

Understanding Privilege

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENTS:

Privilege is a key element in perpetuating oppressive systems. According to Webster's Dictionary, privilege is "a right, favor, or immunity, granted to one individual or group and withheld from another." By having an oppressor exercising privilege that favors one over the other and not questioning the system or being invested in dismantling it, then oppressive systems are maintained.

We are going to spend some time examining the privileges that we hold. Sometimes we only look at areas that we are oppressed – wanting to focus on others' power and responsibility to change the dynamic. However, it is not always "someone else's" problem. So we want to take a little closer look at the privileges we may or may not hold.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS:

Participants are given a tally sheet. Participants will listen to each of the privilege statements. If the participant identifies with the statement and feels that it is true, they do nothing. If the participant does not identify with the statement or feels like it is not true for their experience, they will draw one mark signifying that they do not identify with that particular privilege.

PRIVILEGE STATEMENTS:

1. The leader of my country is also a person of my racial group. (*RACE*)
2. When going shopping, I can easily find clothes that fit my size and shape. (*SIZE*)
3. In public, I can kiss and hold hands with the person I am dating without fear of name-calling or violence. (*SEXUALITY*)
4. When I go shopping, I can be fairly certain that sales or security people will not follow me. (*RACE/APPEARANCE*)
5. Most of the religious and cultural holidays celebrated by my family are recognized with days off from work or school. (*RELIGION/CULTURE*)
6. When someone is trying to describe me, they do not mention my race. (*RACE*)
7. When I am angry or emotional, people do not dismiss my opinions as symptoms of "that time of the month." (*GENDER*)
8. When expressing my opinion, I am not automatically assumed to be a spokesperson of my race. (*RACE*)
9. I can easily buy greeting cards that represent my relationship with my significant other. (*SEXUALITY*)
10. I can easily find hair products and people who know how to style my hair. (*RACE*)
11. In my family, it is seen as normal to obtain a college degree. (*CLASS*)
12. If I am going out to dinner with friends, I do not worry if the building will be accessible to me. (*ABILITY*)
13. I can be certain that when I attend an event there will be people of my race there. (*RACE*)

14. People do not make assumptions about my work ethic or intelligence based upon the size of my body. (*SIZE*)
15. When I strongly state my opinion, people see it as assertive rather than aggressive. (*RACE/GENDER*)
16. When I am with others of my race, people do not think that we are segregating ourselves. (*RACE*)
17. I can feel comfortable speaking about my culture without feeling that I'll be judged. (*RACE/ETHNICITY*)
18. I can usually afford (without much hardship) to do the things that my friends want to do for entertainment. (*CLASS*)
19. When filling out forms for school or work, I easily identify with the box that I have to check. (*GENDER/RACE*)
20. I can choose the style of dress that I feel comfortable in and most reflects my identity, and I know that I will not be stared at in public. (*GENDER/APPEARANCE*)
21. If pulled over by a police officer, I can be sure that I have not been singled out because of my race. (*RACE*)
22. My professionalism is never questioned because of my age. (*AGE*)
23. I do not worry about walking alone at night. (*GENDER*)
24. People do not make assumptions about my intelligence based upon my style of speech. (*RACE*)
25. When attending class or other events, I do not have to worry about having an interpreter present to understand or to participate. (*ABILITY/LANGUAGE*)
26. I can book an airline flight, go to a movie, ride in a car and not worry about whether there will be a seat that can accommodate me. (*SIZE/ABILITY*)
27. People assume I was admitted to school or hired based upon my credentials, rather than my race or gender. (*RACE/GENDER*)
28. As a child, I could use the "flesh-colored" crayons to color my family and have it match our skin color. (*RACE*)

PROCESS QUESTIONS:

How did you feel doing this activity?

How was it to consider the number of tally marks you had on your paper?

How was it to notice the tally marks of others around while you were or were not making marks on your page?

What does it feel like to have or not to have certain privileges?

What is privilege? How would you define it?

ONE DEFINITION OF PRIVILEGE:

Privilege is an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in on each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. In fact, privilege is an invisible weightless backpack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear and blank checks.