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Hidden Power: An Analysis and Reflection on “Making Systems of Privilege Visible”

In our day-to-day life, we witness a variety of things — we surround ourselves with familiar and unfamiliar people. We want to know more about them — their stories, where they have come from, their experiences. What we fail to do is look into ourselves. Once we do this, we realize a lot of things — our rights, our wrongs, and most importantly the privilege we hold. In Wildman and Davis’ essay, the authors talk about privilege — how most individuals experience some sort of privilege, how people included in this system fail to realize the upper hand they hold over the under-privileged. The authors try to educate their readers regarding issues that are prevalent in our society, thereby spreading awareness — male, heterosexual, and white privilege. By doing so, they break the hidden-coated protection that privileged people experience. In addition, Wildman and Davis also articulate that the legal system is not neutral because it hides power. In my essay, I analyze the author’s statements and see whether they succeeded in their purpose of writing.

Wildman and Davis talk about how society favors the heterosexual community and how the homosexual community is overlooked. They say “Rampant heterosexuality is everywhere... Heterosexuality is privileged over any other relationship. The words we use, such as marriage, husband, and wife, are not neutral but convey this privileging of heterosexuality” (887). Before reading these statements, I did not think that these words were biased which shows that people who are included in the system of privilege fail to recognize the upper hand they hold over the under-privileged. This is simply because things have been

like this for the heterosexual community that they feel the use of such words is normalized. This also shows that how the language we use makes privilege invisible and silences the under-privileged. However, after reading their essay and thinking about these words I have come to realize the very existence of this privilege. “Husband” and “wife” make me realize how biased these two terms are, and how they display privilege ever so slightly. The authors use words such as “rampant heterosexuality” to get the readers to think about how heterosexuality is considered as a norm and how it is considered as the only authentic relationship. By including this example, they appeal to the audience to stop the use of such words and find alternatives that fit the LGBTQ(IA+) community as well, thereby taking a step towards eradicating privilege.

The movies we see, the stories we read, and the music we listen to all display black evil and white kind. In movies, how many times have you seen a white person portray an evil role? How many times do we notice the cops associated in such cases are white? Black people are generalized to play the roles of looting, robbery, and murder. The society demands the directors to cast such roles. Wildman and Davis refer to McIntosh’s analysis and tell us “McIntosh identified forty-six conditions available to her as a white person that her African American co-workers, friends, and acquaintances could not count on...not needing to educate her children to be aware of systemic racism” (894). This text can influence individuals to look at the privilege that white people hold. They use words like “systemic racism” which convey a heavy tone from the authors’ part of the view that develops authenticity of the text in the mind of the readers. Furthermore, the inclusion of the number forty-six catches the eye of the readers and creates a sense of curiosity that motivates readers to explore those and understand the concept on a deeper level thereby achieving the purpose of their writing. For me, I delved into that data and realized instances of white privilege in different aspects of

things - in chess, white starts ahead of black and lays a path for black to follow and asserts the dominance of the color white over black.

Even though we cannot possibly put a value on which life is more expensive since every individual deserves an equal right to life and grasp opportunities, the reality is quite different - male insurance packages define the woman's insurance package (Wildman and Davis 891). This discrimination is not only limited to health care facilities or work opportunities but is also seen in the sports industry. Wildman and Davis use the logos aspect of rhetorical appeals as they provide an example of a thirteen-year-old who has a strong desire to become a major league ball power, but as she is a female her inclusion in the game is a question despite her immense talent just because it is supposedly a male-dominated game. Here, Wildman and Davis appeal to our emotions by instilling a sense of sympathy towards the girl. Not being able to succeed because of skill is different compared to defeat due to non-maleness (890). As I am a sports enthusiast, I have noticed the discrimination based on gender in sports — particularly the pay gap. Since I spend a good amount of time watching and reading sports I can say that both deserve equal pay as even though the quality may not be the same, women put equal amounts of hard work and commitment to their tasks as men do — which defines an athlete and brings you laurels, so why do not both deserve equal pay? To combat male-privilege the ‘US Open’ was the first tournament to award the winners of both categories equal prize money. However, recently, last week in the ‘Italian Open’ the men’s winner was awarded €205,200 but the women’s winner was awarded €205,190. Even though the difference is just €10, it does not make a matter of concern in terms of money, but it displays superiority in a rather kind way which shows that this situation still is prevalent in different parts of the world, if not America particularly.

Connection to language can provide power — not only does it define your roots but also enables you a privilege that non-native speakers lack. At the time of jury duty, Wildman

observed every individual juror was subsequently requested to address themselves. Amidst this introductory session, only Asians were asked another question about whether they spoke English — no one else was interrogated at this level. The litigant's representative exercised his privilege over the Asian man and created an atmosphere of doubt in his mind regarding his active involvement and relevance. As soon as he was asked such a question, the man smirked and was taken aback (892). Here, the authors are successful in bringing light to race-based privilege — how the Asian man was discriminated against based on race. But fail to demonstrate the exercise of native-speaker-privilege. However, in Amy Tan's essay "Mother Tongue" we see that the author's mother was linguistically profiled. She had a meeting with the doctor at the clinic to get updates on the brain tumor that a scan revealed the previous month. But as she approached the help desk in the clinic, the staff ignored her claim and did not bother to explain her carelessness in misplacing the document. However, as soon as the author called the staff and spoke in "unbroken English" the clinic arranged a meeting the following week (2). This shows that the hospital exercised the native-speaker-privilege on the author's mother just because she spoke "broken English".

Even though Hindi is not the national language in Qatar, I have experienced native-speaker-privilege without realizing it. When I visit small stores run by Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, or Nepalis, and even saloons for that matter of fact. These stores have their walls covered with Indian celebrities — actors and athletes predominantly. Not only do they converse with me in Hindi, but they also play Indian music and turn their television to some Indian channel. Some use scented sticks, which are mostly used in festivals for aesthetic purposes, to cultivate a typical Indian atmosphere. They do so to resonate with the power I hold, they try to fit in so that they don't let the privileged assert power over them. I have seen when others visit their shops, they don't converse in the customer's native language. This has become almost a ritual, on introspection. I remember this happening three years back and

also last month, which shows that native-speaker privilege like every other privilege is hidden due to its normalization, yet it exists.

As we dig deeper into the term “privilege” we notice that it is a phenomenon that acknowledges components of an individual that go on to be declared as a model for the underprivileged. This accounts for the basis of accomplishment and defeat. People not included in this system are bound to be side-lined (Wildman and Davis). The authors are successful in enabling readers to ponder upon the various privileges — male, heterosexual, and white privilege by using logos and pathos. They have helped me look at things from an under-privileged point of view which has helped me understand the problems people face in day-to-day life, thereby achieving their purpose of writing — spreading awareness amongst the privileged and under-privileged.

However, they do not provide strong reasoning to manifest native-speaker-privilege. For which they enable us to look at other sources such as Amy Tan and myself to help readers understand the oppression faced by under-privileged in government-run institutions as well hospitals — thereby proving that the legal system does indeed require a change.

Works Cited

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