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Book Review

Leavy, Patricia. 2017. *Privilege through the Looking-Glass*. Rotterdam, Boston, Taipei: Sense Publishers

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The book *Privilege through the Looking-Glass* provides a collection of essays that delves into the humanity behind the vast number of demographic groups hindered by privilege. Privilege is an unearned advantage that in the provided essays exists due to the historical establishment of a norm and the undeterred exposure of communities to that norm.

Frequently, privilege's very nature causes its perception to be based on its quantifiable effects. Patricia Leavy collects essays that redefine how privilege is viewed in a manner devoid of numbers and generalizations. She allows the contributors to provide first-hand personal accounts of experiencing privilege's effects, challenge the reader's idea of how to inclusively approach people outside his or her community's idea of normal, and invite readers to accept personal traits as non-definitive attributes that can diversify worldly experiences.

The essays' personal views on privilege's consequences lend the book its title, since the personal stories function as a looking-glass, distorting superficial views of privilege. The essays very effectively showcase common ideas of how gender, race, sexual

orientation, religion, disability, and an array of other traits are used to define individuals from a case-by-case basis. The book ties the analysis of these instances together through an easy to follow structure and format.

First, language is analyzed because of privilege. Privilege leads to the development of terms over time that seek to encompass the entirety of the person. For example, in the essay "Titanium Tits," a woman who grows up with the titular nickname being used only seldom by a friend is led into a phase of deep anguish through the classification. Later in life, the same woman comes out as lesbian and is impacted profoundly by the word dyke. These words stay with the woman for years and encompass a large portion of her existence despite a life filled with events seemingly more worth reminiscence. These derogatory words encompass a reductivist thinking that men can acquire due to privilege eliminating repercussions for unwanted remarks towards women. This essay among others within the book excels at making the reader wonder at the author's anguish, but simultaneously understanding the harmful impact such briefly intended words and actions can have.

Next, the book presents essays that challenge the reader to accept that power dynamics within these personal essays result in the party with lesser privilege to sometimes be reduced to an object-like status or a word that only focuses on a single aspect of character. As mentioned, privilege is often quantified to demonstrate its destructive effects, but Leavy selects essays that involve power dynamics creating a grotesque image of inequality within important and interdependent relationships. We appreciated this approach to presenting privilege anecdotes; advances to use sensitive language and inclusive actions are often tailored to individuals who feel distant from their privilege due to general statements rather than personal stories being presented. Again, the reader is exposed to these essays that demonstrate the destructive effects of privilege abuse on an individual level, and the reader is challenged to evaluate his or her own privilege and potential abuses of that privilege.

Finally, *Privilege through the Looking-Glass* contains an imperative thematic purpose, to transition the reader's usage of character attributes from definitive to non-definitive. This means a trait such as skin color or gender is welcome as creating diversity in society, but will never be used as a factor in defining a person. One of the most powerful displays

of this thematic intent is in the second essay of the book, an essay by Robin Boylorn. Boylorn warns of the danger of attempting to ignore visual identifiers, informing that identifiers such as skin color exist and are a character attribute. Boylorn admonishes a classroom that "To not see my color diminishes me, disappears me." The essay seeks to describe the importance of seeing character traits as diversifying the world without dividing it. Boylorn's call to action invites the reader further into understanding privilege. She prepares the reader to acknowledge the shortcomings of people addressing character traits and deviations from societal norms in the book's following stories.

Privilege through the Looking-Glass achieves its purpose of redefining an examination of privilege. The book presents stories that affect the reader's approach to privilege through their presentation of relationships with unearned power dynamics. When the diction of the stories presents objectifying language set to reduce the experiences of less privileged individuals, the effect of privilege is apparent without the use of any numbers or general statements. *Privilege through the Looking-Glass* is an effective book for properly understanding privilege, a concept best understood through the people it affects directly.

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