



# LET'S TALK equality

## Found: Female, Caucasian, Not Fully Privileged by Dana R.

In previous years, I have always considered myself to be one hundred percent privileged. I thought this simply because I am white, I live in a wonderful neighborhood, I have access to amazing healthcare professionals, and my education was never sacrificed. But a recent college English class focused on the subject has introduced me to the little voice in the back of my head. This voice always kicked me everytime I thought, "Wait, am I totally privileged?" FYW 101 has allowed me to explore the notions of privilege and finally come to terms with my ideas, feelings, and outlooks on privilege.

Privilege is classically defined in the dictionary as "a right, immunity, or benefit enjoyed only by a person beyond the advantages of most." In Roxanne Gay's "Peculiar Benefits" she says almost the same thing. Except, she bows to the knowledge that "everyone has something someone else doesn't." Gay also goes on to say that accepting her privilege was "somewhat embarrassing" but, she also acknowledges that she lacks privileges. I connected with this idea as soon as my brain processed the words. I am quite privileged and recognizing that can be horribly awkward to the point where I feel like I'm drowning in guilt.

Nevertheless, Gay and I know that we also lack privilege. One that we share comes down to simple biology. We're females. Politicians and "meninists" will tell you until they're blue in the face that men and women are equal now. I tried to chew this idea, let it sit with me, and live with me but I can't. Gay wrote it and I live it everytime I walk off campus, "street harassment."

Simply walking back from the neighborhood Walmart, in a crusty tank, running shorts, carrying pounds of groceries, I get hollered at. It is never a compliment. My immediate thought? "How would I defend myself with soup and yogurt if that man in his truck was hollering on foot?" Discussing privilege in FYW 101 has allowed me to not feel embarrassed with these thoughts. I lack the privilege of feeling safe whenever I walk anywhere, because my twenty-third chromosome pair features two x's.

In another class session we viewed "The Outlist." From what I watched, I was let into some very personal spaces by actors, athletes, and the like about their sexual orientation. I cannot fathom the struggles all of them had to go through, but I have witnessed it first hand. A friend of mine in high school transferred into our school because he feared rejection for being 'out' in the school he was zoned for.

I believe 'being straight' is a privilege many people do not recognize. We never battled with self-hate because of who we loved, our families never feared for their honor, or we'll never not get a job or promotion because of who we are. That class session totally empowered my sense of privilege. The little voice in the back of my head never once whispered that being heterosexual was a privilege.

In my friend group back home we all like to complain about life because that's what teenage girls do. However, it dawned on us one day that we enjoy one of the simplest yet best privileges out there. All of our parents are still married and are, for the most part, happy. With that said, at least two of us should have witnessed divorce by our late teen years, but luckily we didn't. We never had to ask one another what house they were at or awkwardly discuss family vacations. We were privileged to have loving and put-together homes.

Finally, if someone came into my room today and was able to round up all my privileges and leave with them, I'd beg to keep my health. I have always known that my health and access to healthcare professionals is an extreme privilege I get to have. I know this intimately because I went through period in my life where I wasn't so able-bodied. I woke up one day at summer camp feeling like I couldn't walk. And I was right. I was hunched over at the hips and could only take the smallest steps. Needless to say, I was sent home and then started the doctor's visits. It took multiple x-rays, blood tests, MRI's, and consults to diagnose what was wrong. Patellofemoral Pain Syndrome would be my life-long friend. Despite years of PT and a surgery on each knee, I'll always battle stiffness and pain. However, I have access to an amazing orthopedist that can help me cope. If my health was stripped away, I would be completely and utterly lost.

Roxanne Gay said "When people wield the word *privilege* it tends to fall on deaf ears because we hear that word so damn much the word has become white noise." Many people have trouble recognizing their privilege let alone accepting it. Most difficult is allowing yourself to know that you may lack some privilege. Privilege isn't just physical. I may be Caucasian but that hasn't shielded me from the hardships of life. Writing and Inquiry 101 has introduced me to broader concepts of privilege and allowed me to validate thoughts I had all along.

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**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](http://www.letstalkequality.com) or on Twitter @ltequality.