

WHITE POWER AND PRIVILEGE: FACILITATOR GUIDE

PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Get a copy of the video “True Colors.” You can obtain a copy from the office of Multicultural Growth & Witness at the Unitarian Universalist Association in Boston by contacting araomc@uua.org.

Make sure you have a video player in working order.

Make copies of the handout entitled “White Privilege Exercise.”

Write instructions for the personalizing exercise on newsprint.

OPENING WORSHIP

Begin the session with a brief opening worship which might include a chalice lighting, reading or song.

REVIEW OF THE GUIDELINES FOR BEING TOGETHER

Please see the facilitator guide for the Examining Whiteness curriculum for some suggested guidelines.

REVIEW OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

If there is another meeting before you do this session you might want to review the key learning’s and what further insights participants may have had during the week.

GOALS FOR THIS SESSION

1. To learn more about white power and privilege
2. To gain skill and practice in seeing systemic white privilege and power

SETTING THE CONTEXT FOR THE SESSION

There is the story told about the wise old fish that was swimming through the water. As he swam along he encountered two young fish coming by. He turned to them and asked “How is the water?” and the young fish replied – “What water?”

Most of us who are white are like the young fish in the ocean, we don’t see our whiteness. We who are white swim in the culture of whiteness and we don’t see how our white skin color gives us undue privilege.

We don’t see our whiteness and we don’t think about being white. Anti-racism educator Robert Terry writes, “Being white means not having to think about it.” Whiteness is the norm of our society. And so it is hard for us as white people to see how it is operating. People of color see it all the time.

We are not taught to see our whiteness or think about our whiteness. Moreover, there is a taboo among most whites about talking about being white or the power of white skin privilege. Is being white something we talk about with other white people on a regular basis? Like at a social event? Or at coffee hour at church? Or with our family around the dinner table?

Even if we wanted to talk about our whiteness we have such limited understanding of it and so few ways of describing it. There is also a feeling among some of us who are white that if we actually talk about race or our whiteness, we are acting in a racist way.

As whites when we talk about racial issues we are usually talking about people of color communities – but not the white community. Janet Helms writes in her book A Race is a Nice Thing to Have, “White people are raised to be confused about their own color. While we are taught to be aware of other peoples color, polite white people do not mention color in public – especially their own.”

Traditionally the studies involving race that white scholars have done in universities have been of people of color communities – but not whiteness or white identity. Only in recent years have academics begun to study white people. Dr. Ruth Frankenberg first raised this as an issue back in the 1990s. So as white people we have only begun to explore the important issues regarding white identity. We want to take some time in this first session to begin this discussion about whiteness and white privilege.

PROVIDING SAFE SPACE FOR THE DISCUSSION

As we move into this discussion of white power and privilege I want to acknowledge that this discussion can be difficult for those of us who are white. So I want to call us back to our guidelines for working together to provide a container for this discussion. I hope we won't revert to blaming and shaming – but that we will have a candid discussion about whiteness.

VIEWING THE VIDEO “TRUE COLORS”

Ask: How many of you have seen the video “True Colors”?

Can you describe what it is about?

The video is about two men – one African American and one white – who go the city of St. Louis. And the film recounts their experience as they try to buy a car, find a place to live and get a job.

ABC produced this piece for Prime Time. Dianne Sawyer is the narrator.

The producers of this video want us to see how racism impacts on people of color. They want us to see the terrible consequences of racism on people of color.

That is the usual goal of the best intentioned pieces that are done by the media. However, when a media piece focuses on the impact of racism on people of color then we don't see ourselves as white people. We see the manifestations of racism but not its end purpose (which is to give power and privilege to white people)

Give the participants an assignment

As you look at the video this time I'd like to ask you to focus on the experience of the white people in the story. I also want to encourage you to take out some paper and a writing instrument. And as you see examples of where white people are given power and privilege, please write them down. After the video we are going to list some of the things you observe about the privileges of the white people in this film.

PLAY THE VIDEO

The man of color is Glen Brewer; the white man is John Cunin.

PROCESS THE VIDEO

1. After the video ask for some of the feelings people had about the video.
2. Acknowledge the impact of racism on Glen, the person of color in the video.
3. The assignment was to observe examples of how the white man, John Cunin, receives privilege, power, and benefits during his time in St. Louis.

Write on the newsprint the things that the participants observed. You might want to have one of your colleagues write these observations down.

PSYCHIC BENEFITS

- Instant attention
- Feeling welcome
- Feeling comfortable
- Instant trust
- Feeling like insider – member of the club
- Affinity
- Getting access
- Getting aid and help (New Orleans is an illustration of who gets aid or not)
- The positive emotional and psychological benefits.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

- Access to jobs and housing
- Cheaper loans
- Transportation
- Buying power

FOLLOW UP DISCUSSION TO THE VIDEO

Ask people to interpret what they see on the list.

The important thing here is the list of privileges and benefits we get because of the (white) color of our skin.

The focus of the video is primarily on the racism of working class white people. What do the participants think would happen if a film like this were made of the banking community in St. Louis or Wall St. in New York, or maybe the city which is closest to where the participants live?

Get a clear reaction of ownership from white participants. I would like to ask my white sisters and brothers: Is this real? The key here is do people see how whiteness gives them undue power, privilege, and benefits.

Discuss that most of these privileges are not wrong – but the real issue is who has access to them. And those of us with white skin have more access and therefore more privilege and power. As the black lawyer Clifford Alexander says in the video, for people of color one's livelihood is a matter of life and death.

Reemphasize that as a white person I don't have to think about this. Whiteness is on automatic pilot. Whiteness is the norm. For those of us who are white our whiteness is invisible to us.

I may feel guilty about this but there is also a part of me that enjoys the benefits of being white.

PERSONALIZING EXERCISE

WRITE ON NEWSPRINT

Appoint a recorder who will also report back to the larger group.

One way I personally experience white power and privilege is.....

INTRODUCTION TO THE PERSONALIZING EXERCISE

Watching the video True Colors we had an opportunity to look at white power and privilege as it operates in the city of St. Louis. We were objectively identifying and analyzing white power and privilege as they were demonstrated to us in the lives of the people living in that city.

But now we want to personalize this experience and look at how white privilege operates in each of our own personal lives.

I hope you will see this as an opportunity to develop a new skill. As white people we need to train our eyes to see in a new way. We need to go beyond our socialization as white people to look at how racism operates in our world. It takes time and practice to get past the socialization's of racism that we have experienced to look at the world through a new lens.

STEP ONE

Invite the participants to read the examples listed on the sheet entitled "White Privilege Exercise."

I like to invite each of the participants to go around in a circle and read one example from the list until all of the examples are covered.

Then ask the participants: Are any of these examples real for you?

STEP TWO

Ask each individual to take about five minutes and add some examples from their personal lives to the list. This will be personal work done in quiet.

STEP THREE

Form groups of three or four.

STEP FOUR

After the groups are formed, refer to the instructions written on newsprint for what people will do in their small groups.

“Appoint a recorder who will list the examples as they are given and also report back to the larger group.”

Each person will have an opportunity to share examples from their personal list. The facilitator should encourage people to use the phrase “One way I personally experience white power and privilege is.....”

Ask the participants to share what they have written down with the other members of their group for the next ten to fifteen minutes.

After the exercise we will come back into the larger group to have the recorders read back their lists.

Keep track of the energy in the groups to decide when to move back into the large group.

STEP FIVE

Debrief the groups. Ask the recorder from each group to read what is written on the list starting each piece with the phrase “As a white person I can...”

STEP SIX

Then ask people: How well do you think you did with this exercise?

If it was difficult, why was it difficult?

CLOSING THOUGHTS

BECOMING MORE AWARE OF OUR POWER AND PRIVILEGE

One of the key things I think is important is how unaware we are of our white power and privilege. It is just so much a part of our live we don't even have to think about it.

People of Color know us, in many ways, far better than we know ourselves. Generally they are fully aware of our white privilege and power, and of our denial of that we have this privilege and power. We can learn a lot from People of Color about our white power and privilege.

WE HAVE PRIVILEGE BECAUSE WE HAVE POWER

White power and privilege are inextricably tied together. We receive so much white privilege because we have access to so much power in our society.

THE SYSTEM AUTOMATICALLY PROVIDES PRIVILEGE AND POWER TO THOSE OF US WHO ARE WHITE

We need to be aware of the fact that the institutions of our society are designed to automatically provide and preserve white power and privilege. We don't have to ask for it, it is automatically given to us.

I would like to refer you to the last paragraph of the exercise page on white privilege, referring to the "invisible knapsack" of white privilege. This is in reference to an article written by Peggy McIntosh.

Peggy McIntosh says that those of us who are white are born with a knapsack which contains all kinds of goodies including educational opportunities, credit cards, blank checks, passports and so on.

The reality of the invisible knapsack is that if you are white you can't take it off. It will be there until the day you die or the day systemic racism is ended.

You can't simply say, "I am not going to be privileged anymore." As long as the institutions are designed this way, they will give you privileges whether you want them or not.

So it is not a matter of choosing whether or not to be a part of a racist system that benefits all white people. If you are white power and privilege is given to you whether you want it or not. Just think back to the white man, John Cunin in the film.

A PART OF US LIKES HAVING WHITE POWER AND PRIVILEGE

But there is another level of this that I would ask us as white people to take a look at today. Consciously or unconsciously we accept this special treatment. I know there is a part of me that does. There is a part of us that loves our white power and privilege. Otherwise there would be a lot more effort to end it.

THE NEED FOR NEW DISCIPLINES

With all these factors in mind I hope those of us who are white will realize that we need to discipline ourselves to see the world through a new lens.

Some of you have become aware – through doing this exercise- of how difficult it is for us who are white to be aware of our white power and privilege. We need to practice and become disciplines in developing this awareness.

At first, it is only when we are with people of color that we can see and feel the difference in the ways we are treated.

But hopefully, over time, we will reach a point we become instinctively aware of how the system is working on our behalf and how we receive undue power and privilege in our system by virtue of our skin color even when people of color are not present.

More than this I hope we will see the importance of using the privilege that we have to make change and to actually dismantle the systems that provide those of us who are white with undue power and privilege. Again, the issue is not whether we have great privilege because of our whiteness. The issue is how we will use the privilege of whiteness to work for justice. We will have more to say about this when we discuss how to develop a positive white identity.

SUMMARY OF LEARNINGS

Summarize the key points made during the review of the video and the sharing during the personalizing exercise.

DESCRIBE THE NEXT SESSION

Share with participants the format and goals for the next meeting. Pass out any handouts they will need to read in preparation.

CLOSING RITUAL

It is helpful to close with a brief ritual. It might be as simple as going around the circle and having people share one word about how they feel.

Maybe there is a song, prayer, or benediction members of a congregation use on a regular basis.

You may also want to invited participants in the program to sign up to lead a closing.

WHITE PRIVILEGE EXERCISE

It is important for us to become aware of the ways the institution and culture of our white society continue to provide power and privilege for White People. Following is a short list of examples of how White People receive power and privilege on a daily basis. Please study this list and then see if you can add to it.

- As a white person I can find positive role models depicted on TV, in the newspaper, and celebrated as heroes in most of our national holidays.
- I can attend college or professional school and find most professors look like me and talk like me, and most of the curriculum reflects my culture, history and background.
- I can shop in most stores and not be followed by a security guard on suspicion that I might be shoplifting.
- I can be late for a meeting without it being attributed to my race.
- I can easily find artists' depictions of God, Jesus, and other biblical figures that match my skin color and facial characteristics.
- I can shop for a house without having to worry that the realtor might not shoe me all available houses in my price range.
- No one thinks I got my job because of racial quotas.

Dr. Peggy McIntosh has written several articles on white privilege. She compares white privilege to an "invisible knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, code books, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks." Her article, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" is available for \$1.00 from Peggy McIntosh, Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, Wellesley, MA 02181.