

The Privilege of the Right to Privacy: An Expansion of Roxanne Gay's "A Tale of Three Coming Out Stories"

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An individual's privacy is a form of liberty, and therefore, it should be considered a fundamental human right. Conflictingly, living in a nation that strives for transparency in its government's conduct, many feel that when information is not available, they are being denied certain rights; however, these people frequently confuse the need for a country's honesty with their own curiosity of other people's personal matters. While some can go about their lives mostly unbothered by another's sense of entitlement to their information, many don't have any choice in the release of that information. If privacy is a form of liberty, it is a fundamental human right; however, not everyone has an equal amount of privacy, and thus, not everyone has an equal amount of freedom. In a country where everyone is supposed to be equal, why aren't we?

Roxanne Gay specifies LGBT+ celebrities' lack of personal privacy in "A Tale of Three Coming Out Stories," but this experience isn't exclusive to them. "Anytime your body represents some kind of difference, your privacy is compromised to some degree" (Gay 79). Gay uses a pregnant woman as an example and employs a quote from Garret Keizer's book *Privacy* to support it. "...[H]er condition is an unequivocally public statement of a very private experience, begun in circumstances of intimacy and continued within the sanctum of her own body—yet there is no hiding it for her..." (Gay 78). This idea of involuntary disclosure of personal information through physical presentation applies to many people—those with physical disabilities, those with different gender identities than their assigned labels, those with neurodivergence, etc.—and with each of them, they lose some amount of their privacy just by living their lives in a world built for people who are not like them. "...[I]t can very difficult for disabled people to assert their autonomy — after all, when you are dependent upon someone else for your very survival, the balance of power tips decidedly in the opposite direction...When we do manage to achieve fragments of privacy, it's hard-fought and not easily earned" (Guéçamburu). "Normal" people notice these people who don't fit in, and—maybe simply out of curiosity, but many times because they think it is their right—they probe for more information; information that any other "normal" person would never have to explicitly state to anyone else. When has anyone had to come out to their parents about their heterosexuality? How many times has someone been asked why they don't need a wheelchair? Why are some people "normal," and what does that even mean?

This is a widely considered idea—that there is a type of person that is the "normal," "healthy," or even "better" type. This type is usually illustrated as a white, able bodied, able minded, heterosexual, gender-conforming person. Many people—most, even—don't fit this ideal, but these "normal" people are what parents expect their unborn children to be like, and when they're not—when they're born autistic, or gay, or trans, or *different*—people are astonished and unprepared, and some are disgusted. The privilege of these "normal" people is

that they fit perfectly into this world without having to change very much, if anything, about themselves, but this is because societies have been built to completely accommodate and support these people in favor of others, sometimes even punishing outliers for not fitting in. Now, more support and accommodations are being given to those who need it, attempting to balance the inequality, but too many people won't even consider the idea that there is a need for equality for people who don't fit this "normal."

There are still many misconceptions and presumptions about disability, neurodivergence, sexual orientation, and gender identity, and the progress to redress these assumptions has been far too slow. Disabled and neurodivergent people often struggle to be heard in their own activism because many people think that disabled people are unable to think for themselves and that they don't know what's best for them, treating them as if they are children, or less than human. Often, differences are only acceptable if they can be exploited by others in one way or another. "Parents of Autistic children seem to be the most eager to expose their children's most difficult moments ... Meltdowns, bathroom issues, nothing seems to be out of bounds. The same parents would be outraged if someone else did this to their children" (Sequenzia). It is as if how well someone functions in this world is conclusive of their right to privacy. People still act as if and think that being gay, or lesbian, or bisexual (or, really, anything other than heterosexual) is like having a fetish—something private, and maybe dirty—instead of thinking about it the way they think about heterosexuality—something common, and undecided by the individual.

Achieving complete equality between so many different types of people is difficult, especially since many people have difficulty accepting and supporting other people who are different. When it comes to equal amounts of privacy, one course of action would be to give everyone who isn't "normal" as much confidentiality as "normal" people do now, but another way would be to give "normal" people only as much privacy as anyone else.

The resolution of this disparity will rely on how future generations view personal privacy, the definition of which is changing as the world makes newer developments. The line between what information is private and what is not is getting blurrier with the advancement of technology, not just in the sense that now more information about someone is generally accessible, but also in the sense that what is considered to be private is different with the sense of anonymity that an online presence grants us versus interaction with people face-to-face. With technological improvements, perhaps the amount of privacy that anyone gets in any situation will be more minimal than it is now, but it will be equal, and equality is what this nation is trying to pursue now more than ever.

Until then, however, the amount of privacy that each person is granted is disproportionate, and thus, not all are equal. In a country endeavoring for equality, it is good and encouraging to know how much progress has been made, but it is also important to acknowledge that the goal has not been met yet, and there is still much more to do to reach it.

Works Cited

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