Promoting Diversity and Social Justice: Educating People from Privileged Groups (2nd edition)
Diane J. Goodman
New York, NY: Routledge, 2011, 214 pages, $36.95 (softcover)
Reviewed by Ali Michael,
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“Men are not the only ones with gender privilege,” someone once told me. “Women have the unique privilege of giving birth.” Invoking the colloquial use of the word “privilege,” the speaker felt that men and women were both privileged, but in different ways. I affirmed that it is an honor to give birth. And—I added—pregnancy is also structurally linked to women’s oppression. I wanted to convey to her that the term “privilege” is a very specific political concept that is defined in relationship to its antonym—“oppression.”

After reading Goodman’s book, Promoting Diversity and Social Justice: Educating People from Privileged Groups, I can now articulate that pregnancy is linked to women’s oppression because the world is structured to give power and opportunities to the people who can best imitate the actions and behaviors of the dominant group. Pregnancy makes that imitation of men even more elusive for women and hence distances them further from power.

In social identity and social justice work, the term “privilege” has become a political term that cannot be understood through its original, colloquial use. Many students resist the term “privilege” because, as was the case with the woman in the previous example, they understand it colloquially to mean “special.” Most people of privilege have never thought of themselves as anything but “normal.” Goodman demonstrates how growing up to think of oneself as normal is precisely what it means to be “privileged,” according to the political meaning of the term. In a theoretical shift that I have not previously seen, she demonstrates how this “privilege” of normalcy is conveyed to all dominant identities.

Abstract discussions of privilege tend to erase the complex dynamics of power that shape U.S. society. After reading Goodman’s first chapter, “Introduction,” in which she defines her terms without offering examples, I feared that this book would do just that. The relatively generic title of the book contributed to this fear. However, the book and chapter titles do not reflect the vibrant, inspired content that lies within this powerful book. Each chapter following the introduction virtually revolutionizes social justice education through its content.

Chapter 2, “About Privileged Groups,” for example, provides a plethora of documented examples about how privileged groups set standards of normalcy in society and thereby assume positions of superiority. Cumulatively the examples help the reader take a giant leap forward towards intersectional thinking about privilege and how it operates to create, aggregate and sustain power. This would be excellent introductory reading for any class on social justice or identity.

Chapter 3, “Perspectives on Individual Change and Development” describes multiple identity frameworks for understanding the developmental processes that affect students and learners within workshops or interventions. Some of Goodman’s frameworks, such as that for understanding the intellectual development of different students, helped me better understand my students and their needs through explanations that merge many well-known frameworks. However, the specific frameworks also required multiple re-reads and extensive cross-referencing in order to connect her explanations and recommendations with the original definitions.

Chapters 4 and 5, “Understanding Resistance”
and “Addressing Resistance” are absolutely critical reading for any person who seeks to create social change through work on privileged identities. I was riveted by every word of these two chapters in which Goodman has gathered the best practices for preventing and reducing resistance, to help people move to a place of true learning and transformation. Having these strategies listed and explained in one comprehensive chapter is a gift for facilitators. Goodman also challenges facilitators by saying that we cannot focus exclusively on student resistance, but must examine the teacher-student relationship that provokes resistance. Realizing that we as teachers and facilitators may be causing the resistance that keeps us up at night could revolutionize anti-oppression education.

Chapters 6 and 7 address “The Costs of Oppression to People from Privileged Groups” and “The Joy of Unlearning Privilege/Oppression.” Through these chapters, Goodman helps the reader understand the truism that “no one is free while others are oppressed” by explicating the dilemmas and opportunities that are particular to people of privilege. These chapters are representative of Goodman’s unique approach to social justice facilitation, which involves seeing the interconnectedness of all oppressions and all people.

Chapters 8 and 9, “Why People from Privileged Groups Support Social Justice” and “Developing and Enlisting Support for Social Justice” describe the different possible motives for people of privilege to be involved in movements for social justice, and the ways to appeal to those motives. These chapters seem more immediately useful to social movement organizing than to teachers or facilitators, but nonetheless belong in a text of this kind.

The final two chapters, “Allies and Action” and “Issues for Educators” again have clear and accessible guidelines for allies and for educators, including common pitfalls that Goodman has witnessed. She gives practical suggestions for responding to racism and for managing one’s own reactions and biases as a facilitator. Her suggestions are innovative, straightforward and doable.

Goodman’s position—that oppression hurts people of privilege and that people of privilege stand to benefit from fighting it—is not new. People fighting in social justice movements have known this for a long time. And yet I am struck by how radical it is to structure social justice learning around the needs (social, developmental and emotional) of people from privileged groups, with the acknowledgement that if these needs are not accommodated, people from privileged groups will not shift. Some people make the point that social change must happen regardless of whether people of privilege are willing to come along. If that is the case, perhaps these tools are unnecessary. But Goodman would suggest that by looking at privilege across social identities, it becomes clear that leaving people of privilege out of movements for social change means leaving everybody behind. It is therefore not an option to minimize or ignore the needs of people of privilege when Promoting Diversity and Social Justice.

**Inside the College Gates: How Class and Culture Matter in Higher Education**

Jenny M. Stuber
Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011, 201 pages, $48.35 (hardcover)

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*Inside the College Gates: How Class and Culture Matter in Higher Education* provides a rich description of how social class mediates the social and extracurricular experiences of students attending two higher education institutions, a selective private liberal arts college and a large public research university.