

White Privilege and Male Privilege (McIntosh)

Being white and being male involve privilege: “an invisible package of unearned assets.”

People who recognize discrimination against others may have trouble recognizing that they have unearned privilege. They are taught not recognize that they have it.

“The pressure to avoid [recognizing privilege] is great, for in facing it I must give up the myth of meritocracy. If these things are true, this is not such a free country; one’s life is not what one makes it; many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their own. These perceptions mean also that my moral condition is not what I had been led to believe. The appearance of being a good citizen rather than a troublemaker comes in large part from having all sorts of doors open automatically because of my color.”

Privilege isn’t good for the development of the people who have it. Privilege may confer power, but not moral strength.

“Power from unearned privilege can look like strength when it is, in fact, permission to escape or dominate.”

Privilege includes both “unearned advantages,” which should be “unearned entitlements” (everyone should have them), and “conferred dominance,” which no one should have.

People benefit from privilege even if they aren’t individually racist or sexist.

“As we know from watching men, it is an open question whether we will choose to use unearned advantage to weaken invisible privilege systems and whether we will use any arbitrarily awarded power to try to reconstruct power systems on a broader base.”