

Social GRRRAAAACCEESSSS and Safeguarding

The 'social graces' provides us with a framework to think about our identity in terms of power, an important aspect in both leadership and safeguarding.

1. What are the Social GRRRAAAACCEESSSS?

The 'social graces' is a framework to help us understand parts of our identity; who we are and how this impacts how we think, and how others might think about us.

The 'social graces' help us think about the power we might hold within relationships due to parts of our identity.

The 'social graces' can be seen as quite clumsy or confusing due to all of the letters, but we don't need to remember them all and can add others. For example, institution or establishment which are important within the Church and can either afford us power or, due to other people's views, leave us powerless.

The 'social graces' include:

- **G**- gender, geography
- **R**- race, religion
- **A**- age, ability, appearance, accent
- **C** – class, culture
- **E**- ethnicity, employment, education
- **S**- sexuality, sexual orientation, spirituality



Reflection:

Using the picture above how would you describe yourself? for example, white, middle class, female, aged 36.

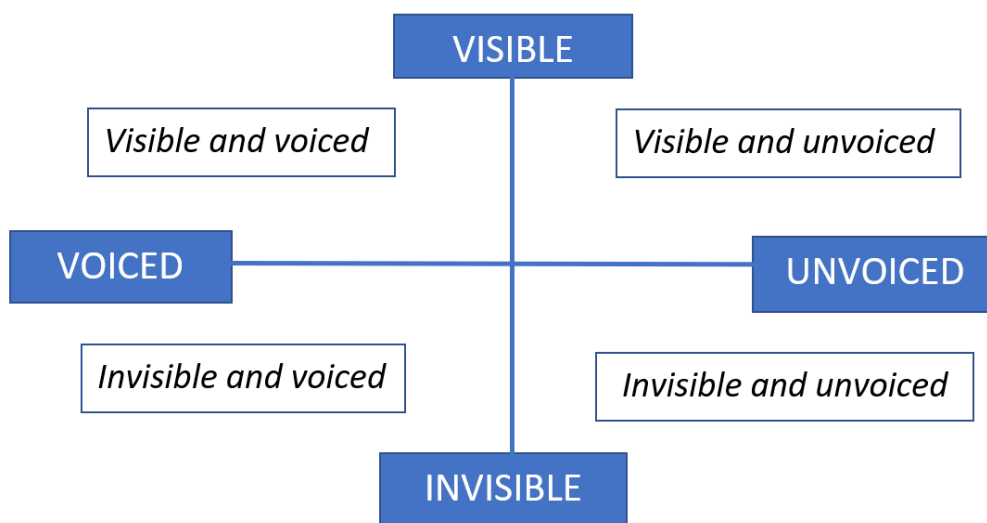
How might someone you meet describe you?

The nature of the 'social graces' means that although some parts of our identity may afford us power, for others this may leave them feeling powerless.

We must also remember that we find ourselves in many different social situations which may mean, due to the presence of others, the aspects of identity which afford power may shift.

2. Visible, voiced, invisible and unvoiced?

Some parts of our identity can be seen, such as gender, or age for example but others might not be such as, education, culture or religion - these are said to be invisible or unvoiced. Nevertheless they can carry power.



Example-

A female Afghan refugee, settled within a predominantly white, middle-class, rural village, with conversational English will be underrepresented. She might feel oppressed due to culture, gender, geography, ability and religion. All of which will be **visible** or **voiced** within social situations. However, the **invisible-unvoiced** SG of education, being that of a medical degree in this case, would - if voiced - afford privilege.

There might be times when we share and/or talk about our unvoiced or invisible 'social graces'. Education is a good example of this; when people share the university they attended or use letters in front of their names.

Reflection:

Can you think about times in which you have shared these invisible parts of you? Why did you do this?

- **Did you feel comfortable to do this?**
- **Would you share this part of you with everyone upon meeting them?**

3. Why do we talk about the Social GRRRAACCEEESSS?

Within safeguarding we need to be aware of our bias's and our thoughts in addition to how we might be viewed by others.

- The 'social graces' help us think about why we think in certain ways about someone or something.
- They ask us to talk about difference and how having power, or not, might impact our behaviours.
- They allow us to think about how we are viewed by other people.

Do you dare ask yourself...

- Have you ever been overlooked for a promotion because of your gender?
- Have you ever felt unable to disclose your sexuality?
- Has a disability ever prevented you from contributing to the workplace?
- Have you ever been rejected from a job application solely based on your surname?
- Have you ever felt your view would not be heard due to the professional titles of those around you?
- Have you ever not spoken about your education for fear of being judged?

Creating a safe culture means we hear everyone's voice and we don't use power to silence or control. Recognising our identity and in turn our 'social graces' means we are more aware of how others might see us. If they see us as powerful could this stop them speaking to us, or make them feel they won't be heard?

We can't eliminate power in relationships but being aware means we can act in ways that addresses power.

Final thoughts

The social graces ask us to think about our behaviours and relationships. They ask us to recognise when we might hold power due to part of our identity and how this might affect others.

Within safeguarding we are reminded that:

- Due to your identity people may view you as holding more power than them
- Due to visible and invisible aspects of 's identity we may hold incorrect opinions and views
- To create a healthy culture we need to talk about power and how this is shared
- We need to question when we make assumptions about someone's identity

We will not always remember the clumsy order of letters within the 'social graces' but having awareness of some of the aspects of identity we aren't always drawn to will help us create healthy relationships and culture.

Further reading

- Drew, C. (2020). *What are the Social Graces by John Burnham? (Explained for Students)*. Helpful Professor. <https://helpfulprofessor.com/social-graces/>
- Burnham, J. (2012) Developments in social GRRRAAACCEEESSS: Visible-invisible and voiced-unvoiced. In I-B. Krause (Ed.) *Culture and Reflexivity in Systemic Psychotherapy*. Mutual Perspectives. London: Karnac.
- Totsuka, Y. (2014). 'Which aspects of social GRRRAAACCEEESSS grab you most? 'The social GRRRAAACCEEESSS exercise for a supervision group to promote therapists' self-reflexivity. *Journal of family Therapy*, 36, pp86-106