

Exploring Race and Privilege

Exploring Race and Privilege presents materials on culturally responsive supervision from the second of a three-part series designed for supervisors in teacher education. This series was developed in partnership with Dr. Tanisha Brandon-Felder, a consultant in professional development on equity pedagogy.

This document contains handouts, planning tools, readings, and other materials to provide field supervisors with a scaffolded experience to improve their ability for culturally responsive supervision.

The following materials build on the trust and community developed through the first set of activities *The Power of Identity*. Exploration of race and concepts such as white privilege will necessitate shared understanding of language and norms for conversation.

1. Understanding the Language of Race and Diversity
2. Ground Rules for Conversation
3. Color Line Instructions
4. Color Line Handout
5. White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack by Peggy McIntosh

Understanding the Language of Race and Diversity

Terms we all need to know:

PREJUDICE

Pre-judgment, bias

DISCRIMINATION

Prejudice + action

OPPRESSION

Discrimination + systemic power. (Systemic advantage based on a particular social identity.) Racism = oppression based

- **race-** the socially constructed meaning attached to a variety of physical attributes including but not limited to skin and eye color, hair texture, and bone structure of people in the US and elsewhere.
- **racism-** the conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional, enactment of racial power, grounded in racial prejudice, by an individual or group against another individual or group perceived to have lower racial status.

Types of racism:

- **Internalized Racism** *Lies within individuals.* Refers to private beliefs and biases about race and racism.
- **Interpersonal Racism** *Occurs between individuals.* The bias that occurs when individuals interact with others.
- **Institutional Racism** *Within institutions.*

Policies, practices, procedures & organizational cultures that work better for white people and work to the detriment of people of color, often unintentionally or inadvertently.

- **Structural Racism** *Across society*

The history and current reality of institutional racism across all institutions. This combines to create a system that negatively impacts communities of color.

Racism=racial prejudice + institutional power

Individualized racial prejudice vs. institutionalized racism:

“Certainly any individual can perpetuate acts of racial prejudice towards another individual. Thus African Americans as *individuals* can be racially prejudice against White people, Asians can be racially prejudice against Latinos and so on. BUT African Americans collectively do not have the social, political, or economic power to alter the collective racial experience of White people.”-Henz, Katz, Norte, Sather, and Walker (2002)

Anti-racism- actively fighting racism and its effects wherever they may exist.

IMPORTANT: This is not against White people, this is a way for us all to examine institutional power and the ways in which people of all races can gain the same level of access and privileges. To be anti racist means to be **active**.

Equity- People have the opportunities they need; which means different people/groups receive different things. This takes into account context (history, current realities, future outcomes).

Equity in education is raising the achievement of all students while: narrowing the gaps between the highest- and lowest-performing students; and eliminating the racial predictability and disproportionality of which student groups occupy the highest and lowest achievement categories.

Reflection Questions

How do these definitions compliment or challenge your prior beliefs/ or understanding of the terms used?

Where do you notice these most obviously and dangerously in your school system?

Adapted from *Courageous Conversations*: Glen Singleton (2006)

Prepared by: Dr. Tanisha Brandon-Felder Director of Equity Shoreline Schools

Ground Rules for Conversations:

1. Agree on Terms

Make sure you're talking about the same thing when you say "race," "racism," "discrimination," and so on. Review the suggested definitions – add your own if you like.

2. Speak Your Truth

Stick to your own experience. Avoid generalizing or speaking for others.

3. Stay Engaged

Be present for the conversation and the experience.

4. Experience Discomfort

This is a "safe" space – but the conversation may bring up painful feelings. You can share these feelings, or keep them to yourself. But let yourself experience them. They are real.

5. Listen with Understanding

If someone says something you don't agree with, or that you find offensive, try to approach the conversation with curiosity. Why do you think they feel that way? What experiences have they had that might lead them to say something like that? Ask questions. Listen to the answers.

6. Expect and Accept Non-closure

Racism has been with us for centuries – we are not going to solve it in a single conversation. The goal here is to share your story, and understand someone else's. Let that experience change how you see the world. Let that change ripple out from you.



COLOR LINE INSTRUCTIONS

This activity is designed to help workshop participants develop an understanding of White Privilege on a personal level and see how their individual experiences are shared with those who look like them. This understanding of a collective experience is crucial in understanding the way racism and privilege operates. Ultimately, participants should also begin to think about how their collective experiences are related to institutional White supremacy in the United States. Due to emotions and reactions this activity can evoke in participants we recommend this activity be facilitated by at least one experienced facilitator.

Time Needed

2 hours minimum

Materials

- 5 x 8 note cards
- Copies of the White Privilege survey
- Tape you can put on the wall
- White Privilege Article (Optional)

Set Up

1. Write the numbers 0-16, 17-33, 34-50, 51-67, 68-84, and 85-100 on 5 x 8 note cards.
2. Tape these cards on the wall in order and evenly spaced in a line or semi-circle around the room.

Facilitating the Activity

Because People of Color and White people process this activity in very different ways, it is best when co-facilitated.

1. Begin by reviewing the norm of experiencing discomfort and staying engaged. Many people experience cognitive dissonance, that is, a feeling that the world is not as they thought, when completing this survey. Some experience deep hurt or anger when faced with a list of privileges they do not have. Staying engaged can be difficult at these times, but it is also the time when greatest learning can occur.
2. Hand out the survey and read over the directions.
 - a) When they have finished the survey they should total their score and then line up next to their number (point out the numbers on the wall).
 - b) Tell them that this comes from an article by Peggy McIntosh, a white woman, who was writing about sexism when she began to realize the importance of her race as well and created this list. You may wish to have the full article available for them as a resource to read after the workshop.
 - c) Have them begin the survey without any further comment about the content.

3. As they are working on the survey, circulate around the room, answering questions and encouraging them to continue despite discomfort. You may want to tell individuals who are reluctant that they will have an opportunity to talk about what they didn't agree with and ask them to make a note of their questions/concerns.
4. Participants can begin lining up any time after they have finished. Remind them to stay quiet for those who are still working.
5. After everyone has finished, ask them to quietly look around the room. Begin the discussion by asking them how they feel when they are looking around. You may want to start with comments from a White person to intentionally flip the dynamics of them waiting to learn from People of Color.
6. Participants should be invited to sit down for the rest of the discussion after they've had a chance to reflect while standing for about 10-15 minutes. At this point we have found it useful to break into two caucuses, one for People of Color and one for White people. Setting up caucus groups can be tricky and bring up resistance. If you are going to caucus, make sure you've thought through how to explain this to the group (see *Explaining Caucusing* below).
7. The following facilitation questions can be used. Based on where the dialogue is going and the needs of the group, you'll want to create some of your own questions on the spot and save some of these for future discussions. You may ask a few of these questions during the caucuses and a few when the whole group is together.
 - a. What part of this activity was difficult for you? Why?
 - b. How does this validate or challenge your understanding of race relations in your life?
 - c. How did you feel when asked to answer "because of your race", rather than because of your individual experiences? Why do you think the survey was phrased this way?
 - d. Were there any questions that stood out to you on the survey?
 - e. What are the particular dynamics of privilege and racism that get played out with people who fall in the middle of the color line, typically Asians?
 - f. Many people react to this list by feeling guilty or shameful. Where do those feelings come from? How can we move beyond guilt/shame to responsibility and accountability?
 - g. What does taking responsibility for privilege mean in your life? What does it look like with White co-workers? With co-workers of Color?
 - h. How do these "individual" experiences reflect institutional privilege? What does this look like where you work?
 - i. Where do you see the color line in "real life"?
 - j. How can being aware of privilege and oppression benefit you?

- k. Based on your experiences, what else could be added to this list?
8. Bring both groups back together. They don't have to report out or summarize what was discussed. Start the whole group dialogue by asking what has come up so far by looking at the color line and talking about White privilege.
9. Following the discussion with information on the institutional level of White supremacy will spur further reflection. You may want to present a few slides with data relevant to your group, such as racial achievement gaps in schools, racial economic disparities, disproportionate numbers of Black and Brown people in prison, etc.

Common Challenges

Everyone is influenced by the dynamics of White privilege within the United States, and this activity makes people feel this on a very personal level. It brings up a great deal of emotion related to experiences of privilege and oppression. However, it has also been an activity where White people have learned “on the backs of” People of Color. With that in mind, it is vital to allow the time and space needed to process. You may want to do this in caucus groups.

Explaining Caucusing

Racialized Identity Caucusing is a tactic embraced by most people actively working for racial justice. For People of Color, it offers an opportunity to process internalized racial oppression within one's own racial group, between racial groups, and within institutions. For White people, caucuses allow an opportunity to openly discuss internalized racial superiority and work together to create an anti-racist White identity. When unaddressed, the dynamics of internalized White supremacy get in the way of building multicultural collectives.

The color line activity is processed very differently, depending on one's racial identity. White people typically benefit from a space where they can talk about the fear of saying the wrong thing and being seen as racist, as well as discuss actual racist acts they intentionally or unintentionally perpetuated. They also can address the tendency to put each other down when trying to prove they “get it”, thus alienating potential White allies. People of Color benefit from having discussions about how they have internalized White privilege and the damage this has caused to the way they see themselves and their relationships with one another. Caucusing provides a space where they can talk openly without worrying about White people assuming prejudice between People of Color is the same as racism and without concern for the comfort of White people.

We have run into all of the following scenarios when caucusing by racial identity. Think about and discuss with others how you would respond, prior to introducing this to a new group.

- a) People who are multiracial (including White) decide to join the White caucus because they want to address that part of their identity.
- b) People who are multiracial ask for a separate caucus group. The other People of Color are upset by the division this causes between them.
- c) A woman who looks White wants to join the People of Color caucus because of her Native American ancestry.

- d) A Latino man who has lived most of his life “passing” as White wants to join the People of Color caucus but doesn’t feel he belongs there.

If using this strategy, both facilitators should have experience with caucusing and be able to share why it is important to anti-racism work. Personal stories will help in this regard. This website has a link to an article you can download that describes in detail the importance of caucusing:

<http://www.jbfcs.org/about/agency-initiatives/confronting-organizational-racism/anti-racism-resources-to-download/>

Other Common Challenges

1. Individual vs. Collective

Many people are deeply invested in the desire to be seen as an individual. This survey asks them to take into account their experiences as a part of a collective, regardless of how they act individually. This shift in understanding is a fundamental goal of the activity.

You may hear comments from People of Color such as, “Well I know this statement is true for me, but I don’t let it impact my life.” Probe how they’ve come to develop that skill and what exactly they do so that it doesn’t impact them. Point out that although they’ve developed coping skills, they shouldn’t have to deal with this in the first place. Why is focusing on eliminating these barriers important for our children, who may not have the skills to cope?

White people may comment, “I don’t know how to answer this. I don’t see myself as a part of a racial group.” Point out that this is about the perceptions, judgments and actions others make regardless of how you want to be seen. What would it mean in your life if, when other people looked at you, they saw a White person? How might this influence the way people interact with you in addition to your individual personality?

Sometimes it is easier for White people to see how People of Color are judged and discriminated against as a group, than to see White people as a group. You may wish to ask if they can think of an example of racial discrimination.

2. Intellectualizing

Some people will immediately want to talk about the institutional impact of the color line and why society is stratified this way. Although this is an important discussion to have, it can also be a way to avoid personalizing the experience. Write that comment in the parking lot and then ask how they are feeling about what is happening right in this room. Revisit how this relates to the institutional level of White supremacy later in the discussion.

COLOR LINE EXERCISE

Score "4" if the statement is always true for you

Score "3" if the statement is frequently true for you

Score "2" if the statement is sometimes true for you

Score "1" if the statement is rarely true for you

Score "0" if the statement is never true for you

Because of my race or color...	Score
1. I can be in the company of people of my race most of the time.	_____
2. When I go to a job interview, one or more people of my racial background will most likely be on the hiring committee.	_____
3. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors will be neutral or pleasant to me.	_____
4. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.	_____
5. I can turn on the television or open the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely and positively represented.	_____
6. When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown that people of my race made it what it is.	_____
7. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.	_____
8. I can go into a bookshop and count on finding the writing of my race represented.	_____
9. I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might mistreat them because of their race.	_____
10. I can swear and dress in secondhand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, poverty or illiteracy of my race.	_____
11. Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not working against the appearance that I am financially reliable.	_____
12. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.	_____

13. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group. _____
 14. I can go into almost any hairdresser's shop and find someone who can do my hair. _____
 15. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its politics and behavior without being seen as a racial outsider. _____
 16. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to "the person in charge," I will be facing a person of my race. _____
 17. If a police officer pulls me over, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race. _____
 18. I can conveniently buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, and children's magazines featuring people of my race. _____
 19. I can go home from most meetings or organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied-in, rather than isolated, out-of-place, outnumbered, invisible, feared, or hated. _____
 20. I can take a job or attend college with an affirmative action employer without having co-workers or colleagues suspect that I was hired or admitted because of my race. _____
 21. If my day, week, or year is going badly, I do not have to do any mental work trying to figure out whether my race played a role in it. _____
 22. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me. _____
 23. I can worry about racism without being seen as self-interested or self-seeking. _____
 24. I can comfortably avoid, ignore, or minimize the impact of racism on my life. _____
 25. I can choose blemish cover or bandages in "flesh" color and have them more or less match my skin. _____
- Total Score:** _____

Adapted from Peggy McIntosh, *White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondence through Work in Women's Studies* (1988)

And adapted from *Beyond Diversity: A Strategy for De-Institutionalizing Racism and Improving Student Achievement* (2001-2002)

White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack

by Peggy McIntosh

Through work to bring materials from women's studies into the rest of the curriculum, I have often noticed men's unwillingness to grant that they are overprivileged, even though they may grant that women are disadvantaged. They may say they will work to improve women's status, in the society, the university, or the curriculum, but they can't or won't support the idea of lessening men's. Denials that amount to taboos surround the subject of advantages that men gain from women's disadvantages. These denials protect male privilege from being fully acknowledged, lessened, or ended.

Thinking through unacknowledged male privilege as a phenomenon, I realized that, since hierarchies in our society are interlocking, there is most likely a phenomenon of white privilege that was similarly denied and protected. As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage.

I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege. So I have begun in an untutored way to ask what it is like to have white privilege. I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks.

Describing white privilege makes one newly accountable. As we in women's studies work to reveal male privilege and ask men to give up some of their power, so one who writes about having white privilege must ask, "having described it, what will I do to lessen or end it?"

After I realized the extent to which men work from a base of unacknowledged privilege, I understood that much of their oppressiveness was unconscious. Then I remembered the frequent charges from women of color that white women whom they encounter are oppressive. I began to understand why we are justly seen as oppressive, even when we don't see ourselves that way. I began to count the ways in which I enjoy unearned skin privilege and have been conditioned into oblivion about its existence.

My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture. I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will. My schooling followed the pattern my colleague Elizabeth Minnich has pointed out: whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow them to be more like us.

I decided to try to work on myself at least by identifying some of the daily effects of white privilege in my life. I have chosen those conditions that I think in my case attach somewhat more to skin-color privilege than to class, religion, ethnic status, or geographic location, though of course all these other factors are intricately intertwined. As far as I can tell, my African American coworkers, friends, and acquaintances with whom I come into daily or frequent contact in this particular time, place and line of work cannot count on most of these conditions.

1. I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.

2. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area that I can afford and in which I would want to live.
3. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
4. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
5. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.
6. When I am told about our national heritage or about civilization, I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
7. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
8. If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on white privilege.
9. I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods that fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can deal with my hair.
10. Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.
11. I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.
12. I can swear, or dress in second-hand clothes or not answer letters without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.
13. I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.
14. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.
15. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
16. I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color, who constitute the worlds' majority, without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.
17. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider.
18. I can be sure that if I ask to talk to "the person in charge" I will be facing a person of my race.
19. If a traffic cop pulls me over, or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.
20. I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children's magazines featuring people of my race.

21. I can go home from most meetings or organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in rather than isolated, out of place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared.

22. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having coworkers on the job suspect that I got it because of race.

23. I can choose public accommodations without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.

24. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help my race will not work against me.

25. If my day, week, or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has racial overtones.

26. I can choose blemish cover or bandages in flesh color that more or less matches my skin.

Elusive and fugitive

I repeatedly forgot each of the realizations on this list until I wrote it down. For me white privilege has turned out to be an elusive and fugitive subject. The pressure to avoid it is great, for in facing it I must give up the myth of meritocracy. If these things are true, this is not such a free country; one's life is not what one makes it; many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their own.

In unpacking this invisible knapsack of white privilege, I have listed conditions of daily experience that I once took for granted. Nor did I think of any of these perquisites as bad for the holder. I now think that we need a more finely differentiated taxonomy of privilege, for some of these varieties are only what one would want for everyone in a just society, and others give license to be ignorant, oblivious, arrogant, and destructive.

I see a pattern running through the matrix of white privilege, a pattern of assumptions that were passed on to me as a white person. There was one main piece of cultural turf; it was my own turn, and I was among those who could control the turf. My skin color was an asset for any move I was educated to want to make. I could think of myself as belonging in major ways and of making social systems work for me. I could freely disparage, fear, neglect, or be oblivious to anything outside of the dominant cultural forms. Being of the main culture, I could also criticize it fairly freely.

In proportion as my racial group was being made confident, comfortable, and oblivious, other groups were likely being made unconfident, uncomfortable, and alienated. Whiteness protected me from many kinds of hostility, distress, and violence, which I was being subtly trained to visit, in turn, upon people of color.

For this reason, the word privilege now seems to me misleading. We usually think of privilege as being a favored state, whether earned or conferred by birth or luck. Yet some of the conditions I have described here work systematically to overempower certain groups. Such privilege simply confers dominance because of one's race or sex.

Earned strength, unearned power

I want, then, to distinguish between earned strength and unearned power conferred systematically. Privilege can look like strength when it is in fact permission to escape or to dominate. Power from unearned privilege can look like strength when it is in fact permission to escape or to dominate. But not all of the privileges on my

list are inevitably damaging. Some, like the expectation that neighbors will be decent to you, or that your race will not count against you in court, should be the norm in a just society. Others, like the privilege to ignore less powerful people, distort the humanity of the holders as well as the ignored groups.

We might at least start by distinguishing between positive advantages, which we can work to spread, and negative types of advantage, which unless rejected will always reinforce our present hierarchies. For example, the feeling that one belongs within the human circle, as Native Americans say, should not be seen as privilege for a few. Ideally it is an unearned entitlement. At present, since only a few have it, it is an unearned advantage for them. This paper results from a process of coming to see that some of the power that I originally saw as attendant on being a human being in the United States consisted in unearned advantage and conferred dominance.

I have met very few men who truly distressed about systemic, unearned male advantage and conferred dominance. And so one question for me and others like me is whether we will be like them, or whether we will get truly distressed, even outraged, about unearned race advantage and conferred dominance, and, if so, what we will do to lessen them. In any case, we need to do more work in identifying how they actually affect our daily lives. Many, perhaps most, of our white students in the United States think that racism doesn't affect them because they are not people of color; they do not see whiteness as a racial identity. In addition, since race and sex are not the only advantaging systems at work, we need similarly to examine the daily experience of having age advantage, or ethnic advantage, or physical ability, or advantage related to nationality, religion, or sexual orientation.

Difficulties and angers surrounding the task of finding parallels are many. Since racism, sexism, and heterosexism are not the same, the advantages associated with them should not be seen as the same. In addition, it is hard to disentangle aspects of unearned advantage that rest more on social class, economic class, race, religion, sex, and ethnic identity than on other factors. Still, all of the oppressions are interlocking, as the members of the Combahee River Collective pointed out in their "Black Feminist Statement of 1977".

One factor seems clear about all of the interlocking oppressions. They take both active forms, which we can see, and embedded forms, which as a member of the dominant groups one is taught not to see. In my class and place, I did not see myself as a racist because I was taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth.

Disapproving of the system won't be enough to change them. I was taught to think that racism could end if white individuals changed their attitude. But a "white" skin in the United States opens many doors for whites whether or not we approve of the way dominance has been conferred on us. Individual acts can palliate but cannot end, these problems.

To redesign social systems we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions. The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tool here. They keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making these subject taboo. Most talk by whites about equal opportunity seems to me now to be about equal opportunity to try to get into a position of dominance while denying that systems of dominance exist.

It seems to me that obliviousness about white advantage, like obliviousness about male advantage, is kept strongly inculcated in the United States so as to maintain the myth of meritocracy, the myth that democratic choice is equally available to all. Keeping most people unaware that freedom of confident action is there for just a small number of people props up those in power and serves to keep power in the hands of the same

groups that have most of it already.

Although systemic change takes many decades, there are pressing questions for me and, I imagine, for some others like me if we raise our daily consciousness on the perquisites of being light-skinned. What will we do with such knowledge? As we know from watching men, it is an open question whether we will choose to use unearned advantage to weaken hidden system of advantage, and whether we will use any of our arbitrarily awarded power to try to reconstruct power systems on a broader base.

Peggy McIntosh is associate director of the Wellesley Collage Center for Research on Women. This essay is excerpted from Working Paper 189. *White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming To See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies* (1988), by Peggy McIntosh.

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