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DISRUPTING PRIVILEGE: A HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM

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A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Cassidy M. Higgins

June 2013

Advisor: Dr. Kate Willink

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### **Abstract**

Current privilege pedagogy scholarship demonstrates the importance of understanding privilege as an entryway into critical studies and everyday community engagement. Thus, this dissertation argues that privilege must be introduced into education earlier, such as high school. In order to demonstrate ethical possibilities of meeting the need for care, this project integrates social work and critical pedagogy scholarship that explores teaching privilege in the classroom, with culture and communication scholarship. This dissertation connects culture and communication, critical pedagogy, and performance to demonstrate an applied use of communication scholarship in two classroom settings to explore dialogues of privilege through a curriculum titled “Disrupting Privilege.” To do this, this dissertation uses critical pedagogy as a method of teaching “Disrupting Privilege” in the two classrooms and narrative ethnography as a method of analysis of what happened communicatively and performatively in the classrooms. The use of narrative ethnography forefronts student voices to guide the analysis of this dissertation.

In “Disrupting Privilege,” an analysis of communication components shows how communication was used to structure and facilitate critical conversations of privilege in the classroom. This structure and facilitation of communication created a space where emotion was brought into the classroom through privilege, pedagogy, and performance. By looking at the communicative and emotional aspects of these two classrooms we see

demonstrations of classroom change and transformation. Therefore, this dissertation sets an example of how the use of communication and emotion, as seen in the “Disrupting Privilege” curriculum, can be used in high school to transform individuals and communities by analyzing what happened in each of these classrooms. The hope is that, through these narratives, student voices and experiences become a way to understand the capacity for high school students to struggle through critical conversations and performances about privilege. Involving high school students more often in these conversations, can teach students to think critically and engage in disrupting systems of power and, in return, potentially transform communities as well as pave the way for deeper, more sophisticated conversations in college.

## Acknowledgements

The process of doing this dissertation project would have been impossible without the support of the many people in my life. First, thank you to Dr. Kate Willink for guiding me as my advisor in the journey; Dr. Eugene Walls for guiding me in the understanding of my own privilege and having the confidence in my ability to facilitate these difficult conversations; and Dr. Bernadette Calafell and Dr. Darrin Hicks for the valuable knowledge imparted on me in the classroom and through feedback provided during the writing process. In addition, I am thankful for support from my fellow graduate students. Beyond the University of Denver, I am thankful for my many outside supports. I am thankful to Dr. Alphonse Keasley for planting the privilege seed that led to this dissertation. Last but certainly not least, I am thankful for my family and friends, particularly my mom, Dr. Georgane Callaizakis, for taking the time to edit and provide feedback.

Along with the academic support that I received from professors and colleagues, I could not have done this project without the schools, students, and teachers who participated in the “Disrupting Privilege” curriculum. I deeply appreciate the two schools that bravely took on this curriculum and the inspirational students who engaged in these conversations, leaving me feeling hopeful about this work. I also acknowledge and thank my co-instructors for taking a risk with me in facilitating these critical conversations and for willing to be co-learners with the students and me on this journey.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction to Privilege**

Over the years, scholarly work that deconstructs the social construction of privilege has steadily been increasing (Manglitz). Much of the scholarship explicitly focusing on privilege is interdisciplinary and often located within Social Work, Education and Sociology (Goodman; Kendall; Kimmel; McIntosh; Pease; Walls et al; Wise; Zetzer).

One of these scholars, Michael Kimmel metaphorically defines privilege:

To run or walk into a strong headwind is to understand the power of nature. You set your jaw in a squared grimace, your eyes are slits against the wind, and you breathe with fierce determination. And still you make so little progress. To walk or run with that same wind at your back is to float, to sail effortlessly, expending virtually no energy. You do not feel the wind; it feels you. You do not feel how it pushes you along; you feel only the effortlessness of your movements. You feel like you could go on forever. Only when you turn around and face that wind do you realize its strength. Being White, or male, or heterosexual in the United States is like running with the wind at your back (1).

Kimmel goes on to argue that it is important for us to recognize privilege so that we can understand how we invest in structural inequality that privileges some and creates disadvantage for others (2). When we look at inequality, we often think from the perspective of the one being disadvantaged rather than the one being helped (6). By laboring to be aware of both the areas in which we are privileged and those areas in which we are not, we develop a more full understanding of the construction of society. We then gain the tools to begin a journey in the “long historical process of change” (10)

in which we take a critical look at the impact of systems of power and explore how we might change them for the future.

While privilege scholarship has been gaining momentum, there is still difficulty in finding scholarly guidance in having these conversations, particularly as it applies to the everyday. Within critical communication pedagogy scholarship, particularly intercultural communication, there is much work done that explores identity and performance that occurs within everyday interactions with institutions, individuals and cultural norms (Alexander & Anderson & Gallegos; Calafell; Conquergood, “Performing as a Moral Act”; Corey; Felman; Collins; hooks, “Teaching to Transgress”; Madison & Hamera; Martin & Nakayama; Warren; Werry & O’Gorman; Zembylas). By bridging social work and communication scholarship, we better develop language in talking about privilege as it applies to the everyday.

In an effort to address the need for privilege work to be applied as praxis within the everyday, privilege scholarship has shifted toward understanding how to teach about privilege (Curry-Stevens; van Gorder; Walls et al). Further, it has crossed into critical pedagogy, which sees schooling as a form of cultural politics and challenges the ways in which educational institutions perpetuate the interests of dominant groups while further marginalizing others based on race, gender, sexuality, class, able-bodiedness, etc. (Apple; Aronowitz & Giroux; Pineau). Pedagogy of privilege requires individuals and communities to explicitly explore dominant identities (such as Whiteness, maleness, heterosexuality, upper class status, able-bodiedness, Western, etc.) and their direct relationship to perpetuating marginalization of individuals not belonging to these

dominant groups. It demands students to be accountable to unearned advantages acquired as a result of privilege and become aware of the impact on marginalized communities that do not have the same access.

Much of this work engages this critical pedagogy at the level of undergraduate or graduate education (Alexander & Anderson & Gallegos; Boler; Felman; Giroux & Shannon; hooks; Pineau; Warren; Werry & O’Gorman; Zembylas). While college level engagement is important, the literature gives little guidance to having conversations about privilege prior to college age. Pre-college age is an important time when our participation in societies and communities is forming, as demonstrated by various sociological and social psychological models and theories such as the Social Development Model (Hawkins & Catalano, cited in Shaffer), Social Learning Theory (Bandura, cited in Shaffer), Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, cited in Shaffer), and Psychosocial Development Theory (Erikson, cited in Shaffer). Secondary schools have a particularly unique opportunity to influence social development (Shaffer).

Current privilege pedagogy scholarship demonstrates the importance of understanding privilege as an entryway into critical studies and everyday community engagement. Thus, this dissertation argues that privilege must be introduced into education earlier, such as high school. Due to the controversial and emotionally politicized nature of privilege and its relationship to violent occurrences such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, etc., much care needs to be taken in designing and teaching such a curriculum. In order to demonstrate ethical possibilities of meeting the need for care, this project integrates social work and critical pedagogy scholarship that explores teaching

privilege in the classroom, with culture and communication scholarship that explores identity relating to dialogue, voice and performance.

*Communication and Pedagogy: Conversation and Contribution*

While privilege scholarship can fall under the auspices of many disciplines, a communication study has a particular advantage in embracing privilege work. Communication is interdisciplinary and comprises our everyday experience of interfacing with others, particularly across difference as seen in culture and communication scholarship (Alexander & Anderson & Gallegos; Calafell; Conquergood, “Performing as a Moral Act”; Corey; Felman; Collins; hooks, “Teaching to Transgress”; Madison & Hamera; Martin & Nakayama; Warren; Werry & O’Gorman; Zembylas). Because of the relationship to cross-cultural interaction, communication can offer a strong foundation for privilege work. Communication is particularly important for understanding how privilege work could be initiated into high school curriculum via critical pedagogy as a tool for exploring privilege through dialogue.

Little work explicitly speaking about teaching privilege, or pedagogy of privilege, can be found within communication studies. Work that is done includes looking at privilege within the media (Esposito), within American political rhetoric (Stutzman) and within critical pedagogy in undergraduate and graduate academia (Kajee; Hopson; Fassett and Warren). Rachel Griffin and Noell Jackson talk about an activity, *Privilege Monopoly*, which can be used to engage diversity awareness within the classroom. However, beyond this little communication literature exists about how to explicitly teach about general privilege in a way that demonstrates how to disrupt these privilege

identities. Much of the work in critical pedagogy and communication contributes an understanding of how to talk about systems of power within the classroom. However, it does not focus on the general interconnectedness across privileged identities and, furthermore, does not explicitly aim to challenge students to learn to actively disrupt these systems in their everyday. Due to lack of literature, this dissertation project aims to explicitly locate privilege within communication scholarship to further develop pedagogy of privilege within the discipline and encourage active community engagement outside of the school setting.

### *Conceptualizing Privilege: A Personal Journey*

I first learned about the concept of privilege during my second year of undergraduate school when I took a sociology honors course titled “Privilege and Modern Social Construction.” It was then that I realized I had White privilege. While I am thankful that I had the opportunity to learn about privilege when others may never have that opportunity, I am also severely disappointed that my learning did not occur until I was twenty years old. For twenty years, I was clueless about the ways I participated in oppressive institutions of power such as Whiteness, middle class status, able-bodiedness, heterosexuality, and Western society. These feelings of disappointment and regret are the productive impetus of this study because my experience has been that I and others would have benefitted from having this awareness sooner. These critical conversations about privilege need to start earlier in order to give students the tools to continue the conversations as they become more independent members of communities. While it would be ideal to begin these conversations as young as preschool, this project takes an

initial step by exploring how these conversations can be started in high school, a primary age for social development (Erikson, cited in Shaffer; Meilman, cited in Shaffer; Selman, cited in Shaffer).

When I started my explorations of privilege, I was also working at a shelter for homeless and runaway youth between the ages of 15 to 24. I was first a direct care counselor and then a shelter case manager. In these positions, I worked directly with youth and was responsible for facilitating and contributing to a caring and therapeutic environment. As I continued to better understand my own privileges, I found that I was better able to develop positive relationships with youth with identities different from my own. For example, as I developed more awareness about my White privilege, I noticed that clients of color perceived me as more trustworthy. Often, clients of color would tell me that I was “not White.” Upon exploring what the youth meant by this they would explain that I did not “act like” a White person, which led me to the hypothesis that as we become more aware of our privileged identities, we are more likely to perform these identities with a critical consciousness that supports anti-oppression.

As I continued this work into graduate school, my understanding of the complexity of privilege improved, along with the development of pedagogical tools to facilitate conversations about privilege. To supplement my approach to dialogue of privilege within Communication Studies, I both participated in and co-instructed a course called “Disrupting Privilege through Anti-Oppressive Practice.” With experience, I learned a structured way to bring dialogues of privilege into the classroom in order to begin conversations that could be taken beyond the classroom and into the community. In

addition, I facilitated many privilege workshops in diverse settings that include university and college classrooms and non-profit agencies. The structure of the privilege workshop is the foundation for my pedagogical approach to privilege and communicating the importance of having these conversations, thus driving this research.

### *The Research*

This research project involved taking a graduate school curriculum, translating it into a high school curriculum, and then teaching the curriculum in two high school classrooms located at two different high schools in Denver, Colorado. The curriculum was a ten-week class that met one time per week. During that time, the classroom both met as an entire class and divided up and, if stability of class size permitted, divided up into smaller caucus groups based on privileged identities (i.e. male privilege caucus, able-bodied privilege caucus, middle to upper class caucus, Western privilege caucus). These smaller groups were facilitated by volunteers who also held the privileged identity of the caucus.

The content of the course began with defining privilege, followed by exploring our resistance in looking at our privilege, making privilege visible, looking at the costs of privilege, and then taking action to disrupt privilege. As a teacher/researcher, I facilitated dialogue around these topics using media sources and performance exercises that elicited critical perspectives about privilege. The course was a co-learning journey in which students and facilitators discussed privilege as a way to create community knowledge of the topic.

During the course, students were asked to keep reflection journals and write in them after every class. The prompt was to write about feelings and reactions they had in class or experiences with privilege they noticed outside of class, or both. These journals were collected weekly and were read and returned with comments. A copy was kept by the facilitators for data collection purposes. In addition, facilitators were asked to keep field notes of what they observed during the class and I also wrote narratives about my own experiences following each class. At the end of the 10 weeks, each small group did a presentation to other classmates about their journey in learning about privilege. These presentations covered where students started in the understanding of privilege prior to the course, where their knowledge about privilege was now after the course was taken and how they were going to commit to disrupting privilege in the future.

Following the course, students and facilitators were asked to volunteer to be interviewed about the course. I conducted interviews with all facilitators and a small portion of the students, to understand the impact the course had on them and to glean ideas they had for moving forward with the course if it were a part of a high school curriculum. Some of the goals of the interviews were to get perspectives about what happened during the curriculum and to provide recommendations for further study. The journal entries, field notes, narratives, and interviews are used as data for the analysis of this project to engage the following research questions. These questions involve looking at the process orientation that occurred within these two classrooms over the course of the “Disrupting Privilege” curriculum.



### *Research Questions*

I explore the topic of teaching privilege in the high school classroom while focusing on three independent levels of research questions. These levels address the complex layers of the project as related to privilege, pedagogy and performance. These questions are as follow:

RQ1: Why should “Disrupting Privilege” be taught in high school?

RQ2: How can the “Disrupting Privilege” curriculum be adapted to a high school setting?

RQ3: What was the experience of the co-instructors in teaching the “Disrupting Privilege” curriculum?

RQ4: What happened for the students during the process of participating in the “Disrupting Privilege” curriculum?

The first of these questions delves into the significance of using a disrupting privilege approach. The next question explores the adaptation of a graduate school curriculum into a high school curriculum. Finally, the last two questions explore the experiences of instructors and students who participated in the research.

### *Research Procedures*

This dissertation research occurred in three different phases. First, I took the curriculum called “Disrupting Privilege through Anti-Oppressive Practice” developed by Dr. Eugene Walls and, with the guidance from Dr. Walls, translated it into a high school curriculum. Second, I taught the translated “Disrupting Privilege” curriculum in two

separate classrooms. Third, I analyzed the communicative and emotional process orientation of the curriculum using a narrative ethnographic method.

### **Curriculum Design**

The “Disrupting Privilege” curriculum was translated during an independent study I took with Dr. Eugene Walls at the University of Denver, Graduate School of Social Work. Dr. Walls designed and teaches a graduate level course called “Disrupting Privilege through Anti-Oppressive Practice.” Prior to proposition and translation of the “Disrupting Privilege” curriculum, as stated earlier, I both took the course as a student and co-instructed the course as a white privilege caucus facilitator. “Disrupting Privilege through Anti-Oppressive Practice” is a course that students must first apply for and then attend an interview. During the interview the student discloses self-identified privileged identities they are willing to explore. Shortly after the interview students are informed of whether or not they made it into the class and the privilege caucus in which they will participate. The class meets weekly for a quarter for two hours and fifty minutes. It culminates with the caucuses presenting their learning journeys back to the community. During class time there is a combination of both larger group interaction and smaller caucus group interaction. The course uses a critical pedagogy approach and incorporates performance exercises such as “Theater of the Oppressed” (Boal) (or theater of the privileged in this case), subversive forms of media, and guest dialogue opportunities.

In translating “Disrupting Privilege through Anti-Oppressive Practice” into a high school curriculum, I was informed by a literature review relating to privilege pedagogy and by my past experience in both taking and co-instructing the graduate school course.

The final product for the independent study I took with Dr. Walls included a syllabus (Appendix A) and a master schedule (Appendix B) for the curriculum that served as a tool box for the specific needs of the space that it was taught. “Disrupting Privilege,” which was co-instructed with 2-3 other adults who were familiar with and open to privilege pedagogy, moved through the themes of introduction, defining privilege, resistance, making privilege visible, costs of privilege, and action. While an outline for “Disrupting Privilege” was designed during the independent study with Dr. Walls, the type of critical pedagogy employed in “Disrupting Privilege” required a fluid transition throughout the execution of this course in order to be responsive to the unique needs of different educational spaces. Dr. Walls approved the curriculum and offered ongoing support and recommendation as the research continued.

In addition to curriculum support, Dr. Walls was also available for support to ensure a safe space during potentially uncomfortable dialogue. The privilege pedagogy used in this research is based on the premise that we experience discomfort around our privilege (e.g. seeing the impact of our privilege, even if we don’t consciously connect it to such) and marginalization (e.g. being violated by “isms”) in the everyday. This curriculum simply makes these discomforts transparent rather than traumatizing. However, if any potential for traumatization had presented itself, both my ten years of experience in facilitating a therapeutic environment for youth and Dr. Walls’s mentoring as a social worker helped assure that “Disrupting Privilege” was delivered ethically and productively rather than destructively. My own experience includes working with homeless, runaway, and foster care youth – groups that experience extreme

marginalization and trauma. Doing work with marginalized youth has developed my ability to communicate effectively with this population and know how to de-escalate situations where youth are triggered. In addition to this, students were informed that they may leave the classroom if needed and there were also supports within the schools, such as psychologists.

### **Teaching Disrupting Privilege**

When facilitating dialogues of privilege in groups, many aspects of privilege become apparent. First, there is a diversity of privilege in groups, some which may be read on the body and others that are not. There is a complexity of identity in which we are both privileged and marginalized. Second, privilege is socially constructed. While our identities make us different from one another, it is through the social construction of valuing these identities that we create hierarchies of privilege. Third, we all have emotions around our privileged and marginalized identities and feel different levels of comfort in claiming ownership. We also have emotions about other people who are different from us, whether this is a difference of privilege or marginalization. Communication about our experiences of identity facilitates our struggle to understand the multiplicity of our identity and its relationship to privilege.

I define privilege as the “unearned advantages that accrue to members of certain social groups solely because they are members of those social groups” (Walls et al). This definition moves away from the idea that we earn privilege and instead places a focus on our advantages over others that are unearned. This is not to say that hard work does not exist. I worked very hard to get where I am in terms of employment and education. But, I

cannot deny that my middle class whiteness has helped me along the way. For example, my middle class whiteness combined with my hard work has likely gotten me further than a lower class, woman of color who has worked equally as hard. Within the definition, I want to bring attention to “unearned” and “accrued solely because” to point out that it is not what I have done to get these privileges. These privileges are also not my fault – I did not ask to be white, it is the way the system is structured. But, I am still accountable for what I do with my privilege.

After defining privilege, it is important to understand what privilege looks like. Once we become more aware of concrete examples of privilege, we understand how we enact privilege in the everyday. We can see privilege existing at various levels including institutional, interpersonal, and cultural. In making concrete lists of our privileged identities, we make our privilege visible in ways that challenge our perceptions of these advantages as “normal.” For example, some concrete white privileges that exist include: white people are more likely to get an interview; white people are seen as more credible; and white people can find band-aids in their skin color. These lists can be made for any type of privilege and they encourage individuals to think about barriers that they do not have to face as a result of their privileged identity status.

Perhaps the most important part of facilitating conversations of privilege is the final part: what do we do to disrupt privilege and what gets in the way? I have been fortunate to have many teachers and role models in my life who have shown me effective ways to facilitate critical conversations about privilege. An element of being a facilitator of these conversations is also learning how to disrupt privilege yourself in the everyday.

This part of the journey encourages individuals to think about ways in which they can step up within their everyday and disrupt privilege. This may include adjusting our use of language to make sure that we are being inclusive of different identities, such as using the word “partner” to describe our significant other, regardless of their gender. Another example might be to use the word “white” as a descriptor when talking about people. Other ways of disrupting privilege include speaking up when derogatory language or jokes are being used by others. It might also include making sure that space is created for marginalized voices in spaces where they are often dismissed or silenced. Disrupting privilege is not about making grand gestures to overthrow the system; it is about taking baby steps in our everyday to disrupt oppression, even if that means placing our own privileged bodies on the line.

It is important to conclude privilege facilitations by asking individuals to explore what gets in the way of disrupting privilege. I honestly believe that, overall, people are good and they do not want to hurt others. We have reasons, whether conscious or unconscious, for participating in oppressive systems. This part asks us to explore what those are. Some things that get in the way of disrupting privilege might include: a lack of awareness, fear, guilt, and pride. We cannot overcome these barriers that prevent us from disrupting privilege if we do not first identify and acknowledge our resistances. Once we begin to develop this awareness and make the invisible visible, as ethically loving human beings, it is hard to go back to conscious oppressive behaviors. In order to effectively have these dialogues we must understand the communication components that facilitate it.

Academic work within education has suggested that high school is a prime space where ethics surrounding civic and community engagement can be cultivated (Andolina, Jenkins, Zukin, & Keeter; Conway & Damico; Flanagan & Faison; Galston; Hess & Torney). Therefore, this research begins in high school because it is developmentally a potential space to reach individuals prior to becoming more independent within society. High school is also a step in integrating dialogues of privilege into education earlier. Despite the interest in civic engagement within high schools, perhaps the most difficult part in executing “Disrupting Privilege” was finding sites willing to take on such an endeavor. One school district refused to engage in any dialogue about “Disrupting Privilege” because they did not want the potential “bad press.” Given the difficulty in finding schools willing to take on uncomfortable conversations, there were limited sites for “Disrupting Privilege.” However, because privilege pedagogy embraces intersectionality in the sense that we all have both privileged and marginalized identities, once two sites agreed to partner on this research, the curriculum was easily adaptable. The two schools that expressed interest in the curriculum were Stratton High School and Kendal High School<sup>1</sup>. I will first introduce the two facilitators followed by an introduction to the two classroom sites.

### *The Facilitators*

The “Disrupting Privilege” curriculum is versatile and can be adjusted to a variety of different settings, both privileged and marginalized. Given this versatility, the “Disrupting Privilege” curriculum was designed prior to knowing about the sites for this

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<sup>1</sup> Names of schools have been changed for purposes of confidentiality.

research and was used as a tool box to flow with the individual sites over the course of the ten weeks. Based on the access to the previously mentioned schools, these sites brought both similarities and differences. At both sites the facilitators were two of the same people: Kayla<sup>2</sup>, a white, queer, female University of Denver colleague and Steve, a white, heterosexual, male colleague from a Denver Metro Residential Childcare and Treatment Facility. Kayla works within culture and communication and I have worked with her before in other academic settings surrounding critical approaches to understanding privilege and marginalization. Kayla has a strong scholarly basis for anti-oppressive work and a willingness to take risks for herself in order to open up space for others to follow her lead. Regarding Steve, I worked the same shift with him and co-supervised kids ages 11-17 and held multiple critical conversations with him surrounding areas of privilege and marginalization. Steve shows constant desire to understand his own privilege and has served as a great role model to other men to also step back and be more vulnerable and open about exploring their own privilege. Both Kayla and Steve were chosen due to their openness to dialogues of privilege and a desire to act as co-learners in this journey.

#### *Site One*

Stratton High School is a magnet school. As such, many students bus in from other parts of Denver to its location in a middle to upper class neighborhood. Therefore, the Stratton site was a diverse classroom of about 25 students including multiple students of color, many students from lower socioeconomic status and backgrounds, and students

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<sup>2</sup> Names of the facilitators have been changed for the purposes of confidentiality.



with refugee status. The Stratton site was an elective Social Studies class called Social Problems offered to juniors and seniors. The teacher for the Stratton class was a younger white female named Heidi. Halfway through the course we were joined by a white male student teacher from Metropolitan State College of Denver. The class consisted of eight male students and seventeen female students. The estimated demographic was fifteen students of color and ten white students. Three of these students disclosed themselves as female refugees from African countries. All of the students appeared to be able-bodied and none of them explicitly identified as queer, though there was one Latino student who performed a perceived queerness. The Stratton class was broken up into four smaller groups with six to seven students per group. The groups consisted of a male privilege group led by Steve, a Western privilege group led by Kayla, an upper to middle class privilege group led by Heidi, and an able-bodied privilege group led by me. The value of the Stratton site lies in the diverse representation of racial, gendered, and classed identities. This offered the potential to add richness to dialogue across difference in the larger classroom space. In addition to the diversity, the Stratton site offered a consistent classroom meeting time and was tied to a grade given by the teacher of the Social Problems class.

#### *Site Two*

The second class was taught at Kendal High School, which is a charter school made up of 98% Latina(o) students. The Kendal class, which was a group of sophomore and junior students from a study hall, had a rotating thirteen students who were sophomores and juniors and all were Latina(o). The students were allowed to choose

whether or not they participated in the class instead of study hall and participants were given three credits toward graduation. Over the course of the ten weeks, there were six male students and seven female students. All of the students seemed to come from lower socioeconomic status, were able-bodied and were not queer identified though, again, there was a perception that one of the Latino students performs queerness. In addition, most of the students had learned English as a second language and some had parents who do not speak English. Due to the transience of the students at the Kendal site, individual privilege groups were not formed. There were usually around six students who attended the class and the same topics covered at Stratton High School were covered here without the division into small groups. The class was then co-instructed by Kayla, Steve, and me without a teacher from the school. The value of the Kendal site was that the facilitators and I had more control over the way that class was taught and we had the opportunity to interact with the students without being seen as “authorities” over them. This allowed for the opportunity for more reciprocal dialogue within the class. Also, the Kendal group was small allowing for more individualized attention from the facilitators and me.

### **Data Collection**

At both of these sites data was collected at four different levels: (a) student journals to get the student narrative occurring throughout the course; (b) my ethnographic field notes as well as the field notes of my two co-instructors; (c) content analysis of a final research in which the small groups present their journey during the course to the community; and (d) post-class interviews with students and co-instructors who participated. The purpose of collecting these levels of data is to include diverse voices in

the ethnographic analysis of the process orientation of “Disrupting Privilege.” After all data had been collected, analysis looking at the communication components of “Disrupting Privilege” and the resulting emotional manifestation was conducted in order to understand the process orientation of “Disrupting Privilege” relating to privilege, pedagogy, and performance.

Weekly journals were requested from every student who participated in the “Disrupting Privilege” course, which resulted into a total of 130 journal entries, 90 from Stratton, and 40 from Kendal. In these journals students were asked to reflect on thoughts and feelings they had during the previous class and/or experiences with privilege that they had outside of class. These journals enabled students who did not feel comfortable or did not have the opportunity to speak up to share what was going on for them with the facilitators and me. After collecting journals, I read each one and then distributed them to facilitators who wrote feedback and comments and then gave them back to students. Copies of journals, with facilitator comments, were kept to document the process of the dialogue occurring within individual journal narratives.

During classes, the other facilitators kept ethnographic field notes documenting what they were observing while I was facilitating the course. A total of 26 field notes were collected over the ten weeks - 11 for Stratton and 15 for Kendal. Facilitators were asked to document student reactions to the course material and to provide a sense of their perspective of the impact of the material being covered in the curriculum. In addition to facilitator field notes, I wrote narratives after every single class detailing my perspective of the class and comments and actions that I observed as I was facilitating. There were a

total of 19 narratives from me, nine for Stratton and 10 for Kendal. In these narratives, I describe my own thoughts and feelings as a facilitator, along with what I was hearing, seeing, and feeling from other students and facilitators.

At the end of the ten-week period, students were asked to complete a final presentation that represented their learning journeys. For Stratton, each individual privilege group, with the guidance of their facilitators, planned and presented their journey to the rest of the class. At Kendal, as a result of the small size of the group, the entire class presented together to their study hall class that occurred at the same time as “Disrupting Privilege.” There were a total of five presentations including four from Stratton and one from Kendal. Students were instructed to present their learning journey in three stages: where they started in understanding privilege prior to the class; where they are now in understanding privilege after taking the class; and how they commit to disrupting privilege in the future.

After the course was finished, interviews with facilitators and students were completed to get dialogic reflection on the experience of the course and ideas of where the course could go. There were 14 interviews completed. Each lasted about 15 minutes. Four of the interviews were done with facilitators. Ten interviews were done with students who volunteered - four from Stratton and six from Kendal. The interviews explored challenges and areas of growth for participants and also sought an overall evaluation of how the course may fit into the high school setting. These interviews provided the basis for understanding what happened for individuals by the end of

“Disrupting Privilege” course, along with providing participant ideas of where the research could go.

### *Scope of Study*

The scope of this study covers a process that seeks to explore the research questions outlined earlier. This study involves taking a curriculum translated from a graduate school course and co-instructing it in two different high school classrooms over ten weeks. During the ten weeks time I collected narrative/observational data from three perspectives: the students, the co-instructor, and my own. The data was then analyzed for the process orientation of the communicative and emotional performances of identities from these three perspectives.

Given the ethnographic nature of this study, there are various limitations to a narrative form of data collection, primarily relating to the specificity of the sites. The sites of study are located in Denver, Colorado which has relative cultural characteristics. There is a history in the region of the country, the state and the city that influences the cultural context of this research. In addition to the different histories, the study is done in two schools that have highly marginalized populations. By limiting the participants to having primarily marginalized identities, it isolates the intervention of “Disrupting Privilege” to specifically looking at the way it impacts classrooms when marginalized experiences are familiar. In addition, this study captures a window of ten weeks of intervention in the classroom. Therefore, it captures the implementation phase of the process orientation and does not focus on the moments before or after the implementation phase except for some interviews immediately following implementation. While this

study holds these limitations, it analyzed an intervention in two different settings to demonstrate the possibility of influencing high school classrooms with a critical pedagogy curriculum interrogating privilege and its influence in the everyday experience of students.

### *Significance of Study*

The significance of this study includes the contribution it makes in linking communication and critical pedagogy curriculum to demonstrate an applied use of communication scholarship in the classroom. The use of pedagogy of privilege gives students access to critical tools that impact individuals in and beyond the classroom. This study aims to contribute an accessibility to these tools so that a diverse population of students may begin these critical conversations early and potentially have a positive impact on their communities and the social justice work within them.

“Disrupting Privilege” is an endeavor undertaken in order to develop critical thinkers capable of engaging in social transformation and change. Within educational development we need to “acknowledge that privilege exists, that it represents unearned advantages and conferred dominance and *that it can be changed*” (Pease 185). Change will only occur when marginalized groups and privileged groups are willing to challenge their privilege and collaborate in the effort to confront systems of power (187). To create a critically open classroom environment we must engage communication scholarship, particularly as it relates to dialogue, voice, and performance so that a dialogue between marginalized and privileged identities can thoughtfully occur. When these efforts between pedagogy of privilege and communication are combined, an educational force

develops that can move us out of our institutionalized complacency and maybe even transform us as individuals and communities into more fully ethical and loving human beings.

The content of this study will include five chapters. In the first chapter, I provided an introduction to privilege, an overview of the study, research questions, research procedures and the limitations and significance of the study. Chapters two, three and four include further description of methods, theoretical concepts, and analysis. Chapter two explains the methodology of this dissertation, which uses critical pedagogy as a teaching method and narrative ethnography as a method of analysis. Within this chapter is a literature review of critical pedagogy and narrative ethnography.

Chapter three provides an analysis of the communication components used in “Disrupting Privilege.” The communication components include the discussion of classroom norms and large and small group discourses, which serve to establish the structure of the course, and voice and dialogue, which are used to facilitate dialogues of privilege. These communication components established the foundation for the course as represented by researcher narratives with influence from facilitator field notes and from student journal entries. The researcher narratives contextualized the communication components while the student’s narratives provide another perspective of the multifaceted influence of this use of critical pedagogical communication in “Disrupting Privilege.”

Chapter four includes analysis that looks at the emotional manifestations within the classroom that occurred as a result of the structure and facilitation as established by the communication components. Again, researcher narratives and facilitator influence

and students journal entries were used to illustrate how space for emotion was created in the classroom through privilege, pedagogy, and performance. Furthermore, these narratives demonstrate the transformation that occurred for students as emotions were worked through in the “Disrupting Privilege” classroom. The multifaceted representations of the experiences of emotion in the classroom capture the possibilities of transformation and change in “Disrupting Privilege.”

Finally, chapter five discusses a summary of the interpreted findings and makes recommendations for further application of the study in addition to analyzing the stage working toward action. I synthesize the previous three chapters to summarize the overall process orientation that occurred throughout the study. In chapter five I will also discuss the implications of this study for communication pedagogy and suggest spaces for further research. In this discussion of implication and future research, I include an analysis of interviews done with students and other co-instructors who participated in the facilitation of the class.



## **Chapter Two: Critical Pedagogy and Narrative Ethnography**

There's always something wrong with these tests. These tests paint a picture of me with no brain. These tests paint a picture of me and my mother, my whole family as less than dumb. Just ugly black grease, need to be wiped away, find a job for (Precious).

Far too often we see people and communities researched and evaluated based on methods that coincide with dominant narratives about what is “good” and “bad.” As a result of these hegemonic research methods many researchers create stories about marginalized people that further dehumanize, demean, and demoralize them because they are being held to unattainable standards of privilege. These stories are then used to justify the righteousness of dominant people to privilege due to “proven” qualification in comparison to the lack of qualification of marginalized people. What we miss when we do research as if we are the experts as researchers, is access and enlightenment to a multitude of ways of knowing, experiencing and being in the world. What we miss is the opportunity to collaborate based on innovative strengths that do not neatly fit into dominant narratives. What we miss is the chance to be inspired and transformed by experiences outside of our privileged identities that allow us and our work to become more human.

This chapter focuses on the possibility, specifically within qualitative methods, of using critical pedagogy and narrative ethnography as decolonizing methodologies to highlight marginalized voices that are silenced and/or ignored far too often within

research. The first part of this chapter explores critical pedagogy as a method of teaching, specifically in relation to the “Disrupting Privilege” curriculum, to elicit data collection for this research. Second, this dissertation transitions to demonstrate how this research uses narrative ethnography as a method of data collection and analysis.

### *Critical Pedagogy*

The course being discussed in this section is titled, “Disrupting Privilege through Anti-Oppressive Practice,” which uses an unconventional critical performative pedagogy to push students to think about privileges they embody and how their performances of privilege directly cause oppression to others. “Disrupting Privilege through Anti-Oppressive Practice” is the basis for the “Disrupting Privilege” course and I use this section to demonstrate the origin of this modeled curriculum, which is rooted in critical pedagogy. Critical performative pedagogy aims to involve people in a “moral discourse” (Denzin 224) that moves us toward embracing more inclusive practices within our communities. Much of “Disrupting Privilege through Anti-Oppressive Practice” is supported by anti-oppressive theory and uses critical pedagogy in its dialogical approach. Therefore, “Disrupting Privilege through Anti-Oppressive Practice” relies on praxis that is rooted within theory and translates it into community practice. Giroux and Shannon highlight the importance of translation, in relationship to the performative, as a space to reclaim “cultural texts as an important site in which theory is used to ‘think’ politics in the face of a pedagogy of representation that has implications for how to strategize and engage broader public issues” (2).

Critical pedagogy brings risk into the classroom – a type of risk that can serve as a catalyst for individual and systematic change. I have seen and felt the ways in which the space for risk and discomfort has given myself and others opportunities to grow as individuals and have a better understanding of how we may begin approaching systems. Therefore, this research demonstrates how critical pedagogy can be used in the classroom to create possibilities for change. I first present a description of critical pedagogy, particularly as it relates to this research. Second, I engage the work of Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren to discuss the ways in which critical pedagogy has the potential to affect systematic change in the research sites. Finally, I integrate the work of Ricky Allen, Paulo Freire, bell hooks, and Megan Boler in looking at ways in which critical pedagogy encourages individual change for students at the research sites. By understanding these aspects of critical pedagogy this research aims to demonstrate its powerful potential for change in the classroom.

### **Defining Critical Pedagogy**

Critical pedagogy is constantly shifting as scholars and educators interpret the approach within the changing political environment. Despite these changes, there are themes within the conceptualization of critical pedagogy that appear throughout the scholarship. First, critical pedagogy is an interdisciplinary (Giroux, “Critical Pedagogy”) approach to education that functions within a model of co-learning (Freire; hooks, “Teaching Critical Thinking”) where students are active participants in their education. Second, critical pedagogy is a moral and political practice (Giroux, “Critical Pedagogy”)

that explores relationships between power and knowledge (Giroux, “Critical Pedagogy”; McLaren, “Life in Schools”), often requiring a radical re-evaluation of views (Boler & Zembylas). Finally, critical pedagogy begins with the life experiences of students (Giroux & McLaren) and uses life experience to move toward transforming relationships and social empowerment (McLaren, “Life in Schools”).

Critical pedagogy as used in “Disrupting Privilege” engages students as co-learners with the co-instructor in exploring the complexities of privilege. To struggle within the complexity of privilege requires fluidity between disciplines, experiences and approaches. In “Critical Pedagogy,” Giroux argues that critical pedagogy must be interdisciplinary because it needs to engage the motives of social citizenship (43). A component of social citizenship is the need to work together with people from various backgrounds. When the need to work together is acknowledged, learning communities are formed which create an environment where learning is most useful. Co-learning occurs when students and teachers share whatever resources or information are needed at the moment to facilitate critical thinking and ensure that what is learned in the classroom is applicable to everyday life outside of the classroom (hooks, “Teaching Critical Thinking” 11). Freire refers to students as “critical co-investigators” who engage in dialogue with the teacher, whose role is to present material for consideration and then to re-consider the material as students express their own perspectives (81). “Disrupting Privilege” relies on a fluid open-ended dialogue between and among students and teachers that aims to explore disciplines as they are interrelated and work together.

The dialogue within “Disrupting Privilege” is a transparent investigation of systems of power. Critical pedagogy places an emphasis on looking at the ways in which power and knowledge intersect (Giroux, “Critical Pedagogy”; McLaren, “Life in Schools”). In “Critical Pedagogy,” Giroux argues that:

critical pedagogy must be interdisciplinary and radically contextual, and it must engage the complex relationships between power and knowledge, critically address the institutional constraints under which teaching takes place, and focus on how students can engage the imperatives of critical social citizenship (43).

Furthermore, critical pedagogy is a moral and critical practice in which we must understand the impact of cultural politics and the roles (both existing and potential) that students and teachers play within the political context (33). While the current education system seems to believe that education needs to be apolitical, this is perceived as an impossibility within “Disrupting Privilege.” Education and its affiliated institutions are intimately tied to the political and to ignore a political relationship is to create a deficit in the pursuit of knowledge for students and to place an impossible expectation on teachers. Boler and Zembylas extend on the idea of politics in education and state that “to engage in critical inquiry often means asking students to radically reevaluate their world views” (111). “Disrupting Privilege” involves risk – but risk creates the space for students to become engaged critical social citizens with more potential for striving toward social change and justice – both of which are inherently political.

Prior to asking students to reevaluate their world views, teachers must first work to understand these views. Therefore, “Disrupting Privilege” begins by meeting students

where they are and making efforts to engage their everyday. Giroux and McLaren propose that critical pedagogy must begin with concern for the student's needs and experiences (234). When teaching begins here, the student's experience and existence is validated and a space is created for authentic dialogue based on these experiences with the potential to transform relationships in the classroom. In "Life in Schools," McLaren traces transformation starting with the micro level of transforming relationships in the classroom all the way to the nation-state (441). "Disrupting Privilege" links micro and macro structures of education through acknowledging that the student in the classroom works within and participates in bigger structures contingent on seemingly smaller classroom experience. Because of micro and macro relationships, McLaren also argues that:

critical pedagogy is founded on the conviction that schooling for self and social empowerment is *ethically prior* to a mastery of technical skills, which are primarily tied to the logic of the marketplace (although it should be stressed that skill development certainly play an important role) (88).

"Disrupting Privilege" begins by acknowledging students as humans with individual experiences that contribute to their potential for being active citizens in community.

### **Critical Pedagogy and Change**

The motivation behind "Disrupting Privilege" is to create change in the classroom and community. After exploring conceptualizations of critical pedagogy we begin to see ways in which both macro and micro structures interact within education. First, this section engages McLaren and Giroux in looking at the systematic impact of critical pedagogy in working toward change. Second, Allen, Boler, hooks, and Freire are placed

into conversation within this section to better understand the potential for critical pedagogy to affect individual change. The conversation based on critical pedagogy scholarship demonstrates the possibilities for using “Disrupting Privilege” in the classroom and proposes that critical pedagogy is the most effective/affective way to pursue both systematic and individual change.

### *Systematic Change*

Within the work of McLaren and Giroux three main themes appear in relationship to systemic change. First, there is the argument that critical pedagogy supports the tenets of democracy. The tenets of democracy include the support of civil rights, separation of church and state, teaching students to govern and creating a space that is open to debate, resistance, and questioning. Second, critical pedagogy has an ethic that works toward social justice. An effort for social justice is made through focusing on creating a world that is free from human suffering, investigating class and race issues, intervening in the world, and understanding relationships between the micro and macro influences in our lives. Third, we see the surfacing of social agency through the use of critical pedagogy in the classroom. The location of social agency is a result of a language of skepticism, possibility and openness, the shaping of beliefs leading to a sense of agency, private issues connecting to collective forces, regaining hope through protest and resistance, and the use of radical theories to challenge neoliberalism. These three themes overlap and work together to highlight the possibility of using critical pedagogy “Disrupting Privilege” to create systemic change.

In “Rethinking Cultural Politics,” Giroux argues that the current conservative teaching approaches embraced by many schools right now are replacing public education with privately funded institutions that push aside civil rights and inclusiveness and ignore the lines between church and state (5). The movement toward conservative education places academic freedom at risk and directly opposes the values of democracy. In “Critical Pedagogy,” Giroux sees critical pedagogy as an inherently political and moral practice that encourages a view of the world that is more democratic, which includes the values of justice and working toward a world free from human suffering (31). Critical pedagogy offers a move toward democracy by not only acting as a foundation for students learning to be governed but also to be capable of governing by learning to be autonomous, self-judging and independent (34). Furthermore, critical pedagogy assists the process of democratization by presenting new:

locations of struggle, vocabularies, and subject positions that allow people in a wide variety of public spheres to become more than they are now, to question what it is they have become within existing institutional and social formations, and to give some thought to what it might mean to transform existing relations of subordination and oppression (35).

By embracing critical pedagogy teaching resists being defined within the politics of neoliberalism as being a market driven practice and redefines learning as a practice beyond a type of training (38). “Disrupting Privilege” is facilitated by a democratic process that teaches students how to become thoughtful, engaged citizens and that resists the current trend of education moving toward a conservative privatized practice with



neoliberal goals to transform the educational sphere into one driven by capitalist market values.

Giroux and McLaren argue that it is precisely the relationship between critical pedagogy and democracy that supports the rationale for defending public schools. When viewed as democratic spheres, schools become agencies of social reform (224). Thus, teaching and learning in schools can be understood in a political language that highlights the potentially transformative role that schools serve in forwarding democratic goals that are foundational to society (224). McLaren and Farahmandpur extend this argument to address more specifically the way in which a revolutionary critical pedagogy teaches students how knowledge is related to production and consumption through history, culture and institutions (65). By reframing our understanding of the current and potential roles schools play in democratic societies we begin to see ways in which “Disrupting Privilege” supports social reform by demanding that students become active participants within an education system that traditionally uses them as pawns within a society focused on production and consumption.

As a part of its relationship to democratization, the critical pedagogy within “Disrupting Privilege” has an ethic rooted in social justice and change. In “Critical Pedagogy,” Giroux argues that critical pedagogy moves away from the apathetic stance of passive education models. It, instead, acknowledges that teaching and learning have potential to intervene in the world in response to the idea that human life is not determined, but rather, conditioned (31). The move away from apathy is made when we

use critical pedagogy as an opportunity to bear witness to the narratives of others and build social relationships dependent on compassion, ethics and hope (45). “Disrupting Privilege” encourages the building of relationships within and outside of the classroom as a way of experiencing what it means to be in community with others. It is through the building of relationship where the real learning occurs so that students can take these experiences and become more affectively connected to others and their environments. When relational investment can be made in the classroom, it inevitably manifests itself in the outside world and serves as a basis for social justice work.

Giroux and McLaren see teaching and learning as an opportunity to educate students on how to take risks and struggle against the oppressive conditions of life that exist within relations of power (226). Education is thus seen as an opportunity to empower students. Giroux and McLaren define teaching as:

the process whereby students acquire the means to critically appropriate knowledge existing outside of their immediate experience in order to broaden their understanding of themselves, the world, and the possibilities for transforming the taken-for-granted assumptions about the way we live (229).

In “Life in Schools,” McLaren later extends this definition by saying empowerment involves a process where students take this understanding of dominant culture and use it to transform, rather than just serve, society (214). “Disrupting Privilege” has the aim of empowering students in the classroom so that they can apply what they have learned to their work in the outside world. “Disrupting Privilege” goes beyond training students as skilled workers. It goes on to teach them the ethics of social justice that encourage a life

full of compassion and hope so they are encouraged to work within power relations as a way of transforming society into a place that is more respectful and inclusive of human life and experiences.

In “Revolutionary Pedagogy,” McLaren focuses empowerment more within the realm of confronting capitalism. He argues that critical pedagogy needs to focus on the transformation of property relations so that there is a more just distribution of wealth (450). Therefore, this focus places the possibility of using critical pedagogy as a way to investigate social class relations and the existence of class oppression as a result of inequality in access to capital. Critical pedagogy has the potential to help students cultivate “affective sensibilities” as well as a language to perform social analysis, critique and activism as a way to resist the capital that leads to these inequalities (452).

“Disrupting Privilege” thus not only transforms systems by focusing on ways it can work toward social justice but also has the goal of directly interrogating class systems that attempt to use education to reinforce rather than dismantle oppression.

Attached to the idea of empowerment in the classroom, is the third theme of social agency. When individuals and communities are empowered in the classroom, it opens that door for social agency to appear within societies, thus creating the power and action to transform systems. In “Critical Pedagogy,” Giroux states that agency is forged within critical pedagogy both through a culture of openness and engagement and through a language of possibility and skepticism (33). Locating social agency also involves a need for critical pedagogy to adopt radical theories to challenge neoliberalism and imagine a

world beyond capitalism (32). In using these modes of knowledge in executing critical pedagogy there is the opportunity to encourage oppositional cultural work and furthermore, to present possibilities of mobilizing collective outrage, and sometimes even collective action (34). “Disrupting Privilege” encourages social agency not by providing answers but by provoking thought around possibility. The classroom becomes a space to explore these possibilities and build community so that alliances can form based on the desire and determination to take action as a collective.

In “Public Pedagogy,” Giroux argues that we see the formation of social agency in the classroom when a space of learning is understood as an opportunity to explore the ways in which dominant influences shape students' beliefs and sense of agency (498). Critical pedagogy highlights the ways in which the political becomes pedagogical and thus impacts the circular relationship between private issues connecting to collective forces. In other words, critical pedagogy pushes us to see the ways in which learning uses politics to shape our identities, desires and experiences within collective forces larger than just ourselves (499). In beginning to understand how politics shape us, learning also becomes the starting point for a social agency that is founded on democratic values (500). Ultimately, Giroux argues that in understanding how critical pedagogy relates to morality, politics, agency and power, it gives us the opportunity to possibly “reclaim hope in dark times through new forms of global protests and collective resistance” (502). “Disrupting Privilege” demands that students begin to see ways in which they as individuals are part of a larger collective that is controlled by systems of power but

nevertheless has the potential to resist these systems. Once students begin to build community with others who want to resist complacency within systems of power, the classroom becomes a catalyst for collectives to form and act against the oppressive forces.

While transformation at the systemic level is vital for the long term impact of “Disrupting Privilege,” the micro level of individual transformation is necessary for short term individual participation in transformation. Therefore, this section engages the work of Allen, Boler, Freire, and hooks to explore three themes of individual transformation. First, critical pedagogy creates a classroom space based on the humanization of individual, addressing both oppressed and oppressor identities (Allen; Freire; hooks). Second, a classroom that engages critical pedagogy brings emotion into the classroom as a way to create affective environments with the potential of leading to individual change (Allen; Boler; Boler & Zembylas; hooks). Finally, critical pedagogy creates a classroom space where individuals can develop accountability to the oppressed and individual agency as the oppressed (Allen; Boler; Freire). Thus “Disrupting Privilege” in the classroom facilitates a process that can go from humanizing self and other, stimulating emotional response to affect, and encouraging accountability and agency in response to new knowledge.

Freire and Allen both address humanization but approach it from two different angles; Freire, the oppressed and Allen, the oppressor. Freire argues that while the oppressor and oppressed are both dehumanized by oppression, it is the oppressor who

must take the lead in the struggle because they are the ones with access to changing policies and laws (47). In order to build an allied relationship, the oppressed must see the vulnerability of the oppressor so that they can move beyond internalized oppressor and toward seeing the possibilities of changing their conditions. Rather than accepting their exploitation, the oppressed become aware of the causes of their condition and may begin to believe that it does not have to stay this way (64). The realization of conditions must be accompanied by a revolutionary leader who works from a humanizing pedagogy in which he or she dialogues with the oppressed to gain an understanding of the consciousness of the students and therefore bases the resistance against oppression directly in response to the needs of the oppressed (69).

Allen, on the other hand, makes a call to the oppressor to play a vital role in lifting oppression. Allen states that we need to not only think about the overthrow of oppression but also the substitution of that oppression with humanization. Humanization is described as a space where love reigns over violence (9). Allen argues that oppressors are dehumanized because they live a life where their oppressive mentalities do not allow them to really see the Other. Instead, the oppressor is driven by fears of the Other that cause them to be stagnant and unable to live (10). For both Freire and Allen, critical pedagogy creates a space where humanization can occur. The classroom can become an environment in which the oppressed begin to see the oppressors as vulnerable and human, thus the oppressed begin to understand that their own condition is constructed rather than fixed. The oppressor has the opportunity to move beyond their psychologically driven

fears and also see the oppressed as human. Establishing humanization in the classroom sets the foundation for dialogue to begin and authentic relationships to surface. In “Teaching Critical Thinking,” hooks describes authentic relationship building as an opportunity for the classroom to become a space where a whole person is valued, which allows for an honest and radical openness (21). “Disrupting Privilege” facilitates this honest dialogue so that students are bearing witness to, and coming into contact with, both privileged and marginalized experiences in the classroom in order to create a space of possibility for allied relationships.

Allen elaborates on the potential created after the oppressor moves toward humanization and states that the classroom space can become one where transformation “can occur through a process of radical love and revolutionary knowledge construction” (25). Humanization relies on the incorporation of emotion into the classroom being vital to individual transformation. Use of emotion in the classroom has the potential to be a powerful tool, though it is often seen as irrelevant and disruptive in traditional pedagogy, and often teachers are not taught to deal with emotion. In “Teaching Critical Thinking,” hooks argues that if teachers were trained to value emotional intelligence in the classroom we would have more opportunities to use emotion as a transformational tool (81). If teachers learned to deal with risky emotions, then students could develop a competency in dealing with these situations of risk in their everyday relationships with others (87). “Disrupting Privilege” relies on relationship building between differences in

the classroom, which inevitably leads to powerful emotional responses. Emotion is one of the primary entryways into potential transformation for the individual.

### *Individual Change*

Megan Boler focuses much of her pedagogical work on the importance of emotion in the classroom. Boler and Zembylas argue that by paying attention to emotional responses we begin to realize our invisible privileges and our participation in dominant ideologies (111). The realization of participation is most often felt through discomfort in the classroom called a “pedagogy of discomfort” that aims to interrogate, transform and subvert oppressive ideals about difference (112). Pedagogy of discomfort not only asks dominant cultures to think about their participation in hegemony, but also asks marginalized cultures to think about the ways in which oppression is internalized in favor of the ruling class (115). Emotional realization often involves an ambiguity that leads to uncomfortable negative emotions such as anger and vulnerability, which requires individuals to develop new habits of living in the everyday that involve risk. However, if an individual is willing to experience discomfort and to take risks, a space opens up for positive results “including self-discovery, hope, passion and a sense of community” (129). By facilitating a safe and loving “Disrupting Privilege” classroom environment that holds discomfort, students have the opportunity to transform through this experience. Discomfort highlights an underlying emotional experience we hold but rarely have the opportunity to explore. Through encouraging privilege exploration to occur in the classroom there arises the opportunity for students to work through discomfort caused by



their current ways of performing identities and to replace these with performances that are transformed and grounded within an ethic of love and compassion. This subsequently leads to the possibility for alliance and the forming of community struggling toward social justice.

"Disrupting Privilege" offers a starting point for action by incorporating emotion in the classroom through critical pedagogy. Again, Freire and Allen look at the concepts of accountability and individual agency from the oppressed/oppressor stance, respectively. Freire argues that the struggle for liberation by those who are oppressed begins when they are able to understand the oppressor and thus believe in themselves. When their belief in themselves combines with their understanding of the system, praxis occurs and in this process liberation begins to take place (64). Allen, on the other hand, explores the accountability that happens for the oppressor. The first step is for the oppressor to actually realize and accept that they are the oppressor (18). Following accountability to oppressing others, the oppressor must then practically demonstrate being in solidarity with the oppressed (18). Furthermore, the oppressor must come to terms with the ways in which their performances of power have traumatized the oppressed and thus created tension in their own perception of self and Other (19). Both Freire and Allen demonstrate the potential for critical pedagogy to demand accountability from the oppressed, while also creating an agency to work toward change.

In addition to placing much focus on the role of the oppressor in social change, Allen also addresses areas in which Freire's argument falls short of acknowledging the

holistic nature of social change. While not in disagreement with Freire, Allen states that the need to empower the oppressed is “correlated to the need to transform the voices of the oppressor” (28). Therefore, Allen adopts a more intersectional approach to understanding accountability and agency by claiming that it is important for both the oppressed and the oppressor to be involved in processes of social transformation, particularly since individuals embody both oppressor and oppressed identities at the same time. Allen presents that a complex approach to change is necessary to dismantle the matrix of domination. Individuals must look at their own oppression and be honest about “how they oppress the Others whose heads and hearts they stand on in the hierarchy of humanity” (44). “Disrupting Privilege” is a space where the students realize the intersections of their own privilege and oppression and have the potential to transform the performances of these identities by being accountable and responsive to the ways in which they are responsible for the perpetuation of oppression.

Like Allen, Boler and Zembylas and Boler have a dynamic approach to looking at accountability and agency for the dominant and marginalized aspects of our identities. In “All Speech is not Free,” Boler states that for the marginalized individual in the classroom, there is the unique opportunity for marginalized voices to respond to the ignorance rooted in dominant ideologies (322). In a more extreme example, if the classroom environment is ethically facilitated, there is also the opportunity for silenced voices to publicly confront hate speech and find a sense of agency in having space to speak (326). Using “Disrupting Privilege” to build a classroom community that is

supportive to silenced voices, the opportunity arises for these voices to find agency in having this space in which to be heard. When being able to locate agency, there is the possibility for healing from the trauma of being silenced and the chance that there will be a new found agency to align with people and communities that will continue the expression of voice in other spaces.

In their discussion about the potential impact of the pedagogy of discomfort on students as a whole, Zembylas and Boler say that the interrogation of formerly valued beliefs and assumptions demands that students and teachers take action in a collective fight for social justice (131). Discomfort results when exposure to new ways of thinking triggered through “Disrupting Privilege” are no longer in alignment with the past performances of students and teacher. Discomfort creates a move of halting these past oppressive behaviors, which clear spaces for transformed performances of what individuals have the potential to be (132). “Disrupting Privilege” creates a space where students are presented with tools to explore knowledge in a way that can shatter former, hegemonic ways of thinking and being. Once shattering happens, the only option is for the individual to rebuild and, with the support of the community created in the classroom, rebuilding can transform the individual thus making a vital contribution to the bigger transformation of the system as a whole. While using critical pedagogy to facilitate this “shattering,” in “Disrupting Privilege,” narrative ethnography is used as the method to observe the nature of this change. In other words, critical pedagogy undergirds the “Disrupting Privilege” pedagogy and teaching philosophy. Narrative ethnography serves

as a research method to conduct the scholarship of teaching and learning in communication study (Darling).

*Narrative Ethnography: A Method for Analyzing Critical Pedagogy*

In order to better understand what happens when “Disrupting Privilege” is used in the classroom, this research engages narrative ethnography to explore the multifaceted experiences of the curriculum. What I do in this section is show how the method of ethnography narrative may be used in critical pedagogy to understand what happened in the “Disrupting Privilege” classroom and, even more, the world in which we work toward social justice. In “Narrative Ethnography,” Goodall states that narrative ethnography “is a cross-disciplinary communication research aimed at re-establishing the centrality of personal experience and identity in the social construction of knowledge” (187). Both researcher and participants actively engage in the social construction of knowledge. Narrative ethnography implicates our bodies and the ways that it impacts the environment that is being studied. Goodall goes on to say, “Personal narratives are about communication as it is experienced in everyday life, which is always first person, deeply felt, rooted in our past, not always rational, and often messy” (188). Narrative ethnography allows us not only to show the nice put together parts of research but also gives a way to include those messy parts that do not feel so good – the parts where we mess up. These are the areas where we can grow and where that growth can more positively contribute to what is being researched. In discussing the method of narrative ethnography, I first break up the two components of narrative and ethnography to

understand each of their contributions and then look at how the two complement one another, specifically within “Disrupting Privilege.”

### **Narrative**

Narrative implicates the storyteller’s body and places it within the complexity of culture through storytelling (Conquergood, “Storied Worlds”; Corey, 1998; Delgado, 2000; Langellier; Ellis and Bochner; Madison, “Dangerous Ethnography”; and Zukic). In “Storied Worlds,” Conquergood describes narrative as being “a way of knowing, a search for meaning that privileges experience, process, action, and peril” (337). Given the potential for the communication of knowing, I specifically consider three aspects of narrative that highlight its contribution to narrative ethnography. First, narrative can be a powerfully dynamic approach that communicates the everyday experiences of individuals (Goodall, “Narrative Ethnography”; Ellis and Bochner; Langellier). Second, these communicated experiences place individual bodies within the context and structure of a bigger cultural discourse which, third, when used strategically, can be transgressive by using these experiences and voices to challenge dominant cultural discourse by highlighting dissonance between the dominant narrative and what is actually occurring (Bowman and Bowman; Corey; Ellis and Bochner; Langellier; Zukic).

Narrative is a space of transparency – representing the range of experiences both comfortable and uncomfortable. In “Narrative Ethnography,” Goodall states, “personal narratives are about communication as it is experienced in everyday life, which is always first person, deeply felt, rooted in our past, not always rational, and often messy” (188).

Narrative thus becomes an opportunity to freeze a moment in time and discover deeper meaning of this moment in relationship to the context in which it exists. The pause allowed by narrative allows us to re-examine our stories and creates the space for reflexivity, or the understanding that involves not only our reflection on the moment but also how this moment connects our past and present experiences to the social world around us. In “Personal Narratives,” Langellier highlights narrative as being an opportunity to look at the seemingly mundane and sometimes private ways in which individuals express themselves (272). By inviting narratives into research we open up the dialogue in ways that become more accessible and offer a glimpse into unadulterated ways of being and experiencing. Through everyday language, narrative moves away from the sanitized and stoic nature of academic writing and invites language and stories that represent the authentic, vulnerable and messy experiences of the everyday.

As a part of representing everyday experience, individual narratives are always rooted in a bigger cultural context. Therefore, narrative is an individual contribution to a conversation that has already been occurring and will continue to occur even after the individual narrative is over. Narrative can be a discursive practice where individuals and communities negotiate and claim their complex identities in relationship to the dominant (Zukic 401). In order to achieve discursive practice, narrative transitions between, privately, what is thought and, publicly, what is said, which then gives insight to the ways language and the body are regulated in society (Corey 250). Narratives transition betwixt and between the constructed boundaries of private and public in ways that call into

question these constructions and their purpose and impact. Thus, narratives offer a candid glimpse into the very real ways these constructions are manifested within the individual experience of the everyday.

In “Personal Narratives,” Langellier extends the conversation by looking at the way in which narrative is both ideological and political and states, “narratives are ideological because they evolve from a structure of power relations and simultaneously produce, maintain, and reproduce that power structure” (267). When we write stories we are writing from within our own belief systems about the world, systems which are strongly impacted by hegemonic notions passed into our minds and bodies since childhood. Since our stories come from an ideological root, we validate these power relations through the retelling of these stories though, as mentioned earlier, there are ways to also use narrative to challenge these power relations. In addition to representing ideologies, narratives also serve a political function in that they encourage certain ways of seeing the world over other ways of seeing the world (271). In assuming that our stories are important enough to share, there is a certain level of belief that what we have to say is important, even if it means being heard over someone else. In many ways, which stories are “important” is already decided by those in power, as there are some stories privileged over other stories that are deemed threatening or less important. Regardless, the point is that even when narratives are not directly political, they become political based on whose personal stories are validated and heard and whose are not.

In “Personal Narratives,” while Langellier talks about the many ways in which narratives are shaped by dominant ideologies and politics, she also argues that narratives present spaces for cultural innovation and challenge (264). The opportunity for challenge comes from the fact that telling personal stories involves risk and vulnerability. To tell a story requires willingness to put our private selves into the public. Once stories are made public there is the chance that we may highlight our mindless participation in hegemony and invite disruption of these behaviors (269). When, through our stories, we begin to see how we perform hegemony and reproduce the dominant narrative, we have the option to make efforts to change our behavior and thus our stories. Along with the risk involved with highlighted vulnerabilities, narrative writing is also about responsibility. This is so because it places the writer’s body on the line, as is also true for any other characters introduced through the narrative. Risk and responsibility is heightened when a narrative accesses the public and thus fits into a bigger space, because it has the potential to be destructive or transformative. When narratives embrace transformative intents, they can encourage change, create space for unheard voices and unite communities through story. Change can be achieved through the manipulation or challenging of power within the everyday, which can then be subversive to dominant narratives or hegemonic ways of letting stories exist.



Ellis and Bochner talk about the potential for subversive narratives by arguing that they can:

create the effect of reality, showing characters embedded in the complexities of lived moments of struggle, resisting the intrusions of chaos, disconnection, fragmentation, marginalization, and incoherence, trying to preserve or restore the continuity and coherence of life's unity in the face of unexpected blows of fate that call one's meanings and values into question (744).

Narrative is a space where marginalized people can represent their struggles against the dominant while both validating experience for marginalized people and making a call to action for transformed performances. Corey directly acknowledges potential through performance and states that narrative is not only able to disturb the master narrative but also, through its performative nature, to possibly work to rewrite the master narrative (250). When we represent our bodies and performances in narrative we demonstrate and model ways of being. In this vein, when we offer different ways of performing our identities that do not align with the master narrative we present options to others who embody these identities to also perform differently. What is particularly important about narrative is that it is rooted in the everyday, which means that these subversive performances can be small challenges to the dominant. This also means these small challenges are more accessible to ordinary people looking for models in disrupting power structures. Through its seemingly mundane nature, narrative becomes a space where individuals can both act out their own subversion of the dominant while also inviting and demonstrating ways in which other bodies can participate in disruption.

Narrative has the potential to make disruption by calling into question the way power is obtained and maintained. Bowman and Bowman specifically call disruption the “anti-narrative” or “avant-garde stories.” These are narratives that work within power systems, but playfully engage the context in a way that reclaims the power of narrative in support of marginalized storytellers (460). In critically approaching narrative writing and analysis we can move toward subversive narrative writing by first understanding the political context and then being innovative about playing with the boundaries used to maintain these power structures. In “Personal Narrative, Performance, Performativity,” one way that Langellier proposes playing with boundaries is by allowing narrative performance to critique the assumed impact or meaning of the story, to remember how the story was informed by context, and to resist the notion of fixed identity by presenting a destabilized, fluid way of being (135). When narrative embraces these political motives, it becomes a tool that can trouble power structures and relations (Zukic 403). When used with the intention of negating and challenging the limits set in dominant narratives, personal narratives can perform ways of being that have been formerly dismissed or deemed as deviant. Through the repetition of these performances and the tying of these stories to real human bodies, our conceptualization of deviance is challenged, along with our blind faith in the dominant narrative.

As researchers, using narrative as a method has the potential to powerfully place our bodies on the line beside those bodies that are often ignored. Delgado argues that narrative pushes the researcher to tell stories as a way to connect to the research being

done. Thus, the researcher becomes a subject who participates in the culture (Ellis and Bochner). When researcher narratives are interlaced with participant narratives it is an opportunity to listen and be responsive to marginalized voices. Through conversation, we can use our privileged access but choose to set aside our voices to create space for marginalized voices, which presents researchers with the opportunity to move between worlds and witness different spaces. Within the traveling between spaces we can learn to disturb that about which we do not want to become complacent. Interpersonally, we discover new languages and build bridges to form alliances with people who are different from us but who want to live in a just world (Madison, “Dangerous Ethnography”). Narrative allows us to have personal reflection and engage in conversations with others while shifting and transforming relationships within the “Disrupting Privilege” classroom and, even further, in the community.

### **Ethnography**

Ethnography is a critical method that is both complementary to narrative and aligns with many of the ethics surrounding narrative writing and analysis. There are three main aspects of ethnography that contribute most to the potential for narrative ethnography. First, critical ethnography understands the body as a site of knowledge (Conquergood, “Rethinking Ethnography”). Second, ethnographic work relies on critical engagement of the researcher with the participants of the research. Part of critical work is for the ethnographer to be reflexive about his or her own identities and how they impact the ways in which culture is socially constructed and the ways in which power and

oppression are maintained (Alexander, "Performing Culture"; Conquergood, "Performing as a Moral Act"; Denzin & Lincoln; Gonzales; Madison, "Dangerous Ethnography"). An uncritical ethnography becomes work that is constructed by the power of the researcher, which becomes an inauthentic representation of the culture being studied. Therefore, ethnography must be grounded within a critical cultural politics that highlights the complexity of culture, including how the researcher impacts it rather than reifying oppressive systems through the researcher's abuse of power. Finally, a critical approach to ethnography reveals what is at stake politically for the cultural practices that exist, which means there needs to be an emphasis on ethical research. Researchers have an ethical responsibility to engage in reciprocal dialogue (Madison, "Dangerous Ethnography"; Goodall, "Writing the New Ethnography"; Conquergood, "Performing as a Moral Act"; Denzin & Lincoln) that ultimately results in research that demands thought rather than imparts knowledge (Talbut).

In "Rethinking Ethnography," Conquergood states, "ethnography's distinctive research method, participant-observation fieldwork, privileges the body as a site of knowing" (180). It is through ethnography and the body that we are able to use cultural performances as a universal tool for laboring to understand the meaningfulness of life (Conquergood, "Performing as a Moral Act" 1). By paying attention to the body as ethnographic researchers we can work to transcend the barriers of verbal language and bring cultural communication research back to a transparency that is only located in the body prior to it being intellectualized by the brain.

In exploring communication between bodies, both the ethnographic researcher and the participants place their bodies on the line. In relationship to these ethics surrounding placing bodies on the line, Madison talks about “Dangerous Ethnography.” Depending on the nature of the research, there will be times that the researcher must consider whether he or she will place his or her body on the line with the group of people being studied. Part of ethnographic work is acknowledging the privilege one has in being able to decide not to place the body on the line and sometimes displacing privilege by taking a risk. Furthermore, if we can reframe danger, ethnographers may even be agents of danger. Danger thus becomes a form of resistance as the ethnographer becomes dangerous to the systems of power that perpetuate oppression by highlighting voices that are often ignored or silenced by dominant voices. Through dangerous ethnography we bear witness and confirm that a certain space and time does in fact exist. After gaining a better understanding of the ethnographic space, dangerous ethnography has the potential to confront hegemony.

However, prior to accomplishing resistance we must first engage in dialogue with the community where research is occurring and understand the relationship between “self” as researcher and “other.” In “Performing Culture,” Alexander describes his own ethnographic work as being an opportunity to understand the lines between his own experience and others who also have experienced that culture, which means gaining a critical understanding of the boundaries between self and other and the ways in which these spaces cross over and intersect (310). Through the defining of self and other we

begin to see the importance of being accountable to researcher positionality. In “Critical Ethnography,” Madison states that as we see the importance of highlighting positionality, we also see the vital importance of having a deep and consensual dialogue with the Other. We must realize that our concerns as researchers need to be grounded in the well being of the Other and we must take seriously the power we hold as researchers (8). Through dialogue with the Other we move between present and presence as a way of opening a space for the audience to have a level of involvement in the conversation being lead by the voice of the Other (10). Within critical ethnography the researcher must begin by understanding how his or her individual body fits into the context of the culture and, furthermore, how his or her body impacts the space. The primary reason for understanding researcher positionality is to ensure accountability to the Other by identifying the subjective stance of the researcher. The humility involved in claiming subjectivity works to decenter the researcher and forefront the voices of the Other as being the authority over the knowledge of their own lives and experiences.

In alignment with Madison, in “Performing as a Moral Act,” Conquergood describes a way in which ethnographers should engage with the Other called the “dialogical performance.” To demonstrate, Conquergood presents a model made up of four quadrants and a space in the middle, which represents the space that the researcher should work toward. The middle space, the dialogical performance, is where the researcher places his or her own body on the line with the culture being studied after being invited to do such. In the dialogical performance, the participants are in control

over how the researcher participates in their culture and the researcher is responsive to the needs of the community. Ethnography done within dialogical performance has the aim of placing the best interest of the group being studied at the forefront. In addition to putting the interest of the group being studied at the forefront, through dialogical performance we can deepen our understanding and engage a community that includes participants and an audience in the dialogue. Conquergood articulates the aim of dialogical performance as being “to bring self and other together so that they can question, debate, and challenge one another” (9). Furthermore, dialogical performance is “a kind of performance that resists conclusions, it is intensely committed to keeping the dialogue between performer and text open and ongoing” (9). Ethnography is not about finding solid answers to questions revolving around “why things are the way they are” or “why people do the things they do.” Rather, performance ethnography is about engaging in an ongoing dialogue as a way to build relationships with communities. Through relationship building we can begin to better understand ways in which the researcher can use his or her own access to systems of privilege to create space for marginalized voices that want to be heard but are not.

As previously mentioned, engagement in dialogue with the other demands the researcher to embody an ethical responsibility or an ethics of engagement with the culture being studied (Conquergood, “Performing as a Moral Act”; Gonzales; Madison, “Dangerous Ethnography”). Ethnographic work is a type of research that intimately explores culture in a way that tests boundaries of aesthetic distance (Conquergood,

“Performing as a Moral Act”). By challenging the distance, the ethnographer and the community being researched face both physical and emotional risks based on what the community experiences within the everyday. Ethnography must take these risks because the essence of ethnographic research is the commitment to address unfairness or injustice within a particular lived experience as perceived by the community being researched (Madison, “Critical Ethnography” 5). As part of the commitment to social justice, the aim of critical ethnography is not to impart authoritative and fixed knowledge onto an audience. Rather, the ethical responsibility tied to ethnography “offers contingent knowledges that are never self-evident but whose meanings and implications must be constantly reinterpreted” (Talbert 98), which means that critical ethnography has an ethical responsibility to present experiences as a way of demanding thought around particular injustices.

### **Narrative Ethnography**

By bringing narrative and ethnography together in “Disrupting Privilege” the aim is to capture and place into conversation the multiple cultural experiences in the classroom. As part of the fluid and constantly changing interpretation of cultural experiences, the nature of ethnography also has been shifting over the years. In talking about the “new ethnography,” In “Writing the New Ethnography,” Goodall argues that there is an obligation for ethnographic researchers to write about their own lives because it requires that observations of “others be firmly rooted in a credible, self-reflexive ‘voice,’ which is to say a believable, compelling, self-examining narrator” (23). The



location of voice and experience is where we begin to see that both narrative and ethnography are critical methods that have potential to transform communities. By bringing the two methods together, possibilities for change shift by locating voice within ethnographic research.

Narrative ethnography is described as a cross-disciplinary method that centers personal experience and identity as vital factors in the social construction of knowledge, and is used as an applied communication research method that employs personal narratives as a way to explain social phenomenon. As a method, narrative ethnography presents a call to action to train the next generation of scholars to become better storytellers. Goodall states that the need for better stories is in response to the lack of accessibility of academic work. In rationally approaching the problem of lack of accessibility, if we want to increase readership, we must then make what we write more accessible to a wider audience. Communication is personal and thus finding our voices through narrative is one method to access the personal characteristic of human communication. Narrative ethnography holds historical value and interdisciplinary potential through personal narrative and thus supports us in developing a more affective and accessible way of writing (Goodall, "Narrative Ethnography").

Given the individual contributions of both narrative and ethnography and the powerful potential in joining these two methods, narrative ethnography manifests three important contributions as an indigenous methodology. First, narrative ethnography moves toward a more holistic representation of the research being done (Alexander,

“Performing Culture”; Goodall, “Narrative Ethnography”; and Gubrium and Holstein, “Narrative Ethnography”). Second, narrative ethnography is a method of procedure that looks at the process of dialogic encounters, which third, joins the self and other as characters in the exploration (Gubrium and Holstein, “At the Border”; Tedlock). Thus, narrative ethnography is a method that highlights the politics of being in relationship to one another in the “Disrupting Privilege” classroom and places these experiences within the larger social construction that maintains and sustains these structures in which these relationships play themselves out.

In “Narrative Ethnography,” Goodall calls narrative ethnography holistic because “it is about work and it is about life, and it is about the interplays of work in our lives and our lives at work” (187-188). In stating the reality of the overlapping and intersecting nature of our lives and work, narrative ethnography embraces personal experience as a foundational part of everyday life, particularly as it relates to communication research that has the intention of challenging the dominant ways of thinking and writing (188). Another way in which narrative ethnography acts as a more holistic approach to research is that it “provides analytical access to the multilayered embeddedness of stories in relation to other stories” (Gubrium & Holstein, “Narrative Ethnography” 254). In other words, narrative ethnography embraces the idea that multiple subjectivities make up what we perceive as truth when talking about privilege. By inviting multiple perspectives and stories, we move out of a single lens of seeing truth and capture glimpses of multiple truths that are quilted together to form communal truths. In “Performing Culture,”

Alexander describes the attention to multiple truths as the opportunity for individuals to articulate their stories in a way that reflects his or her experience within a specific context (308). Narrative ethnography explores the relationships between the public and personal lives of student in the “Disrupting Privilege” classroom and places the exploration within the context of the specific space, allowing for a more complex analysis of the micro and macro influences to our relationships with each other and the environment.

As a part of exploring relationships in the “Disrupting Privilege” classroom, narrative ethnography relies on me, as a researcher, to acknowledge the control and power I have over how the communities are represented and what information is told or not told. In “Narrative Ethnography,” Gubrium and Holstein describe narrative ethnography as “a method of procedure and analysis aimed at close scrutiny of social situations, their actors, and actions in relation to narratives” (250). In narrative ethnographic procedure and analysis, I am brought in as a character in the story through my situatedness as the narrator. Through narration, the reader has the opportunity to identify the lens through which the researcher has selected, which influenced the experiences captured within the text (Tedlock 78). Narrative ethnography captures a process in which I, as the researcher, expose my individual experiences with a community and it has the potential to place these experiences in conversation with other individual experiences of that same community. Because of the procedural nature of the narrative ethnographic method, a space opens up for the reader to go along on the journey

of discovery as relationships transform and evolve through the stories told within the specific context of the “Disrupting Privilege” classroom.

It is through the process or journey within narrative ethnography of the “Disrupting Privilege” classroom where we begin to see the joining of self and other. Tedlock describes the relationship as forming because “both the Self and Other are presented together within a single narrative ethnography, focused on the character and process of the ethnographic dialogue” (69). When we see narratives juxtaposed with one another within the single context of the “Disrupting Privilege” classroom, we have more access to understanding the complexity of relationship between systems that facilitate privilege, power and oppression. Through the revealing of identity and performance through narratives, we see a demonstration of individual experiences that are then placed in dialogue with one another and act as a catalyst for further thought as a result of the encounter. In any representation of the self and other, the researcher holds the power in choosing what is made public in the work. By joining narrative analysis and ethnography they manifest as “representational *interplay*, as analytic urgencies that constantly keep one another in check” (Gubrium & Holstein “At the Border,” 565). By including voices that are not my own and placing them in humble dialogue with my voice, we move closer to a transparency that invites the reader in as part of the present dialogue surrounding injustices impacting communities.

Narrative and ethnography are two powerful methods that, when employed critically, can capture voices and experiences in ways not otherwise seen or heard within

everyday dominant spaces. When these two methods are joined as one, the unique power in each of these methods join to create a representation of communities and individuals based within multiple truths and stories making up the “Disrupting Privilege” classroom. Narrative facilitates a space of individual exploration of identities while ethnography places analysis of these narratives within an ethical framework that values the dialogue of these narratives as a space to work toward social justice. It is through representation of marginalized voices that perhaps privileged individuals will realize that they do not have the answers when it comes to the needs of the marginalized communities. Narrative ethnography demands that we as privileged researchers set aside our own agendas and understandings and finally bear witness and dialogue with the voices that have had the answers, or at least accurate awareness of the problem, all along.

In this chapter, I have reviewed the methods used for both teaching the course and collecting the data. Narrative ethnography organizes the reflections of this intervention into perspectives from multiple levels of participation in the curriculum. The narratives collected during “Disrupting Privilege” include co-instructor and student narratives and interviews. As student narratives were collected through journal entries, co-instructors gave feedback and probing questions for students to consider as they continued to write journal entries. This created a complex exchange of communication that not only occurred within the classroom but also occurred through writing, thus using narratives within an ethnographic setting to deepen the conversation by using multiple subjective truths to move toward a better understanding of the classroom community truth. To

understand what is speaking in and through these narratives, narrative analysis provides insight into the communication within the narratives. These narratives capture the voices of co-instructors and students, which guide the analysis of the experience of the curriculum and, furthermore, guide the recommendations for further application and research of “Disrupting Privilege.” The voices that speak through the narratives are highlighted as experts in demonstrating the experiences of “Disrupting Privilege” and looked to as the guidance for this research.

### **Chapter Three: Communication Components of Disrupting Privilege**

Understanding the communicative environment of “Disrupting Privilege” is vital to exposing effective facilitation techniques for the complex dialogues of privilege. Once we understand how communication functions in the “Disrupting Privilege,” we are able to communicatively recreate it in other classroom settings. Creating a foundational space that could facilitate dialogue about privilege was critical for "Disrupting Privilege." This was accomplished through use of various communication components. This chapter looks at: 1) the communication components that established this foundation for “Disrupting Privilege” and; 2) weaves in narrative ethnography to analyze the ways in which these communication components appeared and impacted the space throughout the course. After giving brief descriptions of the activities used during the curriculum, to provide further context I incorporate pieces of co-instructor (in italics) and student narratives to demonstrate the analysis of the communication components. In the next chapter I look at the emotional manifestations that occurred for students throughout the course as a result of the performative facilitation of privilege pedagogy.

The first part of the chapter looks at the communication components that set the structure for how we interacted in class. This involved discussion of classroom norms and discourse in both the larger classroom setting and being separated into smaller caucuses based on self-identified privileged identities. The discussion of classroom norms created

community agreements so that the classroom could become a space where we could trust one another to be accountable in taking emotional risks in the classroom (Denzin). The large and small group discourses allowed two different options for students to have these conversations about identities in multiple ways (Giroux & Shannon). The large and small groups were different opportunities for students to find a space to address power inequalities by talking about our privileged experiences of engaging with marginalized identities (Pease; Kendall).

The second part of the chapter looks at the communication components used to facilitate “Disrupting Privilege” in an inclusive way so that students and co-instructors could continue to engage in this dialogic struggle. These components are dialogue and voice. Being based in critical pedagogy, “Disrupting Privilege” relied on co-learning through classroom dialogue where all of the voices in the classroom created the classroom reality of the impact of privilege on our lives (Freire; hooks, “Teaching Critical Thinking”). This reality was made up of the multiple voices that surfaced through the classroom dialogue (Allen; Boler, “All Speech is not Free”; Johnson & Bhatt; van Gorder; Wise). The discussion of classroom norms, large and small group discourse, dialogue, and voice demonstrate what was happening in terms of verbal communication as the class progressed and sets the foundation to segue into the next chapter, which looks at the emotionally performative manifestations through the communicative journey of “Disrupting Privilege.” By understanding the communication components used to facilitate the verbal communication in the classroom and have an idea of the emotional



manifestations as a result of the conversations of privilege, we create a possibility to feel more prepared to have these critical dialogues in the classroom.

### *The Disrupting Privilege Curriculum*

The Disrupting Privilege curriculum, while fluid to adjust to individual classroom needs, moves through four main themes: Introduction, Defining Privilege, Resistance, and Making Privilege Visible. The first class of this curriculum is an introduction to the basic structure of “Disrupting Privilege” along with a time to agree to community norms that would guide us as we moved forward through difficult dialogue. The schedule for class one included asking the students to introduce themselves and share their reasons for taking the class; a review of the syllabus; and a classroom norm discussion about what builds trust and what blocks trust. At the end of this first class students were also introduced to the smaller groups they would be working in. These were based on a privilege each student identified with and was willing to talk about.

For the first couple of class meetings following the introduction, the goal was to define privilege and to operationalize the way it was used in this class. Activities included in the second class were: the privilege shuffle, which physically demonstrates the identities of privilege in the room by asking students to walk across the room when they identify with the privilege group being called; discussing the definition of privilege included in the introduction of this dissertation; and making a list of what privilege looks like such as, “as a white person when I am pulled over by the police, I can usually be sure that it was not because of my race.” The third class consisted of viewing a white privilege

video that was produced as a final project in the graduate class upon which this curriculum is based and a debriefing of that viewing.

The next three classes were spent looking at the topic of resistance. During this phase, performance was introduced to explore our own resistance to seeing our privilege. The activities during these classes included: a sculpture activity where students were asked to bring their bodies into the conversation about privilege; small group performances of how we resisted seeing privilege; and doing a “Speak Out” in which the women had the opportunity to tell the men what they never wanted to hear said to a woman, what they never wanted to see done to a woman, and what they expected from male allies.

The final three class meetings before the final presentations were geared toward making privilege visible. The activities during these three classes included: watching some videos speaking to able bodiedness; an activity highlighting the direct connection between privilege and oppression (i.e. as a white person I can usually walk through a store without being followed because people of color cannot); an eye contact exercise to highlight our ability to see others and witness their experiences; an activity to demonstrate reasons for the formation of social class hierarchy; watching a video exploring western privilege and identity; and a revisiting of the resistance exercises – this time, looking at how we committed to resisting privilege. For the last class, groups performed their final presentations back to the classroom community, which will be further discussed in the final chapter. Throughout these class meetings, communication

components were used to establish the structure and facilitation of conversations of privilege.

### *Disrupting Privilege Structure*

The foundation for engagement within “Disrupting Privilege” required a structure to ensure that dialogue would be constructive rather than destructive. Therefore, this communicative structure was modeled after the original curriculum by Walls and adjusted to the individual settings of the high schools in this research. First, prior to engaging in dialogues of privilege, the classroom communities at both high schools were asked to agree to community norms by talking about what builds trust and what blocks trust. The norms were created by students and facilitators in each classroom and varied depending on what was contributed by each classroom community. Norm agreement established a norm that students would be talking about privilege and be open to feedback on the impact of their oppressive performances based on expectations by individuals in each class. By starting here, there was the intention of being productive in having dialogues involving people who want to disrupt privilege (particularly their own) rather than getting stuck in resistance from students who were not ready to do this work. This is achieved through direct communication that set an expectation of accountable transparency among students and facilitators before any conversation of privilege started.

Second, “Disrupting Privilege” was set up in two parts, which included class discussion and caucus meetings. In the first class, students in both classes were assigned to a caucus based on a privileged identity and each caucus had a facilitator/co-instructor

(the caucus space was continuous at Stratton High School but was stopped at Kendal High School due to the small classroom size). The caucuses were designed as spaces for students to heavily explore one privileged identity and they were expected, as a group, to present their journey in privilege work at the end of the course. The classroom, on the other hand, was a space for a more general conversation of privilege and was also a space to acknowledge the intersections of privilege and oppression. Caucus groups were expected to bring their work back to the bigger group, and it became a space of feedback for the group members. In the classroom space people were encouraged to continue putting an emphasis on privilege, but people did talk about their marginalization as a way to graciously educate people from dominant groups. The large and small classroom spaces allowed multiple spaces for communication to occur about identity and the power dynamics between them while the discussion of classroom norms created a safer space for the exploration of power dynamics.

### **Discussion of Classroom Norms**

*Kayla, Steve, and I arrive early at Stratton High School and meet in the parking lot-each of us excited but a little nervous about what might happen next. We breach the doors of the school and get stopped by a man sitting at a table just inside of the doors. He asks us who we are seeing and I tell him we are volunteers. We sign in and give him our identification so that he can print us off a visitor's badge. We stick on our badges and the three of us head upstairs to the classroom, Kayla and I remembering how much we didn't like high school and wondering what we were doing back in one. We enter the classroom*

*and I introduce Kayla and Steve to the teacher, Heidi who seems anxious but ready to begin this process. I ask if we can move the desks around to create a circle and Heidi, Kayla, and Steve do this while I start getting things ready. The desks are separate from the chairs and a bit heavy. Navigating the classroom space proves difficult because of the small size and the large number of desks. Kayla and Steve help put paperwork on desks which includes a syllabus, a piece of colored paper and a half sheet of paper with privileged identities on it. We clean off the white board to prepare for writing. Heidi says the class has about 26 people in it.*

*Students begin to come in and eventually 28 students are squeezed into the circle of desks. The students seem cautious as they enter the classroom-not sure of who these strangers are or why the classroom is rearranged from its normal design. Some flip through the paperwork placed on the desks, others talk to their friends, and some just sit down and busy themselves with other things such as their cell phones. Kayla, Steve, Heidi, and I are spread throughout the room sitting between other students. Kayla and Steve are quiet and students do not engage them. There seems to be a clear barrier between the students in the room and the adults in the room.*

*When most of the students seemed to have arrived Heidi gets the attention of the class and gives a general introduction followed by asking Kayla, Steve, and me to introduce ourselves. I begin, and give an overview of the reason I have for being there followed by Kayla and Steve. I then ask everyone to create a name tent with the colored paper on their desks. In addition to this, I ask students to fill out the check boxes of*

*privilege groups on another sheet of paper. The directions were to check boxes next to the identities that they identify as and are willing to talk about. After this was done, they were asked to pass it to a facilitator in the room. Students begin writing and talking quietly to their neighbors.*

*After a couple of minutes students appear to be ready and I ask them to redirect their attention to the group. I ask if there is anyone who would like to start the introductions and quickly a female student, Natalie raises her hand. She says her name, followed by the reason she is taking the class and this continues as we go around the circle. Many students give their reasons as needing the credit or being signed up by their counselor and many also mention that they stayed because it seemed like an interesting topic. One student, Victor<sup>3</sup> tells a story that leads to laughter about how he got his schedule and read "social problems" and became offended by the assumption that he had these so he saw his counselor. After learning what it was he decided to stay because it seemed interesting. Another student, Sam, shares that he would like to study psychology in college and he felt that social problems was relevant. I share with Sam that I studied psychology in undergrad and that for me it was very relevant. I introduce myself again and share that I am here because I think that privilege needs to be taught in high school and that I have seen young people engage these conversations well. Kayla introduces herself and says that she was here because I had taught a shorter version of this for her*

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<sup>3</sup> Names of students have been changed for purposes of confidentiality

*classes and she was happy to repay the favor. Steve mentions that he used to work with me and was interested in the work that I do and so was also happy to help me out.*

*After introductions are complete I ask students to take out their syllabus and began to review it also disclaiming that all the words and concepts might not make sense yet-and that this is okay. It is a learning journey that all of us, including me, are on. I invite students to raise their hands if they have any questions. After going through the syllabus I ask students to direct their attention to Kayla as she would be leading a discussion about what builds trust and what blocks trust in a community. Students are invited to raise their hands and contribute to either side as Kayla writes on the board. As the group continues to make contributions to the list on the board including contributions from facilitators, Kayla asks me if we are missing anything. I scan a list from a past class and mention anything I don't see on the board. I mention confidentiality and after hitting a couple more important points, including how important it was to take risks and not leave people out on a limb when they do, I tell the students that this list will be typed up and brought in the next time that we meet so that they can sign it as a community contract to help facilitate a community of trust.*

The first classroom discussion that occurred in “Disrupting Privilege” was one that established classroom norms. The discussion of norms asked the class to brainstorm within two areas: what builds trust and what impedes trust. “Trust” within the discussion was not equated with “comfort.” Rather, a space that builds trust referred to an

environment in which growth rather than harm occurs. Tim demonstrated his hope for growth based on our classroom conversation about trust when he wrote:

Last class when we had the DU speakers in class I believe that it was a great beginning to how the rest of the year is going to hopefully be. As long as all subjects and people respect those that are listening, the experience is sure to be a great one. The discussions that I envision taking place will allow the class to create a better vision of the world.<sup>4</sup>

By establishing norms as a group, there was a communal hope for accountability that moved toward a co-learning teacher-student relationship due to the entire community being charged with holding other people accountable for these norms.

The norm of building trust that stuck out to some students in “Disrupting Privilege” and was often brought up throughout the course was “don’t leave people out on a limb.” “Don’t leave people out on a limb” meant that if an individual took a risk and became vulnerable in front of the class, other people within the group would also take a risk and go out of the limb with the other person. Katie talked about finding her own willingness to take risks and wrote, “My first day working with the DU people it seemed like a lot of work. All the rules seemed good. I’m usually like shy like I don’t talk but I actually gave ideas. I think it was pretty cool.” By taking risks, individuals exercised human agency and thus opened up spaces for freedom. According to Denzin, “Freedom is always contingent – contingent on a pledge to struggle and resist, and contingent on individuals’ willingness to accept the consequences of their actions” (228). Therefore,

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<sup>4</sup> Student journal entries are typed in this dissertation as written by students to capture their original voices but corrected for spelling errors.



establishment of norms created a space where people felt like they could take risks without being alone.

Modeling the freedom of vulnerability in the classroom also gave permission to others to expose their own vulnerabilities. It is through feeling permission where students found agency and thus located freedom through authentic interactions with others. Casey expressed her hope for openness through vulnerability when she wrote:

I am very excited to do this class groups. I hope that I am not one of the only ones who volunteers. I am nervous to speak but when no one else does I volunteer hoping other will feel like they can too. I feel like I can learn a lot and take something out of this experience when I leave high school!

One of the main ways in which vulnerability often appeared in conversations of privilege was through taking a look at our own resistance to seeing privilege. When we publically acknowledged our resistances we permitted accountability. When we embodied these resistances we forced ourselves to be conscious of our actions and face the impact they have on others. Molly shared that, “I think that this program will be interesting to learn about. I can learn new things about gender and race that I never knew about. I won’t be nervous or offended because I think it’s nice to understand where I came from.” In the “Disrupting Privilege” space, the public performance of resistance was a way of asking others to pay attention to our inclinations and call us out on these resistances if they surfaced in doing privilege work, which required a painful humility that simultaneously performed a bad habit while making a cry for help in breaking the habit. Without

speaking and feeling our resistances we could never truly get beyond them; in order to do this we had to build trust in the classroom.

Therefore, immediately upon executing “Disrupting Privilege,” it was necessary to assure that students were aware of the space they were entering. In other words, students needed to be willing to sit in discomfort, experience emotional pain, and take risks with both bodies and voices. Marshall talked about his anticipation of the risk-taking classroom space and said, “I feel like this class will be more interactive as time goes on. I also believe that with time we will develop trust with one another and be able to then interact with one another which will be able to make this class a success.” Establishing community norms enabled us to create expectations for this space so that we could move forward with the goal of building trust with one another so that we could struggle through difficult dialogues of privilege and create a more hopeful future.

### **Class and Caucus Discourses**

*As I look through the slips that are filled out by Stratton High School students I realize that as previously thought there will need to be some creativity around exploring less obvious privileged identities, as Stratton High School is a magnet school and has a very diverse population. The first group I create is a male privilege group to be led by Steve. I ask Heidi what she thinks about creating a heterosexual privilege group as many students marked on the sheet their willingness to explore this identity. Heidi says that that is probably one of the most controversial areas right now and it may not be best to begin exploring this identity – I feel the same way, particularly out of concern for students*

*who may identify as queer and who are not public with that identity. I tell Heidi that we will be talking about this as a whole class at some point though and this seems to resonate. The second group I create is a middle-upper class privilege group to be led by Heidi. The third group I create is a U.S. American Citizenship privilege (which later was changed to Western privilege to avoid having students disclosing citizenship, which is illegal for schools to request), to be led by Kayla. And fourth an able-bodied privilege group to be led by myself.*

*I again request the attention of the class and begin to read off names of the groups, apologizing if I mess names up (which is possible due to the ethnic diversity of the class) and ask students to correct me if I mess up. I start with the male privilege group and even though Heidi had told me the pronunciation of one student's name I mispronounce it making part of the pronunciation "Gay." The student respectfully corrects me though I am embarrassed that I mispronounced it in a way that probably happens often and is used in a homophobic manner. I continue reading the list and the next one is easy but the student corrects me saying it was the Spanish pronunciation. I look up at this black male student and he giggles as the teacher tells me that she doesn't think he is telling me the truth. I joke back with him and say that I will now be calling him that for the rest of the class – the class laughs.*

*After all the names are read off, students break into groups and desks are again rearranged in the smaller groups. I ask students to reintroduce themselves and talk about reactions they had to this first class. The students in my group are curious about what the*

*goal is. One student asks when the journals are due. Because time is short, things at the end of class seem like a blur because we need to rearrange the desks for the next class. I ask the students to turn in their first journal entry the next time we meet (two weeks). The bell rings and Kayla, Steve, and I help put the finishing touches on the classroom desks as Heidi apologizes for things being so rushed.*

Communication about privileged identities in “Disrupting Privilege” occurred in small groups based on a shared privilege identity (privilege caucuses) and a large group across difference (larger class). Kendall warns that prior to engaging in dialogue with people who have different identities it is important to remember that we enter into the situation with power and privilege inequality (128). Only through working toward having authentic relationships across privilege by being self-aware and willing to keep communication open can we really begin to address power and privilege dynamics (144). Caucuses and the large classroom facilitated a space where these power dynamics could be explored on different levels. Anna wrote about this structure and said:

The class went well today with the students from DU. The discussions were nice and understandable. I liked it. I also like how we were separated into small groups to work. I’m looking forward to the next meeting.

In addition to exploring power dynamics, small and large groups in the class helped us understand how to better talk about our experience of privilege. In talking about privilege, Pease proposes that instead of speaking for marginalized people, privileged groups talk about their experiences of engaging with marginalized individuals and groups (30). Small privilege caucuses and the large class allowed the students to take this angle

and speak from the experience of engaging with marginalized folks instead of speaking for them and furthermore, provided a space to get feedback on these experiences.

Within the small group space students focused on one privilege and deconstructed this privilege with the support of one another. Breanna articulated her experience of the small group and wrote:

Today we got to know everyone and talked about what to expect from Cassidy's lessons on Mondays. I think that talking about the privileges different groups receive will be interesting and teach us how to break through the stereotypes everyone sets for different groups.

This then became a space where people could be in their privileged identities without dragging people who hold the marginalized identity connected to their privilege through the process. For example, in the male privilege group, the members were able to talk about their maleness from the messy and often hurtful beginning stage of just realizing they hold privilege. Women did not have to waste their time, energy, and emotions on watching this process, which is something that we deal with regularly within our every day.

In accord with Giroux and Shannon, students were encouraged to:

recognize the need to work together to create/perform/construct those spaces in which desire, memory, knowledge, and the body reconfigure discourses of critique and possibility that enable multiple ways of speaking and acting as part of an ongoing engagement with the crucial issues of identity, agency, and democracy (5).

After the second class in the course Dana wrote about things she was beginning to recognize and shared:

Being in the middle to upper class group is already making me realize how many more privileges I have compared to teens who don't. Most kids my age have to take the bus to & from school & some are on the free and reduced lunches. For me I normally get to drive to school and I pay for lunch every day. I get to do pretty much anything I want – when ever. My dad has always been able to supply for everything we needed middle to upper class people have more opportunities because they have more access to anything to make life okay.

The small group space was one in which individuals were asked to work together in taking a journey through understanding privilege without learning off the backs of marginalized people in the classroom.

While exploring privilege in the small caucuses was a vital part of the course, so was the large group. In part this was so because, in order to make power dynamics visible, we had to be willing to develop more self-awareness around our privilege and hear things that did not feel positive from others in the class who were marginalized by our privilege. Students with marginalized identities were not pressured to speak about their experiences with marginalization and it was made clear that if individuals did choose to speak from a marginalized space, it was a gift, not a right. For example, the women's speak-out was an opportunity for men to hear experience of women but women did not have to participate. Tim reflected on this experience in his journal:

Last class we did the speak-out activity of male privilege. It gave the females in the class a chance to express some suppressed feelings or thoughts they may have had. To the males listening, we were put in a position of self realization of all the problems women felt to share of male privilege.

The large classroom space held the small group space accountable to other people. While marginalized identities are not a part of the small group process, this was an opportunity

for the small groups to present a more succinct version of their process and receive feedback and reactions from individuals as part of the larger class. In reference to the women's speak-out Breanna wrote:

Today we split up by gender and the girls expressed their feelings about how men treat women, and the men had to repeat back what the girls said. I hope that the men actually listened to what we had to say and changed the way they treat and speak to women.

While the small group space focused mainly on a single privileged identity, the larger space integrated both privileged and marginalized identities with the intention of further deconstructing privileged identities through the explicit connection of privilege to marginalization.

The "Disrupting Privilege" curriculum was designed so that the small and large classroom spaces were an opportunity for students to dialogically perform messiness and be vulnerable to making mistakes and to learn from these mistakes. Doing privilege work is not safe, clean or perfect. In fact, doing work on privilege meant we messed up – a lot. Felman goes as far to state that a lack of tension in the classroom is almost equivalent to a deficit in true learning (5). It is in the messing up where we learned how to not repeat our oppressive performances and these small and large group spaces facilitated dialogue on two levels so that a productive exchange of voices through dialogue could occur during the course to work through the messiness. Critical communication pedagogy relies on messing up so that we can learn about which communicative performances we need to change. Both classroom norms and the large and small classroom groups created a structure to create a space and facilitate the often messy critical communication and used

dialogue and voice as entryways into this messiness. This then opens up the possibility to be transformed through communicative encounters within privilege pedagogy.

*Facilitation of Communication in “Disrupting Privilege”*

This section highlights two main communication components that facilitated communication in “Disrupting Privilege” including dialogue as a struggle toward human engagement and the exchange of voice through dialogue as a way of gaining meaning and knowledge (Freire; hooks, “Teaching Critical Thinking”). Freire states that “only through communication can human life hold meaning” (77) and by this he means that we can each think as individuals but it is only when these thoughts are placed in conversation with one another that they begin to mean something. In “Teaching Critical Thinking,” hooks elaborates on the value of dialogue and suggests that conversation is the key to gaining knowledge. The “Disrupting Privilege” classroom became a space where students were taught to have critical dialogues around real life issues in order to become fully functioning citizens in society.

Within the critical dialogues that occurred during “Disrupting Privilege,” voice functioned as a site of knowledge transmitted between dialoguers (Allen; Boler, “All Speech is not Free”; Johnson & Bhatt; van Gorder; Wise). As a transmitter of experience and knowledge, voice was a dynamic tool that connected the dialogue between the marginalized and privileged. Dialogue and voice together are communication components that facilitated critical conversations within the “Disrupting Privilege”



classroom and opened up the space for emotional responses to the course through witness, which will be further discussed in the next chapter.

### **Dialogue: A Struggle toward Humanizing Engagement**

*Kayla, Steve, and I arrive at Kendal High School and the library is being used. Kayla, Steve, the students and I wander the halls until an empty classroom is found just down the way and we all enter. The space is barren and there are only chairs and a teacher's desk. I ask the group to pull chairs into the middle of the room and we reintroduce ourselves as I get things ready. I sit down in the circle and thank students for coming back and ask if there are more people coming. One student, Lola, says there was and I ask her to go down to their class and tell the teachers where we are and show any other people joining us where to go. She was quick to offer her help and left.*

*Eventually Lola returns and says that the teachers said it was fine and two more boys follow her into the room. We then sign class constitutions created through classroom norms last class and they are passed in. While the forms are being signed, one of the male students, Juan, tells me a story about how one of the teachers told him to stop talking Mexican. He asks me if I think that was funny. I think he is trying to test me and see what my awareness is around our cultural differences. I engage in the conversation with him and say I do think it was interesting and compare it to when people talk about speaking American instead of English. The group joins in, in joking around and I thank Juan for sharing that story with me. Kayla asks Juan who said it and he mentions that it was a substitute teacher. After the paperwork is complete I ask students to clear the*

*chairs out of the middle of the room and line up at one end. The boys in the class are focusing on something else so I ask them to put it away for now and to join us.*

*The privilege shuffle at Kendal High School elicits different results than I had seen before. Steve and Kayla walk across a lot, highlighting the privileges they hold. One student stays back because he was not raised by his birth parents and one student walks for English being her first language. People seem engaged and are attentive to who walks and who is left behind. Afterward I ask everyone to join the group and ask them what they think. It is slow at first but people begin speaking. I start by saying that I noticed that Steve and Kayla walked a lot and if I had been doing it I would have walked a lot too. One of the girls mentions that she was surprised when Kayla didn't walk for being raised in a suburb because she thought she would have been. Another mentions feeling shame around the question asking if you were homeless or knew someone who was. Another boy says he saw a lot of whiteness walk across. At first he is resistant to say this but he eventually does and I encourage him to say what he was thinking because he isn't offending anyone. After the conversation subsides we move on to defining privilege.*

*I use the white erase board to write the definition and ask students to write it down. I ask them what they think of the definition. Two girls mention that they disagree. I ask one of them to talk about why and she says that she disagrees because if people work hard then they can get to other places of privilege. I thank her for speaking up and use an example of one of my own friends whose family was able to do this but then I ask her if she thinks it would have been easier if my friend and her family was white and she says it*

would have been. The other girl mentions that she doesn't like the definition because it seems so stuck in not allowing people to move around. I agree and tell her the point of the definition is to separate unearned advantages from advantages that are earned and highlight that we can't do a whole lot about the situations that we are born in to but we can be accountable to the privileges we do have. It is only until writing this now that I realize that she may have been speaking from a marginalized space and may have found the definition hopeless for her own situation.

After the definition we start talking about a concrete list of white privilege. I start by using my example of being pulled over and not having to wonder if it was about my race. At first, students are hesitant to speak up but there are some whispers in Spanish around the room. I tell the group that I encourage them to speak up because they are not going to hurt any of our feelings as white people. Once the students are convinced that they will not hurt us, the floodgates open and they are giving example after example of white privilege. A theme of the conversation seems to revert back to citizenship and having papers/being able to vote. It is apparent that this group links whiteness to lack of citizenship. The bell rings and takes me by surprise and I thank the students for participating and they leave the room. Steve, Kayla and I pack up and leave. We all seem to feel good about how the class went and were all surprised at how much students opened up after being told they wouldn't offend anyone. We talk about how there were students who would check in with each other in Spanish before they shared with the

*whole group. It was an interesting second class and trust by creating space for marginalized voices seems like it is already being created.*

Dialogue in “Disrupting Privilege” was a starting point for engaging people with privilege in investigating the advantages attached to the privileged identity (Alexander, “Critically Analyzing”; Baszile; Johnson & Bhatt; hooks, “Teaching Critical Thinking”; Warren; Zembylas; Zetzer). We often spend so much energy trying to convince extremely resistant people to see their privilege that we neglect giving attention and support to those individuals who want to do the work. Therefore, “Disrupting Privilege” asked students and facilitators to be willing and ready to further explore and discuss their privilege, which is commonly painful and uncomfortable (Allen; Boler, “All Speech is not Free”; Kendall; Kimmel; Pease; Wise).

The facilitation of “Disrupting Privilege” relied on a constant dialogue across both similarity and difference. Wilmot & Hocker define dialogue as conversation that is “slow, careful, full of feeling, respectful and attentive” (257). Therefore, “Disrupting Privilege” dialogue was a collaborative search that required a deep sense of importance of the individuals involved. One of these individuals involved, Natalie, wrote in her journal about the white privilege video about a comment that she also made in class:

On Monday we watched a film about race classification/identification and about how white people feel like they have A LOT more privileges than black people and they know it but they don't agree with it or like it. Overall, the discussions that we talked about were touching to me because as a black person, I feel like I am always being criticized and made fun of everyday but I learn to push it all to the side and live my life no matter how hard it can be. All the things that were talked about in the film made me really think that whites do know that they have a lot more privileges

then the rest of us but they don't agree with it and that made me look at them all a different way. I had fun and learned a lot. I can't wait until we start up again on Monday.

We often do not understand experiences different from our own and the point that Natalie made above in class gave white students a different perspective through dialogue. Martin and Nakayama assert that in order to “recognize and embrace our connectedness, even to people who are different from us, we have to engage in true dialogue” (478), which demanded a level of sharing and reciprocity. To achieve this level of reciprocity, there also needed to be humility and accountability in having this dialogue. Breanna talked about her own realization of the value of dialoguing with Natalie in the class and wrote:

Last week we watched a movie about white privilege and what it meant to have white privilege. It was interesting to hear the black kids' reaction to the movie. Natalie said how it was nice to see people admit that they have more privileges than black folks. I never would have known that they felt that way coming from a white perspective.

Collier and Hicks argue that within intercultural dialogue:

Transformation of our contact into borderland dialogues can occur through reflexive interrogation of privileged assumptions, uncovering alternative modes of discourse, and the willingness to reconstruct and add to the more traditional models of deliberation and advocacy (217).

“Disrupting Privilege” used collaborative dialogue to create a classroom space where transformative learning occurred through contact with other perspectives via human engagement (Giroux & Shannon; Felman).

In beginning to make this human connection with others in “Disrupting Privilege,” dialogue pushed our ethical limits into a space of struggle. Wise states, “it is only in moments of discomfort that we find ourselves likely to grow” (131). When

students and facilitators were asked to engage in “Disrupting Privilege” we asked them to engage in a struggle that was often uncomfortable so that we could locate possibilities for transformation. Much of this discomfort arose and was processed through dialogues across similarity and difference. Katie talked about her own struggles after watching the white privilege video and wrote:

There was a comment, I forgot on the movie that kind of hurt my feelings but my coach explained that the meaning of that is not what I thought it was. It was saying whites have the better access of getting things, their better at social access than African Americans. I think this experience is teaching me a lot. It’s helped me to realize more and become more comfortable with my skin color. I see myself differently, more than just another black girl. I’m starting to find out who I am and the things I can do.

Collins describes this as a struggle for self-identity through dialogue between heterogeneous groups. The struggles taken on within “Disrupting Privilege” demanded a reflexivity of identity performance that led to a reimagining of transformed performances in response to the ethical dilemmas that arose within this struggle for both marginalized and privileged identities.

The dialogic struggle in “Disrupting Privilege” was best supported when co-instructors modeled this struggle with an open vulnerability and modeled trading our own privileges for the sake of having real dialogue about privilege. Kelly talked about some of this modeling by a co-instructor in her journal when she shared:

I remember seeing all the cool resistance poses and seeing how it influenced how they viewed their own privileges. For example how the group leader really showed great examples to solve a situation instead of avoid it. Like if you were called a racist instead of shouting no!, I’m

not...you should be like, how, can you please explain to me why? and so on.

By modeling this vulnerability in dialogue, students were more likely to also be vulnerable and take risks in this engagement (Zetzer 12). Modeling was particularly important in conversations of privilege, because positions of privilege have allowed us to never really have to engage in this struggle. Wise proposes that we are driven to engage in this struggle most often as an ethical call to seek justice and prevent injustice and sometimes with hopes of redemption for our past oppressive performances. Lucy wrote about being driven to seek justice in response to the dialogic struggles we engaged in the classroom:

Today was a good day we talked about the way people discriminated others without them realizing it. I think its society it's pretty much a system...It's like going in a circle and no change but once you start going the opposite way change will start happening...I would love to start doing something about it.

Wise presents the possibility that “maybe our redemption comes from the struggle itself” (175). Therefore, dialogue became the starting point for many students on this never ending journey toward redemption and justice.

Freire argues that women and men are essentially communication beings and therefore we cannot be apart from communication (128). In “Disrupting Privilege” we built relationships through communication with one another. Dialogue was a vital component to our drives to communicate in the classroom. Freire states that “founding itself upon love, humility, and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence” (91). Dialogue in the

classroom moved toward creating a space of trust by opening up lines of communication and encouraging contributions of life experiences that related to what is being discussed.

A couple of classes into the course, Marshall wrote:

There was more participation from each of the students in the discussions. With this passed class I feel that everyone is now starting to gain trust in one another which will make class discussions and observations more interactive as well as interesting.

We moved toward trust through dialogue supported by an ethic of love and humility, in which authenticity has the opportunity to surface, thus setting up the openness for change through human engagement.

### **Voice as Knowledge: Creating Space, Bearing Witness and Transformation**

*I meet Kayla in the parking lot at Stratton High School and we walk quickly into the school where we again get caught up at the volunteer sign in table. After getting our badges we head to Heidi's room and it is just her. Kayla puts her stuff down on one side and I put my stuff down on the other. Kayla begins pulling desks into a circle while I pull out paperwork and Heidi gets the laptop ready to show the DVD on Whiteness that I brought. After Heidi and I get done we begin helping Kayla put the desks in a circle. Students begin filing in and some seem excited because they forgot it was the day they had this class. Kayla starts to do check in with their journals and a couple of people participate but it is slow at first. After it seems like whoever wants to share has had the opportunity to, Kayla and I went around and collected journal entries.*

*After collecting journals Kayla leads the class in filling out identity circles. The students ask a lot of questions particularly around the differences between race and*



*ethnicity. Kayla then leads the group in a discussion about what were the identities they thought of the most. A black female student, Natalie mentions her race because of the judgments that are tied to that. Later Kayla asks which identities they thought of the least. A white male student, Weller, mentions sexuality because it shouldn't matter and people shouldn't criticize others – but they do. Another white male, Victor mentions his able bodiedness because he doesn't really need to think about being able to do things. Kayla wraps up the conversation and I briefly introduce the whiteness video to the class explaining that it was the final project for the white privilege group for the graduate version of this class.*

*Heidi starts the video and students immediately seem drawn in. The opening clip is one from The Office and Heidi asks the students if they know what it is and they say they do. The students quietly watch the video and I scan the room to gauge reactions. When one of the white students in the video says one of her perceptions (miseducations) about black people a black female student, Katie, jokingly yet with seriousness says that hurt her feelings. As the movie continues I notice one Latina-looking student, Kelly, go from engaged, to some anger to some sadness. The movie ends and I turned it off and reiterate that this was the journey of these students and it isn't about being prideful about their whiteness but rather it was demonstrating their understanding that they had been hurting people and themselves by not understanding privilege and how they chose to address that.*

*I give students two question prompts to answer in their small groups. One is to talk about feelings and reactions to the movie and the other is to think about how they can connect the video to the type of privilege they are working on. As groups are moving a Mexican (self identified) student, Sam, talks to me about how he wonders why race conversations are always black and white. I tell him this is often brought up as a criticism because a bunch of bodies are then left out of the conversation. Sam also asks me how he should identify his race. I tell him that it is up to him to identify and I mention that many people from South and Central American countries embrace Latina(o). Sam says he doesn't like Latino and wants to identify as Mexican because he is proud of being from Mexico. I tell him that only he can choose how he identifies and that I think it is great if he identifies as Mexican. Two men join the group I was working with since Steve is not in class and I ask people what they think of the video. A black female student, Katie says the people in the video sounded proud and I say that I also was more aware of that this time when I watched it. Another Latina-appearing student, Kelly (the one who appeared upset during the film), says she doesn't understand why the students in the video were putting themselves through that. Kelly feels like the video was stirring things up that don't need to be stirred up and it was causing problems that don't exist. I attempt to explain that it is a topic that is good to learn to have conversations about race so that it doesn't cause problems and instead helps people better relate to one another. I tell Kelly that she was bringing up really great points and I appreciate her contributing to the conversation. There seems to still be some struggle in identifying how this video can*

*be translated to the projects being done by the small groups. The ringing of the bell surprises me and I ask students to quickly put the desks back the way they belong and to remember to bring in journal entries next class.*

*As Kayla and I were walking out Kayla tells me about the positive reactions to the movie she got and how students of color spoke about how they had never heard white people talk like that. One student, Jamie, who was late, related to a statement about lateness being connected to race and shared that the reason she was late was because she wanted to make sure that her two small children were safe before she left for school. She said she would rather be late then wonder if they were safe. Another black female, Natalie, talked about getting pulled over by a white officer for running a yellow light and when she said "white cops always do this" she was issued a ticket. Another black female, Lindsey, seemed resistant to the idea that it was about race and said the cops just knew she was a trouble maker which led to a conversation about why cops would think she is a trouble maker. Kayla says she struggled in getting them to move out of their marginalization into their privilege.*

“Disrupting Privilege” used voice in two ways in the classroom. First, “Disrupting Privilege” created space for silenced voices in the classroom (van Gorder; Johnson & Bhatt; Boler, “All Speech is not Free”). Second, voice gave the opportunity to the privileged to bear witness to the voices of the marginalized (Pease; van Gorder). The witnessing of voice acted as an entryway into many of the emotional manifestations in the class, which are further discussed in the next chapter. Altogether, voice accomplished

at least three things, it acted as the catalyst to de-center hegemony in the classroom; it rebalanced the ways in which we obtained our knowledge through dialogues of privilege; and it created space for transformation in the classroom.

Dominant pedagogies base their truths on dominant narratives that overshadow, hide and silence marginalized voices. When voices are silenced and people unheard, individuals internalize a devaluation of their being. Through valuing the vitality of these voices in “Disrupting Privilege,” it achieved what van Gorder describes when the oppressed are able “to see themselves as hopeful, confident creators of culture and the subjects, rather than the objects, of history” (10). As an example of hopefulness, after the women’s speak-out Phoebe wrote:

Men always want their voice to be on top. The speak-out game that we played, allowed us women to speak to men and not be talked over. That felt good because the male group didn’t interrupt us or talk back to us with negative comments.

Voice located marginalized individuals as agents within culture and created a space where the voice felt heard and thus found hope in the presence of being heard.

In order to achieve a space for marginalized voices in “Disrupting Privilege,” the co-instructors needed to take seriously the responsibility to de-center dominance so that those who are often silenced had the space to speak (Johnson and Bhatt 240). When this was achieved, marginalized voices had the opportunity to use this new found agency to speak back to dominant voices – voices that expressed views ranging from ignorance all the way to hate speech (Boler, “All Speech is not Free”). Lola connected with her anger about privilege in journal entries and wrote:

I've noticed that people view white as a good thing. Last time at Walgreens I was buying band aids and they were pink & a guy behind me said why don't you buy the normal color? This made me upset for a couple reasons. One what's it to them. 2: Who cares if I like pink. 3: I'm Mexican not normal!

Within "Disrupting Privilege," marginalized voices were valued as being the authority of experiences with privilege, particularly since privilege is most visible to those who are oppressed by this privilege. Therefore, we saw a counter-storytelling occur in which we heard stories of experiences that are often not heard and challenged the dominant stories we often do hear (Solórzano & Yosso).

While "Disrupting Privilege" created the space for marginalized voices, another dynamic of this space was that marginalized voices had the agency to choose whether or not to speak up. In response to the women's speak-out, Tracy wrote:

This week's class was very interesting to me, I liked it, although I didn't say anything. I felt it was very important letting the girls tell the boys what they expect from them, what they don't want them to do anymore. I didn't want to say anything because I am still not comfortable speaking up, and I didn't know how others would react.

While it was completely respected when marginalized voices chose to stay silenced, when these voices did speak, it was a gift to privileged individuals to have this experience offered to them. Therefore, voice also acted as an opportunity for privileged identities to bear witness to marginalized voices and experiences.

Bearing witness was not a passive empathy but instead placed accountability on the bearer to share the burden and take educational responsibility (Boler, "Feeling

Power,” 164). Pease points out another thing to consider in the transaction of voices in looking at privilege:

Much of the focus on developing conditions for dialogue across difference is about how oppressed groups can find their voice and speak up about their experiences. Little attention has been given to the responsibility of the privileged to shut up and listen to hear their experiences (179).

In order for voices in “Disrupting Privilege” to transmit knowledge of experience, there also needed to be others to bear witness to this voice, even when listening became uncomfortable. In anticipation of this discomfort, van Gorder asserts that teachers need to be aware of the tendency of the privileged to minimize or dismiss negative experience of the oppressed and thus encourage students to hear marginalized voices “even when articulated in rage and violence” (16). Lara, who expressed a lot of anger after seeing how some of the men responded to the women’s speak-out wrote:

I am disappointed because guys are so ignorant they can’t even look past how a women actually feels and they don’t give them the opportunity to let them speak and say their feelings towards someone. We can’t change the way people act but as long as we know from right and wrong maybe just maybe they’ll take the chance.

When intense feelings were expressed, it required those of us who hold many privileged identities to listen to the experiences of marginalized individuals, particularly when it was uncomfortable (Pease 32). In bearing witness to these voices, individuals with privilege are exposed to other ideas and experiences not present in his or her every day, which also influenced the way students and facilitators felt in the classroom.

To set the foundation for this witnessing, “Disrupting Privilege” went along with Goodman who advocates for an empathy that engages intellect and emotions along with a

laboring to increase personal knowledge and heightens emotional perception (143). When individuals were able to move toward the perspective of another, this was used to change negative attitudes and encourage action toward change (126). Katie wrote about her experience of a changing attitude after the Privilege Shuffle where she found out things about her friends she did not know:

The second time was a lot of fun and I think a lot of people learned from it because I know I did. I was very surprised when we played the game, I was surprised by all of the similarities between each group like when you called for people who have been or had a family member who was homeless and a lot of people stepped up that really shocked me because some of my friends stepped up and I couldn't imagine what it would be like to be homeless or to have a family member or even a friend who is homeless that's something that never crossed my mind until I saw that people that I love have or are going through it.

While the concept of empathy is controversial in terms of the assumption that we can feel and experience the position of other people, what is important in "Disrupting Privilege" was the ability to be moved through witnessing the painful experiences of others.

Witnessing opened up the space for marginalized communities to express their pain and trauma and form alliances that acknowledge the interdependency that is placed at risk through oppression of individuals. Through witnessing marginalized experiences in relationship to her able bodied privilege Kelly realized some things and wrote:

What I learned from class on Monday was very beneficial, I never realized how much of a privilege it was to be 'able-bodied.' Not having to worry about avoiding a flight of stairs or adjusting your home to fit your accommodations. Having to worry about those things are stressful, time-consuming & costly. Another point that I had never really thought about but really stuck with me now so if you're able bodied no one will think your behavior (such as cursing, depression, & aggression) is because you're in a wheelchair. That is really true & sad to me. Also another point

is majority of people on the street & on TV are able bodied so it is perceived as “normal.” So, if you are not able bodied there is a possibility you will not see yourself as normal and can become depressed or mad at the world.

When we were given the opportunity to bear witness to the ways in which our performances impacted the well being of others we created the space to make a personal connection that then attached our well being to theirs.

Kelly Oliver defines witnessing as being present as an observer, or a seeing with one’s own eyes of an experience of another. To witness the experiences of someone who has lived through them is different than hearing these stories from someone who did not. Marshall spoke to the difficulty he had in trying to wrap his head around the idea of witnessing something that he would never experience himself:

I find that the topics are also mind boggling as we are attempting to think outside our own world. It is difficult to examine those things because we don’t understand life any other way. We also spoke about this topic in our small groups. We all felt that is why it was hard to speak was because we each share this common factor which makes it hard for us to communicate.

In witnessing these experiences that are different from our own, it required us to believe that things are real, even if they are not recognizable to us. This acknowledgement of the realness of the experiences that we witnessed involved taking accountability for our involvement in this reality and responding in a way that was beyond our understanding (Oliver). To prepare us for this present witnessing, an eye contact exercise was conducted asking students to go around a circle and make eye contact with everyone. Marshall wrote about the impact of this witnessing exercise and said:



I felt this week was the most challenging. Just due to the first activity. I felt that having to look everyone in the eye was a very difficult task. In everyday life we all interact with others, however I think at times we never truly stop and take the time to have that interaction with others. It was especially powerful because there was not conversation or any sort of communication but simply to look into others' eyes.

In many ways, witnessing the impacts of our privilege, demanded a "leap of faith" in backing up and just believing that something was true, particularly when it had not been our own experience. In order to do this, we first had to see others in the class as human.

Zembylas articulates a desirable classroom community "whose members see themselves as responsible for one another and as co-witnesses who engage in alternative versions of how past traumatic events make them feel and why" (305). As a result of witnessing, students became more open to more positive emotions like love (313). Even if the act of witnessing did not lead immediately to these changes, it was a powerful emotional experience that challenged an individual's ability to see himself or herself as an agent in society (314). Katie reflected on her own experience of witnessing outside of the class and wrote:

Well, last week I went to the final 4 game. Stanford vs. Baylor and Notre Dame vs. UCONN and you did not see very many disabled people there. There were lots of in not all able bodied people. I seen some people in wheelchairs and they were smiling and seem to be happy but a stereotypical saying is people in wheelchairs are always grumpy or they don't want help from anyone. But you cannot tell because it was a happy, exciting event. I think it was an eye opener even though I wasn't trying to realize it.

Through locating this agency, we were offered new ways to understand and act upon our positionality (316). Thus, witnessing was an opportunity to transmit emotion from the

experience of marginalized individuals into an emotional understanding for privileged individuals. When privileged positions made this emotional connection, it was difficult to revert back to harmful behaviors when there had been a direct witnessing of the impact of oppressive performances.

When we embraced an educational approach that attended to understanding emotion in the classroom, we began engaging in what Zembylas terms “dialogues of witnessing,” “that formulate individuals’ experiences in ways that challenge prevailing oppressive forces, through a collaborative effort of interpretation and reinterpretation that includes a shared exploration of the meanings of emotions” (318). These dialogues led us to a “critical witnessing” that encouraged individuals to question relationships based on bearing witness to testimony (319). When critical witnessing occurred in the classroom, authentic emotional connections were made that transcended thresholds of intensity which can prevent us from developing relationships with people across difference (321). “Disrupting Privilege” relied on individuals to open themselves emotionally to witnessing the trauma of oppression. Marshall talked about his own willingness to open himself up to witnessing the trauma of oppression for women and wrote:

I felt this week’s presentation was best this far. I feel this way, because there seemed to be more participation. I felt that the interaction between the guys and women was strong. It was strong in that there was a real reality brought to the presentation. I felt as a guy, I agreed and am well aware of the issues that were stated by the women. However I felt it moving to hear them coming directly from women.

When this openness existed in the classroom, transmission of emotion tied us to one another and led to a change in relationship, which inevitably impacted the ethics and

politics by which we lived. By creating and supporting these emotions in the classrooms we had the opportunity, as Boler concludes in “Taming the Labile Other,” to “open affective territories that promise passionate educational exploration not yet colonized in the economies of the mind” (425).

After having the opportunity to bear witness to marginalized voices, privileged individuals began compiling the information to transform their own voices. In reference to this, Allen says that “one must realize that the pedagogical need to empower the voices of the oppressed is not at odds with, but correlated to the need to transform the voices of the oppressor” (28). Part of this transformation, involved privileged individuals taking accountability for his or her own collaboration in oppression. George spoke about his own accountability and opportunity to change his male performance and wrote:

Our society makes us we just have to accept if we want to be who they want us to be. You may have your feeling for yourself but they are just feeling. We are got to be a model to be the “man” to keep the family united but what about when we are destroyed from the inside what does society expect us to do? I’m enjoying you guys coming on Mondays!

Wise states that through this ownership, there is the opportunity to move beyond past oppressive performances and make a commitment to “doing better next time” (128).

When we made our privileged voices visible and connected these voices to the oppression and silencing of marginalized voices, we had a chance to change these voice performances and use them as tools for social justice that worked in collaboration with the needs expressed by marginalized voices.

The communication components relating to classroom norms, large and small group discussion, dialogue, and voice all contribute to the structure and facilitation of critical communication about privilege in the classroom. Classroom norms and large and small group discussion formed the structure where dialogue and voice facilitated the classroom construction of knowledge and realities of privilege. By having this structure and facilitation of the exchange of voices through dialogue, we created a classroom space where emotion surfaced in the classroom in a way that moved us toward transformation. Much of this emotion surfaced through the structure and facilitation of these communication components and were further demonstrated through performance in the classroom. This chapter outlines the replicable communicative components that built this structure and facilitation. The next chapter builds on the foundation of “Disrupting Privilege” that was established through the above communication components and further looks at the emotional manifestations that occurred in the class through privilege, pedagogy, and performance.

#### **Chapter Four: Emotional Manifestations in Disrupting Privilege**

During the structured and facilitated communication that occurred through dialoguing voices in “Disrupting Privilege” we often needed to tackle difficult issues that risked surfacing complex emotions, particularly when it came to identity. In fact, emotional memory begins before we even have processed concepts (Grille). Furthermore, Grille states that “what we don’t remember with our minds, we remember with our bodies, with our hearts and our ‘guts’ – with lasting implications for our thinking, feeling, and behaviour.” While “Disrupting Privilege” relied on verbal communication analyzed in the previous chapter to explore identity, it also manifested a less tangible, and yet integrally important, emotional communication. Through emotional communication, the “Disrupting Privilege” classroom witnessed students and facilitator transformation. Therefore, this chapter demonstrates how, through privilege, pedagogy, and performance, the “Disrupting Privilege” classroom became a space for change (Boler & Zembylas; Boler; Johnson & Bhatt; Werry & O’Gorman; Zembylas).

Much of the work on emotion within communication comes from an interpersonal approach (Fridlund & Russel; Titsworth, Quinlan & Mazer; Kotchemidova; Bolls; Frisby & Martin; Baek, Wojcieszak & Carpini; Knobloch & Schmelzer). Kotchemidova argues that emotions are integral to individuals as a meaning making process of constructing our cognitive construction of realities. Emotions within the everyday are one of our most

powerful ways of communicating. In addition, emotions give us information about our environments so that we know how to react to what is going on (207). These reactions are disciplined by cultural norms and individuals often learn how to manage these emotions to stay within these social expectations (208). Within this approach, emotion is primarily an individual experience in reaction to what surrounds us.

In addition to this interpersonal work, there is scholarship on emotions and communication within cultural approaches (Leu; Liu; Matsumoto, Olide & Willingham; Motozuka & Ting-Toomey). Leu states that the expression of emotion through everyday language allows people to value what surrounds them. Furthermore, feelings are a link between the social and the cultural. Positive feelings connect us to other people while negative ones block an individual's desire (65). Within culture and communication, instead of being framed as an individual experience, emotion is seen more as a social experience that is responsive to the culture surrounding us, which closely aligns with the way emotion manifested in "Disrupting Privilege" (Boler, "Feeling Power"; Boler & Zembylas; Werry & O'Gorman; Zembylas).

In contributing to communication literature on emotion in the classroom, this chapter breaks down the analysis of emotion in "Disrupting Privilege" by looking at how the speaking and witnessing of voice through dialogue occurred via privilege, pedagogy, and performance in the classroom. The first section looks at how performance occurred in "Disrupting Privilege" and analyzes the ways in which performance led to emotional reactions for students and facilitators. The second section transitions to an analysis of the

impact of the emotional performative space of the “Disrupting Privilege” classroom on transforming student and facilitator performances from oppressive to more informed and reflexive ways of being in the classroom and, furthermore, the world.

### *Performing in “Disrupting Privilege”*

“Disrupting Privilege” used performance exercises to bring the students back to the emotional experience of the body throughout privilege work (Pineau; Alexander, Anderson, & Gallegos). When I say performance I am talking both about the formal activities mentioned in the previous chapter and the informal identities performances that occurred in reaction to the dialogue and voice that was occurring in the classroom. The first part of this section analyzes the function of performance in the “Disrupting Privilege” classroom. Performance helped us understand the material impact of privilege by acknowledging the body as a site of knowledge and encouraging reflexivity in relationship to positionality and intersectionality. After setting the standard for emotional performance in the classroom, we began to perform disrupting privilege in the class, which allowed us to re-imagine ways in which we could transform our performances as allies in the world (Pineau; Warren; Alexander, “Critically Analyzing”; Baszile; Johnson & Bhatt).

### **Performance in the Classroom**

*I arrive at Stratton High School and sign in at the table. I head upstairs and make small talk with Heidi until Kayla and Steve arrive. The bell rings, students sit down and I invite people to check in and talk about what they wrote in their journals. After*

*conversation wanes I share that I am really tired and I want to get people out of their seats and moving-particularly if they are feeling anything like I am. I explain theater of the oppressed and talk about the “fill the space” performance exercise. Students are a little chatty and at first do not move around much when the activity begins. Eventually students loosen up and begin to use their bodies to walk around the entirety of the classroom or “fill the space.” Throughout the exercise there are some students peeking when eyes are asked to be shut and some opening their eyes before I request because they are anxious to see what other people are doing-possibly because they are feeling a little worried about looking silly. I tell them that everyone is going to look silly together so it isn’t something to worry about. I ask them to pose as trees and sea creatures. When the requests get more abstract to marginalization, power, and ally, some students are incredibly creative. Others stand still, including Heidi, who seems hesitant to engage. After the last one, students are asked to sit down and are asked to talk about reactions.*

*Victor speaks first and says that he felt silly. After more students are not participating in the conversation he becomes frustrated and calls them out. I point out that they are leaving him out of a limb for looking silly and make a joke about everyone looking silly but nobody joining him. I ask students if they were surprised by any poses and Natalie mentions being surprised that another student was on the ground for the sea creature pose. I echo her surprise since I had never seen anyone do that either. Katie mentions that she was surprised when another student hugged her when I said ally. I ask her how it felt and she says it was awkward at first but then she got comfortable. I ask*



*students what it means to be an ally and students say it means helping someone out. I challenge Tim and ask him if he thinks an ally acts before or after someone is on the ground. Tim says on the ground at first and I agree that sometimes we are too late but challenge him to think about what it would mean to intervene earlier. I mention what it means to put our own bodies on the line to be allies. Jamie mentions that you have to be wary of when you do this and uses the example of taking a bullet. I tell Jamie she is right and say that we need to think about what is most effective. I give the example of disrupting gay slurs with the risk of being perceived as gay myself as putting my body on the line. Students seem to understand it and I ask for more ways in which people disrupt privilege. Kelly mentions that she saw a bunch of white kids at her job calling a black kid a “nigger” and a “slave” and she kicked them out. I told her that that was a great example because she was disrupting something and potentially putting her own body on the line in making that disruption.*

In alignment with Pineau in “Performance Studies,” the use of performance in “Disrupting Privilege” relied on valuing the body’s “sense-making capability and critical agency” (128). Performance facilitated a communication between bodies that could not occur at the level of speech alone. Eliana wrote about her own impressions of this form of communication and shared:

It was kind funny when we were walking around, and you told us to make signs and I saw some other students had the same signs as mine. To me, it was kind weird when she said that we should close our eyes, and I wasn’t comfortable with it, but I had fun, and understand later. I didn’t know how to come up with some sings of other thing she said, but I tried to figure out something, and it was funny. I was scare, nervous, and uncomfortable, but

I got used to it as she made us to do different signs, so yeah. I think sharing your thoughts with someone is a good idea and I love doing that and I do enjoy as I do that with someone.

By communicating in and through bodies we accessed emotional communication that provided students with a different way of thinking. Performance in the classroom, according to Warren “allows a shift from essentialism to construction – a shift that grants subversive power to the educational enterprise” (101). When we lead with our bodies instead of our heads we have the potential to stumble upon feelings and responses we would not otherwise know existed and to use these responses to subversively move through the educational system. Tim described his experience of using performance in the classroom and wrote:

Last class was kind of awkward because of the activity. We were walking around and all acting silly. I think it was a creative way for our class to get more comfortable with each other. Also the activity helped us recognize similar thoughts or thinking about different ideas.

Many of us recognized that we were not alone in our understanding of the world through performance. In “Performance Studies,” Pineau highlights that by incorporating the performing body in the classroom, the body becomes a tool that can be engaged beyond the classroom. This is partly achieved because “critical performative pedagogy combines acute physical awareness of one’s kinetic and kinesthetic senses with candid and thoughtful consideration of the implications of those bodily sensations” (133). Some of these sensations were surprising to students. Kelly described her own surprise with her experience of performance as a tool and wrote:

I think it was really surprising how everyone has some of the same perspective, even though we are all so different for example when she told us to act our idea of strong majority of people held their arms up. So many of us do have the same idea.

In performance, symbolism became more natural and our bodies created spaces that may only have come about through performance. By reflecting on these performances with others we began to see unplanned meanings and interactions with the people around us, including our similarities across difference.

Bringing performance into “Disrupting Privilege” proved vital to being inclusive to the different experiences of students. Warren points out that by ignoring bodies in the classroom they are pushed aside as excessive factors of the educational process and impede real learning (91). Performance in “Disrupting Privilege” aimed to directly confront this falsity caused by ignoring bodies and, instead, embraced the body as a starting point for learning and dialoguing. By embracing the body as a starting point and including real experiences in the classroom, interaction increased in the classroom.

Marshall observed this increased interaction and wrote:

This week I felt that we were much more interactive with one another. Thanks to the main presentation of each small group I felt that it allowed everyone to show expression to the rest of the class. It created more comfort among everyone to see everyone go in front of the class and show such emotion. More activities such as this are necessary to the class in making it work for everyone. It showed that it worked because there was more participation from each of the students in the discussions.

Thus, performance created a space where more bodies could participate in the dialogue without feeling like they had to be someone who they were not. In “Teaching is Performance,” Pineau describes the dialogue facilitated through performance as being

interdisciplinary, using noncanonical texts, and embracing indigenous performance within the everyday (21). This type of performance dialogue acknowledged that our bodies are always and already politicized within education institutions and it used this awareness as a basis for learning and empowerment (35). Antonio was a student who started out fairly disengaged and disrupted but continued coming to the class at Kendal High School. After performance was introduced he started opening up and sharing more both in the class and in writing and wrote, "Last time we came to meet, we acted out some things. I felt smart." Without performance in the class, Antonio may not have found his connection to the material that we were talking about and, furthermore, may have not felt like he was capable of engaging in the classroom. In "Critically Analyzing," Alexander understands the classroom as being a chance to investigate the relationship between performing pedagogy and the identities that intervene in educational spaces, which implies that we cannot know without embracing this holistic approach (60). "Disrupting Privilege" used performance to assist in our understandings of how our identities influenced the classroom space in which we were talking about privilege and it gave students a different language for expressing this understanding and contributing to what was happening in the classroom.

When relying on the body as a site of knowledge, there was a need for reflexivity around positionality and intersectionality, particularly as they related to power.

Alexander, in "Critically Analyzing," and Warren both explore ways in which reflexivity exists in pedagogical endeavors. Alexander describes a "performative reflexivity" in

which “members of particular communities turn backwards and inwards, to engage the double-lensed act of looking at themselves *look at themselves*” (43). Most students articulated this reflexivity by talking about themselves and the classroom space as a whole and considering themselves as part of that community. In talking about the class privilege hierarchy exercise Lance wrote his observations of the class as:

When people didn't know that different colors of paper meant different levels of “quality.” Everybody was interacting with each other. No one said no to trading papers with someone else. But the instant Cassidy mentioned that each color represented a “class” the environment change.

Students began to see how they interacted as individuals within the system of the classroom. Warren links this idea to the idea that performative pedagogy brings bodies to the present and forces them to exist together through reflexive learning opportunities (101). Performance in “Disrupting Privilege” brought awareness not only to how we performed but also how these performances impacted the people and environment that surrounded us.

In “Disrupting Privilege” we held multiple identities that intermingled to make up our experiences within social structures and our interactions with others. Therefore, a part of reflexivity in “Disrupting Privilege” required that we looked at intersectionality, or the ways in which these multitudes of our identities impacted and informed our experiences as individuals within these systems (Alexander, “Performing Culture”; Conquergood, “Performing as a Moral Act”; Corey; Holling & Calafell; Johnson & Bhatt). Pease talks about two levels of intersectionality that appeared in “Disrupting Privilege.” First, different types of identity oppressions had their own experiences but

oppressions were related and reinforced one another (18). In other words, if one type of oppression exists in the world, we realized that others would continue to exist simply due to the acceptance of oppression as performance. Some of Brenna's realization of able-bodied privilege came from a personal experience in school, which she wrote about in her journal:

When I was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade there was an autistic boy named Maddie. He changed my way of thinking about disabled people for the rest of my life. I am a better person because of him. I don't think people realize how difficult the world is for disabled people. With privilege comes uneducatedness (that's a nice way of saying stupidity or selfishness).

While Breanna is talking about able-bodiedness specifically, she is able to link her discussion back to the systems of privilege being the force that creates oppression rather than staying stuck in ability and disability. Second, in terms of intersectionality we also considered ways in which different privileged identities intersected but, furthermore, how privileged identities intersected with oppressed identities, particularly within a single body (35). For example, while Breanna contributed a lot to conversations about gender in which she expressed her experience of marginalization, she was also able to be critical of her own privilege. Students were actually encouraged to feel their marginalization so that they could then translate this to areas in which they were privileged and thus understand what individuals may have been feeling in response to their privilege. "Disrupting Privilege" resisted claiming hierarchies of oppression and instead considered the multiple intersections of identities as they are privileged and oppressed within systems of power.

In alignment with Pineau in “Teaching is Performance,” “Disrupting Privilege” was a collaborative process in which world views were made and remade, therefore shifting our individual positions within these fictions (23). Students began to see things through performance that they would not have otherwise seen because it embraced the reality of our experiences and interaction. Through the collaborative process Tim wrote about seeing his own reality about how social groups are formed and shared:

The exercise with the paper was good because it showed how people can view others. If one group of people are seen as more popular then they will be less likely to talk with some one of lower rankings. It was crazy how the first time we talked to everybody, until Cassidy told us what the paper color symbolized. Then little groups started forming and people were not as willing to talk with everybody else.

Performance became an opportunity for students to see what we were talking about play out naturally through complex human interaction across difference and intersection. Furthermore, it was highlighted in “Disrupting Privilege that “identities are always multiple, overlapping ensembles of real and possible selves who enact themselves in direct relation to the context and communities in which they perform” (29). Without understanding our intersectional identity performances, we would have been lost in locating our real, and therefore our possible selves, which will be further discussed later in the chapter.

### **Performing Disrupting Privilege**

*Steve and I walk into the classroom at Stratton High school and start putting the chairs in a circle. Kayla was not able to join us today because of a family emergency. As students begin walking in I ask them to pull out journal entries and many students*

*comply. I begin check in and Natalie says she didn't write a journal but she wants to start check in. She says she felt uncomfortable with the exercise we did last time but also expressed liking it and enjoying seeing what other people did. Natalie reflects on her nervousness about other people peeking and I joke that there were in fact people peeking during the exercise. I ask Natalie why she felt uncomfortable and she wasn't sure. I offer up that perhaps it was because it was a performance outside of our "normal" performances that occur in the classroom. Natalie seems to agree. I invite other students to speak up and Victor says that he really enjoyed the exercise and mentions that it would be interesting to do it again at the end of class and see if people are more comfortable with it. I tell him that is a great idea. I ask again if anyone has anything to add and there isn't much said so I move on and tell them that I am glad they enjoyed the performance exercise because we will be doing more of that today.*

*I begin to explain that this class looks at two types of resistance. I ask people what they think when I say resistance. Victor says that it is going against something. Another, Katie, agrees and mildly elaborates. I tell them they are right and begin to define the two ways in terms of privilege work. After explaining it I ask someone to summarize it back. Jamie asks me to tell them again so I do. I ask about the second definition and again no one seems to understand it. I say I am glad that I am asking for understanding and re-explain the definition. I tell them we will be focusing on the first definition today. I explain the performance exercise and some people say they are following and others are not. I had asked them to take notes and Natalie, who did,*



*proudly shows me her notes and says she gets it. I commend her note taking and get into the middle of the circle to demonstrate the exercise with Steve. I tell them my phrase which was “I give up” and my movement, which was turning my head and putting my hand out toward Steve. Steve tells them his phrase which is “I don’t know” and his movement, which was putting his hands in the air with exasperation. Steve stayed sitting down and I invited him into the circle with me which he reluctantly joins-clearly a little nervous. I have Steve start his phrase and movement and then I do mine. It seems to click with the students.*

*I ask them all to get in small groups and I tell Kayla's group I would be working with them. Everyone gathers around tables and start following directions. I mention that I would really like facilitators to participate. Heidi looks nervous and a student teacher who had joined the class took over the facilitation of Kayla's group and seems to be doing really well. My group immediately starts listing names and coming up with phrases. Even people who had never really spoken up before were quick to think of something. Then, my group started creating an action and we put it all together. I check on other groups and give them suggestions about thinking about how they set up in the room. Everyone seems to be doing well and as people start wrapping up I ask people to recreate the circle.*

*I ask who would like to go first and immediately the male group offered to do their performance. After the male performance I ask people to give feedback. Marshall, the only male not in the male privilege group says that he agrees with what they said and*

*that it was true. Natalie mentions that the statement along the lines of “I got to take care of myself” was typical of a guy while another statement of “I don’t know” was seen across groups. I ask her to talk about how those statements make her feel and she struggles. Tim helps her and brings up that the first statement sounds like something a guy would say when breaking up with a girl and she agrees. I jump in to model vulnerability and say it makes me sad to hear men giving up on women and that while I am not angry at any one of them, it is difficult to hear that. The boys look receptive and somewhat surprised at what I was saying and Steve nodded his head.*

*I ask if anyone else has anything to add and no one speaks up so that Western privilege group goes. Feedback for this group include: liking Natalie’s performance choices and Breanna liking the student teacher’s response which was “It isn’t my fault.” The student teacher makes the point that his phrase is typical of a Westerner and I commend the connection he makes. Heidi asks me to clarify Western privilege and I do. Next, the middle to upper class privilege group goes and immediately after they are done Victor raises his hand and jokingly asks if “we could see it now” because it was performed in a space that could not be seen by the entire class. The middle to upper class group repeats the performance and Victor says he liked their phrases.*

*Last, the able bodied privilege group performs and Marshall observes that all the statements had to do with extending a helping hand. I ask him to think about what that might say about able-bodied privilege and he refers back to the specific statement made of “what if they don’t want our help.” Students are anxious to jump on this comment but I*

*cut in and explain the concept of paternalism. I use a story from a homeless and runaway youth shelter that I used to work at and as I tell the anecdote the room was silent. The story is about a time when there was a racial conversation that I was facilitating that was very uncomfortable and I apologized to a Latino client for the situation. The client looked at me and said "miss, I have to deal with this every day." As I conclude the story the student teacher lets out a noise to indicate that it is a powerful story. Students confirm that they understand the difference between disrupting privilege and acting paternalistic. Students continue to talk about how paternalism makes people feel helpless.*

*The conversation lulls and I ask if there is anything else. I plead for journal entries so that I can hear more of their voice and experience and then the bell rings. Heidi mentions how well the class went and that she thought that at first students were acting like they thought it was stupid but really seemed to enjoy it. Steve and I walk out and Steve tells me good job and says he thinks it went really well and asks if I agree. I tell him I do and that I am surprised at how well students picked up on the activity. We say our goodbyes and Steve offers to do any extra work needed given Kayla's family emergency.*

After establishing a standard of performance in "Disrupting Privilege," performance was used in the classroom to practice what we were talking about in class. One way in which we practiced this was by performing our own resistance to seeing privilege. Through performing our resistance to seeing privilege we came to terms with ways in which we have contributed to the oppression of others. In owning her own

privilege Lola wrote, "People never really acknowledge how others feel and they think it's okay to treat them the way they do but that isn't okay." When we confessed to our collaboration in the oppression of others we learned how to work against this and bridged theories about disrupting privilege with the practice of actually doing it.

Kendall and Pease make it clear that we cannot give our privileges back but we can work not to employ them oppressively and instead use our privileges to benefit people who do not have them (Kendall 108). Many students immediately wanted to move to action after realizing resistance. Miguel wrote:

I am thankful we got to talk about this because it isn't an everyday I talk about, I don't even acknowledge people like this do really exist, I realize that is something I should acknowledge because just as myself they need and have needs too.

Students began to move beyond their performance of resist and wanted to create alliances. To understand how to move toward these performances of alliance, it required studying, learning and refining knowledge of experiences so that our actions could move closer to social change (Kendall 145-46 and Pease 24). Anna wrote about her own process of moving closer to openness to change and shared:

Last class was a little weird. The video we watched was very weird to me. At first, I didn't understand the purpose of the things that happened in the video. The song in the video actually scared me. I thought it was some kind of a spiritual or evil song. But at the end, I understood. I feel really bad for the women in the video. I hate how people don't consider her as a real human being. That's really sad. I mean why wouldn't she be consider as a human being? She has almost everything normal people have. I feel really bad for her disability. Her life must be really really hard. I didn't even know people like that existed, so it made me learn something I never knew.

While Anna was challenged to consider whether the woman in the autism video would want her pity and she was asked to consider how it felt when people felt sorry for her own marginalized experiences, this sadness for the marginalized woman was part of her process toward social change.

In “Disrupting Privilege,” we followed Warren’s suggestion that performance be used to slow down the repetition of oppressive performances so that it can be made clear that those performances are no longer tolerated (99). Baszile adds to the exploration of possibility within the classroom by stating that performance creates teachable moments, particularly when they go wrong. As we see above, the journals became one space in which these teachable moments occurred. After making lists about privilege and their ties to marginalization, Mandy wrote:

In class today my group talked about what middle class people have over lower class people and I disagree with most of the statements because I don’t get what I want. If I want something, than I have to work to get it. People make a lot of stereotypes and it’s annoying. Like since I have a nice car, they think I’m rich. Well I’m not! My dad worked hard to get the nice house. And I don’t shop at fancy stores. I go to cheap stores like Wal-Mart or Ross. It may look like fancy or expensive clothes but, it’s not I just like nice clothes. People need to just stop being judgmental.

The response to Mandy’s entry from the facilitator was:

Mandy, who are you talking about when you say “people?” There is no denying that you and your family worked hard but do you think that maybe other people work hard too and aren’t able to achieve the things your family has? Thanks for sharing!

The “Disrupting Privilege” classroom was an opportunity to disrupt, question and challenge these oppressive performances and then take these lessons outside of the classroom (146).

In addition to materializing our own privilege, performances of privilege were powerful for individuals who were marginalized. After the women’s speak-out, Emma wrote:

At first when you said that women need to go their own line, and men’s as well I was kind of surprised because it was the first time and I didn’t know what you was going to make us do, but made myself not to worry because I love you teaching us and it’s really helping me a lot in my life right now, so when you said that we need to tell men’s how we feel, what things they do we don’t like, so they can change. I was inspired for some boys who tried to memories what the girls were saying and repeating them after a while. It was amazing, and beautiful.

Performance of privileged identities in front of people with marginalized identities made us accountable for that privilege, validation occurred because of this accountability. It turned covert microaggressions, or:

brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environment indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communication hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual-orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group (Sue 5)

into overt confirmations of oppression. It blocked denial. When we took accountability for our oppressive performances of privilege we admitted to causing the oppression of others, which was a dramatic contrast to the denial that people with marginalized identities face within the everyday.

Performance of disrupting privilege in the “Disrupting Privilege” classroom allowed us to explore knowledge beyond the brain by bringing our bodies into the classroom. This use of bodies in the classroom made it possible for students to learn how to take it outside of the classroom. When we were able to take these performances into our everyday, we opened the space for being invited into alliances. Johnson and Bhatt say that alliances are spaces where we can embody differences instead of erasing them (223). “Disrupting Privilege” was thus a space where we first understood performances of privilege and the characteristics of these performances. Natalie wrote about her own experience with taking her understanding of her performance of privilege in the classroom into the world:

Last class was really fun and it was interesting to see what everyone’s response was to the activity. When we broke up into groups and watched the movie/film was all fun. The film was really interesting, it was weird to see that all the movements that she was doing were all telling a story. Yesterday, I was walking down Hampden and Monaco with my little sister and we saw a woman in a wheelchair and my little sister asked me what was wrong with her and I replied she’s just different. She said some kids at her school are different and while others make fun of them she is their friend and my sister is only 5 years old.

Once we got here, we could move forward and understand how these performances could be transformed in a way that moves toward social change and resists perpetuating oppression both in and outside of the classroom.

#### *Transformation through Emotion in “Disrupting Privilege”*

Bringing performance into the “Disrupting Privilege” classroom also brought in emotion. Creating space for this emotion was key to moving through the educational

process toward transformation. This section looks specifically at this shift from performance to expression of emotion to transformation in “Disrupting Privilege. First, I demonstrate an analysis of how this emotion manifested in “Disrupting Privilege.” Within cultural studies, there is a body of education literature that explores emotion as it relates to pedagogy and education (Boler, “Feeling Power”; Boler & Zembylas; Werry & O’Gorman; Zembylas). In “Feeling Power,” Boler develops a theory of emotion drawing from feminist, psychobiological and post structuralist theory. This theory of emotion explores how emotions have often been disciplined or ignored in education specifically as a way to have social control over conflicts involving gender, race and class. “Disrupting Privilege” challenged the ignorance of emotion in the classroom and specifically created a space for it to be expressed.

Second, this section provides an analysis of the transformation that occurred in “Disrupting Privilege” as we worked through our collaborative performances of disrupting privilege. In exploring our “real and possible selves” we began to understand how performance opened the door for us to transform our oppressive performances of privilege into performances of alliance and solidarity. By making our performances of privilege intentional and public, our bodies demanded accountability for these performances and became agents of social change. “Disrupting Privilege” highlighted privilege with the aim of disrupting it by making it visible. As Alexander, Anderson and Gallegos point out, by using performance in our everyday lives we can place agency as the focal point of discourse that aims to understand the power dynamics within specific



spaces. Through performance we place our bodies at risk by having honest conversation with others about the harm we have caused and continue to cause to others and ourselves. This risk led to commitment to transformed performances of students and facilitators in “Disrupting Privilege.”

### **Performance of Emotion in the Classroom**

*I meet Kayla in the parking lot at Kendal and we head inside. Steve is not able to make it because he is sick. I sign-in at the office while Kayla waits outside the classroom. I meet Kayla and slowly students begin to gather around us. We walk upstairs and again find that there are kids in the library. We find an open room and walk in there. The students are talkative and I make a comment to Kayla about them not needing any more candy and she agrees. We set up four tables together and the students eventually gather around. We ask students to complete a “do it now” about what they have been thinking about last class or why they came back. I request silence so that it will get done and we can move on. I use candy to motivate them and the ones who usually get it done complete it. A couple of boys struggle and I have to ask for at least one sentence of substance from them.*

*Eventually everyone finishes and I explain the speak-out to them. During this time a couple of the boys are not listening and continuing speaking. I use that as an example of male privilege to demonstrate how men speak over women. The students then line up as requested and things are further explained. Lola has said that she is not going to speak and I reassure the group that this is fine. There are only two girls and Kayla and*

*myself and there are five boys. Lucia speaks up a lot along with Kayla and me. The boys repeat things back. During the second question Lola speaks up and a couple of the boys tease her. I tell them that it is sad that Lola had finally decided to share something with them and they ridiculed her. After this, the boys are less disrespectful. We finish the speak-out and most of the boys do really good jobs-including boys who don't often speak up. I ask everyone to sit down.*

*We open up the conversation for a debrief and we talk about why women speak out and men do not. I use race as an example and say that every day is a men's speak-out similar to like every day is a white speak-out. One of the boys shares that it was uncomfortable and after being probed says that he has never gotten the opportunity to talk about it. I ask him about the discomfort and he says that he thinks it is a good discomfort. The women continue to talk about their experiences and for the most part the boys listen except Eddie, who continues to argue with his sister, Lola. The argument gets heated between the siblings and there is some yelling. Kayla and I interrupt a couple of times to redirect and explain things. I explain that sometimes arguing with the marginalized group invalidates them and I use examples of white people arguing with people of color. I talk about my experience facilitating a DU class and a white boy arguing with students of color. Most people nod their heads but Eddie continues to argue and Lola gets pulled in. Lucia explains that it isn't about bad individuals it is about society. I agree with her and rephrase what she has said. Eventually Kayla asks the students to write their exit tickets.*

*I see that Lola is still triggered after Eddie had stated many mean things and it appeared they were stated from a space of defense combined with sibling rivalry. During the exit ticket I ask Kayla to explain closings where students could say one more thing and I ask Lola to speak to me in the hallway. As soon as we are outside Lola begins to cry and I ask her if she needs to take some space. I talk with Lola a little bit about the difficulty in dealing with people who are not open and how we have the power to choose how we spend our energy. I ask Lola if I can do anything for her and she says no but thanks me. I then ask Lola if she wants to leave early and go to the bathroom and she says she does. I tell Lola how important her voice is and that I would like her to come back next time. I tell Lola that if his behavior continues the way it does that he will not be invited back. I ask Lola if we will see her next week and she says we will.*

*I return to the classroom for closings. I had missed Brent talking about how he had not known the things that women experienced and he was glad that the experience happened. I missed what Lucy said and then Ian skips. Miguel shares that he appreciated the girls sharing and feels bad about the close mindedness of the boys-Eddie interrupts and says that he should just say his name-Miguel continues and says that he was guilty of it himself. Kayla talks about how she appreciated people engaging in the conversation and sitting in the discomfort. I echo many of Kayla's sentiments and say that just as I hope that the students could talk to me about my privilege I was thankful for the boys that let me talk to them about theirs with an openness. I talk about how awareness was the first step in changing society as individuals. Brent asks me if it was possible and I used*

*Steve as an example of one of my male allies. I tell them that he still messes up but that every time a male steps up I am surprised and pleased. I say that you never know when you might positively impact a female by stepping up because it doesn't happen very often. I tell the group that we would see them next week and the bell rings. After everyone leaves Kayla and I look at each other in exasperation and we talk about how hard it was. We leave the school and overhear Lola talking to someone about how mad she was. We walk to our cars and say our good byes.*

Creating a space for emotion in the “Disrupting Privilege” classroom was vital for students to make a human connection with one another and the world. The approach taken in “Disrupting Privilege” aligned with Boler’s aim in “Feeling Power” to re-center emotion within education as a way to inform social action in response to systems of power. In writing about the Privilege Shuffle done at the beginning of class Breanna said that “sometimes when I walked to the other side I felt proud and other times I left like I was putting down everyone else on the other side.” From the beginning of class, it was made clear to students that emotions would be brought into the classroom, particularly through performance. To re-center emotion, Boler references a “Feminist Politics of Emotion” that encourages women to publicly name their emotions as a way to collectively analyze these emotions not as private or natural occurrences, but rather as reflections of learned hierarchies (112). Thus, “Disrupting Privilege” reclaimed emotion from the patriarchal private spaces and placed them in the public sphere as a way to

highlight emotion as a site of social control that could be transformed into a space of political resistance (113).

While many types of emotions manifested in “Disrupting Privilege,” some common emotions were shame and discomfort. In order to transform our behaviors we needed first to feel discomfort in the way we were currently performing, which often manifested as shame and occurred as a result of witnessing the painful experience of others. After the women’s speak-out, Miguel wrote, “In today’s exercise I actually learned how females feel about certain things. Also how some males act in reaction to women saying these things. It actually helped in how to figure out their feelings.” Miguel had also expressed shame about how some of the men reacted to the women. Shame as expressed in “Disrupting Privilege” was often an emotion that was connected to our desires to be good people and live our lives from an ethic of love for one another. Natalie was reflecting on her Western privilege after doing an activity that directly connected this privilege to the oppression of Non-Westerners and wrote:

During the individual groups, I was surprised by what my group and I had come up with because having Western privilege, I don’t have to worry about being blamed for what our government does wrong but other that don’t have that privilege are blamed for worldwide disasters and it sad. It’s good that I have this privilege but then again it sucks because seeing what others have to go through makes me really upset.

In looking at the performance of shame in the classroom Werry and O’Gorman understand shame “as a force that animates and materializes social process in the classroom, and as an optic that makes palpable the contours of power – raced, classed, gendered – in institutionalized learning” (214). This was achieved in “Disrupting

Privilege” because shame subjectified the body, thus making it present and “affectively attendant” (219). Individuals participating in “Disrupting Privilege” were able to see themselves as actors in this social process by feeling their own individual reactions to what we were talking about in the classroom and emotionally reacting to the self implication of their participation in systems of power.

As seen in the above narrative, the “Disrupting Privilege” classroom could not be made a space completely free of emotional discomfort while also encouraging authentic relational development between people. But, when shame was attended to, the discomfort could be made visible (Werry & O’Gorman 221). Natalie articulated some of her own experience with discomfort and wrote:

Class was really weird today. The eye contact activity was kind of weird but then again, it was normal because, I’m use to looking at people and talking to people face to face it was awkward because having eye contact with people is awkward especially if you don’t know them that well or if you’ve never had eye contact with them before. With the activity with the collars was fun at first then when we were told what orange was, everyone wanted to be orange and that kind of separated everyone from others and many where ignored and some felt bad and that is how society is today.

Students began to see how what we did in class impacted the students and facilitators around them. When we saw shame as a “model of relationality” we also highlighted the wounds inflicted on others and felt connections of shared interest and love (Werry & O’Gorman 224). Shame was the starting point for those with privilege to fully realize the harms of privilege and own their contribution to this violence. Some students knew they were feeling things but struggled with articulating them and sometimes performance was the only way to express these feelings in the class. In confusion over her own emotions

Lola wrote, “My emotions are vague I don’t know what I’m doing well trying to understand and see how it is with the different people I see how change can happen but I also see how its hard and able body is not okay and its with change that happens.” By paying attention to emotion in the “Disrupting Privilege” classroom, particularly as it related to shame, we brought ourselves into present relationships with others in that space and had an entryway into vulnerability that transformed these relationships.

In response to shame and discomfort, Boler (2000) proposes a “Pedagogy of Discomfort,” which is both an invitation to inquiry along with being a call to action. This pedagogy used in “Disrupting Privilege” placed an emphasis on “collective witnessing” as a way to challenge esteemed beliefs and assumptions. Miguel shared some of his own observations through collective witnessing and wrote:

Today in class the first activity was interesting b/c of how people with more power react to other lower class people. The lowest wants to be in the higher class and the middle class is just there. And the second exercise was just uncomfortable b/c you have to see people’s true selves.

When we collectively witnessed what was going on around us we became present and saw spaces for flexibility and change. Therefore, the goal was to present the individual with the possibility of being present in a more flexible sense of self (176). Success of a “Pedagogy of Discomfort” was seen when students recognized what it was that he or she does not want to know and began to see how one could develop emotional investment as a way to avoid this knowing. Kelly wrote about her own emotional investment that she found through seeing the transformation between the two resistance sculptures:

I think it was really awesome how most of our groups were able to compare the differences between our opinions from back then to our opinions now. They have changed (at least most) from not knowing what to do and not wanting to be a part of it to wanting and willing to help.

Within the process of performance in “Disrupting Privilege” came the possibility of gaining a new sense of connecting with others and locating the “hope of revisioning ourselves” (200).

Boler and Zembylas discuss discomfort as an emotion in the classroom in which emotional stances bring to surface our invisible privileges along with the ways we perpetuate these privileges by aligning with dominant ideology (111). “Disrupting Privilege” was a space where the surfacing of these stances occurred:

in an emotionally open and safe environment – that nurtures emotions of anger or guilt but challenges them with compassion and courage – there will be possibilities for mutual exploration that also nurture hope and a sense of community for initiating change (130).

This move toward change happened when it became more uncomfortable for students and facilitators to act in the ways we were used to and shifted our behaviors through positive emotional labor. This created space for a more collective movement toward change on both an individual and community level (132). At the beginning of class before Kendal students did the first resistance sculpture Anita reflected on the last class where performance was first introduced with the “fill the space” exercise when she wrote:

I don't remember the last time we met. I sort of remember using our bodies to describe what words mean to us. I didn't like it because I feel that my words are stronger and mean more.



By the end of that class after we did the resistance exercises, Anita's perspective changed and she wrote, "I feel that I have privilege as well as anyone else and taking responsibility for unintentionally using my privilege feels...cool." As students became more comfortable with performing in the classroom they began to feel new ways of learning and laboring to understand. Through this process of emotional labor, in "All Speech is not Free," Boler states, that "one is potentially faced with allowing one's world-views to be shattered, in itself a profoundly emotionally charged experience" (325).

### **Transformed Performances**

*Kayla, Steve and I walk into Kendal High School and sign in and then head to the classroom. We wait until students begin gathering around us. We go upstairs and find a classroom. We open with asking students to reflect on last class. It is difficult for students to focus and to start writing reflections but eventually everyone has things written. Brent excitedly shows me his DJ card with my name on it and says he likes my name so he decided to go by it as a DJ. Lola wants to look at my finger nail polish and she grabs hold of my hand. Students are much more comfortable with Kayla, Steve and me than when we started and this transformation can be seen in the way they interact with us. After people are done writing we watch a video on Western privilege and then discuss it. During the video Brent mentions that the woman in the video is a terrorist because she is wearing a hijab. I tell him it wasn't appropriate though in some ways it sounds more like*

*a critique through humor rather than an intentionally racist comment so I make a note to bring this moment up later in the discussion.*

*We finish watching the video then debrief it. I ask students what they thought the video meant and they first talk about the freedom the woman in the video has in comparison to her parents. Some students talk about religion and then I ask Brent to talk about the comment he made earlier, which leads the conversation to racial profiling. Brent says that they have been learning about racial stereotyping in another class. I ask the students if they understand what is going on in Arizona with racial profiling and they quickly become animated. There is some frustration about being profiled themselves and anger is expressed along with the belief that it shouldn't be that way. Lola asks if she can be honest and is encouraged to do so. Lola talks about how white people get everything easy and she expresses her own experience of not even knowing if she will finish high school. Lola says that even if she does finish high school, she knows that she won't go to college because she is illegal. Julia talks about action and what we can do. Brent says that people need to be educated and asks if I was going to tell people that this needs to be done. I tell the students that that is my reason for doing this dissertation project and that instead of me saying it needs to be done I want to represent their voices in that call too.*

*I use the talk of action to segue into the resistance sculpture. Students eventually remember the first definition and then they slowly come to remembering the second, which is the idea of resisting against privilege and taking action. I ask them to work together to create a performance then Steve, Kayla and I create our own. There is some*

*struggle with focus and a couple of the students are playing around and not participating. I help people come up with phrases eventually; then they plan their actions. Enrique, who hadn't been there in awhile, took on a leadership role along with Julia. After giving them strict time limits they eventually wrap up and we watch them do their performance and give them a round of applause. They seem very committed for the most part and the performance goes well. Then, Steve, Kayla and I do our performance and the students give us a round of applause and jokingly laugh at us (after I jokingly had made a comment about laughing at them).*

*Afterwards, they write an exit ticket and they all begin writing very quickly and focusing. When everyone turns in their paper I pass out old ones (which are coveted and one student says she likes to read my feedback). Students seem to leave on a positive note and they make sure to say good bye to each of us. It feels like the trust and passion in the classroom is extremely strong and it seems like Tuesdays are something these students really look forward to and are committed to carrying out. Steve also talked about how well he feels it went and he expresses his pleasure at being a part of the group.*

By using performative pedagogy in “Disrupting Privilege” to facilitate critical conversations of privilege we created community through collaborative dialogues about systems of power and the ways in which our individual bodies participated in these systems. Miguel wrote about some of his realization about his own involvement in systems of power:

Today we talked about able-bodied privileges and how we can do things and they can't. We watched a video about some kid who is mute and my thoughts about it were that, what was she doing she is weird but now I know that she just isn't able to speak she has her own language and we are too judgmental with people with disabilities.

If we created more spaces like "Disrupting Privilege" within educational institutions to have these dialogues we could give students more tools to critically engage the world around them. Anna reflected on her own engagement with the world through the resistance sculptures:

Last class, we did a resistance sculpture. We did a little bit of acting. We got into our groups and each one of us chose a sentence and then we chose a sign that goes with our sentences. I thought it was fun and interesting. It was very interesting to see the sign or pose people were making. I felt comfortable doing it, I didn't really have any bad reaction or anything. I enjoyed it. Some of the things we did or talked about actually made me think. I never used to think about my able bodied privilege. Now I see things and I do things that make me think of my able bodied privilege.

By bringing bodies into the classroom students found new ways of realizing things about themselves and how their performances impacted people around them. By relying on the body to be a part of critical communication these conversations became real and accessible. Juan wrote about his own reality after becoming more familiar with his able-bodied privilege performance, "I learned that people with disabilities shouldn't be judged, that just like there are people who don't look normal doesn't mean they don't feel like a normal human." By placing our bodies on the line we took risks that prevented us from going back because we realized, through performance, ways in which we were marginalizing and oppressing others-others who were now able to see as more human

than we did before. Once we began feeling the impact of our oppressive performances of privilege we couldn't forget them.

“Disrupting Privilege” ensured that these bodily experiences not only occurred – but occurred in relationship to other bodies. Lola quickly jumped into problem solving after realizing the impact of her own able-bodied privilege performances:

I guess knowing that there are a bunch of people with disabilities. We just need to get used to what they are and where they come from I got no idea why we don't get accustomed to it and why we don't TRY to work out to make them feel good.

Our identity performances were never isolated – they reacted to and impacted those around us. After realizing their impact on people around them, students were quick to want to change these performances. For many students, awareness of privilege was what instigated the desire to change. Anita wrote, "Being in this class has helped me be more aware of how I make other people feel with my presents. I also realize my feelings about the privileges the people around me have." Through embodying our performances of privilege in the classroom and processing our emotions in response to these performances, awareness developed for students that made them present in the class and therefore created a space of transformation. Warren states that:

recognizing that identity and self are constituted through embodied interaction, performative pedagogy makes bodies productively present – forcing all bodies to co-exist in a reflexive, pedagogical encounter (101).

The performative pedagogical encounters in “Disrupting Privilege” brought students and facilitators together in our learning journeys. Anna articulated this coming together when she wrote:

Last class we did the resistance sculptures activities. We formed new sentences about our able-bodied privilege. We had a presentation and we included our first presentation we did a while ago about able bodied privilege. That was very interesting because the first presentation was more about us being apart and separated from each other. And the second presentation was more about us being one and unit. That really showed the differences between those two. I think we did a good job. I'm feeling much comfortable now, I now know what exactly we're doing in this class.

Through communicative performance, "Disrupting Privilege" encouraged student and facilitator relationships and created a community in which we worked through our performances of identity. This transformed our relationships both with each other and the world around us. Lance also observed this transformation and shared, "When we did the original performance it showed where we started. But by doing the complete 180 we showed how we've grown." "Disrupting Privilege" was about possibility – by linking our pasts with the present we forged new performances that demanded accountability – and through accountability, we became changed. In his final journal entry Juan talked about his own transformation throughout the course and shared:

Today we learned that people should be equal and not judge each other. I also learned not to let people destroy each other. I feel like I can do intervene privilege, I feel proud of myself because I can now do what's right and feel proud of myself.

This change occurred through emotional communication between bodies engaging in the dialogical performance of the classroom space. Students and facilitators left the "Disrupting Privilege" classroom feeling changed by the content and by each other.

The findings from this chapter demonstrate how emotional manifestations in the "Disrupting Privilege" classroom occurred through privilege, pedagogy, and performance

– therefore, leading to a space for individual and community transformation. When verbal communication is used to structure and facilitate complex critical dialogues of privilege in the classroom and a space for emotion in the classroom is created through performance, we began to see this transformation. Therefore, communication and emotion as used in “Disrupting Privilege” is a “seed planting” curriculum that begins this change and opens up the possibility for bigger community change by talking about and feeling the realities of the impact of privilege and marginalization in the social construction of society. The next chapter concludes this dissertation by exploring the implications of this change for students and facilitators and uses student and facilitator voices to talk about where this research could go.

## **Chapter Five: Disrupting Privilege: Conclusions, Implications, and Future Research**

This dissertation project emerged as part of my ongoing journey to understand ways in which we can further social justice through “Disrupting Privilege.” This began with my own exploration of understanding the privileges that I embody and then expanded to my development in learning how to effectively facilitate conversations about privilege. More specifically, this project worked toward understanding how to effectively have these conversations in high school, a prime age to learn about civic engagement (Andolina, Jenkins, Zukin, & Keeter; Conway & Damico; Flanagan & Faison; Galston; Hess & Torney). I entered this project with four overarching questions about “Disrupting Privilege”: Why should it be caught in high school; How can it be adapted; What is the experience like for co-instructors; and What happened for students during the course?

To answer these questions I worked with Dr. Eugene Walls to translate his graduate school curriculum; taught the curriculum in two high school settings; and then used narrative ethnography to analyze communicative components and emotion as it manifested in relationship to privilege, pedagogy, and performance. In the remainder of this chapter I offer conclusions related to the research questions posed in chapter one: explore implications of this research as demonstrated by final presentations and interviews with students (Appendix L) and co-instructors (Appendix K); and present



possibilities for where this research could have future impact, based on feedback from students and co-instructors.

### *Conclusions*

Overall, the experience of “Disrupting Privilege” was laborious but had positive affects for many people involved. Before directly addressing the research questions posed in chapter one, I first talk about the final presentations done at the end of class to demonstrate how the class was concluded for the students. Next, I revisit the research questions and summarize the conclusions to each of these questions.

### **Final Presentations: Where We Started, Where We are Now, Where We Commit to Going**

As “Disrupting Privilege” neared the end, groups started planning how they were going to represent their learning journey in their group presentations. There were four primary guidelines students were given in planning their final presentations. First, students were asked to address three different points in their journey: where they started at the beginning of class, where they are now after going through the class, and where they commit to going as a way of continuing the work to disrupt privilege. Second, students were encouraged to incorporate a personal experience with the privileged identity they were focusing on, either by using a past journal entry or creating something new. Third, students needed to include an element of performance in their presentation that demonstrated placing their body on the line as part of disrupting privilege. Finally, students were encouraged to consider involving the audience in their presentation. In

planning the presentations, students were able to decide whether or not to include their facilitators in the presentation but they would have their facilitators to help guide them in the planning of their presentations.

At Stratton High School students were given a couple of class periods to plan their presentations. The presentations were scheduled during the normal meeting time of the “Disrupting Privilege” class and administration and other teachers were invited to the presentations. Unfortunately, at the time of the first presentation date one of the students informed us that it was one of the many senior ditch days and few seniors showed up to class. Presentations were rescheduled for the following week. When the second presentation day arrived we had the auditorium reserved to present. Everybody was given evaluation forms for each presentation they would watch and was asked to fill them out based on the perceived quality of the presentation. These forms addressed organization, content, engagement, presentation, and design. These evaluation forms primarily served to encourage groups to think about these elements in putting together their presentations and to encourage observers to pay critical attention to what was being presented. Groups volunteered one by one to present until all four groups had gone.

Overall, these presentations were invested in change and disruption. Most groups incorporated personal journal entries into their presentations and used their bodies and the space of the stage to transition between stages of their journey. Each group used individual journal entries or newly written pieces to communicate where the student's perspective was at the beginning of the course, which often demonstrated a level of

confusion and curiosity about what we would be doing over the course of the ten weeks. Many of the presentations included definitions of their privilege as it related to the definition that they were given during the class. In all of the presentations, students listed ways in which they benefit from their privileged identity. For example, one student in the able-bodied privilege group stated, “As an able-bodied person I am considered whole.” In addressing the commitment stage of the presentations, many groups made statements about ways in which they will move forward with what they have learned from the class such as, “I will speak up.” As the performances transitioned from where students started to where they would go, the performances generally went from scattered and disjointed to unified solidarity, whether that was represented in body language or the more joined statements made in their communication. While the students appeared nervous, and many were unprepared to make their presentations, the material conveyed through the performances represented a discernible level of transformation that occurred throughout the course.

Since the group at Kendal High School was so small there was only one presentation. The students were given time to plan their presentation during a class period and then presented to the remaining students from their study hall class that had chosen not to participate in “Disrupting Privilege.” Evaluation forms were only filled out by the teacher of the study hall and the facilitators because the student presenters were not comfortable with having peers, who did not participate in learning the course content, evaluate them. Students expressed feeling nervous about presenting, but were eager to

show the other students how they had been spending their study hall time for the past ten weeks. In contrast to the Stratton High School students, the Kendal students appeared excited and eager to plan their presentation. The planning was collaborative with support from the facilitators as students thought about words and actions that they would use to represent their journeys. Students began by writing a sentence demonstrating where they started at the beginning of class, often showing a certain level of ambivalence and wary interest. The students then defined privilege and each gave concrete examples of ways in which they benefit from privilege. At the end of the performance, each student made a sign stating their ongoing commitment, as had students at Stratton High School. Again, this performance went from individualism to the students linking arms in symbolic solidarity in their commitments to move forward. While students who watched the performance appeared ambivalent toward it, there was also a sense of curiosity. The teacher of the study hall appeared pleased with what the students presented and, most importantly, the students who presented appeared proud and confident in communicating their journeys.

### **Conclusions to Research Questions**

The four research questions, posed in chapter one, relate to the ways in which “Disrupting Privilege” weaves in privilege, pedagogy, and performance into the high school classroom. In answering the first question, of why “Disrupting Privilege” should be taught in high school, we see that in order to be critically engaged citizens we must understand systems of power, privilege and oppression. To really understand oppression,

we must use privilege as an entryway because privilege and oppression are intimately connected. Therefore, pedagogy of privilege as it is engaged in “Disrupting Privilege” is vital to addressing Pease’s call to develop critical thinking about privilege as a way to move toward social transformation and change. Both sociological and psychological models describe high school ages as being important to social development (Shaffer). In addition to support from social development models, scholarship also shows that there are prime opportunities for civic engagement in high school (Andolina, Jenkins, Zudin, & Keeter; Conway & Damico; Flanagan & Faison; Galston; Hess & Torney). Given both the sociological and civic potential for influence in high school and the importance of pedagogy of privilege as a way to critically engage systems of power, high school is a key opportunity for “Disrupting Privilege.” Furthermore, this project demonstrated that high school students were interested and engaged in these critical conversations and, through “Disrupting Privilege,” had the opportunity to talk about realities of their everyday that were often not addressed in an educational setting.

In addition to the importance of engaging high school students in dialogue of privilege, “Disrupting Privilege” models ways in which students can engage in these conversations outside of the classroom (Denzin; Freire; hooks). Classroom norms and large and small group discussions allowed students to see a possible communicative structure that can facilitate critical privilege conversation. Furthermore, by engaging their voices in dialogue, students were able to experience both what it is like to have conversations about privilege and also to practice ways in which they could communicate

their experiences to engage in productive dialogues across similarity and difference, marginalization and privilege (Allen; Boler; Johnson & Bhatt; van Gorder; Wise).

Along similar lines of practicing the communicative components of “Disrupting Privilege,” students also had the opportunity to rehearse emotional expressions as they relate to privilege. “Disrupting Privilege” encouraged individuals to bring emotion into the classroom as a method of learning, which gave students a more holistic and applicable understanding of the impact of privilege and marginalization in everyday life (Boler & Zembylas; Boler; Johnson & Bhatt; Werry & O’Gorman; Zembylas). By understanding emotional reactions to privilege, students better understood why privilege maintains systems of power; they felt the influence it has on them as individuals. Performance gave students a chance to communicate these emotions and to access the felt sense of these experiences that they might not have been able to articulate previously.

The second question posed at the beginning of this project was: How can the “Disrupting Privilege” curriculum be adapted to a high school curriculum? Critical pedagogy acted as an entryway into this translation because it engaged students in a co-learning journey and allowed the curriculum to meet students where they were in their current learning journeys (Giroux; McLaren; Allen; Boler; Freire; and hooks). When students were met where they were in their understanding of privilege, identity, and change, it allowed them to start from this place and find their own path to transformation. Critical pedagogy facilitates this transformation by engaging conversations that have real impact on students and by allowing a space for students to ask questions about why

systems are the way they are and explore possibilities for transforming these systems.

In addition to using critical pedagogy as a method of teaching, there were also communicative components that structured and facilitated the critical discussions. First, by setting classroom norms there was increased trust built through a goal of safety while also having an acceptance of discomfort. This allowed the high school students to set their own norms for the space, norms that were applicable to their own community and that established a space to take risk (Denzin; Freire; hooks). In addition to classroom norms, the class was also structured to have large and small group discussions. This discussion structure created two different ways for students to engage in the conversations and provided a way to respond to their safety needs as they related to speaking with others. After this structure was established, dialogue and voice were used as communication components to facilitate conversations of privilege. Dialogue allowed for an exchange of voices and these voices were treated as the experts of the topics we were discussing (Allen; Boler; Johnson & Bhatt). Therefore, the student experiences established the direction of the course discussion through dialogical exchange of voices.

While verbal communication components were vital to the translation of “Disrupting Privilege” into a high school curriculum, by bringing performance and emotion into the classroom, students were able to communicate understandings that could not be verbalized (Boler & Zembylas; Boler; Johnson & Bhatt; Werry & O’Gorman; Zembylas). Privilege is a complex concept, particularly for younger students, and performance created a space for students to communicate without needing to constantly

verbally articulate concepts that their minds may not have yet grasped. Even further, by exploring emotion through performance, students had a different way of accessing the concept of privilege so that they might move toward an articulation of their understanding of privilege and power.

The third research question posed for this project was: What was the experience of the co-instructors in teaching the “Disrupting Privilege” curriculum? In order to answer this question, I use the interviews that were conducted with co-instructors following “Disrupting Privilege.” In looking at the interviews, I first explore what co-instructors liked about the experience and then what was challenging for them throughout “Disrupting Privilege.” Second, I break down the experiences that the co-instructors had with the different components of the course relating to the large and small group discussions and performance.

Co-instructors all expressed having a positive overall experience of co-facilitating the course. Kayla shared that she specifically enjoyed her time at Kendal High School because there seemed to be more connection with the students as a result of increased consistency in attendance; she saw consistency as being central to the process, as was creating a vulnerable space. Kayla believed that the student presentations at both schools demonstrated a growth and strength in learning, which was inspiring for her to see. In particular, she thought that the work around male privilege was empowering to see, though it was also an intense experience. Kayla enjoyed the opportunity to bond and to develop a personal connection with the students through having critical conversations



about identity and she had a sense that this course was an opportunity for students to see white femininity performed in a way different from the oppressive performances that they may be used to seeing; she liked being able to be that disruption, particularly for the students at Kendal High School. At Stratton High School Kayla appreciated hearing stories from students, particularly one black female student who often shared her narratives and found power in being able to share them. Kayla experienced co-witnessing with the students as both the biggest joy and the biggest challenge. Steve expressed that the experience was “awesome” and very different, depending on the class. He particularly enjoyed being able to experience the growth with the students and hearing about the students engaging the topics of the class outside of school in their everyday experience. Heidi talked about how she was nervous at first, but thought that ultimately the class went well. She described the students as being engaged and invested in what they were doing and she believed that the students benefitted from having the curriculum in the course. Heidi expressed enjoyment in seeing the students being able to discuss something that was relevant to experiences that they had in their lives. All co-instructors indicate that they enjoyed seeing the students grow and have the opportunity to be a part of an educational process that was relatable to the students’ lives.

While the co-instructors overwhelmingly enjoyed the experience of “Disrupting Privilege,” there were also some frustrations, many of which related to the institution of education. What Kayla did not like about the experience of co-instructing was working within the constraints put forth by schools, particularly around sexuality. As a queer

identified person, Kayla felt badly about not feeling safe to share her experiences, particularly with students who may have found comfort in being able to relate to her. She believes this challenge is not inherent in the curriculum but is a result of the culture of the schools. Steve shared that he did not like the struggle with logistics in teaching the class; he was frustrated with the coordination, particularly at Kendal High School, and wished there had been more time at both schools to be able to delve more deeply into the topics. Heidi shared that she was nervous that students would feel badly about themselves if they talked about their privilege. She thought, however, that it ended up working well because it was more about asking students to realize how their identities affect how other people perceive them. The frustrations of the co-instructors did not directly relate to the nature of the “Disrupting Privilege” curriculum but, instead, were about the ease in integrating the type of curriculum into the schools. In addition, the way “Disrupting Privilege” was taught ultimately relieved some fears that Heidi had prior to co-instructing the curriculum.

As part of talking about the experience of co-instructing “Disrupting Privilege,” co-instructors were also asked about their impressions of the large and small group structure along with the use of performance. In general, co-instructors enjoyed the large group but also saw that sometimes students would not engage in the large group discussion. Kayla found that the large group space was sometimes very hard to engage, even with having multiple facilitators. She believes that this may come from students not being used to being critical in the classroom and, possibly, to not being encouraged to use

their voices to share opinions and thoughts. Kayla also found the large group in general to be a struggle unless performance was involved. Steve enjoyed the large group more than the small group because he was able to hear more people and it seemed like students were more willing to take a chance to talk. Heidi liked the large group space because it presented ideas to the students that the students could then engage in other ways such as in small groups or in journal entries. For co-instructors, the large group was an entryway into the topics covered in small groups and in performances.

In reference to the small groups, co-instructors seemed to struggle in figuring out how to guide students deeper into their exploration of privilege. Kayla observed that the small group space started out quite well and students were engaged, but then students stopped coming to class and it was hard to get the small group back on track. She said that some of the students were resistant and refused to talk or were disruptive to other students. While Kayla acknowledges that she may have been able to work harder to get students engaged, it was hard to find this motivation when it was lacking in students as well. Steve thought the small group was tough because of the behavioral issues in the classrooms and students seemed to get off track. Heidi also found the small group space difficult because there would be a few students who were talking a lot while others were not talking at all. For co-instructors who had not experienced facilitating dialogue about privilege, it was somewhat difficult in getting the engagement started for the students.

While both enjoyment and challenges were perceived by co-instructors about the large and small groups, they found a lot of value in the way that performance was used in

“Disrupting Privilege.” Kayla saw the performance component of the curriculum as the best part because a different type of learning occurs when students are asked to embody concepts and place theory into practice; she believes that the performance part validated different types of knowing. Kayla stated that she would have liked to see even more performance and that she believes always debriefing performance is a necessity, though she also understands that time restrictions placed by the institutions made this difficult. Steve also enjoyed the performance exercises and believed they did a good job of engaging the students. He saw performance as an opportunity for students to “use their bodies and not just their brains,” which allowed them to enjoy the content of the course more, while also gaining a better understanding. While the performance component made Heidi nervous, she had come to believe it could have been used even more regularly to move students toward a more comfortable and creative space. She observed that performance opened up another space for students who do not like to talk or write to express and process what they are learning, particularly when they did not have the vocabulary to do it any other way. Co-instructors found significance in creating a space for students to further explore privilege by bringing the body into the classroom. Overall, co-instructors were grateful for the opportunity to engage in a co-learning journey with students, particularly in the large classroom space and through performance, and struggled with some of the confines placed on us as a result of the institution of high school education.

The final research question posed in chapter one was: What happened for the students during the process of participating in the “Disrupting Privilege” curriculum? In chapter four, I addressed the emotional process that happened for students in response to “Disrupting Privilege.” Through privilege, pedagogy, and performance, emotion was brought into the classroom, which created spaces for transformation (Boler & Zembylas; Boler; Johnson & Bhatt; Werry & O’Gorman; Zembylas). The transformation was represented in both the shifts in emotions and the shifts in values and ideas. Following, I use interviews conducted with students subsequent to “Disrupting Privilege” to further explore the students' experience. I break down the students’ experiences according to the high school site and, again, look at what students enjoyed, what was challenging, and their impressions of the large group, small group, and performance components.

The students who were interviewed at Stratton High School shared that they had a positive experience with “Disrupting Privilege.” Eliana, shared that she did not think that she was learning anything until she started participating in “Disrupting Privilege.” She stated that her “life changed a bit” by being in the class. Eliana enjoyed the variety of topics that were covered in the class, such as talking about middle to upper class privilege. Breanna, said that she learned a lot particularly regarding things she would not have even considered without having the opportunity to sit down and talk about them, such as what we have access to that others do not. She liked that “Disrupting Privilege” was interactive and that the students were able to get up and move around. Lance stated that overall the experience was awkward at times, particularly in his small group, but that

he liked it. He particularly liked the women's speak-out because he realized that he does speak over women and he was grateful for the opportunity to just listen. Lance also liked the "fill the space" performance activity because he was able to see how his peers thought in a way that was similar to him. Marshall thought that "Disrupting Privilege" was influential and beneficial because it was a chance to think about aspects of his life that he never really thought about. He particularly enjoyed the performance activities, such as the class privilege activity, because it highlighted power dynamics that he believed existed but became more obvious through the demonstration. Students at Stratton welcomed the opportunity to talk about privilege because they did not find this opportunity in other spaces in their lives.

In general, students at Stratton high school internally struggled with certain aspects of privilege that were highlighted in "Disrupting Privilege." Eliana did not like the white privilege final presentation video that was shown in class because it "made her sad" and it did not "feel good" to watch; it reminded her of her own experiences with being racially marginalized. Breanna did not always like speaking in class because she did not want to appear to put people down or make people think that when she was speaking from a space of privilege that she saw herself as better than everyone else. She stated that sometimes she observed other students would look at her "weird" when she shared and she thought she could tell that they did not agree with her. While she was okay with this, she still struggled with the perceived judgment she believed she was receiving. Lance shared that he did not like how quiet the class was at the start and that it

took so long for them to be comfortable with each other. He believed this stemmed from students not being used to stepping up and going “out on the limb.” In addition to this, Lance did express some frustration with his perception that the male privilege group was attacked more than other groups throughout the course. He believed he was being generalized into a privileged group in ways that were no longer true because he learned that certain behaviors were oppressive to women and he no longer did them. Marshall did not like that we met on Monday mornings because people were not as engaged. He struggled with the lack of engagement from some students because it was harder to make progress in the class. Marshall would have liked more time for students to just get to know each other. Students at Stratton high school were challenged by some of the emotions they felt in response to either their marginalization or privilege and also were frustrated with the lack of time available to explore privilege even more deeply.

Stratton high school student interviews reflect that students enjoyed the large classroom space as an opportunity to experience many perspectives but also sometimes found the large classroom intimidating to contribute to. Eliana thought that the large class experience was interesting but there were parts that were hard for her to understand. Breanna thought that the large classroom component of “Disrupting Privilege” seemed familiar; she felt scared to participate in the large class at first but thought that it was good for people to know what others were thinking. Lance thought that the large classroom space was useful, but, in general, prefers small groups because there is more individual attention and focus. Marshall enjoyed the larger group because it was an

opportunity to hear more opinions – more of what people were thinking – but he did not like that it was uncomfortable for some people to talk or to speak honestly. The large classroom was an opportunity to learn but also not always conducive to students feeling like they could present their multiple perspectives.

Regarding the small groups, students at Stratton high school had challenges similar to those of the co-instructors but found value in having the more individualized attention from the co-instructors. Eliana stated that the small group was tough because there were many things that she did not understand and she was not comfortable clarifying things because people could not understand her; so she just let it go. Breanna found the small group component repetitive and it seemed that the same things were being said every time the small group met. However, she liked her facilitator and sensed that the facilitator, along with the other co-instructors, wanted to get to know all of the students on a personal level. For her, this helped the classroom space feel more comfortable. She thought that another aspect that contributed to this comfort was doing journal entries because it was a way for people to open up if they did not feel comfortable speaking in front of others. Lance experienced his own small group as awkward at first, but it became more comfortable as people got to know each other. Even with the increased comfort, he felt a little like an outsider in the male privilege group because he is gay. Lance did not talk about his sexuality in the class but he wondered what it would have been like if he had disclosed it from the beginning. Although he was not open with his sexuality, he observed that his facilitator did a good job of being inclusive of gay men



in his examples of male privilege. Lance shared that he found that his facilitator presented concepts in various ways so that students could understand; the facilitator also held the students in his small group accountable by waiting in silence for everyone to participate rather than letting people who did not contribute off the hook. Marshall sensed that students were more honest in smaller groups, but struggled with the discomfort of the facilitator. While he was grateful for having the facilitator as a guide, particularly for the final presentation, he believed other groups were more comfortable with each other. Students found that the small group was a space where they could more openly explore their privilege and most thought that their facilitators provided further guidance into topics that were discussed in the larger group.

Like the co-instructors, students at Stratton high school found importance in the performance exercises used in “Disrupting Privilege.” Eliana really liked the performance component and said that she thought the activities were interesting and fun. She enjoyed learning that other people thought in a way that was similar to her and appreciated the opportunity to watch other people so that she could learn from them and be able to correct her own mistakes. Breanna's experience was that people were afraid to get up and move around because they did not want to be judged. Despite this, she thought that most people eventually opened up when they saw others open up. Lance believed the performance exercises helped support his understanding in ways that other types of learning did not. He also liked seeing that other people think in ways similar to him; it helped him feel more comfortable to ask other people for help. Marshall thought that the

performance component of the course helped increase the comfort level in the classroom. He stated that since performance was out of the ordinary for everyone, it helped people build confidence and find their voice in the space. The performance component seemed to be the most significant part of “Disrupting Privilege” for students at Stratton high school and it allowed them to locate their voices and find more comfort in struggling through difficult conversations of privilege.

Like Stratton High School, students who participated in interviews at Kendal High School reported enjoying the class. Vince stated that he thought the class was “cool” and enjoyed learning about the different types of privilege. Brent thought “Disrupting Privilege” was a good experience because he had the opportunity to talk about things that he had never been able to learn about in school, such as male privilege. Brent particularly enjoyed the activities that we did and more specifically liked the class privilege activity because it helped us see how people are with one another and how we react to certain situations. Antonio shared that “Disrupting Privilege” was really important because it helped him see privileges that he has that other people do not. He enjoyed the privilege shuffle activity because he was able to see the differences in a variety of people in the classroom. Miguel shared that he thought that the “Disrupting Privilege” class was really fun and that he learned a lot. In particular, he thought the activities were really fun and he liked doing the final presentation for his peers in study hall. For Julia, “Disrupting Privilege” was a good experience because she learned about many things that she never would have been able to talk about in any other space. She

particularly enjoyed the topics that we covered such as male privilege. Juan disclosed that he liked “Disrupting Privilege” because it opened his eyes to a lot of things that he had not realized before. In particular, he enjoyed the atmosphere of the classroom in part because he was able to be “together with friends” while learning more about topics that he did not know about and that were not familiar for him. Students at Kendal enjoyed “Disrupting Privilege” because it brought new realizations and opened their eyes to experiences that were real for them but rarely spoken about.

In half of the student interviews at Kendal, students shared that there was not anything that they disliked about “Disrupting Privilege.” For students who did have dislikes relating to the experience, they related to either not being able to go deeper into the topic of privilege or because they had personal struggles in dealing with their own privileges. The part of the experience that Vince did not like was not being able to attend every time and he would have liked to have been there to learn. Antonio did not like the women’s speak-out addressing male privilege because it put men on the spot and it was uncomfortable. One thing that Julia disliked about the class was how the male students acted, because she saw the majority of them as engaging in immature behaviors when it came to issues that felt serious. Similar to Stratton high school, students at Kendal struggled with internal issues that arose in reaction to “Disrupting Privilege.”

For students at Kendal high school, most of the time was spent as a large classroom because there were fewer students at this site. The students at Kendal found value in being able to have discussions with their peers in the class. Vince enjoyed the

large classroom conversation because he was able to hear different opinions and it seemed to him that we were not just “talking” but “discussing.” Antonio felt comfortable in the large classroom conversation and it was a space that made it easy for people to share their voices. Miguel said that he had mixed feelings about the large classroom discussion because, sometimes when he spoke up because things needed to be said, he felt uncomfortable when it seemed students were judgmental about what he said. He also said that sometimes the large classroom discussion was fun. Julia thought the large classroom discussion was a good experience because it was a chance to learn from each other and to see the way that other people think, which she said gave her a chance to reconsider her own perspectives. Juan found the large classroom discussion unifying for the group; they were able to share views with each other and develop a connection. Students at Kendal high school enjoyed hearing multiple perspectives and also found that it led them to challenging their own beliefs and values and reconsider their actions and performances.

While Kendal did not use small groups consistently throughout “Disrupting Privilege,” students still had access to individualized attention from the co-instructors and were asked about their experience of having this attention. Vince found it helpful to have three co-instructors instead of one teacher because he could ask for help from another instructor if one was busy. He also shared that having three co-instructors allowed him to be exposed to different instructor points of view. Antonio liked having three co-instructors because, if a student did not get along with one instructor, it was easy to be

able to talk to another instructor. Miguel also liked having three co-instructors because it was easier to keep everyone on topic and prevent distraction in the classroom. Juan enjoyed having three co-instructors because there were more people to help individuals understand the topic and they could relate differently depending on the instructor. Students at Kendal enjoyed multiple co-instructors for the diverse perspectives, individualized attention, and as a means of keeping students engaged in the class.

Similar to the students at Stratton high school, students at Kendal high school found the most value in the performance exercises. Vince liked the performance exercises because they helped him see how people think differently and how they feel about certain issues. Brent said that the performances exercises were good because they encouraged teamwork. Antonio thought that the performance exercises acted as great examples of what happened in real life, particularly the class privilege exercise. Miguel thought that the performance exercises were fun as well as educational. He enjoyed the performance component because we were actually doing something that we could focus in on without having people disengage and let their minds wander. Julia saw the performance exercises as “cool” but they were sometimes hard to understand at first. When she did start to understand what was going on, she thought that the performance helped demonstrate what we were talking about. Juan thought that performance was able to demonstrate how views were changing and how the group unified through this learning experience.

### *Implications*

The most important implication of this study is that high school students are capable and eager to engage in dialogue of privilege. In fact, during this project, I realized that in some ways high school students seemed more willing to engage and had less resistance than adults with whom I have done similar work. Perhaps this is due to having less investment in privilege at their younger ages. Regardless, given the importance of having critical conversations of privilege, energy is best spent working with people who want to engage in the conversations. High school proved to be a place where this willingness existed. For the rest of this implication section, I again want to engage the voices of the co-instructors and students based on interviews conducted after “Disrupting Privilege.” In the interviews, co-instructors and students were asked about what they learned from the experience – the answers to which imply that through “Disrupting Privilege” both co-instructor and student perspectives were enhanced with knowledge and awareness. Following, I first demonstrate the implications of “Disrupting Privilege for co-instructors followed by the implications for students.

#### **Implications for Co-instructors**

In addition to having an overall positive experience, all of the co-instructors indicated that they learned new things by participating in the curriculum. Kayla stated that much of her learning related to working with the specific population of students. She reflected that she learned a lot of patience and also found she was exposed to students with different norms for communicating. More specifically, she witnessed a type of “code

switching” (McLaren) in which students would perform different parts of themselves depending on whether they were talking to each other or to us, such as switching between Spanish and English. Kayla also said that she learned a lot about herself in terms of being able to facilitate a diverse group of students; she realized that she is more skilled in facilitating classrooms with many privileged identities and, through this process, learned new facilitation skills by working with a more marginalized group of students. Kayla found that being in an educator role was easier for her than handling the behavior issues, which were the greatest challenge.

Steve stated that he learned a lot about himself in terms of being able to take chances, even if he “screwed up,” and to be vulnerable as a facilitator. He disclosed that he has a fear of making mistakes, particularly in relationship to race and ethnicity and co-instructing the course helped him learn ways to deal with this fear. Steve said that it was easy for him to make a connection with the male privilege groups that he facilitated, but that he struggled with finding his own voice. Steve shared that the most challenging thing for him was learning as we went along, as a co-learner in the journey, instead of as an expert of the topic.

Heidi shared that she learned a lot about the students and realized that “kids can be more mature than you think they can be.” She said that it was nice to see them interacting “more like adults than high school kids.” Heidi disclosed that she was most comfortable in having small, seminar-like discussions and was familiar with this from college so it came easily to her. Heidi stated that the most challenging part of the

curriculum was doing the performance exercises because, even though she performs the role of teacher in her every day, acting in front of people makes her nervous. The main implication of this research for co-instructors is that there is an opportunity to learn a lot about ourselves as facilitators and it challenges our traditional notion of what it means to be an educator. In addition to challenging our own abilities, this research implies that there is also potential for “Disrupting Privilege” to challenge our perceptions about what high school students are capable of doing in terms of engaging critical dialogues of privilege.

### **Implications for Students**

All of the students who did interviews expressed that they learned from “Disrupting Privilege” and that it helped them be more open minded. For students at Stratton high school, many students expressed learning more about themselves and realizing areas in which they can grow. Eliana stated that she learned a lot about trust and was able to locate more trust in communicating with white people. She stated that something about “Disrupting Privilege” “touched my heart” and that she feels more confident in interacting more openly with people and being comfortable with who she is with them. Breanna stated that she learned to be open minded by participating in “Disrupting Privilege.” She said that it helped her notice how people are treated and how people view others, and particularly how she could have acted differently in certain situations to be more responsive to the identities of the other person. Lance also said that he learned to be more open to the need for him to raise his awareness of privilege that he



has, while also not letting his marginalized identities get in the way of taking accountability for his privileged ones. For example, he said that he has an advantage because he is male, but he is also gay, which can be difficult in interacting with others. However, he cannot let this block him doing work on his male privilege. Marshall stated that he learned to be more open and that we need to work together to impact change. He said that he recognizes the privileges that he has now that he did not pay attention to before; the class opened his eyes more.

For students at Kendal high school, many learned that we inadvertently can be oppressive to others without realizing it and they found the motivation to take action both to work against oppressive behaviors in themselves and in others. Vince stated that he learned about the privileges that he has – particularly male privilege and able-bodied privilege. Brent said that he learned that we can be oppressive to others when we do not even know it. Antonio shared that he learned about the privileges that he has that others do not and that there are ways that we can speak up for people rather than judge them. Miguel stated that he learned that we have a lot of faults and that we judge people a lot without even knowing it based on their ability or what they look like. Julia said that she learned a different meaning of privilege. Juan said that he learned that we sometimes judge people without thinking about it and we end up hurting people's feelings without knowing it. Based on the student interviews, implications for students at both Stratton and Kendal high schools were that through "Disrupting Privilege" students became more aware of their own privileged identities and saw the importance in being open minded

about learning further about how they impact people around them. Given these implications for both co-instructors and students, there are many possibilities for “Disrupting Privilege” to be further explored and placed in a potential space of impact.

### *Possibilities for Disrupting Privilege*

The original hope of this research project was that it would present a possible way to approach pedagogy of privilege in the high school setting. The reason for piloting the curriculum in the two classrooms was to demonstrate how it could be done and to elicit student voices to communicate the experience of “Disrupting Privilege.” In an ideal situation, this research would be taken across the country into high schools as a way to engage critical dialogues of privilege. Not only would this project act as a guide but it would also expose and dispel some of the fears around engaging high school students in these difficult conversations. Given that these are my dreams in terms of possibilities for this project, I want to incorporate more of the voices from the follow up interviews to further explore possibilities from the co-instructor and students perspectives.

### **Co-instructor Visions**

All three co-instructors expressed the desire to see “Disrupting Privilege” more integrated into the high school setting. Kayla stated that while it is complicated to do a “Disrupting Privilege” curriculum, these are issues that affect students on a daily basis. In particular, she believes this curriculum should be integrated into schools that have students with primarily dominant identities. Kayla shared that “Disrupting Privilege” is valuable work that helps students make important connection, but she also believes it

would be a challenge to get institutional support in implementing a “Disrupting Privilege” curriculum. Given this challenge, she expressed being torn between whether or not “Disrupting Privilege” should be mandatory or optional. On one hand, Kayla found that at Kendal where the class was an option there was more engagement, while at Stratton there were more disruptions from students who did not show investment in the class. On the other hand, Kayla thinks that students who have primarily privileged identities would need the push of the class being mandatory to encourage attendance. Overall, she thought the experience as co-instructor for “Disrupting Privilege” was enriching and interesting but recommends that there be specific strategies and tactics to deal with behavior issues around student investment. Kayla emphasized that in implementing a “Disrupting Privilege” curriculum we must be open to the fact that it will take a form of its own depending on the space and we need to be open to multiple endings because we are all still learning.

Steve said that he “absolutely” thinks that “Disrupting Privilege” should be integrated into the high school setting. He stated that he thinks the course should be mandatory and the class should meet more than once a week to maintain more of a flow of information because the content of the course addresses situations or events that we encounter every day. Overall, Steve says that it was a great experience to co-instruct the course and that he believes he learned just as much as the students. Furthermore, he believes that by participating in the course he was able to feel more confident about disrupting privilege both inside and outside of the classroom.

Heidi also recommended that “Disrupting Privilege” be incorporated into high school and sees it fitting into a social problems, civics, or senior honors class. She believes it is important that students want to be in the class and that it is optional, though she also believes that the course would be beneficial for all students. Heidi encourages focusing on juniors and seniors and agrees with Kayla that while “Disrupting Privilege” is valuable in more marginalized schools, it would be particularly impactful to have the course in more dominant schools. She recommends that wherever “Disrupting Privilege” goes, it is important to have a lot of structure to guide the students and provide opportunities for modeling, such as having students watch other presentations to guide them in their own iterations of the final presentations. Overall, Heidi thought that “Disrupting Privilege” went well and she liked how the complexity of identities was explored and validated by the experience. The co-instructors expressed that a curriculum like “Disrupting Privilege” is important in the high school setting but that care would need to be taken in how the integration of the course is handled in terms of it being mandatory or optional. Furthermore, while this curriculum would be important in any high school, co-instructors see a particular value in bringing it into high schools with students embodying many privileged identities.

### **Student Visions**

All of the students interviewed from Stratton High School thought that integrating a “Disrupting Privilege” curriculum into high schools would be beneficial. Eliana thought the course should be part of a high school curriculum because it would help students

learn how to handle different issues relating to identity. She really appreciated being able to participate in the class and she learned a lot, particularly about herself. Eliana shared that the class changed her life. Breanna agrees that “Disrupting Privilege” should be a part of high school and thinks it should be an elective because forcing people to take the class would not be productive and students would not get as much out of it. She thinks that if it were mandatory, students who were invested in the class would be disrupted by those who were not. Overall, Breanna appreciated the opportunity to have a space to bring experiences up that she never really was able to share in the past and thinks a space for these conversations is important because, in order to work through difficult issues, we need to talk about them.

Lance also stated that “Disrupting Privilege” would be beneficial as part of a high school curriculum because it helps students realize a lot of things that happen in society and would make the high school atmosphere a better place. He thinks that students would learn that if they are more open-minded to the world then they would benefit from it later on because people would become more aware of what other people may be dealing with and be less judgmental. Marshall believes that “Disrupting Privilege” should be introduced in high school at even a younger age, such as freshman year so that they can go into high school having more of awareness. He thinks that the class should be required to graduate and be a part of a class like Social Studies. Overall, Marshall thought the class was fun and he was thankful for the experience.

Like Stratton students, each of the Kendal students who were interviewed thought that “Disrupting Privilege” should be a part of the high school curriculum. Vince believes the course should be optional because he does not think it would be productive for people to feel forced to take the class and does not think that people would listen. Brent agreed that students should be given the option to sign up to take the class and thinks the class is important because we are hurting people without knowing and we need to learn about it. Antonio said that “Disrupting Privilege” should be required so that people learn about their privileges. Miguel was torn between whether “Disrupting Privilege” should be required and said that he wants it to be required but at the same time students who need the class the most may not care about taking it. Julia thought that the class should be an elective so that people can choose to share their thoughts; being able to choose will allow people to learn better. She believes that if students learn more about privilege, then there would be a more positive high school environment. Juan stated that he thinks that “Disrupting Privilege” in high school is important because it changes views and opens students' eyes. Juan thinks that the class should be optional because there are some people who just do not care. All of the students who were interviewed were in favor of “Disrupting Privilege” being integrated into the high school curriculum mainly because it would encourage students to be more open-minded and therefore create a more welcoming and inclusive high school environment. Again, students had mixed feelings about whether the class should be mandatory primarily due to concern about students

who are not invested in the topic being disruptive to the learning of others, even though many believed that all students could benefit.

I end this dissertation feeling overwhelmed with various emotions. First and foremost, I am so proud of the students who struggled on this journey. My hope is that through these narratives we see their voices and their experiences as a way to understand the capacity for students to struggle through critical conversations and performances about privilege. Ultimately, I am left feeling inspired by these students – inspired to continue to argue that this work is important, that we can learn from high school students by involving them in this endeavor to create a more just world, and that engaging in the disruption of privilege and systems of power is critical to this endeavor.

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**Appendix A: Disrupting Privilege Syllabus.**

<b>NAME OF SCHOOL</b>			
<i>COURSE NUMBER: DISRUPTING PRIVILEGE</i>			
CREDITS			
TERM			
Facilitator contact	Facilitator contact	Facilitator contact	Cassidy Higgins 720-480-0189 (cell) <b>By appointment</b>  <a href="mailto:cassidy.higgins@du.edu">cassidy.higgins@du.edu</a> u

**COURSE SYLLABUS**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course aims to introduce the concept of privilege as it relates to identity and is experienced within the everyday. Michael Kimmel (2003) compares privilege to having the wind at your back:

*To run or walk into a strong headwind is to understand the power of nature. You set your jaw in a squared grimace, your eyes are slits against the wind, and you breathe with a fierce determination. And still you make so little progress. To walk or run with that same wind at your back is to float, to sail effortlessly, expending virtually no energy. You do not feel the wind; it feels you. Only when you turn around and face that wind do you realize its strength (63).*

Along with this metaphor, this class defines privilege as "unearned advantages that accrue to members of certain social groups solely because they are members of those social groups" (Walls, 2009). Therefore, having privilege is not an individual's fault but rather, it is the way the system is structured. But, this does not mean that individuals cannot be accountable to the advantages they have over others. Therefore, this course goes beyond just defining privilege and explores ways in which individuals can be allies and disrupt privilege in and beyond the classroom.

## **COURSE RATIONALE**

This course seeks to introduce privilege and anti-oppressive work as a topic that needs to be explored and discussed beginning in high school. In many cases, privilege is not dialogued about until college (if at all) and this course aims to demonstrate ways in which this conversation can occur earlier, and therefore better prepare students to engage in critical dialogues in settings beyond high school.

## **EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES**

Given regular class attendance, participation in class, successful completion of the course readings, and completion of assignments, the student will demonstrate competency in the following knowledge, values & ethics, and skills objectives:

### *Knowledge*

1. To identify and analyze the personal, historical, situational, structural, and cultural barriers to social justice work aiming to disrupt privilege.
2. To further clarify the impact of privilege and oppression on everyday experiences.
3. To define privilege and anti-oppression.
4. To specify strategies to disrupt privilege.

### *Values & Ethics*

1. To demonstrate ability to relate values to anti-oppression.
2. To establish connections between experiences of privilege and oppression; including understanding how the relationship can impact relationship with others.

### *Skills*

1. To develop and demonstrate anti-oppressive strategies to be used in student's every day interactions.
2. To describe privileged experiences and connect those experiences to anti-oppressive practices.

## **METHODS OF LEARNING AND TEACHING**

The methodology of the course is based on critical pedagogy. The students and the instructor are expected to be active participants in a class dialogue and in the process of meeting course objectives. In addition to lectures, discussions, in-class exercises, and audio-visual presentations, the course will incorporate cooperative learning teams (caucuses) to which students will be assigned by instructor. Cooperative learning teams will be organized around privilege statuses (male privilege, white privilege, and heterosexual privilege).

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

### **1. Reflective Journal**

Students will maintain a reflective journal whereby they reflect upon the course content as related to their own identity and experiences. On a minimum, weekly entries into the journal are expected. Entries should document student's recognition of privilege in their day-to-day life, the student's process of understanding the relationship of their group identities (both privileged and oppressed) to issues of social disadvantage, and the student's developing strategies on disrupting privilege. These journals will only be read by facilitators and the instructor and will be used for research purposes to assess the impact of the course on students and the classroom community.

### **2. Group Presentation**

At the end of the course, students in each of the three cooperative learning groups should demonstrate an awareness and knowledge of the role of privilege in their lives through a creative group presentation. Group presentations should be at least 20 minutes long, but not longer than 25 minutes. Group presentations will be given at an end of the course and will be open to the community.

Presentations must include all group members in some aspect of the presentation, and demonstrate a thorough understanding of (a) the role of privilege on the lives of the presenters and the maintenance of social disadvantage, (b) approaches to disrupting privilege in everyday life.

## **PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE**

Regular participation and attendance is expected. The following guidelines shall be used when considering students' attendance and participation:



- 1. Attendance:** Please treat your attendance in this course as a matter of respectful behavior. Punctuality means being seated and ready to learn when the class is scheduled to begin.

**Participation:** Participation is broadly defined. At a minimum, it means that assigned readings and written assignments are completed on their assigned due date. Participation also includes asking questions, applying course concepts to class discussion, contributing to the learning of others, participating in in-class activities, providing accurate and respectful feedback to others, identifying any unique learning needs or problems to the instructor. Because a significant portion of your grade is a result of group processes (group presentation and group paper), your failure to participate in a manner that is ethical negatively impacts your peers. Classroom contributions should focus on relevant course concepts and experiences.

## **Appendix B: Curriculum Tool Box.**

### **Curriculum Tool Box**

#### **Class One (Introductions):**

- I. Name Tents and Fear in a Hat (given out as students walk into room)
  - a. Supplies
    - i. Paper (name tent) (name, caucus, pronoun)
    - ii. Markers
    - iii. Paper with “In this class, I am afraid/concerned that...”
    - iv. Paper with “In this class I am excited about...”
    - v. Hat
    - vi. Syllabus
    - vii. Reading List
- II. Introductions (15 minutes) – read name tents
- III. Review syllabus and reading list (15 minutes)
  - a. Define privilege and oppression as will be used in class
  - b. Make expectations clear regarding discussions and dialogue regarding discrimination, slurs, inappropriate language (openness)
- IV. Fear in a Hat (20 minutes)
  - a. Give past examples of fear this class has led to
  - b. Ask students to fill out “fear” papers
  - c. Collect papers in a hat
  - d. Ask students to take one slip and read one at a time – others just listen while students read exactly what is on it, no comments on what is read
  - e. Debrief as class – what resonated and what was learned?
- V. Discussion about Trust (30 minutes)
  - a. Introduction (why trust is important in this work)
  - b. What impedes (blocks) trust?
  - c. What builds trust?
  - d. Make copies for next class and ask students to sign and hold community accountable
- VI. Excitement in a Hat (20 minutes)
  - a. Ask students to fill out “excitement” papers
  - b. Collect papers in hat
  - c. Ask students to take one slip and read one at a time – others just listen while students read exactly what is on it, no comments on what is read

d. Debrief as class – what resonated and what was learned?

VII. Caucus (15 minutes)

### **Class Two (Defining Privilege):**

I. Check in (15 minutes)

a. Purpose

- i. Voice concerns, struggles, and experiences that deepen work
- ii. Energy and focus into room
- iii. Help move beyond distractions so that people are present

b. Concerns

- i. Long stories that cause people to check out
- ii. Opposite impact than purpose of course
- iii. Facilitators will stop you

c. Structure

- i. One or two brief facts
- ii. How are you feeling about those facts

II. Privilege Shuffle (20 minutes)

a. This is the power shuffle flipped on its head where rather than having the marginalized groups walk across the room, you have the privileged groups walk across the room.

- i. establish which groups I classify as privileged and which I do not (which can create some dissonance for people since they frequently want to deny that they are privileged in any way, particularly queer folk and people of color -- but also expect some resistance from Christians because they have been fed the notion that they are oppressed by the secular world)
- ii. explore feelings about claiming privileged identities (anger, guilt, sadness, shame)
- iii. compare the emotional experiences of those who are marginalized with those who are privileged (frequently very similar but for very different reasons)
- iv. get folks to start thinking of themselves in multidimensional ways as both privileged and marginalized.
- v. get people to think about why they have different experiences claiming (or not claiming) some identities than others.

b. Gather all participants on one end of the room.

c. Read the rules:

- i. This exercise should be done in silence. No talking. No whispering. No giggling. But pay attention to any impulses you have to talk or to whisper or to giggle.
  - ii. I am going to be reading a list of different social groups to which you may or may not belong and asking you to walk to the other side of the room if you belong to that social group. There is no set definition for these groups...it is completely up to you to decide if you belong to each of the social groups. Your definition, not mine, not anyone else's in the room.
  - iii. Please wait until I have completely finished reading the description of the social identity group before you begin to walk over.
  - iv. It is also your decision to walk across the room and claim membership in the social group. You do not have to disclose membership in any of the social groups if you choose not to. Again, your decision. However, pay attention to how easy it is, or how much pride or joy you feel when you claim certain identities...and how much shame or fear you feel when you claim others. If you don't claim an identity to which you belong, notice how that feels.
  - v. Your other job – besides deciding which identities to claim – is to pay attention to how you are feeling and what you are thinking – about yourself, about others who walk across the room, about others who don't walk across the room.
- d. Would everyone please gather at this end of the room.
  - e. I would like everyone who is male to walk to the other end of the room.
  - f. (after the group has split and all folks who are male are at the other end of the room): look around at who is in your group. Notice what you are thinking about them. Notice who is not in your group. Notice what you feel about them.
  - g. (after a short while): Now I would like everyone to rejoin the group.
  - h. Repeat steps 4 through 6 for the following groups:
    - i. White/Caucasian/European American/European descent
    - ii. Raised middle or upper middle or upper class/wealthy
    - iii. Identifies as Christian
    - iv. Who was raised by your birth parents
    - v. Who does not experience a physical, neurological, psychiatric, cognitive or emotional disability
    - vi. Who is an adult between the ages of 18 and 55
    - vii. Who is gender conforming
    - viii. Who has never struggled with their weight or size

- ix. Who is partnered or married
  - x. Whose first language was English
  - xi. Who identifies as heterosexual
  - xii. Who was raised in a suburb
  - xiii. Who has never struggled with an addiction or had a family member struggle with an addiction
  - xiv. Who was born in the U.S.A.
  - xv. Who has never felt unattractive or unpopular
  - xvi. Who is a citizen of the country in which they live
  - xvii. Who has never been homeless or never had a family member who was homeless
  - xviii. Who had a parent who graduated from college
  - xix. Who is cisgender or identifies as the gender which they were assigned at birth
  - xx. Who is in a romantic/intimate relationship with someone who shares their racial/ethnic identity
  - i. Now let's everyone take a deep breath. Thank you for participating in the Privilege Shuffle. Now if we could all gather round in a big circle so we can talk about our experience of this exercise.
  - j. Questions to ask
    - i. So what was the commonality of all of the social groups that we asked to walk to the other side of the room?
    - ii. What was it like to walk to the other side of the room?
    - iii. What kind of feelings did it arouse? Pride? Fear? Shame? Joy?
    - iv. Were the feelings different for different groups?
    - v. What were you thinking about the "other" group when you stayed behind?
    - vi. What were you thinking about the "other" group when you walked across the room?
    - vii. Without disclosing the identity, did anyone not walk across the room on an identity that you could have claimed? What was that like?
    - viii. Were you surprised at the diversity of the group?
- III. Talking from privileged status (30 minutes)
- a. Complex identities – intersectionality (define) (privilege/oppression related to intersections of identities)
  - b. We usually are more familiar with our marginalized (define) identities
  - c. Focusing on marginalized identities can make it hard for us to work on our privileged identities
  - d. Focusing on marginalized identities can make it hard for groups of people with privilege to work on disrupting that privilege
  - e. Foreground one identity, background another

- f. Insider vs. outsider
- g. Paternalist (define) vs. ally vs. friend
- h. Ally to group vs. ally to individual
- i. Fishbowl with facilitators
  - i. Announce privilege status from which we will be speaking
  - ii. State a question relating to privilege
  - iii. Discuss for 3-4 minutes
  - iv. Ask students what they saw
- IV. Caucusing (20 minutes) – focus on discussion around being in privileged identity space: what will it feel like, what are the barriers, what does it look like when we go into our marginalization, how do you want caucus members to intervene?

### **Class Three (Defining Privilege):**

- I. Check in (15 minutes)
- II. Theater of the Oppressed (15 minutes)
  - a. Building on work of Paulo Freire, method developed by Augusto Boal.
  - b. Means of creating knowledge, making interior realities visible through the body, fostering action to challenge systems of oppression
  - c. Theater of the privileged to make privileged experiences intentional and visible in the body
  - d. Fill the space
  - e. Freeze
  - f. Close your eyes
  - g. Think of a tree
  - h. Sculpt your body into a representation of that tree
  - i. Open your eyes
  - j. Look at the forest of trees around you
  - k. Repeat d through j
    - i. Think of something living in the ocean/pose to represent that something living/look at the ocean creatures around you
    - ii. Think of what marginalization looks like/sculpt body into representation of marginalization/look at impact of marginalization in your community
    - iii. Think of what power feels like/pose in a way to represent power and being powerful/look at amount of power in your community

- iv. Think of what action an ally takes in face of oppression/pose to represent action/look around at the many ways in which allies take action
  - l. Come back to the circle
  - m. Debrief
    - i. What feelings did people have doing this?
    - ii. What were thoughts that came to people's minds?
    - iii. What does this tell us about being an ally?
- III. Whiteness video? Need to check access (30 minutes)
  - a. First year – white privilege caucus end of quarter project
  - b. Debrief whiteness video (group)
    - i. What feelings and thoughts came up for you
    - ii. What does this tell you about the type of privilege you are working on
- IV. Caucus (45 minutes) – define what privilege looks like
  - a. Brainstorm with whole group on what \_\_\_\_\_ privilege looks like in very concrete ways/write on board or flipchart.
  - b. Make sure you have both institutional examples (more likely to get an interview, more likely to get the job because they are seen as similar (comfortable), etc.) as well as interpersonal (more likely to be seen as credible, given more air time, etc.) as well as cultural (Band-aids, hair product availability, general understanding of cultural norms, etc.) on the list.
  - c. Go to caucus and ask them to list as many CONCRETE privileges they can come up with that people in this group get that people who are not in this group don't get.
  - d. Have each group write their list on a sheet of paper and report back to the group after about 10 minutes of brainstorming.
  - e. Follow up questions:
    - i. what was hard about the exercise?
    - ii. what came easily?
    - iii. what did they feel as they reported their list back to the group?
    - iv. what are some commonalities across the lists?
    - v. what are some differences across the lists?
    - vi. does anyone want to add to any of the lists?

#### **Class Four (Resistance):**

- I. Check in (15 minutes)
- II. Instructions for caucus performances (10 minutes)
  - a. Define resistance in two ways
  - b. Theater piece representing resistance to disrupting privilege
  - c. Individual resistance
  - d. How the individual resistances function together
  - e. Movement, sound
- III. Caucus (60 minutes) – plan performances
- IV. Caucus performances (45 minutes)
  - a. Each caucus performs resistance
  - b. Get reactions and feedback from group to debrief each performance
- V. Pinky Show? And debrief –may be too risky with age group? (20 minutes)

#### **Class Five (Resistance):**

- I. Check in (15 minutes)
- II. Speak Out? (60 minutes)
  - a. Have those identifying as marginalized on one end of the room, while those who identify as privilege on the other end
    - i. Problematize: how we get read
    - ii. Problematize: how this exercise reinforces binaristic notions
    - iii. Problematize: notion of learning on backs of marginalized others
  - b. Instructions to marginalized: after each of three questions, respond with your experience. You may respond more than once.
  - c. Instructions to privileged: listen to marginalized. Remember what they say (in their words) and who said it. Do not paraphrase. Do not ask questions. Do not explain what is said.
  - d. Model the process
  - e. There will be three questions. I will ask a question of the marginalized. The marginalized will respond to that question. Once the women have finished responding the men will reflect back on what they heard the women say. Then we will repeat the process with the other two questions. Then we will debrief.
  - f. Question 1: What do you never want to hear said about a \_\_\_\_\_ again?



- g. Question 2: What do you never want to see done to a \_\_\_\_\_ again?
- h. Question 3: What do you expect of your \_\_\_\_\_ allies?
- i. Debrief
  - i. Make explicit why we are doing what we are doing
  - ii. Connection of \_\_\_\_\_ to pain and anger
- III. Caucus (60 minutes)

**Class Six (Making privilege visible):**

- I. Check in (15 minutes)
- II. Eye contact exercise (15 minutes)
- III. Class Dismissed (60 minutes)
- IV. Debrief (10 minutes)
- V. Star Power Game? (60 minutes)

**Class Seven (Making privilege visible):**

- I. Check in (15 minutes)
- II. America the Beautiful (60 minutes)
- III. Debrief (15 minutes)
- IV. Caucus (60 minutes)

**Class Eight (Costs of privilege):**

- I. Check in (15 minutes) (decentering)
  - a. Have students do privilege calculation
  - b. One minute to speak for each marginalized identity (time)
- II. Debrief check in structure (10 minutes)
- III. Mirrors of Whiteness (60 minutes)
- IV. Debrief video (15 minutes)
- V. Caucus (60 minutes)
  - a. Revisit list of privilege made
  - b. Connect privileges to oppression (As a \_\_\_\_\_ person, I \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_ do not)
  - c. Take turns reading items from list to the rest of the class.

**Class Nine (Costs of Privilege):**

- I. Check in (15 minutes)
- II. Fishbowl with guests (30 minutes)

- a. Topic: being queer in high school
- b. Ask class for a question?
- c. Center group holds dialogue and then opened up to class for questions/comments
- III. Autism video (5 minutes)
- IV. Debrief (15 minutes)
- V. Caucus (60 minutes)

**Class Ten (Action):**

- I. Check in (15 minutes)
- II. Toilet Training? (30 minutes)
- III. Debrief video (15 minutes)
- IV. Redo resistance performance with caucus (60 minutes)
  - a. Redefine resistance
  - b. Create new performance of how individuals will resist privilege
  - c. Put performances together to be cohesive
- V. Performances (45 minutes)
  - a. Each caucus does performance
  - b. Debrief after each performance

**Class Eleven (Action):**

- I. Check in (15 minutes)
- II. Fishbowl of caucuses (45 minutes)
  - a. Each caucus in center of bowl, one at a time
  - b. Discuss journey within caucus
  - c. Outside invited to ask questions/comment
- III. Caucus (60 minutes) – final opportunity to plan final

**Class Twelve (Public Presentations)**

### Appendix C: Privilege Groups Check List.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Please check the box(es) next to any identities that you self-identify as **AND** are willing to talk about from a critical approach looking at privilege.

- White
- Heterosexual (straight)
- Able-bodied
- U.S. Citizenship
- Middle-Upper Class
- Male

## Appendix D: Journal Grading Rubric.

### JOURNAL GRADING RUBRIC

Points	Characteristics
4	Demonstrates good insight into issues of privilege and their implications for self and community. Demonstrates awareness of complexity of the issues. Integrates content from readings. Integrates content from classroom experiences and/or practice settings. Content includes cognitions (ideas, thoughts, questions) as well as emotions.
3	Demonstrates some insight into issues of privilege and their implications for self and community. Demonstrates limited awareness of complexity of the issues. Integrates content from readings and/or integrates content from classroom experiences and/or practice settings. Content includes cognitions (ideas, thoughts, questions) as well as emotions.
2	Demonstrates limited or no insight into issues of privilege and their implications for self and community. Minimally integrates content from readings and/or integrates content from classroom experiences and/or practice settings.
1	Minimally integrates content from readings and/or integrates content from classroom experiences and/or community.
0	No entry.

## Appendix E: Consent Form.

Consent Form: **Disrupting Privilege High School Curriculum**

Principal Investigator: Cassidy Higgins, MA

University of Denver's Department of Communication Studies

2000 E. Asbury Ave., Denver, CO 80208

cassidy.higgins@du.edu Phone: (720) 480-0189

You are being invited to participate in the research project, Disrupting Privilege High School Curriculum. Under the supervision of Dr. Willink, Assistant Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Denver, Cassidy Higgins, a doctoral student in Communication Studies is conducting research on a high school curriculum teaching about disrupting privilege. This course aims to introduce the concept of privilege as it relates to identity and is experienced within the everyday. Michael Kimmel (2003) compares privilege to having the wind at your back:

*To run or walk into a strong headwind is to understand the power of nature. You set your jaw in a squared grimace, your eyes are slits against the wind, and you breathe with a fierce determination. And still you make so little progress.*

*To walk or run with that same wind at your back is to float, to sail effortlessly, expending virtually no energy. You do not feel the wind; it feels you.*

*Only when you turn around and face that wind do you realize its strength (63).*

Along with this metaphor, this class defines privilege as "unearned advantages that accrue to members of certain social groups solely because they are members of those social groups" (Walls, 2009). Therefore, having privilege is not an individual's fault but rather, it is the way the system is structured. But, this does not mean that individuals cannot be accountable to the advantages they have over others. Therefore, this course goes beyond just defining privilege and explores ways in which individuals can be allies and disrupt privilege in and beyond the classroom.

If I agree to participate in this research study, the following will occur:

1. You will be asked to participate in classroom conversation about power, privilege, and marginalization and keep a reflective journal on your personal experience and reactions to this journey. The class will meet once a week during normal school hours as part of the course you are enrolled in.
2. You will be asked to explore as a part of a small group, a specific privilege that you hold and then will plan a presentation to the community to demonstrate the experience of this journey.

3. The researcher and co-instructors will review your reflective journaling to understand how to best support you in the journey while also gaining a better understanding of potential personal transformation occurring for you.
4. Participation in this study will take a total of 60 minutes per week over a period of 10 weeks in January through March 2012.
5. There will be no consequences if you choose to not participate. You will continue with your daily assignment in your class.

The information gathered from this study will be kept as confidential as possible. Your real name will not be used in the report and all reflective journal entries will be stored in a locked cabinet in my, the researcher's home, and no one except the researcher and adult volunteers helping on the journey will have access to them. Your name will not be used and any identifying personal information will be avoided.

There are some things that you might tell us that we CANNOT promise to keep confidential. If you tell us about child abuse or neglect, about a crime you or others plan to commit, or about harm that may come to you or others, we are required to report these things.

Other than the research team, only regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protections and the University of Denver Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects may see your individual data as part of routine audits.

There are no foreseeable risks or benefits for your participation in this study, and there is no cost to you if you take part in this study. If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the interview, please contact Paul Olk, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-4531, or du-irb@du.edu, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4050 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

I have read and understood the descriptions of the study, "Disrupting Privilege High School Curriculum." I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty. I have received a copy of the consent form.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F: Parental Consent Form.

### Parental Consent Form for Minor to Participate in Research Study

**Communication Studies**  
**University of Denver**  
**2000 E. Asbury Ave.**  
**Denver, CO 80208**

**Title of Research:** Disrupting Privilege High School Curriculum  
**Name of Primary Researcher:** Cassidy Higgins, MA  
**Phone Number of Primary Researcher:** 720-480-0189  
**Name and Phone Number of Research Advisor:** Dr. Kate Willink, 303-871-4970

#### **A. Purpose and Background**

Under the supervision of Dr. Willink, Assistant Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Denver, Cassidy Higgins, a graduate student in Communication Studies is conducting research on a high school curriculum teaching about disrupting privilege. This course aims to introduce the concept of privilege as it relate to identity and is experienced within the everyday. Michael Kimmel (2003) compares privilege to having the wind at your back:

*To run or walk into a strong headwind is to understand the power of nature. You set your jaw in a squared grimace, your eyes are slits against the wind, and you breathe with a fierce determination. And still you make so little progress.*

*To walk or run with that same wind at your back is to float, to sail effortlessly, expending virtually no energy. You do not feel the wind; it feels you. Only when you turn around and face that wind do you realize its strength (63).*

Along with this metaphor, this class defines privilege as "unearned advantages that accrue to members of certain social groups solely because they are members of those social groups" (Walls, 2009). Therefore, having privilege is not an individual's fault but rather, it is the way the system is structured. But, this does not mean that individuals cannot be accountable to the advantages they have over others. Therefore, this course goes beyond just defining privilege and explores ways in which individuals can be allies and disrupt privilege in and beyond the classroom.

## **B. Procedures**

If I agree for my child to participate in this research study, the following will occur:

1. My child will be asked to participate in classroom conversation about power, privilege, and marginalization and keep a reflective journal on his or her personal experience and reactions to this journey. The class will meet once a week after school as part of an internship he or she is enrolled in.
2. My child will be asked to explore as a part of a small group, a specific privilege that he or she holds and then will plan a presentation to the community to demonstrate the experience of this journey. You are welcome to join this community presentation to see the work that your child has been doing.
3. The researcher and co-instructors will review your child's reflective journaling to understand how to best support your child in the journey while also gaining a better understanding of potential personal transformation occurring for your child.
4. Participation in this study will take a total of 60 minutes per week over a period of 10 weeks in January through March 2012.
5. There will be no consequences if your child chooses to not participate. They will continue with their daily assignment in their social issues class.

## **C. Risks**

Risks will include the possible loss of privacy, possible discomfort at having conversations about issues relating to identity and power.

Confidentiality: The information gathered from this study will be kept as confidential as possible. Your child's real name will not be used in the report and all reflective journal entries will be stored in a locked cabinet in my, the researcher's home, and no one except the researcher and adult volunteers helping on the journey will have access to them. Your child's name will not be used and any identifying personal information will be avoided.

## **D. Direct Benefits**

There are no guaranteed benefits to your child.

## **E. Alternatives**

Your child is free to choose not to participate in this research study. Your child will still participate as part of the class but data will not be collected from your child as part of the research.



**F. Costs**

There will be no costs to your child or you as a result of your child taking part in this research study.

**H. Questions**

If I have any further questions about the study, I can contact Cassidy Higgins by calling 720-480-0189 or emailing cassidy.higgins@du.edu. I can also contact Dr. Kate Willink, Chair of the Committee at 303-871-4970. If you have any concerns or complaints about how your child was treated during the research process, please contact Paul Olk, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-4531, or du-irb@du.edu, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4050 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

**I. Consent**

I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep. PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH STUDY IS VOLUNTARY. My child is free to decline to participate in this research study, or I may withdraw their participation at any point without penalty. Their decision whether or not to participate in this research study will have no influence on their present or future status at school.

My child \_\_\_\_\_ has my consent to participate in the educational research study.

Student is a minor \_\_\_\_\_  
(age)

Parent/Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_  
(signature)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix G: Child Assent Form.

### Child Assent Form

We are doing a study that involves you being a part of a class that seeks to introduce privilege (having advantages over other people due to certain identities relating to race, gender, class etc.) and anti-oppressive work (work that fights against this inequality) as a topic that needs to be explored and discussed beginning in high school. In many cases, privilege is not talked about until college (if at all) and this course aims to demonstrate ways in which this conversation can occur earlier, and therefore better prepare high school students to engage in thoughtful dialogues in settings beyond high school.

If you agree to be in our study, we are going to ask you to participate in a class that explores privileged identities in addition to being a part of a privilege group that focuses on one of your privileged identities. There will be an opportunity for you to talk about ways in which you have felt both marginalized (disadvantaged) and privileged though the intention is to focus on the power that comes with privilege. To further show this exploration, you will be asked to keep a reflective journal in which you make at least one entry per week talking about how this class is impacting your experience in the everyday.

You can ask questions about this study at any time. If you decide at any time not to finish, you can ask us to stop.

This class for this study relies on respectful, honest dialogue and includes the researcher and adult volunteers as co-explorers on this journey. There are no right or wrong answers because this is an ongoing dialogue.

If you sign this paper, it means that you have read this and that you want to be in the study. If you don't want to be in the study, don't sign this paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be upset if you don't sign this paper or if you change your mind later.

Your signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your printed name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of person obtaining consent: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name of person obtaining consent: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix H: Letter to Parents.

Dear Parent(s);

Your student is being invited to participate in the research project, Disrupting Privilege High School Curriculum. Under the supervision of Dr. Willink, Assistant Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Denver, Cassidy Higgins, a doctoral student in Communication Studies is conducting research on a high school curriculum teaching about disrupting privilege. This course aims to introduce the concept of privilege as it relate to identity and is experienced within the everyday. Michael Kimmel (2003) compares privilege to having the wind at your back:

*To run or walk into a strong headwind is to understand the power of nature. You set your jaw in a squared grimace, your eyes are slits against the wind, and you breathe with a fierce determination. And still you make so little progress. To walk or run with that same wind at your back is to float, to sail effortlessly, expending virtually no energy. You do not feel the wind; it feels you. Only when you turn around and face that wind do you realize its strength (63).*

Along with this metaphor, this class defines privilege as "unearned advantages that accrue to members of certain social groups solely because they are members of those social groups" (Walls, 2009). Therefore, having privilege is not an individual's fault but rather, it is the way the system is structured. But, this does not mean that individuals cannot be accountable to the advantages they have over others. Therefore, this course goes beyond just defining privilege and explores ways in which individuals can be allies and disrupt privilege in and beyond the classroom.

If your student agrees to participate in this research study, the following will occur:

1. Your student will be asked to participate in classroom conversation about power, privilege, and marginalization and keep a reflective journal on his or her personal experience and reactions to this journey. The class will meet once a week during normal school hours as a course your student is enrolled in.
2. Your student will be asked to explore as a part of a small group, a specific privilege that he or she holds and then will plan a presentation to the community to demonstrate the experience of this journey.
3. The researcher and co-instructors will review your reflective journaling to understand how to best support your student in the journey while also gaining a

better understanding of potential personal transformation occurring for your student.

4. Participation in this study will take a total of 60 minutes per week over a period of 10 weeks in January through March 2012.

5. There will be no consequences if your student chooses to not participate. They will continue with their daily assignment in their class.

If you have any questions regarding this research please contact the researcher, Cassidy Higgins at 720-480-0189 or [cassidy.higgins@du.edu](mailto:cassidy.higgins@du.edu).

Sincerely,

Cassidy Higgins, M.A.

## **Appendix I: Consent Form for Interview.**

Consent Form: **Disrupting Privilege High School Curriculum**

Principal Investigator: Cassidy Higgins, MA

University of Denver's Department of Communication Studies

2000 E. Asbury Ave., Denver, CO 80208

cassidy.higgins@du.edu Phone: (720) 480-0189

You are being invited to participate in the research project, Disrupting Privilege High School Curriculum. Under the supervision of Dr. Willink, Assistant Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Denver, Cassidy Higgins, a doctoral student in Communication Studies is conducting research on a high school curriculum teaching about disrupting privilege. This research involves a follow up interview after participating in or helping to facilitate the course.

You are being asked to do this interview because of your participation in the Disrupting Privilege course. The purpose of this interview is to get a better understanding of what the experience of the class was for you. In order to fully understand these experiences, I will ask questions about how you felt about the course and what was challenging or impactful. Participation in this study is entirely your choice, and you can choose not to answer any question that you do not want to answer. Also, grades in this class are in no way contingent on participating in this study. If you agree, you'll participate in a face-to-face interview.

Participating should take approximately 1 hour. Interviews will take place in a public location that is selected by you. With your permission, interviews will be recorded. Audio recordings will be stored in a locked cabinet in Cassidy Higgins' office and will be destroyed upon completion of this research project.

The contents of the research will be used by the researcher only for the purposes of academic research, including sharing with colleagues at academic conferences and in academic publications. So that your privacy will be maintained, a pseudonym (fake name) will be used instead of your real name in these accounts, and no personal details will be disclosed that could reveal your real identity.

There are some things that you might tell us that we CANNOT promise to keep confidential. If you tell us about child abuse or neglect, about a crime you or others plan to commit, or about harm that may come to you or others, we are required to report these things.

Other than the research team, only regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protections and the University of Denver Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects may see your individual data as part of routine audits.

There are no foreseeable risks or benefits for your participation in this study, and there is no cost to you if you take part in this study. If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the interview, please contact Paul Olk, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-4531, or du-irb@du.edu, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4050 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

I have read and understood the descriptions of the study, “Disrupting Privilege High School Curriculum.” I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this interview, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty. I have received a copy of the consent form.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I consent to being recorded via audio tape recording (initials) \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix J: Parental Consent for Interview.**

### **Parental Consent Form for Minor to Participate in Research Study**

#### **Communication Studies**

**University of Denver  
2000 E. Asbury Ave.  
Denver, CO 80208**

**Title of Research:** Disrupting Privilege High School Curriculum

**Name of Primary Researcher:** Cassidy Higgins, MA

**Phone Number of Primary Researcher:** 720-480-0189

**Name and Phone Number of Research Advisor:** Dr. Kate Willink, 303-871-4970

#### **A. Purpose and Background**

Under the supervision of Dr. Willink, Assistant Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Denver, Cassidy Higgins, a graduate student in Communication Studies is conducting research on a high school curriculum teaching about disrupting privilege. This research involves a follow up interview after participating in or helping to facilitate the course.

Your student is being asked to do this interview because of his or her participation in the Disrupting Privilege course. The purpose of this interview is to get a better understanding of what the experience of the class was for your student. In order to fully understand these experiences, I will ask questions about how your student felt about the course and what was challenging or impactful. Participation in this study is entirely your student's choice, and he or she can choose not to answer any question that he or she does not want to answer. Also, grades in this class are in no way contingent on participating in this study. If you and your student agree, he or she will participate in a face-to-face interview.

#### **B. Procedures**

Participating should take approximately 1 hour. Interviews will take place in a public location that is selected by the student. With your permission, interviews will be recorded.

#### **C. Risks**

Risks will include the possible loss of privacy, possible discomfort at having conversations about issues relating to identity and power.

**Confidentiality:** The information gathered from this study will be kept as confidential as possible. Your child's real name will not be used in the report and all audio recordings

will be stored in a locked cabinet in Cassidy Higgins' office and will be destroyed upon completion of this research project.

**D. Direct Benefits**

There are no guaranteed benefits to your child.

**E. Alternatives**

Your child is free to choose not to participate in this research study.

**F. Costs**

There will be no costs to your child or you as a result of your child taking part in this research study.

**H. Questions**

If you have any further questions about the study, you can contact Cassidy Higgins by calling 720-480-0189 or emailing [cassidy.higgins@du.edu](mailto:cassidy.higgins@du.edu). You can also contact Dr. Kate Willink, Chair of the Committee at 303-871-4970. If you have any concerns or complaints about how your child was treated during the research process, please contact Paul Olk, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-4531, or [du-irb@du.edu](mailto:du-irb@du.edu), Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4050 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

**I. Consent**

I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep. PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH STUDY IS VOLUNTARY. My child is free to decline to participate in this research study, or I may withdraw their participation at any point without penalty. Their decision whether or not to participate in this research study will have no influence on their present or future status.

My child \_\_\_\_\_ has my consent to participate in the educational research study.

Student is a minor \_\_\_\_\_  
(age)

Parent/Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(signature)

I consent to my student being recorded via audio tape recording (initials) \_\_\_\_\_



## **Appendix K: Co-Instructor Interview Protocol.**

### Co-Instructor Interview Protocol

1. How would you describe your overall experience of co-instructing the disrupting privilege course?
  - a. What were things that you liked about the experience?
  - b. What did you not like about the experience?
2. What did you learn from co-instructing the course?
  - a. What came easily to you?
  - b. What was challenging for you?
3. What did you think about the different experiences of the classroom in the course?
  - a. What did you think of the large classroom experience?
  - b. What was your experience in facilitating the small group?
  - c. What did you think of the performance exercise component?
4. Do you think a course like this should be a part of a high school curriculum?
5. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

## **Appendix L: Student Interview Protocol.**

### Student Interview Protocol

1. How would you describe your overall experience of the disrupting privilege course?
  - a. What were things that you liked about the experience?
  - b. What did you not like about the experience?
2. What did you learn from the course?
  - a. What came easily or were things that you already knew?
  - b. What was challenging for you?
3. How do you feel about the different experiences of the classroom in the course?
  - a. How do you feel about the large classroom experience?
  - b. How do you feel about your small group experience?
  - c. What did you think of the performance exercises?
  - d. How would you rate your facilitator?
4. Do you think a course like this should be a part of a high school curriculum?
5. Is there anything else that you would like to share?