

What is Privilege?

As a noun: a special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group.

As a verb: grant a privilege or privileges to particular person or group.

As a social construct: privilege is a certain entitlement to immunity granted by the state or another authority to a restricted group, either by birth or on a conditional basis.

- **By contrast a right:** is an inherent, irrevocable entitlement held by all citizens or all human beings from the moment of birth

Social theorists separate privilege into two constructs:

- **Social class:** refers to a group of people within a society who possess the same socioeconomic status.
- **Social status:** refers to the relative rank that an individual holds, with attendant rights, duties, and lifestyle, in a social hierarchy based upon honour or prestige.
 - **Ascribed status:** is typically based on sex, age, race, family relationships, or birth
 - **Achieved status:** may be based on education, occupation, marital status, accomplishments, or other factors.

Privilege is a complex construct in that, individuals of the same class and status:

- Do not always enjoy the same level of privileges.

The concept of "*Intersectionality*" recognizes that people can be privileged in some ways and definitely not privileged in others. There are many different types of privilege, not just skin colour privilege, that impact the way people can move through the world or are discriminated against. These are all things you are born into, not things you earned, that afford you opportunities others may not have.

Intersectionality is:

- An analytical framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege.
 - Examples of these aspects include gender, caste, sex, race, class, sexuality, religion, disability, physical appearance, and height.

Peggy McIntosh examples of white privilege based on daily experiences that are often taken for granted, in the hope it offers a better understanding of this complex subject.

1. I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
2. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.

3. I can be pretty sure that my neighbours in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
4. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
5. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.
6. When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilisation," I am shown that people of my colour made it what it is.
7. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
8. If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on white privilege.
9. I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods that fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can cut my hair.
10. Whether I use checks, credit cards or cash, I can count on my skin colour not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.
11. I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.
12. I can swear, or dress in second-hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.
13. I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.
14. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.
15. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
16. I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of colour who constitute the world's majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.
17. I can criticise our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behaviour without being seen as a cultural outsider.
18. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to "the person in charge," I will be facing a person of my race.
19. If a traffic cop pulls me over or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.
20. I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children's magazines featuring people of my race.

Gina Crosley-Corcoran in "EXPLAINING WHITE PRIVILEGE TO A BROKE WHITE PERSON" illustrates the complexity in understanding privilege.

She writes *"I do understand McIntosh's essay may rub some people the wrong way. There are several points on the list that I felt spoke more to the author's status as a Middle Class person than a White Person. For example:*

- *"If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area, which I can afford and in which I would want to live."*
- *"I can be pretty sure that my neighbours in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me."*

- *"I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed."*
- *"If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on white privilege."*

And there are so many more points in the essay where the word "race" could be substituted for the word "class" which would ultimately paint a very different picture. That is why I had such a hard time identifying with this essay for so long. When I first wrote about White Privilege years ago, I demanded to know why this White Woman felt that my experiences were the same as hers when no, my family most certainly could not rent housing "in an area which we could afford and want to live."

She counters the above with:

"I know now that I AM Privileged in many ways.

- *I am Privileged as a natural born white citizen.*
- *I am privileged as a cis-gendered woman.*
- *I am privileged as an able-bodied person.*
- *I am privileged that my first language is also our national language, and that I was born with an intellect and ambition that pulled me out of the poverty I was otherwise destined for.*
- *I was privileged to be able to marry my way "up" by partnering with a Privileged middle-class educated male who fully expected me to earn a college degree.*

There are a million ways I experience Privilege, and some that I certainly don't. But thankfully, Intersectionality allows us to examine these varying dimensions and degrees of discrimination while raising awareness of the results of multiple systems of oppression at work."

Bibliography

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