).

When white people encounter the faces of black men they are primed to believe are "educated," they later recall those individuals as being lighter-skinned than they actually were. The researchers developed a name for this phenomenon: "skin tone memory bias."

This compulsion was chalked up to stereotypical beliefs about dark skin and its correlation with negative traits.

To reckon with the cognitive dissonance created by perceiving a black man as “educated,” white participants unconsciously realigned that intelligence with skin that more closely approximated whiteness.

10. White People View Lighter-Skinned People of Color as More Intelligent, Competent, Trustworthy, and Reliable

A [2006 study](#) found that dark-skinned black men with MBAs were less likely to be hired than lighter-skinned black men who only possessed bachelor’s degrees. A [2010 study](#) in North Carolina found that light-skinned black women received shorter prison terms than darker-skinned black women.

And a [2012 Villanova University study](#) found that, “African American and Latino respondents with the lightest skin are several times more likely to be seen by whites as intelligent compared with those with the darkest skin.”

The implications of these findings are hugely significant, and lend credence to the often expressed feeling of tokenization by black people who are deemed smart, successful, or intelligent by whites.

That is, the feeling that white people perceive certain black people as exceptional or “not like the others.”

It also adds an important layer to the conversation around [colorism](#), which privileges light skin above darker skin both within and outside of communities of color (and has helped [skin lightening products](#) become a booming global industry in places like India, the Philippines, and some parts of Africa).

Unfortunately, I could go on and on. About how, for example, black [students](#) – even [preschoolers](#) – are far more likely to be suspended from school than white students. (That fact is [even truer](#) for dark-skinned black students.)

The same [products](#), when displayed by black hands on the Internet, are less likely to sell than when they are held by white hands. One study even found that white people basically think black people are paranormal entities, an idea so ludicrous it begs that you read an explanation ([here](#)).

Racism is comfortable and easy; it helps us make quick, baseless decisions without the taxing act of thinking. The next time you catch yourself having a racist thought or feeling, try not brushing it off. Ask yourself where it came from, what it means, and how you can unpack it.

Because if the evidence above suggests anything, it’s that critical self-examination is our only hope of moving the needle at all on this thing. Stop imagining that being racist is something that only other people do, and start looking closely at your own beliefs.

Especially the ones you've never admitted to yourselves that you hold.

Kali Holloway is a versatile writer and meticulous copy editor who has created dynamic copy for diverse industries – from tech startups to government to entertainment. Her writing has appeared in Salon, The Guardian, TIME, Jezebel, Raw Story, xoJane, Google Music, DFA Records, Rhapsody, Wondering Sound, Prefix, and many other outlets. You can check out more of her writing on Altnet [here](#).

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