

Introduction:

Peggy McIntosh's "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" was originally published in the July/August, 1989 edition of *Peace and Freedom Magazine* and has since been shared widely and used by educators in a variety of contexts. It is cited as a groundbreaking and foundational article/teaching tool on bias and white privilege.

In this activity, participants will engage with "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" by discussing concepts like systemic oppression, privilege, and power and reflecting on the ways in which they are both advantaged and disadvantaged in society.

Note: This activity may bring up difficult and uncomfortable feelings for many participants. Per the advice of McIntosh herself, the facilitator should tell participants that the purpose of this activity is not to blame, shame, or guilt anyone. Additionally, the facilitator should caution that McIntosh's list of privileges are not generalizable and may not resonate with everyone.

Materials:

Copies of the article "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" (from the National SEED Project—see citation below), a whiteboard or chalkboard, pens/pencils and paper for each participant.

Group Size:

This activity works best in small groups.

Instructions for the Facilitator:

1. Hand out copies of the article and give participants ample time to carefully read through it. The facilitator may encourage them to highlight anything that stands out to them, or take notes on what they feel are important points.
2. After participants have finished reading, the facilitator should debrief with the following questions:
 - What does the word systemic mean?
 - How can we think about society as a system rather than a collection of individuals?
 - What does it mean to be privileged within in a society? What does it mean to be disadvantaged?
 - What is the relationship between privilege and power?
 - How does McIntosh define white privilege? In what ways is she privileged as a white woman?
 - McIntosh says that people from the U.S. (white people in particular) have trouble seeing society as a system because of the "myth of meritocracy." What is a meritocracy? Why do you think this myth of meritocracy has so much influence in the United States?

If participants are having difficulty with any of the questions, the facilitator may need to intervene and provide their insights. The facilitator should also once again emphasize that McIntosh's list of privileges come from her own experiences and cannot be generalized across all white people.

3. Next, have participants generate a list of ways, besides whiteness, where one can be privileged. The examples that McIntosh provides include:
 - Sexual orientation
 - Class
 - Region
 - Religion
 - Gender
 - Gender Identity
 - Employment
 - Physical ability
 - Language
 - Nation of Origin
 - Ethnicity
4. Then, ask participants to make their own list of privileges based on their identities and life experiences. Encourage them to model McIntosh's list in form, but personalize each item to their own experiences. Also encourage them to consider more than one aspect of their identity, e.g. not only whiteness but also gender, class, physical ability, etc.
5. McIntosh says that she began considering her white privilege after she thought her disadvantages in relation to the privileges bestowed to men. Therefore, ask participants to list the ways in which they've experienced unearned disadvantage in their lives. This question should also be approached from more than one aspect of their identity.
6. Participants should then share their lists with a partner. As they are sharing, they should discuss the following:
 - How are their lists similar? How are they different?
 - Is there anything about their partner's list that surprised them, or did it bring up something that they hadn't thought of before?
 - Now that they have heard their partner's lists, is there anything that they would now add to their privileges or disadvantages list?
7. Conclude the activity by debriefing the entire group with the following questions:
 - What did you learn about systemic privilege today? Is there anything that came up that surprised you?
 - Is there anything new that you learned about yourself? How will you use your lists of privileges and advantages moving forward?
 - What are some ways in which we can use our privilege to help end systemic oppression?