
A Reflection on Oppression and Privilege

This week in Common Hour we discussed diversity, social identities and social justice. All of these topics were extremely important to me as I've never had to deal with them before (racism, homophobia and sexism are widely spread and totally acceptable back home). I've really enjoyed analysing myself and the community, so here are my thoughts on the issues of oppression and privilege and their relation to my own social identities.

To begin with, let's define what exactly is oppression. Oppression is the systemic discrimination and social prejudice against one disadvantaged group and has no other reason than the hatred of a particular quality the group has, like race or sexual orientation. The only social identity of mine that experiences a form of oppression is my sexual orientation. Since I'm bisexual, people tend to think that I must be promiscuous or "one foot out of the closet" or simply undecided yet. Not to mention the homophobia – half of my relatives still refuse to speak with me. The negative stereotyping is annoying and can even hinder you if you want to contribute to the LGBTQ community, as a lot of people still don't consider bisexuals to be "valid" enough. I've never really thought that that was considered oppression but now that I understand what the term truly means, I get it and can fight back against it. Educating people is the first step. Here on campus, it's actually refreshing that the only reaction to admitting I'm bi is "oh, that's cool". People are very open minded and it's easy to talk with them about issues with oppression and privilege.

The second social identity that was important to me and is tied to privilege is my race. I'm as white as you can get and so are the other 99.9% of people from where I come from, which means I've never been exposed to the idea of white privilege. It's a terrifying thought that someone can still be oppressed because of the colour of their skin. However, Caucasian people certainly are privileged in today's society. That means that they don't have to worry about things like racial profiling, representation or discrimination based on their race. A personal anecdote about racial profiling – when I flew in to the U.S., I met a nice Turkish girl while waiting to clear customs. We started talking and I joked about being randomly selected for a second screening. She then casually mentions being randomly selected all 3 times that she flew. I go through customs, everything goes without a hitch, I'm waiting for her to clear them and, sure enough, she gets "randomly selected". While I'm not sure you can prove it was because of her race, it seems to be the most likely explanation. Me, I've never had to deal with stuff like this, I'm accepted everywhere, no questions asked and am seem trustworthy just because I'm white. If that's not privilege, I don't know what is.

After learning about oppression and privilege, I feel like I understand them better and can identify them. I can raise awareness, start talking to people and educating them about these

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issues that we're still facing. All in all, a very thought provoking and serious topic indeed.

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