

Resource

Read through the experience of American author Shola Richards. What can it teach us about the effects of racism on his daily life?



Shola Richards walking with his daughter and dog

Twice a day, I walk my dog Ace around my neighbourhood with one, or both, of my girls. I know that doesn't seem noteworthy, but here's something that I must admit, I would be scared to take these walks without my girls and my dog. In fact, in the four years living in my house, I have never taken a walk around my neighbourhood alone (and probably never will).

Some of you may read that and think that I'm being melodramatic, but this is my reality.

When I'm walking down the street holding my young daughter's hand and walking my sweet fluffy dog, I'm just a loving dad and pet owner taking a break from the joylessness of crisis home schooling. But without them by my side, almost instantly, I change into a threat in the eyes of some. Instead of being a loving dad to two little girls, unfortunately, all that some people can see is a 6'2" athletically-built black man in a cloth mask who is walking around in a place where he doesn't belong (even though, I'm still the same guy who just wants to take a walk through his neighbourhood). It's equal parts exhausting and depressing to feel like I can't walk around outside alone, for fear of being targeted. If you're surprised by this, don't be. We live in a world where there is a sizable amount of people who actually believe that racism isn't a thing.

So, let me share some points:

- 1) Having white privilege doesn't mean that your life isn't difficult, it simply means that your skin colour isn't one of the things contributing to your life difficulties. Case in point, if it never crossed your mind that you could have the police called on you for simply bird watching then know that is a privilege that many black people (myself included) don't currently enjoy.
- 2) Responding to "Black Lives Matter" by saying "All Lives Matter" is insensitive. All lives can't matter until black lives matter.
- 3) Racism is very real; it isn't just limited to the extremes.
- 4) In order for racism to get better, it's important we all use our voices and speak up when we see racism.

As for me, I'll continue to walk these streets holding my 8-year-old daughter's hand, in hopes that she'll continue to keep her daddy safe from harm. I know that sounds backward, but that's the world that we're living in these days.