

AUTISTIC HOYA'S BRIEF ABLED PRIVILEGE CHECKLIST

With thanks to other lists and suggestions from Bev Harp, Phyllis May-Machunda, Cara Liebowitz, Astrid's Journal, Alison Aubrecht, Erin Furda, and Shain Neumeier.

This list is meant to serve as an **educational tool** to help people with and without disabilities become more aware of everyday interactions or observances that are impacted by **ableism**. Ableism is an entire way of thinking and doing that harms disabled people by treating some types of bodies and minds as valuable, worthy, and desirable, and others as undesirable and unworthy. Ableism is embedded in legal, social, and political institutions, as well as in commonly accepted and unquestioned attitudes and assumptions.

Like all checklists about social privilege, this checklist is limited by nature.

Even if you don't have a disability, you might not experience some forms of privilege described on this list because of another identity or experience you have. Likewise, even if you do have a disability, you might still experience some forms of privilege described on this list because you don't have another type of disability. This checklist is not meant to be exhaustive or complete, but rather to give a good and meaningful overview of a variety of disability experiences marked by ableism. In particular, this checklist is meant to help non-disabled people gain more critical consciousness of how ableism systematically advantages and values certain types of bodies and minds in the most ordinary ways, at the expense of others.

This checklist can be used as a private, individual exercise; a group exercise during a workshop or training about disability or ableism (especially as part of diversity, inclusion, or social justice programming); or a resource for learning in general. Feel free to use this checklist at your event!

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Note: *The term "neurotypical" is short for "neurologically typical," and means anyone who **doesn't** have any kind of mental, psychiatric/psychosocial, learning, cognitive, intellectual, or developmental disability. In other words, "neurotypical" means your brain is considered "normal" and "healthy."*

Understanding Privilege

“Privilege is not your fault. It is an artifact of systems that favor some people over others, systems that have evolved naturally to meet the needs of the majority, but have failed to provide adequate accommodations for those outside it.

“Privilege is not, in itself, a terrible thing. Having any form of privilege does not make you a bad person. Just about everyone has some form of privilege. No, that doesn't mean it all somehow “balances out.” A person can have, for example, white privilege, male privilege, class privilege, and heterosexual privilege, while still lacking neurotypical privilege. Likewise, not all autistic people have had the same experiences; other forms of privilege can act as a cushion against many of the harsher realities endured by those who belong to multiple disenfranchised groups.

“The statement that privilege exists is not an accusation or attempt to blame. It is an invitation to see your experiences and the experiences of others in a new light. It is not an admonition to change the world, but a simple tool with which to begin considering if, possibly, some changes might be worth working toward.”

—Bev Harp

Instructions: As we read through this list together, think about which of these sentences applies to you, and which of these sentences don't.

1. I am not told that I can't feel pain because of how my brain works.
2. If I go to the doctor, my medical problems aren't dismissed as just symptoms of being neurotypical.
3. I will not be rejected by health insurance providers or healthcare providers because I am neurotypical.
4. When I am bullied, I am not told that it is my fault or that the abuse will stop if I tried harder to not act neurotypical.
5. I don't have to worry that my natural body movements will result in being beaten, tasered, or arrested by the police, especially if I am also white.

6. I don't have to carry a special card, tag, or item that explains my natural movements, sounds, or way of communicating.
7. The public doesn't generally consider me dangerous and likely to become violent solely because I am neurotypical.
8. I'm not considered a burden on my family or all of society for being born.
9. I will never be murdered solely because of my brain or body.
10. Strangers talk directly to me, and not to whoever happens to be with me, because they assume that I am capable of understanding and responding.
11. I don't have to prove that I can think over and over again just to be allowed into school.
12. I can choose to sit anywhere I want whenever I go out to any event, restaurant, movie theater, or religious service.
13. I don't feel like I'm part of a dying species or the target of modern-day eugenics programs because of how my brain or body works.
14. Random total strangers will generally not ask me very personal, invasive medical questions, especially if I am not transgender. If they do, they are considered extremely rude and their questions are considered inappropriate and embarrassing (for them).
15. My type of body or brain is not used as a metaphor for brokenness, awfulness, mediocrity, or ignorance.¹

¹ Some examples of ableist metaphor (using disabled people's bodies/brains as metaphors): "governor is **willfully blind** to the crisis in Flint;" "prisoners' cries for help **falling on deaf ears**;" "politicians **crippled** by greed and aspirations of class ascendancy;" "the government's **schizophrenic** policies on terrorism that both solicit support from Arab and Muslim communities while increasing domestic surveillance and drone killings abroad;" "immigrant communities **paralyzed** by fear of outsider influence;" "white male entitlement is almost **autistic** in its total lack of empathy for women, especially women of color;" "white supremacy is a social **disease** that afflicts all social policy;" "capitalism's practically **bipolar** effects on working-class white people pitted against people of color."

16. No one will tell me that I am totally incapable of relating to or forming relationships with other people because of how my brain works.
17. Strangers do not attribute special spiritual giftedness to me solely because I am sighted, hearing, neurotypical, or walking.
18. I can read pretty much any book available in any library or bookstore in a format I can use.
19. When I get grades from a class, they represent only how hard I worked, and not whether or not I had accessible exams, instruction methods that work with my brain, or assignments that I was capable of doing.
20. Using a computer or phone, reading, or even just being in public does not suddenly make me a spectacle for total strangers to stare at.
21. I can fairly easily find clothes that fit on my body, even if they're not a style I prefer, in at least some stores in any mall or large clothing store.
22. If I don't have a college education, people won't assume that it's solely because of my brain or body.
23. If I have the money for it, I can decide spontaneously or suddenly to go to a movie, a lecture, a conference, a concert, a worship service, a happy hour, an amusement park, a restaurant, or just about anywhere else I please.
24. Strangers won't pressure me into pursuing a specific career where I can make use of typically sighted, hearing, walking, or neurotypical strengths.
25. If I do choose a career that makes use of sighted, hearing, walking, or neurotypical strengths, people will not assume that I chose my career because I am sighted, hearing, walking, or neurotypical.
26. If I decide not to have children, no one will assume that my brain or body must obviously be the reason why.

27. If I do have children, people won't constantly question whether it was responsible or ethical to add another person to the world who might end up being like me.
28. If I do have children, people also won't assume that my brain or body automatically means that I am unfit to be a parent or incapable of parenting. My children will also not be taken away from me by child protective services simply because of how my brain or body works.
29. I don't have to worry about being sent to an institution or having all my legal and political rights taken away when I would otherwise become of age to be a legal adult.²
30. I don't have to worry about a job interviewer's reaction to the way I naturally talk or move, or to my adaptive equipment or service animal.
31. If I am rejected by a potential intimate partner, I know the reason was not only because of how my brain or body works.
32. I don't have to choose between working to earn and save money and keeping my life-sustaining supportive services.
33. People assume that I am able to have and express romantic and sexual desire in potential intimate partners.
34. If I am having sex, I do not have to stop to explain to my partner how my body works or reassure them that my body will not "break" if they perform typical sexual acts on me.
35. If someone is intimately involved with me in a consensual relationship, other people won't assume that my partner is a predator or pedophile and that I must be sexually abused or exploited because of my brain or body.

² This is called guardianship, sometimes conservatorship or plenary guardianship, depending on the state's laws. A person placed under guardianship has been deemed "incapacitated" by a court, usually for a disability-related reason. The guardian, who is usually either (a) a relative, like a parent, adult child (especially of an elderly person), or sibling, or (b) an institutional entity, like a nursing home, hospital, or state services agency, has the legal power to make financial, medical, and other decisions for the "ward" (the person under guardianship).

36. If I am LGBTQIA³, I won't be told that my sexual orientation or gender identity are actually just symptoms of being neurotypical.
37. When I say that I am tired, overwhelmed, or in pain, people don't constantly tell me that I'm lying, making excuses, faking, exaggerating, being manipulative, or being lazy.
38. I will not be left to die in the hospital from completely treatable and curable conditions like pneumonia because of negative assumptions about my quality of life or a belief that I would be better off dead.
39. I will not be denied life-saving organ transplants because of how my brain or body works when I would otherwise be eligible.
40. Other people automatically respect, validate, and understand my form of communicating instead of denying or dismissing it as not real or legitimate.
41. If I don't have a driver's license or don't drive, other people won't assume that the only possible reason is how my brain or body works.
42. When someone says that all they want is a "healthy" baby, I know they mean a baby whose brain and body will be like mine.
43. The ways that I communicate, move, express my emotions, react to stress, and just get through my day in general are considered normal.
44. I will never be trapped and prevented from going to a mandatory appointment by a set of stairs (or even a single step), a malfunctioning lift, or an out-of-service elevator.
45. I can completely ignore trigger warnings and content notes⁴ without any impact on me, so I don't have to notice whether they are there or not.

³ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender non-conforming, queer and questioning, intersex, and asexual-spectrum. This acronym is not all-inclusive, but in general, refers to people who are queer, questioning, trans or gender non-conforming, intersex (regardless of gender identity), and asexual-spectrum.

⁴ Trigger warnings typically provide information like "This article has a graphic description of rape." Content notes can be more general and might say, "This article describes types of violence in schools and discusses drug use."

46. When I grew up, I learned about role models and celebrities whose bodies and brains were like mine without their body or brain being treated as a special inspiration.
47. If I become street homeless, I can go into any shelter or housing services agency, and can expect their building and services to be accessible to me.
48. I can reliably trust whatever researchers and scientists say about people whose bodies and brains are like mine, and I typically won't feel dehumanized or ignored in whatever they write about people like me.
49. I can reliably expect that most, if not all, bosses, managers, and supervisors that I will ever have will have brains and bodies like mine.
50. When someone who has a brain or body like mine is elected to public office, I am not surprised and it is not news.
51. I can reliably expect that most, if not all, teachers and professors that I will ever have will also have brains and bodies like mine.
52. If I have internet access and want to go on the internet, I can access all of the material on pretty much any website.
53. I don't have to worry that online courses or class management tools will lead to me getting an F because I know I will be able to use them even if they are new to me.
54. If I make a mistake, other people won't use it against all other people with brains or bodies like mine.
55. No one asks me to speak as a representative of all people who are neurotypical or able-bodied.
56. At the same time, no one will ever say that my personal experiences mean that I can't understand or talk about other neurotypical or able-bodied people and must only talk about my personal individual experiences.

57. People in customer service jobs don't ignore me or act nervous because of how I communicate. They will also generally be able to communicate directly with me in the same way that I normally communicate.
58. I don't have to rely on strangers to help me bathe or use the toilet, so I don't have to worry about whether I can trust them or not.
59. I can talk about my interests for a long time without people treating it as a symptom that needs treatment or intervention.
60. No one tells me that the way I move or form speech is inappropriate and will result in no one liking me or wanting to be my friend.
61. If I am stopped by the police, they probably won't interpret the way I speak as threatening or the way I move as reaching for a weapon or being on drugs, especially if I'm also white.
62. If they arrest me, I can expect that any public defender assigned to me or private attorney that I hire will be able to communicate directly with me in the way I communicate normally.
63. If I am taken to jail or go to prison, I will probably be able to eat at least some of the food, even if it is terrible.
64. If a court, probation officer, or parole officer requires me to participate in some kind of program or group, I will be able to participate and complete the requirement even if I don't want to.
65. If I report any kind of abuse to an authority figure, my report won't be treated as unreliable solely because of how my brain or body works.
66. I never have to notice when a building has no signs in Braille.⁵
67. The noise and strobes of fire alarms, at worst, are annoying and frustrating to me, but I am not in danger of sensory overload, physical pain, or potentially deadly seizures from them.

⁵ Braille consists of raised dots for tactile reading by blind and low-vision people. Not all blind people are Braille-literate, however.

68. Strangers don't treat me like a hero for ordinary things like waking up or getting groceries.
69. People believe me when I say that I can do one thing but not another thing.
70. No one tells me that I'm too high-functioning or "mildly affected" to ever experience any real challenges or difficulties, just because of one thing that I can do.
71. I don't have to educate every new doctor or other health care worker about how my brain or body works.
72. If I have unusual quirks, habits, or interests, no one expects me to justify them or back them up with medical evidence to be considered real.
73. If I can afford to have a car, I don't have to constantly rely on someone else to drive me everywhere.
74. People believe me and pay attention when I talk about my experiences.
75. I can plan far in advance without worrying about whether an unpredictable pain, disease, or anxiety flare-up will ruin my plans and cost extra money.
76. If I am involved in a social justice, civil rights, or activist movement, no one will tell me that talking about how my brain works will undermine the movement or community's credibility.
77. I can assume that other people with valid feelings and thoughts express them in the same or similar ways as me.
78. If I want to join a protest at the last minute, I don't have to worry about pain flares, anxiety, seizures, PTSD, or meltdowns getting in the way.
79. I don't have to worry that each new doctor visit will be a retraumatizing experience, especially if I am not transgender.
80. People never tell me that I'm inspirational or heroic just for existing.

81. If the power goes out, I can still breathe.
82. If I want therapy from a psychologist, licensed social worker, or other counselor, I know I can find therapists whose brains or bodies are like mine or who at least understand people with brains and bodies like mine.
83. People never say they'd rather be dead than be (or become) like me, either to my face or behind my back.
84. The fact that people like me exist is never used as a fear tactic and compared to crises like natural disasters, car crashes, or mass kidnappings.
85. Based on my body and brain, I don't have to choose between constantly being (a) hypersexualized and treated as a scary sexual threat, (b) fetishized as an exotic sexual experience, or (c) desexualized and stripped of sexual agency (assumed automatically to be incapable of having sexual desires or making sexual decisions).
86. I am considered the expert on my own memories, experiences, emotions, preferences, and body - not someone else.
87. If I say that I am able-bodied or neurotypical, people don't suddenly start talking to me in a baby voice or patting me on the head.
88. If I succeed at something, I'm not considered an exception for people with brains or bodies like mine.
89. As long as I am not incarcerated or undocumented, I am legally entitled to at least the minimum wage for my labor.
90. If my parents or other family members murdered me, I know that I would be considered the victim, not them. No one would talk about what a burden I was on them or how they snapped from the stress of living with me.
91. If my parents decide to significantly alter my body against my will (through surgery or nonsurgical methods), other people would consider it abuse and a violation of my bodily autonomy.

92. I don't have to choose between reporting abuse from my support staff and losing the services that I need to get through my day, stay in school, keep my job, or simply survive.
93. If there were a program that hurt people with brains or bodies like mine to change our behavior, it wouldn't be considered controversial and no one would talk about there being more than one side of the story. The program would be considered abuse.
94. When I feel suicidal, I will be referred to suicide prevention services (like a hotline, crisis counseling, or long-term care) and not encouraged or expected to consider physician-assisted suicide as a "brave" or "heroic" option to get out of my situation and avoid becoming a burden on my partner(s), relative(s), or other loved ones.
95. If I am having a hard time and expressing suicidal thoughts or hurting myself in a non-fatal way, I won't be immediately subjected to coercive or involuntary treatment or forced to leave my school or job after receiving the treatment.
96. No one tells me that I should have nonessential surgery to function or become accepted by others.
97. When I am in pain, other people don't tell me that I am just overreacting, hypersensitive, being manipulative, faking, or making it up. Things that hurt me tend to be painful for other people as well.
98. If this building spontaneously combusted (or otherwise caught on fire), I could escape on my own.
99. If I am religious or spiritual, I can choose which place of worship to attend based on whether I like their worship style or agree with their beliefs, and will not be forced to choose based on whether the services are interpreted for me or whether there is a ramp to the front door.
100. Random strangers don't stop me to ask what's wrong with me.

101. Politicians will not argue that people with brains or bodies like mine need to be subjected to greater police or medical surveillance, or that my personal health records should be made available to police, in the name of protecting public safety.
102. No one ever asks me where my parents or caregiver are or why I'm alone and left unsupervised.
103. In TV and movies, people with bodies and minds like mine are not portrayed exclusively as villains/bad guys, objects for the main characters to pity, or convenient plot devices without feelings of their own.
104. Assuming access to transportation, I can decide to visit any random office, tourist attraction, public place, friend, or family member without wondering whether or not I'll be able to get inside.
105. I can assume that public safety information, like traffic signs, curb cuts, maps, detour notices, or other announcements will be accessible to me.
106. If I have money to go out to eat, I can assume that I can go into any restaurant and find something on the menu that I can eat and it will be served in a form that I can eat without too much difficulty.
107. If I'm not participating in some activity or program that I could otherwise afford to join, others can accurately assume that my non-participation was my choice and not the result of it being inaccessible to me.
108. Strangers will generally not grab, pull, or otherwise touch parts of my body without my permission. If they do, it is usually considered offensive, inappropriate, and a violation of my personal space.
109. If I ask for directions in a hospital, other people will generally not assume that it's obvious where my appointment is based on how my body appears.
110. I can choose whether or not to be part of the fight for disability justice or disability rights (or even whether to think about disability), or to take breaks from it. I don't have to live it every day if I don't want to.