



DEVELOPING TOGETHER

SOCIAL WORK TEACHING PARTNERSHIP

The Invisibility of Privilege - Discussion Tool

Doors of privilege swing open so silently for white people, says Dr Peggy McIntosh, Wellesley College Centre for Research on Women. "I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had not been taught to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege....."

"I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets which 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, assurances, tools, maps, guides, code books, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear and blank cheques.

Whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, formative, average and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work which will allow 'them' to be more like 'us'.

Dr McIntosh has named some of the ways of white privilege (we would ask you to consider these as white British privileges):

1. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I want to live
2. I can be pretty sure that my neighbours in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me
3. I can go shopping alone most of the time pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed
4. I can turn on the TV or open the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented
5. When I am told about national heritage or 'civilisation', I am told that people of my colour made it what it is
6. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race



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7. I can be pretty sure of having my voice heard in a group in which I am the only member of my race
8. 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 which fit my cultural traditions, into a hairdressers shop and find someone who can cut my hair
9. When I use cheques, cash or credit cards, I can count on my skin colour not to count against my financial reliability
10. I do not have to educate my children to be aware of systematic racism for their own daily protection
11. I can swear or dress in second hand clothes or not answer letters/emails, without having people attribute these choices to the 'bad morals', the 'poverty' or the 'illiteracy' of my race
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 remain oblivious to the language and customs of persons of colour who constitute the world's majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion

This tool is adapted from 'Ethics and values on the invisibility of privilege' by Hoople.

See:

<https://www.hoopleltd.co.uk/media/1339/toolkit-for-assessing-social-work-students-in-practice.docx>

This tool draws on the work of Dr Peggy McIntosh:

<https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/mcintosh.pdf>