

Privilege... What Does it Mean?

- * Privilege comes from the Latin *privilegium*, meaning a law for just one person, a benefit enjoyed by an individual or group beyond what is available to others.
- * Any right, immunity, or benefit enjoyed only by a person or group beyond the advantages of most.
- * An unearned advantage that a dominant group has over marginalized groups.
- * Enjoying a special right or advantage that most people do not have.
- * Allows a person to not be subject to usual rules or penalties; exempt.
- * A set of unearned benefits given to people who fit into a specific group.
- * A right granted to some, but not to all.
- * A specific benefit that is available only to a particular person or group.
- * An advantage that is completely out of your control.
- * Characteristically invisible to those who have it. The *absence* of privilege triggers our awareness, not its presence.
- * Exists when one group has something of value that is denied to others simply because of the groups they belong to, rather than because of anything they have done or failed to do.
- * Allows people to assume a certain level of acceptance, inclusion, and respect in the world, to operate within a relatively wide comfort zone.
- * Operates on personal, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional levels and gives advantages, favors and benefits to members of dominant groups at the expense of members of target groups. In the U.S., privilege is granted to people who have membership in one or more of these social identity groups: white, able-bodied, heterosexuals, male, Christian, middle or owning-class, middle-aged, and English speaking.
- * ***Access to, or enjoying rights or advantages, simply by membership of a particular group or identity. These rights/advantages are often unearned and/or undeserved.*** This is different from privilege in other contexts (parents, employers).

*"Check your Privilege" – An online expression used by mainly social justice bloggers to remind others that the body and life they are born into comes with specific privileges that do not apply to all arguments or situations. When considering another's plight, one must acknowledge one's own inherent privileges and put them aside in order to gain a better understanding of the other person. A method to reflect on the ways that your social status might have given you an advantage - even if you didn't ask for it or earn it – while others' social status might have given them a disadvantage. It is a time to reflect and investigate. A time to do some serious reflection on both your own life and the lives of others.

Examples of Different Types of Privilege

Race (the 'norm' is whiteness and the society is structured as such)

Gender (male dominant organizations, minimal career opportunities, internalized oppression – body type, appearance, sexual violence)

Socio-economic (financial stability, access to resources & opportunities)

Christian (member of the dominant religion in the U.S.)

Heterosexual (able to marry and adopt, not viewed by others as a deviant)

Able-bodied (ability to physically participate in society)

Nationality (access due to the country in which one derives from)

Education (access to Higher Education, ability to understand language and identify communication channels to access education opportunities)

Right-handed (resources oriented to their particular perspective – scissors, computer, can opener)

Geographic location (Western privilege, access to information/resources, world perceptions)

English-speaking (access afforded to those who communicate in this language)

Birth order (access/rights given to the first born over middle child, etc.)

Age (access afforded to people considered an 'adult' vs. one labeled as 'youth.' Limited access also given to those considered as 'elderly.')

Body size (to be born with a body type that is celebrated and considered beautiful by the dominant group as reflected in media, social norms, etc.)

Gender-Identity (having a gender presentation that correlates with the expected gender norms)

Modern Utilities (access to water, electricity, other utilities and resources)

Family Structure (benefits - mostly invisible - that come from membership in a stable family...two parents in residence, family support and guidance, encouragement, etc.)

