Teaching About Privilege: A Model Combining Intergroup Dialogue and Single Identity Caucusing

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Abstract

Numerous challenges in educating about issues of privilege have been documented in the academic literature. To address many of those challenges, this paper outlines a pedagogical model that combines a modified form of intergroup dialogue, called *cross-privilege dialogue*, with single identity caucusing to engage participants in exploring their personal embodiment of privilege and their barriers to engaging in ally behavior. The paper identifies specific issues that arose in implementing the pedagogy and theorizes a process from resistance to praxis that combines critical self-awareness with action to assist students in understanding the importance of both.[2]

While the academic community has focused increasing attention on issues of privilege in the last

couple of decades (Manglitz, 2003; Ore, 2006), most of the writing has focused on defining

various forms of privilege and how those forms function to maintain inequality (Goodman, 2001;

Walls, Griffin, Arnold-Renicker, Burson, Johnston, Moorman, Nelsen, & Schutte, 2009). More

recently an arena of scholarship has emerged that focuses on the pedagogy of teaching about

privilege (Curry-Stevens, 2007; van Gorder, 2007) and on the experiences of that educational

process from the perspective of educators (Curry-Stevens, 2007, 2010; Pewewardy, 2007) and students (Nickels & Seelman, 2009; Walls et al., 2009).

In this manuscript we attempt to further contribute to this scholarly dialogue by outlining a model of teaching about privilege in graduate social work education, the theoretical and practical rationale for the structure we have developed, and the benefits and tensions we experienced using this model for five different sections of a course titled Disrupting Privilege Through Anti-oppressive Practice. Each of the authors was involved in developing and coteaching the course the first time it was offered in the spring of 2007, and three of the authors have cotaught the course more than once. While the course was developed and taught in a graduate school of social work, its applicability, we suggest, extends much further than either graduate education, or education specifically in a social work context. More specifically, this structure can be adapted for community education work, undergraduate education, and courses in various disciplines.

Literature Review

We have divided the literature review into three primary sections. The first section examines the overarching theoretical foundation that undergirds the model's philosophy and approach. The second section details common issues documented in the literature on teaching about power, oppression, and privilege. The final section documents the structural components of our teaching model that we put into practice based on our understanding of the current literature.

Theory and Pedagogy

The fundamental pedagogy of the class was modeled closely on the tenets of popular education (Freire, 1970, 2005) and adult learning theory (Mezirow, 1996). These theoretical tenets suggest the need to create a classroom environment that seeks to (a) lessen the power differential between course instructors and learners, (b) build a community conducive to critical dialogue, and (c) generate critical self-reflection. These three tenets are the central techniques to fostering socially conscious learning and social transformation. This approach not only served as a solid foundation for the classroom, but also challenged students to apply what they were learning to their own lives, in their communities, and in their emerging social work practice.

The course began with a clear recognition that everyone enters the classroom with a base of experience, presuppositions, beliefs, values, and biases that are omnipresent in all cultural systems (Freire, 1970). From the onset of the course, students were encouraged to share their perceptions of themselves at the intersections of their identities and to recognize the starting point of their individual journeys, as well as the starting point of the learning community's collective process. Coupled with this was an invitation and expectation to unlearn and question the old assumptions and frameworks (Wallace, 2000) that play a role in supporting and maintaining systems of oppression and privilege.

Students were encouraged to create a dynamic community of inquiry by working through complex scenarios and problems that students brought into the classroom from their own lived experiences.[3] Open dialogue fostered listening and sharing in an environment that recognized that everyone simultaneously occupies both the role of teacher and learner and assisted in breaking down power differences across roles and identities. This, Goodman (2001) suggests, is a key component to beginning to understand privilege and oppression. Likewise, through open

dialogue aimed at transparency, both the students and the instructors were able to process the ways in which they personally, intellectually, and sociopolitically produced and reproduced privilege on a daily basis.

Finally, an emphasis on praxis was central to our mutual learning throughout the course. The connection students were able to make with their own lived experiences situated their agency in the learning process, gave them the ability to identify their own learning edge, and supported them in recognizing and acknowledging their growth. Praxis, the cycle of critical self-reflection, taking action, and then bringing that experience back into the classroom for further reflection and input (Freire, 1970), supported students in learning. It allowed them to "try on" what they learned, allowed room for recognition of mistakes, supported the development of humility, and subsequently helped to build confidence and understanding toward socially conscious action. The ability of the learner to engage in critical reflection, free from coercion, with an openness toward alternative perspectives is crucial to inspire conscious change at micro, meso, and macro levels of engagement (hooks, 1994; Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, 2009). These central tenets of both popular education and adult learning theory created an ideal environment for transformational change (Mezirow, 1991).

Issues in Teaching About Power, Oppression, and Privilege

As a number of scholars have argued, teaching for multicultural awareness and tolerance falls far short of the educational goal of cultural competence (Allen, 1995; Weiler, 1988). What frequently passes as multicultural education—discussions of diversity and traditionally marginalized populations coupled with sporadic attention to social issues such as poverty—rarely addresses dynamics of power, privilege, and oppression and how they function to maintain inequality (Goodman, 2001; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998; Longres & Scanlon, 2001; Nicotera

& Walls, in press; Razack, 2002). For education in professions centered on a commitment to

social justice and equality, the failure to integrate concerns of power, privilege, and oppression

into content and dialogue in the classroom not only is a breach of the professional ethics of those

disciplines, but also serves to reinforce oppressive systems of stratification (Miller, Donner, &

Fraser, 2004). By comparison, educating students on the often invisible dynamics of power,

privilege, and oppression helps them to understand the connection between their personal

identities and how those identities are produced, reproduced, and embodied on a day-by-day

basis, as well as the broader contextual and structural issues that harm marginalized communities

(Parker, 2003).

Given that educators are embedded in and benefit from interlocking systems of privilege

and oppression within the academy (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Hu-DeHart, 2000; Iverson, 2007),

both in terms of their social identities as well as their differing positional roles within higher

educational institutions, it is not surprising that critically addressing these issues is difficult

(hooks, 1994). The extant literature documents numerous ways in which classroom

conversations on these topics can quickly escalate and become problematic, frequently resulting

in misunderstandings between members of marginalized and privileged groups (Miller et al.,

2004) or leaving students and instructors feeling alone, alienated, and attacked (Stone, Patton, &

Heen, 1999). Because many privileged group members do not see themselves as having power

and privilege in their everyday lives (Goodman, 2001; Johnson, 2005), anger, defensiveness, and

other strong affective responses are not uncommon (Miller et al., 2004; Stone et al., 1999).

Additionally, some students (and instructors) may view the process of critical self-reflection and

analyses, accompanied by personal excavation and strong emotions, as inappropriate and/or

offensive in educational settings and may resist this model of education (Goodman, 2001;

Mildred & Zuniga, 2004).

Teaching and learning about privilege is further complicated by the reality that most

students and instructors—like everyone else—occupy multiple social locations at once, many of

which may be privileged, but some of which may be oppressed (Miller et al., 2004). The lived

reality of intersectionality (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991; Hancock 2007, 2009) makes work on

privilege a complex endeavor and may lead to some individuals claiming that having oppressed

identities means that they do not benefit from their privileged identities (Goodman, 2001;

Kimmel, 2006). Further complicating this process is the fact that students are at very different

stages in their personal social identity development processes (Goodman, 2001), and are likely at

very different stages *within* themselves with regard to both their privileged and marginalized

identities.

Pedagogical Concerns

Combining the documented potential pitfalls of teaching about power, oppression, and privilege

in the literature along with a critical examination of attending educational strategies led us to

develop a number of pedagogical concerns and questions that we believed needed to be

addressed to best structure a graduate course on privilege. We outline these issues in this section.

Foregrounding Privileged Identities

As instructors, we knew that we wanted to create a classroom structure where students explored

their privileged identities. However, recognizing the relevance of intersectionality, we

anticipated that the vast majority of students would have salient marginalized identities as well.

In our own experiences of social justice work, we have witnessed well-intentioned dialogues

intending to be centered around taking action on one issue of social justice (racism, for example) devolve into "oppression olympics" (Hancock, 2009; Kendall, 2006) in which participants vie over who has the least amount of privilege with regard to the topic of discussion. Similarly, in past courses we have taught, it is not unusual to find a dialogue on, for example, the role of white antiracist allies in challenging structures of racism switching quickly to white students distancing themselves from their white privilege by focusing on their marginalized identities. Queer white people would be distancing from heterosexual whites because of their marginalization around sexual orientation, or white women would be distancing themselves from white men because of their marginalization around gender. When this occurs, marginalized identities take center stage and the focus on taking action to challenge racism (or other systems of oppression) gets moved to the margins. We came to conceptualize this dynamic as a potential form of resistance to deepening work on privileged identities, and, as such, wanted to decrease the likelihood of this occurring over the course of the class.

In raising this issue, we are not denying the importance of intersectionality, nor are we suggesting that creating space to work on marginalized identities is not important. We are, however, acknowledging how the act of foregrounding marginalized identities may—at times— become a defense mechanism that derails collective work on systems of privilege. For example, while people of color clearly encounter the forces of racism, this does not mean that heterosexual people of color do not benefit from and perpetuate heterosexism. The social psychological literature in this area is clear that we foreground and background different identities at different times based on salience and social context (Brekhus, 1999; Land & Kitzinger, 2005; Taug, McLorg, & Fanflik, 2004). However, what is not evident in the scholarship is whether the

foregrounding of specific identities—particularly those that are privileged—can be done intentionally to target learning about specific systems of privilege.

A New Model of Intergroup Dialogue

While intergroup dialogue (Dessel, Rogge, & Garlington, 2006; Werkmeister Rozas, 2004, 2007) is frequently a strategy used in multicultural education and is theoretically grounded in the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Rothbart & John, 1985), the standard model of implementation places the burden of educating privileged identity groups on the shoulders of their marginalized counterparts. This model can be problematic for a number of reasons. First, in many situations, there are few members of the oppressed community in the group that then sets up marginalized others to (once again) be a numerical minority, and further reinscribes the power differential. Second, because our goal in the class was to support students in inhabiting and exploring their privileged identities, intergroup dialogue as it is typically implemented is problematic because the structure intentionally requires certain members to embody their marginalized identities, while ignoring their privileged identities. Likewise, the standard model reinforces the pattern whereby privileged group members expect marginalized group members to be their educators on the lived experience of oppression. In this instance, the expectation to be taught serves as a form of privilege, in and of itself.

We acknowledge that there are contexts in which intergroup dialogue can be a very effective and useful tool of social justice education, particularly when initiated by members of marginalized communities who voluntarily wish to educate members of privileged groups and who decide that the model can be an effective tool in their efforts to alleviate specific manifestations of oppression they are experiencing. In the context of our classroom goals, however, we found the model to be problematic and opted to reconceptualize an intergroup

dialogue approach whereby individuals were speaking from their privileged identities to others who were occupying different, but still privileged identities. This enabled all classroom participants to speak from privileged spaces and the reciprocal educational process allowed everyone to learn about the lived experiences of privilege through comparing and contrasting the similarities and differences among types of privilege. The success of this privileged-identity-to-privileged-identity intergroup dialogue model (what we came to call *cross-privilege dialogue*) would rest on the ability of students to foreground privileged identities. This also allowed students to bear witness to others' work on privileged identities through which they themselves were marginalized. We were unclear going into the first iteration of the course whether this was possible.

Confusing Safety with Comfort

 One of the expectations that students and others frequently bring into multicultural and social justice educational spaces is the expectation of *safety.* However, numerous activists and scholars have documented that safety frequently gets confused with comfort—particularly for those with privilege who are accustomed to the comfort privilege entails—and that the concept of safety, in and of itself, is problematic because of differential access based on social location (Goodman, 2001; Johnson, 1997; Kendall, 2006). We anticipated that during the unfolding of the course, students would experience discomfort and that the content of the readings, discussions, and experiential exercises would often trigger significant cognitive and emotional dissonance. Given this, we were concerned about how to best problematize the concept of safety with students for them to understand and anticipate the discomfort that characterizes elevating social consciousness and taking transformational action (Goodman, 2001; Kendall, 2006; Walls et al., 2009; Wise, 2005).

Instructors' Social Locations

As instructors of the course, we were aware that by definition of our role, we occupied locations of positional privilege. In addition, because we individually experienced different social locations on a number of cultural axes (race, gender, sexual orientation, social class), we were conscious that our perceptions of dynamics in the classrooms would likely be shaped in dramatic ways by those differences (Goodman, 2001; Johnson, 2005). Rather than seeing these differences as concerns, we aimed to transparently embody our differences as the course unfolded. Our hope in doing so was to model for students that (a) we were—like the students—works in progress who still had much learning to do; (b) we would make mistakes that were shaped by our privileged views of the world; and (c) we could acknowledge and learn from our mistakes, survive our discomfort, and strive to allow our mistakes to be opportunities for growth. This model of instruction, by definition, would mean that as coinstructors, we needed to strive for a higher level of transparency and vulnerability than what is typical in most pedagogical approaches to higher education. Employing this approach, we were concerned with whether or not our approach would be advisable and/or successful in supporting the goals of the classes.

Costs for Pedagogical Innovations

As we worked our way through the pedagogical issues of the class, it became apparent that the financial costs for such a course would be greater than for most courses offered where there is typically a single instructor and, possibly, a teaching assistant. On top of the costs of coteaching, we also wanted to integrate a capstone-like final project where the students would participate in dialogue with the larger community about their journeys and commitments. Implementing this end-of-the-class symposium also added extra costs.

Course Structure

To address these concerns, we designed the course to be a mixture of single identity privilege caucuses (which met one hour per week) and cross-privilege intergroup dialogue (which met two hours per week). By combining the two approaches, we hoped that students would find the mixture of support and confrontation needed to encourage their knowledge building and personal transformation.

Applying to Take the Course

Prior to the course, all of the students interested in taking the class were required to answer a series of questions about which of their privileged identities they would be most interested in exploring. They were also asked to rank their interests. Additionally, students had to write a brief essay[4] about their understanding of privilege and how it impacted their daily lives and their conceptualization of social work practice. Names and all identifying information were removed from the essays, which were read and scored by three faculty and staff members at the graduate school, with the goal of identifying which students were best suited (in terms of their cognitive understanding and conceptualization of privilege as well as their social identity developmental phase) to enroll in the course.[5] The lead instructor of the course then took the ranked essays and, based on the students' interests, assigned each accepted student into a caucus. In the first year, three caucuses emerged: white privilege, social class privilege, and heterosexual privilege. Later iterations of the course included cisgender (nontransgender) privilege (Nickels & Seelman, 2009; T-Vox, 2009; Walls & Costello, 2010), able-bodied privilege (Gage, 1997; May-Machunda, n.d.), and Christian privilege (Blumenfeld, 2006; Clark & Brimhall-Vargas, 2003; Schlosser, 2003; Todd, 2010) caucuses as well.

Single Identity Privilege Caucuses

The goal of the single identity privilege caucuses was to create a small group experience for students with others who shared the privileged identity they were committed to exploring during the course. Because of the similarity across privileged identities, we hoped to facilitate more honest dialogue while decreasing defensiveness and inhibition about acknowledging struggles related to recognizing and acknowledging privilege as well as engaging in ally action. We anticipated that similarities in struggles would emerge that would resonate among caucus members to normalize the difficulty of working on issues of privilege. Likewise, as the course unfolded, we assumed that differences in the various caucus members' experiences would emerge based on intersections of other identities, both privileged and marginalized, moving the discussion into a more complex pedagogical space. While the differences that emerged because of this intersectional complexity had the potential to add nuance to the dialogue about privilege, facilitators were on the lookout for intersectionality being used as a defensive posturing to avoid the deepening of the work. This necessitated having caucus facilitators who not only shared the same privileged identity as the caucus members, but who also were skilled at group facilitation.

Given that single identity caucusing and the desire to have facilitators of the caucus share the privileged identity of the caucus members are integral components of the course structure, the use of coinstructors is typically a necessity. One could obviously think of specific examples where this might not be the case (for example, in a single gender class with only white students with a white instructor who was the same gender as the class members), but those examples would likely be the exception. Teaching the course with coinstructors who have different social locations provides the opportunity to do single identity caucuses across a number of axes. For example, having a heterosexual, nondisabled, male-of-color instructor and a lesbian white

Christian female instructor coteaching creates the opportunity to have (at least) the following privileged identity caucuses: heterosexual, male, able-bodied, U.S./American (assuming one or both are U.S./American citizens), white, cisgender (assuming that at least one does not identify as transgender), Christian, etc. In this same example, having only the first instructor eliminates the possibility of having a white privilege caucus, while having only the second instructor eliminates the possibility of having heterosexual or male privilege caucuses, if one desires to have the facilitator of the caucus share the privileged identity of the caucus members. The addition of even one coinstructor who is different on one or two cultural axes increases the types of privilege caucuses one can accommodate in the structure of the course.

Cross-Privilege (Intergroup) Dialogue

The goal of the cross-privilege intergroup dialogue was threefold. First, by engaging in dialogue across different types of privilege, we hoped to broaden students' understanding of the dynamics of privilege by highlighting similarities across different systems of privilege and identifying differences in the ways that privilege functions. Second, we wanted to create an opportunity for students to bring the work of their privilege caucuses into the larger group where they were no longer in dialogue with only those who shared their privileged identity. This second goal seemed particularly important given that students need to learn how to interrupt and challenge oppression and privilege in contexts where marginalized others are present. We anticipated this would feel more risky to the students than their work in their caucuses, but it allows students to engage in praxis—reflecting on behaviors in caucus, then moving into action by trying out ally behaviors in the cross-privilege setting. Finally, the cross-privilege dialogue helps to provide transparency and accountability in the process as other classmates can see what work is being done (or not)

during time spent in caucuses, providing an opportunity for them to challenge each other on either the lack of progress or the direction of the caucus work.

Blogging About the Process

As one assignment for the course, students were required to make weekly entries into an online individual web log (blog). The individual blogs were private and were read only by the student and the facilitator of his or her caucus. Facilitators responded to the students' blogs with their own insights into what the student was sharing. This individualized attention allowed course instructors to deepen their relationships with students so that confrontation could occur within the context of that relationship. Caucus facilitators thus attended to the task of building a supportive relationship with each student, while at the same time challenging the student. Blogs also allowed the course coinstructors to become aware of the individual and caucus-level struggles that students were experiencing that, in turn, shaped the classroom content and exercises as well as caucus dialog. In addition to individual blogs, students also had the option to blog on a caucus-level blog that could be read and responded to by any of their colleagues in their single identity privilege caucus. Likewise, a course-as-a-whole blog was also available for students and instructors to use to continue the cross-privilege intergroup dialogue, share resources, make announcements, and raise questions.

From the beginning of the course, as coinstructors we were explicit with students that we were not experts on privilege in general, or even on one specific type of privilege. We situated ourselves as being "on the journey" with students and as such would, as it seemed appropriate, transparently disclose our struggles and mistakes over the duration of the course. When a situation would arise in class, we would have a conversation—in front of the students—about which route we should go next in class. At times, we knew that this commitment to transparency

and critical self-reflexivity would be difficult, but agreed that it was helpful in decreasing the power differential between ourselves and students, for modeling openness and willingness to make mistakes, and for genuinely exploring tough conversations where we disagreed and challenged each other. As part of this approach, we were also explicit with the students that while we had "lesson plans" mapped out for each class time period, we would abandon our plans if students believed that some other activity or discussion would be more fruitful for the class.

Course Struggles

In this section, we reflect on the struggles, issues, and lessons that we have seen emerge in teaching five sections of this course over the last three years. Some are on-going tensions about which we continue to dialogue and on which we continue to reflect in an effort to create the best pedagogical environment.

Foregrounding Privileged Identities

Not surprisingly, we found that students (and facilitators) struggled with intentionally foregrounding one of their privileged identities. In the beginning of the course, students had trouble conceptualizing what that even meant and how they would know if they were doing it. However, by the end of the course, most students indicated greater clarity in being able to "hear" what they were saying, and to recognize whether they were coming more from a place of privilege or a place of marginalization. Most students also appeared to grow in their ability to recognize privilege in their lives and in social work practice.

One struggle of foregrounding privilege in a classroom context where all participants have agreed to consciously work on their privileged identities, was how to manage situations when it became clear that someone was speaking from a marginalized identity. What has evolved

as the coinstructors have become more seasoned with the course and the varying dynamics of teaching about privilege, is the ability to validate the marginalized experience, use it as helpful information for the class, and then support the student in shifting back into their privileged identity. Frequently students will recognize it themselves when they are speaking from marginalized spaces and will, after reporting their lived experience of marginalization, intentionally shift their focus back to their privileged identity. While we were initially concerned that privileged students would respond aggressively when confronted by someone speaking from a marginalized space, insisting that the marginalized person move back into their privileged identities, this defensive (and privileged) reaction has rarely occurred.

Working Toward Everyday Consciousness

A common challenge in this course was the desire to support students not only to learn and grow in the classroom, but to have the skills and confidence to bring their work into their lives beyond the classroom on multiple levels—an individual level, a community level, and a structural level. It is only in this way that real, transformational change can begin to break down sexism, racism, heterosexism, ableism, and other forms of oppression and their corresponding privileges in society. Borrowing from the initial pedagogical foundations of popular education and adult learning theory, we tried to establish real avenues and spaces for students to bring their experiences out of the classroom and into the real world.

In moving out into community, many students experienced strong emotions and, in particular, feelings of discomfort and insecurity, even more so than with their work in the classroom. Normalizing these reactions through sharing similar experiences in dialogues and blog responses, the instructors attempted to connect with students as a way to support their growing repertoire of new behaviors and to decrease feelings of dejection when attempts to

disrupt privilege were not as successful as students had hoped. We were also careful to not allow students to confuse these experiences of cognitive and emotional dissonance with a lack of safety, but to normalize these feelings as part of the turbulence of growth in learning to do this work.

In some cases students found themselves unintentionally acting out their privileged identities in the community, only to recognize later in classroom dialogue the degree to which their behaviors were problematic. By way of example, all students in the Spring 2007 course attended the White Privilege Conference. Upon arrival at the conference in the early morning, a number of students (most of whom were in the social class privilege caucus) requested the hotel staff to allow them to check into their rooms earlier than the standard 3 p.m. check-in time. When the hotel staff indicated that this was not possible because the rooms were not ready, the students then approached one of the instructors of the course and suggested that they should be given preferential treatment because the university was spending significant amounts of money on lodging with the hotel. Upon returning to class the following week, the situation was critically examined and the students came to see that their behavior was problematic and embodied social class privilege. The students were challenged to think through the chain of events that would need to occur so that they could—for convenience sake—check into their rooms early. At whose cost would their convenience come? Who (in terms of social location) would be pushed to do their work faster?[6] When situations like this were critically deconstructed in the classroom, they were often met with feelings of guilt and anxiety. While privileged behaviors were not excused by peers or course facilitators, experiencing guilt and anxiety was openly recognized as a very real part of the change process. This particular incident also served as a starting point for the students to gain an intimate understanding of the connection between the course content and the

real world. Likewise, students were able to grasp everyday social consciousness as an iterative process that furthered their learning and their skills in taking action.

Intent Versus Outcome

Another related theme that emerged in the classroom was the challenge of shifting students from focusing on intent to focusing on outcome. A common phrase, "that wasn't my intent," was problematized as students came to recognize that regardless of their well-meaning intentions, the consequences of their behaviors still may have had negative effects on marginalized others and communities. For the students in social work in particular, who overwhelmingly entered the field because of a genuine desire to help others, wrestling with the reality that intention was largely a moot point was quite difficult.

Ripple Effects

In addition, almost every student experienced some conflict in his or her personal relationships as he or she moved through the course. Often partners, friends, and families of origin were the first place students would "try on" their new ideas and understandings of privilege or take action to disrupt oppressive behavior. Some were pleasantly surprised with the openness and dialogue they were able to have, while others experienced painful rejection and hostility. One student reported:

> I had a conversation with my partner about using the word "partner" instead of words that identify sexual orientation. I was surprised by his resistance, but also pleasantly surprised by how I was able to stick to my guns. (class member quote, as reported in Walls et al., 2009, p. 295)

Another, reporting a negative experience in his attempt noted:

> My friend had a graduation party. … I had mixed feelings about going because
> EVERYTHING except the white Christian heterosexual lifestyle is invisible to
> them and it takes lots of energy to explain myself. … I did not go looking for a
> fight … but one found me (class member quote, as reported in Walls et al., 2009,
> p. 298).

 The lessons that emerged from these experiences challenged students to evaluate their

approaches, to assess the context within which they were operating, and to begin to realize the

costs that can come with being a vocal ally (even as those costs are typically significantly less

than marginalized communities experience on a daily basis). Their experiences with the ripple

effect also illustrated the process of "passing along" their education about privilege (Samuels,

Samuels, & Martinez, 2010).

Contextualization

We also found that students, eager to do the "right" thing, were prone to clinging to social justice

"rules" to guide them in their action, sometimes to the point of decontextualizing. For example,

one common theme in social justice work is that privileged individuals should not expect

members of oppressed communities to teach them about the lived experience of oppression. To

have such an expectation is a hallmark of privilege. Through a series of dialogues, the LGBTQ

members of one particular class decided to voluntarily participate in a queer speak out as a way

to share their experiences of heterosexism and heterosexual privilege with their heterosexual

colleagues. Initially, however, several heterosexual students refused to participate in the exercise

and wanted to stop the exercise, having translated the "no expectations" mantra above into a

concretized rule that "we never learn on the backs of oppressed others." What they initially failed

to see was that in their refusal, instead of supporting LGBTQ members to make decisions about

their own lives, they as privileged heterosexuals were deciding what was and what was not okay for LGBTQ members to do—another example of marginalizing queer voices. In a painful debriefing process, those students with access to heterosexual privilege had to wrestle with the reality that their intent to supportively intervene was actually oppressive in that particular context and that while having certain guidelines for behavior can be helpful, those guidelines need to be understood within a situated context.

Coinstructor Identities

The conscious decision to coteach the course with instructors with varying social locations was important not only for the purpose of coinstructors facilitating caucuses based on their privileged identities, but also to provide a model for cross-difference engagement in the necessarily tough conversations. This additionally strengthened the course content and process by providing students with multiple perspectives from various social locations.

While research indicates that instructors who are women (Basow, 2000), people of color (Smith, 2007), and gay and lesbian (Ewing, Stukas, & Sheehan, 2003; Russ, Simonds, & Hunt, 2002), are evaluated differently and often have to prove their legitimacy in the classroom more so than male, white, and heterosexual instructors, respectively, our goal was to decrease the positional power that all of the instructors held by virtue of their role as faculty. This was done, in part, by positioning ourselves as instructors as being on the "journey" with the students, by openly acknowledging that none of us were experts on issues of privilege, and through making our mistakes and oversights visible to the students to further demonstrate our being "in process." This does not mean, of course, that students may not have evaluated coinstructors differently based on the coinstructors' social locations. However, our goal was to connect based on privileged identities while decreasing the salience of difference based on marginalized identities.

For example, one woman-of-color coauthor facilitated the heterosexual privilege caucus and in that role worked with white students and students of color to find the similarities in their embodiment of heterosexual privilege while backgrounding their privileges and marginalizations based on their racial (and other) identities.

Theorizing Resistance to Praxis

A key concept throughout the course was that of praxis—critical self-reflection coupled with action—as one fundamental mechanism for social change. As instructors, we began to see commonalities in the patterns of resistance that students were displaying over the course of the class, realizing that those patterns mapped onto a two-by-two grid representing the intersection of awareness and action. While we have represented the four quadrants as discrete endpoints, the lived reality is, of course, much more complex than that, but we have done so for the sake of parsimony. See Figure 1.

Figure 1: Theorizing Resistance to Praxis at the Intersection of Awareness and Action

		Awareness	
Action		**No**	**Yes**
No		Lack of critical consciousness	Armchair activist
Yes		Nonaccountable activist /charity worker	Praxis

At the intersection of no awareness and no action was a form of resistance that was fortunately not present in our classes, most likely because the course was an elective course that students had to apply to get in to.[7] We labeled this quadrant *lack of critical consciousness*. Individuals who

reside at this intersection have little critical self-reflexivity and, rather than taking action to challenge systems of stratification, either consciously oppose progressive policies and approaches or through their inaction lend support to opposition to such policies and approaches.

Shifting to quadrant two, we find the intersection of awareness with little to no action. Here we found students who were frequently so fearful of their perceived inadequacies and potential for making mistakes in community that they were willing only to work on themselves, essentially immobilized when it came to taking collective action. While these students were more than willing to do the personal *excavation* (Kendall, 2006) that is necessary for cognitively and emotionally understanding one's own role in systems of stratification, the lack of ability to translate that new awareness into conscious behavior left them as *armchair activists*.

In quadrant three, we have the intersection of action with little to no awareness. These were the students who on the first day of class were ready to run into the community and start taking action—for example, through engaging in protest rallies or through social service-related efforts to feed the hungry or supply clothes to the homeless. Having limited critical consciousness and little tolerance for the personal excavation of their own embodiment of oppressiveness, these students had difficulty contextualizing their behavior or understanding the need for accountability to the communities to which they were trying to be allies. These students were the charity workers with no resulting social change, or professional protesters with little accountability to the communities that they were trying to support.

Many students began their journey in this class in quadrants two and three. We came to realize that our overarching mission for the class was to move students from where they started to the fourth quadrant—the crossroad of awareness and action—praxis. Our hope was that our pedagogical structure would be successful in providing both the support and necessary

challenges to the students regardless of where they were starting the journey. In praxis, our goal was to produce individuals who could be counted on as consistent allies to marginalized communities. The qualities we hoped to nurture in the students were the abilities to (a) contextualize their actions, (b) recognize and acknowledge their personal embodiment of privilege and oppressiveness, (c) seek accountability from marginalized communities to whom they were trying to be allies, (d) analyze their actions and their outcomes while learning from their successes and failures, (e) admit their mistakes, (f) listen and take direction from marginalized communities on what the community deemed to be the most helpful, and (g) do all of the above with grace and humility.

Limitations

The pedagogical model presented here is not without its limitations. First, the success of the model has thus far only been demonstrated in one specific context of a single graduate social work program. Its implementation in other contexts (undergraduate, community education, workplace environments, other graduate social work programs, etc.) has not been attempted. Adoption of the structure in other contexts could shed additional light on the model's strengths and weaknesses. Second, although there is potential to address intersectionality as the course unfolds, the current structure of the course constrains this more nuanced exploration somewhat by giving primacy to one specific type of privilege being explored by the student, and by asking the student to focus on foregrounding that privileged identity while backgrounding his or her marginalized identities. While done for specific reasons outlined above, this aspect of the structure could be modified as appropriate for the developmental stage of the specific audience members. Finally, the logistics of creating and maintaining single identity caucuses with

coinstructors who share the identities can be difficult to replicate, both due to the potential financial costs as well as to the procedural barriers that may exist in some contexts.

Even if the structure as a whole is not adopted, there are some aspects of this project that might be integrated into more typical class offerings. For example, nonformalized use of identity caucusing could be integrated into many courses on multiculturalism as a way to support both marginalized and privileged students in their own struggles with issues of power, oppression, and privilege. Likewise, working with students to heighten their awareness about the type of space (privileged vs. marginalized) they are speaking from, or assisting students in shifting back and forth between privileged and marginalized identities can be one strategy for helping students understand their privileges.

Evidence from course evaluations, student blogs, and interviews with students months after the course was completed (see Nickels & Seelman, 2009; Walls et al., 2009) suggests that students found the classroom experience a valuable one. For many students the course has been transformational, as evidenced by their work in the community for social change, their integration of antioppressive awareness and action into their social work practice, and their on-going participation in dialogues about social justice. Other students are continuing to grapple with issues of privilege and oppression and have yet to find their balance of praxis. As the course facilitators, we too have grown in many ways, yet humbly admit that our work—as educators and activists—is far from over. We are committed to continuing to improve the course through dialogue, experience, and reflection, and look forward to learning from others who are also on a journey to create a more just, equitable world.

Notes

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3. Given the nature of our course, students regularly arrived to class with several examples from their everyday lives of how they encounter forces of privilege and oppression in their families, relationships, at work, and on campus. Oftentimes, our discussions were centered upon how students were learning more about privilege and oppression by applying the course content to their personal experiences.

4. Later iterations of the course required a face-to-face interview rather than a written essay.

5. The process of applying to gain entry into the course is not without its concerns. First, such processes are not typical in higher education where access to courses—even elective courses—is frequently based on registration times assigned to students and courses are filled on a first-come, first-served basis. Requesting permission for such a process required special approval through the graduate school's curriculum committee. However it is also important to note that the process is not without its precedent, given that students in the graduate school must apply for and be approved for certain certificate programs (specializations) that give them access to certain courses not available to all other students. Second, the process may not only violate standard operating procedures and policies in certain higher education institutions, but may also be against the law in certain contexts. As such, instructors interested in duplicating the model should inquire about policies and legalities by which they are bound.

     However, the application process, we argue, is an important one if it is permissible. First, because the course requires the creation of single identity privilege caucuses, there must be some logistical process for supporting students in identifying which privileged identities they embody and are most interested in examining across the course. If one student is, for example, only interested in exploring U.S./American citizenship privilege and no other students either occupy that privileged identity or are interested in exploring that identity, it is not possible to create a caucus of one. Likewise, because it is most desirable to have caucus facilitators who share the privileged identity of the caucus, facilitators have to be identified and available for the caucuses of interest that emerge. Finally, since the goal of the course is to explore how one embodies privilege and work to identify barriers to ally action out of that privileged identity, students who are in early stages of social identity development may derail the class process toward those goals, taking up an inordinate amount of class time and energy basically arguing what is, in reality, a very privileged argument and one that we, as instructors, suggest is most likely an acting out of privileges they embody.

6. This experience also provided the group with an important lesson that when we are asking to be exempt from rules that are supposed to apply to everyone, we should step back and examine how privilege might be functioning in that sense of entitlement.

7. We anticipate that this would not be the case were the course a required course for all students in the program, or even an elective course that did not have an application process.

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