

Privilege is an uncomfortable topic. People squirm in their seats on the rare occasion that it is brought up. Privilege is a word that literally means a certain person or persons have an advantage over others. It's uncomfortable to be on either side. The people who lack privilege are envious and left wondering why they were born without the benefits that others have naturally. Those who have an abundance of privilege are defensive. They likely didn't personally oppress the groups that are underprivileged, and they don't want to feel as if they are being attacked for the social identities that they have. However, as uncomfortable as it may be, it must be talked about.

Many scholars have begun talking about privilege and its prevalence in creating and sustaining inequality. Two accredited scholars, Peggy McIntosh and Allan Johnson, have gained notoriety in their fields for their works on privilege. McIntosh's "White Privilege and Male Privilege: Teaching About Being an Oppressor" and Johnson's *Privilege Power and Difference* implement the use of eye-opening lists as to what people with privilege can expect, choose to do, or be entitled to that others cannot. McIntosh made the original lists, which she made for whites, and men. Then Johnson made his own lists for whites and men, but adds one for heterosexual privilege.

Their lists are shocking, because the components of the list are so simple that most people with privilege would never think about them. For example, McIntosh says, "I can choose blemish cover or bandages in "flesh" color and have them more less match my skin." It's just something that a white person doesn't think about when they're picking up band-aids at the drugstore. Johnson and McIntosh's lists make readers critically think about privilege, and, perhaps, makes people want to take action against these unfair advantages that people of certain identities are given. However, McIntosh and Johnson both fail to acknowledge or make a list for a very prevalent type of privilege in America.

Able-bodied privilege is something that often slips under the radar, because walking is something so often taken for granted. Additionally, just as people make ignorant statements about white privilege such as "America isn't racist anymore, because we have a Black president," they make ignorant statements about able-bodied privilege. Having spent many years of my life in a wheelchair, I have had to experience much oppression that comes with being disabled. Before, I became immobilized, I had not spent a moment thinking about able-bodied privilege, nor would I have ever believed how extensive the oppression is to disabled individuals. But, that's part of the able-bodied privilege-- not knowing that you have privilege. Not having to think about privilege is a privilege in itself. When you lack privilege, you have to be burdened by thinking about it, because you have to endure the disadvantages and unfairness of it. On top of that, you have to deal with the people who do not believe that it even exists. "But after The Americans With Disabilities Act passed in 1990 they put elevators and ramps everywhere," they say to argue disabled discrimination is no more.

Unlike Johnson and McIntosh, I have been on both sides of a particular social identity. I spent the first ten years of my life walking around, the next five wheelchair bound, and the five

after that, somewhere in between. The transition back and forth between being able-bodied and disabled has really allowed me to recognize that able-bodied privilege is alive and well in America. Johnson and McIntosh coined the idea of these 'privilege lists' because of the power that lists can have. They are simple, yet eye opening, because of their simplicity. For whatever the reason may be, neither Johnson nor McIntosh found able-bodied privilege important enough to make a list for. But, I find it important. Not only because of my personal experience, but because of its relevance in America today. Anyone can become disabled at the drop of a hat. Nobody thinks about that. If you can walk right now, you do not think about how something could happen tomorrow leaving you unable to do so. You almost certainly do not think about the societal repercussions you would experience if you were unable to walk. So, I'll tell you.

1. Able-bodied people can arrange to be in the company of people like them.
2. Able-bodied people can be sure that their physical ability will not be a reason that they are not hired for a job they are qualified to do.
3. Able-bodied people can assume that their ability status won't determine whether they fit in at work.
4. Able-bodied people can be confident that they weren't hired so that their employer could receive a tax break.
5. Able-bodied people can be successful without others being surprised.
6. Able-bodied people can easily find housing that is accessible to them.
7. Able-bodied people can go to public places like restaurants and malls and know that they will be accessible to them.
8. Able-bodied people can turn on the television and see people who look like them.
9. Able-bodied people can expect that there will be important political figures, national heroes, and people in positions of power of their ability status.
10. Able-bodied people will not have people make assumptions about their mental capabilities based on their physical ability.
11. Able-bodied people can go to public places without having people stare at them or ask what happened.
12. Able-bodied people are not asked to speak on behalf of all able-bodied people.
13. Able-bodied people are not assumed to be lazy based on their ability status.
14. Able-bodied people can assume that all public restrooms will be accessible to them.
15. Able-bodied people can assume that public transportation will be relatively easy for them to use.
16. Able-bodied can assume that people will not think their life is not worth living.
17. Able-bodied people can be tired without being accused of always being tired.
18. Able-bodied people can ask for help without others assuming they aren't capable of doing anything by themselves.
19. Able-bodied people can go to a movie theater and sit anywhere they want.
20. Able-bodied people can take pain medication and not be accused of being a drug addict.

21. Able-bodied people can do well in school or have professional successes without being told what an inspiration they are to people like them.

## Annotated Bibliography

ADA: Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990. Public Law 101-336. § 1. 108th Congress, 2nd session (July 26, 1990)

I think this will be useful in knowing what disabled Americans are supposed to be entitled to. It might be interesting to analyze if I believe these accommodations are actually offered in public. It also might also be interesting to see if there is anything that I think should be in the act, but is not.

Anon. n.d. "Privilege." *Dictionary.com*. Retrieved (dictionary.reference.com).

This source is a good base-line for understanding in very simplistic terms what privilege is. I think it will be good to keep this definition in mind in order to find my own way to explain what privilege is.

Johnson, Allan. 2001. *Privilege Power And Difference*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill.

This book includes one of the lists about privilege that I would like to model my list off of.

Lengnick-Hall, Mark L., Phillip M. Gaunt, and Adrienne A. R. Brooks . n.d. "Why Employers Don't Hire People With Disabilities: A Survey Of the Literature."

This source compiles 87 different studies involving the employment rates of people with disabilities and offers seven different reasons/explanations as to why employers don't hire people with disabilities. I will use this in order to make the claim in my list that able-bodied people are more likely to be hired.

McIntosh, Peggy. "White Privilege and Male Privilege: Teaching About Being an Oppressor," in *Privilege: A Reader*, edited by Michael S. Kimmel and Abby L. Ferber Boulder: Westview Press, 2003, pp. 147- 160.

This is another collection of privilege lists that I think would be useful to have these lists in order to compile mine.

"Tax Benefits For Businesses Who Have Employees with Disabilities." *IRS*.

This is a subsection of the IRS website that explains the tax breaks afforded to companies that hire people with physical disabilities. I will use this to make the claim in my list that able-bodied people can be confident they weren't hired because the employer wanted a tax break.