

Looking at White Privilege

GOAL: To help people become more aware of the privileges that White Euro-Americans receive because of their race.

TIME REQUIRED: At least twenty minutes. Discussion may take additional time.

MATERIALS: None.

PHYSICAL SETTING: A room where participants can sit or stand comfortably.

PROCESS: Introduce this exercise as a way to become aware of privileges that some people in our society have and others do not. It is a way for participants to become aware of their own privileges in our culture. Start with the following instructions:

Please stand if the item that is read is true for you. As you stand or sit please notice who else in the room is standing or sitting. Also, pay attention to your feelings as you stand or sit.

White Privilege Items

1. I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time on this campus.
2. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in on-campus or off-campus housing 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 television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.
5. When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
6. I can be sure that my classes on campus will use curricular materials that testify to the existence of my race.
7. 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 with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can cut my hair.
8. Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.
9. 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.
10. I can speak in public to a important campus group without putting my race on trial.
11. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.
12. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
13. 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.
14. If a police officer pulls me over, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.
15. I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children's magazines featuring people of my race.
16. I can go to a variety of group meetings on campus and find people of my race in attendance and in leadership positions.
17. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having coworkers on the job suspect that I got it because of race.
18. I can choose public accommodation without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.
19. I can choose blemish cover or bandages in "flesh" color and have them more or less match my skin.

Discussion Questions

- How did you feel about this exercise?
 - What privileges were you previously unaware of having?
 - How do you feel about the privileges that you have and that you do not have?
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SOURCE: These items are taken from or modified versions of items from Peggy McIntosh (1989). "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." Peace and Freedom, July/Aug., p. 10-12. The outline was written by Jeff E. Brooks-Harris, Ph.D., Counseling and Student Development Center, University of Hawai'i at Manoa.