



# LET'S TALK equality

## What Privilege Means to Me by Taylor D.

I grew up in a small town, I guess you can say, but while I lived in the town it did not seem that little to me. It was not until I moved out of this “small” town that I realized how compact it really was. I knew basically everyone and everyone basically knew me. I went to elementary, middle, and high school there and I was always use to seeing the same people, but even then I still did not realize that this is what a small town felt like because that was all that I knew. Then when I moved to Tampa I realized that I did not know anyone there. Everyone was always moving and in a rush, no one had time to stop and learn names. I guess privilege had the same effect on me. I thought growing up I was privileged. In my town everyone was close to the same as in financial class and social class. We did not have two extremes; no one was really poor as no one was really rich. Everyone for the most part was either working class to middle to upper middle class, which is how far the spectrum went. I was part of the middle class. My family had money left over after paying their bills and I did not want for anything. That quickly changed when I was in the seventh grade, and we went from middle to working class. Still, I did not feel left out. I felt the effects of the financial shift, but I did not feel like I was substantially less privileged than my peers.

Privilege means something different to everyone. Some only see it as how much money you have or where you stand in a social class. Some believe it is education, others believe it is health and stability, or the color of someone’s skin and specific gender. I use to believe that privilege only dealt with wealth, but now my view has changed through the readings of “Peculiar Benefits” by Roxane Gay, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack” by Peggy McIntosh, and the discussions we have been having in my college English class. I realized that privilege is all of these things.

However, sometimes I live in a bubble. I believe, or let me rephrase that, I WANT to believe that everyone has the best intentions for me and others that surround me, so I do not always realize when someone is treating me differently due to stereotypes or profiling. The First time I went on a plane was when I came to Tampa this fall. I did not know the procedures before getting on the plane. I did not know that it was odd for airport security to pat down or search my straightened hair, until Tiffany Jana said it in her TEDTalk, “The Power of Privilege.” “The Power of Privilege” touched on a lot of points that I could resonate with. Since I can remember, my mother always told me that I was a black female and that I would have to prove myself to society. She told me that I would have to work twice as hard as someone of fairer skin or someone of the opposite gender. My mother’s name is Tiaowanda, she made sure she gave me a “white” name so that I would not have to go through the discrimination that her name presented.

Since I was a juvenile my mother prepared me for society. She always told me to speak in an educated manner, and to monitor my attitude. I did not have the same luxuries of getting upset or

showing my disdain as someone of fairer skin. Even to this day, I do not curse because she always said cursing was looked at as being uneducated or for my skin tone “ghetto.” I would like to believe that stereotypes do not exist anymore and everyone is offered the same opportunity but if the airport incident showed me anything it is that stereotypes are very much alive. Even now, the fact that I cannot swim is often followed with the comment that “It is because you are black, and black people do not like the water,” that is the opposite, I love the water. Stereotypes will always be what people base my characteristics off of before using logical reasoning. Maybe I have not learned how to swim because it was not a priority to me at the time because of where I lived. Or the fact that I speak in complete sentences and try to use proper grammar is a form of “talking white” why is it not just being educated? Not having to deal with negative stereotypes is a privilege I may never have in my lifetime.

I also learned to deal with it. That simple. This is my life, I cannot change who I am. God has made me who I am for a reason. Also, not everyone is willing to see where they may be more privileged in unfair ways because oblivion is better, as Peggy McIntosh wrote, “obliviousness of white advantage, like obliviousness of male advantage, is kept strongly inculturated [enculturated] in the United States...”, but this is the world that many people of power want to live in. The disadvantage of privilege also goes both ways. Some white individuals and males are constantly told that they are at an advantage because of their color or gender; it takes away from their accomplishment. There will be those who were given the position but there are also those who worked hard to get that position and deserve just credit.

Therefore, it is best to accept wherever you stand in life. Society is not perfect, it has improved greatly though, and not everyone has the mindset to be oppressive so do not treat every individual who is seemingly privileged as if that is the case. Everyone has some type of privilege so manipulate that into your favor, and everyone has some type of disadvantage whether it is: color, race, gender, class, sexual orientation, education, health, religion, etc. I cannot change the fact that I am a black female, as another individual cannot change the fact that they are a heterosexual white male. So all you can do is respect others and try and be mindful of your privilege and appreciate it.

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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.