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CLASS ACTION

Using Experiential Learning to Raise Awareness of Social Class Privilege

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Economic inequality in the United States continues to grow. Since the late 1990s, the gap between the “haves” and the “have nots” has widened steadily, and income inequality has reached its highest peak since the Great Depression (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Despite these disparities, scrutiny of social class privilege occurs much less often than critical examinations of other categories of privilege, such as gender, race, ethnicity, or sexuality (American Psychological Association (APA), 2008). Although researchers call for increased attention to social class and economic inequality (e.g., Lott & Bullock, 2007; Williams, 2009), specific pedagogical strategies for examining social class privilege within college classrooms remain rare.

We propose that faculty can successfully teach social class privilege by utilizing experiential learning within a critical, feminist pedagogical framework. Because experiential learning is the process by which knowledge comes from reflection on personal experiences (Kolb, 1984), assignments that allow students to critically examine the unearned power that exists because one belongs (or is perceived to belong) to a middle or higher socioeconomic group will foster awareness of social class privilege. We believe faculty can not only reach their teaching and learning goals by teaching social class privilege using experiential learning, but that with these pedagogical tools they can also work toward the amelioration of the systems that create and maintain privilege.

What is Social Class Privilege?

Researchers define social class in a variety of ways, but the two most common characterizations are either in demographic terms (i.e., as one’s financial wealth, education, or occupation) or as one’s subjective experience (i.e., one’s values,

beliefs and behaviors; see APA, 2007). Yet these definitions lack an emphasis on power, despite the fact that in most societies social class exists within a structure that confers power to those at the top while blocking access for those at the bottom (APA, 2007). Thus, we define *social class* as the organization of people based on a combination of their wealth, values, and social capital wherein those with the most economic resources hold incrementally more power than those with less economic resources (APA, 2008; Lott & Bullock, 2007). We define *social class privilege* as the unearned power that exists because one belongs (or is perceived to belong) to a middle or higher social class group in a system that confers advantage to this status specifically (Liu, Pickett, & Ivey, 2007; Sanders & Mahalingam, 2012).

Which Pedagogies Work Best for Teaching Social Class Privilege?

Faculty can use a number of pedagogical frameworks to examine social class privilege. Although no “right” way to teach social class privilege exists, we find that the most useful pedagogies include feminist or critical frameworks (e.g., Case, Kanenberg, Erich, & Tittsworth, 2012; Weis & Fine, 2012). In general, feminist and critical frameworks examine the attitudes, traditions, behaviors, and institutions that systematically reinforce power and privilege, and they encourage individuals to examine themselves, their social situations, and existing hierarchies (e.g., Collins, 1989; Freire, 1970; hooks, 2000). When used as teaching pedagogies, these frameworks foster collaboration, self-reflection, empowerment, and collective action (e.g., Enns & Forrest, 2005). Thus, faculty should adopt whichever specific frame within the critical, feminist literature that best fits their educational goals.

Personally, I (Wendy) find that “standpoint theory” (Harding, 1986) works well as a frame in my course on the Psychology of Poverty and Social Class. I begin from the position that by ignoring one’s standpoint, one ignores the subjectivity of knowledge (Harding, 2004). To illustrate this, I discuss Harding’s (1997) example of a stick floating in the middle of a large body of water. At first, the stick may appear long and bent, but, if you walk around the body of water, thus changing your perspective, the stick may appear straighter or shorter than it had only a moment before. No “correct” perspective exists, and each interpretation of the shape of the stick reflects one’s standpoint. Thus, every standpoint in the classroom, whether a specific role (e.g., teacher, student) or position within the larger social class structure (e.g., low income, middle class), offers a valid perspective for interpreting social class, and the presence of those perspectives leads to a more nuanced view of social class privilege. Although a student who expresses a privileged perspective (e.g., “poor people are just lazy”) might find validation by the use of this framework, when they hear alternative perspectives voiced by other participants (e.g., “tax breaks for the super-rich cost us millions each year”), it becomes hard for those same students to believe that their perspective is the only perspective, or even the “correct” one. When these instances arise, I remind

students that just as our knowledge about the “true” shape of the stick depends on the number of perspectives we consider, our knowledge about social class privilege and the way it shapes our class-consciousness depends upon the perspectives of people from all social strata. Thus, I find using critical and feminist frameworks (such as standpoint theory) allows students to examine the concept of “truth” and the ways in which “truth” fluctuates according to our position within society (Markowitz, 2005).

What are Learning Goals for Teaching Social Class Privilege?

When teaching social class privilege, faculty may use a variety of learning goals including those that focus on content, skills, and values. Table 11.1 provides an example that can aid pedagogical planning around social class privilege.

I (Wendy) find that I can elucidate the core ideas of my pedagogy through the expression of my course goals and outcomes (e.g., identification of structural barriers, recognizing others’ standpoints, critical reflection, taking action), and so I include a chart like Table 11.1 within my syllabus. Equally, I (Kala) find that this format gives me, as a student, valuable guidance when reflecting on my academic

TABLE 11.1

	<i>Learning Goal</i>	<i>Students Will:</i>	<i>Assignment Related to Goal</i>
<i>Content</i>	Provide information on the way in which systems of privilege create and maintain social class inequalities	Identify structural barriers that prevent mobility at various life stages and explain the way in which these structures reify privilege for individuals within different social strata	Response papers, classroom discussion of readings, and the final exam
<i>Skills</i>	Encourage the application of course content to the “real world” by examining social class privilege in everyday experiences	Use critical reflection on experiential learning to express the way in which psychological research on social class privilege and standpoint theory can be applied to daily life	Experiential learning critical reflections essays, in-class discussions, and the final exam
<i>Values</i>	Foster social change for low-income people by challenging social class privilege	Demonstrate increased social sensitivity and empathy for low-income individuals by taking action with them or on their behalf to confront systems that foster and maintain social class privilege	Performance in service-learning hours and final service-learning project

and service experiences, and helps me make my written assignments more thoughtful. By articulating for students (a) clear learning goals, (b) the ways in which learning gets evaluated by the instructor, and (c) which specific assignments achieve these goals, students can identify the links between the theory, pedagogy, and assignments.

How Do I Put this Pedagogy into Action?

To examine social class privilege, professors can help students recognize where they and others stand within these systems. When students understand the impact of privilege on a personal level (i.e., who possesses power and why), they then appreciate the need for fighting against systemic oppression. In particular, challenging social class privilege requires disputing the commonly held belief of meritocracy, where the allocation of resources results from hard work and perseverance rather than depending on one's birth within the social class structure (Liu et al., 2007). Because privilege is often invisible to those who possess privilege (McIntosh, 1988), faculty need to utilize assignments that illuminate the way in which the system creates and maintains unearned benefits for those with higher social class standing. Although faculty can effectively teach social class privilege in a number of ways, we find that experiential learning with structured reflection most effectively elicits an awareness of, and a willingness to challenge, social class privilege.

Experiential Learning

Faculty can put critical and feminist pedagogies into practice by using experiential learning as a tool for helping students understand social class privilege. Drawing on the work of John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget, Kolb (1984) defines experiential learning as the process by which knowledge is generated as a direct result of reflection on personal experiences. Research consistently finds that experiential learning improves students' understanding of material as well as other personal outcomes (see Kolb & Kolb, 2012, for an extensive, three-volume bibliography of experiential learning research). Activities that foster experiential learning allow students to think critically about "truth" and the way it relates to their own and others' experiences. Readings, papers, class activities, and service-learning provide excellent platforms for experiential learning about social class privilege (Kolb & Kolb, 2012).

Readings and Reflections

We find that readings on critical and feminist analyses of privilege give students the language to deconstruct their own and others' personal experiences. The experiential learning comes not from the reading itself, but from the reflection on

the reading. With reflection, students cannot receive the information passively, but rather must consider it carefully and thoughtfully.

We believe faculty can effectively teach social class privilege using class discussion to aid students' reflection on readings. For example, in McIntosh's (1988) widely taught article, she argues that privilege is an "invisible knapsack" that allows the privileged to live in a very different world than those without privilege. When I (Wendy) assign McIntosh's (1988) article, I ask students to consider their standpoint as they read (e.g., What do you think is the author's most important point? What critique do you have of the author's argument? What questions remain for you after reading this article?). Then, I encourage students to share their thoughts during class discussion. In this way, I can both determine students' ability to grasp the author's ideas, and I can foster the exchange of perspectives. Students, in turn, see the way in which their original perspective reflects their own standpoint, but also that others express different standpoints which they must consider during discussion.

Moreover, because McIntosh's (1988) article addresses white, male, and heterosexual privilege, students use the insight gained from discussing these forms of privilege to unpack social class privilege during our discussion. In particular, I (Wendy) ask students to create a list of "class privileges" as part of the discussion, and we compare our list to similar lists inspired by McIntosh's (1988) work (e.g., Liu et al., 2007). I find that, as a result of peer input, students report that the experience raises their awareness of privilege to a new level (even for those who already understand privilege). For example, when I (Kala) participated in this activity in Wendy's classroom, the experience helped me understand not only my classmates' background, but also helped to situate my own class background within the social setting of a college classroom. I was better able to understand both my privileges and disadvantages in relation to my fellow students.

Finally, the article provides me (Wendy) with an opportunity to push students to identify the ways in which race, gender, and social class privilege intersect (Collins, 1989; Crenshaw, 1989). Research supports that experiential learning enhances students' understanding of the daily impact of social class as it intersects with other social identities like race, ethnicity, and gender (Espino & Lee, 2011), and I find that this type of sustained reflection on readings during class discussion leads students to consider their intersectionality. Through the process of reading and reflecting on the assigned articles, students grapple with social class privilege as well as intersection with other standpoints.

Paper Assignments

By writing about, and reflecting on, their own personal experiences, students can engage in experiential learning about social class privilege. Writing provides an avenue for students to learn about the numerous ways social class shaped their instructor's and peers' past, present, and future. It also provides powerful, personal

evidence for the students to draw on when they critically write about their own social class privilege. For example, I (Wendy) ask students to read my “social class autobiography” prior to class (see the Appendix at the end of this chapter). In class, we then discuss my personal narrative of moving through social class boundaries, and we connect it to the idea of personal standpoint and social class privilege. Students then come to the next class ready to share their own “social class autobiography.” By writing a narrative that gives examples of class privilege or deprivation in their own life, students demonstrate their critical reflection on their own experiences with social class. In discussing each student’s narrative, students make connections between personal experiences and academic theories. Finally, at the end of the course, I ask students to revise their narratives, including any new insights gained about their own social class privilege. In this way, students learn from others’ experience of social class privilege and take sustained time to reflect on their own privilege (or lack thereof). I find that I gain a greater sense of my students’ social class backgrounds through this kind of assignment. I also find that writing assignments like this allow students to share their diverse experiences with privilege (or deprivation) in a non-threatening way. For instance, I find that shy, private, or extremely privileged or deprived students will not necessarily share personal stories spontaneously in a class discussion, but that they more frequently share their experiences if they write about them first.

As an illustration of the effectiveness of using reflection on writing, after reading Wendy’s social class encounters (see Appendix), I (Kala) remembered my own experience with lunchroom social class politics. One of my friends in high school ate breakfast every day in the school cafeteria, and one day she invited me to join her and talk before class. In my high school, the students who ate breakfast at school were stigmatized as “poor” and pitied because they relied on the school for an additional meal. Although I ate breakfast with my friend, I tried my best to “lay low” so that my other friends would not see me. Reading Wendy’s experience in the cafeteria prompted me to remember this similar example from my own life. Through the “social class autobiography” exercise, I made an important connection between the internalization of dominant social class narratives, stigma, and the concealability of social class. It prompted me to examine why I engaged in the same problematic behavior as those with greater social class privilege. I realized I internalized the implicit message that being low income is a negative trait. Thus I was motivated both to conceal my status as a working-class student and to judge those who did not conceal their low-income status. Through reflection, I could see both my former standpoint and the way in which the course changed my perspective.

Activities

The report of APA’s Task Force (2008) concerning “resources for the inclusion of social class in psychology curricula” provides one of the few sources of materials

for teaching social class privilege. Although faculty can use this report as a helpful resource, the text itself does not describe ways to include these ideas within a critical, feminist pedagogical framework of privilege. Because the report describes in detail a number of activities that can raise awareness of social class privilege (e.g., classroom exercises, fiction, film, television, music, and websites), the following section will detail an additional online resource created after the report to illustrate the way in which activities (like those in the APA Task Force report) can foster awareness of social class privilege.

An online activity called “Spent” provides a glimpse into what millions of low-income people experience every month (<http://playspent.org/>). The game asks you to imagine that you are a recently unemployed single parent with only \$1,000 in savings. You then make a series of choices to determine if you can survive until the end of the month without running out of money or experiencing a major personal crisis (e.g., losing your job, your car, your health, or your principles). This virtual reality forces students to wrestle with their privilege by challenging their implicit beliefs and assumptions about the choices that low-income people make. When I use this activity, I find that, although students can intellectually understand poverty, and some experience it themselves, the process of making difficult choices (e.g., Do I give money to my child for her school trip or put gas in my car?) allows for a new level of understanding of the issue of class privilege. For example, students comment on the fact that, even though it was a computer simulation, they struggled with their choices. Moreover, having to place themselves in someone else’s shoes provides students with an opportunity to reflect on their standpoint before, during, and after the simulation. Students report that playing this “game” makes a stronger impact on them than just theoretically discussing social class privilege or standpoint theory. In this way, students use reflection on new experiences to make connections with theoretical concepts (see also www.classism.org/resources for additional sources of activities).

Service Learning

Researchers define service learning as a subtype of experiential learning that increases students’ academic understanding and personal growth by having them engage in a community project that benefits both the student and the community (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Furco, 1996). More specifically, in discipline-based service learning, students work at a community placement relevant to course content over the span of the semester (Heffernan, 2001). In addition to well-planned placements, research finds that structured reflection makes discipline-reflective service learning successful (Conway, Amel, & Gerwien, 2009; Hatcher & Bringle, 1997). Through structured assignments (e.g., readings, papers, projects), students reflect on the ways their experiences in the community compare and contrast to content in their discipline. Thus, service learning provides an opportunity for students to engage in experiential learning outside of the campus community.

In order to effectively illuminate social class privilege, faculty should carefully consider which placements best meet both course goals and community needs (Stoecker, Tyron, & Hilgendorf, 2009). I (Wendy) find social service agencies that provide shelter, clothing, and food ideal for studying social class privilege, but that students can only make necessary connections with course content when they work together with staff and clients (i.e., hear their standpoints). For example, effective assignments may include taking meals to senior citizens, playing with children at a low-income daycare center, or helping women receiving public assistance craft personal résumés (see also Dunlap, Scoggin, Green, & Davi, 2007; Tallant, 2011). Each of these service-learning environments provides opportunities for students to interact with low-income people and confront their beliefs about social class and privilege. At the same time, these placements benefit the community by assisting agencies in meeting their existing social justice goals (Leiderman, Furco, Zapf, & Goss, 2003). Faculty must converse openly with community partners to establish that students' work differs from other volunteer work (i.e., students need assignments that meet their learning goals) and to determine whether students can provide the type of assistance the agency needs (i.e., students' assignments accomplish needed tasks; Stoecker et al., 2009).

As with other experiential learning, faculty can enhance student understanding by requiring reflection on the service-learning component (Conway et al., 2009; Hatcher & Bringle, 1997), so faculty should plan to devote several class meetings (i.e., before the service starts, while in progress, and after completion) to reflection on social class privilege within students' placements. For example, without clear guidance from faculty, students may label their work as "charity." Students may think they are serving people who are unable to help themselves, rather than conceptualizing their service learning as working with a community organization to bring about social change. To prevent this outcome, community partners and their constituents should be treated as co-educators and equal stakeholders (Eby, 1998; Stoecker et al., 2009). Faculty should include community partners in the creation of the service-learning assignments so that the work benefits the community (Leiderman et al., 2003). This type of collaboration makes the distinction between working for and working with the organization clear to students. I (Wendy) reinforce the view of community partners as co-educators when I ask them to guest lecture and provide input on student final grades (e.g., the amount of credit students deserve for their work in the community). Finally, conceptualizing community partners as co-educators provides an opportunity to add important additional "standpoints" to the course.

Additionally, structured reflection allows faculty to deal with the potential problem of students developing individualistic explanations for structural problems (e.g., explaining poverty as laziness rather than a lack of well-paying jobs) or unintended reinforcement of stereotypes while at their service placements (Eby, 1998). Reflection allows faculty to raise students' awareness of their own biases and encourage students to ensure that their work in the community ameliorates

disadvantage rather than upholds privilege. For example, in my (Wendy's) experience, students often feel trepidation about working in the community, particularly with low-income populations. To examine their biases and assumptions, I ask students to write about their expectations for the service learning at the start of the semester (e.g., What do you want to gain from service learning? What do you expect from your placement? What questions or fears do you have about going to your site or engaging in service learning?). After they go to their placement, I ask students to record whether their site looks like what they expected and the ways that their placement either met or fell short of their expectations. Finally, at the end of the semester, I ask them to consider their previous answers by comparing and contrasting what they wrote to what they experienced. Students frequently report that repeatedly considering their assumptions adds layers of insight to their understanding of social class privilege. Repeated reflection allows students to examine the ways in which their own standpoint changed over time. Furthermore, this process makes it difficult for students to hold onto individualistic explanations because they use standpoint theory to broaden their understanding of the causes and consequences of social class privilege.

When I (Kala) was in Wendy's class, I was placed at a daycare facility in which all of the children's families were below the poverty line, and the majority (90%) of the children were African American. Therefore, many of my experiences highlighted my social class and white privilege. In one instance, I put a child in "time out" for exhibiting "bad" behavior, but I was reprimanded by the daycare staff, most of whom were also low income and African American, who said it was not my place to discipline the students. In my reflections on this event in class, I processed through my initial shock and offense at having been reprimanded to gain an understanding of the staff's rationale. I was an outsider because of my social class and ethnicity, as well as my volunteer (i.e., temporary) status. I realized that what I perceived as "bad" behavior and "appropriate" punishment (i.e., a "time out") may not coincide with the cultural norms of the daycare center. Finally, I realized that discipline should come from a regular staff member who shared the student's race and social class, rather than from a White (relatively wealthy and educated) stranger. I doubt I would have examined the multiple layers of privilege embedded in my reaction to this instance if not for the input of other students in the course.

Thus, through a variety of experiential learning techniques, students better understand social class privilege because they connect their subjective experience and standpoint, before, during, and after the experience, with the course information by reflecting on the connections between these pieces. Therefore, in terms of course objectives, experiential learning with structured reflection can facilitate a deeper and multifaceted understanding of social class privilege. It allows students to examine their own and others' positions, to interrogate the "truth," and to deconstruct the factors that lead to the creation and reification of privilege.

What are the Challenges of Teaching Social Class Privilege?

Multiple challenges come with the pedagogical approaches described above. To aid faculty interested in using experiential activities, the following section describes challenges and provides suggestions for overcoming each. We find the four most common challenges include lack of faculty time, insufficient institutional support, student resistance, and unintended negative consequences to communities and disadvantaged students.

First, incorporating experiential learning into one's teaching takes significant time. Although no shortcut to lessen the work involved exists, faculty can use the opportunities created through their innovative teaching techniques to demonstrate tenure requirements. For example, I (Wendy) developed a relationship with a domestic violence shelter because of my service-learning course. As a result of that partnership, I collected data for them and, with their approval, presented my findings at a conference. I also joined their board of directors. I then documented all this work as part of my teaching, research, and service tenure requirements.

Second, because experiential learning often involves additional costs (i.e., increased faculty time, transportation of students, expenses associated with projects), faculty need financial support. Yet even institutions that provide some funding rarely provide enough support to offset all costs. Because administrators often lack awareness of the positive outcomes achieved through experiential learning techniques, faculty can argue effectively in support of experiential learning by demonstrating that research supports the effectiveness of these techniques (Kolb & Kolb, 2012). For example, a dean may be able to find money to support a service-learning project if the faculty articulates the benefits of this experience to the students and the community. A number of resources (both curricular and financial) exist that can aid faculty in demonstrating the effectiveness of service learning, including the websites for the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (www.servicelearning.org), Campus Compact (www.campuscompact.org), and the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* (www.umich.edu/~mjcsl).

Third, faculty may encounter resistance from students who see experiential learning as "extra work" or who deny that they possess unearned privilege (Case & Cole, this volume). If students see that the experiential learning is integral to their understanding of social class privilege, faculty can overcome resistance to experiential learning as "extra work." As discussed above, placing experiential learning in the course objectives and connecting it explicitly to learning goals in the syllabus, as well as in specific assignments through the semester, make the importance of experiential learning to the course content clear to students (Howard, 2001).

As far as recognizing privilege, students may accept that inequality exists but resist acknowledging personal privilege and, in rare cases, even engage in hostile backlash against the curricula (Case & Cole, this volume; Espino & Lee, 2011; Gotell & Crow, 2005; Tatum, 1992). Privileged individuals may feel guilt after

being introduced to the concept, leading to denial of social class privilege to assuage their feelings of responsibility for inequality (Abrams & Gibson, 2007; Gillespie, Ashbaugh, & DeFiore, 2002; Wise & Case, this volume). Although many students use the information they learn through experiential learning to challenge their existing worldviews, some choose instead to reinforce their meritocratic belief system and deny their own privilege (Dunlap et al., 2007; Espino & Lee, 2011). Even when students sign up for optional courses that explicitly aim to raise awareness of social class privilege, they still find it difficult to engage in discourse on the topic (Sanders & Mahalingam, 2012). Faculty can reach these students, however, by supporting their ability to create social change and to develop a sense of efficacy regarding their ability to combat inequality and shape social policy (McIntosh, 2012). For example, I ask students to create a final project of their choice in which they take action with, or on behalf, of low-income people. I find that this activity enables students to see that using one's privilege to advocate for social justice does not come at a real cost to the privileged, but instead encourages students to use their unearned advantages for social good instead of perpetuating inequality.

Additionally, by monitoring students' resistance over time, faculty may find that, although students resist at first, the process of hearing their peers' social class experiences challenges students' denial of social class privilege. I (Wendy) can usually overcome student resistance and backlash by refocusing those students on our standpoint theory framework. When I validate their standpoint, but challenge them to try to put aside those beliefs and take on another's perspective, students usually let go of their resistance.

Finally, although we believe that experiential learning benefits students and communities, potential negative impacts exist. For example, in a survey of community colleges using service learning, although 61% of schools assess student outcomes, less than 35% of institutions survey community partners and only 4% ask community members about their reactions to the service-learning partnership (Prentice, Robinson, & McPhee, 2003). Often, then, faculty treat community agencies and community members as supplemental sources of information, rather than as full partners in the learning experience. Research finds that, if instructors regularly listen to and communicate with community partners to determine problems, they can overcome these issues (Stoecker et al., 2009). Moreover, by engaging in the reflection activities described above while students work at their community placements, faculty can help ensure students' work will positively affect communities.

Because less privileged students often already understand their disadvantage, raising awareness of social class privilege can result in the unintended consequence of discouraging already disadvantaged students. Although discussions focused on what each group experiences remain an important piece for those with privilege, these conversations can provide an important lesson for those without privilege. Because understanding social class privilege necessitates a discussion of the way in

which those with power stack the deck against low-income people, economically disadvantaged students may disengage from the class content (using denial as a psychological defense mechanism) or may become depressed because they feel powerless (Higginbotham, 1996). In this situation, feminist and critical pedagogies become particularly helpful. Encouraging disadvantaged students to take action against existing unfair hierarchies helps them work through the feelings of powerlessness raised by calling attention to their lack of privilege (Stoudt, Fox, & Fine, 2012). Although faculty cannot tell these students that hard work will be their salvation, they can show them that challenging these hierarchies is the only way to make the system fair. In my (Wendy's) work with low-income students, I find that even economically disadvantaged students recognize that they possess some social class privilege (e.g., their educational attainment) through reflection activities and that this often blunts the otherwise discouraging information about social class privilege.

What are the Rewards of Teaching Social Class Privilege?

Teaching social class privilege through experiential learning can radically transform the relationships between instructors, students, and communities (Buch & Harden, 2011; Espino & Lee, 2011; Seider, Rabinowicz, & Gillmor, 2010; Tallant, 2011). Instructors exploring social class privilege through experiential learning can find satisfaction in seeing their students gain a deeper understanding of material and in creating a generation of students who engage with their communities. Instructors also can gain meaningful connections with community partners, and even enhance their own commitment to service and activism by teaching about privilege through experiential techniques.

Students in experiential learning classrooms gain an enriched, active learning experience. In fact, students in service-learning courses report that their "real world" experiences enhance their "textbook learning." For example, the following comments from my (Wendy's) students illustrate this enriched experience:

It is a lot of work, but it will be unlike any class they have ever taken. The class is the most hands on they will get, but that factor makes the class more interactive and satisfying than most other classes.

(Black, middle-class female)

Being at my placement made me aware of my income privilege growing up. [This privilege] makes people notice there are those who need help and it can also produce a guilty feeling. Guilt for being privileged can help someone actually take action.

(White, low-income male)

I believe that my placement has made me aware that I have had access to experiences and education that has made me more aware and understanding

of issues than others who have not had the same opportunities or undergone the same circumstances.

(White, low-income female)

If someone I knew were going to take a service-learning course I would tell them to take it. The class will change them in ways they may not expect. I would tell them that they will learn things through service learning that they could never learn in the classroom. You are giving back to the community and they are also giving to you.

(White, working-class female)

There were some things I didn't truly agree with or understand during lecture that I saw going on at my service-learning placement. Once I saw these things going on I finally realized what the lecture notes meant.

(White, middle-class female)

When comparing these comments to the course objectives, students clearly recognize structural barriers and that some individuals experience privilege within the hierarchy. They understand that their learning was enhanced through the experiential learning, and they can see the connections between course content and the "real world." Finally, they demonstrate their increased social sensitivity by recognizing their ability to affect change.

Community agencies primarily benefit through the attainment of volunteer help, but they can also gain partners willing to develop solutions to local problems (Leiderman et al., 2003). Furthermore, students who participate in service learning often serve as role models for participants in community programs, especially when they work with children and adolescents as part of their placement. For instance, over the course of two service-learning courses, I (Kala) had the chance to listen to and provide support for children 8–10 years of age staying with their mothers in a domestic violence shelter and to interact with children 3–5 years of age at a low-income daycare facility. Finally, because service-learning experiences can inspire students to volunteer in the community in the future, community organizations can "home grow" their future support (Levesque-Bristol, Knapp, & Fischer, 2010). In my (Wendy's) experience, a number of students placed in community settings either completed more hours at the placement than required (as Kala did), returned later to work as volunteers or paid staff, or both. I find that students also make donations of both supplies and money to these organizations after finishing their placements.

Experiential Learning: Teaching Social Class Privilege and Supporting Social Justice

Experiential learning, and especially service learning, encourages a worldview where oneself and one's community are the sources of knowledge. Through

experiential learning, students share responsibility for learning, and they apply their gained knowledge in partnership with their community and one another. An educational model based on connection and support with the community offers profound opportunities for learning. Specifically, courses that use experiential learning as a way to enhance education about social class privilege educate students about the importance of working for social justice. In addition, service-learning courses create university faculty in tune with their communities, and community organizations receive much needed support for their social justice work. Thus, teaching social class privilege through experiential learning techniques can lead to greater understanding, empathy, respect and dialogue about relevant social issues for instructors, students, the community, and our society as a whole.

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Appendix

Wendy's Social Class Autobiography: "No Yellow Tickets for Me"

I never remember being denied anything that I wanted as a child—Barbies, Cabbage Patch dolls, Easy-bake ovens—I had it all. Birthdays and Christmases

were happy and lavish. We lived in suburban Virginia in a four-bedroom, two-bath, three-story colonial-style house with a large yard. My father commuted everyday into Washington, D.C., to work for the government while my mother stayed home to care for me and my two siblings.

My father had an affair, and my parents separated when I was in the fifth grade. Although the outside of our home had not changed, every time I walked into the house I was aware of what was missing. Empty spaces where furniture used to be were both a tangible reminder of the fact that my father had left and that we couldn't afford to replace the lost furniture. Moreover, my mother wasn't there as much either because she had to get a job to help support us. Not only did I grieve that my family would no longer be whole, but I became painfully aware of my loss of freedom as well since I was now the primary after-school babysitter for my younger handicapped sister. Two years after my father left, my mother remarried and we moved to Knoxville, Tennessee. Although our new house was significantly smaller than our house in Virginia, we were still in a middle-class neighborhood and I attended a well-regarded public high school. But our slide down the economic ladder was only stalled, not stopped.

When I was a sophomore, my stepfather lost his job and could not find work. This time our decline was swift. Before my mom and step-father filed for bankruptcy, they took what capital they had and bought a small piece of land in the country, just outside the Great Smokey Mountains National Park. They plotted the design of the house on graph paper, and my step-father and a friend built the house. I now had to share a bedroom with my younger sister.

That summer, instead of hanging out with my friends, my time was spent working on the house. I hammered nails, stapled insulation, and laid pipe for our waterline, but I didn't do it willingly. Much of the time, I was angry and sullen. I raged against what was happening to me. It wasn't fair. This isn't who I was. My parents scolded me for my attitude, and I yelled back with my anger at them for not protecting me. I didn't understand how they could let this happen.

As soon as the house was up to code, we moved in. Although the house was technically deemed "livable," nothing was finished; there was only unpainted drywall on the walls and sub-flooring on the floors. It remained that way until well after I left for college two years later.

Once we started having economic troubles and I stopped getting an allowance, I worked at a series of small, after-school jobs to buy the things I wanted. I cleaned offices, babysat, and worked at a fast-food restaurant. I was no longer the same social class as my friends, but many never knew. Although we now lived in a different county that was more than an hour away from my middle-class high school, I lobbied my parents to allow me to commute there (illegally) every day for class. I used any excuse to get out of having friends come over to visit my new house. I was desperately afraid they wouldn't like me anymore if they saw how we were living. In addition, I spent a large chunk of my paychecks on clothing, favoring items that could be easily recognized as the "popular" labels of the time.

I religiously shopped sales and travelled to the local outlet mall looking for name-brand clothing at cheaper prices. When I bought expensive clothing, I hid the bags from my parents and made sure they didn't see the clothes when I did my laundry. I was devastated one day when I wore my new (expensive) cream sweater and a boy bumped into me with his cheese nachos, staining the front of the sweater with orange goo. I was late to my next class because I stayed so long in the bathroom alternately scrubbing the sweater to clean it and wiping the tears from my face because I knew it was ruined. I was working incredibly hard to keep up appearances; however, the year my family filed for bankruptcy, my mother completed the paperwork for the free/reduced school lunch program. When my mother told me we qualified for the program, I yelled at her, "Are you kidding me? Why did you do that?" She was perplexed. "But Wendy, now you won't have to spend your money on lunch. You can use it for other things. This will help us." I couldn't believe she was so naïve; she was undoing all my hard work. I was adamant, "No it won't because I am NOT using it." What my mom didn't know was that all I could think about was my elementary school friend, Tiffani. Every day at lunch, Tiffani had to give the lunch lady a yellow ticket. We all knew what that meant. Tiffani's family was "poor." I had no intention of finding out what I needed to do to actually receive the reduced lunch benefit. I wanted nothing to do with any markers that would signal my new, lower status. I bought my lunch with the cash that was left from my paychecks.

In the cafeteria, there was the standard hot lunch line on one side, but there was also an a la carte stand in a separate open space in the middle of the cafeteria. The a la carte stand sold mini-pizzas, French fries, nachos, candy bars and other junk food, but they only accepted cash. Because the food prices were higher at the a la carte stand, it was an unspoken truth that the hot lunch line was for the low-income kids. As a result, for months I made a beeline for the a la carte stand to conspicuously pay for my lunch. One day, though, I wanted a baked potato, and those were only available by going through the hot lunch line. I carefully counted out the change I needed (\$1.25) and got into line to pay for my potato. When I got to the front of the line, the woman working the register told me what I owed. *Thirty-five cents*. She never skipped a beat nor did her expression give away a flicker of recognition, but this was clearly a reduced rate. How did she know? My body went cold. My face flushed. I heard a rushing sound in my ears. I thought I might faint. Surely, I must have heard her wrong. I asked her to repeat herself. She did. The amount had not changed and neither did her expression. I hurriedly handed her the money and rushed out of the line. I could only hope that no one else had heard.

I returned to the table where my friends were, but I couldn't eat. How could this woman who had never met me and who didn't know anything about me know my most intimate secret, the one secret that I had worked so hard to hide from everyone? In a school of 2,600 students, how could she possibly have associated my name on a piece of paper for the reduced lunch program with the

girl standing in front of her? And, more importantly, if my charade hadn't fooled her, had it fooled anyone else? I was panicked, ashamed, and scared. During this time, I saw many of the changes that occurred as structural things that were happening to me, but I did not think that these events reflected anything about me personally. For the first time since our economic downward slide began, someone had looked at me and seen the truth.

I was convinced it was a mistake, but it took me months to work up the courage to go back and try again. I dressed carefully that day, making sure I was obviously wearing my most expensive outfit and that my hair and makeup were flawless. I attempted to be breezy and unconcerned, but I was panicked inside. As I inched closer to the register with my potato, my heart beat wildly. By the time I got to the front of the line, I was convinced I would hear the "right" amount from her. She couldn't possibly look at me and think that I was "poor." I was sure it wasn't going to happen again. But it did. *Thirty-five cents*. I never went back through the hot food line again.

Two years later, I graduated and left for college. I attended a small, wealthy, liberal arts college where I continued to hide my social class just as carefully as I did in high school. I told only a few trusted friends about my family's situation, and it wasn't until my senior year that I felt comfortable enough to invite my college roommate to visit my family. I continued to work small jobs to buy my clothing and to pay for the things I wanted. I did everything I could to pretend that I was just like everyone else. I avoided doing anything that would betray my social class.

I think one of the privileges of being middle class is that I don't remember thinking about money until we didn't have it. Yet it wasn't until I entered graduate school and I took a class on "stigma and prejudice" that I started to critically examine my experiences crossing back and forth between social classes. I began to think a lot about my experiences in the cafeteria and what it taught me about the stigma of poverty: how poverty can be visible, invisible, or become visible over the course of an interaction. I've thought about how certain signs are used as markers of social class, and how one's identity can be tied to those signs. I've pondered the psychological and social consequences of poverty for children, as well as the messages that are taught to them about the relationship between education, hard work, and the American Dream.

And I've thought about the lunch lady herself. I never learned how she did it. I suspect that she looked up the yearbook pictures of all the kids who qualified for the free/reduced lunch program and memorized their faces, but I'll never be sure. At the time, I wanted nothing to do with her. Now I wish I could talk to her—to ask her how she did it, to ask her why she did it, but most of all to thank her for her kindness.