Reflection Paper

Genesis Escalera

Alliance Graduate School of Counseling, Alliance University

GCN 603: Counseling and Human Development

Professor: Dr. George J. Ramos

December 17th, 2022

Privilege is a special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group. Some words used to describe/define privilege are a benefit, prerogative, entitlement, and birthright. We can experience privilege because of our gender, race, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, ability, class, citizenship status, religion, demographic, and linguistic knowledge. People can formulate what could be a privilege or not, depending on where they're at demographically. I also believe that how someone defines privilege can rely on one's perspective in life, which would translate into how they interpret their life experiences as either an advantage or disadvantage or maybe something in between. Many of us can experience a combination of privileges and disadvantages.

The unearned material or intangible benefits members of higher social classes can take advantage of are known as class privileges. In other words, they are privileges or social benefits that a person from a higher-class status has, and a person from a lower-class status does not. Class privilege exists within the larger social class construct, categorizing individuals into groups based on similar levels of wealth, power, resources, or status (Miller et al., 2021). Based on my responses to the privilege checklist, I consider myself to have been raised in a family of lower economic and social class. My mother (a single parent) was not an independent, working individual who could afford to own a home and support herself, my siblings, and me on her own. For most of our lives, we depended on public assistance and resources that the government could offer, such as cash assistance, SNAP, WIC, and Medicaid, to name a few.

Although, by definition, I would consider myself to have been raised in the lower class, I still feel as though I had some form of privilege because all of my needs were met due to my family's low-income status. For example, I have usually had access to healthcare, I could afford to visit a healthcare professional multiple times per year, I had access to transportation that

would get me where I needed to go, I had knowledge of and access to community resources/programs, for the most part, my siblings and I grew up having a really nice wardrobe. I even remember my mother frequently taking my sisters and me to the hair salon. Most of the time, we had access to healthy foods. Regardless of the season, my family and I could count on our home remaining at a comfortable temperature despite living in low-income housing/the projects. I also got to go to college for free, obtain a good education, and have a reliable and safe place to study on campus. If I had the privilege of being raised in a two-parent household, despite having economic or social hardships, my lifespan development would've been completely different in a more flourishing and healthy way. Ironically enough, now that I have leveled up to the working class after getting married, there are many things I cannot easily access or can afford, especially living in an expensive city like NYC. I no longer have many of the benefits I had before being married. However, I'm fortunate to still receive Medicaid under my mom's insurance plan up until the age of 26. I still feel that God has provided for my needs and my wants, regardless of the changes in my life.

When it comes to privilege in the area of race, ethnicity, and culture, I believe it is relative to an individual's lived experience, which can include the communities in which they live, work, and play as well as the persons with whom they interact (Bethesda, 2016). This means that even if we share the same race, ethnicity, and culture with someone, our lived experiences, perspectives, and worldviews can be completely different. It can be problematic and very divisive to simply clump people into one category or assume that their lived experiences are the same as those who share the same race, ethnicity, and culture. Personally, I do not feel like I've experienced systemic inequities or disadvantages due to my race, ethnicity, or culture. According to the privilege checklist, I do receive days off from work for holidays that matter to

me, like religious holidays. People know how to pronounce my name; I am never mocked or perceived as a threat because of my name. I understand that the police and other state authorities are there to protect me.

I can expect to see many students and professors of my race on campus especially living in a diverse city like NYC. I do not often have to think about my race or ethnicity--in fact, I don't really notice it. I do not have to worry about incarceration unless I commit a very serious crime. People do not assume I am unintelligent or lazy based on my race. I believe there have been attempts to scientifically or socially eliminate people of my race or ethnicity if we consider the history of abortion and eugenics, and it is still an ongoing issue today. I do believe that other people attribute my successes to my personal merit. My race or ethnicity will not make people around me uncomfortable. I do not have to worry about being chosen last for a job or housing due to my race or ethnicity. I can move into a new neighborhood, start a new job, or enter a new school or class and know that the people around me will generally respect and feel safe around me. I can go to a store or spend money knowing that no one will be suspicious of me. Lastly, I'd like to believe that I am seen as an individual; I am never held personally responsible for the actions of other people of my race or ethnicity. In my experience, I believe I've been negatively impacted the most by my own race, ethnicity, and culture compared to any other race, ethnicity, and culture I've encountered. I also don't think my race, ethnicity, or culture has necessarily given me an advantage or disadvantage. I believe, for the most part, it has been the choices I've made in my life and those around me and in my life that have placed me in a position to have an advantage or disadvantage in society.

My citizenship status has definitely played a significant role in my being able to have certain privileges in the U.S. I was born on the island of Puerto Rico (a territory of the U.S.) and

spent my first 5 years of life living there. The Nationality Act of 1940 established that Puerto Rico was a part of the United States for citizenship purposes (Venator-Santiago, 2020). This allowed Puerto Ricans to be considered citizens of the U.S. and allowed them to move and live in the United States freely and have full citizenship privileges despite being born in Puerto Rico. I am grateful to my parents, specifically my mother, for moving to Puerto Rico from her birth country (Dominican Republic) and to my dad, who married my mother in Puerto Rico and took me in as his own. If it weren't for them, I wouldn't have the privileges I could gain and exercise in the U.S. to this day. In the privilege checklist, I responded with a yes/true to every statement written regarding the privileges a person has because of their citizenship status. For example, I do not have to worry about applying for a job without a social security number. I know that I will be paid at least minimum wage at a job and that labor laws will protect me. If I am mistreated, or a crime is committed against me, I have some hope of being able to access legal recourse. I can vote in any election on policies or for people who will make laws affecting my way of life and my community. I do not have to worry that my citizenship status will make people around me uncomfortable. I can apply for scholarship aid to the institutions of higher education that are supported by my family's tax dollars and apply for student loans. Lastly, I don't have to worry daily about being "discovered" and deported along with or away from my family; I don't have to worry that a slight misstep could lead to my deportation, even if I currently have legal papers to be in the U.S.

When it comes to the privileges I have due to my sex assigned at birth, I do not feel guilty for having those privileges or necessarily think it is a privilege because it was not in my control. It feels completely normal to embrace the person God created me to be. However, I see how and why a person identifying as their biological makeup and sex at birth has become a privilege

today. This is the privilege that comes with having a gender identity (how one identifies and expresses oneself in gendered terms) that conforms to the gender identity that was assigned at birth and to societal and cultural expectations of such a gender identity (*Forms of privilege*, 2014). I think the main disadvantage of being a biological woman (cisgender) is the concerns I have for my safety especially living in NYC, where crime and random attacks/assaults on cisgendered women have increased since 2020. I feel that cis-gendered women are one of the most vulnerable groups of people in society. In addition, I think certain privileges are being taken away from cis-gendered women because we must conform to a new reality where men could be women and women could be men.

I would also argue that cis-gendered women can experience many disadvantages when it comes to the workforce. For example, they are not given adequate time for maternity leave, and they can experience discrimination or sexual harassment, the absence of enough time to care for their families, and the pressure they experience from work-related stress and conflict of interest. Gender privilege and sexual privilege could also be linked together. According to my responses in my privilege checklist, I would be considered privileged in the sense that I can live out and express my sexuality without being discriminated against or judged because I identify as a heterosexual female, which would align with my social/cultural/religious norms. When it comes to male/masculine privilege, I cannot identify with the privileges that a male would be able to experience because, biologically speaking, I am not a male and do not identify as one. I think there are obvious reasons why males have certain privileges compared to females and vice versa because of our biological makeup. However, I recognize that there are certain privileges that males have that females do not. Such as being sure they can enter public places without being sexually harassed, going on a date with someone new or feeling comfortable going somewhere

alone without fear of violence, and not having to worry at work about harassment from customers, coworkers, or bosses.

Ability privilege is described as being able-bodied and without mental disability or not being discriminated against for having certain mental/physical limitations. I think, for the most part, in our day and age culture and society, we have become more accepting and accommodating towards other people's disabilities. I have been diagnosed with testing anxiety. Although it has improved over the years, I am fortunate enough to live in a society where the department of education and higher education offers accommodations to students with certain disabilities that can impact their learning experiences and success in school. In my case, I have received extra time on exams and even sometimes extensions on assignments through obtaining an evaluation and a 504 plan from my therapist/primary care physician. And because of this, I had the privilege of receiving the accommodation and assistance needed to ensure my academic success and progress in school.

A linguistic privilege is a form of privilege where a person is born into a situation where they acquire a dominant and powerful language such as English. I was privileged enough to live in a country where I could easily learn English at a young age while also speaking Spanish at home. However, being bilingual was both a privilege and a challenge for me. It affected how I interacted with others socially, and it affected me during my first couple of years in preschool and elementary school. I remember having to take exams both in English and Spanish, and because my mother only understood and spoke Spanish, I was forced to learn a lot on my own in the English language, although I'm grateful for the ELL/ESL teachers that I had at the time. Growing up during my adolescent and teenage years, I also experienced being in positions where I'd have to be a translator for my mother wherever we went, which felt like a lot of pressure and

was exhausting and embarrassing at times. As I became old enough to start working, I saw the benefits of being bilingual when applying for certain jobs. I also feel like I can go anywhere and assume that I will be able to understand the things around me and communicate with the people around me, being that I speak and understand two dominant languages in the U.S.

While learning about all the different forms of privilege and going through my privilege checklist, I realized that people could be underprivileged in one way, even if they are privileged in another, and vice-versa. Privilege, discrimination, and social groups all operate within interrelated hierarchies of power, dominance, and exclusion (*Forms of privilege*, 2014). There are many distinct types of privilege, but no matter how groups are split, the privileged group is the one that is frequently used as the standard by which the others are assessed or contrasted, which it's seen to be "normal/usual."

References

Bethesda. (2016). *Understanding race and privilege*. National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). Retrieved December 17, 2022, from https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/diversity-and-social-justice/social-justice/understanding-race-and-privilege

Forms of privilege. MediaSmarts. (2014, August 20). Retrieved December 17, 2022, from https://mediasmarts.ca/diversity-media/privilege-media/forms-privilege

Miller, C., Fachilla, F., & Greene-Rooks, J. (2021, February 9). *Exploring class privilege in counselor education*. Counseling Today. Retrieved December 17, 2022, from https://ct.counseling.org/2021/02/exploring-class-privilege-in-counselor-education/#:~:text=Class%20privilege%20is%20generally%20defined,someone%20of%20higher%20class%20status.

Privilege Checklist - Social Justice Training - Google. https://sites.google.com/a/u.boisestate.edu/social-justice-training/about-us/our-training/privilege-checklist

Venator-Santiago, C. R. (2020). *Yes, Puerto Ricans are American citizens*. Encyclopædia Britannica. Retrieved December 17, 2022, from https://www.britannica.com/story/yes-puerto-ricans-are-americancitizens