



LET'S TALK equality

Privilege: A Pretty Little Package by Riana

Growing up in the quaint community of Hermosa Beach, I knew nothing of my privilege. I always felt grateful for what I physically possessed, but I was never aware that being born White, middle-class, and in the United States already put me far ahead the rest of the world in terms of the opportunities I would receive. My only disadvantage was that I was born a female. In recent years, Whites have been called out for such privileges, and have been forced to reconcile with their unfair advantages. In Peggy McIntosh's article, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack," she explains, "As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage." It was not until I read this article that I began to acknowledge the privilege that I was so carefully taught to ignore. Acknowledging White privilege would, to some, be the notion of acknowledging an easier hand of cards dealt to them. No one would be so quick to admit that his or her life is easy, mostly because we do not believe this to be true. What we fail to realize is that life is *easier* for Whites because of the so-called backpack of "unearned assets" that McIntosh describes is filled with provisions that we can rely on to get us through each day.

Eighty-six percent of the Hermosa Beach population is White, so diversity is not something I was well acquainted with. My high school, however, really opened my eyes to diversity with African Americans, Asians, Whites, and Hispanics. It was in high school that I really began to catch a glimpse of what it meant to be privileged. The Asians, African Americans, and Hispanics were constantly battling stereotypes and self-fulfilling prophecies, since they were typically the "permit kids" that came from the surrounding poorer neighborhoods. Kids from outside the Hermosa Beach School District had to apply for a permit and be accepted in order to attend a school outside their city limits. I, a Hermosa Beach native, was given a "get out of jail free card" on such stereotypes since I "belonged" in that school, being fortunate enough to live in a city that allowed me to attend a good high school without the need of a permit. The other students were seen as the "at risk" kids, because their home life was usually rough and they were the students most susceptible to flunking out. The White students were usually seen as the ones with more stable families, even if this was not true, and thus avoided them as being characterized as a student of concern.

It was also in my community that I realized the privilege that comes with wealth. Hermosa Beach, and the surrounding cities of Manhattan Beach and the Palos Verdes Peninsula were all named in the top ten most expensive rental neighborhoods in Los Angeles. Kids who grew up in these cities had access, because of their wealth, to the best SAT and ACT tutors and college counselors, which allowed them to get into the best colleges and universities that money could afford. I did not have the same advantage, which made me jealous. I was privileged enough to attend a private school up until high school, but did

not have the luxury of expensive tutors or counselors. It is in comparison that I realized I was not as privileged as some. White privilege allowed for my peer's parents to hold the highest positions in their respective companies. Because of this, they had more opportunities and connections as a result of their status.

Privilege does not just relate to race. The topic of male privilege has consistently been in the news in recent years. As McIntosh recounts, "I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege." Similar to white privilege, males are taught to subconsciously ignore their privilege. In my introduction to sociology course, our class became aware of the "glass ceiling" and "glass escalator" phenomena. The glass ceiling is a barrier that prevents women from being promoted within an organization. Similarly, the glass escalator allows men to move up to higher positions in female-dominated occupations at disproportionately higher numbers. Just as I see the male-dominated workforce as unfair and unjust, so do the out-groups see the White-dominated workforce as discriminatory. As a woman who will be entering the workforce within the next five years, it is frustrating to know that despite my qualifications, my male counterparts are more likely to be hired and promoted in the occupation of their choosing. Being a woman and seeing my disadvantages, I am aware of how frustrating white privilege must be to non-Whites. In a similar fashion, despite a non-White person's qualifications, he or she will be hired and promoted far less frequently than their White counterparts. The notion of male privilege has helped me to understand how minority groups view White privilege.

As the topic of privilege has risen in popularity over the past few years, it has become important for Whites to become aware of their unfair advantages. White privilege prolongs the racism that people fought so hard to end in the 1950s and 1960s. McIntosh reveals, "...whites are taught to think of their lives as a morally neutral, normative, and average, also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work which will allow 'them' to be more like 'us.'" The idea that whites are better than every other racial group is something we must try to stop believing. We must strive to end our unfair advantages so that we are all seen as equal.

Let's Talk Equality is an initiative by a group of University of Tampa professors to engage students in conversations about privilege, bias and social justice. For more information, visit www.letstalkequality.com or on Twitter @ltequality.