

Let's Say It Out Loud: WHITENESS

How we have to Say it to See It

When I lived in Durham, NC, I lived next door to an older white man who brought us jugs of moonshine and had a pickup truck with a gunrack. Whenever anything tragic happened in the news with Asia, whether in China, Japan, Thailand, Vietnam, he would come out and ask me, "Are yer parents okay?"

Every time he did this, I smiled and said, "Yes, they're doing well" and appreciated how refreshing this experience was. I would rather this kind of racism than the highly refined subtle racism of urban areas. I would rather know something is blatantly racist than have to do a double-take and think about it for a while.

When a white person stops thinking they have white privilege or that they are no longer a part of racism, when they say they are "progressive or radical" and believe they are one of the "cool white people," when they surround themselves with people of color, and think it's okay for them to enter spaces for people of color because they are escorted by them, when we as people of color enable this, when they have the language to talk about racism and anti-racism, is when racism becomes the most lethal.

When a "cool white person" makes a joke about brown people, how is that different than when my neighbor in Durham made a joke about brown people? At least the latter recognizes his racism and his whiteness. He does not hide it, he does not collect people of color to gain immunity, he does not separate himself from other white people, and everyone knows he's racist. Whereas with the former "cool white person" it is harder to pinpoint and less likely someone will call them out because of the trappings of "political correctness". Often, because they separate themselves from the gunrack whites and surround themselves with people of color, or live in "the ghetto", they feel they do not have white privilege.

If you are white, you have white privilege and are part of racism's oppressing group. That is one of the foundation pillars of this country. Racism.

Something that is very telling, is that most often, white people are the ones who fight about what it means to be people of color, or they argue about the term, or argue about being a person of color themselves. Most people of color know they are people of color, whether you can "see it" or not. So many things are done to avoid what's actually happening. To avoid confronting their own whiteness. For example, how many times have I heard white women bring up sexism as a parallel to racism and start playing oppression olympics?

"Political correctness" steals our voices in a way. It prevents us from calling people out, from having open discussions about comments people make. It keeps us from recognizing, that "educated white woman who is a low-income community activist" is still a white person who has white privilege, is part of the system of racism, and yes, does racist things every single day by nature of the fact that she is white. It makes us as people of color reluctant to tell the "cool white person" to respect our space by not showing up to every people of color event. An Obama sticker doesn't make you not white. People seem to be forgetting this.

In order for us to understand racism, we have to understand that there is whiteness. It won't go away if we don't talk about it. It won't go away because it gets more and more advanced every single day. Racism is so smart, people of color unknowingly support it. It's that smart.

Let's all roll up our sleeves and put everything on the table. Folks of color spend more time on whiteness than we need to on a daily basis, mostly because most white folks don't spend the time nor do the work themselves. That's a messed up dynamic that needs to change. Folks of color have a whole bunch of inter-group and internal racism to deal with, let alone bear the burden of educating white folks about white privilege.

No amount of collecting and surrounding oneself with people of color, not talking about it, hiding behind being "progressive", going to people of color events and spaces, is going to make one's whiteness disappear. The sooner that gets out, the more chance we have of dismantling this sucker.