Class Activity: Privilege Exercise

Written by Jen Thomas

Adapted from Peggy McIntosh's "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack" and the "Privilege Walk Activity".

As a group, read and reflect upon the statements below. Take your time with each statement. Ask each other questions if you are confused by the meaning of the statements. You are not required to share your answers with the instructor or anyone else in class, especially if you feel it may "out" you as a minority and make you feel triggered or vulnerable. At the end of this exercise, you will have a chance to reflect on your answers with your group members.

Class

1. I have access to a computer and the internet to complete my coursework.
2. I was familiar with classical European literature, art and music before attending university.
3. Other family members before me have attended college or university.
4. I have never had to skip a meal because I could not afford food.
5. My family had health and dental insurance when I was growing up.

Ableism

1. The campus was constructed in a way that is accessible to me; I have easy access to buildings, within classrooms, and in bathroom stalls without trouble or assistance.
2. I can see the front of the classroom and hear the instructor speak.
3. I can easily find food on campus (in the dining hall, during club activities, or during catered events) that won't cause an allergic reaction, blood glucose spike, or otherwise harm my body.
4. The font and format of exams and assignments are accessible to me. The time allotted to complete exams and assignments is sufficient.
5. Ableist language doesn't exclude me from the classroom (such as "this was an insane amount of reading" or "this assignment is so lame").

Gender

1. At meetings when the group needs a note-taker, no one looks at me expecting me to serve as a secretary because of my gender.
2. People whose gender is similar to mine are widely represented as authors, scholars or scientists in my courses.
3. I can use a public washroom without having others stare, glare, yell or physically accost me (because they think I'm in the wrong bathroom).
4. I have never had a student or instructor give me unwanted romantic or sexual attention.
5. Strangers have never asked me what my genitals look like (because they wonder how my affirmed gender relates to my body).
Race/Ethnicity/Culture
1. The holidays I celebrate from my culture I also have off from work and school.
2. English is my primary language.
3. It is likely that if I ask to talk to “the person in charge,” I will be facing a person of my race.
4. The media positively and widely represents people of my race.
5. My ancestor's history has not been erased nor appropriated (in the form of racialized costumes, commodities, or traditions and food that are emptied of cultural meaning, etc.).

Sexuality
1. No one has ever tried to study if (a)sexual orientations like mine come from a particular gene, hormones, from abuse or neglect.
2. I can be affectionate toward my partner(s) in public without worrying about our safety.
3. My (a)sexuality is never referred to as unhealthy, unnatural or pathological.
4. Sexual slurs—like “faggot”, “whore”, “slut” or “homo”—are not used to hurt me.
5. Strangers have never asked me how I have sex.

Intersectional
1. People who are like me are widely represented as instructors / professors at SFU.
2. There are other people who are similar to me (in terms of gender, race, ability, etc) in my labs and classes.
3. I feel safe walking alone at night.
4. When I say “no,” people respect my boundaries.
5. People listen to me when I have something to say; I rarely, if ever, get interrupted when I speak.
6. People don’t say I am “biased” because I represent a particular group of people or minority status.

Questions to Consider
In what ways, if any, did this exercise make you feel uncomfortable? How do you make sense of this discomfort / what meaning does this have for you?

In what ways do you experience oppression?

In what ways do you experience privilege?

How do these privileges shape your experiences in the classroom?

How does your privilege affect your interactions with students, colleagues or with instructors?

How can you work to be aware of privilege and oppression so as to not perpetuate oppression?