

Being a white male, as defined by the greater part of society, I have and will continue to experience life in our society in a way others will never be able to. Regardless of being warranted or desired, I possess “white privilege,” something that I feel I can never erase from myself and never truly lose all appreciation for. There will always be people that view me as “white” regardless of how I personally choose to identify myself. This privilege places me not only a step ahead of people with recognizable traces of being anything besides white but also assures that any system set in place automatically works to my favor. White privilege is the power and inherent characteristics of being white that give one an unfair advantage or security. 1. So to say that we live in a post-racial society is gravely incorrect; the majority of our society is constructed around the white male. 2. Although this may be hard to grasp, we are constantly surrounded by proof. The fact that most white people don’t know this or scarcely think anything of race at all, of course except seeing people of different “races,” is proof in itself. And just because there may no longer be laws spelling out the liberties (and lack thereof) for people of color and virtually no more “strange fruit” swaying in trees is no basis to claim we have moved into a post-racial society. Before I accomplish understanding race, racism, and the true meaning of post racial society, I have found it necessary to look at myself and where I fit into a world where I am the benefactor of unearned privilege.

Peggy McIntosh also goes on to uncover the issue of male privilege as well before listing the many ways she benefits from white privilege. She explains how illusive these privileges are in our society. When I have hopefully figured out my societal existence in the context of my “race,” I can then fully immerse myself in these other issues. It is interesting to possess the knowledge I have come to accumulate and now look back on my life. I start to wonder how much of my life has been lived for me by looking white. By this I mean how much was given to me without my knowledge because of my color. Although through my mere sixteen years of existence, looking back I still feel I am able to pick out experiences that played out the way they did in large part due to my whiteness.

I was born in Des Moines, Iowa and spent the first ten years of my life there. My first house was in a neighborhood located in the poorer part of the city. A good portion of the neighborhood was made up of people of color. My first friends, our next-door neighbors were black. There were two boys: one was a little older, and one a little younger than me. I distinctly remember spending hours racing remote-controlled cars around the driveways and wading around their inflatable pool. When it became apparent that our three-bedroom, one bath, house was soon to be outgrown by our family of five, we moved a few blocks away to a nicer area of town. There, our neighborhood was made up of all white people and instead of living across the street from a meth lab with dead grass, everyone had large yards covered with green grass, not a syringe in sight. When I started third grade my two best friends and sweetheart were black. I remember drifting apart from them but I did not know why. It became increasingly difficult to stay friends. We talked less and less until one day I lost all communication with them. I should say rather that it felt more like we were being separated from one another, but I was unable to trace what the cause was. To me it seems that society is set on separating people of different races through perpetuating stereotypes that pressure people to conform to their races and make sure our racist society runs smoothly. I feel this way because when I began sixth grade in Berkeley, I again found myself in a predominantly black social group, but once again, as we got older, we were again torn apart from each other. The media and other influential sources deemed we did not have enough in common with one another to continue having as close of a relationship as we once did. I do think it is possible to stay close friends with someone else

despite their racial identity but it takes a certain level of understanding and openness to overcome multi-racial relationships.

My parents, for example, can to some be considered a biracial couple. My father has darker skin to the point where it is noticeable, and he still identifies as white. They have experienced occasional scrutiny surrounding their marriage. For me this was something that I seldom thought about them, being my parents and all, and while not fully aware of all they have had to go through, it was apparent at times that it was difficult to be a biracial couple in Iowa. What makes biracial marriages any less socially acceptable than any other is still a mystery to me.

Until I was fourteen, all I knew of race was that it was meant to explain the color of your skin. I had no idea what a “social construct” was and was barely able to grasp the concept when it was finally presented to me. During my freshman year of high school, in my humanities class, was when ‘whiteness’ carried an entirely different meaning. When my teacher presented the idea of race as a social construct, I felt confusion and even some anger. I was angry because I got the creeping sensation that I had been lied to, the truth masterfully hidden somewhere just beyond my grasp. It seems that this is one of the reasons that white privilege and racism all together still exist today, because it is hidden in plain sight. After I came to terms with the fact that although we are beyond slavery and blatant racism, I realized we don’t actually live in all that nice of a world. I began to wonder why that is. Still, that class did not impact me enough as to make me question anything that much further. The following school year I once again was faced with the topic of race and was forced to think about it. I didn’t mind talking about race or racism, but didn’t think it was going to change anything given that nothing had changed before so it wasn’t even worth talking about all that much. This class also came and went without making me conscious of my privilege. This monotonous process of hearing the same things said differently was getting old. So when my junior year sociology teacher presented Peggy McIntosh’s list of white privileges, things started to make more sense. I was able to then see how racism was still prevalent but just took a different face. I now was starting to think of what it meant to be white, and how easy it is to ignore it.

Looking back through my life there are a couple instances where I can imagine that things would not have gone the way they did if I was not white. When I was thirteen, my best friend and I were walking through his neighborhood, which is made up of predominantly people of color and located half a block from the train tracks. Incidentally, the train tracks had a reputation for crime but were also frequented by some very talented and well known graffiti artists, the work of whom we enjoyed looking at. As we strolled, it became apparent that my bladder could no longer be ignored so I decided to relieve myself next to a wall. As I finished and walked out from behind the corner to reconvene with my friend, a police cruiser came whipping around the parallel corner and came to a screeching halt right in front of us. The officer hastily exited the car and was instantly in our faces. He proceeded with the standard questions of what we were doing and demanded to see our hands, searching for any fresh paint or ink. He then went to the wall where I had just urinated and ran his hand across the surface, looking around for any signs of tagging. Ignoring my explanation, I found it interesting that he made no eye contact and after walking up to us seemed to be searching and moving faster than seemed appropriate. Now of course I cannot know for sure how the situation would have played out if I were a different race, but I can speculate that the duration of the encounter would have lasted a fair amount longer.

A few years later I again found myself in a similar position. The police confronted a friend and me. We were doing nothing wrong but not being particularly productive. They were casual in their demeanor and nothing progressed further than casual conversation. We were in a

place frequented by drug dealers and graffiti artists where many people also went to fight each other or rob people, yet it seemed we were never under any serious suspicion. Speaking from personal experience, seeing people of color interacting with the police, even in the most casual of interactions, there is tension in both parties. This is probably due to the alarming amount of people of color who are incarcerated compared to whites, so this reality is probably in the minds of both the suspected and the police. It is interesting that my feelings during each of these encounters were neither nervous nor scared, because in the back of my head I knew that I would probably be fine.

That is the interesting thing about white privilege. White people are constantly benefiting from it yet hardly are even aware of its existence. And many white people that are confronted with this reality are utterly unprepared to face it and waste their energy arguing that they are not benefiting from it or try to disprove it entirely. I feel this privilege can, in a sense, be dangerous to the person benefiting from it, in that it can create a false sense of security. Many white people need not worry about their safety and well-being going about their daily lives, but because we still live in a racist society people of color are at risk of being harmed by the very people who are meant to protect them.

Every day I go through life with a variety of things that I don't realize are there. Many of these privileges are subtle and easily looked over which makes them hard to recognize. And although I cannot get rid of them, I can be aware that they are there and help others realize this as well.

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