



Research Articles

Examining the Intersections of Privilege through Collaborative Autoethnography: Four White Men Reflect

Craig M. McGill, Ed.D.

University of South Dakota

Kyle W. Ross, Ed.D.

Washington State University

Sean Bridgen, D.Ed.

University of Pittsburgh

Tony Lazarowicz, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska- Lincoln

INTRODUCTION

This project started when we noticed there was a disproportionate percentage of white males in leadership within NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising, the professional association in which we all hold leadership roles. Recently, there has been some discussion about the role of political discourse within academic advising. Over the past century, the field has evolved from using prescriptive/authoritarian approaches (telling students what classes to take) to developmental approaches (a greater appreciation for the student's holistic experience and growth) to a learning-centered paradigm (whereby we are interested in the student's learning). Although it is out of the scope of this paper to detail this evolution and the philosophical debates that characterize the purpose/function/role of academic advising, we simply illustrate that it is a complex activity with great responsibility. In recognizing the

complexity of advising and the role of advisors in teaching students, Puroway (2016) challenged the field to recognize that academic advising “is not a politically neutral activity” (p. 4). In response, Winham (2017) argued that academic advisors are not the appropriate people for students to discuss the political

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environment and how it relates to their experiences within higher education. Winham’s argument is a symptom of systemic racism within higher education (Cabrera, Franklin, & Watson, 2017), minimizing the responsibilities that advisors have to address systems of oppression. This demonstrates the larger issue that advisors may struggle with understanding systemic forms of oppression, how systems of oppression exist within higher education practices, and advisors’ role in helping eliminate them. Without fully engaging in critical reflection and discussion, especially from those of privileged backgrounds (Watt, 2007), it is impossible to work to be agents of change in higher education. This discussion continues to remain largely addressed only from the student’s perspective. For many people from privileged backgrounds, these discussions are uncomfortable to question and self-evaluate their practices and perspectives (DiAngelo, 2018).

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We begin from the premise that academic advising is a context in which advisors can work with students in developing their civic responsibility to dismantle oppressive structures. While each of us feels we have an important role in professionalizing our field of academic advising—and as a significant part of that, making our professional association a more diverse and inclusive group—we questioned our role and how we could be champions for social justice in an authentic way. As such, we critically reflected on whiteness and our responsibility to challenge attitudes, to facilitate discussion around issues of race, and to be allies and advocates. We recognize that we, as white men, carry unearned privileges, and we endeavor to understand privilege within race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status and how to lead effective change when one does have power and influence. Therefore, in this paper, we—four white men of privilege in various roles in the advising field and leadership in NACADA, a professional association in which we are all active—critically reflect on whiteness, gender, and class and their intersection in our identities. We consider our privileges held as a result of these salient identities and think about our responsibility to challenge attitudes, to facilitate discussion around issues of race, and to be allies and advocates.

LITERATURE REVIEW

One way to become more deliberate in our work is to become more introspective by considering our own racial and gender identity development and the collective racial identity of whiteness. An identity is “the set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant of a particular role in society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person” (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 3). Our identities consist of a number of characteristics that give meaning to how we see ourselves and the way other people read us as people. Some identity characteristics may resonate strongly with us (e.g. “my gay identity plays a big role in how I think about

myself”) while others play less of a role in how we perceive ourselves (e.g. “I am right-handed but don’t think about that very often”). Thus, “identities influence behavior only to the extent that the meanings of the behavior and the meanings in the identity standard are the same” (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 82). Oftentimes the identity characteristics that we may think less about have to do with those characteristics that are privileged (e.g. “I am white, so I don’t think about my racial development”). These identity features must not go unexamined.

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Discussions of race and gender tend to be treated separately (Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw illustrated the harm of separating these discussions when the unique experiences of Black women are erased in those separate conversations. For this study, the intersectionality of whiteness with gender and class was important to consider, as those identities were salient in our experiences and discussions. For example, the intersectionality of our identities illustrated the complexity of awareness of white, male privilege when one may experience oppression because of being from a lower socioeconomic status. The literature that informs this study involves examining white privilege, white racial identity development, and transformative learning theory.

Examining White Privilege

A significant challenge for we, white people collectively, to effectively engage in discourse around privilege is that we must go beyond talking about ourselves as individuals and reflect on our collective racial identity (DiAngelo, 2018). As individuals, we may not consider ourselves overtly racist, sexist, or classist, and thus distance ourselves from problems situated in those forms of oppression or deny their existence entirely (e.g. “I treat all people the same, so I am not part of the problem.”). However, to get to the point where we can reflect on, observe, and learn about systemic forms of oppression, we must introspectively grapple with what it means to be white and to have an elevated status in society as a result of racism. This is emotionally difficult for us, and we become defensive in that dialogue that disrupts our perspective, reacting in a myriad of ways. DiAngelo (2018) coined this phenomenon as *white fragility*.

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Beginning in 2008, the European American Collaborative Challenging Whiteness (ECCW, 2012) has hosted the White Privilege Conference (WPC), consisting of experimental sessions on critical humility, which is speaking up, taking action, and being an advocate while still being aware of one’s limited and constantly evolving knowledge. The sessions are conducted to help white individuals effectively discuss white privilege. The ECCW model for critical humility was based on Heron’s (1992) theory of integrating the learning experience, which focused on direct experiences, emotions, and real-world application. To avoid emotional flooding, or the emotional reaction that may trigger the protective responses of white fragility (DiAngelo, 2018), their critical humility model gradually worked up to the direct experience with encounters in the following order: recalling a past difficult conversation, witnessing a difficult conversation,

and engaging in a direct difficult conversation. In the first encounter, individuals recall a past racial conversation with a white person to elicit feelings, foster effective conversations about ineffective ways they have engaged in racism or white privilege conversations, and ponder how to apply more effective critical humility conversations within their own life. In the second encounter, members watch a role play being conducted between two white professors about a student of color. At first, the scenario displays ineffective critical humility, but as the role play is enacted the critical humility guiding questions are used to challenge the white professors, and they end up learning from each other, as well as, actively engaging in critical humility. In the third encounter, members are divided into groups and simultaneously practice role plays with real life scenarios. Members are guided out of their character roles and the critical humility questions are thoroughly discussed. In conclusion to the learning experience, individuals are reminded that critical humility is a manner of being and is a constantly evolving process.

White Racial Identity Development

Considerable research has demonstrated that constructions of race begin as early as childhood, and that elements of white superiority can even be developed as early as preschool (DiAngelo, 2018). However, we, white people collectively, will not see ourselves as racist, because we hold a constructed view of racism that is defined by the “good-bad binary” (p. 71). DiAngelo posits that white people will tend to view racism as the extreme and violent behaviors committed on people of color prior to and during the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Therefore, we will not see ourselves as participants in the invisible, systemic, historical, and cultural forms of racism. For Black people specifically, these forms of racism lead to white gaze (Yancy, 2013), or how “Black bodies in America continue to be reduced to their surfaces and stereotypes that are constricting and false, that often force those black bodies to move through social spaces in ways that put white people at ease” (para. 15). In such a system, white people erase from our perceptions the uniquely-lived experiences of people of color that do not conform to the master narrative established in white supremacy.

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To demonstrate how white people can move beyond blindness to acceptance of their role in racism, Helms (1990) proposed a white identity model to accompany her People of Color (PoC) identity model: “For Whites, the issue in racial identity development is the recognition and abandonment of beliefs in White superiority and privilege and the rejection of normative White strategies for dealing with race” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 27). In the first stage, contact, a white person is oblivious to any notion of race and believes everyone has a fair and equal chance to succeed. The second is the disintegration status, in which a white person may believe that they are non-racist yet are off-put by events like interracial marriage. People may experience some anxiety if they realize that their race is responsible for the oppression of people of color and thus, may try to avoid issues of racism. Reintegration involves reverting back to racist attitudes because of the discomfort from the Disintegration status. They reaffirm their white supremacy values and give in to racial stereotypes: “this point in the process can be pivotal: the individual may either fixate in this status or begin...to question the meaning and role of race, the legitimacy of White entitlement, and the justification for racist behaviors or policies” (Helms, 1990, p. 28). The fourth status, pseudo-independence, propels the individual into movement toward a nonracist identity. In this status, the white person enters a “deceptive tolerance” and curiosity about non-whites and once again considers that whites might be responsible for some of the oppression people of color experience. During status five, immersion/emersion,

the individual searches for the meaning of racism and how one can benefit from their race. Specifically, whites consider what it means to be white and the invisible, unearned privileges they have had their entire life. “The individual confronts the possibility that a Black ‘problem’ may in fact be a White problem and may engage in various forms of racial activism” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 28). The final status, autonomy, is characterized by comfort about one’s racial identity. White individuals in this status experience less guilt and are more in tune to their role in racism and are willing to acknowledge and surrender some of their privileges of being white.

Helms’s model has been criticized because it suggests identity is achieved instead of continually being (re)negotiated and (re)constructed. It has also been critiqued because it lacks a consideration of the intersection of gender and class. Influenced by a number of other identity models including Helms, the Key model of white male identity (Scott & Robinson, 2001) “addresses the convergence of race and gender attitudes that White men may exhibit as a result of socially constructed attitudes regarding appropriate displays of manhood in their lives” (p. 418). Whereas the Helms model is a stage-based model, the Key model is circular and described through a variety of types “to describe a set of attitudes that can be modified by experiences” (p. 418). The types include noncontact type, claustrophobic type, conscious identity type, empirical type, and optimal type.

In the first two types, white men hold broad racist views in seeking power and privilege. In the noncontact type (similar to the contact phase of Helms’ model), white men lack knowledge about race. This can be for many reasons such as ignorance, denial, or minimization. With respect to gender, white males operate within a traditionally rigid and prescribed manner. “The White male is functioning in society as he is expected to function and will either ignore, deny, or minimize the issues dealing with race and race relations” (Scott & Robinson, 2001, p. 418). In the claustrophobic type, men focus on their individual power and see women and people of color as having unwarranted advantages that disadvantage him. From this recognition, the white male oppresses those without power because they are feeling cornered by those he perceives to be vying for his privileges. Men in both types may never experience cognitive dissonance, and thus be foreclosed in their identity development.

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The third type, conscious identity type, opens the white male to dissonance in their views of self and others. The dissonance is created by some event challenging his “existing belief system and real-life experiences with women and people of color” (Scott & Robinson, 2001, p. 419). He is now able to recognize both racist and sexist viewpoints yet may experience attitudes more aligned to the claustrophobic type outlined above or the empirical type described next.

Men in the final two types, empirical type and optimal type are characterized mostly by having nonracist views and intrinsic feelings of self-worth. The empirical type consists of a realization of the realities of racism and sexism and the unearned privileges he has been afforded at others expense. Of particular note, the person experiencing this type “questions his role in the pervasive competition for power and privilege” (Scott & Robinson, 2001, p. 419). The final type, the optimal type, allows the white male the appreciation for the importance of interacting with all people and values the perspectives and experiences of each individual, particularly understanding the struggles of the oppressed person. Understanding the intrinsic worth of each person is essential to this type.

Transformative Learning Theory

Given the focus of our study, Mezirow's transformative learning theory (1997; 2000) helps to frame our exploration of the intersections of our identity characteristics. Transformative learning is a psychocritical model of learning, the "process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or a revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 5). Fundamental to Mezirow's theory is a frame of reference, "structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences. They selectively shape and delimit expectations, perceptions, cognition, and feelings" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). Within frame of reference are two dimensions: habit of mind, "broad, abstract, orienting, habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting influenced by assumptions that constitute a set of codes" (pp. 5-6) and point of view, "the constellation of belief, value judgment, attitude, and feeling that shapes a particular interpretation" (p. 6). Habits of mind are more deeply rooted than points of view, which can change with feedback from others (Mezirow, 1997).

There are four main tenets of transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1997). The process begins with an experience. However, an experience alone is not enough for transformative learning to occur: two people can have a similar experience and have entirely different outcomes. Thus, for learning to occur, a person must critically reflect on the experience. There are three types of reflections: a person may think about the experience itself (content reflection), the ways they will deal with the experience (process reflection) and a deeper reflection (premise), a thorough examination of long-held assumptions and beliefs. Of the three, only a premise reflection can lead to transformative learning.

A person engaged in reflective discourse, a "dialogue devoted to searching for a common understanding and assessment of the justification of an interpretation or belief" (Mezirow, 2000, pp. 10-11). In this process, a person unpacks their experience and receives feedback from others, a process that ideally ends with more clarity for the individual. Finally, a person takes "immediate action, delayed action or reasoned reaffirmation of an existing pattern of action" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 24). Action can take simple forms, such as making a small decision or a larger, in which an individual might unite with like-minded people engaging in protest to propel social justice forward.

METHODS

We conducted this study using collaborative autoethnography (CAE; Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2012). CAE "enables researchers to use data from their own life stories as situated in sociocultural contexts in order to gain an understanding of society through the unique lens of self" (p. 18). Although CAE is a biographical method, it "focuses on self as a study subject but transcends a mere narration of personal history" (p. 18). CAE provides access to internal mental events, but with an added collaborative element that allows collaborators to engage in critical questioning of fellow practitioner-scholars. CAE allows research teams to reflect on critical issues and challenges to practitioners in a field.

CAE engages participants as both researcher and subject (Chang et al., 2012). Therefore, it is important to position ourselves as participant-researchers. All four of us are white, cisgender, temporarily able-bodied men who began this project as primary-role academic advisors working in higher education institutions in the United States. Because it is pertinent to how the reader interprets our findings, we further position ourselves in author order:

1. Craig is gay, single, middle class, Midwesterner, orphaned, well-educated, 4th-generation college graduate. A Nebraska native, Craig has also lived in Florida and

South Dakota. Until recently, his entire career has been in academic advising. He holds master's degrees in music theory and academic advising, and a doctorate in adult education and human resource development with cognate areas in higher education and gender studies.

2. Kyle is straight, married, middle class, and from a family whose parents have advanced degrees. He was born and raised in Arizona for 16 years until he moved to Washington state with his family. His entire career has been in academic advising. He holds a master's degree in Counseling and a doctorate in Educational Leadership, focusing on higher education.
3. Sean is straight, married, middle-class and grew up in a low-income, working class, single parent home near Pittsburgh, PA. He is a first-generation college graduate and was diagnosed with bi-polar disorder in his late 20s. Sean has worked in higher education for his entire career (in academic advising for 15 years). Sean holds a master's degree in Student Affairs and a doctorate in Administration and Leadership Studies focusing on higher education.
4. Tony is straight, married, and middle-class and has lived his entire life in the Midwest among three states (Iowa, South Dakota, and Nebraska). He was born into a Catholic family and continues to identify as a Catholic-Christian. He holds a master's degree in Educational Psychology (emphasis in Counseling Psychology) and a doctorate in Educational Leadership with an emphasis in Higher Education.

Our study involved the collection and analysis of three sources of data: recorded conversations, written notes recording our conversations, and individual reflections that occurred outside of the meeting times. We began the project generally thinking about our experiences of being white men in our field and professional organization. We wondered about our roles on our campuses, our experiences in leadership, and our responsibility as white men of privilege.

Following our initial meeting together, each researcher/participant was asked to write a question. The questions were stored in Google Drive for all researchers/participants to view and edit. We began with a list of five open-ended reflection questions:

1. What are our past experiences that got us to understand privilege as it relates to race, class, and gender?
2. How has race shaped our advising experience? Leadership experience?
3. How has being a white male impacted our experiences on our campus with students?
4. How has being a white male impacted our experiences in NACADA?
5. How do we elevate consciousness/awareness of whiteness and gender/class privilege to others?

We initially planned to meet over Zoom for one hour each week for 10 weeks to collect our data, analyze it and build the manuscript. We reasoned that we could get through one question per week/meeting, each of us responding to the question and the other three participants engaging in questioning and note-taking. In the course of five meetings we had allotted for data collection, we got through the first question only. We were not discouraged with our progress because we realized there was so much richness to our collective experiences. During our weekly meetings, discussion included expressions of surprise regarding previous conversations, reflections we each had in the week between our meetings, and questions we posed to each other for clarification.

Halfway through the data collection process we realized that we had not created any ground rules for challenging each other. When this occurred to us, we had to decide how to proceed. If we began being critical too soon and before sufficient rapport had been established, our stories may not have emerged.

There is deep shame and possibly more ignorance than we once realized associated with our identities, our choices, and behaviors. We decided it was methodologically important for there to be freedom and safety to share our thoughts while collecting the data. If we had been constantly challenging each other and “calling out” each other’s assumptions and biases, we wonder if our “authentic” lived story would have come through. We decided it would be key to be critical during our later conversations when we began our analysis.

In a study like ours in which researchers are also participants, data collection and analysis are fluid and iterative processes occurring simultaneously (Chang et al., 2012). Thus, our coding and even to some degree, theming of the data occurred while data collection was still in process. One of us was taking notes, documenting our conversations at all times. Each conversation was recorded so we could come back to our sessions together. These were not transcribed because we had recordings of each meeting and could thus transcribe verbatim pieces to present in our findings as necessary. This was a more efficient use of our time with only a week between each meeting.

Our analysis to arrive at themes was not overly formal: after the first five meetings, one of us indicated three themes he saw emerging. We all agreed with his assessment and began to furnish the themes with evidence from our stories. We then engaged in a prolonged period of collaborative scholarly writing in which we further refined the interconnected themes and attempted to link them to existing conceptual frameworks.

FINDINGS

Three themes emerged from our analysis: for each of us, class was the first salient form of privilege; second, it took graduate education to recognize racial privilege; and gender privilege was the last recognized form of privilege.

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Class as First Salient Form of Privilege

Socio-economic status was the first dimension of privilege that we recognized, and we all began to see perceived SES-based privilege at a young age. Even though we grew up in different SES locations, we all recognized class issues first.

Craig grew up middle class in a small (population <5,000) mostly white Nebraskan community and attended Catholic school. He is the son of a dentist and Catholic school teacher. Although his family lived modestly, he had a sense that he was better off than others in school in terms of income. For instance, on days when he forgot his lunch money, he learned that he could only borrow a “lunch punch” (meal ticket) from students who paid full price. Consequently, he learned who in his school lived at his family’s status and who were less economically fortunate. Craig felt weird knowing such information about people at that age.

Tony grew up in a middle-class family. While his small town was nearly exclusively white, he lived nearby a predominantly Hispanic community. As a child he noticed that the Hispanic community lived in different

geographical place, separated by a river. He remembers wondering why this was the case. Tony had contact with Hispanic people when he went to the local mall and noticed that they were speaking Spanish. Tony recognized an “us and them” divide and never felt like he could or should interact with them. At this point, Tony did not recognize white privilege but saw that there were differences between himself and the people from the Hispanic community. He also noted that he was never followed by security guards at his local Wal-Mart who were more focused on “other” kids.

Kyle and Sean discussed how they were less economically privileged. Kyle’s family lived in Tucson, Arizona for most of his childhood. He perceived his family as “mixed between middle-class and broke.” When his family moved to Washington state, one of the first questions people asked when meeting him was “What neighborhood do you live in?,” a proxy for determining his SES. Growing up in Tucson, Kyle was exposed to diverse cultures and understood diversity existed but didn’t see any issues until he moved to Washington. He moved to an almost all (98%) white community and noted the discrepancy in SES compared to a nearby community that was more diverse, but he didn’t think deeply about it at the time.

Sean’s parents divorced when he was six, and his mother was forced to go on welfare and food stamps to support him and his two younger siblings. His mother worked very hard to climb the ladder from convenience store clerk to regional manager at a grocery store chain. Sean grew up in a post-industrial milltown near Pittsburgh, PA, which had one major factory that was the anchor of the economy. In the early 1970s, the mill ceased operations. Physical geography also played a role in class division for him. Generally, the closer one lived to the mill, the lower one’s SES. Sean grew up toward the top of the hill where most of his neighbors were skilled workers. Due to the lower price of the homes near the mill, families with less money lived in that neighborhood. Historically, African-Americans were only permitted to live on certain streets in certain neighborhoods. While there was no official law or policy enforcing this dynamic, the local mafia made sure that certain people lived in certain parts of town. At a young age, Sean observed the interrelationship between race and class. While there was no shortage of poor white kids in his school, he noticed that almost all of the Black children were poor, and most of the people who seemed to have money were white. Most of Sean’s poor and working-class friends thought that the kids who had more than them were “rich”. Those “rich” families were, in fact, middle class, and the rest of them were in varying degrees of poverty. Sean remembers hearing “poverty line” being discussed along with food stamps and welfare and asking someone in his family if they were in poverty. His family, who owned a house, had food on the table, and never had their utilities turned off for non-payment, would have been too proud to admit that they were impoverished.

As we analyzed our life histories, we noticed that perceived social class is not addressed within the Key or Helms models; however, this was a salient aspect of our identities and may have served either to facilitate our identity development as white men or muddled our lens on privilege in relationship to race and gender. Vis-à-vis intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) separating race, class, and gender in mutually exclusive categories does not effectively speak to the unique interaction of these three categories in our lived experiences. Eidlin (2014) notes, “economic class position creates certain life chances, which interact with social status groups and political parties to shape particular identities” (p. 1045). The reflections of Tony, Kyle, and Sean support this claim because they all described life experiences that could have facilitated connections between privilege, race, and class simultaneously, yet only Sean did so. Evidence is seen through Tony and Kyle who discussed SES and observed the interrelatedness with race, but ultimately, only connected privilege to SES. Sean, being in a perceived lower SES, was able to connect privilege with race and class at an early age. Craig’s upbringing in a small, conservative Nebraskan town afforded few opportunities to connect race, class, and privilege due to homogenous school/church/neighborhood environments. While each of our attitudes aligned with the noncontact type (Key model), it is interesting how varied our connections between race, class, and privilege in childhood and adolescence were due to our perceived SES.

Graduate Education to Recognize Racial Privilege

For each of us, the recognition of our racial privilege occurred much later. That this occurred at roughly the same point in our lives was somewhat interesting given that each of us had different upbringings. For instance, Kyle and Sean described how they were exposed to greater ethnic diversity. Tucson, where Kyle lived until he was 16 years old, is ethnically diverse, and he was always exposed to racial and ethnic diversity (His Catholic school in the central area of the city was 60% White/40% PoC). Kyle frequently heard different languages in school. Although this signifies healthy diversity, Kyle got the impression that no one had issues based on color/race/ethnicity. While Kyle gained a basic understanding of privilege and oppressive systems during undergraduate and graduate studies, it was not until he began his doctorate (through a course entitled “Leadership Studies for Social Justice”) when he started to truly grasp hidden, systematic, and institutionalized forms of oppression. The professor cultivated the necessary dissonant space but noted the work would not always be easy and encouraged students to remain open-minded and open-hearted. Having grown up in a diverse community, Kyle believed that “Everyone is the same, and I treat them all the same.” He described a “lightbulb moment” the following semester that significantly shaped his lens when he started forming ideas around a tentative dissertation topic related to mandatory versus optional academic advising models. Some institutions claim “equity” by mandating that specific populations meet with their advisor more frequently than others, but if caseloads are not properly distributed so that advisors could successfully engage with those populations more often, then it was not truly an equitable advising model. This moment prompted additional insight for Kyle’s learning about systemic, hidden, and inequitable practices. It opened him up to learn more about the experiences of PoC in education and prompted his learning about critical race theory and its applicability to higher education.

Tony and Craig described how they experienced more racial homogeneity while growing up in small midwestern towns. Craig was in a multicultural graduate course when he was introduced to the invisible knapsack of privilege (McIntosh, 2007). This was a watershed moment because he had never understood how many unearned privileges he had. This attuned him to problems inherent in his thinking. For instance, at that same time, while working at Barnes & Noble, Craig approached an African American woman to see if she needed any assistance. The two struck up a conversation, and Craig thought “Wow! This woman is very intelligent.” Immediately, a second thought occurred to him: “Why the hell is that such a surprise?” Craig is chagrined to this day thinking about the incident, but it is important to talk about. In terms of transformative learning, this constituted a “disorienting dilemma” (Mezirow, 2000). However well-meaning Craig may have been in his (positive) impression of her intelligence, the surprise of her intelligence is deeply troubling and illustrative of systematic problems in the thinking of our societal consciousness.

As part of his multicultural course, Tony described when he attended a Black male empowerment forum and a Hispanic heritage event. In both cases, he felt out of place. He behaved cautiously, not wanting to stand out more than he already felt like he did. These experiences, along with a few other presentations in the course, enlightened Tony’s thinking and helped him accept how unearned privileges, particularly racial privilege, placed him in a comfortable situation. When in spaces intentionally designed for PoC, he was much more keenly aware of his actions and those around him.

Sean described a somewhat different experience. Sean’s post-industrial milltown was 80% white/20% Black, and since pre-school, he had Black friends. Having grown up with limited financial resources and having to fight for everything he had, it was challenging for him to understand and emotionally accept his privilege. He thought, “What do you mean, white privilege?” During his junior year of college, Sean needed twenty dollars and considered asking his mom. A Hispanic male co-worker responded, “Wow, it must be nice to be white and rich.” Annoyed, Sean replied, “What are you talking about?” and told him about his childhood. During that time, Sean had a hard time understanding definitions of privilege that were unrelated

to class and became annoyed when others assumed he had financial privilege because he was white. As Sean began to learn more about privilege and power, he realized his family had social capital, mostly due to his family's Italian roots. Historically, like other immigrants, Southern Italians were not considered "fully" white (Guglielmo & Salerno, 2012). As he got older, he realized Italians were "allowed" to build wealth and community in ways other racial groups could not, because they were "white enough." Sean also reflected on James (pseudonym), a Black friend he knew since first grade. James was well-liked and smart but frequently in trouble. In third grade, James sold food stamps to other kids at the playground. In high school, James seemed to understand algebra better than everyone else. Then, James got suspended and disappeared. Sean lost track of James until college, when he saw James's name in the paper for stealing a car. Over the years, Sean wondered about his and James's lives (and other Black men he knew who ended up in prison) and wondered why he was able to attend college and graduate school and not them. Even though Sean studied Cross (1991) and Helms (1990) and understood race-based privilege intellectually, he did not fully recognize his own white privilege until early in his professional career when he developed a workshop—and had the opportunity to have deep conversations—with a Black male colleague.

Sean started his job on the same day as another new advisor, William (pseudonym), a Black male and they instantly became friends. As they built a trusting relationship, they began to discuss race. Sean remembers having a conversation about Malcom X and the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. William was speaking favorably about the Black Panthers, and at the time, Sean had only heard they were the "Black version of the KKK." William told Sean about the real history of the Black Panthers and how they were targeted by the FBI's COINTELPRO program. William then gave Sean a copy of Dead Prez's "Let's Get Free" album. Over the next year, Sean and William discussed growing up, William as an economically privileged Black male, and Sean as an economically underprivileged white male. These conversations inspired them to prepare a workshop, an event that led Sean to affectively process, accept, and understand his own white privilege. They used the RESPECTFUL Model (D'Andrea & Daniels, 2001), which outlines multiple aspects of a person's identity. When learning about this model, Sean began to see white privilege as another form of privilege (such as being born without a physical disability). The RESPECTFUL model helped Sean to understand that having white privilege did not mean he did not have hardship in his life, but race did not add to the hardships he had to overcome. Rather, he realized being a straight, white man from a Catholic family likely made his hardships easier to overcome.

...none of us had a clear understanding of our racial privilege during our formative years.

For differing reasons, none of us had a clear understanding of our racial privilege during our formative years. This aligns with Yancy's (2013) statements regarding the white gaze on people of color. For example, Tony, Kyle, and Sean all discussed childhood experiences and socioeconomic status in relationship to people of color, yet they did not make the connection to how race could be a contributing factor at the time. While there were moments when they saw a difference between other ethnic groups due to socioeconomic status, the beliefs, thoughts, and attitudes of individualism and meritocracy perpetuated by society at large were so deeply ingrained that race was invisible in their understanding of class. As DiAngelo (2018) described, they were "insulated" from that racial stress (p. 1). Instead, people of color were viewed as the "others" in a lower SES for no different reasons than they saw white people in a lower SES.

Three of us—Craig, Kyle, and Tony—experienced a profound disorienting dilemma in graduate studies. All of us existed in the noncontact type (Key model) and moved to the conscious identity type in that there was a profound moment of dissonance for three of us in graduate education. Sean was more aligned to the claustrophobic type instead of noncontact type as he grew up. We all progressed to the empirical/optimal types as well, and perhaps graduate education helped smooth that transition because the Key model suggests that once in the conscious identity type, "The person in this phase can either adopt the attitudes of the

Claustrophobic phase or move into a phase (the Empirical type) in which he rationally and realistically looks at his feelings and actions toward women and people of other races and the overall struggle for power and privilege” (Scott & Robinson, 2001, p. 419). The Helms model also readily applies to our experiences with race. Kyle could definitely see that he was in the contact and disintegration phases for a long time. Graduate education was an opportunity for Craig to examine the privileges that come from being a white man from a middle-class family and the opportunities that have been afforded to him but not others. Perhaps Sean was unable to think about his white privilege deeply because of his own financial safety and security in more basic areas (Maslow, 1943). Our perceived SES created a lens in our lives whereby we encountered certain life situations that helped or hindered our ability to see past class and look at issues related to race and gender. And graduate education helped three of us transition to the pseudo-independence and immersion/emersion phases.

Graduate education was an opportunity for Craig to examine the privileges that come from being a white man from a middle-class family and the opportunities that have been afforded to him but not others.

Gender Privilege as the Last Recognized Form of Privilege

Our gender privilege was the last dimension we recognized. Sean described how he was raised by a strong single mother and married an independent, intelligent woman. He always looked to women as a source of strength, intelligence, and security and never understood why people saw men as superior. While recognizing male privilege, he did not understand it in the same way as race and class. To deepen his understanding, he talks with women about the ways they experience the world. His wife is very good at explaining things to him. For example, she is constantly aware of her risk for sexual assault, even walking to and from her workplace in a major city. He recognizes she has a lot of noise and psychic energy to carry around simply because she is a woman. Having grown up in a blue-collar area with “hyper-masculine” views on masculinity, he always felt different than most other males growing up. Sean sees gender as a continuum and is still trying to understand his gender in terms of a spectrum rather than traditional definitions. He feels more feminine than masculine but does not identify as transgender.

Kyle described how he did not recognize gender privilege until his involvement in NACADA. He almost always had female supervisors in his early career and in graduate school and was usually one of the few men working in his department or office. In the association, though, he saw the overrepresentation of men in leadership roles compared to the membership demographic. In our conversations, he also considered the fact that he was elected to the Board of Directors just seven years after joining and wondered if his rapid ascension was due to being male.

Craig’s recognition of gender privilege was clouded by a childhood struggle with gender and sexual identity. He wrote:

Although I knew I was supposed to like girls (and whether by nature or cultural reinforcement, I did), there was something about little boys that intrigued me. Throughout grade school, it was hard to find people with whom I shared common interests, but I didn’t know why. It became much clearer as I entered the awkward, dreaded junior high years where almost every male classmate teased me about being gay. I vigorously denied it. My gender was entangled because I did not uphold societal male expectations. In adolescence and puberty, I reacted strongly to the hair I was growing. When I started shaving, I carried so much shame. I fantasized about the day I could drive to the big city and buy a razor and

shave without shame. I knew I wasn't a girl but was reticent about admitting my impending "manhood" and was terrified to discuss it with anyone. The summer before middle school, I was terribly nervous because of having to take public showers after P.E. [physical education class]. Worried about being turned on by other boys, I practiced putting my penis between my legs.

Craig continued to struggle with gender and sexual identity for many years:

I was much too afraid to admit to anyone—even other gays—that I was gay. In fact, I avoided them as much as possible because I considered them a threat. It was not until my freshman year of college that I admitted to myself that I was gay and I was never going to be able to change. I was striving to be heterosexual and hoped if I could just be bisexual, I could bury that "other side" forever. My last semester, I dated a lovely woman, but soon discovered I could not live this way. Over the next year, I began telling people who I was.

That same year, Craig's parents were killed in a car accident, which expedited the coming out process:

Losing my parents forced me to deal more explicitly with the mess in my head...learning to become comfortable as a man in terms of gender and in becoming an adult. Growing up involves the responsibility of owning your values, expectations, beliefs, behaviors, etc. and through this reflection (and yes, graduate education) I came to terms with my White male privilege. A White, broken man who was trying to find his way in the world...but still someone with immense privilege.

...we confronted why gender was our last recognized form of privilege.

In our conversations, we confronted why gender was our last recognized form of privilege. Like class and race, our experiences differ. While not empirically testable, we suspect we did not recognize our gender privilege due to the women in our formative years we described as "strong" in our narratives. We were all raised to hold non-traditional views of gender (all had "strong," independent mothers; Craig with a somewhat effeminate, emotional dad). Beginning in the noncontact type, none of us displayed the claustrophobic type, and we ascribe this to having feminine role models or working in helping professions. Sean skipped the conscious identity type and seamlessly transitioned to empirical type. Craig and Kyle needed a precipitating event to move to the conscious identity type. Kyle re-evaluated his views because he was always in situations that validated his existing (positive) views of gender (e.g. being in helping professions dominated by women, supervised by women). As a child, Craig experienced too much internal chaos about his sexual and gender identities to make sense of the external, very real privilege of being a white boy from a middle-class family. It took a life-changing event to precipitate change. This illustrates the very important role of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1990) in examining our identity construction through these lenses. Being an orphan is still a hugely salient part of Craig's identity, and he now identifies as a staunch feminist.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we examined how our social location as white, privileged men impacts our practice and ways of knowing and behaving. None of us would have made these realizations individually. Although sometimes uncomfortable, we would be professionally and ethically remiss if we did not continually consider how our privilege impacts our work. A transformative learning experience has the potential

to change one's life in powerful ways. Our thinking and worldviews have also been profoundly affected by our realization of these categories of privilege.

A responsible practitioner “must understand the personal and cultural dynamics of his or her worldview while simultaneously attempting to comprehend those of his or her client” (Lee, 2006, p. 17). Reflective practice prevents a professional from establishing a habitualized and/or systemic method of thinking about complex human problems. Reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983) occurs in retrospect to a situation when practitioners engage “in reflective thinking after the occurrence of professional situations. Based on their speculations of professional situations, practitioners consider what they might have done differently or what they can do differently in future practice” (p. 89).

One finding addressed the role of our graduate education experience in our understanding of social justice issues, specifically as it relates to race. We have taken coursework that has dramatically shifted our perspectives on how our social positions impact the work we do. What we find so compelling about our recognition of racial privilege is that it took graduate education for three of us to really become aware of it. And graduate education is yet another form of privilege. Sean can understand why working-class white people have a hard time understanding or admitting white privilege. In his case, it took graduate education combined with hours of open, frank discussion with a good friend who is Black. Most white, working-class people do not have these opportunities. How do people who are not afforded the opportunity for education learn about their racial privilege? How can they understand racial privilege when perhaps they lack other forms of privilege (e.g. class, education, etc.)? We all experienced ways in which our lesser forms of privilege (e.g. class, sexuality) clouded our realization of other forms of privilege as white men. According to the Key model, at several points in identity development, there are possibilities for returning to an earlier type of attitude or positively progressing in development (Scott & Robinson, 2001). Even without graduate education, white men still experience dissonance and still can develop attitudes more representative of the empirical and optimal types. We thought perhaps graduate education related to helping professions, education, and/or cultural studies is more of an accelerator of the emotional intelligence needed for that progression to the empirical and optimal types rather than the catalyst for that change. We will continue to discuss this idea in future dialogue.

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Another area we must scrutinize is our language around gender and our lingering gender bias/sexism. One of the anonymous reviewers for this paper correctly pointed out that our discussion of gender privilege (and about women in general) used language that should be investigated: the examples of have having strong, intelligent, women in our lives, as though having such women in our lives is an exceptional occurrence. When we use these qualifiers for women, what are we implying? “We don't use that phrase when talking about men...is that because the default is perceived to be weak women? And that therefore strong women are an aberration?” We feel this is an excellent point and one that must be further explored. Moreover, some of the words we used to characterize ourselves might be seen by some to reify the gender binary: use of masculine, feminine and effeminate, “which seem to essentialize these constructions of what gender means.” We have made the decision not to correct the data, as this would erase conversations that need to be had. The preserved data thus “demonstrates the persistence of stereotypes” and the reality that well-meaning people constantly make mistakes. We know that we open ourselves up for critique, but hope we also open up dialogue.

One dilemma we faced was how we, as white men, advocate for social justice without being saviors (Cammarota, 2011; Hughey, 2014).

One dilemma we faced was how we, as white men, advocate for social justice without being saviors (Cammarota, 2011; Hughey, 2014). We all acknowledged that we struggle with taking action out of concern that we come off as the white savior and would inadvertently do more harm than good by our actions. Kyle identified that, sometimes, taking action while acknowledging the risk of doing harm is more meaningful than not taking action at all. Tony noted that even if a white male does take action with the most genuine intention of championing for social justice, he may still be perceived as the white savior. Thus, we realized that to minimize the risk of harm due to actions we execute as advocates, we must be cognizant of not only our lens, but the lenses of the people impacted by our advocacy. In grappling with being advocates without falling into the trap of saviorhood, we kept in mind that “White allies adopt a significantly different position from White saviors. They realize they have privileges and work to undermine the very power that provides them with superiority” (Cammarota, 2011, p. 253-254). As we continue our collaborative dialogue, we will see if our perspectives change around this important dilemma.

IMPLICATIONS

The collaborative dialogue the four of us engaged in presents another way for learning about whiteness and privilege in a manner that prevents emotional flooding as described by the ECCW (2012) and could be useful to centers for teaching and learning and centers for diversity and inclusion to consider in their education models around these topics. Rather than incorporating role-playing techniques or passive activities, we took a personal and direct approach to reflecting on our lived experiences, sharing those reflections with each other, and finding the common threads in our experiences. This speaks to the importance of reflection in transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997; 2000). While premise reflections originally were thought to be the only that lead to transformative learning, our reflective dialogue was also content and process-based. We would not have been able to do this work without having built relationships with one another through NACADA, so a degree of trust is necessary prior to engaging in this dialogue. While it is a form of privilege to say that spaces must be created for we, white folks collectively, in such a way that does not trigger defensive reactions of white fragility (DiAngelo, 2018), learning cannot occur if we are going to express anger or guilt, for example, rather than curiosity, openness, and empathy.

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While graduate-level education on social justice and whiteness was necessary for us to understand our racial privilege, not every white male will have that opportunity. DiAngelo (2018) discussed the difficulties of even getting courses on these topics integrated into curriculum. How, then, do we educate white men who may not have the opportunity to enroll in these courses? Our findings suggest that perhaps discussing class privilege might be an effective first step in a professional development curriculum and, we would argue, could be integrated into undergraduate and even secondary education. By starting with education on something more salient to white men that the four of us observed even as early as childhood, maybe then

they would be more open to furthering their learning on racial and gender privilege through engaging in readings, social media, videos, Podcasts, etc.

LIMITATIONS

One important point for consideration as we continue our reflective dialogue, and for others who wish to engage in similar conversations, is that we did not officially establish norms at the beginning of our meetings. This would have been helpful to ensure that each person could share their perspectives but also could be challenged for assumptions that may be problematic (Sawyer & Norris, 2013). As we discussed in the methods section, we did not want to challenge each other's perspectives too much, as that could limit our ability to draw out the "authentic" lived story of each individual. However, while we acknowledged the individual expertise each person has over their own lived experiences, even experts can and should be challenged to think differently about their ideas. Craig noted, "There is no knowledge production if you don't." We did question, though, if we would have been willing to challenge each other had a moment arisen where it would be important. Would we have, instead, avoided that point to preserve our relationships in this reflective space? Establishing norms is an effective step in creating a reflective space that cultivates collegial dialogue, rather than congenial dialogue (Nelson, Deuel, Slavitt, & Kennedy, 2010). We discussed that each person probably would prefer being challenged differently, so as to not trigger the defensive reactions that stem from white fragility (DiAngelo, 2018). Craig questioned if some people might need to be challenged directly and assertively, whereas another might need to be "cushioned" into this dialogue. We could have discussed people's preferences for engaging in this type of dialogue in a first meeting as a way to establish a norm around critical, challenging questions. Had we established this expectation at the beginning, perhaps we could have seen more questioning that challenged each other's assumptions and beliefs, while still maintaining sharing of authentic stories. For example, we could have established a norm that if we needed to ask a question that potentially challenges a person's perspective, then that question would be asked in a separate meeting from when we are interviewing that person. That way, we draw out the authentic story first and then engage in critical questioning later. As we continue our dialogue, we will return to this and establish formal norms to proceed forward.

BEGINNING

These findings report, to the best of our ability, our self-analysis and our own implicit biases salient to our experiences in terms of our racial, gender, and class identity development and privilege. We acknowledge that this reflection represents our current stage of identity development that may not reflect the raw experiences (e.g. Kyle in a noncontact phase would report things very differently than Kyle in an optimal phase). We intentionally consider this a new beginning, not a conclusion. Having gotten through only one of our questions, we have realized just how much there is to unpack in our four experiences. This continues to be a beginning because as humans open to change, we are ever becoming. We have not "arrived" (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 5), nor will we ever. Thus, we commit ourselves to continual engagement in building self-awareness, reflection, and education.

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Craig M. McGill, Ed.D. is a post-doctoral researcher at the University of South Dakota. He holds Masters degrees in Music Theory and Academic Advising, and a doctorate in Adult Education and Human Resource Development. He is a qualitative researcher with an emphasis on professional identity, professionalization, and social justice. Dr. McGill can be reached at craig.mcgill@usd.edu.

Kyle W. Ross, Ed.D. Kyle W. Ross, Ed.D., is the Academic Coordinator for undergraduate programs in the College of Nursing at Washington State University and teaches in the graduate curriculum on nursing education. He serves on the Board of Directors through 2022 for NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising. His research interests include capacity building, organizational learning, action research methodology, social justice in higher education, and student retention and attrition in health care professional programs.



Sean Bridgen, D.Ed. is the inaugural Director of Academic Advising in the newly founded School of Computing and Information at the University of Pittsburgh. He is also serving as an inaugural Excellence in Academic Advising Fellow (EAA) and is a member of the NSF Aspire Alliance National Change Team.

Tony Lazarowicz, Ph.D. is the Associate Director for Academic Advising for the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in Lincoln, Nebraska. He currently chairs the Advising Community on Transfer Students for NACADA. His research interests include identity development; transfer students and transition experience; and advisor training and development.

