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Mapping Graduate Social Work Student Learning Journeys about Heterosexual Privilege

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Abstract

Using qualitative data from student web logs (blogs) written as part of the requirements for a graduate social work course addressing issues of privilege, this study examines the learning journey trajectory that emerged for the students and facilitator participating in single-identity caucus examining heterosexual privilege. What emerges is a five-stage learning journey that spans the *resistance* and *redefinition* phases of social identity development. Additionally, the study includes reflections on the impact of the course on students' lives and social work practice that were gathered approximately six months after students had completed the course.

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Introduction

In the last couple of decades there has been increasing attention from the academic community on issues of privilege (Manglitz, 2003). This has included examinations of white privilege (Dobbins & Skillings, 2000; Pewewardy, 2007; Pewewardy & Severson, 2003; Rodriguez, 2000), male privilege (Anderson & Accomando, 2002; Calasanti & Slevin, 2001; Farough, 2003), and to a lesser extent, heterosexual (DiAngelo, 1997; van Every, 1995), Christian (Blumenfeld, 2006; Clark & Brimhall-Vargas, 2003; Schlosser, 2003), and social class privilege (Abramovitz, 2001; Kivel, 2004). Much of this work has centered on defining and outlining how various forms of privilege function as part of systems of inequality. More recently, however, a few scholars and educators have turned their attention to examining how to teach about issues of privilege.

This study explores the learning journeys of graduate social work students enrolled in a course about privilege that was held during the spring 2007 academic quarter. The data were taken from a number of sources including web logs (blogs) that were maintained by the students as part of the course requirements, the teaching journal maintained by the caucus facilitator, and reflections on the impact of the course written six months after the course had ended. From these data, themes emerged that indicated a fairly consistent learning trajectory.

In the next section, we briefly examine the literature on teaching about issues of privilege, followed by a description of the pedagogical components of the course, and then an outline of the methodology of the study. We then turn our attention to the learning journey that emerged from the data, the students' reflections on the impact of the course, and end with a discussion of the implications for social work education and future research.

Importance of Teaching about Privilege

Teaching solely for multicultural awareness falls short of the social work educational goal of cultural competence (Allen, 1995; Weiler, 1988). As multicultural and anti-oppression scholars have argued, discussions of diversity and traditionally marginalized populations are not the same as addressing issues of power, privilege, and oppression that are central to maintaining systems of inequality (Goodman, 2001; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998; Longres & Scanlon, 2001; Nicotera & Walls, in press; Razack, 2002). Failure to address these issues not only misses the mark, but further serves to reinforce oppressive systems of stratification (Miller, Donner, & Fraser, 2004).

Educating specifically about issues of privilege is central to teaching students to address structural inequities, and to attenuate the negative impact of privilege on marginalized communities (Holody, 1998; Swenson, 1998; Swigonski, 1996). Privilege – the system of unearned advantages enjoyed by members of certain social groups based solely on their membership in those groups (McIntosh, 1993) – “gives some people the freedom to be thoughtless at best, and murderous at worst” (Bailey, 2004, p. 308). If social work educators are to engage in transformative education toward the goal of social justice (Banks, 2003), they must help students come to see not only active and overt forms of oppression, but also the “embedded forms that members of the dominant group are taught not to see” (McIntosh, 1993, p. 37). Breaking through this “historical amnesia” (Lorde, 1984) can transform the way that students think about, talk about, and act upon cultural differences (Allen, 1995; Allen & Baber, 1992; Fonow & Cook, 1991).

Educating social work students on the dynamics of privilege and oppression helps them to understand the connection between their personal identities and broader contextual and structural issues (Parker, 2003). It assists them in struggling with important questions such as, “How can I as a social worker challenge systems of oppression and privilege while embedded in these systems?”

Or, “What systems of oppression do my agency and I maintain and perpetuate in the way in which we structure our services and engage in the practice of social work?”

Providing this education not only empowers and educates social work students to become advocates on a policy level, but also lies at the very center of the therapeutic process (Parker, 2003; Swenson, 1998). Failure to address such issues in clinical work negatively impacts the therapeutic process and leave clients feeling invalidated (Carter, 1995; Helms & Cook, 1999; Ridley, 1995), while at the same time maintaining the status quo. Students need to struggle with questions such as, “How do my privileged identities impact my interactions with clients and coworkers?” Or, “What role does privilege and oppression play in the issues that my clients bring to the table?”

Unfortunately, social work education has not done a good job of addressing issues of power and oppression in the curriculum or in practice (Allen-Meares, et al., 2000; Almedia, R., Dolan Del Vecchio, K., & Parker, L., 2008; Etiony, 2007; Frey, 2000; Tamasese, K., & Waldegrave, C., 1993; Teasley, 2005; Vodde, 2001; Weaver, 2004), leaving graduating social workers confused about how and when to address these issues with clients (Miller et al., 2004). This failure can also be seen in the avoidance of difficult conversations on cultural differences among colleagues, and in the way in which issues of power are managed in social work organizations. If social workers – who have a shared value base, a common disciplinary vernacular, and educational privilege – are unable to successfully discuss these issues *among* themselves, it is a sure sign that these issues are not being handled well in the therapeutic relationship with clients (Miller et al., 2004). At what cost are these issues not addressed in the field of social work? Who does it benefit when we fail to address them?

If addressing issues of power, privilege, and oppression are central to a quality social work education, to therapeutic relationships with clients, and to the effective functioning of social work organizations, why then has the discipline not adequately integrated this content into the curriculum? It is to this question to which we now turn our attention.

Teaching about Power, Oppression, and Privilege

Teaching about issues of power, oppression, and privilege is difficult (hooks, 1994), particularly given that educators are embedded in and benefit from interlocking systems of privilege and oppression within the academy (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Hu-DeHart, 2000; Iverson, 2007). The existing literature has outlined numerous ways in which classroom conversations on these topics can quickly escalate and become problematic. Discussions about social identities are challenging and increase the potential for misunderstandings between members of marginalized and privileged groups (Miller et al., 2004). They may leave students (and instructors) feeling alone, alienated, and attacked (Stone, Patton, & Heen, 1999). Privileged group members are frequently shocked to hear the extent of oppression in the daily lived experiences of marginalized social group members (Miller et al., 2004). As a result, they may become defensive and invalidate the lived experiences of marginalized classroom members, or they may experience significant cognitive dissonance as they recognize how their privilege is intertwined with the oppression of others (Miller & Schamass, 2000). Because many privileged group members do not see themselves as having power and privilege in their lived experiences (Goodman, 2001; Johnson, 2005), and because denial of the existence of privilege is one way in which privilege functions to perpetuate itself (Allen, 1995; McIntosh, 1993), anger and defensiveness and other strong affective responses are not uncommon (Miller et al., 2004; Stone et al., 1999). Additionally, some students (and instructors) may be resistant to the critical self-reflection and analyses that is required for this type of educational process (Mildred & Zuniga, 2004), wanting rather to stay in the safe world of disembodied and decontextualized content.

Education on privilege and power is further complicated by some aspects of the social work identity. Social work students may feel that the decision to become a social worker is, in and of itself, evidence of their commitment to challenge injustice and their 'sacrifice' to making the world

a more just place. They may be resistant to examining the role the discipline has played in perpetuating stratification and the way in which individual social workers can reinforce oppressive and privileged norms (Kivel, 2004; Margolin, 1998; Mullaly, 2006; Specht & Courtney, 1994).

Social work students occupy multiple social locations at once – some of which are privileged and others of which are oppressed (Miller et al., 2004). They may claim that having oppressed identities means that they do not benefit from their privileged identities (Goodman, 2001). Students may be at very different places in their social identity development from one another (Goodman, 2001), requiring the instructor to manage the intricacy of different developmental processes at the same time (Miller et al., 2004). Similarly, students may be at different places in their social identity development on different identity issues *within* themselves. A white, female student, for example, may be quite astute and advanced in her understanding and integration of gender, while she may – at the same time – be completely oblivious to issues surrounding her whiteness.

Instructors also occupy complex and shifting social locations. To successfully work with students on these issues, instructors must interrogate their own privileged (and oppressed) identities (Crumpacker & Vander Haegen, 1987; Fonow & Marty, 1991; McIntosh, 1993). Instructor's failure to recognize and critique how their own social location impacts their teaching practices can play a significant role in alienating students and making the instructor much less effective (Eyre, 1993).

Course Description

The idea for the development of the course was inspired by a presentation about a program of the Office of Women's Programs and Studies at Colorado State University that worked to engage men as allies to end sexual assault against women (Barone & Linder, 2006). Using research on bystander intervention, the program supports undergraduate men in a year-long conversation about gender stratification, male privilege, and the ways in which men's failure to intervene and challenge

other men around aggressive behaviors toward women plays a role in the existence of rape. The presentation spurred the primary instructor of the course into considering how to structure a course whereby social work graduate students from privileged groups identified and addressed the barriers to ally action in their own model of social work practice. After consultation with members of the university's center on multiculturalism, the dean of the school, and the faculty committee on multiculturalism, a draft syllabus was developed and presented to the curriculum committee for approval as an experimental course. The course was approved and offered in spring quarter of 2007.

Pedagogical Decisions

Addressing the challenges outlined in the literature regarding issues that arise when teaching about privilege required intentionality about the pedagogy of the course. In this section we briefly sketch the various components of the course and the structural concerns they were meant to address. (For more detail on the pedagogy of the course, see Walls, Roll, Griffin, & Sprague, 2007).

The decision was made to use both single-identity group caucusing and intergroup dialogue. One hour per week of class time was allotted for caucusing and two hours per week of class time were allocated for 'cross-privilege' dialogue in the classroom. Caucusing was organized around various privileged identities on which students wanted to focus, and caucuses were facilitated by co-instructors who shared the identity and were committed to being on the learning journey with the students. To coordinate these logistics meant that students had to indicate upon which privileged status they would focus prior to the beginning of the course so that appropriate facilitators could be recruited. As such, students were required to apply for enrollment into the course by writing a brief essay on privilege and how it manifested in their lives, indicating and ranking up to three privileged statuses they would be willing to work during the course. The essays were read by a committee of four faculty and staff members and 18 students were selected from the 22 students who applied. The single-identity privilege caucuses created a small group atmosphere where students could support

one another in focusing on a particular privileged identity and provided a more intimate connection whereby challenging one another could also occur.

The two hours per week of class time devoted to ‘cross-privilege dialogue’ were structured to avoid some of the inherent pitfalls that can emerge with the typical model of intergroup dialogues. Because time in this segment of the class was to be spent consciously foregrounding a privileged identity, the goal was for the discussions to occur from privileged identity to privileged identity rather than the more typical model whereby marginalized group members educate privileged group members about their experiences of marginalization. For example, in the typical intergroup dialogue model, gay and lesbian individuals would talk about their experiences of living in a heterosexist world as a way of increasing heterosexuals’ awareness about the oppression of lesbian women and gay men. In the model we attempted, however, heterosexual people (of all colors and genders) would attempt to dialogue about their experience of heterosexual privilege with those who experienced male privilege (of all colors and sexual orientations), and vice versa, so that both groups could better understand the shape, look, and function of privilege in the world. The difficulty of course in this model, continuing with this particular example, is for the gay male involved to stay in the space where he is foregrounding his male privilege during the dialogue as he may witness heterosexuals exploring some aspect of their heterosexual privilege that triggers a shift into his marginalized identity. Likewise, it might be difficult for the heterosexual women to stay in her privileged identity as a heterosexual when she hears men discussing an aspect of their male privilege that is painful to hear as a woman. This intentionality of embodying privileged identities was not meant, in any way, to deny the importance of marginalized identities in the lives of those involved in the course. Rather, by struggling to intentionally occupy privileged spaces, the goal was to eliminate the convenient escape path that occurs often in groups working on issues of oppression – the pull to move into one of our marginalized identities as a way to distance from members of our

privileged group, and to deny or decrease the potency of our privilege and its impact on oppressed others.

One particularly illustrative example of growth for the class around this struggle occurred during an experiential exercise early in the course where each privilege caucus had to develop a vision statement about their caucus' work for the quarter, and then share this with the class as a whole. The white privilege caucus used the term 'solidarity' in their mission statement and when they presented it to the class as a whole, two persons of color in the class were triggered regarding the meaning and history of that particular term in the context of racism. This led the class through a process whereby the reactions of the two community members of color were validated and unpacked, leading both individuals to recognize that their reactions had emerged from the occupation of their marginalized identities as people of color, not from their privileged identities as heterosexuals which they were trying to consciously occupy. The experience provided the class with a good example of the ease with which most of us move into our marginalized identities, but also illustrated the pervasiveness of white privilege in our everyday interactions – even those meant to be in service of becoming a better ally. In this case, white privilege was operating at the level of the white privilege caucus given that there was a lack of awareness in the caucus regarding the history and potential meaning of the term 'solidarity' to persons of color. Additionally, it was functioning at the level of the class as a whole when white class members outside of the white privilege caucus failed to challenge the white privilege caucus' use of the word, illustrating either their lack of awareness or their unwillingness to take the risk and question the use of the term if they were aware. Processes such as these occurred throughout the class and were the primary vehicle through which the embodiment of privilege in everyday life was examined.

As part of the assignments for the class, students were required to make at least one entry per week in a blog that was maintained in an online course management software program. The

blog was private and could only be accessed by the student and their caucus facilitator. Students were given wide latitude in how they might use their blogs to best support their educational process. In addition to the required individual blogs, caucus blogs (which could be read by any member of their caucus) and a course blog (which was open to everyone involved in the course) were also set up and used by the class members.

The use of blogging in the course addressed a number of issues. First, it was hoped that students would find the blogs a helpful extension of the classroom experience whereby they could engage in private self-reflection. Second, blogging was provided as a support to introverted students who might feel less comfortable speaking up in class. These students could request feedback from their caucus facilitator or from their classmates in a manner that was more comfortable for them. Third, it was hoped that students would reflect on their struggles foregrounding their privileged identity as a way to increase their critical self-reflexivity, providing an opportunity for the caucus facilitators to provide feedback and ideas to help the student with these struggles. Fourth, by developing individualized relationships between students and facilitators through the blogs, it was anticipated that the power difference between the two roles would be decreased. In addition, the blogs provided an opportunity for the facilitators to see into the more private world of the student's processes so that early intervention could be undertaken should a potential problem arise with one of the students or among caucus members. Finally, the caucus- and course-level blogs created a collaborative space in which students could share resources, information about upcoming events, and social justice opportunities to further their personal and professional development.

Based on the student applications for enrollment in the course, three caucuses emerged: a heterosexual privilege caucus, a social class privilege caucus, and a white privilege caucus. To support the caucuses, three co-instructors were hired to facilitate them. This resulted in a team of four co-instructors, each of whom occupied very different social locations: (a) a white, gay male

tenure-track assistant professor who was raised in a working class background; (b) a heterosexual women of color who was a PhD student in the Human Communication department who was raised in a working class background; (c) a white heterosexual women from an upper class background who was a PhD student at GSSW; and (d) a white lesbian woman from a working class background who was a community-based social worker and an adjunct faculty member. The team met a few times prior to the course and talked about the philosophy of the class, its experimental nature, the willingness of each member of the teaching team to be ‘on the journey’ with the students, and the vulnerability this model of teaching entailed. The team agreed to attempt to model cross-difference leadership that incorporated both supporting and challenging one another in a manner that was transparent for the class. This might mean engaging in discussions in front of the class about strategies to intervene in the class process, about personal reactions to what was happening in the moment in class, and about the experience of being challenged to address personal issues of privilege. In addition to modeling, the hope in adopting this transparent mode of co-teaching was to decrease the power difference between the instructors and students.

While course activities were planned in advance, the co-instructors were explicit from the beginning that the class could take whatever direction the class members felt would be most beneficial for their learning journeys. As such, activities planned for a class could be abandoned if the students were in the middle of processing an experience that seemed particularly beneficial. This did, at times, result in class members (and co-instructors) feeling ‘stuck’ about what direction to take, and required class time to move through the process.

Communication between the course co-instructors was frequent. De-briefing meetings were held immediately after class during which the co-instructors discussed the dynamics of the class, made decisions on how to intervene with particular students, and discussed the class’ next steps in the process. Additionally, there were frequent phone calls, office visits, and emails among the four

co-instructors as processing on the class needed attention. At times, the process resulted in emails being sent to all students in the class, visits with individual students by one or more of the co-instructors, or postings to the class or caucus blogs.

Finally to support the costs of the pedagogical structure of the course, funding was sought from various entities on campus.¹ Engaging these campus entities in supporting the course not only provided financial resources for stipends for the facilitators, books for the students, and funds to support students' final projects, but also enabled the course to cover all the costs for food, lodging, travel, and registration to the White Privilege Conference which was held in the middle of the quarter in which the class was scheduled. Additionally, having resources from these various sources on campus, provided additional backing and legitimacy to the course.

Research Question

While some scholars and educators have written about their process of uncovering and exploring heterosexual privilege in their own lives (Cashwell, 2005; Sommer, Weatherman & Cox, 2005), little research exists that gives voice to the student experience of learning about heterosexual privilege. As such, the primary research question guiding this exploratory study was, What themes emerge in the learning journeys of graduate social work students engaged in an educational process focused on exploring heterosexual privilege?

Research Design

Because little has been written on student learning journeys regarding heterosexual privilege, an exploratory research method design was necessary to begin to understand the processes involved in this experience in graduate social work education. The study uses grounded theory as a paradigm through which to interpret student experiences as a conduit to theorize about

¹ Funding and support for the experimental course were provided by the Graduate School of Social Work, the DU Campus Climate Council, the DU Latino Center for Civic Engagement and Scholarship, the Center for Teaching and Learning, and the Curriculum Diversity Fund of the DU Center for Multicultural Excellence.

what this educational process may entail (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The inductive nature of grounded theory provides a structured process for constructing theories that are established from the data collected (Strauss & Crobin, 1990). The data were reviewed to identify common themes across participant experiences which were then extracted and presented to the study's participants through a member-checking process to insure that emergent constructs reflected the participants' experiences. Data analyses of the blogs were conducted solely by the lead author of the paper, who had not previously read or responded to the individual blogs as part of his responsibilities during the administration of the class. The heterosexual privilege caucus facilitator and the students from the caucus reviewed and commented on the themes that emerged from the data only after they had been extracted. No *a priori* assumptions were made about what themes might emerge, nor were there any *a priori* expectations that the emergent themes would document a learning trajectory.

Participants

Participants in this study include six graduate-level social work students and the heterosexual privilege caucus facilitator who was a doctoral student in the Human Communication department, all of whom are co-authors of this paper.² One of the students was a first-year student, while the remaining five were second-year students in their final quarter of graduate school. One student was male, the rest identified as female. Two students (and the caucus facilitator) identified as people of color, while the remaining four students identified as white. Five of the students and the caucus facilitator identified as heterosexual, while one student identified as pansexual, but was currently in a long-term opposite sex relationship whereby she experienced heterosexual privilege.

² While there were twelve other students and two other caucus facilitators involved in the course, no data from their blogs were examined as this paper focuses solely on themes regarding heterosexual privilege, and they were involved in caucuses focusing on white and social class privilege.

Data Collection

Primary data for the study was collected from individual blogs kept as part of the course requirements by the students in the heterosexual privilege caucus, the heterosexual privilege caucus blog, and the teaching journal of the heterosexual privilege caucus facilitator. Excerpts from reflections on the impact of the class included in this paper were written by the heterosexual privilege caucus student members and facilitator six months after the course had ended.

Data Analyses

Triangulation of data contributes to the soundness of findings in qualitative studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). As such, data from individual blogs were examined and cross-referenced with themes that emerged from the heterosexual privilege caucus blog as well as with the teaching journal of the caucus facilitator. Based on immersion in the data and multiple readings over time, themes were extracted from the data.

Findings

Five primary themes emerged from the data as the students and facilitator explored their day-to-day embodiment of heterosexual privilege. While not expected at the onset of the data analyses, these themes roughly represent a trajectory of development that emerged as the class experience unfolded. As with most group processes, students were not always in the same stage of development at the same time, and while generally in the same temporal order, the process should not be misconstrued as being strictly linear. While the purpose of qualitative research is not generalizability, the reader should be reminded that the student learning journeys regarding issues of privilege found within these data may not necessarily represent a typical learning pattern. It is only with replication that the consistency and reliability of the emergent model can be ascertained (Godinet, 1998).

Stage 1: I'm Afraid of What I've Yet to Realize

Early in the class experience, student blogs centered around experiences of trepidation and anxiety about a number of issues. They were concerned that they would not be able to see and uncover heterosexual privilege in their lives. These fears and anxieties were not a denial of the existence of heterosexism or heterosexual privilege, but rather more focused on their performance as heterosexual allies. This theme was clearly communicated in the individual blogs of students.

...how has my 'sexuality blindness' (is there a better way to put this?) been a disservice to social justice? Has it just made me complicit?

I feel like I can only see the tip of the iceberg of my mindlessness and the mindlessness of our culture in regards to heterosexism. I can see a glimpse of the magnitude of heterosexual privilege and GLBQ oppression, but it is very murky and far off.

By the end [of the class] I would like to understand more about the privileges that are out there, particularly the ones that I have and do not pay as much (or any) attention to.

I had a dream last night that really freaked me out. It was about our class: we were on our way to class, which was held in a different building through a war zone with tanks and landmines. As the students in the class got closer to the building, I started making very heterosexist remarks. I can't remember what the comments were, but I remember making these comments in front of people who identify themselves as gay or lesbian with whom I am close. I woke up feeling like I needed to make amends to all my friends about those comments...I have interpreted it to mean that I may have amends to make for my lack of awareness and action with regard to my heterosexual privilege.

As I sit down to write this blog, I am struck by the fact that I can't think of much to actually write about. I haven't seen as many examples of heterosexism or homophobia. I also haven't seen ways to challenge or be a better ally. What this tells me, is that I haven't been paying enough attention.

In addition to appearing in the individual caucus member blogs, this theme also emerged in the caucus-level blog in discussions among caucus members.

I feel stuck in this spot with heterosexual privilege where I can only see what has already been identified for me...privileges associated with marriage, safety, and public affection...this feels surface

...we tend to see the privileges that are identified for us. I think we will all be surprised by how many privileges we have that we are unaware of.

I am afraid of what I have yet to realize. Whenever people point out heterosexual privilege, I find myself wondering “Have I done that?” or “Do I do that now?” I also wonder about the “moments of privilege” that I have missed... When has someone needed me to be an ally when I was unaware of their pain?

Another form of anxiety emerged whereby caucus members were concerned about how increased consciousness might impact their relationships with friends and family. Sometimes the members expressed frustration at their colleagues for not having a similar experience to theirs. In these concerns, students were expressing the awareness that allowing themselves to more fully see the prevalence and impact of heterosexual privilege would change them.

I also think it will be challenging to not expect those who are close to me to grow as much as I will over this quarter. Perhaps that's something that we can all help each other remember.

I am constantly having to remind myself that it just takes time, and some people may never get to a place where they are willing to have these conversations. The challenge is how to manage your relationship with that person when you discover they are unwilling to go there with you.

Another thought... is that my [spouse] is not going to understand this next change in me and it will effect our marriage.

I had a conversation with my partner about using the word ‘partner’ instead of words that identify sexual orientation. I was surprised by his resistance, but also pleasantly surprised by how I was able to stick to my guns and respond. He is, of course, supportive of my attempts, but doesn't see it as very meaningful.

My emotions around my heterosexual privilege and my white privilege in particular are so incredibly intense and overwhelming, and it was really tough to hear that others don't share that. It makes sense, but it was really hard for me to hear.

In this stage, we can see that students are aware of the existence of heterosexism and heterosexual privilege as something ‘out there’. They can see glimpses of it, are committing to uncovering it and its impact in their lives, but are concerned that they won't do a good job of it, or of the costs to them for becoming more aware.

Stage 2: Mutual Support

In the next stage that emerged, students encouraged one another by identifying concrete resources that might be helpful to others, by providing emotional support, and by helping one another frame and understand their lived experiences of heterosexual privilege. Some of the support was in response to concerns raised about not being able to see their heterosexual privilege in the previous stage, while some was expressed by joining with others in the feelings that emerged upon recognition of heterosexual privilege and its prevalence. While this sharing of resources first emerged at this point in the process, it continued throughout the rest of the course.

Here is a link to the HB1330 article (second parent adoption bill)- [weblink provided] ...The HRC website is a great resource for definitions, what the general experience is like coming out, how to be an ally, etc. [HRC website address]...I also found this “How to be an ally” document from the CU GLBT Resource Center [document embedded].

I came across an article that might be of interest to you after our brief discussion of LBGTIQA identities and religion...I was excited because it is in a social work journal.

I thought about this article I read about the difficulties of filing taxes for same sex couples and wanted to include the link if you are interested [weblink].

[In response to a member talking about filing taxes with their spouse and recognizing the economic benefits of filing as a married couple as a heterosexual privilege], I am right there with you. My partner and I filed taxes a few weeks ago and we got a substantial chunk as well. I had this horrible feeling in my stomach. Everything inside of me was saying it was wrong that we got it and others don't because of their sexual identity.

The focus of this stage remains on uncovering, recognizing, and emotionally reacting to heterosexism and heterosexual privilege. This stage, however, represents a shift from the expression of concerns and fears about the process to a place where members are reaching out to support one another in their engagement in the process.

Stage 3: How Often is This Happening?

With the encouragement of others, students began to identify heterosexual privilege in many aspects of the lives. What had been mostly invisible or in the background of their lives began to take shape in the foreground of their lives, and the prevalence of heterosexual privilege began to weigh

heavily on the conscience of the students. Intense feelings of shame, guilt, anger, pain, and sadness started to emerge in the student's writings and responses to one another.

[In response to an article on religiously-based protests at a gay bar in Cleveland, Georgia, and a follow-up letter to the editor], ...thanks for posting these... whoa... how often is this happening around the country? I tend to simply dismiss these types of protestors as evangelistic bigots...that is part of my privilege...I can recognize the injustice, and feel anger, but I can also gloss over...

Don't even get me started on the letter. I couldn't even read that entire thing.

I don't even know what to say...wow. I agree with [previous poster], I couldn't even finish [reading] the letter to the editor...whew! This has been an emotional week!!!

One particularly powerful and painful moment occurred in the caucus when a friend of a caucus member experienced a hate crime, vividly illustrating the impact of oppression that members of the caucus did not have to fear because of their sexuality-related privilege.

I just received terrible news about a friend of mine. He was raped and physically assaulted on Wednesday night. He was riding his scooter, as he often does, and a car with two men in it drove by him and yelled "faggot" out their window. He ignored the comment and kept riding as that has happened to him before and he figured it was just someone who was going to yell hateful comments and drive on...this time the guys decided to come back and find him. They shoved him to the ground and proceeded to rape him, what they didn't know is that he is transgender. So when they found out they were raping a biological women, not a biological man, the violence escalated and they become more physical...at this point I can't even put into words how this makes me feel...there really are none.

Oh god [name], this is horrible. I am so, so sorry that your friend experienced this. It pains me deeply that people have to live through this and I, too, cannot find words to vocalize my horror or disappointment...

[Name], my stomach turns as I read about your friend...

I too am so sorry to hear about your friend. I am ashamed of every hetero male right now. I am so sad this is our reality.

[Name], I read about your friend's experience and the tears began to flow. I am so sorry for his pain and your pain...this is when I feel the urge to dig deep and change the way I view the world and hopefully influence others to change as well...

Similarly, caucus members wrestled with the feelings that emerged as the once vagueness of the prevalence of heterosexual privilege came into clearer focus.

It is difficult for me to notice it [heterosexual privilege] in everything. I have found myself getting very sad at little things like the radio or TV. I was sad when Grey's Anatomy came on and I told [my partner] and she rolled her eyes. I need to find a balance or I will go insane.

I was expecting [this class] to be difficult at times and knew it would be challenging. Then around week 3, it started to just feel draining. I left class exhausted and somewhat discouraged.

This week I was having lunch with two friends in the [MSW] program. One is getting ready to lead a group of women and was asking for referrals. The other friend said she did not have any women she could refer, but that she had a very feminine gay male and was asking if she could refer him. The whole conversation took me by surprise and before I could get over my shock and confront her comment, the topic of conversation had changed. I realized that I am not used to challenging friends who I know hold similar values to me. I know that both of these friends are accepting of all sexual orientations, but this was still a comment that I feel I could have challenged.

Have you noticed that Denver Health's logo is a man, woman, and child? I drove past the other day and really noticed it for the first time. It's insidious and the messages are everywhere. I've always thought about these messages about the traditional, nuclear family as damaging to women with regards to traditional gender roles, but now [I] think of them from a heterosexist lens as well. These value statements are everywhere and are so normalized that they don't even seem odd. What if the logo was two women and a child? It would never fly.

The conversations with [my] partner about these types of decisions are very difficult...with all of these decisions the cost to me is to be "heavy", a "stick in the mud", "overanalytical", "taking things too seriously", "too idealistic"...this makes me sad and often I feel alone when faced with these decisions.

While the students in this stage were actively shedding the blinders that had kept them from consciously seeing and recognizing the prevalence of heterosexual privilege in the world, their recognition of heterosexual privilege in this stage was primarily situated in the world external to themselves. It was in the media, in their friends, and in their families. While the recognition of the prevalence was heavy and painful for them, it was still a disembodied heterosexual privilege.

Stage 4: My Complicity

The recognition of heterosexual privilege external to themselves that emerged in Stage 3 of the trajectory shifted in Stage 4. In Stage 4, students moved into a place where they were embracing heterosexual privilege as integral to who they were and how they operated in the world. It

represents a new level of seeing heterosexual privilege as embodied in themselves, and highlights how frequently they had failed to take action as an ally.

The next thing that I awakened to was the fact that even communication for me is difficult because my privilege filter is still prevalent. I asked a question at a trans workshop [at the White Privilege Conference] and after the question was asked I realized that the very question might have been grounded directly in my privilege. Later I went back and spoke with the workshop leader about it to get an idea about how to approach conversation when I am stuck in my privilege She was encouraging to me and I am glad that I went back to repair what I might have broken.

...last week I did not stand up...as an ally...a handout for class about family therapy and domestic violence was clearly written from a heterosexual perspective. I took for granted that others training to be a therapist would notice this too, so I didn't say anything...it didn't seem like a big deal...another student who does not identify as heterosexual ended up pointing this bias out at the end of class. I felt terrible...I was lazy, and that was part of my privilege. Others in class may or may not have noticed, but it needed to be verbally recognized...the silence is part of the privilege and the subsequent oppression.

I still identify as a woman and he [partner] as a man...our sexual identity is very visible when we are together...I feel the privilege more when we are together...like there is nothing I can do about it...is this really true? Of course I can speak out...call out his friends.

I need to get in touch with my complicity...I am just beginning to feel emotion around my heterosexual privilege...like when I was in the movie theater, when I was talking to my partner about using the word "partner," pondering the fear I feel with new friends who obviously assume that I am heterosexual...I need to see myself as part of the system.

When I notice things, it tends to be oppression (name calling for example) as opposed to my privilege as a heterosexual...my choices are someone else's risk because of sexual orientation or appearance thereof.

It's still about the babies...I still tend to "automatically" view "variations" on heterosexual sexuality as "other" ...but then I experience conflict with this automatic thinking...I am in the struggle...frustrated that I can't just make the automaticness go away...angry, guilty, and accusatory...

I know I don't have the complete picture, but today I contributed to oppression by explaining away why I call my husband my partner (holy shit that was hard to write). I feel ashamed, disappointed, sad, and frustrated at myself that I felt the need to justify why I used the word partner versus husband.

Despite my use of the term "partner", I am still more safe than someone who is GLBTIQ using that term because eventually people who engage with me regularly will find out that my partner is a man, and at that point in time, to some extent, my safety is restored.

While students expressed shock, dismay, and concern over recognizing heterosexual privilege in the world around them in Stage 3, in Stage 4, the recognition of how fully they personally enacted heterosexual privilege shifted the experience to one that was more salient. It represented the shift from projecting heterosexism and heterosexual privilege onto ‘less enlightened’ heterosexuals to a place of personal liability. Along with the shift toward recognition of self as complicit in heterosexual privilege, came an increasing sadness and, at times, deepening despair. However, the heaviness of this stage may actually have been a primary motivating factor that propelled students into the next stage as a way to resolve the experience of pain.

Stage 5: This Class is Like Working Muscles

In the final stage that emerged from the data, students were experimenting with ways to redefine what it meant to be a heterosexual in a way that was not (or was less) oppressive to non-heterosexual others and in a way that challenged the system of heteronormativity. Students were actively experimenting with new behaviors that disrupt heterosexual privilege and were beginning to see themselves as allies to the queer community. They were also supporting one another in taking the risks that come along with acting in alliance. For the most part, they had not consolidated the identity as an ally at this point, but they were trying it on and it was becoming more a part of how they saw themselves. They were clear that they had not ‘arrived’ and that they still had much to learn, but they were emerging as hopeful that they could more fully live the values they upheld as social workers. They were also starting to recognize the complexity of their own identities and of the world around them in terms of the intersection of multiple privileged and oppressed identities.

My friend had a graduation party back in Colorado Springs. I had mixed feelings about going because going back often feels like stepping into a lion’s den. I have many friends [there], but I struggle because EVERYTHING except the white Christian heterosexual lifestyle is invisible to them and it takes lots of energy to explain myself to them...I did not go looking for a fight...but one found me...

...today I awkwardly (and pretty unsuccessfully) intervened when a fellow social work student used the word “gay” to describe something as silly and ridiculous...I said I should

intervene, but also said I didn't know how...thinking about it minutes later, I clearly know how.

I have been consistently using the word "partner" instead of "boyfriend" though it still feels a little weird.

Over the past few weeks, I have noticed a pattern. It seems that every time I am hanging out with friends, somehow the topic of privilege comes up...[A friend] kind of laughed it off and seemed to think that it was somewhat expected for me to talk about [it] because I was in the social work program. But now I wonder if he was also expecting for my focus on privilege to diminish over time when I am no longer in classes[?]

It's a little scary to think about going out into the world and continuing this work. At least at GSSW, when I encounter resistance, I can fall back on our Code of Ethics that supports what I am working towards. But outside of social work, I don't have that safety net to fall back on. I wonder how much strain this will put on friendships when I call attention to privileges that are taken for granted.

...as I went through the [White Privilege] conference, I began to see how privileges intersect in so many ways. It came much more difficult to choose just one privilege that was at work...

I'd like to talk about my friend, the pro-GLBTIQ rights social worker who refuses to use the word "partner" b/c she doesn't like it. Furthermore, she thinks that "they should come up with a different word." When I explained that WE should come up with a different word that doesn't out people, she rolled her eyes. Then she said all of her gay or lesbian friends back home use girlfriend or boyfriend anyway, why can't she? A lengthy discussion ensued...I think she got it by the end. But it was so hard to balance having her hear me (b/c she didn't want to!), and talking about being an ally, with calling out her privilege!

My friends have become tired of my challenges and reminders of their heterosexist assumptions. Perhaps because they are safe I feel comfortable to address their remarks. I've been wondering, how do I challenge myself to challenge more folks?

I think that it's so important to be an ally of action, and on the other hand I see my own ally development as internalizing how I oppress others with my heterosexual privilege. For me the process of internalization takes some time and that's what I struggle with. I want to be present in this process of embodying the actions that go along with being an ally, but it would not feel genuine if it did not come from an internal place.

[In regard to how she might challenge heterosexual privilege at a heterosexual friend's wedding]: I had a dream a few days ago that I got up in front of everyone at the reception to toast the couple and made a speech about how oppressive the laws on marriage are and that we have a responsibility as people with heterosexual privilege to find a way to fight those who continue to oppress people who identify as GLBTIQ by spreading hateful messages and passing laws that prohibit people from celebrating the love in their life.

This class is like working muscles that I am not used to working...I am completely on board with the values and the social justice goal...it's the process that makes me feel inadequate at times.

Talking about this course and the caucus has opened up some conversation with folks at work. They inquire about the class and what we have been talking about and most of co-workers were not even familiar with the term “privilege” before. Very unexpected. Also my partner has talked about some changes in how he thinks and has opened up to engaging in these conversations...also I have started a conversation about privilege with my sister.

As part of the process of redefining one’s self as a heterosexual ally, students were taking new risks and engaging in behaviors to disrupt heterosexual privilege they experienced in everyday life. Their blog entries demonstrate a new level of awareness and a complexity in their thinking and reflecting on who they are and how their behaviors support or challenge heterosexual supremacy. They were also beginning to question what this increased level of awareness meant to them in terms of their relationships and how they conceptualized a life and a model of social work practice that consistently challenged heterosexual privilege.

Reflections on the Impact of the Course

Six months after the course was completed,³ the members of the heterosexual privilege caucus were contacted and asked to answer a couple of questions about the impact of the course. They were asked to seriously reflect on the course’s impact on their personal lives as well as their social work practice. In this section, we have included excerpts from these critical self-reflections.

The Immediate Impact

Students and the caucus facilitator were first asked to consider how they believed the course impacted them immediately after the course was over. A number of common themes emerged. Some reported a shift from a focus on the impact of their marginalized identities to a more complex acknowledgment of the role they played as privileged individuals, or in their ability to see the prevalence of heterosexual privilege. Others talked about the influence the course had over their conceptualization of social work.

³ Five of the six student members had graduated from the program at this time.

In this course I was asked and encouraged to forefront my privilege. As a woman of color from a low socioeconomic background, this was extremely difficult to say the least. I had never had to reckon with a form of privilege that I was born with. This was a difficult and humbling process; I had never fully identified as the oppressor before and felt both defensive and frustrated at times.

The course forced me to deeply assess how I am unintentionally perpetuating heterosexism and homophobia and to find ways to make heterosexual privilege visible to those whom it benefits. The course was essential in my understanding of how all my privileges impact the people with whom I work everyday and the importance of social workers' commitment to becoming effective allies.

I felt that it changed my perspective about almost everything. As a person, I saw privilege everywhere: in the music I listened to, in the movies I watched, in the "jokes" that friends and family told. My newfound perspective created some challenges in the relationships I had with my family and friends. I had a new sense of responsibility to fight the injustice as someone with privilege. I felt a different sense of calling.

Before the class, I often felt paralyzed by my guilt and anger. When I felt uncomfortable in conversations, I felt like I had no words to voice my concerns and my frustrations. The result [of the course] for me was an overwhelming sense of despair and pain at first. How can I have an effect on such a violent and unfair world? It has always been safer and easier to recognize those others that are oppressing me and my people. Beginning to recognize my own part in the creation of an unfair, oppressive society was extremely painful.

I felt both relief and intimidation. I would not have to cope with the emotional intensity that the actual course offered, but how was I going to continue this work? As a person, I was better informed about the impact and prevalence of privilege and oppression. I had an improved vocabulary and more systemic way to approach conversations about privilege and oppression with others. I had a solid experience of being surrounded by others willing to face the reality of privilege and oppression under my belt. That experience itself, dwelling on my privilege and others' oppression with a group of honest, earnest people, was like a gem, a solid little rock in my pocket that I knew I could always go back to when my identity as an ally might waver.

It brought to my attention the parts of me that were either hidden or undiscovered that continue to contribute to the heterosexist status quo of our society. My evolution includes self-awareness as to how I perpetuate heterosexism by being complacent, ignorant, and silent. It formed the way in which I see my heterosexual identity, and the role I have in confronting heterosexism in myself and others.

It helped to clarify my purpose in being a social worker...it enhanced my understanding of our values, ethics, and commitment to social justice. Social work is not just about helping disadvantaged populations, but it is also about advocating for social justice and social change in order to create a society in which disadvantage no longer exists. This cannot solely be done by focusing on the disadvantage or oppression, but must also be balanced by examining privilege and the ways in which advantage keeps the system intact.

Six Months Later

Students were then asked to reflect upon the impact of the course given their perspective from six months after the course had ended. They report having more confidence in confronting issues and having a language with which to make heterosexual privilege visible. They describe involvement in activities and organizations that support equality, and increased intentionality about practicing social work in a way that is anti-oppressive.

Because of my experiences in this class I have more agency to discuss privilege and oppression with my coworkers. It makes me a better colleague because I am aware of and acknowledge when I am afforded privileges that my coworkers who identify as GLBTQ are not and I actively seek opportunities to change oppressive policies and practices.

The students and co-instructors of the course serve as both hope and reminders of my responsibility and accountability to be engaged in the process of rendering my and others heterosexism and homophobia visible and to do something, to spend my privilege in a way that speaks to liberation. I pay attention to policies and political discourses surrounding marriage, family, relationships, and adoptions. I notice and name the absence of positive discourses that address and/or include LGBTIQ identities.

I am much more willing to name and challenge oppressive behavior, especially because I see it more frequently and clearly than I previously did. I frequently name my privilege in conversations with friends, family, and co-workers. Naming privilege and oppression has made me unpopular at times – and this certainly impacts my life. However, the course has made me a more conscious, self-reflective person and has assisted me in standing up for my passions.

As a program director, the course has impacted what I take into consideration when planning, developing, and implementing violence prevention programs. I see that oppression and privilege are intertwined with everything that I do, from my relationships in the office to how we conduct prevention programming in the community. I constantly evaluate every decision our department makes to ensure that it is the best course of action for the community and not a decision I make from a place of privilege.

I now have words to say I am uncomfortable or something about this does not feel right. Because of my new language of privilege I can join with other people that I was much too afraid to speak with. I do less blaming and pointing fingers and more exploring in conversations and joining. The fruits of these new approaches have been exponential. I have found allies in places I would never have thought to look before.

This past fall I spent a lot of time helping to prepare for Seven Straight Nights Walk and Vigil for Equal Rights. This was a public action, but I really do think more of my impact came from talking about it with friends and acquaintances whom I never would have had a conversation about heterosexual privilege. It gave me a way to assert my identity as an ally openly/publicly. I am able to see a bigger picture and get excited about the amazing things that are happening to bring about change and social justice.

I suppose, in a way my social work style is more “pro-social” and less “individual” focused than it was a year ago. I suppose this is because of my training in family systems theory as well as the anti-oppressive practice course. The two basic concepts go hand in hand. In short, the anti-oppressive class has certainly changed the way that I practice social work. This is most apparent in the way I assess a client situation, how I approach problem solving with them and what I see as possibilities for therapeutic intervention.

After being out of school for about 6 months, and working in the social work profession for about 4 of those months, I am beginning to see the lasting impact of this course. I continue to be more aware than some of my colleagues about the roles that privilege (or lack thereof) is playing in the lives of our clients. I am realizing that sometimes this means educating teachers and daycare providers of the role privilege plays.

It has also changed the way in which I parent my child. I am more aware of heterosexual comments made that are degrading and create an unsafe environment for my son to express his own identity. I have become more vigilant about confronting such comments and others heterosexual (hyper masculine) attitudes. I have sought out organizations that support equal rights for all, and when looking for job opportunities I asked about benefits for partners.

As a social worker, I have become more responsible in seeking out and creating safer more equal environments for kids to understand their own identity by posting GLBT support groups and information regarding sexual orientation and identity. I am much more aware of the use of heterosexual words in session when talking with a client. I talk with colleagues about privilege from the start.

Situating the Learning Journey

Post-hoc examination of the learning journey stages that emerged from the data and the reflections of the on-going impact of the course on the class member’s lives and practice of social work, raised the question of how this process might map onto a general social identity development process. As such, we examined the characteristics of the different learning journey stages and found that a number of factors suggest that the developmental trajectory outlined herein falls within particular phases of a larger social identity development model. Using Goodman’s (2001) extrapolation of Hardiman and Jackson’s (1997) racial identity development model to outline a more general social identity model, we suggest that students were primarily in the social identity development phases of *resistance* and *redefinition* in the context of their emerging heterosexual ally identity.

Briefly, the social identity model consists of five phases of development: (a) *naïve*, (b) *acceptance*, (c) *resistance*, (d) *redefinition*, and (e) *internalization*. In the *naïve* phase, there is little

to no awareness of social identities and systematic inequalities, a phase typical only of very young children. In the *acceptance* phase, the dominant ideology about stratification has been accepted and there may be denial that inequality exists. Oppressive attitudes may be expressed, or notions such as colorblindness may be held. In the *resistance* phase, the oppressive ideology starts to be questioned and an exploration of the ways in which inequality is manifested is frequently undertaken. This may include acceptance of one's own behaviors as oppressive or the recognition of the way in which privilege functions to advantage some groups over others.

In the *redefinition* phase, a struggle with how to redefine oneself in a way that is not (or that is less) oppressive takes place. Frequently the awareness of the interconnection of various forms of oppressions and privileges emerges, as well as the recognition of the complexity of personal identities that consists of oppressor and oppressed identities. The final phase is *internalization* which represents a new level of comfort with the newly developed anti-oppressive identity.

Based on the themes that emerged from the data, we have situated the heterosexual privilege learning trajectory primarily in the *resistance* and *redefinition* phases of social identity development for a number of reasons. First, there were little to no data in the individual, heterosexual caucus, or course blogs to indicate that students in the heterosexual privilege caucus were in the *acceptance* phase of identity development as allies. None of the students were arguing that sexual orientation had no impact on life chances and experiences, nor were they arguing that they were 'sexuality blind'.^{4,5}

⁴ This may partly be due to self-selection into the course and is probably not generalizable to graduate social work students in general

⁵ One of the side effects of requiring students to write an essay and apply to get into the course was that students who applied and were enrolled in the class were past the *acceptance* phase of social identity development around the issue of privilege they were exploring. Permitting students to enroll in the class who were still arguing that 'there is no such thing as [white, heterosexual, social class, non-disabled] privilege,' had the potential to derail the class's exploration of the process of *how* privilege manifested itself in their lives and social work practices. An ironic impact of accepting a student who is in the *acceptance* phase of social identity development in the course could be that instructors end up spending an inordinate amount of class time attending to what is basically a very defensive privileged perspective.

The second, and primary reason, we are suggesting that the trajectory that emerged from the students' learning journeys falls within the *resistance* and *redefinition* phases is based on the mapping of the content of the stages of the learning journey trajectory to the descriptions of the identity development phases as described by Goodman (2001). Below we have briefly outlined that comparison and in Figure 1 we have illustrated the comparison of the social identity phases with the learning journey trajectory stages.⁶

In Stage 1 of the learning journey trajectory we found that students were experiencing concerns and anxiety about not being able to identify heterosexual privilege and concerns about the potential impact of greater consciousness on their lives. We have situated this stage in the early part of the *resistance* phase of social identity development as a heterosexual ally. Students are clearly aware of the existence of heterosexism and heterosexual privilege and are, thus, not denying its existence as would be expected in the *acceptance* phase of social identity development. They are embarking on the journey of allowing themselves to see what heterosexual privilege means for them. They are as Goodman (2001) points out, "...people from the dominant group...begin[ing] to answer the question 'who am I?'" (p. 56) in the context of their heterosexual privilege.

In the second stage of the learning journey, we found a lot of mutual support between the students. They were helping each other by providing resources, and by validating and joining with others who shared similar experiences. We have situated this stage in the *resistance* phase of social identity development, as well. While it may represent a gearing up for the journey of discovery and supporting one another in taking the first steps, there are no clear indications that students have started to redefine themselves as heterosexual allies at this point in the process which would be expected in the next phase of social identity development.

⁶ We have purposefully used the term *phases* to refer to social identity development and *stages* to refer to the learning journey trajectory as a way to maintain clarity about which process we are discussing.

Like the first two stages of the students' learning journey trajectories, we have situated Stage 3 in the *resistance* phase of the social identity development process as well. The emotional response that characterizes this phase mirrors the guilt and shame that Goodman (2001) talks about as part of the *resistance* phase that begins to emerge as the individual starts to recognize the prevalence of privilege and oppression. The intensification of feeling and the shift from recognizing heterosexual privilege in the world "out there" to seeing heterosexual privilege as embodied in their lives as heterosexually-identified or heterosexual-appearing people, still situates Stage 4 in the *resistance* phase, albeit a step closer to the next phase of social identity development. "After feeling guilty or ashamed of their dominant identity, they may need to develop a social identity that is positive and affirming." (Goodman, 2001, p. 56). The intensity of the uncomfortable feelings of Stage 4 may be a necessary motivator to keep the students moving in the process of social identity development as heterosexual allies, particularly given that students are concomitantly becoming clearer of the potential cost to themselves for standing in alliance with lesbian women, gay men, and bisexuals.

The final stage in the trajectory of student learning journeys bridges from the *resistance* phase of social identity development into the *redefinition* phase. Here we start to see the despair and pain lift as students actively engage in behaviors that signify a more public commitment to being an ally to the gay and lesbian community. In this stage students are more actively challenging heterosexist comments by their colleagues, friends, and family members. They are experimenting with shifts in language that ambiguate their heterosexuality and indicating more comfort with negative reactions from other heterosexuals who do not support their alliance with the gay, lesbian, and bisexual community. While their redefinition as heterosexual allies is far from complete, it is definitely underway, and examination of their reflections on the impact of the course six months later, shows even more consolidation of their commitment to the identity.

Discussion

Tackling the issue of privilege in social work education is not optional if schools of social work are serious about their commitment to social justice. Outlined in this study is a model of a course that was intentionally structured to address some of the major challenges found in the scholarship on teaching about power, oppression, and privilege. We argue that by all measures we examined – quantitative teacher/course evaluations⁷, qualitative evidence found in student's writing about the course while enrolled in the course, and the student's post-course reflections – that the course was a success and had a positive impact on the student's understanding of themselves as members of a privileged group, as well as on their conceptualization of how they might disrupt heterosexual privilege in social work practice. While the study is an exploratory, qualitative study utilizing a small sample of students in a specific context, we argue that it adds to the relatively new scholarly dialogue on teaching about privilege. Additionally it offers a suggestion for how these strategies might impact social identity development as an ally, and how the emergent learning journey might map onto that social identity development process. As such, we would like to offer a few tentative observations for social work education and suggestions for future research.

First, while the use of single identity caucuses raises a number of logistical and philosophical issues in teaching about privilege, we believe the strengths of the pedagogy outweigh the concerns. Facilitated caucusing provided a more intimate space where students felt freer to express their struggles with prejudicial attitudes and behaviors, as well as challenges and fears in owning their privilege. The small group structure allowed for greater accountability and engaged students on a deeper level. Pairing a facilitator who shared the identity and was committed to being 'on the journey' with the students further strengthened the strategy. The shared privileged identity

⁷ Although not discussed within this paper since extracting the evaluations of the heterosexual caucus members from those of their classmates is not possible given the anonymous nature of teacher/course evaluations, the evaluations were overwhelming strong for the course.

decreased student's defensiveness, and decreased the ability of students to distance from other privileged group members who were seen as 'less evolved'. Caucusing allowed students to have more airtime about their individual struggles, and heightened the salience of the specific identity around which the caucus was organized.

Engaging students in a process whereby they were asked to foreground a privileged identity and background marginalized identities was another intentional strategy used in the course. While attempts to do so were sometimes felt to be either artificial or, at times, even oppressive to students (and instructors), the process made everyone involved much more aware of resistances to acknowledge how privileged statuses influence our perspectives. It also helped us to develop insight about what lenses we were using to shape our views of situations. Some discovered that just monitoring self was enough to help shift perspectives, while others came to realize that they needed to verbally acknowledge and validate marginalized identity(ies) which then freed them to move into privileged statuses. We suggest that the reality is that most of us occupy our privileged identities often in life, significantly shaping our movement through our daily lived experiences. In reflection on our experiences of the course, we believe that our resistance to foregrounding privileged identities was more about allowing ourselves to be conscious that we were occupying those privileged statuses, rather than the actual intentional occupation of them.

A third observation is the importance of discomfort and pain in this developmental process. Every student involved in the heterosexual privilege caucus found themselves in both guilt and despair at some point. From the instructors' vantage point, the urge to sooth and lessen the feelings of pain was fairly strong at times. However, what appeared to emerge and what Goodman (2001) suggests is that the discomfort and pain actually motivate students to continue movement through the developmental process. We are not, in any way, advocating the infliction of pain or discomfort upon students, but rather acknowledging that there is frequently a natural emergence of emotional

pain as the enormity of the impact of privilege becomes more real for students. Being able to bear witness to and validate the student's pain was central to the course's impact.

Finally, the structure of the course outlined here, was more financially costly than a course that does not use co-instructors. Co-teaching, however, broadened the perspectives and the lenses that were available to understand what occurred in the classroom. Because of the insidious and invisible nature of privilege, we suggest that teaching a course that engages the cognitive and emotional components of the topic necessitates instructors from multiple social locations. While using co-instructors who receive a teaching stipend was the option we used, there are various other models that might provide feasible alternatives. These might include having doctoral students who are doing a teaching practicum on diversity act as facilitators, or having prior students from the course acting in the role of facilitators for independent study credit. An examination of how schools of social work dedicate resources to particular activities and courses, restricting the amount of resources available for courses such as these provides an opportunity for the organization to reflect on institutionalization of privilege and oppression, and how it lives the values it claims.

In terms of potential research, the need to examine other groups of students' learning trajectories about heterosexual privilege, as well as mapping the learning journeys of students exploring other types of privilege could provide additional information on the stages that emerged. Collecting data on social identity development processes will broaden the understanding of how learning trajectories influence social identity processes. Because the course examined in this study was an elective course, it is reasonable to expect that required courses on privilege might get very different responses than the ones identified here. No doubt the students involved in this course were among the students in the program who had the strongest commitment and interest in issues of social justice. Understanding the outcome for students who are required to take such a course might illuminate a qualitatively different learning trajectory.

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Figure 1: Comparison of Social Identity Phases and Learning Journey Trajectory Stages

Social Identity Phases	Learning Journey Trajectory Stages
Phase 1: Naïve	
Phase 2: Acceptance	
Phase 3: Resistance	Stage 1: <i>I'm Afraid of What I've Yet to Realize</i>
	Stage 2: <i>Mutual Support</i>
	Stage 3: <i>How Often is This Happening?</i>
	Stage 4: <i>My Complicity</i>
Phase 4: Redefinition	Stage 5: <i>This Class is Like Working Muscles</i>
Phase 5: Integration	