**You’re not a bad person for having white privilege. However, you do need to accept that this unequal system unfairly benefits you.**

**--Kristance Harlow wearyourvoicemag.com**

[Content Note: Racism]

Are you white? If you answered yes, this lesson is for you.

This is Part 3 in a series I like to call, “How to Be Less of a Jerk: A Crash Course on -Isms.” Be sure to study up with the other lessons on not being such a jerk: heres [Part 1](http://wearyourvoicemag.com/identities/less-jerk-101-crash-course) and [Part 2](http://wearyourvoicemag.com/more/social-justice/less-jerk-101-part-2-admitting-racism).

Despite mounds of undeniable evidence and tons of analysis explaining white privilege, white people still can’t deal with talking about racism. It is long past time to destroy that sensitivity. We can’t let fellow white folks sit pretty in the ignorant bubble of white supremacy. Ignoring white privilege, whether you will admit it or not, adds to a long history of exploitation and oppression of non-whites.

**Stop Dismissing Racists**

As Trump’s presidency spins out of control, fewer people are telling me to keep my criticisms about him to myself. Unfortunately, they do still tell me to stop “making everything about race” as I try to challenge my own white privilege. They say to not go overboard with accusations of racism. They say to calm down and wait to see what happens. Just say “sorry” for upsetting family and friends. Get over it. If I want, I can play nice and live in the safe walls of a white echo chamber where people mediate bigotry by dismissing it as a difference of opinion, because “racist” is word reserved only for the annals of the distant past when slave owners sold humans like livestock.

It’s been surreal, in a nightmarish kind of way, to watch it unfold. I can’t help but wonder if those “Make America Great Again” hats (made in Vietnam, China and Bangladesh) are cutting off circulation to key parts of the brain used for processing information. Then I remember: this vile racism is nothing new. Now that racism is on full display, we’re just seeing it more. I have never had to feel racial oppression, because I live in a world made for people who look like me. A flippant ableist comment about stupidity is a lazy way for us to dismiss racists so we don’t have to come to terms with the racism pervasive in our communities.

**Is Resistance a Privilege?**

I recently had a conversation with someone who is avidly against the new POTUS said, “I’m not going to let Trump ruin my life.” I agreed with them. Then I realized: ***that kind of statement is a privileged one.*** This is a level of privilege many people (yes, ***white*** people) don’t understand: to know that with enough strength of will, your life will not be destroyed by the system. This is a problem that crosses political lines and is historically based and culturally rooted.

I can hear the annoyed sighs and distant rumble of discontent among my white readers, and the lesson isn’t even finished. Hold onto your indignation for a moment. Privilege is not something to be *ashamed* of or to hate yourself for having. You’re not a bad person for having privilege (there’s probably a lot of other reasons you’re a bad person; ask your frenemies to solve that conundrum). However, you do need to accept that this unequal system unfairly benefits you. It benefits me too. I have never lived in a world where my skin color was a disadvantage for anything besides sunbathing.

**Learn to Share**

This is a problem that has existed and persisted for generations. If you don’t know that, it’s probably not because you didn’t pay attention in history class. You most likely have on white-people goggles and can get along in life just fine without ever taking them off. Note that I said “white people goggles” and not “rich person goggles” or “beautiful person” or “able-bodied person” or “neurologically unimpaired” –you get the picture — because white privilege doesn’t mean someone has it easy in life. There are certain things you don’t deal with because you are white. Your life can really suck even though you have white privilege, but your life probably sucks less than someone in the [exact same situation who isn’t white](http://wearyourvoicemag.com/identities/race/white-privilege-shapes-intent-intent-keeps-privileged-whites-jail). Privilege and struggle are not mutually exclusive.

If we get to where we are seen solely on our own merits, then what is with all those people talking about being thankful to other people? Who cares about their first-grade teacher Mr. Studebaker, or that doctor with the long nose hair or sweet Aunt Tina with the famous friend? Award winners always seem to thank other people, even though the award wasn’t given to anyone but the winner.

When someone is grateful for something in their life, its common to hear the riff, “I am very lucky” or “I feel blessed.” People acknowledge other people because things happen in life that are not the result of having the most organized plan for success. They happen because Mr. Studebaker believed that you could learn how to read and spent extra time with you so you wouldn’t be held back a grade. They happen because Aunt Tina has a friend who knows someone who could made sure your application for that NBC internship was given a proper look. They happen because the doctor with the long nose hair insisted on a set of tests that diagnosed a serious, but treatable, ailment.

If Mr. Studebaker wanted to make sure he had the resources to teach every student to read, because he doesn’t think it’s right when only a select few get the specialized attention necessary, would that make you upset?

If Aunt Tina got involved in a networking program to connect college kids with job opportunities in their field of interest, would you feel personally attacked?

If the screening that doctor-long-nose-hair ordered for you was going to become standard, since the ailment you had was an increasingly common issue, would that piss you off?

If you answered no, then you should have no problem supporting people who are fighting for equality. Combatting white supremacy just means you are willing to let other people have the same benefits as you.

## No, We Don’t Know What It’s Like

A common theme in white liberal circles has been to express outrage about how Trump has personally offended them. I actually heard a white woman say, “I thought women and black people faced the same oppression.” Then she went on to say that the civil rights movement is her movement, and that the problems faced by minorities are her problems, so everyone should stop being divisive.

Read the following conversation and see if you can spot the problem:

Alania has recently been diagnosed with a mental illness. She is talking with her good friend Vicky about treatment and about finals at school.

Vicky: “I’m glad you are feeling better now that you have a support team.”

Alania: “Yes, but I am still having a hard time concentrating.”

Vicky: “I know exactly how you feel. I hate studying, it’s like ADD on overdrive!”

What happened here? Vicky, who doesn’t have a mental disorder, suggested that her personal distaste for studying is the same thing as the disruptive symptoms of an illness. The experiences of communities that you are not a part of do not count as yours. Even if you are the most badass, aware, educated activist ally accomplice for that community on the planet, their experiences still wouldn’t be yours. Alania’s experiences are not for Vicky to lay claim to.

It is on white people to educate and self-educate on racism. We cannot ask people of color to do all of the emotional and intellectual labor. It is on straight people to educate and do the work to self-educate on LGBTQ+ rights and diversity. We cannot ask people who already face stigma and discrimination to do the emotional and intellectual labor. It is on cisgender men and women to do the work to self-educate and educate on gender inclusivity and acceptance of diverse gender identity and expression. Men have to talk to other men to challenge rape culture.

It is on each of you to educate the communities which you are a part of in whatever way feels most authentic and effective. But do not forget that other people’s issues are not your issues, and it’s an important distinction. I care about a lot of issues and people and communities, but problems faced by people in communities that I am not a part of are **not** my problems. That doesn’t make them any less important, but to act as if they are mine is a denial of privilege.