



White Privilege

What is white privilege

In Australia not everyone experiences the same access to things, some groups of people have advantages.

White privilege refers to the advantages white people experience over other racial and ethnic groups. These benefits are not always obvious, but they are formed through society and systems that treat white as the racial 'norm'.

“White privilege is both a legacy and a cause of racism”[i]

Racially privileged groups may be unaware of the advantages that they receive, and by association the disadvantages that marginalised racial groups experience. White privilege enables many of us to move through the world with an expectation that our needs will be readily met. People of colour move through the world knowing their needs are on the margins.

White privilege does not mean that white people do not experience disadvantages and challenges. They may still experience disadvantage related to class, gender, or ableism. White privilege explains that any disadvantages white people face is not because of their race.

What is the impact of white privilege

Everyday experiences of white privilege

Peggy McIntosh's 1989 Essay: 'White Privilege: unpacking the Knapsack' gives some examples of the privileges that **white people may receive:**

- **Being able to go shopping alone, most of the time, without being followed or harassed.**
- **Not being asked to speak for all the people of your racial group.**
- **Turning on the television and seeing people of your race widely and positively represented.**
- **Moving through life without being racially profiled or unfairly stereotyped.**
- **Walking into a store and finding that the main displays of shampoo and band aids cater to your hair type and skin tone.[ii]**



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Systemic white privilege results in:

- Access to higher education
- Access to well-paying jobs
- Choice of safe neighbourhood to live in
- Police protection
- Basic civil liberties

Accepting that systemic racism is entrenched and ongoing is the first step to its disentanglement [v]

The importance of acknowledging white privilege

Understanding and acknowledging the unearned advantages that whiteness provides is important. This may be a difficult process, and may evoke feelings of guilt, defensiveness, anger, denial, or discomfort [iii]. It is important to overcome these feelings, because denial makes white privilege more invisible, and harder to address. It needs to be acknowledged and visible, so we can start to shift systems that privilege whiteness at the disadvantage of other racial groups. [iv]

These conversations do not aim to attack white people, but rather empower them to acknowledge how they benefit from this power structure. Knowledge and empowerment can help equip people to fight racism in all its forms.

You can take action [iv]:

- **Preference** the voices of People of Colour in conversations around racism.
- **Recognise** that feeling guilty or defensive about your privilege is not useful to make change.
- **Harness** possible feelings of guilt to motivate change.
- **Read** more, listen more, and learn more from the experiences of racially marginalised peoples.
- **Let this knowledge guide** what we can all do to take action.
- **Write to your MP** on issues of justice and inequality.
- **Show up** at protests.

Next Steps

- 1 Learn more about white privilege on our resources page.**
- 2 Read our next factsheet on systemic racism.**
- 3 Become familiar with basic terminology.**

[i] Cory Collins, "What is White Privilege, Really?", Salisbury Education, 2018. [i] Summer May Finlay, "How to be a good ally", May, 2019, <https://reconciliationnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/recnewsmay2019.pdf>.

[ii] Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: unpacking the Knapsack", University of Maryland, Baltimore County, August, 1989, https://psychology.umbc.edu/files/2016/10/White-Privilege_McIntosh-1989.pdf.

[iii] J Willis, "Tangled up in white: The perpetuation of whiteness in Australian national identity and Northern Territory Intervention," Macquarie Matri 2, no. 1 (2012): 85, <https://studentjournal.mq.edu.au/Willis.pdf>.

[iv] Willis, "Tangled up in white," 82.

[v] Willis, "Tangled up in white," 82.

[vi] NASP, "Understanding Race and Privilege", 2016. <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/diversity-and-social-justice/social-justice/understanding-race-and-privilege>