

# Want To Disrupt Racism? Change Your Everyday Behaviour

It's the one thing that you have control over, that you can do immediately and that will actually make a difference.

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It's a challenging and charged world that we're living in right now. We see forms of overt racial bias everywhere. As a person of colour, it's really hard — both to watch and to experience. In many respects, for me it feels harder to be a racialized person today than ever before in my life.

As a diversity professional, lately I'm constantly being asked what people can do — especially white people — to interrupt racial biases. Many want to do better, but often don't know how, especially as it relates to their own behavior, which reinforces racial stratification and white supremacy.



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Everyone has [unconscious biases](#), and unless we consciously work to address them, they will adversely influence our interactions with others. Unconscious bias refers to the neurological shortcuts your brain takes in decision-making, including who you put into your "in group" and your "out group" based on likeness and the messages you've absorbed from society about certain identities. For example, given that we repeatedly hear negative messages about people of colour, most of society ends up treating people of colour poorly, both consciously and unconsciously.

The reality is that the negative, biased messages tying back to race — e.g. that black people are less intelligent or more violent than others; Indigenous peoples are lazy or undeserving; brown people are fanatical terrorists; white people are inherently worthy — permeate our society. These messages are woven into the fabric of how we live and interact with each other, and are far subtler than we might think. If you dig deep, you'll see the nuanced nature of racial bias in how we excuse racism in

our use of language, how we judge people of colour and how we silently participate in affirming racism through what we consume.

There are countless recent examples that illustrate how bias weaves its way into the messages we take in. For example, biased language [has saturated](#) the recent media [coverage of Charlottesville](#). Terms like "white nationalist" and "alt-right" are reflections of racial bias — they minimize the potent, and racist, identities of the white supremacists involved in this horrible event. Consider these terms in contrast to the word "terrorist," which is regularly attributed to people of colour without hesitation, even in unconfirmed news stories.

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Further, consider the use of the term "rally" to describe a violent assembly of hate-mongering white people (including an event in which someone was killed as a result of racial hate) — as opposed to "extremist riot," a term that has been attributed to non-violent gatherings of people of colour protesting their experiences of racism. Rather than being challenged and eradicated, biased language like "white nationalist" and "alt-right" has made its way into everyday discourse and media reporting (see this [month's cover story in \*The Atlantic\*](#)).

Another example of racial bias in the media is the recent news hubbub in Canada around Rana Sarkar's appointment as Canada's consul-general to San Francisco. Sarkar is a highly accomplished professional who has been recruited from a high-paying job in the private sector for this prestigious post by the government — and he's a brown-skinned man.

Notably, Sarkar will receive a significantly higher than typical salary for the position, which has spurred a barrage of articles from Canadian journalists [calling into question](#) his [networks](#), [credentials](#) and [worth](#). The elephant in the room of this media flurry is that highly accomplished white men are regularly recruited from high-paying jobs in the private sector for prestigious posts by the government, and are paid significantly

higher than typical salaries. These instances may cause a raised eyebrow, but the networks, credentials and worth of these white men are rarely questioned and, if we see media coverage about their appointments, it's most often to commend them. This is racial bias — and when we don't call it out, we are perpetuating it.



Getty Images UFC featherweight champion Conor McGregor.

We also affirm racism through what we say, watch, consume and buy, and we only uphold racism when we are willfully blind to it. An example of this is the recent Floyd Mayweather vs. Conor McGregor fight. Leading up to the event, there was some media coverage about McGregor's overtly racist remarks and behaviour towards black people (and some coverage about misogyny and homophobia on both sides). Journalists and fans knew of McGregor's racism, and despite this, the media glorified the fight and millions watched around the world. Many of these same people would boldly say that they abhor racial prejudice

and discrimination, but they then chose to separate McGregor's public persona from his racism — this is complacency.

After today, if you want to interrupt racial bias — especially as a white person — you must [actively look](#) for biases in your thoughts and actions (what are my biases?). You also need to look for biases in the data you're taking in (what are the biases here?), question the accuracy of your beliefs (is this judgment fair or right?), replace your biased thoughts with accurate messages (what is the truth that I need to believe instead?), and consciously change the way you behave in everything you do (how can I act differently going forward?).

This is tough, awkward and challenging work. It's not fun. It requires relentless consistency and intense self-reflection. And it feels uncomfortably personal, which is why very few people do it. But ultimately, if you want to interrupt racial bias, you must change your behaviour. It's the one thing that you have control over, that you can do immediately and that will actually make a difference. And frankly, if as a society we want to actively disrupt racism, everyone needs to do this.