Kyle Korver, Privilege and Racism

Table Talk: Family Conversations about Current Events

In April 2019, Kyle Korver, a U.S. professional basketball player who plays with the Utah Jazz, wrote an essay about racism and white privilege that received a lot of acclaim and attention. In the essay, Korver, who is white, reflects on several biased incidents involving his African-American teammates and his reaction to those incidents. He then reflects on his own white privilege and considers what he and others can do to act as allies to help bring about racial justice.

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ADL defines privilege as follows:

**A term for unearned and often unseen or unrecognized advantages, benefits or rights conferred upon people based on their membership in a dominant group (e.g., white people, heterosexual people, males, people without disabilities, cisgender people, etc.) beyond what is commonly experienced by members of the marginalized group.**

Privilege reveals both obvious and less obvious unspoken advantages that people in the dominant group may not recognize they have, which distinguishes it from overt bias or prejudice. These advantages include cultural affirmations of one's own worth, presumed greater social status and the freedom to move, buy, work, play and speak freely.

People can be privileged by certain aspects of their identity and marginalized by others. Because people identify themselves in a variety of ways (e.g. race, gender, gender identity, age, religion, sexual orientation, ability, ethnicity), it is important to consider different identity groups as well as the intersections of those identity groups when discussing privilege. For example, if a heterosexual girl holds hands in the hallway with a guy she is dating, she does not have to worry about name-calling or harassment based on her sexual orientation. The same young woman, however, lacks gender privilege as she walks on the street late at night, worrying about being harassed or attacked.

Here are some other examples of privilege that young people and others may have seen, experienced, heard about or witnessed:

- I can feel free to call the police when there’s trouble.
- I can walk into most clothing stores and find something that is my size.
- I can use the restroom that matches my gender identity without being harassed.
- I am able to take tests in my native language.
- I can challenge my teacher without them thinking I'm being defiant or rebellious.
- I can purchase makeup that matches my skin complexion.
- I can be sure to not have tests and important school functions scheduled on days of religious observance.
- I am not usually questioned as to whether I am American.
- I don't have to worry about whether transportation, a building or street is accessible.

**Age**

12 and up

**Questions to Start the Conversation**

- What phrases or sentences stand out for you (i.e. you can relate to, you agree or disagree, you didn’t understand, you want to talk about, etc.)?
- What is Korver saying about racism and privilege?
- What does he mean when he says, “It's not like it was a conscious thought. It was pure reflex.” Has something like that ever happened to you?
- Why do you think Korver wrote the essay?
- How do you think people will react to the essay or how have others around you reacted so far?

**Questions to Dig Deeper**
Ideas for Taking Action
Ask: What can we do to help? What individual and group actions can help make a difference?

- Help to organize an educational forum in school to talk about racism, privilege and racial justice, and explore and strategize what can be done about it in school, in your community and in society at large.
- Write your own reflective essay on privilege that explores your experiences and perspective, and share the essay with your school or community newspaper. If friends or peers want to all write essays, collect them and post on your school's website or create a page to share them.
- Get involved in local or national activism around issues of racism, racial justice and racial disparities in the criminal justice system. See below our resource on ideas for activism.

Additional Resources
- Game Changer: Kyle Korver Speaks His Truth on Privilege (ADL Lesson Plan)
- Athletes and Activism (ADL Lesson Plan)
- Privilege, Discrimination and Racial Disparities in the Criminal Justice System (ADL Lesson Plan)
- Race Talk: Engaging Young People in Conversations about Race and Racism
- 6 Ways to Be an Ally (En español)
- 10 Ways Youth Can Engage in Activism

BACK TO TABLE TALK