

Privilege Beads

Materials

- Privilege Lists
- 9 Color varieties of pony/craft beads
- Small bowls or cups to hold beads
- Small cups for each participant
- Cord or twine for stringing beads

Setup

1. Create 9 bead stations around the room, spacing them so that multiple participants can stand at each station
2. Place one or two bowls of beads at each station. Each station should have a different color bead.
3. Post 2-3 copies of each privilege list at each station so that several participants can read them.
- 4 Explain the purpose of the exercise. Suggested talking points:
 - We're going to explore our privilege as related to various social identities. Privilege refers to ways that individuals or groups can enjoy advantages based on their real or perceived membership in identity categories (race, gender, sexuality, etc.)
 - This exercise is not meant to make anyone feel guilty or ashamed of having or not having privilege, but rather to explore how we ALL have SOME privilege, and therefore to also explore how to engage that aspect of our life.
 - We believe it is critical for everyone to reflect on privilege in this way in order to use our individual and collective privilege(s) for equity and social justice.
 - Focus only on your experience.
5. Provide each participant with a cup for their beads.
6. Point out stations around the room and provide instructions:
 - Each station includes a list of 8 statements related to a specific social identity.
 - Each statement describes one possible example of privilege related to that category's system of oppression and privilege.

- Note that neither the stations nor the statements are meant to be exhaustive or comprehensive; these are meant to be a sampling, and a starting point for discussion given our limited time together today.
- You might think of other categories that could be included, or you might contest some of the items. Please do not over-analyze the statements: our goal is to begin reflection and discussion. If you can quickly answer “basically yes,” take the bead. If your answer is “basically no,” do not take a bead.
- Also note that each list is meant to focus on your current status in life, which may mean that you haven’t always enjoyed the privileges that you can identify today, or that you may have less privilege in a category than you once did.
- Please visit each station, and read every item on each list. As you read a list, for every item on the list to which you can answer, “Yes,” take one bead. If your answer to an item on a list is “No,” do not take a bead. As you read each item, know that while some persons in the room may be taking a bead, others may not be. Do this for each list. When you are finished with every list, you will have a set of beads that represent your composite of privileges.
- Ask if anyone has questions.

7. Once given instructions, invite participants to circulate among the stations.

8. As participants finish collecting beads, provide them with a length of string/cord, and invite them to make some kind of jewelry/accessory for themselves with their beads (e.g., bracelet, necklace, headband, anklet). However, let them know that this is optional, and that they do not have to use all of their beads if they decide to make an accessory.

Discussion Questions

Invite participants to reflect on what it was like to focus on privilege and advantage, rather than on oppression or disadvantage as we often do in diversity activities. Was it a new experience? Comfortable? Enlightening? How did it feel (actual emotion words!)?

Why is it important for us to be aware of privilege as an aspect of our identities/experience? Why don’t we (have to) attend to it on a regular basis?

What does it mean for us to have multiple, intersecting identities—where we experience some privileges (around some identities) AND some oppression (around others)? What insight can this give us in connecting with others? Being patient/generous with them and ourselves? Holding ourselves and others responsible for our actions? Being allies or advocates?

What identities (systems of privilege) were not represented here today? If we had them how would that affect your collection of beads?

We asked you to turn your beads into something wearable. What would it mean for you to wear this noticeably for the rest of the day? What messages could others take from your set of beads? How noticeable, to us and others, are our privileges on a daily basis? Can we and how do we hide (deny, justify, ignore) our privilege on a daily basis?

What does the collective privilege present here mean for us as individual leaders? In collaboration at our workplaces, campuses, or communities?

Our bead selection today was based on our current experience – here (in USA, at college, etc.) and now (today), not on where we, our families or others of our identity group have been. Some identities and privileges can and do change over time, for “better” or “worse”; but we are discussing the present, not the past.



www.IowaSafeSchools.org

Questions about this resource?
Email GSAs@iowasafeschools.org



Sexuality Privilege

1. I can be pretty sure that my coworkers or classmates will be comfortable with my sexual orientation.
2. When I talk about my heterosexuality (such as in a joke or talking about my relationship), I will not be accused of pushing my sexual orientation onto others.
3. I can go home from most meetings, classes, and conversations without feeling excluded, fearful, attacked, isolated, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, stereotyped or feared because of my sexual orientation.
4. People don't ask what I made the choice of sexual orientation.
5. No one will ever questions whether or not it is appropriate for me to have children or get married because of my sexual orientation.
6. I can easily find a religious community that will not exclude me for being heterosexual.
7. I can walk in public with my significant other and not have people double-take or stare.
8. I will be able to sit at my partners death bed.

Ability Privilege

1. If I need to move, I can easily be assured that the school I will be attending is easily accessible.
2. I have never been taunted, teased, or ostracized due to a disability.
3. I do not have to worry where the curb cuts are located or if I do not know what a curb cut is.
4. I can assume that I will easily have access to any building.
5. I can perform daily tasks and not have people ask me how I complete those tasks with my ability status.
6. I can sit anywhere I want in the classroom and still be able to see and write comfortably.
7. I never have to worry about having an interpreter present in my classes or events that I attend.
8. I can easily complete a test without asking for special accommodations from a teacher.

Gender/Sex Privilege

1. I do not worry about walking alone at night.
2. If I choose not to have children, my gender will not be called into question.
3. I do not have to consider my physical safety when you accept a date.
4. I can complain about something without being told you are too emotional or asked if it is that time of the month.
5. I can have multiple sexual experiences and be patted on the back and not called derogatory names.
6. If I have children and a career, no one will think I'm selfish for not staying home.
7. My elected representatives are mostly people of my own sex.
8. When I ask to see "the person in charge," odds are I will face a person of my own sex.

Race Privilege

1. I can choose blemish cover or bandages in “flesh” color and have them more or less match my skin.
2. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assure that I will not be followed or harassed.
3. I can be sure that if I ask to talk to “the person in charge,” I will be facing a person of my race.
4. If a police officer pulls me over, I can be sure I haven’t been singled out because of my race.
5. I can choose public accommodations without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.
6. When I am told about our national heritages in the U.S.) or about “civilization,” I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
7. I can enroll in a class at school and be sure that the majority of my teachers will be of my race.
8. I can easily buy posters, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and magazines featuring people of my race.

Religious Privilege

1. My school is closed on my major religious holidays.
2. I can openly talk about my religious practices without concern for how it will be received by others.
3. When people find out my faith beliefs, I am not bombarded with questions about why I subscribe to that religion.
4. I probably do not need to learn the religious or spiritual customs of others, and I am likely not penalized for not knowing them.
5. I can travel without others assuming that I put them at risk because of my religion; nor will my religion put me at risk from others when I travel.
6. My citizenship and immigration status will likely not be questioned, and my background will likely not be investigated because of my religion.
7. I can openly display religious symbols on my body (dress, accessories, etc.) without people staring or asking questions.
8. I can easily find a place of worship in my town that aligns with my beliefs.

Class Privilege

- 1. Where I go to college is not dependent on my financial aid package.**
- 2. I have health insurance.**
- 3. My family owned a home that I grew up in.**
- 4. I am reasonably sure that I or my family will not have to skip meals because we can't afford to eat.**
- 5. I have taken a vacation outside the country within the past three years.**
- 6. I have never been homeless or evicted from my place of living.**
- 7. I never have to worry about being able to afford medication for myself or my family.**
- 8. The neighborhood I live in is relatively free of obvious drug use, prostitution, and violent crime.**

Nationality/Citizenship Privilege (U.S)

- 1. If I apply for a job, my legal right to work in this country probably will not be questioned.**
- 2. I will never be denied housing in the U.S. due to my citizenship.**
- 3. I can go into any bank and set up a checking account without fear of discrimination.**
- 4. I can be reasonably sure that if I need legal or medical assistance, my citizenship status will not matter.**
- 5. I do not fear that my employer will threaten me with deportation.**
- 6. If I wanted to, I could travel freely to almost any country and be admitted back into the U.S.**
- 7. If I were a victim of a crime, I wouldn't think twice about seeking police assistance due to my citizenship status.**
- 8. I am not afraid of my family or friends being deported or arrested due to their immigration status.**

Random Privilege

1. I did not have to “come out” to my family, friends, and/or others.
2. My dietary needs are met at most public locations.
3. My first language is spoken in most places I go.
4. I do not have to worry if there will be enough room for me in a car, airplane, amusement park ride, or theater seats.
5. I can sit at almost any desk in a classroom and still be able to write comfortably.
6. Both or my parents are still alive.
7. I can find clothes that fit my body type in most department stores.
8. Members of my family have never been incarcerated.

Mental Health Privilege

1. When I am/was in school, I do/did not need deadline extensions, alternate assignments, or other accommodations due to my mental health.
2. When I am at work, I do not have to keep silent about my mental health for fear of losing my job.
3. When I go to a social event, I do not have to worry about potential triggers or prepare a contingency plan for what happens if I am put in a state of being unable to function.
4. I can leave the house any time I am physically up for it, without having to consider the effects of my mental health.
5. If I feel an emotion daily or near-daily, I can be sure that most of the people I know will understand that emotion.
6. I do not have to worry that if my house is messy, people will take it as a sign that I should be locked up or have my legal rights taken away.
7. I do not have to avoid things I like doing because I do not have the mental energy for them.
8. I have never been hospitalized due to my mental state.