

## *On Social Justice and the Development of Social Privilege*

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While the term “social justice” was coined within the Catholic Church, the idea has been around ever since humans have organized into communities. Western thinkers have pondered how to rectify the rights of the individual with the needs of society. Common themes in the realm of social justice include order, dignity, obligation, benefits, fairness, and the common good. The discourse of social justice usually centered on equality for the individual as a method of community cohesion. This led to the creation of laws, policies, institutions, and government structures that ensured basic rights and resources to all citizens.

Yet, the underbelly of social justice involved who constituted a valid individual within a social context. While the espoused principles sought equality and fair distribution of wealth and resource, there was a system of criteria to assess who was an endorsed member of society. Commonly, individuals who were culturally different, disabled, women, young, or old were excluded from societal benefit. Mechanisms of exclusion included religion, science, education, class, caste, and law. As societal wealth and economy developed, so did the stratification of class and hierarchies of access.

In recent times, social justice has begun to shift from ensuring the rights of the land-owning male citizen to considering those marginalized groups that have historically been excluded from consideration. These include women, children and the elderly, people of color, and LGBTQIA groups, just to name a few. Advocacy and awareness-building have developed into the prime focus with legal and governmental policy being the most common ways to pursue this form of equity. It acknowledges the consequence of oppression on the individual and seeks correction.

Social justice can be depicted as a coin with two sides. The side that receives most attention is oppression, the act and systemic condition that results in denying human and civil rights. While individual prejudice and interpersonal discrimination are symptoms of oppression, the mechanisms of exclusion can be considered the etiology.

The unexamined side of the social justice coin is that of social privilege. Social privilege can be defined as the unearned benefit and advantage at the cost of other people, based on social membership, usually ascribed by birth. In Western societies, the advantaged memberships include being born white, male, straight, and able-bodied. Privilege is like a gentle wind from behind, helping an individual float above barriers and difficulties in life.

The very nature of social privilege is that it is unaware and unrecognized by the individual. Awareness of privilege is usually possible only by contact with another without privilege. Once awareness occurs, it can directly threaten our shared values of meritocracy and an individual’s identity. The idea that part of our accomplishments is due to social factors, instead of our own hard work and determination, can undermine our very sense of self.

The field of psychology could be conceptualized as pursuing a form of restorative justice to heal those individuals who have been denied an equitable position in society. While psychology has led the effort to acknowledge the impact oppression has on individual behavior, the concept of social privilege has only recently appeared in the literature. The integrated study of both oppression and social privilege can result in more effective social justice.

Psychological studies recently have focused on the unmet needs of oppressed groups without acknowledging the corollary system of privilege that maintains the status quo of oppression (Helms, 2017). The recent University of Chicago (2017) GenForward bimonthly survey found some 50% of white millennials entering the workforce believe discrimination is as big a problem for White people as for people of color. This could be an outcome of educational curriculum that does not address mechanisms of social systems, or of teaching practices that do not challenge students' misconceptions about how systems of oppression operate on individuals and groups within society.

Several researchers in the fields of sociology, education, and psychology have attempted to address a lack of knowledge of systems of power and privilege (Case, 2013; Johnson, 2018; Kimmel & Ferber, 2018; Tatum, 1992). These authors have identified such gaps in understanding as core contributors to current systems of privilege and oppression.

We are part of a team of researchers with the explicit goal of conceptualizing a developmental model of social privilege awareness and action. One of our main questions includes what is the developmental process of persons who have experienced privilege in any domain of their social identity as they move among the roles of oppressor, bystander, ally, and privilege antagonist (Helms, 2017). Using domains from Hays' (2016) ADDRESSING model, informants were asked about their privilege. A grounded theory approach was utilized in analysis of qualitative interviews due to the dearth of knowledge on this topic (Bergkamp, 2010; Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2014).

Preliminary themes presented at the American Psychological Association's 2018 convention include Awareness by Comparison, Identity Protection, Agent Shame, Diffusion Confusion, and Immunity to Consequences. Awareness by Comparison highlights the most common pathway of privilege awareness, in which the individual reflects on their own social location in comparison to their family, friends, peers, and educators. Privilege awareness appears to threaten an individual's identity narrative, prompting protection efforts such as avoidance, intellectualization, or benevolent but uninformed action against perceived threats. As a result of these protection efforts, two different emotional reactions emerged from the data. The first is Agent Shame, in which the individual with socially privileged membership (e.g. male, straight, white) feels bad about who they are and how they cannot change their membership. The second is Diffusion Confusion, in which an individual with both privileged and unprivileged (e.g. female, LGBT, person of color) memberships experiences confusion regarding their internal identity narrative. Lastly, some individuals are able to articulate an understanding that due to their privileged

social memberships, they are protected and immune to some difficulties that others who are unprivileged face every day.

We intend to build on previous models of identity development such as Bennett's (1986) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity and Helms' (1984) Model of White Racial Identity Development, incorporating these concepts into a psychological model of privilege awareness. We hope to uncover aspects of individual development related to self-awareness of privilege that may inform the education and training of psychologists at all levels working for social justice. We believe a developmental model of privilege awareness may support culturally competent professional practice in psychology, in the name of social justice.

## *On Organizing a Formerly Incarcerated College Graduates Network*

Christopher Beasley

As a formerly incarcerated assistant professor, I can attest to the importance of higher education for formerly incarcerated people. Higher education provided me an opportunity to learn more about society and opportunities to have a meaningful life through legal activities. It helped me develop an alternative to the life I had been living. Although I've certainly accomplished a lot in life so far, I realize the immense privilege I've had though—a parent to stay with, an uncle who talked me into attending college, a Dad who would drive me to school and back, and pink skin that diffused some of the threat perception. I firmly believe that, in the words of President Kennedy as inspired by Luke 12:48, "For of those to whom much is given, much is required." Therefore, I've made it my life's mission to build structural supports for other formerly incarcerated people to attend and excel in college. What is described below is an example of how I've done so using community psychology practices, principles, and concepts.

When I was an undergraduate student, I thought that it was somewhat rare for a person to go to college after prison. In fact, I didn't know if anyone other than me had done so. I just hadn't heard of anyone who had followed that path. One of the most striking experiences was when I met four other formerly incarcerated people in graduate school—all of whom went on to earn doctoral degrees. It transformed my beliefs about formerly incarcerated people and what we are capable of. It also provided an identity-based sense of community I had been lacking. This community provided social support and was also a source of social capital. It also provided a source of mentors and role models. Seeing the value in this group of formerly incarcerated people, I decided to work with a local organization on a class project to develop the Returning Student Support Group (RSS-G)—a mutual-help group to support people transitioning from prisons to colleges and universities in Chicago.

This group later morphed into the national Formerly Incarcerated College Graduates Network (FICGN). It was developed as a response to a challenge finding formerly