



LET'S TALK equality

Maybe My Ex Was Right by William W.

"I don't like labels." That's what my ex-girlfriend told me in a poor attempt to let me down easy. I tried my hardest to reason with her and convince her otherwise, but it was to no avail. While the same can be said of me, I dislike a different kind label; the social type. Social labels define someone to a certain extent, and the stigma that is formed is very difficult to overcome. These stereotypes are the core problem of all social privilege, including racial, gender, gender identity, sexuality, and religious advantages. Simply put, if there were no labels, there would be no privilege.

Of course there are some types of privilege that labels are not responsible for. Economic, educational, and able-bodied privilege for example, are benefits that are determined mostly by the circumstance one is born into. That being said, stereotypes play a vital role in that. For example, economic privilege is largely based on what class one is born into. The United States has always prided itself on the "American dream" motto and that there is an opportunity for upward mobility. That upward mobility is greatly hindered by social barriers caused by labeling. It can be something as little as a tattoo in a job interview, to an employer promoting someone based on the majority and minority groups they belong to. I've also seen students discriminated against by not getting into the predominately white private school near me, but at the same time, being a minority gives you a large advantage when applying for college. Educational and economical privilege are directly related; just how financial standings can allow one a better education, education can allow one to be in better financial standing. Both of these have social barriers that are brought on by labeling.

History is also key in regards to privilege. Every kind of social privilege is linked to some form of maltreatment of a group in the past. Racial: blacks were enslaved, Gender: women were denied suffrage, Gender Identity: Trans-genders were not allowed in some public places (Compton's cafeteria riot), Sexuality: it was illegal to be homosexual, Religious: millions of Jews were persecuted. . Everyone likes to think we currently live in such an advanced and post-*insert oppression of various group* society, but the truth is we don't. It is more evident than ever in the language some people use every day. Nigger, bitch, fag, kike; the list goes on and on. These words, obviously derogatory slurs, are still linked with injustices these groups faced, and although it's nice to think it is all in the past, the injustice is still alive and thriving today.

My college English class has been recently talking a lot about identity and privilege. The prompt that connected to me the most in class was when we watched *The Out List*. When I was presented with the question "Which privilege would be the hardest to give up?" I didn't know. I thought about it for a while and here was my thought process. At first it seemed easy, financial. I wouldn't want to give up all the

money my family has, and all the opportunity I've been exposed to as a result of it. Then I thought about health. Health seemed like it was a foolproof choice, because without health you would not be alive, hence all the other privileges wouldn't matter. Finally, I thought about *The Out List*. The name says it all; yes the people featured in the documentary are "out" as in openly gay, but some people also view them as outcasts in society.

I couldn't imagine being gay and listening to a priest, who is supposed to be viewed as an extension of God himself, preach that something that I am, something that I have no control over, is wrong. I couldn't imagine listening to a priest, who is supposed to absolve sins, but instead is preaching that I am living a sin, and that ultimately I will go to hell as a result. It reminds me of the irony of the founding fathers . "All men were created equal" yet there were slaves all around. This all goes back to labels and how to a certain extent they define you; a gay person in theory could live the holiest life, do all sorts of wonderful acts, win a Nobel Peace Prize, yet they are still discriminated against in the Catholic church because in the bible it says marriage should be between a man and woman. Marriage to whomever one loves shouldn't be a privilege only some have. It sounds cliché, but I don't understand why society cannot see through that first label into what is underneath, because that is what should define someone.

The reason I wouldn't want to give up this privilege on "the in list" is simply all the freedom and privilege I have from it. I can get married in whatever U.S. state I want. I can hold hands and kiss in public with my significant other, and no one will look at me any differently. To watch *The Out List* and see the testimonies of people coming out to their families, and seeing how they reacted, is something that I don't think I could live with. Family is supposed to be the people you can always rely on and accept you for who you are, yet some families don't accept members simply because of who they love. Health and well-being is a great privilege, yet being on this "out list" sometimes causes a lack of it. To be discriminated against to the point where someone even remotely thinks about ending their life is just unacceptable. I don't know how the government continues to make the decisions they make, or the Catholic Church continues to preach the things they preach, knowing the ramifications it has.

If there is anything these discussions have taught me, it is to never accept society the way it is. I no longer think "Well it doesn't apply to me", or "It'll take too long to try and fix". I grew up in Catholic schools, going to church every Sunday, and now I finally have the mindset to not accept my religious beliefs the way they were handed to me. More than anything else, I've learned to dig deeper and look past the labels that even I create in everyday life. The hard part about stereotyping and creating labels is that most of the time it is an unconscious act. Labels are derived from a place of hatred in history, so it's senseless that they even exist in modern day. That being said, they are still the root cause of all social privilege, so the only way to even out privilege for everyone, would be to get rid of negative labels altogether.