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## To ID or Not to ID

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# To ID or Not to ID

## **Abstract**

“And now can I have the last four digits of *your* Social? Then we’ll *both* know each other.”

A cloud of anger swept over me. I glanced up from my computer, blinked, and then elected to continue with my work. I gave the man his money and receipt and sent him on his merry way. He transformed into a veritable ray of sunshine for the other tellers, calling, “have a nice day!” as he left. [*excerpt*]

## **Keywords**

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, prejudice, white male privilege

## **Disciplines**

Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies | Inequality and Stratification | Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies | Sociology of Culture

## **Comments**

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](#) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at [surgegettysburg.wordpress.com](#) Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that –isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

# SURGE

[ VERB ] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

## TO ID OR NOT TO ID

October 22, 2015

“And now can I have the last four digits of *your* Social? Then we’ll *both* know each other.”

A cloud of anger swept over me. I glanced up from my computer, blinked, and then elected to continue with my work. I gave the man his money and receipt and sent him on his merry way. He transformed into a veritable ray of sunshine for the other tellers, calling, “have a nice day!” as he left.

The bank that I worked at this summer, and where this lovely interaction happened, was fairly small. Besides myself, there was only the manager and three other full-time tellers, and the work was pretty easy; there were few instances where I was truly intimidated or stressed.



Since I was dealing with people’s money, an important part of my job was to ID members before carrying out a transaction. This usually just required that I ask for the last four digits of their social security numbers, and during my first couple of weeks I had to ID everyone because I couldn’t recognize any of the members yet. It was simply a precautionary measure, since I, as an employee, had an obligation to protect all account information. Most members, being patient and understanding of the fact that I was new, would comfortably rattle off the digits, no questions asked, and let me finish their transaction.

Some people did give me a hard time, though, like the white man who chose to snarkily ask for my own Social. He was especially rude and impatient with me, and loudly scoffed when I tried to ID him. The guy stated the oh-so-burdensome four numbers with a dramatic sigh after some polite coaxing from me.

This is not an isolated incident, in my experience. I’ve frequently heard older male family members complain about being ID’d at package stores, and noticed that white male friends never have to worry about going anywhere alone; it’s little things like these that add up to huge disparities in race and gender,

even though most of the time they go unnoticed. That said, there have been recent studies attempting to draw attention to the issue of the white male privilege. For instance, one entitled "[Still Not Allowed on the Bus](#)," explores what happens when male bus riders in Queensland, Australia, ask to ride for free because they lack the funds. In multiple scenarios, white males received the free ride 72% of the time, while black males succeeded only 36% of the time. Another experiment conducted by white comedian Jessie Kahnweiler concludes that white privilege is indeed institutionalized through her failed attempts to get arrested by the police in "[Jessie Gets Arrested](#)."

Even keeping this in mind, I have to admit that I almost didn't ID this guy, despite the fact that I didn't know who he was. Why? Probably because he was a middle-aged white male. He looked like my dad. My dad's an honest and trustworthy guy, so this guy must be too, right? So to some degree, I can understand why he was surprised.

This member's race and status likely influenced his disproportionate reaction more than anything else. He probably lashed out at me due to his extreme unfamiliarity with this kind of situation. I suspect that he was not used to being questioned, owing to his race and his gender, and certainly never predicted that this "suspicion" might come from someone like me: a young, white female who quite literally could have been his daughter. Maybe he thought I was acting out of place, out of groundless disrespect.

I was by no means disrespecting him, but he arguably could have viewed it as such because of his privileged position in our society. And I'm not blaming him for his privilege. I'm really not. As a white female, I'm rarely questioned, either, but I have become aware of this privilege and its impact on me.

A lot of us are afraid to admit that we're raised to make assumptions about people based solely on their appearances: their race, gender, age, or whatever else is immediately apparent when someone enters a room. And in making these assumptions, we're perpetuating stereotypes that are almost always false. It really isn't "our" fault as individuals; it's a result of the system. But what's important is that we recognize our individual roles in influencing the system. You don't have to enforce stereotypes just because they're visible in the media, or because a friend believes them, or because you benefit from them. I had the power to decide, and I consciously chose to ID him. But that split second of hesitation was still there. Had I not done so, there really wouldn't have been any immediate harm: he would've been done a whole 4 seconds sooner (and without any inconvenienced huffing!), and I wouldn't have been pissed off for the rest of the afternoon. It could've been a win-win.

But in reality, there actually would have been some harm done. If I hadn't asked for his Social, I would've, ever so slightly, contributed to the cementing of this guy's privilege into his subconscious. Like I said, his entitlement is not his fault; it's a result of the system. But it's possible that I helped, on a microcosmic level, to pick away at stereotypes and privilege.

Many times it may seem easier to ignore these issues because they seem so far away, as though they cannot be identified in our daily lives. But they're present, every single day, whether we like to admit it or not. And if we as individuals choose to acknowledge them, we can start to make some serious change.

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