

Handout I: Condensed version of the Privilege Project assignments

Section 1: Why is talking about privilege important?

Some of the restraints to talking about privilege:

- * Making things equivalent
- * Confusing experiences of individual hardship with considerations of privilege
- * Dividing from others: 'Somebody else is worse at this than us'
- * Avoiding talking about it: 'Talking about this issue is divisive'
- * Talking isn't enough: 'All talk, no action'
- * Competition / Comparison
- * Changing the focus of the conversation: 'It's class not race' (or any other variation on this theme)
- * Debating the terms of the discussion: 'This isn't the right conversation to be having'
- * Undermining the messenger: 'I'm not sure if you are doing this the right way'
- * Having to pretend you know
- * Shame, guilt, sadness
- * A lack of awareness of the effects of the conversation on other people in the discussion
- * Individualism: 'I'm not connected to this'
- * Heroic accounts
- * Obscuring personal prejudice with relations of power and privilege

I. Are any of these above restraints relevant in your situation? If so, which ones?

II. Have you slipped into some of these practices at times in the past? If so, which ones?

III. If so, what would contribute to you being able to resist doing so next time?

IV. What do you think is the most likely restraint to you thoroughly identifying the ways in which privilege and dominance act in your work and life?

Section 2: What sustains us in talking about privilege?

I. Interests:

- * Why are you interested in exploring these issues related to privilege? If your main interest relates to being in this class, what other people, experiences, or histories would take your interest beyond this class?
- * Is your interest connected to any particular hopes for your work, for your life, for the world in which we live?
 - * If so, what name would you give to this hope?
 - * What is the history of (*name from above*)?

II. Commitments:

- * To look thoroughly at these issues requires a significant commitment. Would you say that you have a commitment to look at these issues? If so, what would you call this commitment? What is its history? If it is relatively new, what has sparked this commitment? If it is a long-term commitment, what has sustained it over the years?
- * Who is this commitment connected to? Can you recall a particular person / relationship / experience that has been or could be significant in encouraging you to look further at these issues? If so, what did you learn from this person / relationship / experience?
- * If this person(s) was present now, what would they say about your current commitment and how you are enacting this commitment in your work and life? What would they be happy about? In what areas might they invite you to take a further step?

Section 3: Identifying our own privileges

1. How might your experience as a white person differ from the experience of a person of color in:
 - o applying for a job?
 - o passing police on the street?

- o preparing your child to go to school for the first time?
2. How might your experience as a heterosexual person differ from the experience of a Queer* person in:
 - o expressing affection, love and comfort in public?
 - o preparing to introduce your partner to your family of origin?
 - o seeking counseling for assistance in your couple relationship?
 3. How might your experience as a descendant of Settlers differ from the experience of a descendant of native/indigenous peoples in:
 - o seeking assistance from welfare workers or social workers?
 - o attending a workshop on grief?
 - o reading a book or seeing a film about the history of the country in which you live?
 - o planning what you will do when you retire?
 4. How might your experience as a professional wage-earner differ from the experience of an unemployed person in:
 - o attending a parent-teacher night?
 - o seeking assistance from a therapist?
 - o attending a school reunion?
 5. How might your experience as an able-bodied person differ from the experience of a person with a disability in:
 - o getting yourself to work each day?
 - o negotiating where the annual work dinner is to be held?
 - o how people interpret any expression of anger or frustration?
 6. At this time, how might your experience as a non-Arab person differ from the experience of an Arab person in:
 - o attending high school?
 - o getting on a plane to travel to a professional conference ?
 - o seeking assistance in a hospital emergency ward?
 7. How might your experience as a male therapist differ from the experience of a woman therapist in:
 - o running therapeutic groups in a men's prison?
 - o working with women survivors of sexual abuse?
 - o working with heterosexual couples?

Section 4: Focusing on white privilege

I. The values of our ancestors

1. Please name or describe one of your ancestors who came to the United States as settlers (whether this is someone of your parent's generation, or grandparent's or great-grandparent's generation, etc).
 - Alteration: If your ancestor did not come as a settler, under what circumstances did your ancestor arrive in the U.S.?
2. Please think of the sorts of values that they brought to this land and name these.
3. What were they looking for in this land, what were their hopes?
4. Which of the values that you have identified are you proud of, and would you want to continue for yourself and pass on to your children? Why?
5. Which of these values do you not wish to continue? Why?
6. (Regardless of your history as a settler or not) Why was it, do you think, that many of the values brought by settlers subjugated the values of the Indigenous people of this land, or the values of those people forced to this land?
7. What do we need to do now to ensure that values of 'settlers' do not continue to subjugate the values of the Indigenous people of this land?
8. What do we need to do to ensure that our work and workplaces respect the values of the different cultural groups who seek services?

9. What processes might we need to put in place to ensure that we do not privilege one cultural way of being, and one cultural way of healing, over others?

II. Appreciating cultures

- * What are the things you treasure and appreciate about your own cultural heritage? Why is this important to you?
- * What are some of the things that you treasure and appreciate about others' cultural heritage? Why is this important to you?
- * How do practices from your own cultural heritage influence your work presently, or how might these practices influence your future work?
- * How does your appreciation for particular practices of other cultures influence your work? Are there things that you have learned from your relationships with people from other cultures that now influence your work practices?
- * How can we ensure that our appreciation of our own cultural heritage enhances rather than reduces our appreciation of the cultural heritage of others?

Section 5: Developing knowledge and skills about recognizing and responding to our privilege

I. Exploring the history Knowledge related to privilege:

- * How, where and from whom did you learn about how male privilege shapes your life?
- * How, where and from whom did you learn about the ways you inadvertently enact male privilege?
- * How, where and from whom did you come to learn to notice this?
- * How, where and from whom did you learn to notice when women are trying to point out to you that you are enacting male privilege?
- * How, where and from whom have you learned to respond to these situations?

II: Identifying the influence of "Knowledge"

1. Knowledge about different forms of privilege in our own lives and in our workplace: In what ways has privilege shaped our lives and work practices in relation to gender, class, race, culture, sexual identity, age, ability, etc?
2. Knowledge of the ways in which we enact privilege: In What ways will privilege be enacted in our personal relationships, in our workplace, in our counseling and/or community work?
3. Knowledges and skills related to noticing when we are enacting privilege: In what sort of circumstance would you be most likely to enact privilege? (Or, In what situations might privilege try to strongly direct your actions?) How can we tell when we are enacting privilege?
4. Knowledges and skills in noticing when others are trying to let you know that you have enacted privilege: What shows us that others are trying to let us know that we have enacted privilege? Or that enacting privilege has been encouraged? What makes it more likely for people to be able to tell us, or for us to be able to hear and see when this enactment occurs?
5. Skills in how to respond to situations when we have enacted privilege: How can we develop ways of learning from mistakes? How can we create structures and processes to ensure learnings are carried into the future? What place does apology and reconciliation have in this process?

Section 6: Responding to other therapists and community workers

- * If you see a member of your own social grouping replicating dominance (e.g. if you are a heterosexual person and you hear another heterosexual person speak in homophobic ways), what is your immediate response? What do you feel? What do you think? What images are evoked for you?
- * How have you responded in the past? Is this response consistent with how you would like to respond? How would you most like to respond in such situations? What principles, values, or individuals would you like to inform your responses?
- * In these situations, what might be the forces at play that encourage us not to say anything or to "go along" with it? What are the forces at play that discourage us from raising issues of dominance within our own groups?

- * If it is possible in the circumstances, how could you respond in a way that made it clear that you do not agree with such statements without adopting a position of one-up critique? What would you need to do in your response that would acknowledge that in some respect we are in this together?
- * Are there ways of talking with colleagues and friends about these issues, ahead of time, so that together you can try to explore ways of responding to these situations? If so, how could you go about setting up such a conversation?

Section 7: Unpacking shame and guilt; Identifying Values

- * In relation to these ideas about privilege, what have you felt ashamed, guilty, angry, or sad about?
- * Often when someone feels shame and/or guilt, this shame and guilt represents certain values that you feel you have let down, that you have strayed from. What values do you think you have strayed from?
- * Why are these values significant to you?
- * What is their history?
- * Are there other people you know who share these values, and/or who would respect these values that you hold?
- * If so, is there some way of initiating a conversation with these significant others about how these values could possibly shape a response to your new learnings around these issues? Is there some way that these values could assist in shaping a collective response in your family, friendship network, workplace etc?

Section 8: Next steps

- * What will be the next steps of learning more about matters of power and privilege?
- * What will be the next steps of considering how relations of privilege influence your work?
- * What resources will you dedicate to these issues?
- * Joining with others with similar hopes and values can make an enormous difference. Who will you be linked with in these next steps?
- * How will these relationships sustain your next steps?

Handout II: Privilege Project Letter Writing Assignment

Final Summary Documentation

The Summary to the privilege project will seem somewhat unusual compared to the typical “summary paper” often seen in courses. Rather than compose an academic composition, you are being asked to create a reflective document that will be more for your purpose than for the purpose of the instructor. This will be a document that affirms what you have done, your gained knowledge, your stance in relation to privilege, and your motions in the future. Unlike a paper that only summarizes past work, this document serves as a declaration of present accomplishment and future intention.

This document will come in the form of 3 letters. Being personal letters, it is not necessary to use APA style or even “conventional” grammar; rather you are invited to write the letter as you would to any personal friend or relative. Some questions are provided to help you think about your letter. You are not obligated to answer all of these questions or even address them; they are meant to help you think about what you might write if you are having difficulty starting the letter.

Being letters, it is difficult to create a page limit. However, keep in mind that letters are meant to focus on what you most want to say to the intended recipient. It may help to try to limit yourself to no more than 2 pages (single-spaced), although letters that go beyond this will not be graded down.

With your permission, we may read some of these letters in class anonymously. Your decision to participate in this has no effect on your grade.

1. First letter:

Choose an ancestor to write to about the legacy that has been left to you and how you now see your place in it. This ancestor could be the ancestor you wrote about in Section 4, or could be someone different. Perhaps you have learned of or know about an ancestor who actively participated in some form of oppression or discrimination, or an ancestor who worked hard to resist such forces, or simply an ancestor you can identify as someone who has been significant in you being able to become the person you are today. Some questions you might consider when writing the letter:

Why have you chosen this person? Why is it important this person read your letter?

What images, beliefs, or feelings come to you when you think of this ancestor?

Are there important stories, secrets, or histories that must be addressed?

What ideas, values, misunderstandings, etc. did you inherit from this ancestor?

How has this legacy influenced who you are today? How you interact with others?

What will you choose to continue? What will you discard or change? What feelings or thoughts might this ancestor have in relation to this?

Would this ancestor be proud, angry, hopeful, etc. in relation to what you have learned? Will this ancestor's legacy help to support your new efforts or work against them? If against, what will you say or do now to ensure the undermining effects of the legacy are kept away?

2. Second letter:

Depending on your experience with privilege, write a letter to either: someone or some group who has been disadvantaged by privilege, or someone or some group who has been advantaged by privilege. You could possibly choose someone or some group with whom you share membership; in other words, you might have a similar experience of privilege as the person/group you've chosen to write to. Or you might choose someone whose experience has been very different, perhaps opposite of your own in relation to privilege. The purpose of this letter is to inform the chosen person or group of what you believe is most important in continuing to create relationships, communities, organizations, and societies that reduce or discontinue oppression. Some questions to consider:

Why did you choose this particular person/group?

Are there particular feelings associated with the ideas you are sharing? Would you consider sharing these feelings in the letter?

What experiences of your own have contributed to the ideas you are expressing in your letter?

If you shared this letter publicly, where would you share it? How?

Would the tone or shape of the letter change if you imagine the person you're writing to is a very close, personal friend?

What would you hope the reaction to this letter would be?

3. Third letter:

The last letter is to be directed to your descendent(s). This could be a direct descendent (child, adoptee, grandchild, nephew, niece, etc.), or another related person who does not yet exist, or a more general concept of a future generation. You might think of this person as a biological relative or as a relative by choice; either way attempt to imagine someone specifically tied to yourself rather than a completely unidentifiable figure. Write to this descendent:

Your hopes, intentions, desires for them and the world around them;

Your goals for them, especially considering how you would want them to relate to the enactment of privilege;

Your cautions, skills, or other knowledges that you believe they will need in order to achieve or maintain these goals;

Who you would suggest they try to ally with in order to have support;

Your most important lessons about privilege and what you hope they gain from it without having to experience it personally;

What from you, your life, or your experience you hope they carry on and hold dear

Anything else you think should be included.

I am very interested in feedback, ideas, and finding collaborators! For more information regarding the Privilege Project and Letter assignments, contact:

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