

4 DISMANTLING PRIVILEGE WITH MINDFUL LISTENING

normalization means that those identities often remain invisible. Whiteness tends to go unnamed as a racial identity, while people of color are marked as “raced”; heterosexual identity becomes the norm against which LGBTQ/queer folk have to “come out.” These identities are set up in a binary and are defined against one another, with one half of the binary receiving power as the norm (Dalton 2005). Each form of oppression has its flip side of privilege: male privilege, heterosexual privilege, able-bodied privilege, class privilege (for the wealthy), and race privilege (which in the United States means White privilege). Moreover, though these identities are historically and culturally specific and have been constructed over time, that context is erased, so that society simply accepts the current construction of that dominant identity (Barrett and Roediger 2005; Omi and Winant 2014; “Race the Power of Illusion” 2003).

Privilege works hand-in-hand with discrimination to create both systems of disadvantage for members of marginalized groups and systems of advantage for privileged groups (Tatum 2006; Case, Iuzzini, and Hopkins 2012). In effect, privilege describes the ways that systems of oppression have been built to advance the lives of dominant groups while placing numerous barriers in the way of members of marginalized groups. Those barriers can be small but powerfully cumulative, such as the ability to easily purchase makeup that matches one’s skin color, or large, such as the right to marry who one loves. Either way, they accumulate into a set of deeply inscribed advantages. People who receive them come to see them as entitlements, which means they often blame the victim for not succeeding because they fail to see the benefits they receive that others are denied. This deep entitlement and fear of losing their privileges is often hidden in another privilege: the “privilege of obliviousness,” which means not having to be aware of one’s privileged identity or systems of oppression in general because one is never the target of them (Wise and Case 2013, 23). This obliviousness characterizes all forms of privilege, including male, heterosexual, able-bodied, gender-conforming, and class privilege. It brings with it another key aspect of privilege: the ability to choose whether to fight against privilege or simply remain silent and allow it to proceed (Wildeman and Davis 2005).

Systems of oppression use privilege as one way to keep themselves working smoothly. When they work properly, the people who receive privilege remain oblivious to the benefits they receive and the fact that marginalized groups do not receive them. This allows people in power to blame the marginalized groups for not getting ahead, because they do not see the ways that life is made harder and resources scarcer for marginalized groups. Once we start revealing privilege, the system starts to hit bumps in the road. But it is an adaptable system, so it has a back-up plan that involves built-in, learned reactions that will come flooding in to protect the system of privilege, usually in the form of defensive, so-called resistant reactions. If it works properly, those reactions will keep the individual neatly participating in the system. While she/he/ze may no longer be completely

If we are interested in building a movement that will not constantly be subverted by internal differences, then we must build from the inside out, not the other way around. Coming to terms with the suffering of others has never meant looking away from our own.

—Cherríe Moraga (1983)

While internalized oppression is a powerful force in diversity classrooms, so too is another key factor shaping student responses: privilege. While some of our students will be uncovering socialized negative self-definitions as they learn about oppression, others will be realizing the extent and depth of the benefits they receive in society, not because of who they are as individuals, but because of their membership in a group that has been granted power in society. For these privileged students, this realization can evoke denial, despair, grief, and confusion. Moreover, many of our students will find that they struggle with both internalized oppression and privilege with regard to different aspects of their identities. In this chapter, I will first define privilege and discuss how it can manifest in our classrooms, then outline how mindful listening can offer critical ways to understand and dismantle privilege.

Defined perhaps most famously by Peggy McIntosh, privilege refers to the unearned benefits granted to members of dominant groups and denied members of marginalized groups. It is an “invisible knapsack” of advantages that make the life of privileged groups easier while typically remaining invisible to those who receive them. Indeed, privileged identities are the norms of society against which every other identity is defined as “abnormal” (Wildeman and Davis 2005). This

oblivious to the concept of privilege, this “back-up buffer” prevents him/her/zi from really questioning the privilege and neatly reroutes them back into upholding the system.

I reframe reactions to privilege in this way because it helps us see this “resistance” as byproducts of the system rather than merely the fault of stubborn and unwilling students, an idea that I will discuss more fully in the next chapter. One problem with this framing, of course, is that it speaks of the system as disembodied and removes individual agency from the process. I have just described a system working on the individual but not the individual actions, choices, and responsibilities that occur when individuals engage with the system. The good news is that systems of oppression prefer that individuals not realize they have agency. They work much more smoothly if dominant groups do not realize that they can work against their privilege, unlearn the ideologies that support it, and ensure that the privileges that are currently granted to only a few become rights extended to all.

Many scholars argue that in order to truly dismantle systems of oppression, we need to not only focus on the discrimination faced by marginalized groups but also on the invisible, systematic benefits consistently granted to members of dominant groups. In her book *Deconstructing Privilege: Teaching and Learning as Allies in the Classroom*, Kim A. Case (2013) argues that social justice courses need to examine power and privilege, encourage student and teacher reflections about where and how they might receive privilege, and place a great deal of value on the voices and experiences of marginalized groups. This last point refers to the dangers of holding all perspectives in diversity discussions as equal, while it is indeed important to hear from and validate the experiences of all students, “privileged voices and experiences [cannot be] used to deny the existence of oppression and privilege” (Case 2013, 4). So while teachers in anti-oppression courses need to challenge students to uncover and dismantle their privilege, we cannot do so in a way that re-centers the experiences of the privileged while continuing to marginalize members of oppressed groups.

At the same time, I have seen this caution interpreted as rendering unimportant the experiences of privileged students. Some teachers err too far on the side of this caution in that they do not give any space to the deeply unsettling process of taking accountability for one’s privilege. I have made this mistake myself, and I have come to see it as not only lacking compassion but also deeply pedagogically ineffective. When people begin to truly see the extent of their privilege, they often feel overwhelming guilt and shame, stemming, in part, from the conflict between their growing recognition of their privilege in systems of power and their desire to believe that they are good people (Wise and Case 2013, 19). While we do not need to “take care of” these feelings in a way that re-centers privileged stories, we do need to honor that they exist and help students cultivate the skills for processing through those emotions. Without these skills—which include the

ability to see why those reactions are arising—students will never effectively be able to dismantle their privilege. Before I delve into some mindfulness practices that can help students develop those skills, let me make one more key point about why such skills are so necessary in anti-oppression pedagogy.

We All Have Work to Do

Feminist intersectionality theory tells us that many people receive privilege in some ways while being oppressed in others. While some of us fit neatly in the category of “oppressed” or “oppressor,” many more of us straddle both of those categories at different moments in our lives. Much of the scholarship on privilege focuses on White privilege, but there are several different types of privilege: male privilege, White privilege, heterosexual privilege, Western privilege, class privilege, able-bodied privilege, and so on (Case 2013; Rothenberg 2008; Wise 2011; Cole et al. 2012; Coston and Kimmel 2012; Sanders and Mahalingam 2012). When viewed through an intersectional feminist lens, many of our students will receive privilege in some ways while being denied it in others. Some people are marginalized in so many ways that they do not receive any privileges (such as a poor, gay, woman of color living with a disability), but many people receive *some* privileges. That means that we *all* have some work to do in undoing systems of power and privilege (even those who do not receive any privileges likely have work to do around internalized oppression). This is an important bridge of common purpose to which I will return later in the chapter. Students need to be able to bring their full selves to the process of unlearning oppression, and for that to happen, they need to recognize where they are oppressed and where they are privileged. They also need to learn to have compassion for how we are *all* caught in systems of oppression, albeit in different ways.

There has been some discussion about the importance of strategically focusing on one aspect of privilege. Rachel E. Luft and others make important points about how an intersectional approach can be used to deflect conversations about privilege. This avoidance tactic occurs when people with privilege shift the focus onto the part of their identity that is marginalized rather than doing the hard work of confronting and taking responsibility for their privilege (Luft 2009; Keatwork 2007; Wise and Case 2013). This is a very real concern, and there are times and places when a strategic focus on one aspect of identity or one form of privilege is useful. When this mono-issue approach is taken, teachers should make students aware of the strategic reasons for that focus.

However, there are also limits to this strategy. As Abby L. Ferber and Andrea O’Reilly Herrera (2013) point out, this single-focus approach continues to fragment both people’s identities and our understanding of how power, privilege, and oppression work. Instead, they argue that foregrounding the multiple forms of

privilege that exist and noting that most people are privileged in some ways and marginalized in others helps to preempt several common tendencies to deflect difficult discussions of privilege (Wise and Case 2013). First, it helps avoid the guilt and blame that so often subsumes discussions about privilege, because students become aware that most people get some privilege of some kind. Not only does everyone have some work to do, but they can more effectively understand how the process works when they reflect on their experiences on both sides of the equation. Students are less likely to get defensive and avoid facing their own privilege when they realize what it is like to be denied privilege that their classmates receive. Second, it better illustrates the complexity of how power, privilege, and marginalization happens and demands a contextualization of those dynamics. This book takes the position that we need to utilize an intersectional analysis in order to both fully understand the complexities of power, privilege, and oppression work and to enable all students to bring their full selves to the unlearning process.

The other critical component of this intersectional matrix model, from the perspective of contemplative pedagogy, is that it “advocates a connectionist, non-divisive approach, which is relational and begins by focusing on something that ties students together” (Ferber and O’Reilly Herrera 2013, 89). While institutional power dynamics obviously pit us against each other in some ways, they also thrive by maintaining those “us” and “them” binaries. If we can forge connections between students and build communities in our classrooms, we have a much better chance of not only unlearning oppression but also learning important critical reflection and mindfulness skills that will continue to transform our communities in the broader society.

Common Student Responses in Discussions about Oppression

Much of the pedagogical discussion around privilege revolves around common student responses that emerge when they are challenged to confront their privilege.

For instance, Watt (2007) describes several tactics students often use to avoid dealing with their privilege. In her Privileged Identity Exploration (PIE) model, she states that fear and entitlement provide the foundation for most of the defensive mechanisms that are so common in diversity discussions. One critical point to make about entitlement here is that students’ defensive mechanisms often arise because they view challenges to their privilege as “optional,” which is part and parcel of privilege itself. People who are oppressed do not have the option of not dealing with oppression. The fact that privileged individuals can choose not to face it or dismantle it is part of their privilege.

According to Watt, different defensive strategies tend to be used depending on how individuals are asked to consider their privilege. When students are asked

to “recognize their privileged identity,” they often resort to denial, deflection, or rationalization. These tactics allow them to avoid noticing the privileges they receive because of their membership in a dominant group. When students are asked to “contemplate privileged identity,” they often resort to “intellectualization, principium, or false envy.” So, rather than critically reflecting on the nature of their systematic advantages, they fall back on principium, which occurs when individuals use a religious or personal principle as an excuse for facing their privilege. Or they invoke false envy, which occurs when the individual expresses affection for someone as a way of avoiding the complex power dynamics in the situation. When challenged to “address privileged identity,” the defense mechanisms tend to take the form of “benevolence or minimization” (Watt 2007, 119–120). The former occurs when an individual expresses an overly sensitive attitude that is more about charity or patronizing than it is about truly wanting to dismantle power relations; the latter trivializes the situation.

Watt’s point that intellectualizing can be a tactic that is used to avoid taking account of one’s privilege is important to note here, because too often in social justice classrooms, we keep discussions of privilege on a conceptual level. Watt’s theory suggests that such intellectualizing may actually prevent us from deeply dismantling privilege. Clearly the intensity of discussions about this topic indicates that a great deal is happening on the emotional and psychological levels. Students often become deeply upset on the one hand or immersed in avoidance techniques, on the other, when they are challenged to face the effects of their privilege. The tension in both these reactions indicates that we need to unpack privilege on a much deeper, embodied level, in addition to analyzing it on an intellectual one.

In their article “Deconstructing Privilege When Students Resist,” Kim A. Case and Elizabeth R. Cole describe several key patterns that emerged in their interviews with teachers about how their students have “resisted” content about diversity. While I will discuss the issue of resistance in greater depth in Chapter 6, here I want to note that the first theme from their research is “worldview protection,” meaning that students “resist” learning new material that deeply unsettles the paradigms through which they make sense of the world. When their ideologies, like the myth of meritocracy or their sense of who they are as a person, are deeply unsettled, students will often fall back on various defense mechanisms to try to maintain order. Often, this process happens subconsciously in an embodied way.

Psychologist Kristin Neff (2015), who is best known for her work on self-compassion, describes the way our body reacts to perceived threats to our well-being. Neff says that when we feel threatened, our bodies close off as we feel the rush of adrenaline and cortisol and prepare for fight or flight responses. In ancient times, this biological reaction was designed to protect us from physical bodily harm. Today, especially in the college classrooms that are the context for this discussion, bodily harm is not as likely as the harm to one’s self-concept. Neff

(2015) suggests that when our self-concept is threatened, stress hormones will often kick in and our fight/flight response will serve to separate us from others. According to this theory, then, it really should be no surprise that students use defense mechanisms to avoid confronting privilege. Indeed, this theory suggests that their reactions are deeply embodied, which means that our pedagogical practices need to address these deeper levels if they are to be effective.

I find that informing students of the common patterns people use to avoid facing privilege is a helpful way of robbing these tactics of some of their power. I also find it is helpful to present some versions of the identity development models I discussed in Chapter 3. When students can see that there are common patterns that people move through as they become more aware of power systems and how they are positioned in them, they can become less defensive and more mindful to their own reactions and those of others. They can learn to have more patience and compassion with their classmates, their friends, their relatives, and even themselves, because they can see the various stages people are in that are shaping their responses (Ferber and O'Reilly Herrera 2013).

In addition, laying the foundation of feminist intersectionality early in the semester provides something to return to again and again. If many of us are both privileged and oppressed through different aspects of our identity, then we can learn to see our experiences of each with discernment and compassion. When we remember how painful it is to experience oppression, we can be more present with a classmate as she/he/ze describes their experiences of marginalization. When we recognize how challenging it is to try to dismantle privilege and the dismay we felt when we first became aware of our own privilege (whatever it may be), we can learn to have more compassion for our classmates when we see them having similar responses to their own privilege. For instance, I consider my anti-racist work to be, in part, a lifelong journey in dismantling my White privilege, and I recognize that I will make many mistakes along the way. I try to be humble and accountable in the moments when I do make a mistake, doubling down on my efforts. My awareness of that fraught process makes me more willing to have compassion for people around me who are trying to unlearn their heterosexual privilege. When they make a mistake, I remember what it is like for me, and I try to value their commitment to the journey (if they have such a commitment) enough to continue to work with them in their unlearning process. We both have rocky journeys, and we will both make mistakes. Our commitment to one another and to a better world is what encourages me to keep an open heart.

Such patience is not always possible. People do not always have the capacity to keep an open heart, particularly in the face of unskillful or even willful denials of privilege. Those reactions also need space in the classroom—if for no other reason than that they are present in our discussions, whether we like it or not. Again, helping students understand and have empathy for where those reactions

are coming from—in themselves and in their classmates—can go a long way to productively navigating those conversations and sustaining a sense of community.

One of my yoga teachers, Rod Stryker, notes that “each of us is both being and becoming” (qtd. in McGonigal 2013). We can have more patience and compassion for ourselves and others when we realize that it is a complicated journey for all of us, regardless of the exact nature of our individual work. This perspective allows for the “both/and” possibility for which Patricia Hill Collins (2000) and others call. “It asks students to examine both an oppressed identity and also requires White students to examine their White Privilege” or some other aspect of their identity in which they might receive privilege (Ferber and O'Reilly Herrera 2013, 94). Creating space for both elements of this process will enable more productive discussions in the classroom and beyond. Wise tells the story of a class exercise in which participants were asked to rate their privilege index in a variety of ways. Though Wise was not impressed with the instrument and expected Whites in the room to use it to avoid accounting for White privilege, he was surprised to see that most of them did not. By “being allowed to ‘mark their pain,’ . . . rather than being shut down as if to say that white privilege trumps all other systems of oppression . . . they had been able to relax, open up, and acknowledge the power of Whiteness in their lives without shame or guilt” (Wise and Case 2013, 25). This happened, in part, because everyone in the classroom was asked to account for the ways in which they received privilege and the ways in which they were marginalized. This both/and approach allows all participants to being their full selves to the table and, therefore, takes us further toward unlearning oppression.

How Privilege Harms

This relational, intersectional matrix framework also reveals how we are all harmed by these inequalities. Privilege, as Wise tells us, comes with a price. This is not to say that those who are privileged are harmed in the same ways or to the same degree as those who are oppressed, but it is to say that systems of oppression impede the full expression of our humanity for all of us. We, therefore, all have incentive to dismantle the systems, even if we receive some benefits from them. Wise and Case outline some of the costs of privilege for dominant groups, including: 1) a loss of connection to one's ethnicity and cultural heritage; 2) deep racial biases even when one does not want to have them; 3) a sense of expectation and entitlement that can result in despair when it is not granted; 4) isolation from community; and 5) a participation in power dynamics that produce vast inequalities (Wise and Case 2013). All of these costs create psychological stressors. This is NOT to conflate the pain felt by people who are privileged with the suffering of the oppressed. It is, however, to say that we all have a stake in dismantling systems of oppression because they hurt virtually all of us, despite the promised benefits.

These “costs” of privilege are worth discussing a bit further, since they explain why people with privilege would/should be motivated to dismantle privilege. One might wonder, if people receive so many benefits from the system, why they would want to deconstruct it. While it is true that those in the dominant groups accrue a great many advantages from the current system and that some people will want to cling to those privileges, there is also a price to pay. Wise defines this cost in a profound way:

Racism, even if it is not your own, but merely circulates in the air, *changes you*, allows you to think things and feel things that make you less than you were meant to be. It steals that part of our humanity that is the most precious: the part that allows us to see . . . the goodness of creation in all humankind. And our unwillingness to see that, and more than to see it, to really feel it, deep in the marrow of our bones, is what allows us, and even sometimes compels us, to slaughter one another.

(2005, 159, emphasis in original)

The cost to our humanity far outweighs the advantages we receive from our various privileges. To live our privileges means internalizing a dehumanizing sense of others and a false superiority for our own groups that rings hollow over time. Wise discusses what happens when people who are promised entitlements are suddenly faced with disappointment and conflict for which they have never been prepared. The result is often harmful for the privileged individual but also for the broader society, as that person sometimes lashes out in problematic ways.

Privilege signals belonging in a dominant group, but, paradoxically, it also disconnects us from one another and from a holistic identity. We receive privilege not as individuals but as members of a dominant group, but we are never fully in control of whether we are defined as “belonging” to that group. Think, for instance, of a person who identifies as heterosexual but who is “read” as gay; that person will be denied heteronormative privileges even if he is not gay (Johnson 2005). The power of self-definition is not entirely in the individual’s hands. Thus, privilege is, as Allan Johnson (2005) notes, a paradox. Part of the paradox is that the price of “belonging” to a dominant group means forfeiting a sense of ethnic or cultural identity, because by definition, the privileged group usually remains undefined. Wise tells the story of being in a workshop in which participants were asked to describe what they liked or valued about being part of their racial group. All the people of color easily listed attributes about their communities that they felt strengthened them, but all the White people were at a loss to describe any of that. What they listed instead were White privileges, which rang hollow when the two lists were compared. While the people of color in the group described valuing the strength of their families and the camaraderie of their community, for

instance, Whites listed things like not being followed in a store under suspicion of shoplifting. Wise notes that,

none of what we liked about being white had anything to do with us. *None* of it had to do with internal qualities of character or fortitude. Rather, every response had to do less with what we liked about being white than what we liked about *not being a person of color*. We were defining ourselves by a negative, providing ourselves with an identity rooted in the external—rooted in the relative oppression of others, without which we would have had *nothing to say*.

(2011, 170, emphasis in original)

While this cost is not the same as the deeply harmful effects of oppression, it is another price the system extracts: the full expression of our belonging as a cultural group. Ethnic heritage that was once marked as distinct becomes homogenized into whiteness, seemingly devoid of characteristics except for how it is not something defined as “undesirable.” As Wise (2011) notes, many Whites come from ethnic groups that have rich histories and cultures—often even histories of resistance to oppressive systems—but all of that has to be erased as the price of admission to whiteness. Similar points can be made about membership in other dominant groups. All things considered, I do not think the benefits of privilege even come close to outweighing these costs.

Let me reiterate again that I am not in any way suggesting that people who are privileged suffer in the same way or to the same degree as people who are oppressed. But we cannot expect people who are privileged to automatically give up those privileges out of altruism. To recognize the wounds of the privileged does not need to mean supplanting the suffering of the oppressed nor does it have to mean shifting the spotlight from one to another. The framework that says there is only room in a discussion for the suffering of the most wounded creates a poverty of humanity. It also makes it impossible for everyone in the room to fully show up and do their work of unlearning oppression. Most of the great mindfulness teachers have taught this lesson. The renowned Buddhist monk and scholar Pema Chödrön notes that “injustice, by definition, is harming everybody involved” (2007, 24). This realization is a powerful incentive to deconstruct privilege.

Moreover, the rewards of privilege are not entirely granted to every member of the dominant group. I am not talking here of “exceptions” to the pattern, the atypical examples students will often cite to try to invalidate the larger cultural patterns. Instead, I am referring to the failed promises of privilege that leave a deep mark on many people, wounds that do not have names and that are often obscured by the myth of meritocracy. Many people do not receive the full benefits that are promised by systems of oppression, and the myth of meritocracy leaves

them blaming themselves instead of seeing the deep flaws in the system. The next section outlines one such case for a student in one of my Women's Studies classes.

The Broken Promises of Privilege

The most common reactions I hear my colleagues describe as "resistance" (an idea which I will discuss in greater detail in the next chapter) comes from members of dominant groups who presumably do not want to acknowledge their privilege. Over the years, I have come to realize that often a great deal is going on underneath the surface of those outward reactions. For instance, one of my students wrote a paper for a Women's Studies class that illustrates some of the complexity of what might be going on for such a student. I will spend some time on this extended example here in order to illustrate how students need space to work through the dissonance that appears as students begin to unlearn oppression and deconstruct their privilege.

This White male student, whom I will call Jim, was a nontraditional-aged college student probably in his late twenties or early thirties. He did not speak much in class, though his first comment helped break the ice in our class discussions by making it "real." He had made a statement that expressed a different opinion than my own and then acknowledged with some surprise how vulnerable he felt doing so. This comment revealed a layer of self-consciousness that we often do not see when talking about White male privilege. During the first part of class, he explained that he had been injured on the job and was now living with a disability.

About a third of the way into the semester, he wrote a paper for me on masculinity. He had mentioned that he was searching for a new form of masculinity because he realized that the one he had been taught no longer included him. The story he told and the uncertainties he explored in the paper illustrated to me a complex process of unraveling privilege and a search for a new way of being. It also revealed the tensions and dissonance that are usually a messy but integral part of the process.

His paper described growing up in an abusive home, in which his father regularly beat him and his mother. He described feeling powerless to stop his father hurting his mother, noting that in the town in which he lived, cops did not arrest other cops. At one point in his teens, he fought with another young man (on the advice of his father) and ended up in the criminal justice system with a record.

Eventually, Jim decided to join the military to get away from the small town—an interesting choice, given how hurt he had already been by systems of hypermasculinity. But he was a working class young man, and joining the military offered options where few were available. While in the military, he described being passed over for promotion. The position, he wrote, was given to a Black person "because of affirmative action." Of course, this false interpretation of how affirmative action works reflects White privilege and institutionalized racism. It is

also one of the ways the system pits working class Whites against people of color. But there is more to the story.

When he left the military, he decided to be a police officer so that he can help people—another interesting choice since law enforcement and criminal justice agencies had not necessarily served him well thus far. Jim mentioned in the paper how angry he became in our class discussions in which he felt people "bashed" cops for racial profiling. He acknowledged that some officers abuse their power but argued that many are good guys and that only someone who serves on the streets everyday knows what it is like working with the worst elements of society day in and day out. Other police officers have echoed his comments, noting that it is tricky to avoid becoming hardened when one is working with such awful situations day in and day out, usually in a state of hypervigilance. The toll that takes on a person's ability to remain open and compassionate is significant and speaks to a flaw in the system of law enforcement itself (Maples 2015).

This student went on in his paper to describe the incident in which he was injured in the line of duty. He tried to intervene in a domestic dispute, even though his backup had not yet arrived, and ended up being assaulted by two men. The event put him on disability but also caught him in a system of having to fight for benefits because he had not "followed protocol." The student noted how deeply he felt his masculinity is regularly challenged because his disability is not one that is "visible," so people question why he cannot work. He said he feels like less of a man because he cannot support his family.

What struck me when reading this paper is the dissonance he felt as he struggled with the ways he received privilege and the ways that promise of privilege failed him. On the one hand, this student repeatedly noted how the constructions of masculinity have failed him and are no longer available to him. I see them as the broken promises of whiteness and masculinity. He had been handed a script, but the system repeatedly denied him the promised benefits of that script and ultimately made it impossible for him to play that role. Simultaneously, however, he repeatedly strives to play the part: joining the military, becoming a cop. The choice to go into a dangerous system alone, in violation of protocol, on the one hand illustrates a kind of cowboy mentality that is common of our Western male heroes. On the other hand, in his description of it, it seemed to come from a deep childhood wound and it dramatically backfired. The paper described his repeated attempts to perform the cultural scripts of White masculinity. He keeps being attracted to its promises, at the same time that he is able to say quite clearly how it has failed him. He is having to unearth the deep roots of this paradigm even while trying to find or create a new script, which results in stark contradictions and deep dissonance.

Of course, even with the broken promises of White masculinity, he has still benefited from privilege. Had he been a working class Black man living some of those experiences, he would likely be in jail or killed. Black men do not get the

breaks he got. But recognizing that inequality does not have to mean minimizing his experience, and I think we teachers impede transformational learning if we suggest that it does. His hurt and disillusionment need to be acknowledged before he will be able to see the ways he is privileged. The system hurts many people, not just the ones who are most deeply oppressed, and rather than continuing to pit the different groups against each other, we would be more effective if we can help our students see that. As a teacher reading this paper, I felt I needed to give the student the space to be in the confusing uncertainty of his soft edge. Had he stated the affirmative action comment aloud in a class discussion, I would have challenged it more explicitly, so as not to seem to condone it. But because he wrote it in a paper to me, and because I knew I still had the rest of the semester with him, I challenged it less directly, choosing to give him the space for his complex reaction. If I had simply framed his response as the "resistance" of a White guy to seeing his racism, I believe I would have missed the deep complexity of what was happening. And, I think, I would have shut down his transformational learning process rather than helping to facilitate it. In the next section, I outline the mindfulness skills that can help both students and faculty effectively dismantle privilege.

Mindfully Interrupting Privilege

The question becomes, then, how to more effectively allow for this complex unlearning process in the classroom without reinforcing or perpetuating privilege, a challenge that becomes even more complex when we realize that oppression, internalized oppression, and privilege will show up for different students at different times and in different ways.

In her article "Blazing the Trail: Teaching the Privileged about Privilege," Lisa F. Platt offers three basic tips for addressing privilege in the classroom: 1) "make it personal; 2) make it relevant; and 3) manage emotional responses" (2013, 207). While all three tenets are, I agree, critical to helping students unlearn their privilege, they will be of limited effectiveness if we utilize them only at the cognitive level. Even Platt's point about "managing emotions" is revealing, since it is mostly framed as teachers managing students' outwardly expressed anger, guilt, fear, and other defensive reactions. This approach sends the message that such reactions are "problems" to be "handled." A more effective approach, I suggest, is to help students understand that privilege—and the defensive reactions that emerge to keep it in place—are the inevitable byproducts of living in an inequitable society. If students get clear on the deep costs of privilege, for themselves and for those who are oppressed by it, they will be far more motivated to dismantle it.

The first step, as always, is to see clearly what is happening, without reacting, without judging—just clear awareness. We need to teach students how to listen to their own inward responses with clear awareness. Rather than "managing" emotions, I prefer to strive for a kind of emotional intelligence that allows students

themselves to learn to discern what is happening for them and why. Only then, I argue, will we begin to dismantle the safety mechanisms that keep privilege intact. This skill needs to be modeled by the teacher (an idea that I will discuss in a moment), but it ultimately needs to be learned by the students so that they learn to sit with and understand their own internal reactions, which, in turn, will actually have the effect of "managing" external displays of defensive emotions. Helping students learn to hear their own complex reactions will help achieve Platt's outlined pedagogical goals of "(a) increasing awareness and knowledge of awareness; (b) increase empathy and compassion for those who do not possess privilege; and (c) promote action for initiating societal change in the future" (2013, 208).

In order to cultivate this awareness, students need to practice cultivating the Witness that we discussed in the previous chapter. After gaining some experience with merely observing and disidentifying from the emotions and physiological responses, we can bring another layer into the mindful unlearning process: deep, contemplative listening. Let me be clear that ALL students need to practice the skills of the Witness and deep listening; I am not saying that only those with internalized oppression need to Witness or only those with privilege need to learn to listen more profoundly. All these steps are necessary for the unlearning of oppression, but they need to be developed incrementally. Students usually need to become familiar with one or two parts of the process at a time and then develop it further, or they become overwhelmed. Critical for each step of the process is the meta-level. As teachers who are implementing this process, we need to explain why we are integrating mindfulness into social justice courses and how it works. Students will be far more likely to sit with the process if they understand how and why it works, particularly in the context of oppression.

So why is listening so important to dismantling privilege? Because many of the defensive tools that I have already described that emerge to keep privilege intact and invisible occur at an intense and usually precognitive level. They provoke strong emotions that most people do not know what to do with, especially early in their journey of learning about oppression. Even for those who have been on a social justice path for years, the subtlety of the reactions require increasingly refined emotional intelligence to unpack. Layered upon those gut reactions are the storylines used to keep privilege intact: ideologies such as the myth of meritocracy, blaming the victim, or entitlement that explain away the critiques of privilege. Those of us who teach social justice classes have likely seen these reactions emerge intensely in class discussions about privilege. These are the reactions that shift discussions of oppression from marginalized experiences to those of the dominant groups. The inability to see how deeply privilege manifests usually produces intense frustration, pain, and anger from those who are marginalized, which, when expressed, often causes those with privilege to dig their heels in and/or shut down. What is needed in these moments are mindfulness skills that allow us to listen more fully to ourselves and others.

It may seem counterintuitive, but the first step in learning how to effectively and authentically listen to others is to learn how to listen to ourselves. If we expect students to be able to truly listen to the perspectives of their classmates and to interrupt their privilege, then they need to become very adept at listening to their own defense mechanisms that arise to keep privilege in place. Those defenses are very loud, usually preventing an individual from hearing what else is happening. Contemplative listening can help a person Witness what is arising for him/her/zie without overidentifying with it. Instead, the student can learn to listen deeply and with curiosity to the embodied responses and the accompanying ideological storylines. This process can help students resist initial outward reactions and help them feel more empowered to dismantle the socially constructed narratives that, as we have already seen, are limiting their humanity.

Many academic scholars and psychologists talk about active listening, which involves empathy, attention, caring, receptivity (Brady 2003). But the form of contemplative listening I am invoking here goes deeper. This form of listening starts from a place of self-awareness. We cannot be truly open to others' perspectives if we are not attuned to what arises for us that may block that openness. Particularly in hard conversations, those barriers are likely to arise, and we need to be aware of them so that we do not feed them. Deep listening comes from a place of receptivity that is open, attentive, and calm (Rome and Martin, n.d.). It involves a radical openness—both in terms of receptivity and in terms of an open heart. It is a skill that students can learn that, when practiced, becomes an “attentive rather than a reactive listening” (Barbezat and Bush 2014, 138). It requires that we learn to sit in a place of uncertainty, that we learn to be in the process of learning which, paradoxically, means accepting the state of not knowing. This form of listening comes from a place of inquiry rather than certainty. When we are listening deeply, we approach the conversation from a place of belief that the other person is communicating something important to them. “Trust here does not imply agreement, but the trust that whatever others say, regardless of how well or poorly it is said, comes from something true in their experience” (Rome and Martin 2014).

David Rome and Hope Martin (2014) distinguish between poor listeners and deep listeners. The former, they write, are generally preoccupied with how the conversation affects them. They tend to spend their time awaiting their turn to speak and planning what they will say, rather than truly focusing on the speaker (Rome and Martin 2014). Because they are preoccupied with how the narrative affects them (though they are often unaware that this is their focus), they typically respond by either restating already formed opinions or debating the person to whom they are supposed to be listening (Rome and Martin 2014). Those of us who teach in social justice classrooms have seen both of these modes at work in class discussions.

Effective listening, on the other hand, means being receptive to new perspectives and truly focused on trying to hear what someone else is trying to say, both

on the surface level of content and on the deeper level of intention (Rome and Martin 2014). This receptivity is much closer to what we strive for in social justice classrooms because it draws on the “radical openness” that hooks describes. Rome and Martin’s model of Embodied Listening includes three central components: mindfulness to cultivate self-awareness; the Alexander Technique, to ease tension and cultivate an embodied awareness; and mindful focusing, which lets you access the “felt sense” or “intuitive wisdom of the body” (Rome and Martin 2014). Whether deep listening uses this particular model, the embodied nature of listening is critical for discerning when ideologies of privilege motivate our actions and for tapping into a deeper wisdom, beneath those storylines.

Though it draws on a different tradition and uses different language, the mindful focusing in the Embodied Listening model is akin to the yogic traditions of the *koshas*. *Koshas* are the layers of the subtle body, though most of us only access the outer, grosser or more material levels (Johnsen 2014). The most accessible *kosha* is the physical body, called the *annamaya kosha*. This is the one accessed through physical yoga practice, but the purpose of doing so is to be able to connect with the increasingly subtle layers beneath it. The next *kosha*, or “sheath,” is the *pranamaya kosha*, which refers to the breath. This is why so many yogic practices involve breath work, because *prana* is considered the life force energy. Our third layer of the body is the *manomaya kosha* or the thought body. This is thinking mind, but it is also the entire nervous system. The last two *koshas* are far more subtle and, therefore, require regular practice to access. *Vijnanamaya kosha* refers to the higher mind, including conscience and will. It is the discerning, higher, best self that is in every one of us. This is the level of connection we can ultimately strive to connect through if we are to truly create a socially just society. Most of the time, we operate on the layer of *manomaya kosha*, but the thinking mind is informed by the ideologies of the culture in which we are embedded. The *vijnanamaya kosha* is a more authentic self. The final, deepest, *kosha* is the *anandamaya kosha*, which refers to the bliss body (Johnsen 2014; Judelle personal communication, November 29, 2013; Devanadi Yoga Teacher Training 2014). Each of these sheaths exist within the other one, like Russian nesting dolls. We have all of them all the time, but we are most aware of the most material ones, the ones closest to the surface. If we can learn to access our higher, discerning self, we would, ideally, bring our “best selves” to anti-oppression work.

Few students will come into our classes knowing how to listen in this deep way. It is a skill that they will need to learn and that is, fundamentally, a radical act. Norman Fisher describes the act of listening in the following way:

to listen is to be willing to be simply present with what you hear without trying to figure it out or control it Because truly listening requires that you do this, listening is dangerous. It might cause you to hear something you don't like, to consider its validity, and therefore to think something you

never thought before. . . . This is the risk of listening, and this is what it is automatic for us to not want to listen.

(qtd. in Barbezat and Bush 2014, 137)

It is dangerous to listen not only because we might consider new ideas but also because we might begin to question our very self-concepts and realize how infused they often are with systems of oppression. We might be motivated, then, to dismantle them. Rather than immediately shoring up our self-concepts when they are challenged, this mindful practice allows us to sit with the uncertainty and discomfort that arises in that moment and learn to probe, explore, and question what is happening for us, what function those defensive mechanisms serve, how they manifest in our body, and whether they let us open up or close down.

It may seem counterintuitive to listen without trying to figure it out or control it. After all, we want students to interrupt their privilege, right, so what is with this nonjudgmentalness? This step in deep listening works much the same way accepting our reactions to internalized oppression works: we have to first truly listen, without laying any interpretive storylines atop them, if we are to discern what is happening. When we listen deeply, “we let go of our inner clamoring and our usual assumptions and listen with respect for precisely what is being said” (Barbezat and Bush 2014, 137). As soon as we start to “spin” it, we move into our thinking mind, which is already shaped by systems of oppression. The conceptual frameworks through which we make sense of the world are learned, which means they are likely shaped by oppressive ideologies. Moreover, moving into the intellectual mind too quickly usually takes us out of our embodied experience—that disconnect between mind/body/heart is also a learned fragmentation that supports systems of oppression. We disconnect from our own entirely human experience and, therefore, it becomes easier to dehumanize others. In order to interrupt that fragmenting process, we need to first learn to just stay present with whatever is happening, listen and reflect, and accept. Once we do those steps, *then* we can intellectualize, analyze, and politicize. We can then determine which responses are in line with our vision of how we want the world to be. But first, we just listen, with our whole bodies and hearts. As the yoga teacher Tara Judelle points out, “we can’t listen if we aren’t present” (personal communication, November 29, 2013).

Contemplative Listening as a Way of Building Compassionate Classroom Communities

I can already hear some critics arguing that this mindfulness skill puts the focus back on the privileged person thereby perpetuating the marginalization of the oppressed. This is a valid concern that needs to be monitored and the focus can’t stay there. But learning to really hear and discern how ideologies of privilege manifest within ourselves (for any of us who hold any form of privilege) is

important for several reasons. First, as teachers, we expect students to challenge their own privilege and often condemn them if they do not, so it is only ethical to give them the tools they need to dismantle their privilege. Second, the reactions that keep privilege entrenched emerge in our classrooms whether we effectively address them or not. They will continue to exist long after our class ends, since unlearning privilege is a life-long journey. So it makes sense to offer students the tools with which to recognize and interrupt these deeply entrenched ideologies so that they can continue to do this work even after the conclusion of the semester. Third, listening inwardly is the first of several steps in deep listening. It lays the foundation to listen outwardly. While we commonly address the outer layers of voice and listening, social justice class discussions would become far more authentic and effective if we can practice *all* these layers.

Deep listening occurs on multiple levels: first, at the intrapersonal level, which means learning to Witness, be present, and listen to what is happening internally (“Deep Listening” 2014). This is a crucial step in unlearning privilege because we first need to recognize how the narratives of entitlement and fear are embedded into our sense of self. What do they sound like for each of us? When do they arise? What do they urge us to do in order to preserve this privilege? What do they feel like in our bodies? Many of the responses teachers describe in discussions about privilege emerge, I believe, from gut reactions to these internalized narratives of privilege or oppression. So the first step in interrupting them is to listen deeply, with curiosity not judgment, to discern how exactly they show up for ourselves.

The next layers of deep listening are interpersonal and group levels, in which an individual is listening to another person or several individuals are listening to others. The idea here is to withhold judgment or a planning of our own statements and instead give our full attention and awareness to the person who is speaking. This listening is informed by three central principles: “listening to learn; listening for understanding rather than agreement; and ask[ing] powerful questions” (“Deep Listening” 2014). This form of listening enables a much more authentic presence with one another that can build the trust essential for sustainable communities that can dismantle systems of oppression. Because so much of oppression happens in the ways we relate to one another—ways that are learned behaviors—truly receiving one another while suspending our internalized assumptions enables new possibilities to arise (“Deep Listening” 2014).

When practiced at all three levels, deep listening enables a profound bearing witness—something that is vitally important in discussions about social justice. This form of listening is not the way most students understand participating in a discussion, which usually entails listening with one ear while forming one’s own opinion, preparing what one is to say next, or waiting for a point of disagreement. None of these tactics can enable deep listening. Of course, discussion and debating have important roles, especially in a college classroom. But those discussions will become much more profound if students can first learn the skill of listening

deeply to themselves and others with a compassionate presence and receptivity. In his book *Right Listening*, Mark Brady offers several characteristics of this kind of listening, including “listening without an agenda, listening without ‘shoulding on people;’ 3) Establish support for speaking truth to power; . . . avoiding letting your story take over their story” (qtd in Barbezat and Bush 2014, 146–147). These skills bring us closer to what Kramer calls “insight dialogue” that helps us learn to bridge our inner and outer landscapes with the compassionate awareness that “much of our suffering tends to come into relief through our relationships with others” (Barbezat and Bush 2014, 146). It helps relieve the suffering of ourselves and the other person in the conversation, because the point is to listen with the purpose of helping the other person empty his/her/zir heart. This purpose is important, says the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh, because then, even if the person says something hurtful that is full of wrong perception, we can continue to maintain an open and compassionate heart because we remember our purpose. It will be important to help him/her/zir “correct” the wrong perception, but that happens at a later time. In this moment, the point is to try to truly understand his/her/zir perspective and to relieve his/her/zir suffering by listening fully. He says, “the fear, the anger, and the despair is born on the ground of wrong perception. We have wrong perceptions concerning ourselves and the other person, and that is the foundation for conflict and war and violence” (Hanh 2014).

When I was first watching this short but profound video of Thich Nhat Hanh discussing deep compassionate listening, it seemed so clear to me that what so many of my students long for in the classroom is to speak and to be heard. Whether they are describing experiences of oppression or speaking from a place of privilege, they long to be understood—truly heard. What so often prevents that are the learned ideologies that construct an “us” and a “them,” the inner narratives that keep our identities positioned against each other. A critical step in dismantling these power dynamics is to learn to profoundly listen to one another. That requires learning to witness when those narratives of privilege arise and learning to dial them down long enough to really try to understand what the other person is saying. Then we can discuss points of disagreement or debate. It is incumbent for everyone in the room to practice this skill, which means people who are oppressed also need to learn to listen deeply to people who are privileged—not to say that their perspectives count any more than their own, but to hear where they are coming from. This is a deeply difficult process for people on both side of that divide, but it is a critical, mindful step in unlearning oppression.

A couple things can help with this process. The intersectionality framework can help students see where they are privileged and where they are oppressed. Since many of our students will hold identities in both of those categories, they can learn to have more patience and compassion for others. They will likely experience their own difficulty in disrupting the places where they are privileged, for instance, which may allow them to have more patience for their classmates when

they struggle. Similarly, because they know how painful it is to be oppressed, they can form empathy for their classmates as they describe their own pain of marginalization. Even though it will not be the same experience—and certainly should not be conflated—it can become an entry point for empathy and connection.

Second, we can recognize that we will not always be able to remain open, patient, and compassionate. There are times when the oppression is so raw and cumulative that we cannot hold that space, and understanding where that comes from in someone else can help us not react as strongly if we are on the receiving end. This self-awareness is not the same thing as the poor listening described earlier, in which the listener is preoccupied with his/her/zir own retorts. Instead, self-awareness in this context means being deeply aware of how our own responses may be getting in our way of truly listening, combined with a consistent effort to bring our attention back to the speaker with an open heart. This is a skill that needs to be learned, particularly since it is fairly counter-cultural.

The Resistance of Privilege

Once we learn to both witness and listen to what is happening for us in the moment, we can more skillfully work with the “holy pause” I discussed in previous chapters. That pause between reacting and responding allows us to make more intentional choices about which responses we want to feed, remembering that whatever we feed gets stronger. Pema Chödrön teaches us that we can learn, in this pause, to not “bite the hook.” In her book *Practicing Peace in Times of War*, Chödrön describes the force of *shenpa*, which in Buddhist traditions is the source of conflict, cruelty, and oppression. Even if we are not Buddhist and are adopting mindfulness in secular ways, Chödrön’s explanation of *shenpa* and how to mindfully work with it is useful here. *Shenpa*, she writes, is the “charge” behind our negative gut reactions. Say someone criticizes you. What do you feel? She describes its common sensation:

It has a familiar taste, a familiar smell . . . there’s a tightening that rapidly spirals into mentally blaming this person, or wanting revenge or blaming yourself. Then you speak or act. The charge behind the tightening, behind the urge, behind the storyline or action is *shenpa*.

(2007, 56)

The good news is that we can learn to work with this process by learning how to not bite the hook. Mindfulness teaches us to learn to sit with the raw energy underneath the storyline we attach. So, before interpreting, judging, or acting out, we simply learn to listen and sit with the uncomfortable feelings. This will likely be hard for students to learn (for everyone to learn really) because U.S. culture is

flooded with attempts to distract us from discomfort. Sitting with it patiently and with curiosity is the last thing most of us want to do.

Moreover, one of the “benefits” of privilege means that the world is structured in such a way so (not to) protect privileged people from discomfort. Once again, though, this is a false promise. For many people from dominant groups (in fact, possibly for all but the literal 1%), that promise will fail to come through at some point in our lives. When that happens, the ground under us will be unsettled in small or large ways. Discomfort is a part of life and learning to sit with it an important component of resilience. Chödrön describes this discomfort as “the underlying insecurity of the human experience, the insecurity that is inherent in a changing, shifting world” (2007, 58). The urge to react from our gut is a quick fix attempt to run away from that discomfort. If we can practice contacting it, lightly, with curiosity and compassion, we have a better chance of breaking the cycle of oppression and violence that occurs when we “bite the hook.”

For anyone new to mindfulness, this suggestion to listen to and explore the charge underneath our reactions will likely seem abstract and impossible. Even for those of us who are experienced with mindfulness practice, the ability to do this will vary by how deeply a particular comment or event triggers us. We may be able to engage this teaching in less fraught moments but likely will still have trouble with more intense ones. This is part of the process. Here, the meta-explanation is critical for anti-oppression pedagogy. In order for this practice to be effective, we need to explain why we are doing it, elucidate the various common reactions that arise for people, and give students regular opportunities to both practice deep listening and reflect on their experiences of the practice. Here again is a profound parallel between mindfulness and anti-oppression efforts: *what arises for us is the work*. The complex reactions are not things to get past in order to get to the “real” social justice work. The grief, anger, pain, confusion, horror, and denial that arise, along with the storylines we attach to try to avoid sitting with the intensity of those feelings, *is* the work. When we regularly reflect on what arises for us in discussions about oppression, along with our various attempts to examine them through various mindfulness practices, we will learn a great deal about our own role in oppressive systems and how to interrupt it. Only then can we imagine new possibilities into reality.

The majority of the privileged students I have encountered over the years want to believe themselves good people who do not hurt others. To the degree they have thought about it (which may have been very little), students of privilege want to believe that the atrocities of oppression are mostly in the past, or perhaps confined to certain egregious events, but not perpetuated by daily actions and ideologies in which we all participate. To the degree that it still exists, many of them want to believe that they work against injustice. As they start to learn how extensively they benefit from systematic oppression, whether or not they ever do anything explicitly oppressive, they often experience dismay, horror, grief,

and confusion. They can become deeply unsettled as their entitled worldview is shattered. That paradigm includes their very sense of who they are, which then becomes deeply shaken by this process. Inevitable questions start to arise: “I thought I ‘earned’ those accolades because I was more talented than others. What if that’s not why I got them?”

Moreover, unearthing privilege is not like lifting a veil to reveal it all at once. It will likely take years, even a lifetime, to excavate all the vestiges of privilege in various places in their lives, so when students see it in one place, that awareness is weighted by all the other entitlements throughout their lives that counter that awareness.

Naming the privilege is one tool. Analyzing how privilege works is another tool. These are the ones we usually do pretty well in diversity classrooms. But if we go back to Levine’s SIBAM model from Chapter 2, these tools are the latter part of the process. The earlier part of the process is the more embodied part: what emerges emotionally, psychologically, and physiologically when we help students unearth privilege. In the next section, I outline six steps for unlearning privilege.

Tips for Learning to Deeply Listen and Dismantle Privilege

So how do we work with this energy? Chödrön suggests a model based on the four Rs:

1. *Recognize* the Shempa.
2. *Refrain* from scratching.
3. *Relax* with the underlying urge to scratch.
4. *Resolve* to interrupt the momentum like this for the rest of our lives (2007, 63, emphasis in original).

This is an effective model for working with the intense charge to “react,” but since most of our students will be unfamiliar with mindfulness practices, I find that a more context-specific model makes it more relatable and useful for them. In the remainder of this chapter, I will offer a model for students to learn to listen to their own privileged storylines, when they arise, and to sit with the raw energy behind them rather than acting out. I will then conclude with some tips for teachers as they facilitate this model in social justice classrooms.

How to Learn to Listen to the Workings of Privilege

1. Someone has just pointed out how you are privileged. Notice the waters of privilege getting churned. Do not respond verbally or move immediately to outward engagement. Instead, turn inward and listen to what is happening.
2. Pause. Ask for a moment while you listen to your response. Witness your response with curiosity, not judgment. This may only take a moment if the situation does

not allow you to take longer. But try to get a good snapshot of what those churning waters feel like so that you can reflect more deeply on them later.

(Note: This step gets more familiar the more you do it. That is not to say that it gets easier. The intensity of the experience of turning inward will depend on the depth of privilege being unearthed, the role in your own sense of identity that that piece of privilege has, and the amount of pain caused by the entitlement that is granted to you and denied others).

3. Listen to both yourself and to the person speaking. If you do not entirely understand what the person is saying, ask for clarification. Do it in the spirit of inquiry. This is not about asking members of marginalized groups to "educate" you about racism or sexism. It is about getting clear on what they are trying to say to you in the moment.
4. Turn inward. Get familiar with your internal landscape. What is arising for you at this moment? Anger? Defensiveness? Confusion? Grief? Where do you experience those emotions in your body? Do they have a texture? A color? How intense are they? Notice and feel.
5. Cultivate the Witness. Get bigger than the experience. So often, we get consumed by our thoughts and feelings. We think we ARE our thoughts and feelings. When we think that, we often cannot help but act on them. We become overwhelmed by them and so the reaction is immediate. The focus, then, is on the intensity of the emotion and our reactions, along with whatever ripple effects that reaction produces, both internally and externally.

When we can create a pause between our reaction and the acting on it, we can also learn to get bigger than the reaction. We can see the reaction as the inevitable churning that happens when our sense of self is challenged. We can also begin to see that what is getting churned is our *learned sense* of self, not our self itself. *Not our very being*. They are merely the layers of socialization and learned privileges that have been layered upon our being. We can begin to see that each time we peel away another layer of oppression, we can learn to have more choice in what messages we learn and what we choose to integrate into our sense of self. For many of us, the ideologies of privilege were internalized without our even knowing it. So unlearning them means we have more choice about the role we play in the world, how we relate to others, and how we understand ourselves. While the process of unlearning privilege can be deeply unsettling, the potential results are liberating, for marginalized groups and for ourselves.

Tips for Teachers as They Facilitate Deep Listening in Conversations about Privilege

1. Normalize the process. The complex range of emotions, and the difficulties sitting with them, are a natural part of the process. They are how privilege works and we can learn to sit with them.

2. Sitting with the negative charge of sensation when privilege is unsettled is challenging, but we can learn to do it. When we sit with it rather than "biting the hook," the tenor of the raw energy changes and sometimes dissipates. It is a skill that can be learned. Remind students that reacting in habitual ways to privileged narratives is also uncomfortable and comes with deep costs to the humanity of privileged groups and oppressed groups, despite the promised benefits.
3. Model our own process of unlearning privilege, in whatever areas of our identity we might have privilege. Share the mistakes, the denials, and the successes. It can be very helpful to students who are new to this process to learn from the journeys of those of us who have been at this work for quite some time. Being honest and humble about when we do it well and when we "fail" can give permission to students to continue their work even as they stumble along the way. Indeed, normalizing that iterative journey can give them the courage to stay on the path even when it becomes rocky.
4. Help students connect with how deeply they want to be heard. Remind them that all of their classmates also want to be heard that deeply, whatever their experience. This realization gives students an opportunity to empathize with one another, and that empathy goes a long way toward helping them stay in the conversations about oppression even when it is hard.
5. Make very clear distinctions between when we want students to practice deep listening and when we want them to engage in more normative college discussions. Eventually, we can learn to merge the two skills, but in the beginning, it will be important for them to understand when they are supposed to listen from a place of receptivity, inquiry, and with the goal of relieving the suffering of others by really hearing them, and when they are expected to contribute their own thoughts, perspectives, and experiences. Without these clear parameters, students will be unclear about what is expected of them, particularly since deep listening is countercultural in much of academia. Murky boundaries between the two forms of listening, in the beginning when students are learning how to deeply listen, will likely impede the formation of an honest and connected community in the classroom. For instance, one student might take the risk of baring their feelings and experiences, expecting to be deeply heard, when another student responds with opinions rather than listening; the result may cause more conflict and prevent the first student from being that open in future discussions. Clear parameters for when to practice which skill will help prevent that confusion. Students will also become more adept at choosing when to use which skill, which is another important life skill that will serve them long after the completion of the course.
6. When things get messy, model how to navigate the fraught nature of the conversations with compassionate reflection. Remind students (and ourselves) that what comes up for each of us is *the work*. Dismantling privilege

is not easy, or we would have done it by now. When we make mistakes, get upset, feel silenced or frustrated (whether we are privileged or oppressed), we have opportunities to learn from rich moments that are key to the process. The tensions and difficulties are not something to be brushed over; they are something to be compassionately examined and learned from. The stronger the community in the classroom, the more effectively that can be accomplished.

- Remember that this is a lifelong journey. We are learning about deeply entrenched systems of oppression and becoming familiar with deep listening techniques that we can continue to practice long after the end of our classes, indeed, long after students graduate from college. It takes patience and courage to do this work, but it can also be reassuring to recognize that it is a journey that will take quite some time. Accepting that reality makes it far less likely that students will give up when the going gets tough, particularly if we teach them how to meet themselves and their classmates with compassion, wherever they are in their journey.

Parker Palmer writes that, "when we learn how to listen more deeply to others, we can listen more deeply to ourselves" (2004, 121). I believe the reverse is also true.

The mindfulness skill of deep listening allows us to better understand and interrupt our own privilege by preventing many of the defensive reactions that keep privilege intact. In turn, we then learn how to more authentically be present with others. This skill will prove in valuable when we have difficult dialogues and conflict in the classroom. In the next chapter, I will discuss how to reframe student "resistance" in ways that help us more productively unpack what actually happens. The result, I hope, can be more authentic and transformative dialogues, both in our classrooms and in our communities beyond.

Mindfulness Practices

Contemplative Listening

An Hour of Silence

Go someplace where you can sit, undistracted, for an hour. Your phone should be off (except, perhaps, for an alarm set to signal the end of the hour). For one hour, just sit quietly and pay attention to what is happening around you. Listen to the sounds, feel the wind (if you are outside), smell whatever scents float by. Do not interact with anyone; just notice. When you find your attention wandering, gently invite it back to your breath and to the present moment. At the end of the hour, journal for ten minutes about what you noticed and what your experience was.

*Notice whether it was difficult for you to be with silence. Notice what thoughts flooded your mind as distractions.

Contemplative Listening with Community Members

For five minutes, listen to someone else with the full intention of just being present with her/him/zir. Take a few deep, grounding breaths and then turn your full attention to your classmate as she/he/ze tells you about his/her/zir perspective. This is not about what you think about the issue, this is about fully listening to him/her/zir. You will have your chance to speak. For now, as your classmates speak, do your best to be fully present to hear that perspective. Make eye contact, focus on their words and their body language, breathe deeply and evenly. If you notice yourself reacting to what is being said, just take mental note of what is happening for you but keep your focus on her/his/zir perspective. You are bearing witness to them, not engaging in a debate. At the end of five minutes, both of you can pause, close your eyes, and breathe deeply for five slow breaths. Then switch.

After both of you have gone and have taken the five deep breaths, talk about your experience of the activity. Focus on what it felt like to be heard in this way, not on the content of the speech. Reflect on what it felt like to listen in this way. Once both of those reflections have been discussed, then the two participants can discuss the content of what was said, paying particular attention to whether that discussion has a different tenor than most because of the contemplative listening that has occurred. (Note: this last step can be done as a large group as well.)

Like many mindfulness practices, this one will likely work best if students become familiar with it in low-risk situations first. We cannot expect them to be able to practice deep contemplative listening about a loaded topic if they have never practiced it before. But if we start early in the semester with topics such as what our day is like or what we hope to achieve in college, then this practice will be more available and effective later in the semester around more loaded topics.

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