

## Examining Privilege and Oppression

<p><b>Overview</b></p>	<p>This discussion-based activity guides students in understanding privilege and oppression as concepts. Students will recognize the ways their own privileges benefit them and impact daily life or recognize the different manifestations of oppression they face due to privilege(s) they do not hold. If you as an instructor need a refresher or introduction to privilege before leading this activity, please review <a href="#">“An Instructor’s Guide to Understanding Privilege.”</a> All other necessary materials are linked as PDFs below.</p> <p>As an extension of this activity, please see the <a href="#">“Invisible Knapsacks” activity guide</a> to push students to think critically about their relationship to whiteness and white supremacy.</p>
<p><b>Goals</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) To help students understand various kinds of privilege as well as how in the absence of privilege, groups can experience oppression.</li> <li>2) To prompt students to recognize and reflect on their own privileges and/or oppression and by the end of the activity, be able to identify how privilege and/or oppression influences daily life and offer examples from their own experiences.</li> <li>3) To begin to illuminate the larger impact of privilege on daily life and how it relates to oppression as well as to have a greater understanding of the need for individuals to engage in allyhood behaviors.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Anti-Racist Pedagogy Principles</b></p>	<p>The following anti-racist pedagogy principles are incorporated into this activity guide. For a review of the principles, visit our <a href="#">Practicing Anti-Racist Pedagogy homepage</a>.</p> <p><b>Principle 1: Anti-racist pedagogy acknowledges racism in disciplinary, institutional, departmental contexts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In this activity, students are asked to think about how privilege and/or oppression show up in their lives as students and in different spaces/places on campus.</li> </ul> <p><b>Principle 3: Anti-racist pedagogy disrupts racism whenever/wherever it occurs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussing and reflecting on privilege and oppression is an important step in engaging in anti-racism practices. As students acknowledge their own privilege and/or oppression, they can begin to see how their lives are impacted at different levels of racism (internal, interpersonal, institutional).</li> </ul> <p><b>Principle 4: Anti-racist pedagogy seeks change within and beyond the classroom</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although this activity takes place within a classroom setting, the discussions and reflections extend beyond the classroom. This activity provides an opportunity to practice reflexivity and examine positionalities as instructors and students. Students</li> </ul>

also discuss how privilege and/or oppression operate outside of the classroom at U-M.

**Principle 6: Anti-racist pedagogy focuses on the importance of process over time**

- This activity is not intended to be a one-off lesson. As mentioned in the **Implementation** section, revisiting this activity throughout the semester is encouraged. Revisiting this activity will help students make additional connections to how privilege and oppression show up in and outside of the classroom.

**Implementation**

This activity can be implemented at any point throughout the year. However, beginning the year with a reflection activity can set the tone for an anti-racist and inclusive classroom. Returning to this activity throughout the semester promotes regular reflection on privilege and oppression and how they impact our day-to-day lives. Revisiting this activity also reinforces the mindset that anti-racism is not an achieved state of being or boiled down into one activity, but rather it is intentional everyday actions, behaviors, and thoughts.

Importantly, the activity allows students to learn about one of their privileged identities in a small group with other students who share that privilege. The rationale is twofold: First, students read lists of privilege examples and therefore avoid relying on members of the oppressed group to educate them in this instance. Second, they have the opportunity to share comments or questions that they may be too afraid or embarrassed to ask in the presence of oppressed group members.

It is recommended that before you implement this activity, you take an appropriate amount of time reflecting and learning about inclusive and anti-racist teaching practices. Without the proper guidance and context for this activity, students can become defensive, shut down, or be triggered by the content or other students. Be sure to complete the activity for yourself and to view our other resource guides related to this topic.

Inclusive teaching and/or practicing anti-racist pedagogy requires that we put in the work of critically self-reflecting on a topic before introducing it to students. Instructors should complete this activity on their own before bringing it to students. Additionally, instructors should follow through on the prerequisite work of regularly reflecting on their relation to privilege and oppression. If you are new to this topic or are looking for a way to start, our resource guide "[Doing One's Own Personal Work on Privilege and Oppression](#)" offers insights, readings, and strategies to begin this critically important self-reflective work.

It is also recommended that instructors review the following guides for additional insight and context:

- [Applying Dialogic Techniques](#) (Resource Guide)
- [Implicit Bias](#) (Resource Guide)
- [Identifying and Addressing Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture](#) (Resource Guide)

- [Invisible Knapsacks](#) (Activity Guide)
- [Racial Bias Test](#) (Activity Guide)

It is our goal that our [activity guides](#) and [resource guides](#) are not used in isolation from one another. Engaging in inclusive and/or practicing anti-racist pedagogy is an ongoing process that requires consistent engagement and reflection. Be sure to review the many resources that are provided on the LSA Inclusive Teaching website.

The optimal group size for this activity is 20-30 students, but it can be modified for smaller or larger groups.

## Challenges

- 1) This activity assumes that all students can move easily around the room. If you have a classroom space that limits movement or have students whose movement is limited, you will need to think through and make prior accommodations for those students and constraints.
- 2) The small group discussion portion asks students to pick a privilege that they have. While most students will have one of the 6 privileged identities, it is possible that a student will not experience any of the available forms of privilege.
  - a) If this happens, you can meet with any students in a one-on-one discussion of privilege, perhaps finding an area that they do experience privilege. For example, thin privilege, English language fluency privilege, heterosexual privilege, access to college, etc.
- 3) Another possibility is that a group may only have one person in it.
  - a) If this happens, there are some options to consider:
    - i) Ask students to consider joining another group in which they hold that privilege.
    - ii) Similar to the option under the second challenge, you can meet with students who may be in a group on their own if it is not possible for that student to join another group.
    - iii) You could have all unpartnered students form a group to discuss their various privileges.
    - iv) The groups can reconfigure themselves around a privilege that is not included in one of the lists, but that is mentioned under the second challenge.
    - v) If these options are not possible, students may complete the discussion questions on their own.
- 4) Discussing privilege can make students defensive. While this activity is designed to be comfortable (or at least as comfortable as confronting privilege can be), be prepared for some resistance, potential claims of “reverse” discrimination, and dialogue blockers.
  - a) Review our [activity guide on dialogue blockers](#).
  - b) Review our [resource guide on hot moments](#).

<b>Materials</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) Copies of the reading, "<a href="#">Privilege 101: A Quick and Dirty Guide</a>"<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. You can also have students read this article before or during class if everyone has access to a laptop or tablet.</li></ol></li> <li>2) Lists of privilege examples, 5-7 copies each:<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. <a href="#">Ability Privilege</a></li><li>b. <a href="#">Christian Privilege in the US</a></li><li>c. <a href="#">Cisgender Privilege</a></li><li>d. <a href="#">(Mostly Cisgender) Man Privilege</a></li><li>e. <a href="#">Socioeconomic Status Privilege</a></li><li>f. <a href="#">US Citizenship Privilege</a></li></ol></li> <li>3) Small group discussion questions<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. <a href="#">Examining Privilege List Discussion Questions</a></li><li>b. 12 slips or two per group</li></ol></li></ol>
<b>Citations</b>	Resource adapted for use by the Program on Intergroup Relations, University of Michigan.

## Session Sequence

Lesson Structure	Time <i>(Estimated amount of time for each component)</i>	Activity Content and Instructions
<b>Introduction</b>	5 mins	<p>The instructor welcomes the class and provides an overview of the lesson, introducing the concept of privilege and stating learning goals for the class period.</p> <p><b>Privilege:</b> Societally granted, unearned advantages accorded to some people and not others. These systemic or structural advantages impact people based on identity factors such as race, gender, sex, religion, nationality, disability, sexuality, class, and body type.</p> <p><b>Oppression:</b> Societally constructed disadvantages and disenfranchisement due to holding a marginalized identity (an identity not part of the dominant group/culture). These systemic or structural disadvantages impact people based on the same identity factors of privilege.</p> <p>This would be a good time to reintroduce class norms. If you do not have class norms, taking time to develop norms for this activity is recommended. For additional insight, explore our resource guide "<a href="#">Discussion Guidelines</a>".</p>
<b>First Reading</b>	10 mins	Ask all students to read the article, "Privilege 101: A Quick and Dirty Guide"
<b>Large Group Discussion</b>	15-20 mins	<p><b>Lead a large group discussion to process the article and how it relates to students' own experiences.</b></p> <p>Questions to consider:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) How familiar were you with the concepts of privilege and oppression before reading this article?</li> <li>2) What caught your attention or surprised you in this article?</li> <li>3) Did anything relate to your personal experiences?             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Students may identify personal experiences of privilege or oppression</li> </ol> </li> <li>4) Did anything raise questions for you?</li> <li>5) What role does intersectionality play in privilege and oppression?</li> </ol>
<b>Small Group Activity</b>	5-10 mins	<p><b>Frame the activity and give instructions:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) As we read in the article, many identities grant privilege. We also read how it is easier to notice when we are experiencing oppression compared to privilege.</li> <li>2) We are now going to review six privilege lists based on:             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Ability</li> </ol> </li> </ol>

- b. Being Christian in the US
- c. Cisgender
  - i. If necessary, pause here and ask if someone in the class can define cisgender. If the term is unfamiliar, provide one for the class.
  - ii. Cisgender: People who were assigned a sex and gender at birth that is in agreement with their self-designated gender.
- d. (Mostly cisgender) Man
- e. Socioeconomic Status
- f. US Citizenship

- 3) Each of you will join a small group that will explore one of these privileges. You must choose a privilege that you hold yourself.
  - a. There should be at least 2 students in each group.
  - b. As noted in the challenges, there may be students who do not possess one of the 6 privileges for this activity.
    - i. If this happens, you can meet with any students in a one-on-one discussion of privilege, perhaps finding an area that they do experience privilege. For example, thin privilege, English language fluency privilege, heterosexual privilege, access to college, etc.
    - ii. Conversely and if you feel capable, you can engage in a conversation about oppression with students. Use this as an opportunity for students to discuss their perspectives on privilege and oppression. Do not use this as an opportunity to interrogate students on oppressed identities they hold. The goal is not to have them teach you about oppression, but to hold space for dialogue.
- 4) To get the most out of this activity, you are strongly encouraged to choose the privileged identity that makes you the most uncomfortable and/or that you have had the least opportunity to interrogate.
- 5) Listen carefully again to the six privilege lists we have and think about which one you would like to focus on.
- 6) Assign locations around the room for each small group, according to the privilege lists.
- 7) Allow students to self-select, but check in with each group – does everyone in the group hold the privilege explored by their list?

15-20  
mins

**Small Group Discussion**

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Distribute the small-group questions (found in the materials section) to each group and ask students to read the privilege list before discussing the prompts.</li> <li>2) Circulate the room and check in on different groups during their discussion.</li> </ol>
<b>Large Group Debrief</b>	20 mins	<p><b>Lead a large group debrief conversation:</b></p> <p>Questions to consider:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) What did it feel like to read the privilege list?</li> <li>2) What is something you learned about yourself from the small group activity? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What is your relation to privilege? Oppression?</li> </ol> </li> <li>3) Does your awareness of your own privilege make you aware of how you have viewed others?</li> <li>4) If you were unaware of privileges OR lack of privileges that you hold before this activity, why do you think that is?</li> <li>5) Why is it important to be aware of privilege and conversely oppression? How can we use our awareness to reflect on concepts of privilege and oppression in different contexts (internal, interpersonal, institutional, societal, etc.)?</li> <li>6) How do privilege and oppression show up on campus? Classrooms, common spaces, dorms, facilities?</li> </ol>
<b>Closing</b>	5 mins	<p><b>Possible closing remarks:</b></p> <p>Thinking about privilege and oppression can bring up many unpleasant emotions such as guilt, anger, fear of making mistakes, sadness, and so on. It is important to exercise self-compassion and know that we all have privileges that we did not choose. However, because these privileges influence every aspect of life, we must also remind ourselves that unacknowledged privilege often prevents us from exercising important values such as equality, fairness, justice, and even kindness. I encourage you to continue learning about privilege, identifying how you can harness any privilege you hold to create a more just world. Similarly, I encourage you to continue learning about oppression, identifying where it shows up in the different contexts of our lives (internal, interpersonal, societal/institutional, etc.). Ask yourselves, who benefits? How? How did this come to be? What are the beliefs and the processes that enable this oppression to continue?</p>