

= Acting white =

In the United States , acting white is a pejorative term , usually applied to African Americans , which refers to a person 's perceived betrayal of their culture by assuming the social expectations of white society . Success in education in particular (depending on one 's cultural background) can be seen as a form of " selling out " by being disloyal to one 's culture .

The term is controversial , and its precise meaning is hard to define . Some minority students are discouraged from achieving in school by the negative prejudices of ethnic peers ; such a view has been expressed in articles in The New York Times , Time magazine , and The Wall Street Journal ? and by public figures and academics across the political spectrum .

= = History of usage = =

The question of whether or not " acting white " attitudes are prevalent has been debated in academic literature . The African @-@ American comedian and media figure , Bill Cosby , used the term in what became a noted May 2004 speech when he challenged the black community against the idea that gaining education was " acting white " . Black people accused of " acting white " are sometimes referred to as Black Anglo @-@ Saxons , a term coined by comedian Paul Mooney . The 2008 election of Barack Obama as President of the United States resulted in a public discussion that the acting white attitude may be waning , as he represented a model of African @-@ American achievement .

= = Case studies and research = =

Not all scholars define acting white in the same way . Most definitions include a reference to situations where some minority adolescents ridicule their peers for engaging in behaviors perceived to be characteristic of whites . In this scenario , they equate " white behavior " with high grades in school , a result researchers can quantify , but the term is not limited to this .

In 1986 , Signithia Fordham co @-@ authored with Nigerian sociologist John Ogbu a study that concluded that high @-@ performing African @-@ American students in a Washington , D.C. , high school borrowed from hegemonic white culture as part of a strategy for achievement , while struggling to maintain a black identity . Ogbu made a related claim in his 2003 book , Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb : A Study of Academic Disengagement , concluding that black students ' own cultural attitudes sometimes hindered academic achievement and that these attitudes are too often neglected . Ogbu had earlier written in his seminal work Minority Education and Caste (1978) , that school disengagement among caste @-@ like minorities occurs because white society limits the job @-@ success of their parents and others in their communities by a glass ceiling . In his new book , he said that non @-@ whites " failed to observe the link between educational achievement and access to jobs . "

In 1997 the scholars Philip J. Cook and Jens Ludwig published a report finding that blacks do not face any stronger social pressures than whites to succeed in school , nor do they have greater feelings of alienation towards education in general . They noted anecdotal and ethnographic research confirming that minority students hold these views , but they concluded that these are not inherently generalizable and do not substantially affect student behavior in the classroom . They labeled the issue " something of a distraction " from what they saw as more important educational reforms .

Though Ogbu 's 1978 study 's conclusion was widely discussed , a 2003 work also challenged its validity . In 2003 , Karolyn Tyson , a sociologist , and William Darity , Jr . , an economist , of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill , conducted an 18 @-@ month study at 11 North Carolina schools . The study concluded that white and black students have essentially the same attitudes about scholastic achievement ; students in both groups want to succeed in school and show higher levels of self @-@ esteem when they do better in school . They compared attitudes identified as acting white to the normal adolescent pains experienced in John Hughes ' movies .

A 2006 study titled *An Empirical Analysis of "Acting White"* by Roland G. Fryer, Jr., at Harvard University and Paul Torelli suggested that the phenomenon probably had little to no effect on students achieving at average levels, but might explain a significant role in the disparities between black and white students at high achievement levels. Fryer has also written that, in contrast to Fordham and Ogbu's theory, "acting white" prejudices are actually more common the more integrated the school, with historically black schools free of any effects. He found that groups such as Italian immigrants in Boston's West End and the Maori of New Zealand display similar behaviors. He concluded that there is necessarily a trade-off between doing well and rejection by your peers when you come from a traditionally low-achieving group, especially when that group comes into contact with more outsiders.

A fundamental drawback of much of the research so far is that the people studied have been asked to rate their own popularity in the eyes of others, which naturally brings those scores into question. Roland G. Fryer, Jr. has remarked, "Asking teenagers whether they're popular is like asking them if they're having sex."

Stuart Buck, a lawyer, also explored this issue in *Acting White: The Ironic Legacy of Desegregation* (2010). He said that segregated black schools had featured teachers, counselors, and others of the same race as the student population, and the adults often acted as mentors to the students. Integration of many public schools since the mid- to late 20th century may have resulted in schools in which black students perceived they were controlled or dominated by whites. A black student trying to achieve high educational success may then be considered as trying to leave the minority group.

Margaret Beale Spencer and Vinay Harpalani (2008) argue that usage of the term "acting white" by black teenagers does not reflect their cultural values; rather, it is a manifestation of their racial identity development, experienced in conjunction with normal adolescent hassles and peer pressure. Spencer and Harpalani employ William E. Cross's (1991) Nigrescence framework and contend that black teenagers' use of "acting white" in relation to academic achievement is similar to white teenagers' use of the term "nerd": the only difference is that black teenagers express it in racialized terms, as in addition to normal teenage peer pressure, they are grappling with racial identity and what it means to be "black". Expressions such as "acting white" may or may not reflect black teenagers' cultural values, and their usage is sometimes counterintuitive: for example, Ogbu (2003) himself documented one instance where a black teenage girl with natural hair was accused of "acting white" by her black peers because "like white people, she did not have to process her hair." These kind of examples show that accusations of "acting white" are not fundamentally about black cultural attributes (although such accusations may reflect these attributes). Rather, "acting white" is just a manifestation of racial identity development for black children and teenagers, who are learning and defining for themselves what it means to be "black" in conjunction with normal adolescent peer pressure and hassles. That is also why such accusations are less common among black adults, who have come to greater resolution regarding racial identity issues.

= = Commentary = =

Political observer John McWhorter has commented, "[t]eenagers have a variety of identities open to them for trying on anti-Establishment postures. White kids can be stoners or goths. Black kids can be 'nonwhite'." He interpreted those kids as black "nerds". He stated that the acting white attitude developed as the creation of an "other" among newly integrated African-American kids.

In their 2003 study, Tyson and Darity said that school staff and faculty who hold racist attitudes about the ability of black students use the acting white disparagement as a cover for disparities in student performance. Shelby Steele wrote in *The Content of Our Character* that what he identified as middle-class black values are falsely viewed by the majority of blacks as "white," while they are colorblind. He argued that this attitude is distinct from other issues of young blacks in poverty.

Kenji Yoshino , a New York University School of Law professor , in his *Covering : The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights* (2006) , criticizes social pressures to conform to mainstream white culture . He said this violated African Americans ' civil rights , and they can uphold their own social distinctions . He said they should be able to freely choose to identify with white culture if they wish . Anne Arnett Ferguson , a professor at Smith College , wrote in 2001 that white culture " ruthlessly excludes African American cultural modes as relevant and meaningful " . She highlighted the insistence in schools of standard English over Black Vernacular English as an example .

Clarence Page remarked on *The News Hour with Jim Lehrer* in 2004 :

In African American folklore , the sea crab ranks among the dumbest of creatures who also offers a valuable lesson . When you catch a bucket or a basketful , you never have to put a lid on because when one of the creatures tries to get out , the others will just pull it back in . Some of our fellow human beings aren 't much smarter than that . When they see you working hard to achieve your dreams , they 'll make fun of you just for trying .

= = Accusations of " acting white " = =

= = = Barack Obama = = =

Public figures arouse controversy . Before he was elected as President , Senator Barack Obama , was criticized in 2007 as " acting white " by Jesse Jackson in relation to a specific case involving blacks . Also before Obama 's election , Ralph Nader , a longtime activist , in 2008 characterized the senator as " talking white " . However , one must note that Obama is also a Mixed @-@ race American , with a White / European mother and Kenyan father ; he also has Cherokee descent . Kenyans are a different ethnic group than the various groups modern day African Americans are descended from .

Also , note that " talking white " is a form of a dialect . Who President Obama is speaking with may determine the dialect he chooses to use .

Obama 's presidential victory in the 2008 election and public image prompted a public discussion about whether he would shift the ground of critics of ' acting white . ' Commentators John McWhorter and Stephen J. Dubner have said that it might . Yahanna of the Israelite School of Universal Practical Knowledge , described by the Southern Poverty Law Center as a black supremacist sect , did not consider Obama to be black but " African of white descent " and advised African Americans not to vote for him .

Obama strongly criticized the idea that achievement was limited to " acting white " in his keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention . He said that " children can ? t achieve unless we raise their expectations and turn off the television sets and eradicate the slander that says a black youth with a book is acting white . ?

= = = Russell Wilson = = =

Seattle Seahawks football player Russell Wilson came under fire in 2014 when anonymous sources alleged that the feeling in the Seahawks locker room was that Wilson lacked " blackness . " CBS Sports cited this conflict as a possible reason for the trading of star player Percy Harvin from the Seahawks to the New York Jets .

= = = Matthew Clark III = = =

Socially conscious Texas Hip @-@ Hop artist , Matthew Clark III addressed the diminutive effects African @-@ American adolescents face when being accused of " Acting White " in his autobiographic song " Acting White " " " (2015) . In his song he depicts the average struggles of young black children that don 't fit the stereotypical mold society wishes to place them in . He describes the struggles of dealing with police harassment , being made fun of for dressing differently

, enunciating his words , being accused of stealing in stores , and his aspirations to be like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr .