An Inquiry into Privilege and Power

Power — The ability to decide who has access to resources, the capacity to direct or influence the behavior of others, oneself, and/or the course of events.

Privilege — Unearned access to resources, influence, opportunities only readily available to some people as a result of their advantaged social group membership and identity.

Privilege exists when one group has something of value that is denied to others simply because of the groups they belong to, rather than because of anything they’ve done or failed to do. Access to privilege doesn’t determine one’s outcomes, but it is definitely an asset that makes it more likely that whatever talent, ability, and aspirations a person with privilege has will result in something positive for them.

— Peggy McIntosh

Most documented privileges are around: skin color, gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, marital status and nationality. Others include:

- Housing privilege — own vs rent, safe neighborhood vs unsafe or noisy
- Height privilege — tall vs short
- Beauty privilege — good looking vs not so attractive
- Education privilege — are you college educated vs high school
- Shade privilege — within your race, are you light-skinned vs dark-skinned
- Citizenship privilege — are you documented vs undocumented or refugee
- Language privilege — do you speak your country’s dominate language without an accent vs another
- Size privilege — thin vs fat
- Health care privilege — fully funded care vs no access due to finances
- Transportation privilege — access to a car vs public transportation, or easy access to public transportation vs not so easy access
- Family structure privilege — raised by biological parents vs foster care, or raised with biological siblings vs not, or extended family in same neighborhood/state/province vs living far away
- Regional privilege — urban vs rural, coastal vs mountain, east vs west
- Age privilege — millennial vs boomer, young vs old
- Mobility privilege — move unaided vs needing aids to help you function

Some privileges give you more power than others. The goal with this exercise is to choose the ones which you can identify quickly. Write down the privileges you have.
Reflective Writing Prompts

You do not need to answer all the prompts in one sitting. Review the prompts, then choose one to answer in your writing session. Then, work on the second question in your next writing session.

Question #1 — What privileges do you hold? Use the list on the prior page as your guide as you list your privileges. If more come up for you that are not listed above, write those down too.

Question #2 — Choose the most obscure privilege — the one that isn't obvious or the one you don't think much of — and journal about it using these questions as a prompt: In what ways is this identity a privilege? What words would you use to define this specific privilege? How does this privilege suppress others who are at a different level within this privilege? What evidence do you have that tells you that this privilege exists.

Question #3 — What are the 3-5 things you do not know about this specific privileged identity?

Question #4 — How will you use your privilege to elevate, amplify and include voices of those that don’t have this privilege? Based on your personality and work setting, strategize how you’ll put those voices and perspectives forward.

*From Unpack Biases Now – www.unpackbiasesnow.com