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**[New post] Racism in Science**

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Thu, Feb 23, 2017 at 9:03 AM

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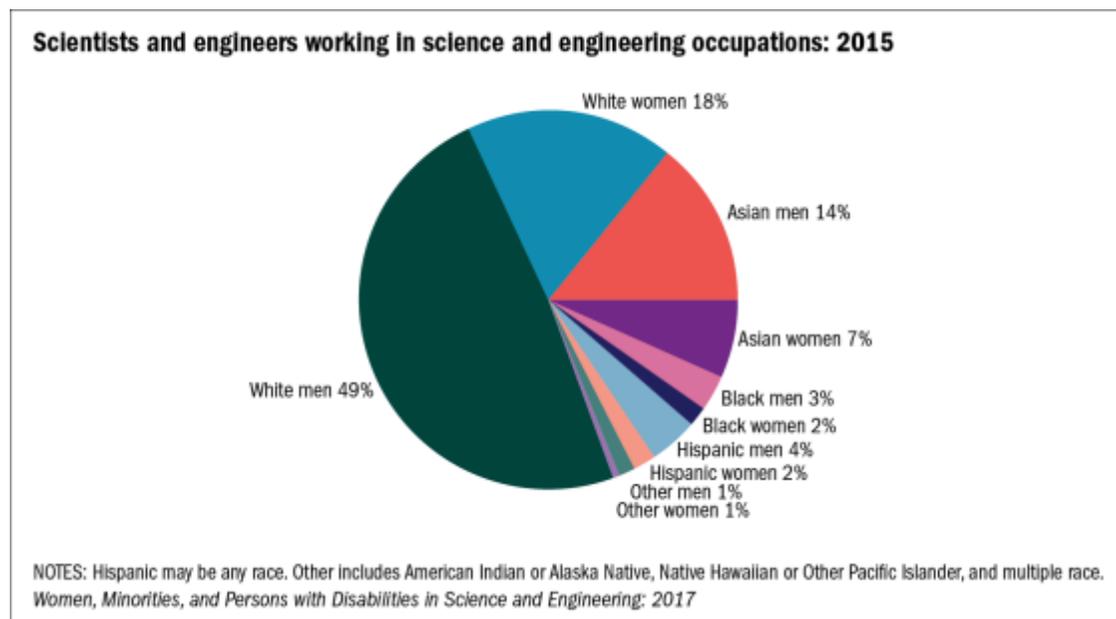
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New post on **Black Light****Racism in Science**by Lucianne Walkowicz

There exists a widespread belief that science, and scientific discoveries, function outside the troubling social matrix of our culture. Science culture itself embraces this belief, clinging to the notion that science is "pure", an infallible meritocracy where inclusion is based solely on one's own achievements, and access to education, and the enjoyments of the benefits of scientific research, are unimpeded by the messy mores of society.

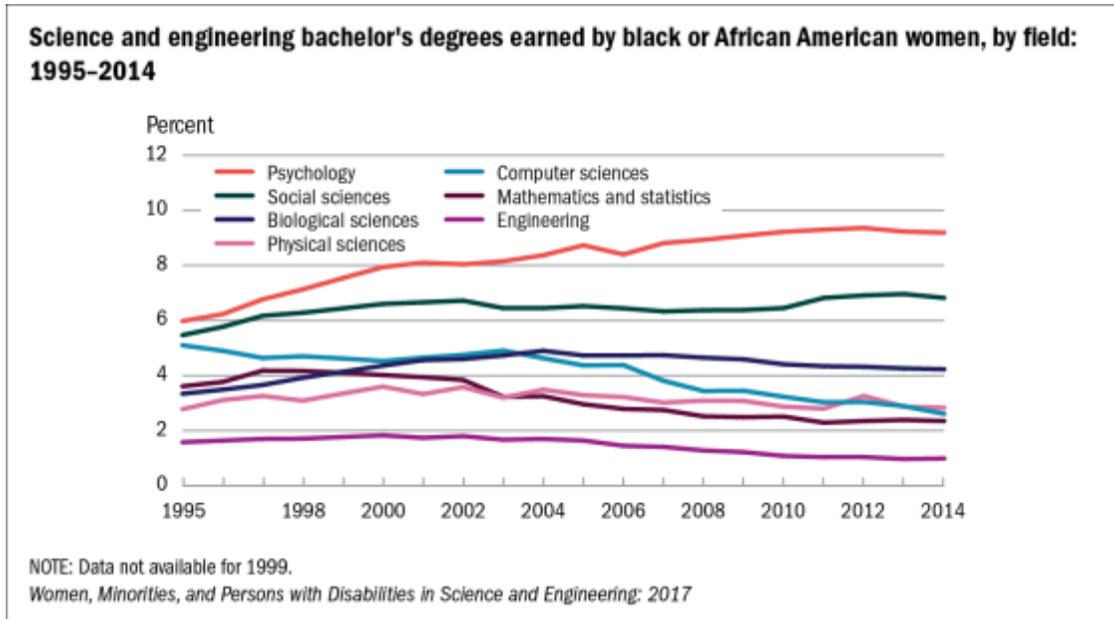
Unfortunately, the belief above is not supported by data -- it's a myth.

[This recent report by the National Science Foundation](#) breaks down some of the available data on who's getting college degrees in the sciences, and who ends up employed in the sciences. Take a look at this figure from the report:



White people make up a full 2/3 of all people working in science and engineering occupations. While there's been a fair amount of focus in the media on empowering *women* in the sciences over the past several years, it doesn't take much to expose that

the focus on gains by "women" almost always means *white* women. This figure shows the fraction of Black women getting college degrees in science and engineering:



See how almost every line on this graph is flat, or even decreasing? This graph shows that with the exception of psychology, no branch of science has gotten any better in its representation of Black women with time.

Interpreting these data leaves us with two options: either Black people are somehow intrinsically less capable of being scientists, or something else is at work: racism.

Science itself has a long and ugly history of not only upholding existing white supremacist norms, but actively providing so-called "evidence" that shored up racist policies and beliefs. The most clear-cut example of this is today's vocabulary phrase: **scientific racism**, or the application of pseudoscientific techniques to justify racism. It might be tempting to believe that, once it was clear that only tiny genetic differences account for the differences in superficial appearance upon which racism based, obvious scientific racism would vanish-- but even today, scientific racism continues onward.

However, these obvious examples of scientific racism aren't the only ways racism affects science. The study of science, and conducting scientific research, is part of our human culture, and so the white supremacist power structures that affect opportunity for Black people in every other aspect of their educational life and career opportunities are also at work in science.

One example of how these racist assumptions play out is in assumptions of who looks like a scientist, or even a professional-- as an example, read this round-up on Blavity, ["Black Twitter recalls the time it was mistaken for the help"](#). For many people, the word "scientist" conjures only a picture of a white man in a lab coat, which both erases Black people in science, and reinforces that science is the realm of white men. These assumptions are often examples of unconscious bias, where we unintentionally reinforce biased beliefs we are not aware we hold. Curious whether you might be part of the problem? You can [take an easy, anonymous test to see whether you have unconscious bias](#) as part of a long-running research project at Harvard.

In part, it is science culture's belief that their field operates outside these structures that actually works to uphold them-- telling Black colleagues in science that racism doesn't exist in science stands in contrast to not only the data, but also their lived experiences of racism, effectively gaslighting them.

We end today's post with this powerful talk by [Dr. Jedidah Isler](#), astrophysicist and founder of [#VanguardSTEM](#), where you can watch many conversations between women of color in STEM fields. In her work, Dr Isler implores us that inclusion in the sciences is essential to the scientific excellence that will unlock nature's mysteries:

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[Lucianne Walkowicz](#) | February 23, 2017 at 9:00 am | Tags: [featured](#), [science](#) | Categories: [careers](#), [culture](#) | URL: <http://wp.me/p8kqYQ-pe>

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