



LET'S TALK equality

A Personal Reflection on Privilege

I'll never forget one winter afternoon almost ten years ago. It was the epitome of a bitter cold Connecticut day. The temperature was below freezing, and my Mom had just picked me up from Elementary school. On the way home she abruptly pulled over the car. It wasn't until then that I noticed one of my classmates walking home alone, wearing just a t-shirt. My Mom gave the boy a ride and proceeded to ask where his coat was, and why he was even outside in such frigid temperatures. It was later revealed that he did not, in fact, own a winter coat, and his parental guardian, a single mother, worked full time and could not pick him up from school. I didn't think much of this event when it occurred, but in retrospect, it actually had a major impact regarding my views on privilege.

Now that I reflect upon this event as an adult, I realize just how fortunate I am. I've always considered myself as someone with a great deal of privilege. Growing up in a town with a high level of diversity aided in my understanding of what privilege truly is. West Hartford, Connecticut is filled to the brim with multi-million dollar estates, fancy country clubs, and some of the best public school systems in the area. However, West Hartford is also home to families on food stamps, government paid housing projects, and those who are too poor to afford clothing and food. Likewise, West Hartford borders the City of Hartford, which was ranked by the FBI as one of most crime-ridden places in the United States. Growing up there has given me the chance to see both sides of the spectrum.

As a kid I could clearly understand the enormous impact money had on an individual's life. I consider being a middle class citizen a huge privilege. Growing up in the middle class has allowed me to have everything I could possibly need. There was never a concern about having dinner on the table, a warm bed to sleep in, and clothes on my back. Likewise, being in the middle class has also allowed me to understand what it would be like to have financial struggles. My family has never had nice cars, vacations, or any other extraneous things. We have enough money to pay for what we need and that's it. Money has always been tight, and looking back I think this aspect made me who I am today. Nothing was handed to me on a silver platter, and I was given the opportunity to understand the value of a dollar, and experience the feeling of earning my own money. Ta-Nehisi Coates, an American writer and journalist, hit the nail on the head when he stated that those "who were financially "better off" than me should assume only that, and no more. They should certainly not assume they were more privileged. I certainly do not. It is the privileges which I experienced, as an individual, that brings me here." There's no denying that there will always be people that have more than you, and people with significantly less. I have learned to be thankful for everything I have, and never forget that there are millions of people who would willingly trade places with me everyday. I am often surrounded by individuals that have more money and power than myself, but I consider my character developed by my upbringing and middle class

status a true privilege. I can empathize with both sides of the coin and have the ability to accept where I stand.

Having parents that support and care for me made me the person I am today. Without their help, I wouldn't be in Florida currently studying to become a nurse. When I reflect on the number of people in this world who have never been given the opportunity to even attend school, I know that I am beyond privileged. Having an education gives me an upper hand while also opening many doors, which will lead to a brighter future. I can't deny that a person who has never received an education is at a major disadvantage. Having no form of education makes pulling yourself up by your bootstraps nearly impossible.

When I think back to my eight-year-old self, I'll never forget the wide variety of students in my class. Some kids left school riding in the back of their parent's Escalades, wearing designer winter jackets, while others trudged home alone, coatless. One might say that the boy wandering home unaccompanied is actually extremely privileged, solely based on the fact that he is receiving an education in an amazing school system. These experiences have revealed the fact that everyone possesses privilege in some way or another, however, the amount privilege one has can vary dramatically and is entirely contextual. Through the eyes of a wealthy West Hartford resident, a person who can't afford winter attire is extraordinarily poor and disadvantaged. On the other hand, there is undoubtedly a person somewhere who would consider this boy rich and fortunate for his own circumstances.

Living in a town as diverse as West Hartford allowed me to see that money does not equate to happiness. In fact, looking back, my three wealthiest friends were actually incredibly unhappy. They struggled every day and dealt with a plethora of issues. From an outside perspective they looked like attractive, rich, white girls. But as someone with an inside perspective, I could clearly see that no amount of money, clothes, or popularity would ever satisfy them. This statement is not to say that rich people aren't happy-- but to simply demonstrate that no amount of money can buy happiness. Having money is both a privilege and an advantage but there are many crucial things money cannot buy. Money cannot buy health, it cannot bring back a person who has died, money cannot give you two loving parents, money cannot cure a mental illness, and the list goes on. Which brings me to my last point, that my most valued privileges-- the ones I would be most reluctant to give up, have nothing to do with money. I am so fortunate that everyone in my family, including myself, is able-bodied and both mentally and physically healthy. I grew up with two parents who love and support me with any decision I make. Without these factors my life would simply not be the same.