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# PrivLineage: A Conceptual Model for Exploring a Legacy of Privilege

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PrivLineage:

A Conceptual Model for Exploring a Legacy of Privilege

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*The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University - University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a single semester time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.*

**Abstract**

Peggy McIntosh likens white privilege within American culture to an "invisible package of unearned assets that [one] can count on cashing in each day" (McIntosh, 2008, p 1). Majorities of people entering the social work profession are white and hold advanced degrees, while many of their clients come from minority, marginalized populations with a high percentage of people of color (Whitaker, Weismiller, & Clark, 2006). Without a healthy amount of awareness on the part of a social worker regarding his or her privilege, clients with disadvantage may become further alienated and marginalized by unwittingly discriminatory actions and decisions. Due to this danger, it is imperative for social workers to have an awareness and understanding of other cultural identities.  The National Association of Social Workers' code of ethics states, "social workers should obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression." (Workers N.A., 2017). This article puts forth a conceptual model for gaining awareness of one's privilege entitled PrivLineage.

PrivLineage is a way of exploring one's personal legacy in terms of unearned advantages that benefited predecessors at the expense of other historically marginalized groups. To better inform this model, the researcher conducted a synthesis of literature exploring the connections between privilege, cultural competency, and self-awareness within social work education and professional development. The author presents a personal case study of PrivLineage based upon a framework informed by the research findings. The case study demonstrates how exploring one's PrivLineage has the potential to assist a social work student or practitioner to better understand the personal effects of privilege and to gain a more meaningful orientation to the larger issues of privilege that persist today.

**Acknowledgements**

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## Introduction

A majority of individuals entering the profession of social work hold advanced degrees and identify racially as white (Center for Health Workforce Studies & NASW Center for Workforce Studies, 2006). As seen throughout the history of the United States, these traits are imbued with certain privileges. Earning an advanced degree privileges one access to higher paying jobs, while being white places one in the dominant racial group that has historically been safe from sweeping oppressive mechanisms of institutional racism.

Generally, the populations served by social workers do not possess the same levels of privilege. These individuals are much more racially diverse and tend to belong to marginalized and disadvantaged populations, such as those suffering from homelessness, poverty, physical and mental disabilities, and chronic mental illness. By nature of the work, there is an imbalance of power between the practitioner and the client. For example, a social worker in many instances makes the decision of whether or not a client is eligible for services or resources. This imbalance is further exacerbated when a practitioner from the dominant culture and higher socioeconomic class is serving a client from a non-dominant culture and lower socioeconomic class. Privilege has a tendency to be invisible to those that possess it, allowing personal bias and prejudice to go unchecked. Practitioners unaware of their privilege and power may unwittingly perpetuate oppressive discrimination by the decisions they make on behalf of their clients. The Council on Racial, Ethnic and Cultural Diversity within the Council for Social Work Education (n.d.) outlines the imperative for social workers to acknowledge "the impact of the entrenched influences of power, privilege, and oppression on their experiences and the larger social, economic, and political structure."

The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which privilege is explicitly addressed in social work practice and education. This will be done through a review of literature pertaining to privilege, cultural competency, and self-awareness within the field of social work. Findings from this literature review will inform the concept of PrivLineage which the author has conceived as a way of exploring one's legacy of privilege. This paper will then provide a detailed case study to illustrate the purpose and application of the PrivLineage model.  It will conclude with a discussion of implications and suggestions for further research.

**Background**

Privilege is an advantage an individual is given without effort or merit (Franks & Riedel, 2017, McIntosh, 2008). Privilege can be physical, such as being born with a fully functioning respiratory system, or it can be a social and material condition, such as being born into a wealthy and nurturing family. There are many ways in which individuals are privileged. In American society, the physical attribute of white skin is a privilege. In defining white privilege, Peggy McIntosh likens it to an "invisible package of unearned assets that [one] can count on cashing in each day, but about which [one is] 'meant' to remain oblivious. [It] is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, [and] codebooks" (McIntosh, 2008, p 1).

A majority of people entering the social work profession are white and hold advanced degrees, while many of the individuals being served come from minority, marginalized populations (Whitaker, Weismiller, & Clark, 2006). There is danger in the disparity of privilege between the practitioner and client. "Privilege nurtures dependence, distances us from others, and creates a barrier to reflective social work practice" (Franks & Riedel, 2017, p 1). The National Association of Social Work (NASW) recognizes this danger and outlines the imperative

that "social workers should obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression." (Workers N.A., 2017).  The Council for Social Work Education (CSWE) also suggests that generalist social workers possess a "competency to engage diversity and difference in practice" which requires "social workers understand that, as a consequence of difference, a person's life experiences may include oppression, poverty, marginalization, and alienation as well as privilege, power, and acclaim" (CSWE, 2015).

Without a healthy amount of awareness, even the most well-meaning practitioner will make unwittingly discriminatory actions and decisions further alienating and marginalizing already disadvantaged clients. Author Golden (2013) provides an example from her practice in which she witnessed many white, middle class mental health professionals misdiagnosing mothers from non-European cultures as "lacking all feelings." Golden knew these clients well and had a starkly different perspective. "They were not 'lacking feelings'... they were strong women whose spirit had helped them find ways to survive. Sometimes they paid a big price for the terrible struggles they had known." The mental health professionals in this situation were making a diagnosis heavily influenced by their perception of healthy emotional expression and not taking into account a different response born of a very different life experience. In situations like these, the practitioner must pay heed to their power and the bias of their perceptions. By doing so, practitioners "increase their capacity to affirm their humanity and that of the communities they serve" (Franks and Riedel, 2017).

Privilege is inextricably linked to personal aspects beyond one's control, such as family and upbringing. Tracing the roots of privilege requires one to examine the context of opportunity afforded their ancestors in comparison to the coinciding forces of oppression. Learning history, especially as it applies to one's personal lineage, is vital in understanding oneself and the world

one lives in. "The great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do" (Baldwin, 1966).

In a reactionary article that stirred some controversy, author and Princeton student Tal Fortang (2014) lashed out against the quip "check your privilege," which he was told multiple times on campus. Fortang contends that simply because he is white and male does not mean he should feel personally guilty for patriarchy or white supremacy nor is he personally given an unearned advantage. He rails against the pejorative request by providing historical examples of how his family overcame adversity, such as fleeing Nazi Europe to immigrate to the United States and working hard to create a better future for their children. Fortang believes that his only privileges come from the altruism and self-sacrifice of his grandparents. What Fortang fails to account for is the ways in which his grandparents' situation differed from others during that time who were denied the same opportunities.

Researching a personal history of privilege necessitates an awareness of the disadvantages experienced by others. To understand privilege and its ramifications, one must see their personal lineage within the context of the larger societal structures of privilege and oppression. This is the opposite of individualism, which negates the relevance of racial identity. "Individualism erases history and hides the ways in which wealth has been distributed and accumulated over generations to benefit whites today" (DiAngelo, 2011).

Had Fortang (2014) been aware of or mentioned the oppressive Jim Crow laws of the south and the denial of access to small business loans and mortgages to blacks in major cities like Chicago and New York where his parents immigrated, he may have a more nuanced perspective (Rothstein, 2017). He would see how his parents, being white and European, would

have been more likely to assimilate into American life than an African American family that had

lived here for generations. This is not to discredit the hard work and fortitude of Fortang's

ancestors but to point out that there were larger forces of inherent advantage that precluded other

families from the opportunities afforded his. Unfortunately, the personal legacy he presents does

not account for this larger context and assumes that everyone else had the same level of access

and opportunity available to his ancestors. That is why when one considers tracing a legacy of

privilege, they must hold it in juxtaposition to a legacy of oppression.

The author has conceived of a model for understanding one's legacy of privilege called

PrivLineage, which provides a way of exploring one's personal legacy in terms of unearned

advantages that benefited predecessors at the expense of others. As explained by author Emily

Styles (1996), learning is always personal and contextual. By examining PrivLineage, one may

be more likely to see where personal history fits in the larger historical context of advantage and

disadvantage. Seeing these connections may help better orient one to the larger societal issues of

the present and see more clearly one's position in society, realizing the power and opportunity

one has to effect change.

To better inform the concept of PrivLineage, the author will conduct a synthesis of

literature exploring the connections between privilege, cultural competency, and self-awareness

pertaining to social work education and professional development.

## Methodology

### Research Design

The chosen method of research was a narrative systematic literature review, the goal of

which was to collect as much relevant, published, and authoritative information as possible to

gain an informed perspective on the concepts of privilege, cultural competence, and self-awareness within the field of social work practice and education. Collected articles were analyzed systematically to abstract pertinent data. Data were further analyzed for recurrent themes providing insight in answer to the research question. The narrative systematic review differs from a typical systematic review by including "gray area" literature such as periodicals, critical analysis, and curricula.

The three research questions for this narrative systematic literature review were: "In what ways is the concept of privilege addressed in social work education and practice?", "How is the concept of cultural competence informed by privilege in social work education and practice?", and "How is the concept of self-awareness within social work education and practice informed by awareness of privilege?" The synthesis of these three literature reviews sought to inform the model of PrivLineage.

Based upon the synthesis of findings from the review of literature, a model of PrivLineage is defined. The author will then present a personal case study of PrivLineage to demonstrate how the model can assist a student or practitioner in developing better awareness of privilege and more meaningful orientation to the larger systems of privilege that persist today.

**Definitions**

The author's definition of "privilege" for the purpose of this study entails advantages based upon racial, ethnic, and cultural characteristics, chiefly the concept of "white privilege" defined by McIntosh (2008, p.1). Many studies observe privilege based upon other characteristics, such as gender, sexual orientation, religion, physical ability, and intersections of advantages and disadvantages that exist for individuals that identify with multiple characteristics. For example, such an identity may be a cis-gendered, black woman raised by white parents in an

affluent neighborhood. It is important to point out that the concept of privilege is complex and difficult to define in very cut and dry terms. The author thus decided to focus on race-related privilege in order to narrow the scope of this particular study.

The NASW defines cultural competence as "a knowledge base of clients' cultures and demonstrable competence in the provision of services that are sensitive to clients' cultures and to differences among people and cultural groups" (Workers, N.A., 2017, p. 9). This author defines cultural self-awareness as the social work practitioner's sense of self as it relates to ethnic and racial identity. This larger concept is informed by knowledge of one's own personal lineage regarding culture, societal privilege, and oppression.

**Types of Literature**

The primary purpose of the literature review was to gain a deeper understanding of the concepts of privilege, cultural competence, and self-awareness as it relates to social work education and practice. The literature included for review included literature reviews, critical analysis of social work practice and education, and exploratory and anecdotal literature pertaining to the concepts of privilege, cultural competence, and self-awareness within social work practice and education.

**Types of Publications**

The search for literature included articles published by peer-reviewed journals as well as "gray" literature, such as education curricula, periodicals, and reports. Research was limited to articles published after January 1, 2000 in order to focus specifically on current and relevant information. These reviews utilized literature written in English and pertaining to social work education and practice within the United States. Databases utilized for this search were Social Work Abstracts, SocIndex, PsychInfo, Scopus, and ERIC.

For literature relevant to the concept of privilege within social work practice and education, the following search terms were utilized: "social work," "social worker," "social work education," "privilege," "white privilege," "whiteness studies," and "whiteness."

For literature relevant to the concept of cultural competence within social work practice and education, the following search terms were utilized: "social work," "social worker," "social work education," "cultural competence," "cultural awareness," "cultural sensitivity," "social justice," and "racism."

For literature relevant to the concept of personal lineage within social work practice and education, the following search terms were utilized: "social work," "social worker," "social work education," "racial identity," "ethnic identity," "self-concept," and "awareness."

**Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

For the purpose of these systematic reviews, the author conducted a study to identify search terms and criteria to be included and excluded in the search for applicable review literature pertaining to privilege, cultural competency, and self-awareness.

**Privilege.** To find a broad scope of articles related to privilege within social work practice and education, the author used the search terms "social work," "social worker," "social work education," "privilege," "privilege (social sciences)," "racism," and "social justice." Search terms were used in all databases, which yielded 182 articles (Social Work Abstracts [n=30], SocIndex [n=36], PsychInfo [n=34], Scopus [n=49], ERIC [n=33]). Within these results, 114 articles were excluded for not meeting the following criteria: published with the years 2000-2017 (n=30), social work education and practice within United States (n=26), and concept of privilege referenced in title or abstract (n=58). The remaining 68 articles contained 15 duplicates that were removed, yielding 53 articles. Forty-two articles were excluded because the concept of privilege

was not primary. The 11 included articles were further screened by review of the entire article,

searching for relevance to cultural competency and self-awareness. Six articles were excluded

based upon these criteria. Results yielded five articles (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1. *Privilege Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

Literature Search
Databases: Social Work Abstracts, SocIndex, PsychInfo, Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar
Subjects/Keywords/Search Terms: "social work", "social worker", "social work education",
"privilege", "privilege (social sciences)", "racism", "social justice"

Combined Search results (n=182):
Social Work Abstracts (n=30), SocIndex (n=36), PsychInfo (n=34), Scopus (n=49), ERIC (n=33)

Excluded Articles (n=114)
- **Published between 2000-2017 (n=30)**
  *Social Work Abstracts (n=10) SocIndex (n=4)*
  *PsychInfo (n=5) Scopus (n=11) ERIC (n=0)*
- **Social work education and practice within United States (n=26)**
  *Social Work Abstracts (n=4) SocIndex (n=6)*
  *PsychInfo (n=5) Scopus (n=11) ERIC (n=0)*
- **Concept of privilege primary as it relates to education and practice (n=58)**
  *Social Work Abstracts (n=6) SocIndex (n=2)*
  *PsychInfo (n=10) Scopus (n=19) ERIC (n=21)*

Included (n=68):
Social Work Abstracts (n=10),
SocIndex (n=24), PsychInfo (n=14),
Scopus (n=8), ERIC (n=12)

Articles screened for duplicates

Excluded (n=15)

Included (n=53)

Articles screened after further review of title and abstract

Excluded (n=42)

Articles screened after further review of article

Included (n=11)

Excluded (n=6)

Included (n=5)

**Cultural Competency.** To find a broad scope of articles related to cultural competence within social work practice and education, the author used the following search terms; "social work," "social worker," "social work education," "cultural competency," "cultural competence," and "cultural awareness." Search terms were utilized in all databases, which yielded 165 articles (Social Work Abstracts [n=30], SocIndex [n=24], PsychInfo [n=48], Scopus [n=26], and ERIC [n=37]). Within these results, 99 articles were excluded for not meeting the following criteria: published with the years 2000-2017 (n=33), social work education and practice within United States (n=13), and the concept of cultural awareness is applied to generalized social work practice and populations (n=53). The remaining 66 articles contained nine duplicates that were removed, yielding 57 articles. Thirty-four articles were excluded after further review of abstract revealed that the article did not meet aforementioned criteria. The remaining 23 articles were further screened by a review of the entire article, searching for relevance to the concept of privilege and self-awareness. Fifteen articles were excluded based upon these criteria. The final yield of articles for review totaled eight (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 2. *Cultural Competency Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

Literature Search
Databases: Social Work Abstracts, SocIndex, PsychInfo, Scopus, and ERIC
Subjects/Keywords/Search Terms: "social work", "social worker", "social work education",
"cultural competency", "cultural competence", "cultural awareness",

Combined Search results (n=165):
Social Work Abstracts (n=30), SocIndex (n=24), PsychInfo (n=48), Scopus (n=26), ERIC (n=37)

Excluded Articles (n=99)
- **Published between 2000-2017 (n=33)**
  *Social Work Abstracts (n=4) SocIndex (n=1)*
  *PsychInfo (n=0) Scopus (n=24) ERIC (n=4)*
- **Social work education and practice within United States (n=13)**
  *Social Work Abstracts (n=4) SocIndex (n=5)*
  *PsychInfo (n=2) Scopus (n=0) ERIC (n=2)*
- **Concept of cultural awareness is applied to generalized social work practice and populations (n=53)**
  *Social Work Abstracts (n=11) SocIndex (n=10)*
  *PsychInfo (n=5) Scopus (n=17) ERIC (n=10)*

Included (n=66):
Social Work Abstracts (n=11),
SocIndex (n=9), PsychInfo (n=18),
Scopus (n=7), ERIC (n=21)

Articles screened for duplicates

Excluded (n=9)

Included (n=57)

Articles screened after further review of title and abstract

Excluded (n=34)

Articles screened after further review of article

Included (n=23)

Excluded (n=15)          Included (n=8)

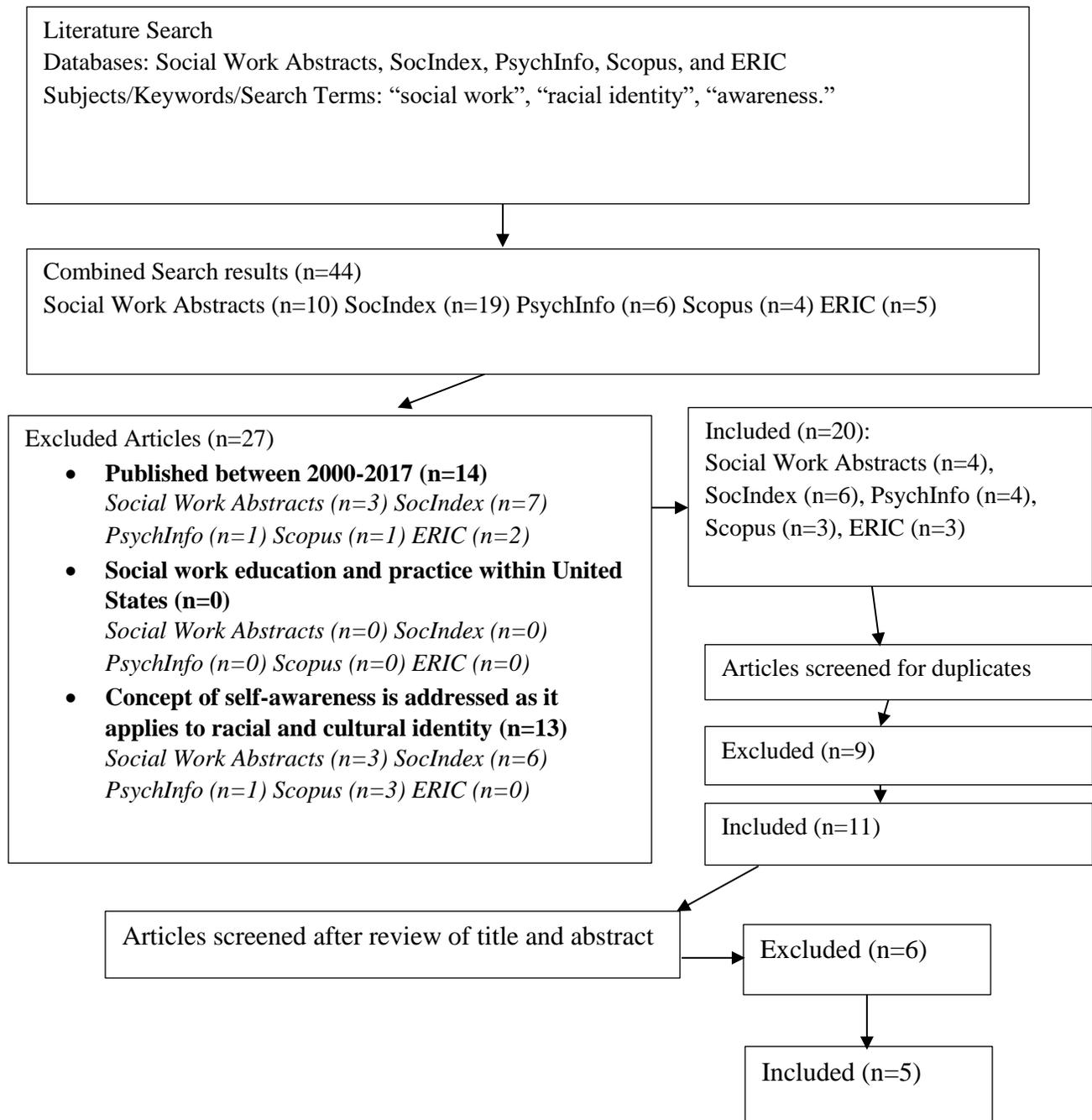**Self-Awareness.** To find a broad scope of articles related to cultural self-awareness within social

work practice and education, the author used the search terms: "social work," "racial identity,"

and "awareness" in all databases, and this yielded 44 articles (Social Work Abstracts [n=10],

SocIndex [n=19], PsychInfo [n=6], Scopus [n=4], and ERIC [n=5]). Within these results, 27

articles were excluded for not meeting the following criteria: published with the years 2000-2017

(n=14) and concept of self-awareness is addressed as it applies to racial and cultural identity

(n=13). The remaining 20 articles contained nine duplicates that were removed, yielding 11

articles. These remaining 11 articles were further screened by review of the entire article,

searching for relevance to privilege and cultural awareness.  Six articles were excluded based

upon these criteria.  The final yield of articles for review was five (see Figure 3 below).

Figure 3. *Cultural Self-Awareness Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

Literature Search
Databases: Social Work Abstracts, SocIndex, PsychInfo, Scopus, and ERIC
Subjects/Keywords/Search Terms: "social work", "racial identity", "awareness."

Combined Search results (n=44)
Social Work Abstracts (n=10) SocIndex (n=19) PsychInfo (n=6) Scopus (n=4) ERIC (n=5)

Excluded Articles (n=27)
- **Published between 2000-2017 (n=14)**
  *Social Work Abstracts (n=3) SocIndex (n=7)*
  *PsychInfo (n=1) Scopus (n=1) ERIC (n=2)*
- **Social work education and practice within United States (n=0)**
  *Social Work Abstracts (n=0) SocIndex (n=0)*
  *PsychInfo (n=0) Scopus (n=0) ERIC (n=0)*
- **Concept of self-awareness is addressed as it applies to racial and cultural identity (n=13)**
  *Social Work Abstracts (n=3) SocIndex (n=6)*
  *PsychInfo (n=1) Scopus (n=3) ERIC (n=0)*

Included (n=20):
Social Work Abstracts (n=4),
SocIndex (n=6), PsychInfo (n=4),
Scopus (n=3), ERIC (n=3)

Articles screened for duplicates

Excluded (n=9)

Included (n=11)

Articles screened after review of title and abstract

Excluded (n=6)

Included (n=5)

In total, the preliminary search for literature yielded 18 articles.

**Analysis Plan / Data Abstraction**

An abstraction form was created for each group of articles in order to compile the relevant information regarding each strain of the research (privilege, cultural competency, and self-awareness). Each article in the group related to privilege was reviewed for information within the following six categories: characteristics of privilege, barriers to awareness of privilege, resistance to awareness of privilege, assumptions that sustain ignorance of privilege, relevance of privilege to cultural competency, and how to acknowledge privilege. Pertinent data from each article were recorded. Data abstraction forms (see Figure 4) were then analyzed for recurrent ideas, and emergent themes were recorded.

Figure 4. *Privilege Abstraction Form*

| Article Title | |
|---|---|
| Author | |
| Citation | |
| Database of origin | |
| What characteristics of privilege are identified? | |
| What barriers exist to awareness of privilege? | |
| What resistance is there to acknowledgement of privilege? | |
| What assumptions sustain ignorance of privilege? | |
| How is the concept of privilege relevant to the concept of cultural competence? | |
| How does one arrive at acknowledgement of privilege? | |
| What should one do beyond knowledge of privilege? | |

Each article related to cultural competence was reviewed for answers to the following

questions: How is cultural competence or similar concept (cultural sensitivity, cultural

awareness, cultural humility, etc.) defined? How is the concept of privilege addressed within

cultural competency training in social work education? Pertinent data from each article were

recorded. Data abstraction forms (see Figure 5) were analyzed for recurrent ideas, and emergent

themes were recorded.

Figure 5. *Cultural Competence Abstraction Form*

| | |
|---|---|
| Article Title | |
| Author | |
| Citation | |
| Database of Origin | |
| How do authors define cultural competence or similar concept (cultural sensitivity, cultural awareness, cultural humility, etc)? | |
| Is the concept of privilege addressed? And if so, how is it defined and what are the implications as it relates to cultural competence or similar concept? | |

Each article within the self-awareness strain was reviewed for answers to the following questions: How is self-awareness to privilege attained and maintained?  How does self-awareness of racial identity and privilege relate to cultural competence?  What principles/values of social work are identified? Pertinent data from each article were recorded. Data abstraction forms (see Figure 6) were analyzed for recurrent ideas, and emergent themes were recorded.

Figure 6. *Self-Awareness Abstraction Form*

| | |
|---|---|
| Article Title | |
| Author | |
| Citation | |
| Database of Origin | |
| How is self-awareness to privilege attained and maintained? | |
| How does self-awareness of racial identity and privilege relate to cultural competence? | |

**Findings**

Data abstracted from the literature reviews pertaining to privilege, cultural competency, and self-awareness is addressed in the proceeding sections. Information from all three strains were be synthesized to inform the framework and process of PrivLineage.

**Privilege**

Abstraction of the data revealed many barriers that prevent white social workers from being aware of privilege. The barriers fell into two categories: individual and systems level barriers.

      **Individual level barriers.** The individual level barriers were divided into two separate categories: active resistance and passive resistance. Active individual resistance describes barriers such as having a dismissive or invalidating view of non-dominant cultural perspectives. Passive resistance describes barriers that are less overt, such as discomfort, ignorance, or guilt and shame.

      *Active resistance.* Many authors spoke to a lack of respect or invalidating attitude towards non-dominant cultural perspectives as a barrier to acknowledging privilege (Minarik, 2017; Davis & Gentlewarrior, 2015; Abrams, & Gibson, 2007; Vodde, 2001). Author Vodde (2001) speaks to the concept that those functioning well within a particular system tend not to consider how that system may not function well for others. He refers to French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's "strategies of condescension" where those that are in power "deny the social distance between themselves and others" (p.144). This denial helps support the idea that what the privileged individual possesses is merited by way of virtue and hard work. Minarik (2017) states that "those in positions of advantage have the greatest investment in the belief that the system of rewards and penalties is fair and legitimate" (p.53). Assertions that contradict this belief are more

apt to be invalidated or excused as self-serving. Vodde (2001) states that often times within

higher education, women and faculty of color who speak up about issues of oppression are seen

as "focusing narrowly on their own interests or personal proclivities" (p. 149). Authors Abrams

& Gibson (2007) confirm this reality by speaking to the discomfort that students of color feel in

speaking up about their experiences for fear of being criticized by their more privileged white

peers (p.150). This general invalidating atmosphere manifests itself in several real ways for

people of color, such as "a lack of promotion and advancement opportunities, a lack of respect,

silencing, micro-aggressions, and workplace practices and policies that constrain individual

practices" (David & Gentlewarrior, 2015, p. 203).

Many authors also spoke to active denial of responsibility as a barrier to privilege

awareness (Minarik, 2017; Davis & Gentlewarrior, 2015; Jeyasingham, 2012; Abrams & Gibson,

2007; Vodde, 2001). Denial tends to be very narrowly based on one's subjective experience,

especially for individuals that come from a working class background and do not see themselves

as privileged based solely upon their own socio-economic positioning. Their experience may

lead them to believe that everything they possess came by way of hard work. The idea that they

are privileged simply because of their race does not immediately ring true (Minarik, 2017).

Authors Abrams & Gibson (2007) present a model of stages that many privileged individuals go

through in coming to awareness of their privilege. In their model's initial stages, an individual

faces a decision of "disintegration" or "reintegration" (p.152), a choice brought on by the

disorienting idea that one has unearned privilege. In reintegration, the individual might respond

by "minimizing the significance of racism and freeing oneself of personal responsibility," while

in disintegration, the individual "acknowledges the many vicissitudes of racism" and moves

towards a more "anti-racist" identity" (p.152-153). Vodde (2001) identifies a different model in

which the initial stages are "denial and minimization" (p.154). Vodde characterizes the sentiment

of denial and minimization with the phrase, "I am not responsible for that which I did not cause"

(p. 150).

Several authors also discussed the barrier of defensiveness (Minarik, 2017; Abrams &

Gibson, 2007). When confronted with the idea of white privilege, many white individuals will

react with defensiveness, interpreting the assertion that they are privileged based upon their race

as a personal accusation that is unfair towards well-intentioned people (Minarik, 2017). Abrams

& Gibson (2007) point out that many white students may view the concept of white privilege as

fundamentally "anti-white," prejudiced, or even racist towards white people. This defensiveness

will tend to increase and make it even more difficult to have "meaningful education, dialogue, or

growth" (p.155).

*Passive resistance.* Several barriers of passive resistance exhibited by individuals were

identified across the literature. The most common barriers are ignorance, discomfort, and guilt or

shame (Minarik, 2017; Abrams & Gibson, 2007; Vodde, 2001; Lamberghini-West et al., 2011).

It is noted that often students are told to reject prejudice but are neither well-informed of

disparities nor challenged to examine the privileged advantages they possess (Abrams & Gibson,

2007). Students are often left to believe that their "experience is representative of reality" in

which it is almost impossible to conceive of another reality faced by others (Vodde, 2001, p.

149). Vodde highlights this disconnect by contrasting the starkly different experiences of whites

and African Americans with police. Vodde explains that, typically, white middle-class

individuals do not experience repeated and seemingly unnecessary traffic stops and thus respond

to accounts by African Americans with "incredulity" and "a tendency to look for valid reasons

for the incident" (p.149). An inability to relate may make it difficult for white people to listen to

accounts of racial profiling from African Americans because it presents such a stark alternative reality to their own.

This harsh contrast can create discomfort, which presents another barrier to awareness of privilege common throughout the literature. Vodde (2001) speaks to the discomfort elicited amongst white students when content of oppression is discussed. Common responses are "Haven't we talked enough about this?" or "Why do we have to harp on things that are so uncomfortable?" (p.151). This unwillingness to experience discomfort leads to avoidance and minimization of the work necessary to fully grasp the concept of privilege and the reality of oppression experienced by those who are not a part of the dominant culture. Vodde states that in order to de-center privilege, "we must be willing to tolerate discomfort that we may not understand, agree with, or sanction" (p.151).

Another common barrier is the guilt and shame that many white students experience in confronting aspects of their privilege. Abrams & Gibson (2007) speak to the paralysis of white guilt that can be experienced by individuals that are caught up in a nagging anxiety about their individual role within a system of oppression. Guilt can motivate, but it can also paralyze. What is most important to realize is that, though awareness of privilege may change the perspective of privileged individual, no change is made unless that individual takes actual steps towards dismantling the effects of privilege in their own life. Awareness is pivotal for change to occur, but nothing changes by the mere occurrence of awareness (Davis & Gentlewarrior, 2015; Jeyasingham, 2012). In doing work to examine and acknowledge one's privilege, there can be a tendency to slip into a false reality, believing racism has been personally exorcised and only exists elsewhere, within those who are less self-conscious and more ignorant (Jayasingham, 2012). One may claim to be "woke" and thus be beyond racism. "The reflexive work of

identifying one's participation in systems of dominance does not, in itself, challenge racism; it only changes the position that the speaker takes up in relation to racism" (Jayasingham, 2012, p.676). The examination stops short of real honesty so one can maintain the idea that "I am a good, anti-racist person" (Jayasingham, 2012, p.676).

**Systems level barriers**. Systems level barriers are societal phenomenon such as white normalcy, individualism, and meritocracy. Author Vodde (2001) identifies a pervasive and ingrained belief in the idea of meritocracy, in which all people are given the same host of opportunities and the difference between success and failure has to do with the character and discipline of the individual (p.142). Vodde contends that this "unquestioned acceptance discounts the perceptions of those whose experiences challenge the validity of the ideology" (p. 143). The belief in the system as fair and legitimate is difficult for most to deny and, in order to challenge this belief, one must be aware of the legacy of disparity between members of high and low status. After understanding this precedent, one is more apt to recognize that "more than just individual effort results in success and that individual failure likewise cannot be assumed to rest solely on the hands of the individual" (Minarik, 2017 p. 60). Seeing the legacy of disparity from a privileged vantage point elicits empathy and openness to the narratives and realities of individuals from the non-dominant group. Vodde (2001) states, "we [social work practitioners] must be willing to see ourselves as [those with less power] see us" (p. 153).

A common systemic barrier referenced across the literature is the normalization of white culture (Davis & Gentlewarrior, 2015; Jeyasingham, 2012; Lamberghini-West et al., 2011; Abrams & Gibson, 2007; Vodde, 2001). Traditional training in therapy as well as  many of the theories informing psychotherapy come from a Eurocentric bias and, historically, white European-American behaviors have been used as the pinnacle of normalcy by which other non-

dominant cultures are assessed (Lamberghini-West et al., 2011; Vodde, 2001). Along these lines,

the educational theories informing multicultural studies have come from a white European-

American perspective with the goal of labeling and categorizing other cultures. A major criticism

of multicultural education is that white students are "often alienated from positioning themselves

in any ethnic or racial grouping" (Abrams & Gibson, 2007, p. 153). This othering perspective

has the effect of "positioning white identity outside of race, being left un-scrutinized"

(Jeyasingham, 2012, p.671).

The individual-level barriers of resistance, denial, and guilt along with system-level

barriers, such as the myth of meritocracy and the normalization of whiteness, work to preserve

the status quo and leave the institutional inequities unchallenged.

**Cultural competency**

The abstraction of data related to cultural competence yielded several major recurring

themes. Major recurring themes fell into two categories: critique of earlier forms of cultural

competency that do not address privilege and recommendations for improving cultural

competence with inclusion of curriculum addressing privilege.

**Critique.** Many authors spoke to the value of addressing privilege and oppression in

cultural competency coursework (Dessel & Rodenborg, 2017; Nylund, 2006; Abrams & Moio,

2009; Garran & Werkmeister Rozas, 2013; Fisher-Borne, Montana Cain, & Martin, 2015; Yan,

2008; Conley, Deck, Miller, & Borders, 2017; Drabble, Oppenheimer, & Sen, 2012). Nylund

(2006) identifies conventional cultural competency as an analytical process that focuses on

observations of difference amongst minority cultures but fails to examine the intricacies of

dominant white culture with the same or any level of critique. Authors Fischer-Borne et al.

(2015) contend, "The term 'culture' is often conflated with or used as a proxy for 'non-white

racial identity'" (p. 169). Authors Drabble et al. (2012) and Yan (2008) speak of the Eurocentric

perspective of social work education and the profession's "historical roots in Anglo-American

culture" (p. 317). Author Jeyhasingham (2012) states that "[n]on-white people come to be seen

as raced while white people come to be seen...as just people" (p.671). Most articles also

comment on the concept of a normalized, monolithic "white" culture (Vodde, 2001; Abrams &

Gibson, 2007; Lamberghini-West, Mindrup, & Spray, 2011; Jeyasingham, 2012; Davis &

Gentlewarrior, 2015; Minarik, 2017). Many white students will not see themselves in racialized

ways, and are not cognizant of their racial identity, thinking of themselves as "normal" rather

than as white.

Another aspect of cultural competence that further reinforces the normalization of

whiteness is that it simplifies non-dominant cultures into limiting essential characteristics.

Nylund's (2006) criticism of conventional cultural competency is that, despite good intentions, it

has the potential to perpetuate negative stereotypes and "tightly bound fictive identities that

reproduce notions of inherent, durable, and unbridgeable differences between people" (p.29).

Dessel et al. (2017) also note the tendency of cultural competency courses to reinforce "the

notion that non dominant cultures have discrete homogeneous characteristics" (p.223). Conley et

al. (2017) warn against "reductionist" conceptions of other groups that unwittingly maintain and

promote prejudice (p.237).

Most importantly, authors note that cultural competency curriculum within social work

has a tendency to focus on individual context at the expense of larger systemic issues of

oppression "which are [unwittingly] echoed in helping relationships" (Drabble et al., 2012).

Fisher-Borne et al. (2015) contend that, oftentimes, cultural competency curricula focus on

"understanding, awareness, and not systemic inequalities" (p. 170). This narrow focus on

individual context can leave students unequipped to deal with higher levels of institutional

racism and oppression (Abrams & Moio, 2009), which falls short of social work's principled call

to "undermine racism" (Nylund, 2006, p.29). Additionally, this focus on interpersonal context

may lead some to the conclusion that the "determinants of poverty, exclusion, and disadvantage

are based upon individual attributes," ignoring the larger context of historical and societal

oppression (Dessel & Rodenberg, 2017, p.223).

     This "othering" approach to cultural competency positions white students outside of

cultural definition without leaving much room for self-reflection and racial identification.

Students who approach cultural competency with this lens may never critically assess their own

background and culture. Cultural competency devoid of white cultural awareness does not give

white social work students the opportunity or tools to critically assess their own identity in

relation to privilege and oppression (Fisher-Borne et al., 2015).

     **Recommendations.** Several of the reviewed articles proposed new theories arising from

their critique of cultural competence. Nylund (2006) proposed that social work education utilize

critical multiculturalism, which "recognizes the socio-historical construct of race...considers

intersectionality of race with other factors, such as class, gender, nation, sexuality, etc." (p. 30).

Critical multiculturalism also implores students to "interrogate conditions of 'otherness'" and

challenges the idea that social work is in some way "apolitical, trans-historical" and "removed

from the power struggles of history" (Nylund, 2006, p.30).

     Authors Abrams & Moio (2009) propose utilizing the lens of critical race theory (CRT)

to inform cultural competency curriculums which tend to focus on individual level attitudes and

not upon larger systemic issues of racism. Abrams and Moio (2009) state that the general

mission of CRT is "to analyze, deconstruct, and transform for the better the relationship among race, racism, and power" (p. 250). CRT's emphasis on racism, especially as it pertains to its societal permeation and enmeshment within larger systems that perpetuate oppression, can provide much-needed context to cultural competency training that might otherwise gloss over or even avoid the issue in seeking to understand and disseminate information regarding other cultural perspectives.

Nylund (2006) promotes the inclusion of whiteness studies into cultural competency curriculum. Nylund makes the argument that current de facto cultural competency curriculum fails to examine white culture with the same lens of curiosity it directs towards other cultures, "thereby overlooking 'whiteness' as if it is the natural, expected, and normal way of being human" (p. 31). Nylund provides several questions to ask white students that get at this concept, such as "Are there any white cultural practices? How did families identifying as Finnish, Irish, or Italian, for example, change to identifying as white?" (p.33). Nylund suggests that these modes of inquiry illicit the kind of critique often reserved for non-dominant culture, thereby "de-centering" it as the norm.

Drabble et al. (2012) put forth the idea of a transcultural perspective that deemphasizes the practitioner as cultural expert. The transcultural perspective is made up of five interconnected elements: "[importance of] culture; dynamics of power, privilege, and oppression; positionality and self-reflexivity; respectful partnership; and cultural competence" (p. 207). The transcultural

perspective acknowledges cultural competence as a piece of a larger puzzle that also includes privilege and self-awareness.

Multiple authors also gave credence to the framework of cultural humility (Conley et al., 2017; Drabble et al., 2012; Fischer-Borne et al., 2015). Cultural humility "is a process of 'committing to an ongoing relationship with patients, communities, and colleagues' that requires 'humility as individuals continually engaged in self-reflection and critique'" (Fischer-Borne et al., 2015, p. 171). Cultural humility is very much focused on bringing the practitioner into view as a cultural subject in need of critical review, "requiring an understanding of self on a deeper level and an analysis of power and privilege" (Fischer-Borne et al., 2015, p. 175). Drabble et al. (2012) state cultural humility focuses on a commitment to "mutually beneficial and non-paternalistic partnership with communities on behalf of individuals and defined populations" (p. 209).

In review, emergent themes criticizing cultural competency curriculum spoke to its tendency to normalize white culture, perpetuate negative stereotypes of cultural groups, focus on individual level issues at the expense of larger systemic ones, and ultimately bypass the opportunity for white students to critically assess their own cultural identities.

Authors provided many theoretical frames to augment the stated shortcomings. The proposed theories (critical multiculturalism, CRT, whiteness studies, transcultural perspective, and cultural humility) all attempted to address the issue of privilege by including critique on white culture and deconstructing the idea of the practitioner as cultural expert.

**Self-awareness**

Authors put forth many ways in which the process of self-awareness should be conceptualized and practiced in regards to understanding privilege and cultural competency (Suárez, Newman, & Reed, 2007; Adamowich, Kumsa, Rego, Stoddart, & Vito, 2014; Yan & Wong, 2005; Bender, Negi, & Fowler, 2010; Hall & Jones, 2017). Themes that emerged from the abstraction of data were the balance between knowing oneself through personal exploration and in comparison with the experiences of others, the subjective and fluid nature of self-awareness, and the honesty and vulnerability required to acknowledge privilege.

We do not exist solely within ourselves and cannot possibly understand ourselves without the context of another's experience (Abrams & Gibson,2007; Drabble et al., 2012; Garran & Werkmeister Rozas,2013; Suárez et al., 2007; Bender et al., 2010; Adamowich et al., 2014; Yan & Wong 2005). Self-awareness requires a "critical exploration of personal familial history within geographic, cultural, relational, and societal contexts" to better understand our heritage and societal positioning (Bender et al., 2010, p.2). This is especially true with regard to understanding privilege. In order to see the mechanisms of privilege explicitly, one must observe and empathize with the realities of those who experience oppression. The scope must widen beyond the interpersonal plane to better see the systemic realities faced by those who are underprivileged. Acknowledgement of these inequities must be melded with empathy for those who suffer.

Self-awareness is extremely personal and subjective. It cannot be generalized, and it will never be objective (Jeyasingham, 2012; Vodde, 2001; Suárez et al., 2007; Adamowich et al., 2014; Yan & Wong, 2005). One potential pitfall of self-awareness within the curriculum of cultural competency is its subject-object dichotomy, suggesting that culturally competent social

workers "are subjects capable of becoming neutral and impartial culture-free agents" by just being more aware of their cultural identity (Yan & Wong, 2005, p.181-182). This dichotomy creates a problematic relationship between client and practitioner, alleviating the practitioner of the responsibility to consider him- or herself a subject of critical inquiry within the process. Excluding oneself from the equation creates a blind spot to issues of countertransference and prejudice.

Self-awareness is also a practice requiring honesty about personal prejudices and biases (Dessel & Rodenborg, 2017; Drabble et al, 2012; Fisher-Borne et al, 2015; Bender et al., 2010). The process of critical self-awareness is foundational to social work practice. "As social workers we are called upon to be self-aware and take responsibility for our thoughts and actions" (Adamowich et al., 2014, p.132). In being honest with others and soliciting honest critique, practitioners willingly make themselves vulnerable to discomfort "that [they] may not at first understand, agree with, or sanction" (Vodde, 2001, p.151). This discomfort may conjure a litany of emotional responses, which is why Vodde (2001) refers to this process as "courageous acts of self-exploration" (p.157). Suárez et al. (2007) explains that this self-exploration "requires a commitment to confronting our pain, our guilt, and our fears for the sake of becoming more just practitioners" (p. 416). When practitioners acknowledge personal privilege in empathetic contrast to the oppressed other, they are more likely to assume the obligation to confront and disable the mechanisms that produce and sustain privilege.

Self-awareness, like privilege, is never static or fixed, and thus requires ongoing and intentional reappraisal (Davis & Gentlewarrior, 2015; Abrams & Gibson 2007; Vodde, 2001). Our realities are also in flux with the others we encounter. Yan and Wong (2005) refer to this as "[co-creation] of meanings and relationships" and note that this happens in each new interaction

a practitioner has with a client (p.187). Yan and Wong (2005) stress that "self-awareness...is not an isolated and individual process, 'but one in which the social worker must be open to the influence of the other in the creation of enhanced practice'" (p.187).

**Synthesis of Findings**

Underlying the major findings of the literature review regarding privilege, cultural competency, and self-awareness were appeals for the following qualities: honesty, humility, empathy, and responsibility.

Much was made of honesty in the literature. Authors spoke to the need for social workers to honestly examine their own prejudices and biases (Dessel & Rodenborg, 2017; Drabble et al, 2012; Fisher-Borne et al, 2015; Bender et al., 2010), acknowledge positions of privilege, deny the myth of meritocracy (Vodde, 2001; Minarik, 2017), and examine family history (Bender et al., 2010). Authors also expressed the imperative of honesty with others in full self-disclosure and open dialogue that acknowledges privilege (Vodde, 2001; Yan & Wong, 2005).

In keeping with honesty, humility is equally important. Literature expresses the need for humility in acknowledging that one cannot be an objective being because one's circumstances are not the same as others (Abrams & Gibson,2007; Drabble et al., 2012; Garran & Werkmeister Rozas, 2013; Suárez et al., 2007; Bender et al., 2010; Adamowich et al., 2014; Yan & Wong 2005). This is the same humility that allows white people to see the problematic "white is normal" delusion, acknowledging that perception is informed by culture and that white people are cultural beings, not somehow devoid of it (Davis & Gentlewarrior, 2015; Jeyasingham, 2012; Lamberghini-West et al.,2011; Abrams & Gibson, 2007; Vodde, 2001). Humility allows practitioners to examine their own biases and prejudices without outright denial or the smokescreen of defensiveness. Tolerating discomfort requires humility (Minarik, 2017; Abrams

& Gibson, 2007; Vodde, 2001). Ultimately, humility enables social workers to acknowledge their clients as equals and their needs as equally valid (Yan and Wong, 2005).

Empathy is the glue that holds all of these concepts together. Empathy employs honesty and humility in listening to the cultural other and opens the practitioner to an understanding different than their own. Empathic practitioners respectfully listen and validate the experiences of their clients, especially those that do not come from the same cultural identity. If practitioners are not aware of their privilege, it will be difficult to truly empathize with disadvantaged individuals because to deny privilege is to deny oppression, and denial of oppression is invalidating and disrespectful to the countless testimonies of those who experience it every day (Minarik, 2017; Davis & Gentlewarrior, 2015; Abrams, & Gibson, 2007; Vodde, 2001).

## PrivLineage

The themes of honesty, humility, empathy, and responsibility that arose in the synthesis of findings help to inform the concept and framework of PrivLineage which will guide the following case study. PrivLineage requires the following: honest and critical inquiry of one's own history alongside the experiences of oppressed individuals; humble recognition that one is not free of bias, racial prejudice, or unmerited advantage; empathy for those who have suffered a history and reality of unmerited oppression; and a responsibility to work towards dismantling the mechanisms of oppression from which the privileged personally benefit. To demonstrate this conceptual process, the author will present his own PrivLineage and reflection as a case study. Discussion will follow, tying the findings of the literature review to the reflections from the case study.

**Case Study**

For the purpose of this study, I traced the history of home ownership within my family over the course of three generations. Home ownership is highly valued in the United States and is viewed as a measure of success. Depending on where one lives, home ownership can be an extremely stable and lucrative investment that can be passed through generations. The ability to maintain a home in a safe neighborhood is extremely beneficial to the safety and stability of a family. Within each generation, I will examine coinciding reported issues of disparity and oppression regarding access to home ownership. I will discuss the formation of my biases and stereotypes as well as my privileges regarding home ownership. The case study will conclude with my reflections on the process of exploring my PrivLineage.

**Great Grandparents.** My maternal grandfather's parents, Beatrice and Leland (see Family Tree, Appendix A), both grew up in central Illinois and moved to Chicago in the 1920s. Beatrice's parents were wealthy landowners, and Leland's family history is not known. They rented apartments in Chicago's South Side and never owned a home. My maternal grandmother's mother , Anna, was born in 1907 and descended from Irish immigrants. Anna grew up in Chicago where she met Leon (b.1887), my great grandfather who hailed from Jackson, Mississippi. He moved to Chicago looking for work and secured a job at the Armour meat packing plant, one of the largest meat processing plants in the country at that time. He worked there during the 1920s and 1930s. Anna and Leon rented a home in the Park Manor neighborhood of Chicago's South Side, where my grandmother spent her childhood.

My paternal grandfather's parents, Helen and Walter Sr., were second-generation immigrants from Germany. Walter Sr. worked as an office manager for Armour Meats from which he retired with a pension. Walter Sr. and Helen owned a home in a southern suburb of

Chicago called West Lawn. My paternal grandmother's parents, Agnes and Russel, were first

generation immigrants from England. They also owned a home in West Lawn.

Between 1946 and 1953, over 300 large-scale riots were reported in which white

residents tried desperately to keep black families from moving into their neighborhoods

throughout the South Side of Chicago (Mullen, 1985). One of the first reported incidents was the

Airport Homes Riot in 1946. Airport Homes was a new housing development built by Midway

airport in West Lawn, less than a mile from where both of my paternal great grandparents lived

(see map in appendix B). The development was a temporary housing project for returning World

War II veterans and their families erected by the newly established Chicago Housing Authority

(Knox, 2004). Two veteran African American families moved into the new development and

were met with an angry mob of hundreds of white neighbors. The crowds that gathered threw

rocks, hurled insults, and made violent threats. The intimidation was successful and the families

left the project (Hirsch, 2009).

One of the largest riots of this time happened in Park Manor, just three blocks from

where my maternal grandmother grew up (see map in Appendix B). It is reported that on July

25th, 1949, a crowd of nearly 2,000 people descended on the newly purchased home of an

African American couple, Roscoe and Ethel Johnson. The crowd was sectioned off, but the

police were unable to disperse the mob or prevent damage to the property:

> "We barricaded the doors with furniture and put a mattress behind it," Mrs. Ethel
>
> Johnson recalled. "We crawled on our hands and knees when the missiles started
>
> coming in through the windows...Then they started to throw gasoline-soaked rags
>
> stuck in pop bottles. They also threw flares and torches" (Hirsch, 2009, p.58).

Both of these riots happened only blocks from the residences of my great grandparents. They were young adults while these riots raged. These outright violent acts of intimidation worked in tandem with predatory and discriminatory housing practices to maintain very stark lines of segregation between black and white neighborhoods throughout the 1950s and early 1960s.

**Grandparents.** My maternal and paternal grandparents both married in the 1950s. In 1956, my paternal grandparents, Walter Jr. and Louise, purchased their first home in the township of Worth, Illinois, which was seven miles southwest of West Lawn, even further from Chicago (See map, Appendix C). Walter Jr. and Louise were able to make the down payment with financial assistance from Walter Jr.'s parents. The purchase price of the home was $14,000 and they were able to sell it in 1964 for $21,000 before purchasing their second home in the same township for $28,000. My maternal grandparents, Francis and Marilyn, rented apartments and homes throughout Chicago's South Side, including the township of Worth. They also rented for some time in the towns of Dyer and St. John, Indiana, located about 25 miles southeast of Chicago (See map in Appendix C). In 1958, Francis and Marilyn were able to buy their first home in Posen, Illinois, which was located approximately 10 miles southwest of Park Manor, where Marilyn grew up. Francis and Marilyn purchased the home for $15,000 utilizing an FHA loan that required no money down. The development that Francis and Marilyn moved into was all white.

In both instances, my grandparents were able to purchase a home with assistance that was explicitly denied to African Americans. The development that Marilyn and Francis moved into was exclusively white, and the loan they acquired was very common in the post-war era, allowing young families to buy starter homes in brand new suburban developments. Many of

these developments had racially restrictive covenants that did not allow black families to buy,

even if they utilized the same GI loans that allowed white families to make a down payment

(Moser, 2014). Similarly, banks that were providing FHA loans to white families were explicitly

not providing them to black families (Madrigal, 2014).

For Walter Jr. and Louise, their assistance came through the wealth of Walter Jr.'s

parents, which came in part from the equity of the home they owned in West Lawn. African

American families were restricted in where they could live. Lending institutions did not invest in

areas that were predominantly black, further restricting economic growth. This led to an extreme

decline in property values in these neighborhoods, and made many black families eager to move

out of increasingly impoverished and overcrowded neighborhoods. With few financial assets,

these black families were vulnerable to exploitation. Speculators would scare white homeowners

into selling their homes at below market value and turn to sell them on contract to black families

at a price much higher than market value. Historian Beryl Satter states, "These sales stripped

black migrants of their savings during the very years when whites of similar class background

were getting an immense economic boost through FHA-backed mortgages that enabled them to

purchase new homes for little money down" (Moser, 2014, paragraph 8).

**Parents.** My parents grew up in neighborhoods and attended schools that were

exclusively white. When my mother's parents moved to Posen, she was enrolled in a private

Catholic school that was not integrated. She later attended a public school that was. My father

did not interact with any African Americans until his high school football team played rival

schools.

After graduating high school, my father, Dave, secured a job at a warehouse he heard of

through acquaintances in high school. My mother, Gay, was able to pay for nursing school by

way of an inheritance her mother received from an aunt. My parents were married in 1974. They

were embarking on careers at an early age, and with no student loan debt and dual incomes were

able to accumulate enough savings to afford the down payment on a house in Oak Forest,

Illinois, a suburb even farther south of Chicago, shortly after their first year of marriage. The

1970s were a good time to buy a home as home values tripled during this decade (Oliver &

Shapiro, 1995).

In 1978, my parents bought a larger home in Mokena, Illinois, and one year later, my

brothers were born. Around this time, they were able to secure a loan against their home to start a

small business. It was short-lived, and in order to pay off the debt accrued they requested a small

loan from my great grandmother to liquidate the assets and dissolve the company. My father

quickly bounced back and returned to gainful employment through his connections in the

railroad industry.

In 1986, one year after I was born, my parents wanted a larger home in which each of

their children could each have his own room. They purchased a new home in a brand new

housing development in Manhattan, Illinois, even farther south of Chicago. Throughout this

time, Dave was gainfully employed and continued to advance in his career. Gay worked on and

off as a registered nurse but was also able to take a substantial amount of time off to stay home

and raise my brothers and me. Our needs were always met, and as time progressed, my parents'

wealth grew. Both of them would say they grew up in lower to middle class socioeconomic

status, but today would consider themselves to be in the upper middle class.

The upward mobility that my parents experienced was by no means "handed" to them.

They made wise choices with their money and chose to invest in ways that paid off in the long

term. Unfortunately, the same opportunities and resources my parents benefited from were much less available to people of color during this same time. Sociologist Thomas Shapiro explains:

> That's a difference that comes from the past. Their parents were shut out of the Levittowns; their parents were shut out of FHA; their parents were shut out of GI loans; their parents were shut out of Veterans Administration [loans]. Their parents were zoned out and excluded and redlined out of the opportunity to build up that wealth in homes (Keough, 2004, para. 22).

During the 1970s and 1980s, job growth was moving away from the city centers and into the suburbs. Access to these new job opportunities by way of proximity was almost exclusively unavailable to the many minority families who were overtly denied entry to these developing suburban neighborhoods a decade or two earlier (Oliver & Shapiro, 1995). Current disparities in wealth between white and black families show how this oppression has a cumulative effect:

> Average wealth for white families is seven times higher than average wealth for black families...median white wealth...is *twelve times* higher than median black wealth...These raw differences persist, and are growing, even after taking age, household structure, education level, income, or occupation into account. Overall, housing equity makes up about two-thirds of all wealth for the typical (median) household. In short, for median families, the racial wealth gap is primarily a housing wealth gap (Jones, 2017, paragraph 2).

**Myself.** It was not the intention of my parents to raise their children in segregation, but that is the reality of my upbringing. My high school was predominantly white. I had all white

friends, belonged to an all-white church, and lived in neighborhoods that were predominantly

white. White was my normal, and any exposure I had to the experiences, values, and lives of

other races, ethnicities, and cultures was rarely, if at all, face to face with someone I lived near,

went to school with, or worshipped alongside. Most often, I was introduced to the stereotypes of

other racial groups, cultures, and ethnicities before I was ever introduced to an individual of

another culture, and to this day these stereotypes are present in my mind whenever I encounter

someone that either looks like me or doesn't. This segregated upbringing created a void marked

by an absence of other perspectives, which allowed the invisibility of privilege to persist until

much later in my adult life.

My wife and I bought a home in 2016. We had enough money in savings to make a down

payment of 20%. We had many options of where we could live within the Minneapolis area. We

chose the neighborhood we live in now because of its convenient location by a great park, the

light rail transit line, and important amenities within walking distance like pizza places. We were

excited to own our own place after having rented apartments where we shared parking and yard

space and we had to be mindful of our neighbors just on the other side of the wall.

The freedom and sense of ownership that came from purchasing our home was very

exciting. The process for securing a loan was quick, and we had a lot of support from co-workers,

friends, and family who were available to give us advice and referrals. Our financial ability to

make such an investment was heavily aided by money my wife's great grandfather had invested

on her behalf early in her childhood. Our families were instrumental in providing assistance in the

financial investment of our home. It was not hard-earned money, but money bestowed upon us by

generous family members who had the ability to support us in such a way. Our reliance upon our

family's wealth is a common scenario for many other white families in our generation:

Nearly one-half of all white homeowners report that they received significant

financial assistance from their families. In sharp contrast, seven out of eight

African-American homeowners purchased homes on their own. Whites have a

greater ability to provide larger down payments and high service fees for lowered

interest rates. Statistically, Black homeowners pay $12,000 more for the average

home over a 30-year mortgage (Moser, 2014).

After learning of the extreme forms of oppression, it is not difficult to draw the conclusion that

"this inheritance results from the discriminatory housing markets of a previous era, marked by

exclusion and residential segregation and backed by government support" (Moser, 2014).

**Case study Reflection**

In tracing my PrivLineage through homeownership, I gained a deeper understanding of

my legacy of privilege. Learning that my family lived in close proximity to events of outright

racial hatred, violence, and overt segregation brought on a new sense of closeness to the spoils of

oppression. By examining this aspect of my family history, I was able to see a clearer line

connecting the deep-seated and systemic racism of the past to the stark disparities of wealth and

access between whites and blacks that still exist today.

I was also able to better understand my own biases and discomfort in cross-cultural

settings as a byproduct of a long history of segregation. There is a historical precedent that

predisposes me to feel a certain way. These entrenched biases and stereotypes are unfortunate

and tending to them is my responsibility, but it is not something that needs to consume me with

guilt.

This exploration into family history gives me a better understanding of my own culture

and ethnic background. It exposes new information about the historical context that shaped my

family. I also possess a greater admiration and gratitude for the positive aspects of my family history. Although my predecessors possessed a great amount of privilege, they also worked hard and sacrificed for their children, generously providing resources to better their lives. I am quite fortunate for all they have done and the decisions they made.

The study heightened the awareness of how my privilege comes at the expense of another's oppression. This awareness increased my empathy for disadvantaged communities and sharpened my awareness of systemic racial barriers, which in turn elicits a stronger sense of obligation to actively advocate for those who continue to suffer from oppression. Others may find the exercise just as insightful, enabling deeper reflection for practitioners to develop a stronger obligation to continual awareness and advocacy.

## Discussion

### Implications

Privlineage has the potential to address barriers of both active and passive resistance that were identified in the literature. In addressing the barriers of active resistance, such as denial or invalidation of oppressive narratives, PrivLineage compels the learner to explore his or her historical context and see for himself the recorded and verified accounts of oppression. Observing this information by process of self-study tied to a personal lineage makes it more difficult to deny the distance between themselves and others. This process can give students resistant to the concept of privilege a less confrontational and more personal way to understand and acknowledge it.

In regards to the passive resistance reviewed in the literature, exploring one's PrivLineage provides a personal guide for recognizing privilege, allowing for reflection and

discovery on one's own terms. Tying historical events to a personal lineage may help students better understand the historical precedent for implicit biases they may be able to internally identify but feel immense guilt or shame in acknowledging.

The concept and process of PrivLineage may also provide a way to better understand the larger systemic issues of oppression. As noted in the literature, a barrier to acknowledging privilege is a belief in the system as fair and legitimate. When a white student looks at his legacy of privilege within the context of racial discrimination in the United States, what he learns may dispel the myth of meritocracy and equal opportunity, not dissimilar to the author's realization that black families were explicitly excluded from easy access to loans in order to invest in a home and build equity.

Tracing one's ethnic background is helpful in overcoming the barrier of monolithic white culture addressed in the literature. To an American whom is a descendant of Europeans, seeing one's ethnic heritage is to become more aware of one's foreignness. Considering that, at one time in history, a relative immigrated here and shed certain cultural identities that allowed them to assimilate, allows white students to connect with their cultural identity and no longer see themselves as a "normal American" outside of culture.

Along these lines, Privlineage may help to combat the normalization of whiteness within the realm of cultural competency training, a major criticism that arose from the literature. By examining one's culture alongside other cultural identities, white students are expected to apply the same level of critique usually reserved for non-white non-dominant cultures to their own background. Many authors stated that the larger systemic issues of racism that determine who is privileged and who is oppressed are often adjacent to discussions regarding cultural competency. PrivLineage requires examination of the larger historical context that one's predecessors lived

through, expanding the scope beyond the individual and interpersonal realm to look at larger

systemic issues of privilege and oppression.

Much of the literature reviewed suggested that students and practitioners have a sense of

their familial backgrounds, most generally around an understanding of one's ethnicity and

cultural heritage. The exploration of PrivLineage would greatly complement that pursuit and aid

in increasing awareness for white students entering the field of social work. This exercise would

serve well as an assignment in a foundation level social work class. The PrivLineage concept and

case study is aimed at white social workers, but can presumably be a helpful exercise for anyone

to gain a deeper awareness of the context in which their predecessors experienced privilege or

oppression. Students would have a unique opportunity to learn from each other if this study were

to be done in a classroom setting where students of various backgrounds complete and share

their own PrivLineage. The exercise would also set the tone for a discussion regarding privilege

and oppression that is personal and immediately relevant.

The study of one's PrivLineage creates a unique connection and exposure to the

experiences of marginalized and oppressed individuals that may not otherwise be made. This

connection creates an opportunity for deeper empathy with individuals that share a common

proximity in time and place to one's predecessors. PrivLineage promotes a kind of self-

awareness that necessitates the inclusion of another's narrative. This joining of legacies has the

potential to bring disparity into sharper focus for the student who might not otherwise consider

his or her connection to non-dominant narratives, much like the aforementioned piece by

Fortang.

**Limitations**

The insight gained from the case study is unique to the author and cannot be generalized to others. The topic of home ownership helped to narrow the scope of the study and demonstrate how one can trace a legacy of privilege. Housing discrimination in Chicago is very well documented and serves as a relevant aspect to the author's case study; however, others may choose to explore other issues and characteristics of privilege.

The focus of this case study is, of course, very insular and reliant on recorded data without any actual interaction with an individual from a non-dominant culture. The work of understanding privilege in a more relevant way requires the voice of others from an opposing perspective. There is a Chinese proverb that states, "If you want to know what the water is like, don't ask the fish." Understanding one's own privilege without the insight of an outside observer is like the fish trying to understand the water against which it has nothing to compare. In addition to including an outsider's perspective, the information utilized in much of the case study presents generalized information, which has the potential danger of reinforcing stereotypes or simplifying the experiences of non-dominant cultural narratives into essential characteristics or situations.

Due to the amount of work necessary to complete a PrivLineage, one can lose sight of the fact that this work is for personal insight and alignment with the experiences of underprivileged voices, but does nothing to actually undo racism. Greater awareness is important and a necessary first step in anti-racism work, but one cannot stop at this point and expect anything to change.

**Further study**

For future research, it would be helpful to create a standardized questionnaire that can be more generalized for other individuals to explore their own PrivLineage while also lending itself to more standardized research. Since the results cannot be generalized, it would be helpful to see

if similar results could be replicated by a larger sample size of social work students or practitioners. Potential questions could seek to gather data from ancestors regarding how well basic/psychological/self-fulfillment needs were met, or if there was any suffering due to discrimination.

## Conclusion

Privilege can only be understood or actually seen when juxtaposed to the coinciding narratives of oppression. Examining one's own family history is like looking into a mirror that gives a clearer and more informed image of identity and history. Learning about the history of others is like looking out a window, observing a scene that is not one's own. When one is able to empathize with the scenes seen in the window, one may begin to see their reflection in the pane, much like a mirror (Styles, 1996). This dual imagery brings to the fore an awareness of ourselves alongside awareness of the other. The goal of PrivLineage is to promote learning and understanding by juxtaposing one's history with the histories of others. It is through this juxtaposition, seeing their reflection in the window of the stories they hear that social workers can begin to more clearly observe and acknowledge privilege in an empathic way.

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3894.2453

**Appendix A**

*Family Tree*



Family Tree Abbreviated
3 Generations

Anna Wheat
Marilyn (Wheat) O'Dell
Leon Wheat
Gay (O'Dell) Otte
Beatrice O'Dell
Francis O'Dell
Leland O'Dell
Travis Otte
Kyle Otte
Derek Otte
Agnes Noble
Louise (Noble) Otte
Russell Noble
Dave Otte
Helen Otte
Walter Jr. Otte
Walter Sr. Otte

**Appendix B**

*Map 1*

**Appendix C**

Map 2



# Case Study Locations

**Past Family Residences**

Walter's Parents Home 1930-1950

Louise's Parents Home 1930-1950

Marilyn's Parents Residence 1930-1950

Walter and Louise 1st Home 1956

Walter and Louise 2nd Home 1964

Francis and Marilyn's apt mid 1950's

Francis and Marilyn's apt mid 1950's

Francis and Marilyn's 1st home 1958-1981

Mom and Dad's 1st apt

Mom and Dad's 1st House

Mom and Dad's 2nd House

Mom and Dad's 3rd House
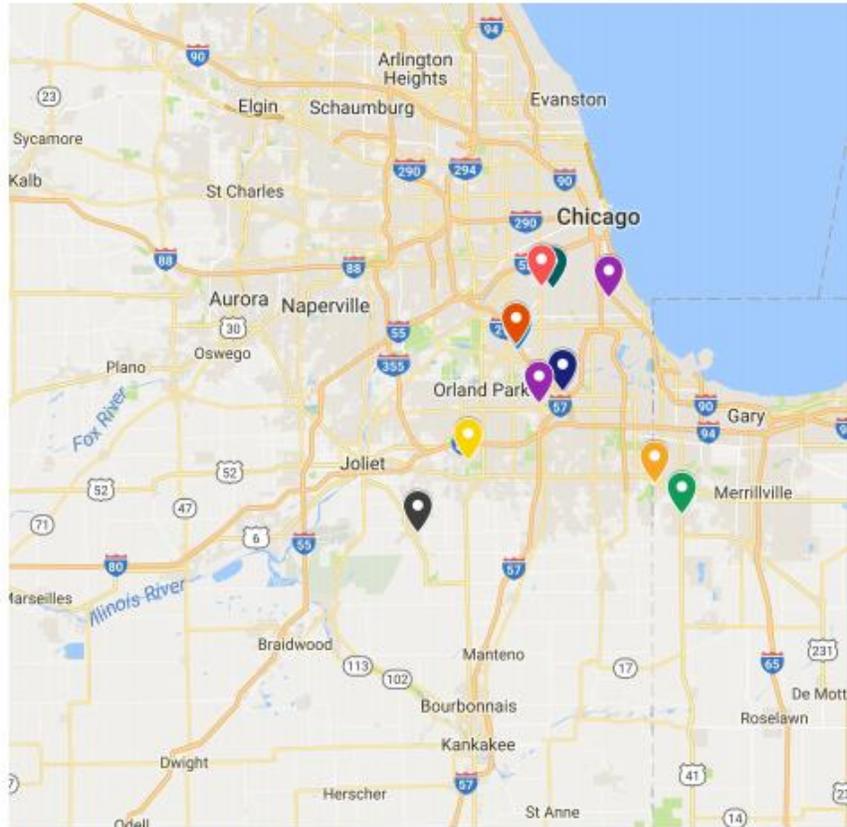
Locations of residences, employer, and events referenced in case study