

Summaries of 2015 ACPA Mental Health Related Presentations

The Privileged Identity Exploration (PIE) Model Revisited

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Privilege is a sociopolitical construct that recognizes how individuals with dominant cultural identities in our society are afforded more benefits and experience fewer obstacles due to their social group membership (Johnson, 2006). For example, White privilege references the economic, social, and political advantages for White members of our society (e.g., higher incomes over a lifetime) at the disadvantage of those in non-dominant groups (McIntosh, 1988). Research on privilege, and the awareness of one's own privilege, illuminates the negative effects of systemic social oppression and the ways in which educators can advocate for social change as allies (Broidio, 2000; Edwards, 2006; Howard, 2006; Watt, 2007; Watt, Curtiss, Drummond, Kellogg, Lozano, Tagliapietra, & Rosas, 2009).

The ACPA presentation included a review of the recently updated and re-articulated Privileged Identity Exploration (PIE) model (see Watt, 2015). The PIE model illuminates the defensive reactions individuals may display as they move through the development process of understanding their identity and provides a fuller explanation of their behavior as they work toward embracing a deeper understanding of themselves and their social and political positioning. The model assumes: (a) there is no ultimate level of consciousness in exploring privileged identities; (b) in order to engaged in exploration of privileged identities, people need to engage in difficult dialogues about social oppression; (c) defenses are innate and normal human reactions; and (d) each person possesses an intersection of privileged and marginalized identities.

Principally, the PIE model identifies eight defenses that individuals display when recognizing, contemplating, and addressing privileged identities, including: denial, deflection, intellectualization, principium, rationalization, false envy, minimization, and benevolence (Watt, 2007; Watt et al., 2009). The defenses arise as individuals confront dissonance-provoking stimuli through difficult dialogues. Understanding and identifying defenses within self and others is an essential skill necessary for social change.

The presentation concluded with the announcement that a team of researchers are developing an instrument to measure and identify defenses when exploring privileged identities. The model and corresponding instrument can lead to a deeper understanding of the concepts for scholars and tools for a richer application to campus practices for student affairs professionals.

References

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