



LET'S TALK equality

Try to Look Past It All

Privilege is infinite. Yet, when someone says privilege aloud the image that flashes in all our heads is, a white heterosexual male from an upper class. And if this truly were the case, more than half of the world would be classified as non-privileged. X equals X ; X cannot equal Y . However, the discussions that we've had in class, outlining privilege in all directions, is the first step in eradicating this image that has been ingrained in our history for decades. Privilege encompasses all aspects of life, and until we recognize its infinite presences, the minority will continue to serve under the majority.

No one person shares privilege in the exact same way as another. If one man is rich but blind and another is poor but can see, whom could you consider more privileged? There is no right answer because each one experiences privilege in a way unique to them. But in our social system it is not that simple, because if you compare a rich black male to a middle-class white male, the white male would be defined as more privilege. See in our history and built into our culture, are lines that many of us dare not to cross, and this is what feeds discrimination, racism, disrespect and all the negative energies that are passed between the "privileged" and "non-privileged."

My best friend goes to the University of Mississippi; she's half black – half white. She has light tan skin, colored eyes, and curly sandy blonde hair. To say that she goes to school in an area still plagued by racism is an understatement. In her own words she has told me, "People would rather pretend that I am just a really tan white girl, than acknowledge the fact that I am half black." She comes from a two-parent home, has a full education, and is in good health. Yet some how all these privileges don't seem to offset the biggest disadvantages that have been a part of our social system for decades.

Last semester there was an incident where a fraternity tied a noose around the neck of a statue of one of the universities prestigious black figures. Those involved were put on suspension with no further punishments to follow. In such a violent, hateful display of disrespect you think a heftier punishment would have been prescribed. But as it turned out, the fraternity was built on a stereotypical roll call, with southern country white males from prestigious backgrounds, just "bonding" in the way of their forefathers.

When I was younger I failed third grade and it wasn't because I didn't try. It was the educational system. The teachers and advisors saw me as an underprivileged student from the streets ready to take my place in a fulfilling prophesy. Truth be told I fooled them, as it turns out I have a learning disorder, dyslexia. Most people would not see this as a privilege, but I do. Yes, I had to repeat a grade and I had to see all my friends move on. But repeating afforded me the chance and attention I needed to receive a fulfilling education. This disadvantage that some would call it, taught me the abundances of privilege.

Of all the privileges I have, the one that I could not live without is my education. In our society I was disadvantaged the minute I was born. Any skin color other than white will always warrant a few skeptical stares, and being female will always put my word at the back seat of males. Beyond those things, twelve years ago I could barely read or write, I have experienced life without my privilege. I faced our culture without the basic necessities to fight back in a struggle between minorities and majorities. To imagine my life now, without my education, it is safe to say that I would not be here at this university.

Like me, my father has dyslexia, except between us I share more privilege than him. My father knows how to read and write, but his level of dyslexia is much more challenging than mine. There are days when my father asks how to spell words as simple as: how, who, hear, here, daughter, etc. And many times I see stares in my father's direction because he is asking something that we learned in elementary school. At times I feel my self getting irritated with him because he's always asking the same questions. It sounds horrible, but up until now understanding the different definitions of privilege, ~~that~~ I didn't realize I was so lucky. He never received the education he needed to fully combat the limitations that come with having a learning disorder. And just because my father wasn't allotted the same education as me, he still shares an abundance of privilege. He has health, a loving family, a job, and he still has what is left of his hair, which he cherishes. Even so, my father's privilege, my privilege, and the privilege of others is much more than money, skin color, gender, and so on. Privilege is life. And accepting this idea of privilege could change our society as whole, and bring equality and balance.

My privilege is my family and friends, physical and mental health, education, love, the oxygen in this room and all the little things in between. I see privilege for all its parts, we are all thankful in our own ways. But so long as our society continued to back the traditions of "privilege," it is going to be hard for those who are underprivileged to finally see the privileges they already have.

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.