

Let's Talk About...Privilege

Have you ever been told that you're privileged? Maybe you've heard somebody tell you to "check your privilege," or maybe you've heard someone start their opinion with the caveat, "I know I'm speaking from a place of privilege." I know when I first heard somebody talking about how much privilege I have, I thought they clearly didn't know me or my story. How could I be privileged? I grew up in the middle of nowhere, attended some of the poorest public schools in my state, lived off church potlucks, and hardly ever wore anything but hand-me-down clothes. And yet, in so many ways, I have quite a lot of privilege. Maybe you can relate to my uncomfortable confusion? So, let's talk about privilege.

Remember that people are complex. I am neurodivergent and a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, but I'm also white and socially middle class, with secure housing and a master's degree education and strong familial support. So there are ways that I am marginalized and other ways that I am privileged. I imagine the same is true for you, in your own complexity.

When someone has privilege, that does not mean they're lifted up on a pedestal. It simply means the ground isn't dropping out from under them. If you'd like some more insight into how privilege works and also a glimpse of my college-age mind from 2014, you can read a music production analogy for privilege here: <https://valeighstar.wordpress.com/2014/09/06/faders-also-something-about-privilege-that-makes-sense/>

Privilege isn't something to be ashamed of—not at all! It is, however, something we need to be aware of, because not everybody has the kind of privilege we have. Here are 3 things you can do to help balance things out when privilege has us all working from different starting points:

1. Don't be ashamed or embarrassed about having privilege or not having it. The point of understanding privilege is not to decide who has it worst or best; it's to figure out who has the respect and resources and who needs them in any given scenario, so that we can use our power to make the world a little less unfair. This is a chance to learn how to love people in the ways that they want and need to be loved!
2. When you have privilege that gives you access (to people, resources, etc.), share it! If you hear somebody's great idea and you have the connections that could help it become reality, don't hide your light under a bushel. For example, practice listening to everyone. When you notice that somebody's consistently talked over or ignored, use your voice to get others to hear them out. When you notice that somebody's consistently getting their way without others necessarily having a chance to make their case, use your voice to create a little more time and space for other possibilities to be heard.

Offer grace to everyone. Sometimes we can tell when somebody's speaking from a position of a lot less or a lot more privilege than we do. Other times we may not understand how this person who seems just like us can be so clueless or callous about one thing or another. Understanding privilege means understanding that sometimes privilege or lack thereof is invisible, and we don't have to know exactly what people have been through to give them the benefit of the doubt.