

White peggy
mcintosh lists fifty
ways by which



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White Privilege and Indicators of Oppression In “ White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”, Peggy McIntosh lists fifty ways by which her status as a white woman in American society arbitrarily serves to her advantage.

While all the items McIntosh includes in the article are worth in-depth discussion and inspection, some seem to have greater implications than others. One such item is the thirty-eighth privilege listed by the author, who acknowledges the fact that she “ can think over many options, social, political, imaginative or professional, without asking whether a person of her race would be accepted or allowed to do what she wants to do “(1). While what McIntosh describes seems like something all people should be afforded, it is simply not so. People of color do have to navigate the many barriers set in place when it comes to professional and social advancement, and this is something society does not recognize enough. It is widely accepted that, in American society, white people are generally afforded full access to the many avenues of western life while minority groups face great uncertainty.

This social custom reflects the principle of cultural imperialism, an indicator of oppression, which places the majority culture of a nation as the norm and as something to be respected (Young 41-43). In this case, the white population is being rewarded with the prospect of having an open future just for being part of the majority group. Because the general belief of the majority white community is that they have open opportunities, it may be difficult for members of that group to understand that others do not enjoy the same feeling. Thus, and especially for those who refuse to acknowledge the truth in white privilege, it may be difficult for them to empathize and want to change things. While McIntosh’s thirty-eighth privilege doesn’t make a direct

reference to violence, another indicator of oppression, history shows that members of minority groups trying to rise above what society deemed their station have been met with physical aggression from the beneficiaries of mainstream society. The word "allowed" in the author's claim can indicate more than just being restricted by rule - it can also mean restriction by force. The status quo set in place by the sense of cultural imperialism felt by McIntosh and others has been deemed so sacred that any violation of it and the part of the minority warrants attack or the threat of one. Exploitation is also at stake with McIntosh's privilege.

The fact that minority groups have limited personal and economic prospects implies that they are more likely to be subject to the kind of low-skill, low-paying, "menial labor" that Adams's text describes (Five Faces of Oppression 37-38). Historically, this has manifested itself through the common trend of white families using Hispanic and African-American people as maids and household workers. In this example, the minority group's servitude and stagnant employment status "transfers energies from one group to another to produce unequal distributions" (38).

In other words, their work benefits the lives of white family far more than their own. Marginalization is also implied with McIntosh's statement. As white people are the norm, people of color are the other. They exist on the margins of society, and thus the general principle of free choice does not apply to them. Because they are restricted in their prospects, they are also, as a result, restricted in where they live. Many people of color live in low-income neighborhoods, where again they are denied access to the opportunities that could lead to advancement. The cycle continues, and the indicator of

powerlessness comes into play as the oppressed groups feel more and more confined to a life arbitrarily given them.