



**OBTC 2016 at Walsh University**  
**June 8<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

## Title, Abstract & Keywords

### Title

Diversity and privilege: An exercise to raise awareness, cooperate, and serve

### Abstract

Individuals who are privileged are unaware of unearned advantages that they have. Because of this lack of awareness, individuals with privilege may attribute poor performance of a non-privileged individual to that individual's lack of effort or ability, rather than recognizing that the non-privileged person may not have had sufficient opportunities or resources. Without fully being aware of such privilege, it can be difficult for students to appreciate the diversity surrounding them, both in the classroom and in the workplace. This session demonstrates a classroom activity and debrief strategies to illustrate the concept and consequences of privilege.

**Keywords:** privilege, inclusiveness, diversity, experiential classroom activity

#### 1) Format

- ☒ Activity or exercise
- ☐ Roundtable discussion (60 minute only)
- ☐ General discussion session

#### 2a) For activities and exercises only, is yours best suited for

- ☒ A traditional classroom
- ☐ An online class
- ☐ Either

#### 2b) For activities and exercises only, is yours best suited for

- ☐ Undergraduate students
- ☐ Graduate students
- ☒ Either

#### 2) Time Requested:

- ☒ 30 Minutes
- ☐ 60 Minutes (*Roundtables must select 60 minutes*)
- ☐ 90 Minutes

#### 3) Planning Details:

Need a big enough room to be able to break out into small groups during the session

#### 4) Teaching Implications:

### ***Goals for the session***

- 1) Participants will understand the concept of privilege and the connections between privilege and workplace outcomes;
- 2) Participants will appreciate and learn from the exercise experience;
- 3) Participants will engage in an interactive debrief session to share reactions, learning observations, and ideas for additional classroom application.

### ***What is privilege?***

"A privilege is an unearned advantage or benefit because of membership in a particular group or social category (McIntosh, 1988; Wildman, 1996). Rocco and West (1998) identified eight attributes that determine privilege: (a) class, (b) gender, (c) race, (d) religion, (e) sexual orientation, (f) able-bodiedness, (g) ethnicity, and (h) age. Manifestations of privilege are "power, access, status, credibility, and normality" (Rocco & West, 1998, p. 173).

### ***Why does it matter for students to understand privilege?***

As a result of the circumstance of being privileged, an individual may receive more valuable resources, more opportunities, greater advantages and, as a result, better outcomes. Furthermore, individuals who benefit from such unearned privilege often over-attribute their success to their own individual effort and performance, thus perpetuating the invisibility of privilege (DiTomaso, 2013).

We use two studies to discuss this notion in the classroom. First, Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) found that fictitious resumes presenting Anglo-American or "white-sounding" names were more likely to be called for an interview (50% more callbacks) than resumes with African-American names. Thus, having a "white sounding" name was shown to lead to more opportunities for interviews and, presumably, more job opportunities. Second, Goldberg, Finkelstein, Perry and Konrad (2004) found that men in feminine jobs earned higher salaries than their women counterparts. The authors suggested that although men were in the minority, more favorable masculine stereotypes may have been activated, resulting in the benefit of higher salaries.

### ***What can a classroom exercise accomplish?***

Merely discussing privilege may put students in a defensive mode or compel them to over-rely on past experiences and attitudes. Under such conditions, they will be less likely to learn about and reflect on the implications of privilege. In this exercise, we have found that students have an "aha" moment in which they become aware of how they may have been innately advantaged by privilege. In the exercise, we intentionally choose resources as a context to discuss privilege in order to create an opportunity for the students to experience the concept of privilege without feeling personally confronted.

### ***5) Session Description and Plan:***

#### **Part I: Introduction and Group Activity (10 minutes)**

In this proposed 30 minute session, we plan to demonstrate an experiential exercise that focuses on the concept and outcomes of privilege. We will begin with a brief overview and

agenda to explain that the session is divided into three sections. Each section is briefly described below.

First, the participants will be told that they will be competing with one another to create the best “output” that they can, given the resources allocated to them. The teams will be judged on their output and then be rewarded based on these rankings. Next, participants will be broken into small groups to complete a pre-determined task. The resources each group receives will be based on one of three conditions (1=high level of resources for the project; 2= medium level of resources for the project; 3= low level of resources for the project). After eight (8) minutes, the participants will be asked to submit their projects. We will then judge the projects. Once we put up the results in the board, we will then also review the criterion that the projects were based on. This portion of the activity should last approximately ten (10) minutes.

**Part II: (5 Minutes)**

Next, the concept of privilege will be defined, followed by a discussion of the relationship between privilege, diversity, and potential workplace outcomes. Implications will be discussed. This portion of the activity should last five (5) minutes.

**Part III: Debriefing of the exercise (15 Minutes)**

Finally, an interactive debriefing of the exercise will conclude the session. Sample questions used to generate student reflections on the exercise will be shared during this time. Examples of students’ responses to the exercise will also be discussed, and best practices for conducting the activity will be highlighted. Participants are welcome to ask, share suggestions about the exercise, and brainstorm about how to use the exercise in their own classes. Interactive discussion is encouraged throughout the session. This final portion of the activity will last approximately 10 minutes.

6) Application to Conference theme:

How does your session fit with the overall OBTC theme of *United in Service*?

As the OBTC website conference theme states, we should strive to be “United in Service.” One area that is directly addressed in this pursuit is the act of “appreciating the diversity in our classrooms and our world and leveraging it to create a unified front as we serve our communities.”

This exercise is designed to generate discussion and insights about the concept and consequences of privilege. Individuals who are privileged may miss opportunities to recognize this status and the impact that it has on collaboration, competition, and performance outcomes. Unearned privilege related to characteristics such as gender, race, or age directly affects one’s ability to appreciate the challenges related to a lack of such privilege. It also limits the search for ways to allocate resources and opportunities most

effectively. In order to create a unified front to serve our classrooms, workplaces, and communities most effectively, we need to explore the benefits and consequences of privilege on both an individual and collective level.

7) Unique Contribution to OBTC:

We have not presented this work at a conference. However, one of the instructors has successfully used this exercise in two undergraduate classes (Diversity and Leadership). The interactive nature of the activity along with the “aha” moment in class when it dawns on the students the relationship between privilege, diversity, and outcomes has proven to be impactful across a range of personal experiences. These deep insights create rich opportunities for teaching and learning about ways to appreciate and maximize individual contributions to both the classroom and to workplace success. We feel that a focus on this topic would be well-received by the OBTC community.

**References**

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