**PRIVILEGE BEADS ACTIVITY**

(adapted from: <http://www.differencematters.info/uploads/pdf/privilege-beads-exercise.pdf>)

**INTRODUCTION**

* Personal introductions
* Introduce activity
	+ applies to your *current* privileges (not your family of origin necessarily)
	+ explain how activity will work

**ACTIVITY**

* stations set up around room
* 8 sections, 5 questions for each
* can move around room in any order

**DEBRIEF / POST ACTIVITY DISCUSSION**

Invite participants to reflect on what it was like to focus on privilege, rather than on oppression or marginalization, as we often do in diversity activities. Was it a new experience? Comfortable?

Enlightening? How did it feel (actual emotion words!)?

Why is it important for us to be aware of this aspect of our identities/experience? Why don’t we (have to) attend to it on a regular basis?

What does it mean for us to have multiple, intersecting identities—where we experience some privileges (around some identities) AND some oppression (around others)? What insight can this give us in connecting with others? Being patient/generous with them and ourselves? With holding ourselves and others responsible for our actions?

What other questions related to these identities (systems of privilege) could have been asked? How would that affect your string of beads? What identities were not represented here today? If we had them how would that affect your string of beads?

We asked you to turn your beads into something wearable. What would it mean for you to wear this noticeably for the rest of the day? What messages could others take from your “bling”? How noticeable, to us and to others, are our privileges on a daily basis? Can we and how do we hide (deny, justify, ignore) our privilege on a daily basis?

What does the collective privilege present here (all our combined beads) mean for us as individual leaders? In collaboration at our own campuses or workplaces? Across campuses/communities?

Other possible talking points:

• Our bead selection today was based on our current experience – here (in USA, at college, etc)

and now (today), not in where we, our families or others of our identity group have been or

are. Some identities and privileges can and do change over time, for “better” or “worse”; but

we are discussing the present, not past or potential.

• We can’t do “oppression algebra” where our oppressions and privileges across multiple

identities cancel out to some ‘net’ oppression or privilege score! It’s both/and.

• Facilitator: particularly if you have to cut off conversation on any particular question, and/or at the end of the session, emphasize that this activity is meant to BEGIN the larger conversations of So What and Now What. Recognizing privilege can result in feelings of guilt and isolation. It’s important to acknowledge these feelings as normal, and also to affirm the huge step taken by everyone simply by participating thoughtfully in the activity and reflecting on what these privileges mean within their lives. The goal is not to be paralyzed by guilt but rather to build deeper relationships and to move forward in working against systems of oppression.

**(PRINT OUT EACH OF THE QUESTIONS BELOW, TO BE PLACED NEXT TO EACH BEAD STATION. YOU MIGHT CHOOSE TO LEAVE OFF THE TITLE AND ONLY PRINT THE QUESTIONS, SO THAT THE CATEGORY OF PRIVILEGE IS LESS OBVIOUS AND DOESN’T HINDER HONEST ANSWERS TO EACH QUESTION)**

**For each statement that applies to you, take 1 bead.**

**Nationality Privilege**

In the United States:

1. People generally assume that I can communicate proficiently in English.

2. I have never been told not to speak in my native language during everyday interactions.

3. People do not assume I am poor because of my nationality.

4. People from my country are visible and positively represented in politics, business, and the media.

5. If I wanted to, I could travel freely to almost any country.

**For each statement that applies to you, take 1 bead.**

**Sexuality Privilege**

1. I have formalized or could formalize my love relationship legally through marriage and receive the benefits that accompany marriage.

2. I can move about in public without fear of being harassed or physically attacked because of my sexual orientation.

3. I do not have to fear that if my family or friends find out about my sexual orientation, there will be economic, emotional, physical, or psychological consequences.

4. People don't ask why I “chose”my sexual orientation.

5. I can go for months without me or anyone else referring explicitly to my sexuality.

**For each statement that applies to you, take 1 bead.**

**Religious Privilege**

1. I can assume that I will not have to work or go to school on my religious holidays.

2. Food that does not violate my religious practices can be easily found in any restaurant or grocery store.

3. Places to worship or practice my religion are numerous in my community.

4. Implicit or explicit references to religion where I work or go to school conform to my religious beliefs.

5. I do not need to worry about the ramifications of disclosing my religious identity to others.

**For each statement that applies to you, take 1 bead.**

**Class Privilege**

1. I can be sure that my social class will be an advantage when I seek medical or legal help.

2. I am reasonably sure that I or my family will not have to skip meals because we cannot afford to eat.

3. I have a savings account with at least a month’s rent, printing costs, and other bills, set aside in case of emergency.

4. I have taken a vacation outside of my home country within the past three years.

5. I have never been homeless or evicted from my place of living.

**For each statement that applies to you, take 1 bead.**

**Race Privilege**

1. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or closely watched by store employees because of my race.

2. I am not faced with questions or assumptions that I got into my college of choice only because of my race.

3. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.

4. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.

5. I can contemplate many options ‐‐ social, political, or professional ‐‐ without asking whether a person of my race would be accepted or allowed to do what I want to do.

**For each statement that applies to you, take 1 bead.**

**Ability Privilege**

1. I can assume that I will easily have physical access to any building.

2. I have never been taunted, teased, or socially ostracized due to a disability.

3. I can do well in challenging situation without being told what an inspiration I must be to other people of my ability status.

4. I can easily see and read the letters on this page.

5. I am reasonably certain that others do not think that my intelligence is lacking, just because of my physical status or learning difference.

**For each statement that applies to you, take 1 bead.**

**Gender/Sex Privilege**

1. If I have children and a successful career, few people will ask me how I balance my professional and private lives.

2. When I ask to see “the person in charge,” odds are I will face a person of my gender. The higher‐up in the organization the person is, the surer I can be.

3. Most individuals portrayed as sexual objects in the media are not the same gender as I am.

4. In general, I am not under much pressure to be thin or to worry about how people will respond to me if I’m overweight.

5. Major religions in the world are led mainly by people of my gender.

**For each statement that applies to you, take 1 bead.**

**Cis Gender Privilege**

1. I can use public restrooms without fear of verbal abuse, physical intimidation, or arrest.

2. In general, I blend in as I navigate the world, not being constantly stared or gawked at, whispered about, pointed at, or laughed at because of my gender expression.

3. I can access gender exclusive spaces such as women’s centers, womyn’s music festivals, and gendered athletic teams and not be excluded because of my trans\* status.

4. I have the ability to flirt or date and not fear that my biological status may be the cause for rejection or attack, nor will it cause your partner to question their sexual orientation.

5. I can reasonably assume that my ability to acquire a job, rent an apartment, or secure a loan will not be denied on the basis of my gender identity/expression.