

## Who is Presentable in a White Society?

### Definitions

Assimilation: Generally by coercion, the taking on of a dominant society's characteristics, culture, etc. in order to blend in.

Pro-white bias: A subconscious preference for white features and presentation.

Social contract: An unspoken agreement by people in a community or society to behave or look a certain way.

Whiteness: A racial power that subordinates a racialized "other." It is an identity and a position of privilege that anyone can benefit from when aligned with it.

White supremacy: A central belief assuming that white people are superior, and encompasses the actions taken based on this assumption.

### White supremacy's reach

Because we live in a society built on white supremacy, there are many ways those beliefs and practices can make their way into mainstream thought. One way of doing so is through *assimilation*, where a group of people must let go of aspects of their own culture or identity to fit larger society. This is not maintained by just one or a few people but continues by the will of many who align with these practices.

The effects of white supremacy are experienced by the victims and benefactors of whiteness. *Whiteness* is an extension of white supremacy and can be carried out by anyone. This includes Black people and people of color. Whiteness is a tool used to uphold white supremacy. It is an ideal that general society agrees to under a social contract and can be enforced in many ways.

One way is through standards of presentation, dress, and beauty. Whiteness influences the way we view what is or is not presentable. This causes things such as the following to be heavily regulated on anyone who is not white:

- Hairstyles
- Headwear
- Formal attire
- Language/dialect
- Loungewear/comfort clothing

### Whiteness is a habit that can be broken

Because whiteness has a hold on the way we view ourselves and others in society, it can be disrupted. By questioning our perspective, whiteness' hold on our mindset can be eroded. However, because white supremacy is a group-process, there are practices that make a resistance to this mindset difficult.

How can we understand where whiteness shapes our perspective? Ask the following:

- Is how white people may react/feel molding my outlook?
- Does this perspective put down marginalized peoples or undervalue their culture/identity?
- What is this rooted in? Is it with the intention to assimilate into white society?

### **Who set the standard?**

In interrogating our thinking, we can uncover paradoxes in our understanding. Where do these standards come from, and are they attainable? The idea of professionalism comes from a working person who obtains the desirable (desirable to whom?) level of skills and education, and is able to join the [labor aristocracy](#). This class of people is historically white and male. *Professionalism is a practice of assimilation*, assuming the behavior and appearance of a dominant culture to appease their standards.

The same goes for what is considered presentable in everyday society. Certain features, aesthetics, and even body types are unacceptable and heavily regulated. Because this is an extension of whiteness, the only way to truly appease white society is to dawn white skin. This is directly oppressive to marginalized peoples whose cultures and personhood does not fit this image or align with the *pro-white bias*.

### **Breaking the habit**

In order to build a truly multicultural society, what is considered presentable and professional in public should be reexamined. White supremacy permits the scrutiny and regulation of marginalized peoples, especially Black women, for the purpose of enforcing a colonized mindset.

For example, what is considered formal wear (i.e. tuxedos, suits, dresses, etc.) is even dominated by a Western perspective. Cultures all over the world and within this society have their own formal attire, but the white understanding of formal attire is our societal default. This principle can be applied to how we leave the house, how we do our hair, the way we communicate, and even how we celebrate (i.e. applauding at graduation ceremonies).

Working toward total Black liberation and our ideal society means breaking the hold whiteness has on one's mindset and outlook. It's an uncomfortable process, but necessary for collective growth and freedom. Our culture and appearance as Black people is something to be dawned with pride, not hidden for the comfort of our oppressors.

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