

Johnson, allen g.
2006. privilege,
power, and
difference. 2nd ed.
boston: mcgraw-...

[Sociology](#)



PRIVILEGE, POWER AND DIFFERENCE The book, Privilege, Power and Difference by Allen Johnson, unlike others I have read regarding the contentious topic of privilege, has been by far the most instructive. Several factors conspired to make it an exciting page turning experience. The small size of the book makes it appealing to even those who are not avid readers. The nature of the introduction is not to be ignored either. The author uses a dog walking, a simple, quotidian, but extremely exciting activity to draw attention. This ensures even non-specialist readers can easily read and understand the underlying message, without barriers such as jargon and vocabulary.

It is easy to think that issues, which are treated with considerable caution in other texts, are being oversimplified. However, such fears are allayed when one realizes that the author holds a PhD in sociology, and has been writing and researching on the discipline for over thirty years. In that time, Johnson has stripped down discrimination in all its forms down to its bones. He presents the skeleton to us so that we can clearly see its internal composition, understand how different issues link up to bring discrimination, but most importantly appreciate the role in it and make genuine steps to end it.

However, a glaring omission is the concept of racism. It is increasingly common for two black people working in the same institution, for instance to refer to the each other as lazy, unable to work under strict supervision, among other stereotypes we would traditionally associate as flowing from whites to blacks. Perhaps, it is because same race racism is still in its infancy as far as research is concerned, it is my hope that the author will incorporate

it in subsequent revisions.

To foster understanding of the topic of discrimination in its entirety, he presents to us an instance when he had to hold a conversation with a black female. This lady embodies several forms of discrimination that Allen seeks to discuss in his book. On the other hand, Johnson (2006) embodies the privileges that condemn such people to the indignities of discrimination. By using real life examples, the topic is made more poignant. The examples of how the lady has to live her life differently just to survive in a world where she is underprivileged touch even the most hardened reader.

The author has made it the purpose of this book to bring down all the barriers that make it impossible to hold a productive discussion on discrimination. He belabors the necessity to approach the subject in a way that does not leave the privileged people with a sense of guilt, or even make it necessary for them to be angry in self defense. Johnson (2006) makes the specimen for the topic at hand. He presents himself as the white, rich man trying to hold a conversation with a black, poor woman.

As the discussion develops throughout the topics, we learn that discrimination is not a problem of any single group. The interconnections are much more subtle than we realize. For example, Johnson (2006) states that there would never be the concept of 'black', if the white did not exist. We also get to appreciate that ones privilege and other people's plight are always interrelated. As a result of the interrelation, there is no single group that can tackle discrimination on its own.

The author also establishes the misinformed tendency of privileged groups to look away as the biggest barrier towards holding a cogent discussion. The

unadorned language attracts even the unschooled. This balanced approach does not assign blame quickly, even to the privileged; thus, putting them off. This book has to be read especially during the current economic disenfranchisement when gender, class and race are at the fore. The book can be read by anyone who comprehends the English language since like what it espouses, it is non discriminatory.

Reference

Johnson, Allen G. (2006). *Privilege, Power and Difference*. 2nd Ed. Boston: McGraw -Hill