



LET'S TALK equality

Privilege or Judgment?

by Rachel C.

When I reflect on the community I grew up in, the first word that comes to mind is, "privilege." Unfortunately, the word is frequently followed by a negative connotation. Having privilege usually entails having to explain yourself to people who don't share in the same privileges, or don't understand why you have them. As a white Jew from Long Island, this was a situation I found myself in a lot. The common stereotype about Jews is that we are money hungry, so people were always quick to judge me. Yes, money can open doors and make life easier, but monetary related privileges are the ones that I'd be most willing to give up.

This past July, I injured myself. One minute I was up, and the next minute, my kneecap slid out, and I was on the ground. I wasn't given proper medical care, so other parts of my body were damaged. My knees and my hips don't work properly, so I've been in physical therapy ever since. This incident has taught me that we take for granted privileges that seem minimal in theory. In reality, these are the most important privileges we can possess. We aren't guaranteed the ability to walk, or the care needed to recover from an accident.

My health is the privilege that I wouldn't be willing to compromise. Between having to learn to walk again, and seeing loved ones become ill, I've learned that good health is the key to living life to its fullest. Growing up, my parents often reminded me that, "Money can't buy happiness." You think that's a load of garbage until life throws something at you, and you're forced to face reality. I realize that many people wouldn't want to acknowledge this as a privilege. As Roxane Gay pointed out in her piece on privilege, "Peculiar Benefits," it's difficult for people to acknowledge privilege. When you get a good report from your doctor annually at your check-up, you believe you're invincible, and nothing is ever going to hurt you. You take your good fortune for granted.

I'll admit that as much as I try to remind myself to appreciate what I have, I've often overlooked some of my privilege. It's isn't because I'm ungrateful or because I don't care about people who aren't a part of my normal circle; it's because I forget that people's differences can put them in uncomfortable situations that I haven't had to deal with. A time when this concept really hit me was during my first trip to Wal-Mart. My friends B-rad (Black), Carolyn (White), Leo (White), and I had gone grocery shopping, and were leaving when we were stopped by one of the workers. He approached B-rad and asked to see his receipt. We asked if he needed to see ours too, but he said that it wasn't necessary, and was on his way. Everyone was left extremely uncomfortable, and didn't know what to say about the situation.

When B-rad said that this wasn't the first time it had happened to him, I felt horrible. It made me wonder why I had never been targeted. I realized that being a white female kept me under the radar. That

was a huge privilege I had been overlooking. Throughout history, women have fought to keep us under the radar, and to get us the rights that we deserve. For people like B-rad, the fight isn't over. Much like having privilege, people like to ignore the fact that not all races are treated equally. People feel that if they acknowledge it, they'll have to do something about it.

This brings me back to a question that's been bugging me, "Why is privilege viewed so negatively?" I've always wondered how others can make us feel so inferior that we feel the need to apologize for what we have. I'm guilty of apologizing for having opportunities that others don't. Sometimes, not having a privilege can be more of a blessing than having one. When fighting for what you want is your only option, you learn lessons and become a stronger person; in spite of the hand you've been dealt.

The LGBT Community is the example that comes to mind when I think of a group fighting for privilege. Although fighting for marriage is what they've made headlines for lately, it isn't the most important privilege they've fought for. LGBT people are fighting just to be accepted. One of my biggest inspirations has been my friend Riley. We met about 5 years ago, when he was just a little redheaded girl named Liz. She knew nothing about her sexuality. She was in a relationship with a boy, and suffered from extreme depression. Over the years, she began to discover who she was, and her parents eventually began to come around to the changes she exerted. She began dating girls in addition to boys, and then just girls, then cut off all of her hair, and started to dress more like a boy. A couple of weeks ago, she gave me a call and said she had something she needed to talk about. She told me that she was a "he," and wanted to be called, "Riley" from now on. The now, "he" said that if I wasn't okay with it, he understood and respected that. My heart sunk. It's such a privilege to be able to love whomever I want without it being a problem. It's also a privilege that I feel my gender identity and my gender match because I won't have to go through all of the bullying that I know he will.

As Riley proved, we don't always get to choose our privileges. Where we grow up, the family we're born in to, the education we receive, etc., play a large role in the privileges we receive. Every privilege is something we should be grateful, and unapologetic for. Privilege isn't something that should be looked down upon; it's something that should be celebrated. So the next time you feel that you're too, "black" or "gay" or just too "you," realize you aren't, embrace what makes you who you are.

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.