This Simple Chart Shows the Difference Between a Gang Sign and an Innocent Gesture

Image Credit: Keith Knight
Why is that seeing one hand gesture makes us want to greet a stranger, while witnessing another makes us wonder if we should call the cops?

Despite some arguments to the contrary, racial profiling is still very much alive and well in the U.S. Profiling is apparent in the way people's perceptions of strangers vary according to their appearance, for example how people judge the safety of a neighborhood by the looks of the person standing near your car.

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Though this is meant to be funny, Knight's strip addresses the important implications of racial profiling that have popped up in the news recently. New research suggests that black children are mistakenly viewed as older and less innocent by cops. This troubling conclusion also means black children are more likely to be the subjects of dehumanization by police officers, thus making them subject to higher rates of police violence.

Reports from organizations such as the NYCLU have shown repeatedly that police do indeed treat citizens different based on the color of their skin, making the issue of racial profiling an essential one for America's youth. According to an NYCLU report, 87% of those stopped and frisked by the NYPD in 2011 were black or latino.

The recent case of high school student Darrin Manning epitomizes racial profiling's continued presence in the U.S. Manning was patted down by Philadelphia police in January so aggressively that he ended up in the hospital with a badly injured testicle. Manning, who did not have a criminal record, may have been stopped because he and his friends were wearing scarves to ward off the cold — and they were young men of color.
As Knight's cartoon points out, Manning and his friends were doing something innocuous — in this case, wearing scarves because it was cold — but the behavior took on an entirely different meaning due to their race. Everyone, not just the police, should be thinking about this message on a daily basis.

Smriti Sinha
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