Expanding the Definition of Privilege: The Concept of Social Privilege

Linda L. Black and David Stone

Examinations of privilege have historically focused on gender and race. By placing privilege within the context of oppression, the authors offer an expanded view of the domains of privilege that include sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, differing degrees of ableness, and religious affiliation.

Los exámenes del privilegio se han enfocado históricamente en el género y la raza. Colocando el privilegio dentro del contexto de la opresión, los autores ofrecen una vista ensanchada de los dominios del privilegio que incluye la orientación sexual, la posición socioeconómica, la edad, diferenciando los grados de habilidad, y de la afiliación religiosa.

In many cultures, particular groups benefited and prospered because of the entitlements, advantages, and dominance conferred upon them by society. These privileges were granted solely as a birthright, not because of intelligence, ability, or personal merit. Ironically, privileged persons often believed that their personal qualities specifically warranted their inclusion in this group while simultaneously remaining unaware of the extent and impact of these privileges. Lack of membership in privileged groups was characteristically viewed as a lack of effort. Therefore, the belief was that those denied power, access, or visibility must, by definition, have earned their exclusion and oppression because of some personal defect. This belief is often referred to as the "myth of meritocracy" whereby a culture communicates that the oppressed could earn society’s privileges if they were just different (e.g., more like the privileged group).

Many discussions of privilege have focused on gender, race, or both (Lucal, 1996; McIntosh, 1992; Pappas, 1995; Willis & Lewis, 1999). Dichotomous categorizations of privilege diminish an understanding of its intersections, intricacies, and influence. Numerous authors have called for a more inclusive definition of privilege (Bohan, 1996; McIntosh, 1992; Robinson, 1999), and some (Harris, 1995; Reynolds & Pope, 1991) have explored and identified multiple identities and oppressions.

In this article, we define privilege within the context of oppression, expand the domains of privilege by describing the multiple identities that one may hold, and describe the potential impact of privilege on the privileged and the oppressed. The domains are presented here in an order that reflects the relative attention each has received in the academic literature. The citations specifically related to privilege in the areas of racial/ethnic, gender, and sexual orien-
tation are more substantial than those for the domains of socioeconomic status (SES), age, differing degrees of ableness, and religious affiliation. Although, the domains of SES, age, differing degrees of ableness, and religious affiliation are viewed as critical to the discussion, they are discussed more tentatively because of a scarcity of articles in the literature.

defining privilege, oppression, and social privilege

PRIVILEGE

There is basic agreement among authors (Luca, 1996; McIntosh, 1992; Robinson, 1999) regarding the definition of privilege. Drawing on the work of these authors, it seems that five core components provide the defining boundaries of this concept. First, privilege is a special advantage; it is neither common nor universal. Second, it is granted, not earned or brought into being by one's individual effort or talent. Third, privilege is a right or entitlement that is related to a preferred status or rank. Fourth, privilege is exercised for the benefit of the recipient and to the exclusion or detriment of others. Finally, a privileged status is often outside of the awareness of the person possessing it (McIntosh, 1992; Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 2000).

The academic literature has primarily focused on the domains of race/ethnicity and gender (Crenshaw, 1997; Dyer, 1988; Jackson, 1999; McIntosh, 1992; Pappas, 1995; N. M. Rodriguez & Villaverde, 2000). We sought to expand and contextualize the definition of privilege beyond race and gender to include the five socially constructed categories of sexual orientation, SES, age, differing degrees of ableness, and religious affiliation. As Reynolds and Pope (1991) eloquently stated, "Nature does not create these categories of human traits or identities. People create these categories to simplify the complexities of multiple identities and multiple realities" (p. 175).

The rationale for selecting the additional five domains was threefold. First, there was growing support in the academic literature (Baruth & Manning, 1999; Hanna, Talley, & Guindon, 2000; W. M. L. Lee, 1996; Pope, 1995; Reynolds & Pope, 1991; Robinson, 1999; Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 2000) for examining a more complex, interlocking, and inclusive description of individuals and, hence, potential sources of oppression and privilege. A more complex and more clearly defined concept could aid in the identification of the unique needs within and between specific groups and could highlight the conflicting and/or competing nature of privilege (e.g., a racially privileged man who is also gay). We heeded the suggestions of Locke (1992) and C. C. Lee (1991) by exercising caution in the selection of categories or descriptors that had been previously and repeatedly presented in the literature. Second, these five domains described visible and invisible identities that more fully illustrated the intricate and complex nature of an individual's identity. Third, participants in the focus groups
we conducted identified a total of 20 possible categories of privilege. A sample of their suggestions included nationality, body size, attractiveness, religious denominations, regional differences, English as a primary language, and levels and types of intelligence. We excluded 13 of these categories based on a significant lack of reference to them in the literature and because each seemed to be a social preference rather than a privilege.

We noted a difference between a privileged and a preferred status. Privilege was any entitlement, sanction, power, and advantage or right granted to a person or group solely by birthright membership in a prescribed group or groups. Privilege led to the oppression of a nonprivileged group. Preferred status, or a social preference (e.g., fondness, predilection, or inclination toward a favored group), seemed to be less well defined and less pervasive, yet could be personally painful.

OPPRESSION

Hanna et al. (2000) discussed oppression in the context of racism and prejudice. These authors posited that oppression is expressed via two modes (force or deprivation) and is manifest at three levels (primary, secondary, tertiary). Oppression by force is the act of “imposing on another or others an object, label, role, experience, or set of living conditions that is unwanted, needlessly painful, and detracts from physical or psychological well-being” (p. 431). According to Hanna et al., oppression by deprivation is analogous, except the mechanism is the removal or withdrawal of the desirable and affirming factors. The three types of oppression run along a continuum from primary, which is active, blatant, and purposeful, through the secondary type, in which persons are not active in the oppression of others yet benefit from the oppression, to the other pole, tertiary oppression, in which members of an oppressed group seek the approval from the dominant group by “selling out” or indirectly victimizing members of their own group.

We believe that oppression is an outcome in a society where privilege is unchecked and unchallenged. Watt (1999) suggested that there is an irrational sense of entitlement assumed by the oppressive person or group. At the root of this entitlement is social privilege.

SOCIAL PRIVILEGE

The complex and intricate relationship between privilege and oppression has led us to a definition of privilege that is more inclusive and intricate. We define social privilege as any entitlement, sanction, power, immunity, and advantage or right granted or conferred by the dominant group to a person or group solely by birthright membership in prescribed identities. Social privilege is expressed through some combination of the following domains: race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, SES, age, differing degrees of ableness, and religious affiliation.

Our definition differs from other authors’ definitions of privilege (Lucal, 1996; McIntosh, 1992) in that we believe that recipients may or may not be aware of their
privileged status. Privileged persons may be unaware of their dominant status or may sometimes be aware of it and are simply disinterested. Persons possess social privilege when they can look on prejudice, bigotry, and conferred dominance with detachment. This detachment may be demonstrated through a lack of involvement in the eradication of or responsibility for privilege and oppression. A privileged status allows the privileged to remain insulated and distant from the oppressed. Grieger and Ponterotto (1998) captured this sentiment when they stated that

Humans have a propensity for intolerance, and prejudice develops easily from an interaction of three factors: our natural tendency toward ethnocentrism, our lack of meaningful contact with other groups, and our need to categorize and classify people (and things) to help manage “information overload.” (p. 419)

The remainder of this article focuses on describing the multiple sources of privilege in this culture and expanding an understanding of privilege based on race and or gender. Although each of these areas is treated separately, we wish to emphasize that these areas must be viewed as complex, interrelated, and multiply influenced.

## Dimensions of Social Privilege

### Racial Privilege

Racial privilege has received the greatest degree of attention across many disciplines in the academic literature (Babb, 1998; Crenshaw, 1997; Harris, 1995; Jackson, 1999; McIntosh, 1992; Pappas, 1995; R. Rodriguez, 1999). McIntosh’s seminal article articulated the nature and scope of her privilege as a White woman. She identified the process as difficult and multilayered because it made her “newly accountable” for giving up some of her power (privilege).

The tenets of racial privilege are rooted in historical White supremacy that permeates society in the United States. The term *historical White supremacy*, as it is used here, means that being “White” has been and is viewed as culturally valued and the norm against which all other races are evaluated. In the United States, racially privileged status is rooted in the patriotic ideal that “all men are created equal” and “possess certain inalienable rights.” These two phrases provided the foundation for the belief that this was an equitable and just society. Upon closer examination, the ideal is tarnished when one acknowledges that “all men” meant only male Euro-Americans. Therefore, the benefits, rights and privileges were given as a birthright only to male Euro-Americans. Indigenous persons, enslaved Africans, and female Euro-Americans were prohibited from equality and justice before the law.

Male Euro-Americans became the normative group with which all other social groups were compared. Kerchis and Young (1995) described this as an essentialist meaning of difference in which we “define social groups in opposition to a normative group as typically the dominant social [privileged] group” (p. 14). Differences are viewed in bipolar terms (e.g., good/bad, male/female, White/
Black). Within this polarity was an implication of superiority versus inferiority. The normative group viewed their values, beliefs, and behaviors as universal, neutral, and correct. Nonnormative groups that held different or conflicting values, beliefs, and behaviors were viewed as deviant and disruptive. Threats, intimidation, and oppression by force were the mechanisms that warned those who were different that there was a penalty for not assimilating into the dominant culture.

Racial privilege has typically been described in terms of a Black/White dichotomy (Crenshaw, 1997; Harris, 1995; Jackson, 1999; Lucal, 1996). This approach dismissed the experience of persons from other racial or ethnic backgrounds. For example, the cultural experiences and social expectations of persons of Asian descent and persons of Mexican descent are likely quite different. Persons of Asian heritage are well acquainted with the myth of the “model minority” (e.g., quiet, hard working, smart) while persons of Mexican or Latino heritage face doubt or suspicion related to their capacity to speak English and to their citizenship status. These persons may encounter oppression resulting from the imbalance of privilege, and it is likely to be qualitatively different from the experience of a person of Native or African heritage. Their differential experiences are imbedded in the relative value each group holds in relation to the dominant (White) culture.

The concept of racial privilege needs to be expanded to include all marginalized members of society and to address the corollary issues of shades of skin color (e.g., “passing” for White) and the needs of the multiethnic. Persons of multiple racial or ethnic heritages add additional dimensions (Reynolds & Pope, 1991) to the discussion of privilege. Typically, multiethnic persons are viewed as “non-White,” and their identities are further marginalized by most if not all of the ethnicities to which they belong.

GENDER

Privileged status in terms of gender has also received increased attention in the academic literature (McIntosh, 1992; Rasberry, 1991; Weis & Fine, 1993, 1996; Willis & Lewis, 1999). The women’s movement, from suffrage through the late 1970s, documented the struggles that women faced in terms of recognition and valuing of their place in this culture. Patriarchy and androcentrism (Bem, 1993) have reinforced that the male biological sex was superior and preferred.

Gender privilege is based on a perceived difference (e.g., what women lack in relation to men). Stereotypic male attributes are viewed as desirable and the norm (e.g., being rational, logical, assertive, dominant), whereas stereotypic female attributes are viewed as less desirable, and many are considered undesirable (e.g., being emotional, nurturing, submissive). Men were granted financial, career, and gender role benefits and rewards that were greater than those given to their female counterparts who had similar training and experience (Weis & Fine, 1996). Men have been and continue to be viewed as the more valued, more powerful, and more influential members of U.S. society.

The literature related to gender privilege seems to be focused on the overt differences between the sexes in terms of financial value of work, historical
contributions to society, and women’s legal and reproductive rights. What seems to be missing is a discussion of the impact of perceived gender role expectations and their relationship to privilege. The oppression that accompanied privilege has a negative impact on both genders. For example, there exists a gender role expectation that men are more powerful and less emotive than women. Yet, Swanson (1992) and Good, Dell, and Mintz (1989) discussed, respectively, that despite privilege and patriarchy, not all men feel “powerful” (Swanson, 1992, p. 12) and that many men experience “restrictive emotionality” (Good et al., 1989, p. 299) that inhibits their acknowledgement and expression of fear, dependency, and weakness. Gender role expectations, homophobia, and the conferred dominance of being male have also limited men’s nurturing contact with other men.

Because the male gender and accompanying gender role are viewed as normative and preferred, most men have been and are quite unaware of their privileged status. In fact, some men believe that quite the opposite is true. Some men have cried “foul” when asked to examine their privileged status and instead point to the reverse discrimination that they have encountered as other groups seek their rightful portion of the culture’s benefits (Faludi, 1991). The reduction of White male privilege, although by no means pervasive, has created a backlash that is evidenced today by the repealing of affirmative action and civil rights legislation in many states. Gender roles reinforce the paradox of privilege by trapping men in culturally expected behavior (e.g., being dominant, unemotional) that may be personally incongruent with who they are.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Similar to privileges based on race or ethnicity, heterosexual privilege is based on an essentialist meaning of difference and oppression. Heterosexuality is viewed as the normative expression of sexual orientation, and any orientation that differs or varies from this expression is unnatural, deviant, and wrong. Discussions regarding heterosexual privilege have differed from discussion of other types of privilege in that they are typically much more intense, vitriolic, and volatile. These discussions are often filled with religious and moral admonitions. One may happen to be born Black, or poor, or with a disability; these conditions cannot be changed, yet, as Blumenfeld (1992) suggested, despite the existence of homosexuality throughout history, it is currently viewed by the media, schools, and society as a choice and something that can and must be changed.

This cultural mandate has allowed the dominant group (heterosexuals) to blame the nondominant group (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transsexual [GLBT]) for their choice to be deviant. According to Bohan (1996), this cultural mandate (blame) has historically been supported by three arguments: (a) Homosexuality does not occur in nature and, therefore, is unnatural; (b) the structure and function of the sexual organs allow for an unmistakable and particular use (heterosexual intercourse); and (c) reproduction of the species is natural and because nonheterosexual sex does not result in reproduction, it is unnatural. Therefore, these arguments lead to the conclusion that because nonheterosexuality
is an unnatural choice, GLBT persons do not deserve the privileges and benefits of a society they choose to reject.

Bohan (1996) identified numerous societal privileges granted to heterosexuals in this culture in the areas of coupling and marrying, self-acceptance, cultural validation, institutional acceptance, and personal safety. As is the case with other members of marginalized social groups, GLBT persons typically find their identities reduced to a singular characteristic, while their membership in other groups is simultaneously dismissed. Members of the GLBT community differ from other marginalized social groups in that their identity is further focused on a singular behavior (a sexual act) within a singular category.

SES

Discussions of SES seem conspicuous by their omission in the literature on privilege. A privileged status based on one’s SES seems to modify the impact of race and gender and ensures greater access to the economic, educational, and social benefits in society. The benefits derived from one’s SES can, in effect, provide a personal or familial “safety net” for the privileged. The myth of meritocracy allows people to be comfortable with their “earned” place in the social order. Those privileged by their SES may believe they have earned their place while simultaneously and blithely ignoring the social, linguistic, educational, and economic barriers that the oppressed face. This is oppression by force and deprivation.

Oppression of the disadvantaged maintains the comfort, convention, and convenience of the status quo and ensures an underemployed, unemployed, and service class of persons. Privilege based on SES seems to promote a synergy of interlocking components of oppression: lack of access to quality education, adequate medical care, and employment at a living wage. Socioeconomic privilege provides status, rank, and power to those granted this sanction and ensures their place at the top of the social order.

AGE

Privileged status based on age or perceived maturity is one of the least written about domains. Although age does not fit neatly into the definition of privilege, the attributions related to one’s age seem to benefit or oppress the persons to whom the attribution is ascribed. One’s age is in constant flux, and therefore a privileged status can seem to wax and wane.

Older persons can experience a great deal of privilege (expectations of wisdom, perceived financial and familial stability, acceptability of a retired status) while simultaneously experiencing oppression (expectations of frail health, loss of mental faculties and personal competency, loss of independence). Conversely, younger persons may be denied cultural benefits because they may be viewed as immature, less financially reliable, interpersonally unstable, and lacking in wisdom. The privileges ascribed to younger persons are their perceived physical prowess, their attractiveness, and the expectations to reproduce and to begin a career.
Privilege based on age can vary by culture and can be viewed as a positive, nonoppressive factor. For example, in some cultures, elders are viewed as assets and sought for counsel, support, or advice. This preferred position is partly due to age but is more likely influenced by the elder person’s family reputation with, and his or her experience among, community members.

DIFFERING DEGREES OF ABLENESS

As is the case with age, privileged status based on differing degrees of ableness has not been critically examined. The passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act (1990) gave some recognition to the struggle faced by persons who are differently abled. Differently abled persons face a multitude of physical, attitudinal, and emotional barriers. These barriers go beyond the need for physical access to accommodations. Although physical accommodations are critical, the needs of this population are far more diverse and complex.

Differently abled persons may be viewed by the more abled as possessing a multitude of deficits. People who have limited physical mobility or who are nonsighted are often erroneously viewed as limited mentally or emotionally. Persons with less visible disabilities (mental illness, chronic health concerns [AIDS], various learning/speech disorders) fight the stigma of their disorder and the fear of being exposed. Differently abled persons appear to have been lumped together by a portion of the abled population into a category of deficient human beings. They are not viewed as fully functioning; therefore they are deemed as not fully human.

Although many nonprivileged groups describe the experience of derision or antagonism from society, the differently abled most often feel invisible to society. Many people avoid eye contact or polite social conversation with someone who is differently abled. When their presence is acknowledged, the typical response from an abled person tends to be pity or sympathy for the differently abled condition. For a differently abled person, this sympathetic response can be viewed as offensive and indicative of the difference between the two individuals and the groups they represent.

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

The term religion, as it is used here, describes an institutionalized system of beliefs, behaviors, and rituals related to a supreme creator to which persons submit. Religious affiliation is differentiated from spirituality in that spirituality is viewed as the personal expression of and relationship to one’s beliefs. Thus, these beliefs may not be sanctioned by religious institutions.

A majority of Americans report that they regularly attend church and that their dominant religion is Christianity. Within this system of belief, there seems to be an assumption by many that the Christian view of religion is the only “correct” one and that others are seemingly misinformed or misguided. Furthermore, those who do not engage in religious practices seem to be viewed with suspicion and cultural mistrust. If this were not the case, the teachings and practices of Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and other recognized religions would be accepted
as equal forms of religious expression. Although all citizens are granted the freedom from governmental interference in the practice of their religion, many persons experience discrimination and oppression because of their differing religious or nonreligious beliefs. A few examples of religious oppression based on privilege include the Salem witch trials, compulsory school prayer, the ubiquitous references to God printed on U.S. currency and spoken in the Pledge of Allegiance, and the U.S. government’s banning of certain Sioux spiritual ceremonies deemed as subversive (Brown, 1970). Religious organizations wield a great deal of social and political power over individuals and institutions in the United States as evidenced by the reemergence of the Moral Majority and Religious Right as forces in national politics. The expression of religion has the effect of simultaneously enlightening and oppressing, and the absence of a discussion of religion in the dialogue about privilege is peculiar.

impact of social privilege on the individual

Social privilege holds consequences for the privileged (e.g., exaggerated sense of self-worth, belief in personal superiority, need to continually oppress others to maintain the status quo) and for those oppressed by the social privilege of others (e.g., a lack of access to the economic and social mainstream, divisiveness, cultural mistrust and hatred). In the words of Freire (1970), “Dehumanization, which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human” (p. 28).

Those who benefit from social privilege can experience a distorted sense of self (Robinson, 1999). Privileged persons misperceive that they have “earned” the benefits, status, and/or rank. They must work to maintain their belief in the status quo in order to view themselves as superior, more fortunate, and more talented than those who are oppressed. The privileged must rely on denial or other defensive reactions to maintain this fragile sense of superiority and to combat the dissonance and confusion that accompany the recognition and understanding of their privilege. The belief that they are superior and therefore deserving of special entitlements, sanctions, power, immunities, advantages, and/or rights thwarts their emotional and intellectual development (Pinderhughes, 1989).

Privileged persons live in a distorted reality. This distortion is akin to the concept of denial in the treatment of persons with chemical dependency. The denial serves to protect the chemically dependent person from the painful consequences of the truth. Examining the consequences of the truth and being accountable for the impact of one’s chemical dependency, or in this case privilege, are threatening, painful, and challenging experiences that few willingly seek. Being accountable for personal privilege means that the privileged are prepared to forego benefits and entitlements to which they have become accustomed and that they acknowledge their role in the potential oppression of others. Furthermore, it means that they seek to dismantle the insidious mechanisms of privilege (power,
status, access) that attempt to seduce them. Freire (1970) stated that both the oppressors (privileged) and the oppressed must identify their respective roles in the dehumanization process and work to reform them. All must do their part.

According to Reynolds and Pope (1991), persons experience multiple oppressions when they are members of two or more oppressed groups. We submit that some people experience a mixture of privileged and oppressed status. Persons who hold simultaneous memberships in privileged and two nonprivileged groups may sense uncertainty, confusion, anger, self-hatred, and cultural mistrust. For example, consider a differently abled African American man or a Caucasian gay man with a low SES; each holds male privilege in relation to the status of women, yet each varies (perhaps significantly) regarding his experience of cultural oppression. The complex and competing nature of their experiences is likely to negatively affect their emotional and physical well-being.

The impact of social privilege on those oppressed by privilege is pervasive and astounding. Oppression related to privilege comes in many external and internal forms. Externally, a person oppressed by privilege may experience multiple forms of prejudice, bigotry, epithets based on her or his perceived identities, poverty, physical violence, and/or murder. Internally, the impact of social privilege and oppression are equally devastating. Persons who experience oppression as a result of another’s privilege may view themselves as helpless or less competent and express internalized racism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, “ablism,” and a profound sense of dread unrelated to who they know themselves to be. Furthermore, oppressed persons may develop antisocial or maladaptive methods for attaining some of the benefits of privilege. Robinson (1999) stated that privilege creates confusion about one’s racial identity. Her statement seems to ring true for all forms of social privilege.

**Implications for the Counseling Relationship**

Counselors and counselor educators have a unique opportunity to influence individual and group experiences of privilege and the resultant negative consequences. As Sue et al. (1982) suggested almost 2 decades ago, effective multicultural training requires self-awareness, knowledge, and skill. These three processes are predicated on the notion that counselors-in-training will learn about themselves and others and how they relate to others. The focal point of this learning emphasizes the need for counselors-in-training to engage in meaningful self-exploration, internal reflection, and processing. A decade later, Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992) again called for counselors to explore their personal biases and beliefs; increase their knowledge of their cultural heritage and its impact on others; improve their awareness of racism, oppression, and discrimination; and continue to seek out educational opportunities to confront their multicultural counseling limitations and to develop a nonracist identity.

McIntosh (1992) stated that one of the hallmarks of privilege is that the recipient is almost always blind to its presence. Culturally competent counselors
cannot afford this lack of awareness. To be effective with all clients and, in particular, minority clients, dominant-group counselors must be engaged in self-exploration in order to become aware of and actively address their multiple identities and sources of privilege and oppression. We agree with Sue et al. (1992) about the need to emphasize the particular responsibility of White counselor educators and White counselors to recognize and address the impact of the privileges they have been granted as they develop into culturally competent counselors. To that end, we offer the following suggestions. First, counselor educators must set a credible and ethical example by conducting a personal examination of the nature and extent of their own social privilege and the resulting oppression. Second, as this personal process proceeds, the counselor educator could enter into a discussion and examination of how students’ privilege or oppression potentially affect each member of the triadic relationship (e.g., supervisor–counselor–client), specifically, by exploring their cultural assumptions, beliefs, imperatives and expectations for and about each other. Finally, this exploration of counselors-in-training could focus on the degree to which their privilege influences self-disclosure, determines use of the expert role, reinforces or diminishes the inherent power differential in counseling, accounts for the degree of responsibility (blame) placed on the client, and determines who defines the role and description of the client’s family.

We view any attempt to train culturally competent counselors without a focus on privilege as inappropriate and intentionally reinforcing the oppression of the status quo. Furthermore, failure to address the dynamics of privilege and oppression within the counseling profession and the counseling relationship is likely to produce counselors with restricted emotional, intellectual, and psychological development, thus lowering the overall effectiveness of the counseling profession.

**Limitations and Implications for Further Research**

This work represents a long and complex dialogue regarding the definition, nature, and scope of social privilege. A limitation of this discussion is that several of the domains are identified without strong support in the scholarly literature. Although this is an acknowledged limitation, it is also an opportunity for discourse. The areas of racial/ethnic, gender, and sexual orientation are more developed and conceptually clearer. The domains of SES, age, degrees of differing, degrees of ableness, and religious affiliation require further examination.

Implications for further research abound. First, a sound, adequate, and agreed-upon definition of privilege is necessary so that researchers can truly investigate its extent and impact on individuals and groups. Second, the difference between preference and privilege status needs to be more clearly explicated to further define what privilege is and what it is not and its impact on counseling relationships. Third, the relationship between and among privileged and oppressed identities
needs to be explored to determine both the impact on the individual and possible counseling interventions. Finally, valid and reliable psychometric instruments must be produced that allow for credible assessment of this phenomenon. Once an individual has learned of his or her privilege, he or she can no longer claim ignorance of the experience or deny the responsibility to dismantle it.

references


