Defective and Deficient: White Supremacy and Disability Oppression Tangled Together

Eli Clare

Abstract

Eli Clare presented "Defective and Deficient: White Supremacy and Disability Oppression Tangled Together" as a keynote address at the 2018 White Privilege Conference in Grand Rapids, MI. The keynote outlines some of the ways the ableist construction of defectiveness is used both historically and currently to strengthen and maintain white supremacy.

Keywords: disability, defectiveness, body-mind, deficiency, ableism, racism, accessibility

White, disabled, and genderqueer, Eli Clare is a writer and activist living near Lake Champlain in occupied Abenaki territory (currently known as Vermont).

For more than a decade, he has traveled across the United States and Canada speaking, training, and teaching at over 300 (and counting) conferences, community events, and colleges about disability, queer/trans identities, and social justice. He has written three books and has been published in many periodicals and anthologies.

Among other pursuits, he has walked across the United States for peace, coordinated a rape prevention program, and helped organize the first ever Queerness and Disability Conference.

1. Prayers, Crystals, Vitamins

Complete strangers offer me Christian prayers or crystals and vitamins, always with the same intent—to touch me, fix me, mend my cerebral palsy, if only I will comply. They cry over me, wrap their arms around my shoulders, kiss my cheek. Even now, after five decades of these kinds of interactions, I still do not know how to rebuff their pity, how to tell them the simple truth that I am not broken. Even if there were a cure for brain cells that died at birth, I'd refuse. I have no idea who I'd be without my tremoring and tense muscles, slurring tongue. They want to make me normal. They take for granted that my body-mind is wrong, bad, broken.

> The body-mind as gristle
> and synapse, water
> and bone, pure
> empty space.

Complete strangers ask me, "What's your defect?" To them, my body-mind simply doesn't work right, defect being a variation of broken, supposedly neutral. But think of the things called defective—the mp3 player that will not turn on, the car that never ran reliably. They end up in the bottom drawer, dumpster, scrap yard. Defects are disposable, body-minds or objects to eradicate.

Complete strangers pat me on the head. They whisper platitudes in my ear, clichés about courage and inspiration. They enthuse about how remarkable I am. They declare me special. Not long ago, a White woman, wearing dream-catcher earrings and a fringed leather tunic with a medicine wheel painted on its back, grabbed me in a bear hug. She told me that I, like all people who tremor, was a natural shaman. Yes, a shaman! In that split second, racism and ableism tumbled into each other, the entitlement that leads White people to co-opt Indigenous spiritualities tangling into the ableist stereotypes that bestow disabled people with spiritual qualities. She whispered in my ear that if I were trained, I could become a great healer, directing me never to forget my specialness. Oh, how *special* disabled people are: We have *special* education, *special* needs, *special* spiritual abilities. That word drips condescension. It's no better than being defective. It's simply another way to declare some body-minds bad and wrong.

Complete strangers, neighbors, and bullies have long called me *retard*. It doesn't happen so often now. Still, there's a guy down the road, who, when he's drunk, taunts me as I walk by with my dog. But when I was a child, *retard* was a daily occurrence. Once on a camping trip with my family, I joined a whole crowd of kids playing tag in and around the picnic shelter. A slow, clumsy nine-year-old, I quickly became "it." I chased and chased but caught no one. The game turned. Kids came close, ducked away, yelling *retard.* Frustrated, I yelled back for awhile. *Retard* became *monkey.* My playmates circled me. Their words became a torrent. *You're a monkey. Monkey. Monkey.* I gulped. I choked. I sobbed. Frustration, shame, humiliation swallowed me. My body-mind crumpled. It lasted two minutes or two hours—I do not know. When my father appeared, the circle scattered. Through the word *monkey,* those kids joined a long legacy that names White disabled people and all people of Color not quite human.

> The body-mind
> a live wire
> singing fear,
> hope, desire.

They approach me with prayers and vitamins, taunts and endless questions, convinced that my body-mind is somehow bad—animal-like, defective, special, an inspiration, a tragedy. They leave me with sorrow, shame, and self-loathing (Clare, 2017a).

2. Defect

Across the centuries, how many communities have been declared inherently defective by White people, rich people, nondisabled people, men backed by medical, scientific, academic, and state authority? I ask this question rather than answer it, because any list I create will be incomplete. I think of White women suffragists fighting for the right to vote, declared defective as a way of undercutting their demands. I think of Black people kidnapped from Africa and enslaved in the Americas, declared defective as a way to justify and strengthen the institution of slavery. I think of immigrants at Ellis Island declared defective and refused entry to the United States. I think of lesbians and gay men declared defective in 1940s, '50s, and '60s and given hormones and shock therapy to cure their homosexuality. The list of peoples considered defective keeps growing, the damage deepening.

Defectiveness holds such power because ableism builds and maintains the very notion that defective body-minds are bad, undesirable, disposable. In a world without ableism, *defective* as it is applied to humans, meaning the "imperfection of a bodily system," would probably not even exist. But if it did, it would only be a neutral descriptor. However, in today's world where ableism fundamentally shapes White Western cultural beliefs about normal and abnormal, worthy and unworthy, whole and broken body-minds, any person or community named defective can be targeted without question or hesitation for eradication, imprisonment, institutionalization. The ableist invention of defectiveness unequivocally names many body-minds wrong.

> The body-mind as symbol,
> metaphor, academic
> abstraction, the body-mind
> as history.

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Defective arcs repeatedly through history. Let me trace a single trajectory, starting in 1851, though I could begin nearly anywhere. Dr. Samuel Cartwright (1851) wrote in the *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal*: "It is this *defective* hematosis … of the blood, conjoined with a *deficiency* of cerebral matter in the cranium … which has rendered the people of Africa unable to take care of themselves" (p. 693). Using scientific language, Cartwright defended and justified slavery, casting Black people as inferior and racist stereotypes as medical truth. Defectiveness and deficiency lay at the center of his argument.

In the same article, he coins several "diseases of the mind," including *dysaesthesia aethiopica,* which according to Cartwright led enslaved Africans and African Americans to be lazy. This diagnosis not only turned resistance into illness but also allowed Cartwright (1851) to frame white power and control as cure:

> The complaint [of *dysaesthesia aethiopica*] is easily curable. … The best means … is, first, to have the patient well washed with warm water and soap; then, to anoint it all over in oil, and to slap the oil in with a broad leather strap. (p. 712)

Cartwright's slight of hand is brutal. Enslaved Black people become patients and "it." The violence they endured becomes cure. The disabling nature of slavery is hidden away. Cartwright reveals in no uncertain terms the social control embedded in the declaration of defectiveness.

His words travel from 1851 to 1968, landing with White psychiatrists Walter Bromberg and Frank Simon (1968), who pontificated: "The stress of asserting civil rights in the United States these past ten years and the corresponding nationalistic fervor of Afro-American nations … has stimulated specific reactive psychoses in American Negroes" (p. 155). Cartwright's claims transform and yet stay the same, the 1851 "defective hematosis" twisting into the 1968 "specific reactive psychoses." Bromberg and Simon continue:

> The particular symptomology we have observed, for which the term "protest psychosis" is suggested, is influenced by … the Civil Rights Movement … and is colored by a denial of Caucasian values. … This protest psychosis among prisoners is virtually a repudiation of "white civilization." (p. 155)

In coining this new diagnosis "protest psychosis," cousin to schizophrenia, and declaring it widespread among Black people who defied white supremacy, they, like Cartwright, framed resistance as pathology. They used defectiveness yet again to justify violence—this time the locking up of Black people in prisons and psychiatric facilities and drugging them with antipsychotic medications.

Bromberg and Simon's words travel from 1968 to 2014, landing in the grand jury testimony of White police officer Darren

Wilson, who shot and killed young Black, unarmed Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. In his testimony, Wilson recounts the altercation that happened moments before the shooting: "[W]hen I grabbed him, … I felt like a five-year-old holding onto Hulk Hogan [a 6'7", 300-pound professional wrestler]… . That's how big he felt and how small I felt" (State of Missouri v. Darren Wilson, 2014, p. 212). There's no reflection of an adult man and a teenager of almost equal size—both of them 6 feet 4 inches tall, Brown weighing more and Wilson, the adult, armed and wielding the power of the state. Instead Wilson creates a picture of a monstrously overpowering Black man. He continues, claiming at one point that the eighteen-year-old "had the most intense aggressive face. The only way I can describe it, it looks like a *demon*" (p. 225). Wilson remembers that once he started shooting, Brown was "still coming at me, he hadn't slowed down. … [I]t looked like he was almost bulking up to run through the shots" (p. 228). Brown becomes, in Wilson's story, a monster, an embodiment of evil, superhuman, impervious to bullets (Bouie, 2014).

Unlike Cartwright, Bromberg, and Simon, Wilson doesn't characterize all Black people as a group, wield diagnosis, or directly call Brown defective. Yet in painting him as a monstrous, superhuman demon, Wilson calls upon centuries of white supremacist belief in Black people's defectiveness. His testimony joins with *dysaesthesia aethiopica* and protest psychosis in naming African Americans defective.

Cartwright and the rest invent defective body-minds precisely to explain and justify the practices of slavery, imprisonment, institutionalization, and state violence. In essence white supremacy fortifies itself by

leveraging defectiveness.

> The body-mind as gut
> and bowel, hope
> and dread, literal trash.

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Entire body-minds, communities, and cultures are squeezed into *defective.* And then that single blunt concept turns, becoming *defect.* Bullies hurl it as an insult. Strangers ask it out of curiosity. Doctors note it in medical files. Judges and juries hear it in testimony. Scientists study it as truth. Politicians write it into policy. *Defect* explodes with hate, power, and control (Clare, 2017b).

3. Resisting Defectiveness

Because white supremacy is built upon and strengthened by the ableist invention of defectiveness, in order to end racism, we also have to dismantle defectiveness. Let me suggest four ways of resisting this ableist invention.

First, we need to develop a daily awareness of defectiveness. How are we impacted by it? When and where do we witness it? How does it operate in prisons, schools, courtrooms, doctors' offices, workplaces, and homeless shelters? Do we find it in our homes or places of worship, among our friends or with complete strangers? For those of us who, by virtue of privilege, are less personally impacted by defectiveness, cultivating this awareness is all the more necessary.

Second, we mustn't struggle against our oppressors, conservative politicians, and avowed white supremacists by mocking or diagnosing their body-minds. On a regular basis, I read activists belittling President

Trump's hair, body shape, hand size, even genital size. I hear speculation about his possible mental health diagnoses. In essence, these activists are arguing that the president's "defective" body-mind strengthens the proof that he is unfit and incompetent. This argument plays into and bolsters the invention of defectiveness by affirming the connections between body-mind differences and incompetence. Rather than using this ableist invention as an argument, let's stay focused on resisting Trump's policies and the racist, sexist, transphobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic, homophobic, ableist, and classist cultural climate that he's encouraging.

> The body-mind
> as ink on paper:
> court order, medical
> diagnosis, data
> on file.

Third, let's create broad-based access in our homes, schools, workplaces, and movements for social justice. By broad-based access, I mean not only disability access, but also the availability of child care and gender neutral restrooms at gatherings; the use of sliding scales at events that cost money; the planning of meetings at locations near public transportation; the use of multiple languages, including American Sign Language (ASL), to communicate in all our community spaces; and the development of safety plans that do not rely on police. Access means being able to get into spaces both literally and metaphorically, being able to stay in those spaces, being able to fully participate, being able to belong. Creating access radically contradicts a dominant culture that deems whole communities of people disposable. And because disposability almost always works in tandem with the ableist invention of defectiveness, practicing access is powerful

resistance to it.

And fourth, we need to pay attention to the communities and people most impacted by defectiveness. I'm remembering Tanisha Anderson, a Black disabled woman killed by Cleveland police in November, 2014 on her way to a psychiatric facility. Resisting all the ways in which Anderson was deemed defective will help ensure that no one is ever killed again on their way to a psych admission. I'm remembering Reginald Latson, a young Black disabled man who, while wearing a hoodie and waiting for a public library to open in Stafford County, Virginia, was approached by police, tipped off without reason that he might be carrying a gun. In actuality he was unarmed: This was classic racial profiling. Latson responded with fear and agitation. The police read his Black neurodivergent self as dangerous, and he landed in prison, spending much of his sentence in solitary. Resisting all the ways in which Latson was (and is) deemed defective will help end the practice of locking people up in prisons and other institutions. I'm remembering Jerika Bolen, a significantly disabled Black lesbian teenager who shortly after her fourteenth birthday expressed a desire to die. Rather than being provided counseling and community support to strengthen her life, she was allowed to commit medically sanctioned suicide in 2016. Resisting all the ways in which Bolen was deemed defective will help keep marginalized peoples alive. Tanisha Anderson, Reginald Latson, and Jerika Bolen vividly remind me of how intensely defectiveness targets and impacts Black disabled people. The Harriet Tubman Collective (2016), a group of self-described "Black Deaf & Black Disabled organizers, community builders, activists, dreamers, [and] lovers," writes, "[L]iberation will never come without the intentional centering of Black Disabled/Deaf narratives and

leadership. We know this because it never has" (para. 7).

In the end what we need is simple: a wholesale revolt against the ableist invention of defectiveness.

The body-mind
as protest,
resistance,
everyday truth.

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Dismantling Racism and White Supremacy in Organizations: The Role of White Leaders and Change Agents

Kathy Obear
Center for Transformation and Change

Abstract

Kathy Obear presented "Disrupting from the Inside: The Role of White Leaders and Change Agents in Dismantling Racism & White Supremist Culture in Organizations" as a keynote address at the White Privilege Symposium in Denver, Colorado in 2018. This keynote deepens the capacity of White change agents and leaders to effectively partner with People of Color to create greater racial justice in our organizations.

Keywords: organizational leadership, racial justice, anti-racism, white caucuses, white affinity spaces, dismantling racism

Currently, president of the Center for Transformation and Change and a Co-Founder of the Social Justice Training Institute, Kathy challenges whites to dismantle racism in their organizations and communities and to develop the competencies to partner with and follow the leadership of people of color to incorporate racial justice and liberation in everything they do. For over two decades, she has created spaces for whites to do the critical self-work to dissolve internalized dominance, interrupt racist attitudes and behaviors, and shift racist practices and policies to shape genuinely inclusive, racially just organizations.

I am grateful to all who have come before: for all their commitment, sacrifice, courage, and strength to create greater racial justice in this country and world. I have benefitted from so many teachers and mentors and colleagues; People of Color, as well as Whites, who nudged and supported me, took the risk to give me feedback, and confronted me on my racist attitudes and behaviors. Take a moment, and remember all those who are your teachers, coaches, mentors. I invite you to *say their names* as we honor them all.

What horrendous, critical times we live in. When I was growing up, I had a very clear, narrow understanding of what racism and racists were. I thought racists were people like Bull Conner, George Wallace, and members of the KKK and White Citizens Councils. Racists bombed Black churches and set fire to Freedom Summer buses. Racists used fire hoses and attack dogs to terrorize peaceful, unarmed protesters, and spewed racist hate speech as children tried to simply go to school.

I looked at all these types of Whites and called them the racists and used that belief to distance myself from these Whites to prop myself up as a good White believing, "I am not racist! I am not like them! I am not violent!"

My fear is that *today* too many of us Whites are using this same tactic to avoid and rationalize away any need to look at our own racist behaviors, our own complicity and collusion in the organizations we work in. Who has seen a rise in racist comments and behaviors, as well as hate speech in your communities? Your organizations?

So many horrific acts of racism and white supremacy have occurred recently. In this last week or so, there were three unconscionable acts of domestic terrorism that we know of. I invite you to take a moment to remember those who were murdered and their families and friends. Remember all those deeply traumatized by these and so many other recent racist acts of violence.

Some news outlets and leaders keep saying that these white nationalists, these murderers and assassins, are on the fringes of society. That's not been my experience these last few years. How many agree? I believe Pandora's Box has been opened as we have witnessed a significant increase in virulent, racist, white supremacist hate speech and unconscionable actions: the assassination of two Black shoppers in a Kroger store; the despicable, racist, xenophobic video tweeted yesterday that is just another Willie Horton type of race baiting rooted in white supremacist propaganda that has been used for centuries to promote murder and genocide, to uphold and enforce white supremacy both inside and outside this country; the seemingly unstoppable killing of unarmed People of Color by some police, supported by the institutional racism permeating the legal and justice systems; the onslaught of anti-immigrant, xenophobic hate speech and actions; misogynist and sexist messaging, sexual violence, and resistance to justice; anti-Semitic hate speech and the recent Pittsburgh massacre; anti-transgender threats and attacks—all of this and much more. These acts are perpetrated by top leaders and so many who support them. We can no longer pretend this is a fringe element *nor* can we stay silent and hope things go back to the way they were.

It is too easy to romanticize society, our communities before 2016. Racism and all these other forms of oppression were alive and well then, as well as for decades and

centuries before. Maybe it is all just more visible and apparent to more people in these last two-plus years. We all need to pay attention, be vigilant, and use everything in our power and sphere of influence to speak up, speak out, and work for racial justice as well as social justice in every aspect of oppression. Protesting and organizing, as well as confronting and engaging leaders, is critical work. Getting involved in community, regional, national, and international efforts to interrupt systemic racism and white supremacy *and* to create racial justice is critical work.

But I find that too often Whites overlook another key aspect of the work: our day-to-day interactions and dynamics in our organizations. We say we are for racial justice, *yet* how we engage People of Color often betrays our implicit racist beliefs and completely undermines our espoused commitment to create greater racial justice. We are most often completely unaware of the negative impact we are having on the People of Color in our lives.

We need people who will protest, who will call their senators, as well as those who will put themselves on the line in DC, at state capitols, in the streets of our cities and towns. We need people who will run for office to *become* senators! And vote! Who's voting? Who's bugging everyone you know to *vote*?!?!

And while we are all focused externally, working to change huge, entrenched societal dynamics, we also need to pay far more attention to the racist dynamics *within* organizations and community groups and deepen our capacity and resolve to interrupt racist dynamics, policies, and practices. *Yes*, we need to keep our focus on creating societal change, while we also work inside

organizations to create far greater racial equity every single day.

This morning, I want to talk about how to disrupt from the inside and expand on the *critical* role and responsibility of White leaders and change agents in dismantling racism and white supremacist culture in organizations.

In college when I was student teaching, if you had asked me, I would have loudly proclaimed that I thought racial prejudice and racism were wrong and that Students of Color should have the same access and support as White students. I'm sure I wrote that in a paper for some class! But the reality of my behavior did not align with my stated beliefs.

I was student teaching in a tenth-grade history class on the eastern shore of Maryland. I didn't know it at the time, but I perpetuated whiteness and treated Students of Color out of racist and white supremacist beliefs. Even as I was purporting to be working for greater equality, I was fueled by racist attitudes: I wanted to *help* those poor Students of Color because they were underprivileged and underprepared. I believed it was not their fault, but that they were deficient. I was coming out of a racist *deficit* perspective, believing that they needed my help so that they could pull themselves up by their bootstraps and fit into mainstream—that is, White—society. Do you hear the patronizing, condescending energy? I wanted to help them to be successful and assimilate to White culture and White ways, which I held as better, more professional.

I'll never forget these three or four Black young men sitting one behind the other along the far wall. They weren't engaged and never spoke up or participated. Instead

of trying to make a connection and support them, I just left them alone and avoided them.

It took me years to recognize how I had been socialized to value White cultural practices, to believe that Whites were smarter and superior, to see People of Color as defective. But back then, I never questioned all I had been taught.

It never entered my mind then or for decades thereafter that I was supporting and perpetuating ways of learning and engaging that privileged whiteness and White students. I'd centered Whites and European culture as the norm, and my actions were fueled by racist attitudes I was taught throughout my life.

So much of my life I only focused on not being like the blatant racists, the KKK. I was stuck at the Individual Level, walking on eggshells and being so careful not to say anything I thought was racist. I was so desperate to *not* be called out as racist. Can you relate????

I believed that if I didn't use derogatory terms or make racist jokes, I was not perpetuating racism. I thought I was doing fine by being nice and polite to People of Color and saying hello. This is what a good White should do. And so long as I didn't make any racial slurs or say something offensive to People of Color, then I'd be okay. And I knew that when others made racist comments—like my mom did when I came home to visit in graduate school—then I had to do something. So I shook my head and didn't laugh along, thinking that was enough.

It never occurred to me until much later how many racist comments I probably heard in my home and at school that I didn't notice

at the time and that I probably repeated myself, as I was thinking the same thoughts out of implicit racist bias. My mom didn't spontaneously start telling racist jokes when I was in my early twenties, I was just beginning to be able to recognize them, or at least some of them.

Go greet five-plus people and with the fifth person, talk about what is *a source* of your *passion and commitment* to dismantle racism and white supremacy and create greater racial justice.

To be effective White allies and change agents, we need to have trifocals. We need a deep capacity to analyze and respond in situations at three levels—all at the same time:

- Individual
- Group
- Organizational

Rooted in our passion—our *big why*—we need to pay attention to our own attitudes and behaviors at the Individual Level and interrupt these racist dynamics in ourselves *before* we act on them and negatively impact others and before we create policies, programs, and services that privilege Whites and create barriers and do not meet the needs of People of Color.

Working at the Individual Level is necessary, not sufficient. We also have to develop our capacity and courage to recognize and interrupt racist dynamics all around us at the *Group Level*: what others are doing and experiencing—not just staying focused on ourselves.

Form groups of four and each share one or two recent racist comments, behaviors, practices, or policies that you have observed, done, or heard from a credible source. You

can share more obvious ones, as well as more "subtle" examples. Listen deeply to each other and relate. Not only do we need to keep expanding our awareness of these types of microaggressions that occur every single day, we also need to develop the skills to consistently speak up *and* model new ways of engaging effectively.

Yet, being vigilant and disrupting racist dynamics at the Group Level will have only minimal impact on the day-to-day experiences of People of Color so long as the policies, practices, programs, and services of the organizations that privilege Whites and create barriers to People of Color. We will make no real, meaningful progress until we empower, skill up, and hold accountable *everyone* in the organization to constantly recognize and interrupt White cultural practices and institutional racism embedded in organizational policies, programs, practices, and services.

We may have more influence at the Group Level to start. So we can begin here, and then build to organizational change work. One way to help others and ourselves increase our capacity to recognize the daily microaggressions and choose courage to speak up is to spend time discussing common racist microaggressions at a couple of levels: those unproductive behaviors that happen all around us that we often miss, as well as the more racially obvious dynamics that many of us *still* miss or stay silent and do nothing about when they occur.

For Whites who are newer to race work, starting with common unproductive behaviors may be a place to enter the conversation, since most will probably agree that egregious, blatant racist comments and behaviors have no place in the organization. I mean, even NBC *eventually* let Meghan

Kelly go shortly after she said it was okay for Whites to wear Black face!

It can be harder to recognize the more subtle comments and behaviors that leave People of Color feeling dismissed, disrespected, not valued, and as if they do not belong. These common unproductive meeting behaviors can negatively impact anyone, *and* they have a far more significant *impact* if they come from a White person to People of Color, especially when we realize the cumulative impact given *how often* these occur in organizations.

As you reflect on common unproductive behaviors, I want you to use an expanded *race lens*, including related intersecting identities, to examine the following:

- Racialized identity, Indigenous identity
- Culture, ethnicity
- Skin color
- Appearance
- English proficiency
- "Accents"
- Nationality, national origin
- Immigration and/or documentation status

How often have you seen Whites do *and* how often have *you done* these to People of Color:

- Dominate airtime
- Interrupt, talk over, take over
- Speak "for" People of Color
- Have side conversations
- Only look at other Whites when they talk
- Dismiss, ignore, disregard comments
- Like an idea only after a White person says it or agrees

- Take credit for ideas
- Center ourselves
- Crying, demanding attention
- It wasn't my intent!! (instead of exploring the impact of our behaviors)
- Play the White savior
- Rushing in to fix it!
- Saying, "Look at all I have done for People of Color!"
- Minimize the frustrations
- White-splaining them away
- Give unsolicited advice
- Challenge the validity, credibility of what People of Color are saying
- Require more "proof"
- Emphasize our good intent
- Shut down if confronted about our racist comments or behaviors
- Demand comfort and safety
- Blame People of Color if we feel the least bit unnerved or uncomfortable
- Tone policing
- Roll our eyes

When you notice and name these common race dynamics on your team and in your organization, anticipate that you'll also experience White fragility and White resistance. It can sound so many ways, such as:

"These happen to me, too!"

"It happens to all equally."

"This has nothing to do with race."

"People of Color do it, too!!"

I have thought and said each of these and many other defensive comments trying to discount and dismiss calls to address issues of racism in the organization as well as my own practice. Yet, when we start to pay

attention and track group dynamics with a *race lens*, we begin to see the frequency of these unproductive behaviors, as well as their negative impact on our Colleagues of Color. We also begin to see the patterns of how Whites react differently when these same behaviors happen to Whites compared to when they impact People of Color.

I ask you to commit to tracking these dynamics in five meetings over the next two weeks. Notice any patterns and talk to a few White colleagues about what you are noticing with a race lens.

Have you ever *not* noticed these types of unproductive dynamics across race? I have. I have been far more focused on myself or my needs in the moment and just oblivious to what was occurring around me and the impact my behaviors had on People of Color. Then, when I started to see these race dynamics more, I didn't know what to do.

Have you ever stayed silent for fear of making someone mad or hurting your relationship with Whites in the group? Have you held back for fear of being labeled the "diversity police" or losing some of your access and status?

It is critical that we choose courage and talk with other Whites about what we track and also ask them to reflect on their own behavior in meetings. And then, together, we can practice how to interrupt these racist dynamics when they inevitably occur.

When we collude and stay silent, we are contributing to very predictable consequences for our Colleagues of Color. They may *again* feel dismissed, not valued, as though they do not belong. And the whole team loses from the loss of innovation and creativity, as well as lower productivity, due to increased tension and conflict in the

workplace. All of these impact retention and recruitment and ultimately our capacity to serve. However, it is far more than these daily racist microaggressions. We also have to be vigilant and pay attention to coded racist phrases and comments that, if unaddressed, can sink the careers of People of Color. Have you ever thought, said, or heard comments like these about Colleagues or Candidates of Color?

- Not a team player
- Not a good fit
- Doesn't have enough experience
- Or the right experience
- I couldn't understand what they were saying!

Or have you ever heard how supervisors comfort the White candidates who didn't get the job or promotion, saying, "HR told me we have too many Whites in leadership and so made me hire a Person of Color"? These types of coded racist comments infer that White candidates were more "qualified" and competent, and the only reason they didn't get the job or promotion was because they were White.

Have you ever defended a White colleague after a Person of Color is concerned about something they said or did that had a racist impact, by saying: "He's a good person!" or "She adopted a Latina child," or "She's married to a Native American!" There are so many other common coded racist phrases that are used to maintain the status quo and diminish the input and perspectives of People of Color, such as:

- They are so loud.
- They self-segregate.
- Their research is on the margins.
- She has an attitude.
- He attacked me.

- I'm the victim here.
- They always seem angry.
- They are too sensitive and over-react.
- They are too focused on race.

How many of these have you heard? Thought? Said yourself?

We demand that People of Color jump through so many hoops, turn themselves into pretzels in order for us to even *begin* to listen to them, much less allow them to just do their jobs. We require that People of Color show up in ways that keep us comfortable and always:

- Smile
- Enthusiastically support our ideas
- Acquiesce to our "requests," which are really demands
- Not push back or question us
- Do what we ask them to do
- Show no emotions
- Not sit with or talk to more than one other Person of Color
- Always be on time, even though we walk into meetings late without consequence
- Never use the wrong word or mispronounce a word
- Never send an email or report with a typo, even though *Whites do this all the time*, without it being attributed to our racial identity

It is critical that we engage these racist dynamics each and every time *and* work to get underneath these and ask ourselves and others, "What may have fueled these racist behaviors?"

It is too easy, a cop out, to *only* focus on other Whites. We need to *also* recognize our own racist attitudes and dig deep to find

where they came from. Reflect on this question:

When do you remember realizing that *Whites, as a group,* believed they were superior to People of Color, People who are Indigenous, People who are Biracial/Multiracial (smarter, more organized, better leaders, more competent, etc.)?

As I was going into ninth grade, they desegregated Prince Georges County schools, and I was to be "bussed" to Bethune Junior High, an "all-Black school" as people in my White neighborhood described it. I do not remember my parents or siblings ever talking directly about race as they made arrangements for me to go to an all-White private school. They said things like, "You are smart. We want you to get a good education."

Take a moment and share a story with a colleague.

Now I invite you to reflect on this more challenging question:

When do you remember realizing that *you* believed Whites were superior to People of Color, People who were Indigenous, or People who were Biracial/Multiracial (smarter, more organized, better leaders, more competent, etc.)?

I was at a national diversity conference and ran into a friend of friend, a Black woman, who invited me to join her and her friends for dinner. As we walked up to the table, I noticed that all the other 10 to 12 people there appeared to be People of Color. I sat down and listened to their conversation about the books they'd been reading for pleasure recently. I was going to join in about the fiction book I was reading, as a

few folks talked about Stephen Hawking and physics and so many more topics I had no idea about. At that moment I realized how incredibly smart and well-read all these People of Color were compared to me. The kicker was how shocked I was at that realization. I came face-to-face with the truth that I still held onto the White supremacist belief that Whites are smarter than People of Color.

I encourage you to get honest and share a story about when you realized you still believed these types of racist thoughts as I did.

These common racist beliefs and attitudes fuel racist behaviors in our organizations. The term *internalized dominance* is a concept that may be new to many Whites. My understanding is it describes how we Whites have internalized and believe racist, White supremacist attitudes and biases, even if we are not conscious of how they fuel our actions.

Which of the following dynamics have you observed or heard many Whites do or say? I still trip over some of these even after 30 years of consulting, with 20 of those focused on dismantling race and racism. These racist attitudes are deeply rooted, often just below the surface:

- I "earned" what I have.
- "Professional" (White cultural) norms are better.
- People of Color need to assimilate.
- If they just worked harder, they would succeed.
- People of Color are hired to fill a quota.
- I resent taking direction from a Person of Color.
- Look how far we have come!
- Racism is in the past—get over it.

- I assume Whites are the leaders.
- I exaggerate the level of intimacy I have with Colleagues of Color.
- I'm scared to be called racist.
- You attacked me. I can't say anything now.
- I'm a "good" White.
- I have friends who are People of Color.
- That happens to me, too! (rationalize away race dynamics)
- They play the "race card."
- They do not appreciate all I do.

The first step is to get honest and recognize what we have thought or done in the past and probably still do. The next step is to consistently interrupt our racist thoughts before we react out of them and perpetuate racist dynamics in the organization. So, what could you do if you observe or notice any of these types of racist thoughts in yourself?

One tool to interrupt racist, internalized dominance in the moment is to ask yourself these questions:

- Is it true? Really true?
- What is my evidence that this is more true for People of Color than Whites?
- When Whites exhibit the same behavior, how do I make meaning of that? And then treat People of Color?
- What were the racist biases fueling my actions or inactions?
- What is my payoff for having this racist thought?

We can unlearn internalized racist beliefs and then relearn more accurate ones, but it takes vigilance and daily effort. As Dr. Margaret Wheatly said, "Be brave enough to have a conversation that matters" with yourself and with other Whites. And stay motivated and committed to this work by remembering the words of Dr. Maya Angelou, "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, you can do better." We need to be vigilant and shift our racist attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts in each and every moment.

Recognizing and responding to racist comments and behaviors at the *Individual* and *Group* Levels are critical but not sufficient. We have to also work to disrupt racist dynamics at the Organizational Level.

One place to start to recognize the pervasiveness of White privilege all around us so we can then interrupt these seemingly invisible pillars of racism in organizations is with the work of Dr. Peggy McIntosh (1989). Ask yourself and your White colleagues these questions:

- What behaviors are valued as competent or professional?
- By group membership, who gets rewarded for demonstrating these?
- By group membership, who gets ignored, overlooked, or even criticized for the same behaviors?

For example, how is leadership defined in your organization. In most predominantly White organizations I have worked with, people are considered leaders if they are:

- Assertive
- Confident
- Outspoken
- Passionate
- Direct in their communications

When Whites do these behaviors, we are seen and rewarded as leaders or as having leadership potential. Is this true for the

People of Color in your organization? More often, when People of Color display these very same behaviors, they are critiqued and criticized and undermined in their leadership by being labeled as:

- Aggressive
- Controlling, bullying
- Not a team player
- Can't work with others
- Angry
- Militant
- Not professional

How often have you seen or experienced this dynamic? It is so common, especially if Whites do not like what People of Color are saying.

We have to recognize all the privilege we get as Whites and then choose courage to name and interrupt these dynamics when they occur.

It can still be hard for me to recognize how White cultural practices have become embedded into organizational culture and operate as "business as usual." White culture is in the air we breathe. White cultural practices and values are embedded into most every program, policy, practice, and service in organizations.

Let me be clear. I am not saying that everything about White culture is bad. In fact, some White cultural practices can be very helpful at times. The serious problem occurs, in my opinion, when White cultural practices are maintained as the *only way*, the *right way* to engage and those who have other ways of being are critiqued, punished, and not even allowed in the organization.

For example, what does "professional" mean in your organization? Most organizations enforce unwritten rules about

professional dress (clothes, hair, make-up), professional behavior and communication styles, professional ways to engage in conflict and disagreements, etc. It took me a long time to realize that these pervasive organizational "rules" about professionalism were consistent with White cultural practices:

- Even-tempered
- Polite, smiling
- Logical
- Analytical
- Impersonal
- Emotionless
- Solution focused
- Aware that time is money
- Not challenging or questioning leaders
- Working within the hierarchy

I was especially shocked to realize that I had only held People of Color to these White standards as I made lots of allowances when other Whites or I showed up in ways that were "unprofessional."

A great resource to learn more about White culture in organizations is an article by Jones and Okun (2001) from Change Work, "White Supremacy Culture."

Another skill set at the Organization Level is the capacity to analyze and revise all policies, practices, programs, and services with a race lens. To practice, reflect on this situation:

During the most recent budget-cutting process, some leaders are considering changing the travel policy to require employees to stay at motels where you have to go get your key and then enter your room from the outside, often from a not-well-lighted parking lot.

By group membership, who might have concerns for their safety or be in danger? Reflect on the same identities we used earlier:

- Racialized identity, Indigenous identity
- Culture, ethnicity
- Skin color
- Appearance
- English proficiency
- "Accents"
- Nationality; national origin
- Immigration and/or documentation status

We need to train all people in our organizations to analyze policies, practices, programs, and services with a race lens so they do this as a part of their everyday activities. Can you imagine if in every meeting, no decision was ever made until the group thoroughly explored these questions:

- By group membership, whose needs will be met by this idea?
- Whose needs may not be met?
- How might Whites be unintentionally privileged or advanced by this idea?
- How might People of Color experience greater obstacles or barriers?
- Whose voices and input are we missing?
- How can we get a fuller, more complex understanding of these issues?

I hope you help your organization analyze every practice, program, and service, such as all those related to marketing, customer service, hiring, onboarding, professional development, promotion, supervision, mentoring, and performance management. A simple change in hiring practices is to give lists of the interview questions to every candidate as each interview begins. This small shift can help level the playing field for members of multiple marginalized groups.

Effective White allies and accomplices continually do their self-work at the Individual Level, constantly deepening their capacity at the Group Level to effectively recognize and interrupt racist microaggressions, and accelerate their ability and those of other Whites at the Organizational Level to disrupt white privilege, shift White cultural practices, and revise policies, programs, practices, services with a race lens.

We must be vigilant as we deepen our capacity to partner with People of Color and other Whites to interrupt racist dynamics at all three levels and create true racial justice throughout the organization. Too often, we well-intentioned Whites fall into these common *pitfalls* as we enthusiastically begin to try out new ways to disrupt racism in our organizations. Which of these are all too familiar to you?

- Distancing yourself from other Whites
- Competing to be the "best White"
- Playing "find the racist" in the room
- Critiquing other White change agents (social justice elitism)
- Piling on if a White missteps or makes a microaggression
- Staying stuck in our heads, intellectualizing
- Quickly moving to solutions: Here's how to fix it!
- Only hanging out with People of Color

- Being all talk with no collective, meaningful action

I love this quote from Dolores Huerta: "Every moment is an organizing opportunity, every person a potential activist, every minute a chance to change the world."

Why should Whites work for racial justice? There are potential risks if we speak up and name racist dynamics in the workplace. If you are feeling fear, you are not alone among White allies! But imagine what it is like for People of Color who do not have the added protection of White privilege and White culture!

It helps me to continuously get grounded in my *big why*, my passion for doing racial justice work. I want to be a part of creating the world I envision is possible, one of true liberation for all. I want to live in a world where everyone can succeed without racist barriers and obstacles.

And there are some deeper motives for me as well. I was in denial for so long about the impact of my racist behaviors and attitudes. I sold my soul and my humanity for White privilege. I bought into White cultural practices and overburdened the few Colleagues of Color with doing their own work *and* a second and third unpaid job of doing all the race-related work. Today, I want to do my part and take my share of responsibility for creating real, sustainable change.

But most painful for me is that I am motivated to stay in the work, to stay vigilant so that I never again say and do things that negatively impact People of Color. I do not want to perpetuate racism any more. For me, it is no longer about *not* being called out on my racist behaviors, I

am motivated to change by sitting in the pain of knowing I have violated my core values and caused harm to others. I want to live differently, I want to be different.

I hope you commit to staying in this process of self-work. If you do, you will develop a far more authentic relationship with yourself and other Whites. You will find accountability partners, other Whites to learn with and get support from as you deepen your capacity as a White accomplice and change agent. And you might even be blessed with more meaningful, intimate relationships with People of Color.

We are always under construction. And if we want something we have never had, we have to continually do things we have never done before. It takes courage and perseverance, and a deeper willingness and resilience that many of us have never had to develop before.

I want to offer a few last thoughts on next steps to deepen our capacity as White allies and accomplices:

- Do your own self-work.
- Deepen your understanding of racism and white supremacy.
- Create White affinity spaces; learn with other Whites.
- Work with other Whites.
- Engage them where they are; model, and invite movement.
- Partner with and follow the leadership of People of Color.
- Track team and organizational dynamics with a race lens.
- Speak up and name racist dynamics.
- Support others when they speak up.

- Revise all policies, programs, practices, and services with a race lens.
- Listen deeply when engaged and confronted.
- Stay in it for the long haul.

I hope you live in your strengths. It can feel overwhelming to try to hold *all* that needs to be addressed. Find your passion that matches your talents and skills and do that for racial justice. Do what you do well and support others to use their passion and talents to disrupt racism in other ways.

We need all of us together in this work. Go where you are called and give it your best. And then ask: What else? What more can I do? *And* maybe do a little bit more.

This past year I have been deeply moved and motivated by this passage I am told is from the Talmud: "Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it."

Thank you for all you do to dismantle racism and create greater racial justice in organizations. Together, I believe we can manifest the world we envision.

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Understanding & Dismantling Privilege

The Official Journal of The White Privilege Conference and The Matrix Center for the Advancement of Social Equity and Inclusion.

Why and How Facing Your Privilege Can Be Liberating

Miki Kashtan
Center for Efficient Collaboration

Abstract

Because we live within highly individualized modern cultures, we often do not see the structural dimension of privilege. Having our privilege pointed out often sounds like being told we are a terrible person. Conversations about privilege become highly charged and often ineffective, but something better is possible. It starts with recognizing and naming that since privilege is structural, not individual, it has nothing to do with goodness or badness. The key is to focus on two distinctions: systems as distinct from individuals and *having* privilege as independent of *choosing* how to engage with it. This paper identifies four negative ways of engaging with privilege—Denial/Invisibility, Guilt/Shame, Defensiveness, and Entitlement; and four positive ways of engaging with privilege—Owning privilege, Learning about privilege, Opening to feedback, and Stewarding privilege. Shifting to the positive path liberates us from the unnecessary discomfort of seeing a systemic issue as an individual failing. Instead, facing the reality that our privilege is at the expense of other people invites a generative and useful discomfort. My hope is that we can find our way to collective awakening with only the necessary and unavoidable discomfort, and not more.

Keywords: facing privilege, shame, feedback, defensiveness, liberation, white fragility

Miki Kashtan is a writer, blogger, facilitator, consultant, and trainer working with others to reclaim our collective capacity for collaboration, including across divisions of power and privilege. She co-founded Bay Area Nonviolent Communication. For more information about her work go to www.faceprivilege.org.

"Having wealth is unjustified, but the Rockefellers justify it by doing good. I had to cut through all this and understand that there is no rational justification for my family having the amount of money that it has, and that the only honest thing to say in defense of it is that we like having the money and the present social system allows us to keep it." – Steven Rockefeller (1983)

There is no way around it: Facing our own privilege is uncomfortable. Even while I was writing this piece, a friend told me, in so many words: "I am ashamed of being a man, and I am ashamed of being White." He is far from alone in this discomfort. Because we live within modern, capitalist cultures that are highly individualized, we often do not see the structural dimension. Many of us then struggle to separate out privilege from attitude. In this context, having our privilege pointed out to us often sounds as if we are being told that we are bad people. This makes conversations about privilege highly charged and often ineffective. After some years of working with people in support of facing their privilege, I have come to believe that something better is possible. We can frame things in a way that shows the reality of structures of privilege and minimizes any unnecessary challenge.

It starts with recognizing and explaining that because privilege is structural and not individual, it has nothing to do with goodness or badness. It is plainly a factual reality about life. The key is to focus on two distinctions: (a) systems as distinct from individuals, and (b) *having* privilege as independent of *choosing* how to engage with it. Since these distinctions tend to be obscured, I have found that people often experience relief when they tease apart these two aspects of privilege.

Understanding Privilege

When I talk of privilege, I am referring to forms of access to resources that result from legal or social norms having to do with membership in a group, independently of any particular action, inaction, or even awareness on the part of the people who have that access of the existence of the disparity, the potential benefits to them, or the costs to others.

Privilege is societally given, not chosen, and is independent of attitude or belief system. Believing in equality among the races in the United States, for example, does not cancel out the privilege of a White person. At the same time, having structural privilege often leads to certain behaviors through socialization, normative models, and the tendency to justify privilege that has existed in human societies since social stratification started around the time of agriculture.

Although there are forms of privilege that can be acquired (wealth and education are key examples), most of us acquire most of the privilege that we have before we are even born. Moreover, we do not have much choice about whether or not to have the privilege. If I came from an extremely wealthy family, for example, I could conceivably give away my entire fortune without erasing the way the privilege I was born into affects who I am. I would still be far more likely than someone who grew up in poverty to have levels of education and manners of behavior, thought, and attitude that would help me land a decent job or give me the capacity to create a successful business. And this, once again, would put me in a position of greater material wealth than others. In addition, as Assata Richards, a community organizer in Houston, said, "What privilege means is that effort and

activity have different returns for different people based on the privilege structures in our society" (personal communication, 2016). Hard work, the cornerstone of the belief in a meritocratic society, does not guarantee anything and only works at all, insofar as systems of privilege allow it to do so.

We cannot run away from having privilege once we have it. The only choice we have, I believe, is how to engage with the privilege we possess. Below I identify four negative ways of engaging with privilege and four positive ways of engaging with privilege.

Engaging with Privilege: The Negative Path

Although I catalog below four distinct ways of engaging with privilege, in actual reality, they are often intertwined and blend into each other. I still find value in understanding, and supporting others in understanding, the differences between them and how they contribute to the perpetuation of systems of privilege.

Denial or invisibility

One of the ways that systems of privilege continue to be transferred from generation to generation is by making the existence of the privilege invisible. What is rendered invisible is both the gap between the experiences of those with privilege and those without it, and the relationship between the two. In the context of a commitment to equality and meritocracy, the latter in particular is obscured. It is easy for many to think that if others applied themselves, then they, too, could attain wealth. Or, seeing how some few darker-skinned individuals have "made it" economically or politically, to extrapolate to

a claim that there is no more racism and that claims to the contrary are based on personal lack of taking responsibility, or lack of willingness to accept the results of fair play.

Denial contributes to systems of privilege by reducing the chances of people having conscious choice about what to do with their privilege.

Guilt or shame

In the same way that lack of systemic perspective can easily lead to denial, so guilt and shame can emerge from the blending of privilege and attitude. Many people find it nearly impossible not to equate their own access to privilege with a sense of personal badness, a moral failure, when opening up to hearing about the reality of structures of privilege that benefit some at the expense and suffering of so many others. For example, in some segments of the population people experience shame if they inherit large amounts of money and others in their communities are struggling, so they end up hiding the fact of their wealth.

This association of tragedy with moral judgment is directly an outcome of a culture steeped in right/wrong thinking, rather than focused on human needs and how best to attend to them.

Guilt and shame contribute to the continuation of privilege because they are paralyzing feelings that keep us spinning within them rather than mobilizing us to take action, individually or collectively.

Defensiveness

Because of how vulnerable to judgment and self-judgment we are, and how easy it can then be to hear blame and judgment regardless of whether it is there,

defensiveness is almost a "natural" response as a way to counteract the possibility of shame and guilt. If I can "prove," at least to myself, that I am a good person, then I do not have to look more closely at the privilege, or listen to what others are telling me.

This is why in so many conversations related to privilege, those with privilege focus attention on their intentions and on being misunderstood, while those without the privilege try, often unsuccessfully, to focus attention on the effect of the privilege or of behaviors, often unconscious, that emerge from having the privilege.

Defensiveness contributes to the existing system by keeping the focus on the individual level, and specifically, on the person with privilege. Meanwhile, the attempts of those without the privilege to call attention to it, to open up a conversation, to mobilize to take action, or in any other way to create change, go unattended.

Entitlement

In a world structured around scarcity, everyone is scared to lose. In a stunning piece of research, many multimillionaires were asked if they have "enough." Most said "no." On average and across the range of wealth in the sample, they said that having 25% more than they had would be enough. After the initial shock of finding out this information, I am no longer surprised. When we do not trust that our needs can be met in and of themselves; we are pushed to come up with justifications for why we deserve what we have, and hold on to it as tightly as possible.

When a friend of mine and her two sisters confronted their three brothers after

discovering a trust in the family that distributed money to all living males whenever someone died, their brothers uniformly stated, simply, that they were not the ones who set it up. With that, they were satisfied to keep the money instead of seeing that they each could divide it with one sister and then all would have access to it regardless of what the trust says.

The sense of entitlement contributes to the persistence of privilege in direct ways by keeping those who have the privilege from being able to be creative in their use of it.

Engaging with Privilege: The Positive Path

For each of the negative ways of engaging with privilege, I have found a positive way that moves the person engaging it into more freedom and choice. In addition, if enough people engaged in the ways I describe below, perhaps a larger shift would become possible.

Owning the privilege

Time and time again I notice just how simple and strong it is to own and acknowledge my privilege where I have it, and to do so without guilt and shame. When I do it, there is almost invariably deep and sometimes overwhelming sorrow. Sorrow, as big as it can be, is soft. It joins with life rather than fights against it through denial. Once denial is traversed, recognizing what is true releases energy that was blocked in the hiding, and makes it available for connection and for choice.

Learning about privilege

When I came to the United States in 1983 from Israel, I knew absolutely nothing about privilege. I was aware of racism,

which made absolutely no sense to me as a foreigner and an immigrant. It took some years before I was exposed to people and groups that were looking deeply at social differences and their effect. Then, in 1991, I took a course on race and ethnicity in the United States as part of graduate studies in sociology and wrote a paper about racism in the women's movement, which was an accelerated immersion in the topic. Since then, it has been a steady experience of learning more and more about the historical roots of race privilege in the United States, and I intend to keep learning for as long as I am able to read and speak with others.

In some ways, it is easier for me, an outsider, than for a White person born in the United States to approach the topic. I do not carry the weight of guilt that growing up White in this country leads so many into. It is not my ancestors or the structures created by them that have established what is happening. Similarly, I learned about the extent of the dispossession of Palestinians that was part of establishing the state of Israel when living far away, once again making my task easier than it is for those living right there, facing the reality in the most visceral way. So I may be limited in my ability to imagine what it is like for people born with privilege and living in its direct context to try to grapple with it.

I can only say that I have seen many times how learning about the history of privilege and its structural nature relieves people from the suffering of guilt and shame. I suspect this is because the personal element becomes less pronounced as the magnitude of the larger issues is exposed.

In addition, learning about any particular privilege any of us has, within the particular society or culture we live in, gives us an entryway into understanding the particular

ways we may unwittingly reinforce structures of privilege in our most mundane actions. That, too, increases choice and reduces the chances of inadvertently acting in harmful ways. I cannot imagine that not being liberating.

Opening to receive feedback

Perhaps the most difficult discipline of engaging with privilege is that of choosing to do whatever it takes internally to be relaxed and open to hear feedback from a person who does not have the particular privilege that one has. Much of my learning about the topic of privilege, especially as it relates to race relations in the United States, came through friends and students who were willing to speak truth to me across lines of power difference, sometimes two (both race and my position as a leader). This is very hard work. And I know its value and necessity. When I am the person with privilege, I am much less likely than the person without the privilege to notice the dynamics of power. Because of that, and especially in times of conflict, I would almost always want me as the person with privilege to commit to hearing and opening to all feedback even when I am utterly convinced that whatever upset the impacted person is experiencing is based on misunderstanding my intentions. Why? Because focusing on my intentions before focusing on the effect of my actions reinforces the structures of privilege. I have compassion for the many times I do not succeed, because I know the strength of my need, anyone's need, to be seen and understood. And this compassion is not about getting me off the hook, only about motivating me more fully. I am always committed to this, even when I am not successful. I want to get better and better at holding gently my need to be seen, breathing with it, and letting go of having it met, at

least for a while, while I make myself available to those who do not have the privilege that I have.

The freedom that comes with this willingness is the freedom of choice about my own needs. One of the core practices of inner freedom that I am aware of is precisely the capacity to live in peace with unmet needs, because it is when our needs are not met that we are most likely to lose choice without an active practice. Being able to sit with unmet needs means generating more choice, more capacity for freedom and nonviolence.

Stewarding privilege for the benefit of all

The last of the four positive ways of engaging with privilege that I have found is a deep and conscious shift from possessing to stewarding my privilege. Instead of automatically and reflexively assuming that the privilege is "mine" and the benefit of having it goes to me, this change in attitude puts me in a position of seeing the privilege as belonging to the whole and seeing me as its steward for the benefit of all. A whole new vista of possibilities opens up when this shift begins.

One practice that I have supported quite a number of people in undertaking is thinking proactively about what resources we have, how we are using them now, and how we might want to use them for the benefit of all. So far, people have loved this activity, and have felt inspired and lighter after doing it. Going through this simple activity myself is what led me to begin offering a series of free conference calls on the very topic of Facing Privilege, and then to doubling their number to twice a month. It was immediately after a grand jury decided not to press charges against Darren Wilson after he killed Mike Brown in

Ferguson, Missouri. Like many, I was profoundly disturbed about this outcome. I already had the frame of using my privilege for the benefit of all, and I didn't know what I could do in that instance, when I so wanted to do *something*. Upon reflection, I realized that one of my privileges, an acquired one, is access to a small platform and a small following, and that I could use *that* privilege to do the work of moving, however minutely, in the direction of dismantling the system of privilege. I could open up conversations about privilege that would be loving and fierce.

I have never looked back. These conversations are some of my most cherished moments of every month. The quality of connection, the risk taking, and the commitment to challenging all of us with love keep growing. I also notice continued deepening of my own internal willingness to engage, to challenge myself and others, to reach across divides, to make messes by trying to offer support, to name things that others may not feel up to looking at, and to put myself overall in more and more uncomfortable positions.

Necessary and Unnecessary Discomfort

The willingness to experience discomfort is essential for shifting from the negative to the positive ways of engaging with privilege. The positive path does not eliminate discomfort. Indeed, I do not know any way in which any of us in a position of privilege can wake up to it without experiencing discomfort. The question for me is not whether or not there will be discomfort, only what kind of discomfort.

My way of understanding the deepest source of the discomfort emerges from my faith in the human spirit. I believe that we are all born with an innate capacity for care

and from it with the desire to contribute to life around us. Because of that, the way we usually explain to ourselves implicitly why we have privilege is by denying that we have the privilege and at the same time thinking that we deserve it. Both ends of this illogical position combine to provide some ease in relation to our fundamental care. To suddenly recognize that there really is no reason for us to have it other than that's how society is structured puts us face-to-face with the reality that our privilege is at the expense of other people. This spells a moral contradiction that I see as the root of the challenge of facing privilege.

We cannot protect ourselves and others from this discomfort because the existence of systems of privilege is, indeed, at odds with our basic inclination to care for everyone's needs. This discomfort, the anguish of truly seeing how much of what provides comfort, ease, material resources, access, and more to some is at cost to others, does not go away. It cannot go away as long as the systems we have in place are what they are. Nothing else would bring an end to the excruciating and growing disparities that exist in the world in terms of access to resources of all kinds. That anguish, when faced fully, becomes a source of energy fueling work for transformation. I find it generative and useful.

The unnecessary discomfort stems from making a systemic issue appear to be an individual failing. When the word *privilege* is either used or heard as a statement about the moral character of the person with the privilege, it tends to bring about shame and defensiveness, both of which interfere with learning.

Given that many of us want to make the reality of systems of privilege known, I find it important to remind myself that we

become more effective the less shaming and the fiercer tenderness we can bring to the topic. Then we can find ways of supporting all of us in staying present as we look at the untold suffering that exists in the world because of massive differences in power, so that we can truly come together and create change.

There are no guarantees, because anything that anyone says, no matter how skillful, can still be filtered through the experiences of the listener into something that is far from the original intention. My hope is that we can find a way to do this collective awakening with only the necessary and unavoidable discomfort, and not more. This, to me, is one of the core tasks facing us if we are to still find a way to turn around the march towards destruction that's only been accelerating in my lifetime.

Because of how easy it is to fall into self-blame and shame, I am actively excited about focusing on how much liberation *for self* there can be in engaging with privilege. I have no hope of transforming the world if people engage with privilege out of obligation. Instead, I want both to remember and to effectively show others that having unexamined privilege and unconscious or reactive ways of using it is at cost to all, not only those without privilege. The cost is drastically different, and still it affects us all.

In this context, I experience dedicating my resources for the benefit of all as the most liberatory of all the positive ways of engaging with privilege. It challenges the heart of the system: a privileged person's ability to protect themselves from discomfort. By willingly taking on discomfort, I begin to free myself from attachment to the privilege. As I do that, more and more, I live in more integrity and less fear at the very same time as

contributing to others and to transforming
the systems of privilege, even if minutely.
Less separation all around.

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Uprooting: How Can I Ethically Sell My Home in a Gentrifying Neighborhood?

Amie Thurber
Portland State University

Abstract

In areas that are rapidly gentrifying, the decisions sellers make—to whom to sell, and for how much to sell—are of particular consequence to their neighborhood. As someone who studies the myriad harms of gentrification, these decisions were particularly acute when I was facing them myself. Interweaving Nashville history, gentrification scholarship, and personal reflection, this article traces the ways my family navigated the question of how ethically to sell our home in a gentrifying market in order to be accountable to the neighborhoods we left behind.

Keywords: gentrification, Nashville, relational-accountability

Dr. Thurber is an Assistant Professor in the Portland State University School of Social Work. Her scholarship is broadly concerned with the ways persistent inequities are spatialized, and the possibilities for building more just communities through innovations in policy, practice and participatory inquiry. Recent projects include consulting with the City of Nashville on an equitable development plan for the city, studying the effects of mixed-income housing on social well-being, and conducting action research designed to amplify resident-led efforts to improve their neighborhoods.

There was some irony in moving my White family from our home in Montana into a historically Black and working-class neighborhood in Nashville, Tennessee, so that I could study gentrification. Gentrification is most commonly understood as the process through which areas once home to high levels of affordable housing transform, catering to middle- and upper-income residents (Lees, Slater, & Wyly, 2008). As the newest residents of our block, my family reflected this demographic shift, and we grappled continuously with how to be good neighbors in the context of neighborhood change. I pushed through my anxiety related to being a "gentrifier" (when the Black family next to us put up a "for sale" sign in their yard days after we moved in, I had a sinking—and ridiculously self-absorbed—suspicion that it was because of us) to build friendships with my Black neighbors. I also reached out to my White neighbors and noticed the contrasting ease with which I made those acquaintances. Through stories of long-time residents, I learned how, after school desegregation was finally enforced in the 1970s, White families pulled their children from public schools; how deindustrialization particularly hurt Black workers; and how, not long ago, taxis would not drive down our now-quiet street out of fear of crime and violence. At times I spoke out against decisions made by my nearly all-White neighborhood association that adversely affected the predominantly Black children in our neighborhood schools, and I also chose not to send my daughters to those same schools. I was in this mix, wrestling with how best to address the complicated legacy of systemic racism, neighborhood disinvestment, underfunded schools, intergroup tensions, and now gentrification. But it wasn't until I neared completion of my doctoral degree and we prepared to sell our home that I realized just how implicated I had become in the phenomenon I had been studying. The decisions we were about to make—to whom to sell, and for how much to sell—would directly impact our neighbors and neighborhood. Interweaving Nashville history, gentrification scholarship, and personal reflection, this article traces the ways my family navigated the question of how ethically to sell our home in a gentrifying market in order to be accountable to the neighborhoods we left behind.

Situating gentrification

There is often confusion about whether gentrification is a good or a bad thing. Clearly there are many residents who want to see improvements in their neighborhoods, such as safe, quality housing, an area grocery store, or improved parks for families to enjoy. The difference between general revitalization and gentrification hinges on the intended beneficiaries of such improvements. Will the people who live here now be able to afford those houses, shop in those stores, and enjoy those parks? In my East Nashville neighborhood, the answer is clearly no. In recent years, the neighborhood has steadily become wealthier and Whiter.

Indeed, throughout much of the country, race and place are so entangled that gentrification cannot be fully understood without attention to the legacy of racist housing and urban development policies. In 1860, just 4,000 Black people lived in the city of Nashville. This dramatically changed with the onset of the Civil War (Lovett, 1999). Within the first year of battle, the Union army gained control of the city, and a great migration of freedom-seeking Black families found their way to Nashville. By 1865, the Black population had tripled (Lovett, 1999). As these new residents were

still considered someone else's property, the Union army settled them into what were called "contraband camps," three large encampments spread around the city (Lovett, 1999). In exchange for lodging, the army enlisted the labor of Black men and women fleeing slavery to build the forts, trenches, and rifle pits necessary to fortify the city (Kreyling, 2005).

The conditions were squalid, subject to flooding and disease (Lovett, 1999). And yet, these camps held the promise of freedom for those born into slavery, and after the war these became the first Black neighborhoods in Nashville. Just six months after the war ended, Fisk University was founded on the edge of one camp, and continues to operate as the state's oldest private historically black colleges and universities. Near another, a Black Baptist congregation formed within a year of the war's close, and in 2017 they celebrated their 150th anniversary. Nashville's Black neighborhoods have been remarkably stable, and yet have long been sites of tension, marked by deprivation and disinvestment from the city while also being sites of industriousness, congregation, creativity, and resilience.

The racialization of Nashville neighborhoods continued after the containment of Blacks in contraband camps during the war: Redlining practices limited investments in Black neighborhoods in the 1930s, while decades of discriminatory loan practices provided subsidized home ownership opportunities for White families in the suburbs. Urban renewal freeway construction gutted and/or annexed Black neighborhoods from the 1950s through the 1970s. Although the Civil Rights Movement won important victories against discrimination, the racialization of Nashville intensified during the period. As historian

Benjamin Houston writes, "The dotted lines of roads now replaced the WHITE and COLORED signs of the past … an entire city was redrawn and reshaped in order to preserve the legacies of the past" (2012, p. 242).

Although each city's history is distinct, the racialization of Nashville neighborhoods also followed a familiar pattern of racial and economic segregation. The places where poor and working-class residents live— particularly those proximal to city centers— result from planned and chronic state disinvestment (Harvey, 2005), and are often marked by the absence of valuable resources (such as quality schools, transit access, and health care), as well as the presence of increased risks (such as the siting of hazardous waste facilities) (Lipsitz, 2007; Pulido, 2000). The places where wealthy people live have also been created, but by planned and pervasive investments in infrastructure, resources, and amenities. Historically, wealthy areas were racially segregated by design, the result of racist lending practices and neighborhood covenants that kept People of Color out. Today, continued institutional discrimination, such as the disproportionate targeting of Black and Latino families with subprime loans (Bocian, Ernst, & Li, 2008), and racial biases, including the preference of most White residents to live in White neighborhoods (Krysan, 2002), reproduces geographies deeply segregated by race and class. As a result, People of Color—at all income levels—are more likely than their White counterparts to live in disinvested areas (Lipsitz, 2011).

Critically, state disinvestment in an area should never be equated with the level of investment residents have in the place they live. In spite of the destructive forces of racial and economic segregation, across the

country, communities of Color have built—and rebuilt—robust neighborhoods, often supporting and supported by vibrant business and cultural districts. Many of these neighborhoods have experienced massive disruptions, most notably by urban renewal projects of the 1950s, which demolished over 1,600 Black neighborhoods, and cleared the way for freeways and other infrastructure projects (Fullilove, 2004). Gentrification marks yet another massive disruption.

In our current economic system, the finite spaces in the city must be made and remade in order to provide new opportunities for wealth production (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). That means that when cities experience economic growth, individuals, governments, and private developers look to new markets—which in recent decades have been the previously neglected neighborhoods in the urban core. Housing values in previously affordable neighborhoods rise, and businesses begin to cater towards middle- and upper-income residents. Importantly, gentrification does not "just happen"; it is the result of historic disinvestment and current reinvestment that together created the conditions in which the estimated value of my Nashville home increased by 122% in just under five years.

Transforming Nashville

In Nashville's current development boom, many of the city's historically Black neighborhoods are now radically transforming. According to census data, between 2000 and 2010, the city's population of Black residents increased by 15%, but in my neighborhood the trend is reversed; there is a 20% decrease in Black families. Between 2002 and 2016, housing values in our area rose 106%, double the countywide average.[1] Over five years, my

neighbors and I watched as in all directions the modest workforce housing of the 1960s was demolished and replaced by much larger homes few of us could afford.

The material consequences of gentrification have been well documented. As housing values rise, so do residents' rents or property taxes (Brookings Institution, 2001; Zuk et al., 2015). Certainly, rising housing values benefit some homeowners. Some may elect to sell their homes and cash in on the improving market. Others may weather the rising property taxes for a more significant return on investment down the road. But for those living on low or fixed incomes—including many of my neighbors working in the hospitality industry, my elderly neighbors, and those unable to work—the rising housing costs are untenable. Residents who remain in the neighborhood can quickly become cost burdened, spending more than the recommended 30% of their income on housing costs. Cost-burdened residents may fall behind on other bills, or scrimp on necessities like food, heat, and medication. Some people are forced to move further from the city center to find affordable housing. Although rents may be lower elsewhere, savings can be quickly offset by the increase in transportation costs to access school, work, and other resources (Brookings Institution, 2001).

While displacement from any home represents a significant injustice, the displacement of homeowners has a compounding generational effect. Historically, homeownership has been a primary way that American families with moderate incomes are able to build wealth. However, as a result of preferential lending to White people and predatory lending to People of Color (versions of which continue to this day), White people have had many

more opportunities for homeownership (Wyly et al., 2012). Consequently, the average White household has $130,000 greater net worth than their Black and Latino counterparts (Shapiro, Meschede, & Osoro, 2013). These economic stores make it possible to pursue higher education, to make a down payment on a home, or to withstand a period of unemployment. Many of the Nashville neighborhoods gentrifying today were once the only areas in the city where People of Color could own homes, and their residents were some of the first and second generations that did so. Given the legacy of restricted opportunities for homeownership and wealth production in communities of Color, the displacement of homeowners in gentrifying neighborhoods is particularly troubling and has repercussions for the economic well-being of future generations.

Although the loss of affordable housing is one of the most significant consequences of gentrification, it is not the only harm. The focus of my research in recent years has been the *more than material* consequences of gentrification; that is, the harms gentrification causes to long-time residents' sense of community, history, and belonging, as well as their sense of agency and civic participation (Thurber, 2018). Studying three gentrifying neighborhoods in Nashville, I found that gentrification disrupts social ties. Residents describe the pain of lost relationships, as friends are forced to move away, and the class and racial biases of newer residents prevent building new relationships. People who had lived a lifetime in their neighborhood express anguish at feeling like an outsider on one's own block, losing not only one's neighbors but a sense of belonging to a neighborhood. Residents often feel that their perspectives are ignored or discounted, and some describe being left out, or pushed out,

of places where people come together to make decisions, such as neighborhood associations. People mourn lost place histories as their neighborhoods are rebranded and express a deep desire to have their visions for their neighborhoods' futures valued. Given these harms—stigmatization, isolation, marginalization, and erasure—it is not hyperbole to understand gentrification as a form of violence. Gentrification uproots families, damages residents' social and emotional well-being, and tears at the fabric of communities.

Importantly, gentrification is not inevitable. Scholars from Jane Jacobs (1961) to Mindy Fullilove (2013) have highlighted models of urban living that disrupt the economic segregation of cities and ensure that a variety of types and costs of housing (as well as other critical amenities) are available in every neighborhood. Nor is gentrification unstoppable. There are dozens of policy strategies being used by cities to prevent or mitigate gentrification by building, funding, and preserving affordable housing (as cited in Thurber, Gupta, Fraser, & Perkins, 2014). Unfortunately, the city of Nashville has been slow to move the needle on affordable housing, the need for which has now reached crisis conditions. The mayor's office recently reported that nearly a third of residents cannot afford the cost of housing (Office of the Mayor, 2017), and in 2016, the population of homeless residents in the city increased by 10% from the prior year (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2016). Although the city is hamstrung in part by state legislation (which outlawed rent control provisions, for example), it is undeniable that the city could do more. But even if Nashville were to implement robust strategies to preserve and build affordable housing, these policies would not address the loss of social ties, sense of community,

and place-knowledge taking place in Nashville's gentrifying neighborhoods.

And, the more I studied these harms, the more deeply I came to realize that when my family sells our home and moves west, we will contribute to the damage gentrification causes. Though my family's move is voluntary, we too will lose meaningful social ties and place attachments. But my concern here is the constellation of impacts that selling our home might have on our neighbors and neighborhood, and particularly for those without the same financial stability and opportunities for mobility we have. Given all this, my family was left with the question: What's the most ethical way to sell our home?

Being accountable to the places we leave behind

As we prepared to list our home, my spouse and I began cataloguing the various impacts our home sale might have on the neighborhood. There was certainly a financial aspect to consider, as we understood that the sale of our home would contribute to driving up property values and rents around us. As such, it seemed appropriate to donate some portion of the profit to an affordable housing organization. But that would address only the material loss of affordable housing; what about the more-than-material losses to which our moving contributes? We were lucky to have had a role model in this regard, Ms. Audrey Stradford, the 73-year-old African American woman from whom we bought our home five years ago (see Figure 1).

These days, most people do not have the chance to meet the former owners of their homes, much less to build an ongoing relationship with them.

Figure 1. Abigail, Audrey, and Ella, 2012, Nashville, TN.

When she arrived mid-afternoon—she stopped by to drop off the garage door opener she had inadvertently taken—we had already ripped out the wall-to-wall carpet she had thoughtfully steam-cleaned less than 12 hours before, and were mid-way through demolishing a wall between the kitchen and living room. I walked outside when I saw an unexpected car pull up, and as I invited her in from the sweltering summer heat I stumbled over my words, wanting to prepare her for the physical changes already underway. She squealed with delight when she saw the hard wood floors, exclaiming "I always knew those were there!" She had long wanted to pull up the carpet and refinish the floors, but it had been too big a project for her to take on. As we walked through the house, she shared the history of each room, and wanted to know who in our family would be where. Astutely observing our twin 12-year-old daughters looking a bit morose, she offered to take them on a tour of the area sometime soon.

When she came back two weeks later, she again delighted in the changes to the house, and this time dropped off a large black and white photograph of the garden, where she had hand labeled all the plants by name so we would recognize them once they came up in the spring. She told us about the

high school across the street, describing how she used to stand on the front porch and clap along with the marching band as they entered the arena for Friday night football games. And then she loaded the girls into her car for an afternoon spent exploring the city.

Not only did Audrey help us develop place knowledge—providing insight into our new home, neighborhood, and city—she helped us develop social ties. During her visits, Audrey told us the names of our neighbors and the ages of their children. We invited her to our housewarming gathering, where unbeknownst to us she photographed many of our guests. She later dropped off large color prints so that we could surround ourselves with images of the community we were building. And she became part of that community. From the moment she offered to take the girls to explore the city, she seeded a special friendship with these children who had just landed more than two thousand miles from their nearest grandparent. We had periodic visits over the years, and she was always eager to see what changes we had made to the home and garden. She tracked with interest both my studies and my daughters' progress through school. She was invested in our well-being, and we in hers. And she was also invested in the well-being of the home we held in common, offering to help orient the new owner to the house when the time came for us to move.

During my doctoral program, I encountered American Studies scholar George Lipsitz's (2007, 2011) work on the Black spatial imaginary, and could not help but think of Audrey. Lipsitz describes spatial imaginaries as a "metaphorical construction that reveals actual social relations" (2007, p. 13). Spatial imaginaries can be understood as ideologies that manifest in individual and collective

relationships to place, land, and community. Lipsitz (2011) contends that there are distinct White and Black spatial imaginaries and, while they are not universally held by all members of each social group, they are pervasive and powerful enough to shape differing landscapes. In Lipsitz's (2011) formulation, the White spatial imaginary is characterized by an emphasis on individual gain, privatization, resource control, and wealth accumulation. In contrast, the Black spatial imaginary privileges "use value over exchange value, sociality over selfishness, and inclusion over exclusion" (2011, p. 61). In her efforts to ground us to place and people and her demonstrated commitment to the long-term well-being of her (former) neighborhood, Audrey exemplified these values. Lipsitz (2011) argues that the Black spatial imaginary offers "tools for building a more decent, humane, and just society, not just for Black people but for everyone" (p. 17). Audrey—and the Black spatial imaginary—also offer tools to those of us seeking an ethical way to sell our homes in a gentrifying market, and calls us to be accountable to the community we will leave behind.

Given each household's distinct financial and social situations, there is no singular way to approach such accountability. As my family grappled with what this might look like, we considered the following strategies:

- Help offset the loss of affordable housing. Donate a portion of sale value to a group organizing for or building affordable housing, and ask your real estate agent to consider making a matching contribution.
- Consider not accepting the "best" offer. Because homes are valued (and property taxes determined),

in part, based on the sale price of comparable homes in the neighborhood, taking less for the home may help mitigate the rapid inflation of housing in the neighborhood.

- Help stabilize the neighborhood. Vet prospective buyers based on their intended use of the property, and in light of the potential impacts on the neighborhood.

- Help preserve your neighborhood history. Leave a note with information regarding the history of the home and the community.

- Help nurture social ties. With your neighbors' permission, make introductions, either in person or by leaving a note with names and contact information.

We ultimately selected a combination of these strategies. Based on our real estate agent's projections, we anticipated making a $200,000 profit from the sale of our home. As we prepared to list our home, we wrestled with the amount of money we would be prepared to donate. On the one hand, we were moving from one gentrifying city to another, where housing prices were significantly higher than Nashville, and with only one of the adults in our household as of yet employed. Like many homeowners, our wealth is in our home. We invested in the purchase and improvement of our Nashville house with the hope that it would allow us to buy our next home, and help us support our children through college. As such, the prospect of walking away from Nashville with less in our pockets was somewhat uncomfortable. On the other hand, the negative consequences of gentrification are not comfortable for my neighbors. The dramatic increase in the value of our home resulted from the newfound desirability of

our neighborhood—irrespective of the investments we made in the property. Understanding that the spike in home values directly contributes to the displacement of our most economically vulnerable neighbors, and balancing our own financial needs, we decided to contribute 5% of our sale price toward local affordable housing efforts.

As it happened, in a neighborhood where many older Black residents have been priced out, my family found ourselves in the unusual position of receiving an offer from Darlene, a middle-aged African American woman who had grown up in the neighborhood and was looking for a place to live with her elderly father. As she had attended the high school across the street, Darlene already had strong place attachments to the neighborhood and felt that the home and established gardens would be a perfect place for her family. The home was a bit outside her price range, and she asked that we consider an offer below the listing price. Her offer was 5% below what we had hoped to sell the home for—the difference of which we had already decided to donate—and we accepted her offer. Given our own financial constraints, by accepting a lower-than-planned price, we no longer felt able to make a donation to a housing organization. That said, by accepting a price below what we believed our house's estimated value, we hoped the sale would function to slow the inflation of homes values in our neighborhood—if only modestly—and thus mitigate the impact on property taxes and rents for the surrounding homes.

Following Audrey's modeling, we also hoped to address some of the more than material consequences of our move. Our last day in the house, our family gathered to meet Darlene and pass on the keys. I had a

pile of materials for her, warranties related to the home (some from Audrey's years in the house and some from ours) and a couple of books about the history of the neighborhood. As we passed through the now empty house and still abundant garden, we talked about kids and plants and our respective plans for the future. As a final stop, I walked Darlene next door and introduced her to some of her new neighbors. In the weeks that followed, we stayed in loose touch, texting about the house and garden. As my family has left the state, we will not be community to one another in the way Audrey was to us, but, I hope that we helped leave in place some of the connective tissue Audrey helped us to build, which linked us to our neighbors and neighborhood.

In many ways, we were lucky. Given prevailing trends, most people selling their homes in a gentrifying market will not have the opportunity to sell their house to someone who reflects the very demographic that is being priced out by rising costs. And though we did sell our home to Darlene, we have no control over what happens next: She could stay in the home forever, or she could scrape it, divide the lot, and build four high-priced homes. We can make no guarantees about the future of the home we leave behind. But we did endeavor to be accountable to the neighborhood we are leaving. In the end, I do not think it is possible to completely offset gentrification's harms, and I still wonder if my family could have done more, in our years as neighbors, and in the process of selling. Our home still sold for much more than our purchase price five years before, and to those neighbors with whom we were close, our moving frayed the social fabric of the block. Though we found a way to sell our home that felt ethical, it is still not altogether comfortable, and that is perhaps as it should be.

Ultimately, though gentrification does not result from individual actions, individuals do have responsibility to mitigate the harms of gentrification to which we have contributed. Each of us can consider the myriad of possible ways to be accountable to the neighborhoods we are leaving, and strive by our actions to be good neighbors, even in our uprooting.

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[1] To determine changes in housing values, I analyzed GIS layers provided by the Nashville Metro Planning Department (which include Tax Assessor data for 2002 and 2016, and neighborhood boundaries). To determine changes in racial demographics, I analyzed racial demographic data drawn from the 2000 Census (NP003A, Population by Race) and 2010 Census (P1, Race). In both cases, I used the Stratford School Zone boundaries to determine changes over time in my neighborhood.

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I Thought I was One of You

Danny L. Morales
University of Colorado Colorado Springs

Abstract

This is a creative expression of a young, American-Yaqui's journey of servitude.

Keywords: Yaqui, American-Yaqui poetry

Danny L. Morales, III was born and raised in Southern California, and while in high school, the school administration kicked him out because of what they termed "violent gain activity." Because of such, he joined the United States Army to escape the violence, where he then flourished in the elite unit of the 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne). Unfortunately, because of some horrible life choices, Mr. Morales was sent to prison for an indeterminate four year to lifelong sentence. It was in that deplorable space where Mr. Morales reconnected to his Yaqui culture and began his formal education. After serving seven and a half years, he earned his freedom and continued his education. He has received an AA in General Studies, BS in Business Administration, and he will be defending his thesis, "Prosecutorial discretion: Society's pyrrhic victory over an illusory powerless enemy." Mr. Morales has recently applied to the University of Colorado Colorado Springs, School of Education's Ph.D. program in Educational Leadership, Research, and Policy.

I Thought I Was One of You

You treated me nice, told me how much you liked me

You gave me praise, told me how much you wanted me

You asked for my help, told me to join

Sign here, march there because *WE WANT YOU*

You said read this, learn that, because I need you

You *said forget the past, it never happened*

It didn't last, your loss, we conquered

You said *do as I say, not as I do*

Don't steal, don't kill, play fair, please cut your hair

Appreciate, no need to educate, nor contemplate

No need to have pride, just hide

Wash my dishes, mow my lawn, pickup my garbage

Be my soldier, build my company, don't speak your language

Never tell me no, don't talk back

Make sure you say SIR, YES SIR

The more I learn, the less you can lie

I see my plight, I see no right

Only wrong, it's been far too long

The less I let you do for me, the more I do for myself

I thought I was one of you, but now I see you're not one of me

Showering in Everyday Privilege: A Reflective Analysis

Alicia M. Pinelli
McMaster University

Abstract

This piece utilizes critical reflexivity and an auto-ethnographical approach applied to the act of showering to analyze systematic intersections of privilege in daily acts. It examines how one of our most private/intimate experiences—showering—relates to ability, class, gender, and race and their attached privileges, and reinforces acts of social policing. Through this deconstruction this piece brings to light the ways in which the privilege has been socially constructed to connect to all areas of life, perpetuating societal norms and privileges. It highlights the importance of individual critical reflexivity and its connection to societal change.

Keywords: auto-ethnography, class status, ableism, critical reflexivity, privilege, gender

Alicia Pinelli is a Masters Candidate in Social Work at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario and has a Bachelor of Critical Social Work from York University. Their current research utilizes a critical and queer theory lens and focuses on the intersection of gender and mental health, primarily looking at the experiences of transgender and non-binary individuals with eating disorders.

My alarm goes off each morning with a buzzing tone that causes me to wake and start my morning routine. Each day starts the same: I get up, walk to the washroom, turn on the shower faucet, and begin the showering process. Showering is something most people in Canada do on a daily basis. Showering is seen as a natural process that can be completed without thought. I start by turning the faucet on, making sure to have a perfect balance of cold and hot water. I independently undress my able body and step into the warm water, taking my time in order to soak up the warmth and privilege that drips down.

The privilege I exercise in the showering process begins even before I step into the water. Undressing my body and preparing to shower is something I have done independently since a young age. My able body has always been capable of completing these tasks without aid, without thought, and without consideration for those who may not have this privilege to exercise. I subconsciously choose to shower over the option of a bath, with no conscious thought that some individuals may not have this choice. Some individuals live being policed by the medical model our system is based upon that labels their bodies as "abnormal," a label I have never had to endure (Loja, Costa, Hughes, & Menezes, 2013). I step into my shower, designed so that one must have the capability to step over a large ledge to enter the stream of water. There is no hose extension on the showerhead, no railings to provide support, simply just minimal design meant solely for an able-bodied individual. These are aspects I never think about or consider, but instead are made invisible by the privilege I have experienced throughout the entirety of my life.

With each step my able legs take, even in the privacy of my own home, I am

perpetuating an ablest perspective that Campbell (2008) notes as being "associated with the production of ableness, the perfectible body and, by default, the creation of a neologism that suggests a falling away from ableness that is disability" (p. 153). Living in ignorance, I do not consider how the acts I am blindly completing out of routine are connected to privilege. Brod (1989) referenced this connection to privilege, noting that:

> Privilege is not something I take and which therefore have the option of not taking. It is something that society gives me, and unless I change the institutions which give it to me, they will continue to give it, and I will continue to have it, however noble and equalitarian my intentions. (p. 280)

Even if I were to acknowledge the privilege that I hold, it would not change how it is rooted in the daily routine tasks I complete. My ablest actions are socially organized. It is a mundane activity that is taken for granted, and whose actions are socially constructed. My actions, although appearing to be a conscious choice, are truly governed by the power of privilege. As noted by Campbell and Gregor (2002), "it is only when something goes unaccountably wrong that we stop and notice the organized complexity of our lives that we otherwise navigate so easily" (p. 31). Unless my body's ability is threatened or lost, even if I engage in the reflexivity regarding my privilege, I continue to perpetuate the standardized organization of privilege and oppression within society.

As the water runs down my body, I adjust the temperature to my liking—a small act that I am able to complete due to having

the necessary physical ability, as well as access to running water. With the simple turn of a knob, I am using my middle-class status, the payment of my utility bills, and the expectation of access to not just water but also to the ability to make it so hot that the steam engulfs the room. I continue to wash myself, not thinking about how I can afford to pay my bills, despite the fact that I do not work. Never do I worry about running out of hot water or having access to water in general. Water is one of the basic necessities of life; however, this does not mean that everyone has access to it. Reports have shown that only 57% of the world's population have access to running water (World Health Organization, UNICEF, & WHO/UNICEF Joint Supply and Sanitation Monitoring Programme, 2010, p. 13). To some this may seem like a large percentage, however, this means that 3.7 billion individuals live their daily lives without the luxury of running water—something many of us would find inconceivable. One major crisis that has been brought to light is that of Flint, Michigan, where elevated levels of lead were found in the drinking water, causing what researchers deem profound deleterious effects on the health and well-being of the community (Masten, Davies, & Mcelmurry, 2016). This is just one example of the reality for many Americans who do not have consistent access to clean drinking water. For myself, I have had the privilege of coming from an upper-class family that has supported me financially so that I may live independently with the continued expectation of clean, running, warm water. The consciousness of this is always constant, though subliminal, and reflects the status I have held for the entirety of my life.

Having a middle-class status is something that many individuals are aware of, but rarely do we reflect on how this status is used. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.) defines the concept of "status" as, "a person or rank in relation to others." By this definition, status is a human concept that is used to differentiate and compare individuals within our society. However, having a status does not necessarily mean that the individual has earned the status. As I stand in the water, my privilege showering down on me, I am basking in the status I have inherited. Research shows that intergenerational correlations for economic or class status is substantial. Children with access to parents living in the middle- to upper-class range tend to have more access to education, health supports, and financial supports (Bowles & Gintis, 2002, p. 4). However, those who do not have this privilege may enter a "spiraling crisis." This term refers to the situation in which an individual may have started off with one issue—such as not having access to running or clean water—and this issue suddenly expands to incorporate many issues, such as health concerns or societal labeling and ostracizing (Rwigema, Udegbe, & Lewis-Peart, 2015, p. 39).

As I stand there in the shower, I am using my privilege to wash away the deviant labels of "unhygienic" or "dirty" that I have been conditioned to despise. With each swipe of body wash, and each squirt of shampoo, I am ensuring that my skin will be clean and my hair soft and am blindly following society's normalized standard for those with class. In this moment, I am ensuring my positive social identity. Rosenberg (1979) and Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher and Wetherell (1987) believe that social identity is the part of one's self-concept that derives from group memberships, being the groups with which the person identifies or to which the person is socially recognized as belonging. On the other hand, when an individual does not

belong to a dominant group, his or her self-esteem may suffer. Our society is quick to judge individuals who reside outside of the dominant norm. For example, hair that is perceived as unclean or body odors that are not seen as pleasant or typical generally lead to individuals being ostracized and ridiculed. Therefore, we spend numerous hours within our day ensuring that we fall within the social construct of what is acceptable. This reflects the concept that:

> self-esteem is partially dependent on the perceptions and views of others is consistent with the theories of the "looking-glass self" (Cooley, 1922) and reflected appraisals (Mead, 1934), both of which state that conceptions of the self are highly dependent on others' appraisals of oneself. We come to know how valued our social identities are by the reactions those identities elicit from others. (Galinsky et al., 2003, p. 224)

The soap that runs down the drain is a symbol of my conformity to the norm, as without the aspect of showering I would be labeled a deviant individual, and my social identity compromised.

As I run my finger through my hair, preparing it for shampoo and conditioner, I reach for a bottle of product that holds strong links to my race that I often overlook. On a bottle that is meant for hygiene, images of whiteness stare back. I do not typically purchase the same brands, but rather whatever I can find on sale, and all of these products have one thing in common: They advertise using primarily White women as models and occupy the majority of hair care aisles. Other than a small section that is indicated as carrying ethnic hair care

products, the only other time any individual of Color is seen is on bottles specified for frizz and curls. The hair care aisle is not the only time that colonization has taken over and oppressed individuals of Color, attempting to place them outside of the norm. In fact, "in an effort to dehumanize and break the African spirit, Europeans shaved the heads of enslaved Africans upon arrival to the Americas. This was not merely a random act, but rather a symbolic removal of African culture" (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014, p. 87). Although society may not be shaving the heads of individuals any more, they are ensuring that the majority of space is still occupied by the White majority.

I begin to shampoo my hair, not realizing that I could have chosen from more than 30 companies whose products are designed to appeal to individuals like me, White and unaware of the privilege that I hold. Never had I needed to think about what the product would do to my hair, nor had I noticed the images in the advertisements or on the bottles. Instead, I find myself at home, washing a product out of my hair that I know contained chemicals to tame frizz and create a soft wave that only naturally straight hair can achieve with ease. The chemicals normalize my hair to fit into the whiteness of society. As Weedon (1999) stated, "whiteness signifies an absence of colour" which can be connected back to the marketing, product development, and target market of the larger hair care companies (p. 154). As I run my fingers through my hair a final time to ensure that no product remains, I place the bottle of white privilege back in its original spot and continue on without a second thought.

Hair is something that holds so much power, whether it is on your head, arms, legs, or any other area of the body. Historically, hair holds a connection to

gender that is still evident today, with an abundance of hair linking to masculinity and virility, and an absence of hair connecting to women, youthfulness, and passivity (Fahs, 2013). This connection to gender is what subconsciously pushed me to reach for my razor in an attempt to remove any indication of manliness from my body. Not only is the act of shaving indicative of my gender, but also the razor itself is plastered with symbols of patriarchy. Bright pink in color, with the word "Venus," the name of the goddess of love and beauty, spread across the handle, this razor created for women not only represents conformity, but ensures that the ideal of what a true woman looks like prevails. I grasp my razor, my symbol of female beauty, in my hand and place my leg on the corner of the shower tub. The razor drags across the skin on my leg, ensuring that every last hair is removed, and society's view of beauty is all that remains.

Since elementary school I have been shaving my legs and underarms, never questioning why. Having hair on my legs as a female reflects the negative, deviant quality of being unattractive and unhygienic. Despite the inconvenience it causes, I continue to shave my legs in order to avoid the discrimination that can come though deviating from this whitewashed example of female beauty. This can be echoed by Fahs and Delgado (2011), who note that the fact that "hair removal seems trivial and relatively unnoticed makes it all the more potent as a means of social control, as women adopt ideas about idealized femininity without considering the ramifications of those ideologies and accompanying practices" (p. 15). To deconstruct this idea further, Fahs (2013) conducted a study in which male participants were asked to reject the current gender norms for males, specifically the choice of whether or not to shave their body

hair, and adopt the societal feminine beauty standards of shaving all body hair for a period of 12 weeks. Despite only eight men participating in the study, the experiences recorded were shocking. Not only did Fahs's (2013) study show an increase in appreciation by the men for the time and commitment women put in to conforming to this normative belief of hairlessness equaling beauty, but they also identified a double standard. A male participant described his experience with this double standard by sharing, "I know I can be manly with or without hair, but women can't be feminine with hair. It is a double standard. I didn't make it that way" (Fahs, 2013, p. 571). Although it is true that no one person created this double standard, many of us contribute to its continuation almost daily, including myself. I let gender define what I do both in public and in private. Society has made it exceedingly apparent that there are hygiene products that have been designed with specific binary genders in mind. Research has shown that humans have a fundamental desire to belong and fit in, which motivates us to avoid deviance through complying with societal norms, despite how inconvenient they may appear (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

I finish washing the soap from my body and turn the faucet off, preparing to exhibit my final act of compliance with societal norms. When I step out from behind the shower curtain, I instantaneously reach for my towel so that my nude appearance, including my breasts and vagina, are covered. The nude appearance has been labeled as overtly sexual and something that should remain private so that, even in our own homes, our sexuality remains concealed. The majority of the time we speak about objectification, we discuss how others, and not necessarily ourselves, objectify women. However, "sexual

objectification refers to the fragmentation of a woman into a collection of sexual parts and/or sexual functions, essentially stripping her of a unique personality and subjectivity so that she exists as merely a body" (Calogero, 2012, p. 574). It is a body that I have been conditioned to cover almost instantaneously, despite being the only resident in my household. By covering myself I am ensuring that I remain in the realm of privilege that only a true "lady" can obtain. As children, we are told to always cover ourselves after a shower, never let our "private" parts show, as it would be something that a "slut" or "whore" would do. Regardless of gender, this is a sexual norm with which we all comply. Some may follow these norms out of habit, others out of comfort, but regardless of the reasoning, following these norms perpetuates the dichotomy of "pure" individuals versus sexual deviants.

Every morning I used to step into the shower and subconsciously exercise my privilege. I receive much of this privilege by my ability to follow societal norms, even in a situation as intimate as cleaning my body. Despite being subconscious, it is a conscious choice each day to not question how our actions may be socially constructed. Many individuals still conform to the societal norms in order to keep access to their privilege throughout their lives in both public settings and the most private. It is the combination of subconscious and conscious decisions that work together to cause compliance with the societal norms and continuously enforce them as well.

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