

## Conversation with Inclusive Grace: Race, Gender, and Sexuality

In June and July 2020 Inclusive Grace watched Reverend Brit Barron's [presentation](#) to The Reformation Project's 2018 Annual Conference and hosted three Zoom discussions of the video. The following pages contain the discussion topics with paraphrased comments made by participants. Reference information utilized in the discussion begins on page 16.



The video is of Brit Barron's keynote opener to the conference. The Rev. Brit Barron shared her coming-out story in the church and her intersectional experience and understanding of the church Christ calls us to be. As a pastor at New Abbey Church in Pasadena and a spiritual director at The Christian Closet, an online counseling practice for LGBTQ Christians. She has spent the last ten+ years of her life in ministry.

### June 24<sup>th</sup> Let's talk about Race, Gender, and Sexuality:

- 1. Brit starts by reminiscing of her childhood, her love of roller hockey. She speaks of the time she first learned (from her mom) the way in which she wants to move in this world. She found herself in a situation – that just felt wrong – without the necessary resources or the ability to change it. Her mom came alongside her to create a change WITH her and FOR her...**
  - Have you had the opportunity to do this for someone? Have you had someone do this on behalf of you?**

I thought of this ministry as an opportunity. When Brit talks about how she didn't have the words at that age, but she knew it just wasn't right. I think we all knew the UMC position on LGBT persons just wasn't right. General Conference after General Conference this injustice and hurt kept happening. This ministry was an opportunity for us all to take some action and try to affect some change within our little community (Matthews UMC) within the larger church.

Years ago, I had a job as an Advocate. Basically, you learn from the person that is oppressed about what their issues are, from their point of view. Then you help them advocate for themselves or you do so on their behalf when they are not there. I did a lot of work for and with people with disabilities that taught me how to be an advocate for myself. I had never felt I was worthy to speak up for myself, as I was raised in an environment that cultivated insecurity. Through others and advocating for persons with disabilities I learned to recognize that every person is entitled to dignity

and respect – to be all they can be. That work helped me to be that for myself and to be someone who could feel worthy.

- **This was the first time of many when Brit had to defend her space. Have you ever had to defend your existence in a space? As a woman? As a disabled person? As a person of color? Etc.? Tell us about it. How long did that persist? How did you feel when it ended? How would you feel if you had to perpetually defend yourself, like in Brit’s case, how did you think it would affect you?**

I thought of a situation at church when I wanted MUMC to get it involved with an outside ministry. I met the director and whenever he and I were together I felt on equal footing. I wanted him to meet a non-clergy church leader at church, with whom I also felt an equal. I brought them together over lunch, which I paid for. As soon as we sat down to the meeting, I saw this power thing going on between the two men. Suddenly it was like I was invisible. I tried to interject; it was as if I was hushed and told to be quiet. Let us men discuss this. It was very demoralizing and sad. When I talked with each of them 1:1 it was fine, but when I brought us all together, it was as if the woman in the room didn’t have anything important to say.

As a senior executive with a large corporation I hadn’t experienced any blatant sex discrimination until I started working with a patriarchal, international team. It was two-fold. Part was cultural. In the States work culture was collaborative, we worked in teams, listened to everyone’s voice. In their culture it is was a hierarchal work environment, where teammates deferred to the most senior person on their team. Their society also was very misogynistic. Regardless of my seniority among the combined group, because I was a woman my perspective was dismissed, what I was asking for was second guessed, run up another flagpole. Lots of efforts were made to derail my requests. It was really a frustrating experience. It just seemed so blatant to me, where in the past perhaps discrimination had been more finessed.

- **How does the perception and experience differ for those who are the ‘other’ in a space for the ‘normal’ versus a person in the group of the ‘normal’ who wants to be a part of spaces made by and for the oppressed, like an HBCU, a woman’s group, Time out Youth, etc.?**

There’s a lot of discussion in the world lately about the idea of a “safe space” and how people want to create spaces where they feel comfortable. Like there might be women’s groups or an organization for black people, where they share their experiences and support each other. And there’s a need for it. One example is the Time Out Youth Center in Charlotte. For those unfamiliar, it’s a center off Monroe Rd for LGBTQIA youth ages 12-20, who are in need of a space to express their authentic self and receive resources. And while here in Inclusive Grace we’re doing a lot of work ON BEHALF of the community and FOR the community, there’s still the need for LGBTQ+ people to have their own space.

I am queer. When I’m out in public (and Charlotte’s a fairly accepting place all things considered based upon the surrounding area) there will be times I’m walking with a girlfriend and I’m on edge. I’m thinking “Oh, is this a place where I can authentically express myself? Dress how I want to? Are people going to be hostile toward me?” There’s this hyper-vigilance, just walking with a romantic partner. But when you go to Time Out Youth, or at my college where there was a large population of LGBTQ people, or to a gay bar or a certain comic book store in town, there’s a difference. I don’t

have to pay as much attention to my surroundings. I can relax a bit. That's why those spaces just for people who are part of the 'other' are important.

2. **Intersectionality is a framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities might combine to create unique modes of discrimination or disadvantage. It identifies injustices that are felt by people due to a combination of factors. Dr. Kimberle Crenshaw, who coined the term in 1989, has described Intersectionality as a "lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects." (See more information and illustrations in the Reference Information pages 16 & 17.)**

**An example is that the injustice faced by a black transgender woman is beyond the sum of being solely a woman, solely transgender, and solely black. There are many dimensions to a person's identity, some of which provide privilege and others that create 'othering,' disadvantage, oppression, and discrimination.**

I never knew the word intersectionality and wondered what it was. Then I thought back to my work with folks with disabilities. I worked with a lot with deaf folks who use sign language. I had several conversations with people who are black and deaf about how they perceive their blackness and deafness in 2 different ways. They felt they were identified more as a black person than a deaf person even, though not hearing really separates them from the rest of the world. But because the visible-ness of being black really set them apart, they always felt more black than deaf. And I realized that I understood what Intersectionality was.

Your definition was really interesting – 'how aspects of a person's identity might combine to create unique modes of discriminations and disadvantages.' That coalesced for me so completely on Intersectionality: what it was, how it affects people, and how it affects their relationship with the world.

When you mentioned how black women were excluded from both the feminist movement and the black power movement, I thought of a common phrase in dating apps for gay men: 'no blacks, no fats, no fems.' That's used to exclude people who the person wants to date. It makes me think that even within an oppressed group, there's still bigotry toward other people. Another example is within the disability justice community --there's a big problem of homophobia and transphobia, and vice versa with the accessibility of gay bars. Often you're not just one 'thing.'

Everyone has a combination of attributes - in some ways they are privileged even when they are oppressed in other ways.

- **Thinking of your life to date, is there an instance when you've experienced discrimination / injustice because of the intersections of who you are? Would you share it with the group? What happened, how did you feel, how did you react? Or in thinking of others, have you been in a situation where you've observed injustice or discrimination against others because of who they were, tell us about it? How did you respond?**

Most instances I have encountered have more to do with racism. Just this week I heard Wayne Brady talking about pulling up to a traffic light. When a cop is behind him he gets nervous just because they put him into a group-- it's his blackness even though he's never done anything [wrong.] Just being black is harsh. That's very sad to me.

I had the opportunity to go to Mexico with a group of people from church, to see what the asylum seekers were experiencing. It's horrific! It's still going on today, even though they are fleeing horrible circumstances, experiencing threats, have seen family members killed. They come to the US seeking asylum, and they do it in a legal manner. But they have been barred from coming here and are treated like non people.

As a teacher I've taught in inner city schools where most of my students have been Hispanic. Some are here are lawfully, some not, and I see what they go through.

Being a person of another nationality myself, I sometimes have been mistaken for being that and/or being non-white. I've been insulted by other people. I know what it feels like and have seen it first-hand. It's tough.

You try to think what it's like for someone who ALWAYS experiences that anger and hate indefinitely, over and over. It's just hard to fathom what that is like.

Years ago, I worked at an office, where there was a man that the other men were so cruel to. He was effeminate and they made fun of him, cracked jokes about him, and taunted him. He seemed a very, angry person. I think that after years of carrying that protective shield around him, he came across being angry & hurtful. Well, I got to know him and he was one of the sweetest, most loving people. He's since died and it just broke my heart. I couldn't imagine the kind of life he had lived on a daily basis. The whole situation was just so sad for me. People missed out knowing a wonderful man, and knowing what a wonderful friend he was, just because they chose to discriminate against him.

I've spoke before about advocating for children. You'd not believe the cruelty of children to those who are different from them. I know kids are different now and many are more open minded, but you have to be so aware and step up, step up to their parents, and get between them and other children. Listen, step in, help them understand that it's not right. You have to be everywhere – on the playground, outside the bathroom, everywhere. You need to help children understand kindness and not let things go.

### **July 8<sup>th</sup> Let's talk about Race, Gender, and Sexuality CONTINUED**

**1. Brit talks about the idea of “peppering” ideas into conversations – and that until she came out, she would “pepper” beliefs into conversations through her platform as an evangelical megachurch pastor.**

- **Thoughts on this? Is there a difference between “peppering” and advocating?**

It's a good way to test the waters to see how someone feels or doesn't feel. I do that in the political sense too, nowadays.

If you're peppering it in, you're giving people something to think about before you go deeper. You throw something out there, give them something to think on, then later on bring it into a bigger conversation.

I think you have to know your audience, particularly in a work situation. When in a conversation that you don't want to derail into something else, but you want to get your idea out there, that's a good place to just pepper something in there without taking over the conversation and changing it.

Two thoughts. I have a hard time even when I start with peppering to keep it there. If someone actually engages me, I have a hard time limiting myself. I'm compelled to support my position. Maybe that's because I'm not personally at risk and it's a topic [LGBTQ inclusion] I'm passionate about. The other thought is that sometimes I don't want to waste my time having a conversation with someone who doesn't seem receptive, particularly relatives. I know how some will react, so I don't even pepper.

If you don't know your audience, you talk about it lightly to get a sense.

- **Is there a time where one is more advantageous than another?**

If you throw out a little peppering, it shows where you stand and gives them the opportunity to jump in where they feel comfortable. If you don't get a response then you know that's not where you want to go right now. I do the same thing with political stuff these days. People can be 180 degrees on politics, and you don't want to get in an argument. It is a good way to test the waters and see what kind of response you get.

When I first watched the video and she brought up the term peppering I thought of seasoning. To me it is like seasoning the conversation. I like that idea.

I may be stirring the pot a little, but I think peppering is a way to protect yourself. I feel like it's kind of a cowardly thing to do, as it pertains to LGBT. To X's point, they have a hard time stopping at (peppering) because they want to truly advocate and they're not in an at-risk position by continuing to fight and say more, whereas a marginalized person could potentially be put in harm's way. It's being an ally-- being an advocate is like standing in front of and being armor for that person who is marginalized and at risk. Putting yourself between that person and that potential risk.

don't like confrontation. I don't like arguing with my family. I avoid it most of the time, but I think that's the wrong thing to do. The only way that people are going to hear things, and potentially change, are if people ARE going to say something. (*A personal situation was shared.*) If I don't stand up for myself and be clear, it's not going to change.

I think we are in a time where peppering and doing things like it makes things easier for us, because we don't put ourselves in the line of fire for someone to potentially react in a bad way. But you're also giving somebody else, someone who could potentially react in a bad way, an easy way out instead of having hard conversations. It's uncomfortable, and it's going to be uncomfortable, and if nobody wants to be uncomfortable then nothing's going to change.

I think we're probably using different ideas of what peppering is. I would think, peppering is to me, gently feeling the subject. They would have no way to know whether I was fully for them, but I don't want to scare somebody off by being too bold. They might not be ready for that. I think you have to start out a little softer than that.

It would depend on the circumstance for me. If I was in a situation where there was someone being mistreated because of LGBTQ, I would not hesitate to do more than pepper. But if it was another type of situation, where I wasn't having to come to somebody's defense, I would be more gentle.

It sounds like peppering is the entrée to a spectrum of conversations with someone. If you start as a blaze of glory, people could get defensive and not even have a conversation. But there are times that we, particularly those of us who are allies and not in the LGBTQ community, need to be more

forceful or to engage someone more fully, especially if there have been prior conversations. Each time making it a more rich conversation. It would help each of us grow in being a better ally if we try to take on more.

Again it comes back to knowing your audience, on that spectrum you're talking about, whether to pepper or whether step in and firmly advocate for someone being harmed.

It might be a process that grows as the relationship grows. As time goes on you have more in-depth conversations, where you can be more assertive on the subject.

It could also be a process based on where each of us is in our 'ally journey.' If some people have had little to nominal experience with advocating, they may start smaller. David presented this concept when we held our Meet Inclusive Grace event last September. It depends on where each of us is on that continuum.

**2. Brit says over and over – those with a journey of suffering are those who are best equipped to heal the world and incite change. There is a strength that forms in the face of adversity, a strength that leaves you most equipped to aid in the healing of the world. Thoughts?**

*(Folks shared personal experiences of how their experience with mental illness and personal grief has enabled them to support others and be sympathetic to what others experience.)*

While we can be compassionate and caring and advocate for people, when you've actually experienced something personally it enables you to be there more fully, to not just rely on your own imagination.

**3. How do you see the United Methodist Church healing and becoming whole, as it moves to be affirming of all? How can Inclusive Grace, and Matthews UMC help bring this to fruition?**

Follow the path the clergy are showing us-- To be open with others who may seem 'different' to some folks, whether LGBTQ, black & white, etc. The clergy are leading all of us.

Like with any situation where people are uncomfortable, we benefit from others sharing their stories. You can't discount someone's own story.

We should have more conversations where we hear stories, like the healthy conversations, which increase people's comfort level with ideas/people that may be new to them.

A year ago, we discussed creating a book of stories, like Central UMC Asheville. We could do that or publish video clips of personal stories to share with the congregation.

- Video makes a greater impact as you hear the stories and see faces and the emotion expressed, like the race matters videos with Layton Harris that were so powerful
- The burden or responsibility shouldn't lie with those in the LGBTQ community
- How do you balance the privacy and respect of those witnesses in the LGBTQ community with the need of folks to hear their stories?
- Participation depends on a witness' comfort level and how open they want to be.
- Providing stories gets people talking.
- If you don't know someone in the LGBTQ community (or you don't think you know anyone in the LGBTQ community) you may not realize that we're all the same.

- Sharing a witness gives people a chance to know you for you.

**How do those in the LGBTQ community feel about the idea to share their story – say in a video?**

*(Note: these points and those in Q4 were captured nearly verbatim, absent some personal details, as they represent heartfelt, brave, and impactful personal witness.)*

- That gives me major anxiety
- I don't want to risk what I have by being what I am
- At least we hear from the pulpit about LGBTQ now – that's good, but it needs to be a stronger force
- I want to see a pride flag or symbol somewhere on the campus. We say we're affirming but it stops there. That's great, but how would I know if I walked past the church? How would you know unless there's some sort of sign outside?
- You've got THIS group on the website but even that's buried, you can't find it. You have to dig deep to find what you're looking for. So, from the outside in you'd never know this group existed.
- If you know that I'm [lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer] that's great. If you don't, that's fine too. I'm not one to out myself.
- Me neither.
- I'm not worried people will drop me. I'm afraid of reactions – I don't want the BS tropes out there about [LGBTQ people] projected on me.
- I know people who have had bad experiences.
- I don't have a problem making a video or standing up and talking to people. I do also think that it all shouldn't be on people in the [LGBTQ+] community to educate others. It is kind of frustrating. People have questions and I'm happy to answer them, but it's all tiring, over time, because I'm much more than [an LGBTQ] person and have much more to offer.
- Is it my responsibility to educate MUMC on LGBTQ things just because I'm out and willing to talk about it?
- The more people know you the more they know you're a 'normal' person. That's why it's important to come out and be out BUT doing it is DEFINITELY harder.
- When I came out at church people were nice, they told me I was 'allowed' to come to church and be involved, BUT they were also adamant that this is NOT OKAY even though they loved me.
- I've been asked to leave churches because I was out as a lesbian. Asked not to date within the church because of it.
- I went back recently for a funeral and the looks I got and sheer discomfort I felt being in the church, when I was there for a family I grew up with and who I knew and loved deeply. And to feel so much not connected -- I definitely was not welcome there.
- From the outside Matthews looks like one of those super traditional churches that if I was just a typical person in the [LGBTQ+] community, if I saw it, I'd think that's probably not an affirming church. I probably shouldn't go there.
- When I came to Matthews I didn't know anyone, so if I had a falling out [by sharing my story] I wouldn't lose relationships with anyone. It's different for those with more invested [in the church]. I totally understand not wanting to publicly tell your story if a lot of people know you. You have more to lose.

- If you put out a video, who knows...your phone will start ringing, email blows up because people want to talk with you about it. Are you willing to open that can of worms to talk to a bunch of people and who knows what they will want to say?

**4. After coming out as a lesbian at the evangelical megachurch, Brit says, “All of a sudden, I found myself on the outside of a world where I’d made my home.” -- Imagine what it might feel like if you suddenly had to leave the church or leave your home. Thoughts?**

- That’s just how I feel. Like when I read the book [Torn](#) I thought, that’s me!
- I AM me in church. If I came out then I CAN’T be me in the church. I can’t be ALL of me.
- I like what I have and don’t want to risk that
- When I came out at church only a few people knew and I didn’t search out more people to tell. While my fears didn’t come to fruition, I’m still cautious.

A gay friend recently told me, “Gay pride was not born out of a need to celebrate being gay but instead our right to exist without prosecution. Maybe instead of wondering why there isn’t a straight pride month/movement, straight people should be thankful they don’t need one.”

**5. How can we take on things (racial injustice, inequalities, etc.) without passing them to others? How can we initiate change without becoming the thing that hurts us or the thing we are rallying against? (fight racism without becoming racist, empower the oppressed without becoming an oppressor, etc.)**

I think it’s very difficult. You have a position such as advocating for LGBTQ rights within the church. We feel that those who feel otherwise aren’t being loving and accepting enough. Are we in turn judging them for feeling that way. They are judging us for loving the community and we in turn are judging them back. How do you try to model the love you want them to be without being judgmental back?

We take the high road and be loving, which doesn’t mean we don’t state our opinion, but we still can be loving to people who have a different opinion than ours. People can get that way about religion too, and that can be the easiest way to push someone away by judging them for not having the same beliefs as you.

I struggle, I don’t know the answer with how you do this. I agree people can have different opinions Everyone has a right to their opinion and I to mine, and we should be in a place where we can exist in a space together without issue. It becomes more difficult when it involves my rights or my ability to be involved or my inclusion. If your opinion is that I don’t exist or that I’m wrong or illegitimate, at what point is that not okay.

I’ve had this experience before at Matthews, at one of the healthy conversations. A man who sat across from me told me he thought I was absurd. That people would think he was crazy if he dressed up like Theodore Roosevelt and said he was the dead president. But if I dress up like a guy and say I’m a guy, then people should just accept that? I told him he has a right to have his own opinion and we can both exist, go to the same church, and believe in a higher power and that’s okay. But at what point am I giving too much? I don’t know.

Are you saying, where are we just letting them off the hook?

My belief has always been love, love, love. Regardless of that man’s belief, God loves him and I should love him. And maybe by knowing me more he changes his mind. But I am real, I do exist! I



should have equal rights in the country and in the church. At what point should I push more? Do I just say, “we all have the right to our own opinions, and we can both exist at the same table regardless?” The problem I find is that the people who are against me are very loud and they outnumber me. So they’re very loud, they outnumber me, and they have the most power to make the decisions that result in what I have as rights as a human and also inclusiveness in the church.

As a person in the LGBTQ community we do have to get more cis, straight, white people on our side because they make up the majority and hold the power. We need them to be allies for us so they can advocate for more change. So we’re doing that, we’re trying. I don’t have the answers and don’t know at what point I push more or not.

So many similarities with this and the issue of racism. Anytime there’s an oppressed group there’s the same issues. I just read White Fragility, it’s worth reading, so many similarities.

I recommend a great Netflix documentary called Disclosure. It’s about the trans community and how it’s portrayed in the media. Everybody in it is trans. The reality is that 80% Americans don’t know a trans person so the only info they have is from media. In the media / movies trans men barely exist. Trans women are portrayed as serial killers, victims of violence, or killed. In reality they are being killed! We have to change this, so people’s understanding changes.

### **July 22<sup>nd</sup> Let’s Talk About Brit Barron’s Theology**

**While first reading through the Harry Potter series, Brit had a friend (early on) who told her “it was all a dream” for Harry. With that, Brit read the books through that lens – disregarding certain relationships, etc. Imagine her surprise when she reached the end of the series and this in fact was not all what had happened. A few things that upset her...**

- 1. You can never read something again for the first time.**
- 2. She read the entire thing thinking that one thing was true, and in the end – it wasn’t.**
- 3. Once you have been told something – it is hard to change your lens.**

**She then went on to relate this to how people read and interpret the Bible.**

- Thoughts on this?**

This applies to so many things. Given the subject we’re talking about, people have their perceptions and they choose to interpret things based on their perception or assumptions, often rather than doing more research which may change their perceptions or assumptions.

I agree. I also think Brit’s talking about a first impression reading a story. And as with anything in life, we don’t have to stick with our first impression or our first understanding. Same thing with meeting people. You might grow up with a family that taught you things a certain way. As you become more worldly, or whatever the word is, you may grow to have a different perception. So, I don’t know that a lens is fixed. It can be corrected, but it’s not easy. The easy thing is just to fall back on what you know.

- How do different lenses affect how people read or interpret scripture, or it could even be bigger than that, things happening around them?**

Sometimes you meet somebody and you've heard something about them beforehand. Then when you meet them you may think, "this person is nothing like what somebody else said." Our own thoughts and feelings are different. People have said that when they met someone who is [in the LGBTQ community] they wonder "why do people think they're that different?" They're still people who are kind and loving, and all those things, yet other people stereotype them.

My children have called me on that so many times. I'll say, "he's so well spoken." What do you think his skin color was? My lens! I've worked on that a lot... When I taught, I said, 'we don't refer to anybody by the color of their skin,' which I never do. Yet when I say something about somebody being well spoken, well that's just the same thing! You don't even realize you're doing it; you just do things without thinking.

Yes, it's showing our conscious or unconscious implicit bias that's there, even if we don't want it to be. We've just been raised in it and it shows up sometimes.

Sometimes our lenses are already focused, and we need to refocus them.

That's why we get corrective lenses to see. And sometimes our minds may need a little correction too.

I'm like you, I'm trying to work on that. To make my own decisions and to give people the opportunity.

You know the question applies to reading the Bible too. If you're raised in a certain tradition, you're taught certain interpretations and that persists. Brie talks about how she had one perspective being raised in the evangelical church. Then she came to a different understanding as she studied more and was exposed to other interpretations. So again, it does require you to CHOOSE to be exposed to something other than how you were raised.

I've taken a deep dive into racism in recent weeks (reading; watching programming on TV, Netflix, Amazon Prime and YouTube). I watched a video called [Holy Hierarchy: The Religious Roots of Racism in America](#); it's about how religion in the United States contributed to racism. Talking about interpreting the Bible... what they pointed out was that from the beginning of our country, religion was used to promote the idea of white superiority or white supremacy, and the effect that's had on people of color. They called out different scriptures that people used to reinforce the idea that slavery was God ordained. I think we can draw the same parallel to the LGBTQ community. That people take scriptures, and in my opinion twist them, to support their prejudices about that. Lots of parallels in both those areas.

- **Has your lens changed, recently, over time, about anything?**

Mine is not changing when it comes to racism, but I'm finding information to support my stance by becoming more knowledgeable. And I'm trying to see racism through the psyche of somebody who is a person of color. I feel it's impacting me in a positive way. I've done lots of reading and research when it comes to the LGBTQ issue too. One of the ways we change our lens is by being willing to challenge it, to become more knowledgeable, to talk to people, and to listen. To get out of our bubble and comfort zone instead of choosing to stay stuck in a particular position.

If you surround yourself with people who have the same beliefs, you can be stuck. Surround yourself with people who have different beliefs.

Be prepared, though, for the fact that when you start talking about these things, people may just want to tune you out or totally not want to have anything to do with you.

My feelings are the same as they were when I was a teenager. I had racist parents born in GA and AL in the early 1900s. I had a terrible time convincing them that I wasn't bad because I spoke with someone who was black. The same thing went with LGBTQ persons. I've always been open. A person is a person because they're breathing and moving just like I am. And there's no difference. What matters to me is that they're people who are God's kids.

I grew up in a very conservative family, went to a Baptist church. I've always said they're really great people and I loved them and feel they loved me. They believed a certain thing and I was allowed to be there, but they had very strong beliefs about how they read scripture, about what they believed to be sinful or not, and whether I could be saved or not based on my sexual orientation at the time. It took a long time for that lens to change for me. There was a lot of self-hatred and self-loathing and a lot of shame and feeling like something was wrong with me. Because these were people who I trusted, who had more knowledge and a seminary education, I BELIEVED this was what a particular scripture meant. I trusted these people. I just assumed that was the truth, even though I knew I had a relationship with God despite what they were saying to me. It took a long time for me to deconstruct and reconstruct my belief system. And now I don't believe that what they taught me is true, I don't believe it's the truth. I'm actually getting to a place that I don't actually believe that they love me. It's hard for me to say that because I spent a lot of my time at one church in particular. I do believe that you can love somebody and have a relationship with somebody and believe different things, but to be so anti me - they ARE anti what I am in my core. I'm getting to a place where I believe that you cannot be so anti me and also support and love me. They just don't mesh. And it makes it hard. I'm struggling with that piece of it.

Talking about racism and race, I would have told you too that skin color is not a thing, people are people, I don't treat people differently. BUT then when think more deeply... like when I'm driving my car through a poor neighborhood that's predominantly black, my reaction is to lock my door. I've driven through poor white neighborhoods and that's not my reaction. That's wrong! And I feel terrible! And I have to make conscious efforts to not be that way! I get so frustrated with myself.

Six months ago I went to a gas station in the middle of the night. I had on a hoodie. I went into the store, got what I needed, and walked up to the cashier. She told me to take my hood off, so I took my hood off. She rang me up and was said, "don't ever come in here with your hood up like that again. If you do, I'll have to ask you to leave." I left and didn't say anything to her. I got home and was [mad]. I said, "Do you believe these people? I was wearing a hoodie. What do they expect ME to do?" I think about that now - what a privileged piece of [garbage] I am! I was literally like, "what's wrong with these people? Me of all people, like I'm going to do something sketchy. These people don't know me." But the reality is that my situation would be entirely different if I were black. Just like when I get pulled over, my initial reaction is to go into my glove box pull out my registration & insurance. I don't wait for the cop to come up to the door. If I were black I would be dead and that's the reality. It shouldn't be that way. I feel like I'm super inclusive and I'd say that to anybody, but all this stuff has made me self-reflect and look at ME. I have so much white privilege! Even though I've been through a lot and dealt with my own stuff and discrimination against me, I have done this too without even realizing it. I have to really try to deconstruct the way that I think about everything.

You're right. You experienced the benefit of white privilege that night. After I read Robin DiAngelo's book, [White Fragility](#), it really woke me up to a lot of things. Like you, I have been making a conscious effort to think about things and how I react. We've taken some of that in, whether we wanted to or not.

Looking at it now, my family is extremely racist and I would not have said that 6 months ago. (*personal story shared*). I was so desensitized to it. It makes me really want to self-reflect. I need to deconstruct and rewire how my brain is and the way my brain thinks. A lot of these are split second, they're inherent. Some people will say "well, it just is what it is." NO. It isn't just what it is! You have to make a conscious effort to change. And if you're not, then you're part of the problem!

Going back to the comment that those people didn't love you as much as you hoped they would... What came to my mind is that judging somebody and loving somebody ARE mutually exclusive. If we're going to stand in judgement of anyone for anything, then we aren't really loving them in my opinion.

- **Recognizing that people have different lenses, how do you share your beliefs with those who read the Bible through a different lens?**

I think it's the same thing as sharing the gospel itself. Our best position on sharing the gospel is to share what God does in our own lives. Don't try to tell someone what God ought to do in their life. Same is true with issues like this [racism, LGBTQ inclusion]. I will share what my thoughts and feelings are and not try to tell someone what their thoughts and feelings should be.

Start where they are and move gently. It's always easier when you talk about what they believe and not necessarily try to change it.

You talk about what you believe. I respect that's what you believe. Now I'm going to talk about how I feel and what I believe. And doing it in a way that you're sharing. Actually shut up and listen to them. Don't just wait to say, "okay that's wrong, this is....."

I do think that to approach things out of love is the best. Regardless of what anyone believes we should love them. God loves them. As far as scripture, I think it shouldn't be trying to beat someone over the head with the Bible to have them believe what you believe. It takes time to develop a relationship with a person before you can even try to have something more, when it comes to what you believe.

Sometimes you have to agree to disagree. I find myself in that situation a lot.

I like what X said about starting where they are and not trying to start a conversation by convincing them they're wrong. Get their views, find out where they're at, and move forward with it. Don't just try to force your thoughts immediately on them.

In July/August last year Linda Linfors from St Stephen shared her approach to conversations, called Graceful Engagement. Over time each person gains an appreciation of the other's perspective and it opens up the relationship for when there is a more serious discussion later.

Interesting when that kind of thing happens, when someone has held a negative/judgmental attitude and it hits close to home. They find themselves feeling very uncomfortable in their position because it's somebody they love.

**Brit introduces the concept that the Bible is all about dealing with POWER, both addressing and breaking down power structures as well as Jesus' concern with who we see as powerful, acknowledging strength that comes from adversity and suffering. Does this change the way you read it?**

That's exactly what the documentary I watched last night was emphasizing. That's exactly how the interpretation was in this nation early-on . It was about power. It was about the white people being in power.

**Brit states that POWER is the first domino that falls – which leads to OTHERING – which ultimately ends in violence (video clip)**

- **Brit uses haircare as a simple example of othering. What other ways does our society 'other' people? How do we 'other' each other in church? How does othering make people feel?**

Zip codes, neighborhoods, schools, kind of car you drive, kind of clothes you wear, it can go on and on, who you hang out with –it's pervasive –even in the church. You're in that class, well I go to this class. Even what service you go to.

Something that's has really made me start thinking is when they started talking about white privilege. Growing up I didn't have a whole lot and I never thought about the privileges I have that other people don't. For instance, where you go to school. It makes me feel kind of bad that everybody doesn't have those privileges. Everybody should go to a good school, everybody should have 2 loving parents, and life isn't like that. I never really thought about those things being privileges. And they are.

It's because 'whiteness' was set up to be the normal, so we don't talk about our whiteness because we've been led to think THAT'S the normal. So you don't hear people, very often, refer to themselves as a white person, but we're very quick to refer to someone as a brown person or black person.

And you don't hear people talk about how straight they are. It frustrates me when people say "why do I care if you're gay? Why do I care if you're trans? Nobody asks me if I'm straight." No, because society has deemed that's 'the norm.'

When we talk about privilege, while it is sad that people of every race should have a good school, should have loving parents, etc. I think the MOST important thing is that they should be able to get pulled over and not get killed. [White privilege] is so much more. People of color have a right to live and not be killed in the street. However you feel about George Floyd, he was killed in the street in front of a bunch of people, in front of a crowd he died. People could argue that it could have been the same way if it was a white person, but it wouldn't have. - probably not- and THAT'S the white privilege. THAT'S the privilege that society has deemed - that we are more worthy of living. And that's insane.

Of course the world doesn't treat everybody the same, but I can do that or work towards doing that, fight for everybody. ... It really distresses me that there are children who don't have the opportunity to do online schooling. We all have a responsibility to help see that things happen for them. Because it doesn't matter where they live, or who they are, or what color their skin is, or what sexual orientation they have. Everyone has that right and deserves it. As Christians we need to show that love.

Going back to white privilege, we as white people don't have several strikes against us going into a situation like people of color do. Like the lady we're listening to, she has several strikes against her, which she shouldn't have. But, in our culture people do that. She's African American, she's also a lesbian. So there you go, in a lot of people's minds.

Another way we judge people, because I am one- I'm 80 years old – there's a lot of discrimination against people of age. Same as with sexual orientation or color of skin.

- **What can we do when we witness othering?**

When we're in a situation and we hear somebody making a derogatory remark, whichever 'other' they're picking on, handling that can be very difficult.

There's an expression now, instead of calling someone out you call them in. It's a kind way of sharing with them. Important not to do it publicly, to just share as different perspective. But you have to be careful so you don't come off as condescending.

You need to preserve their dignity and think about how Christ would approach it.

Staying silent, I don't think is good – it's a cop out.

If you stay silent, and I'm guilty of this, then you're condoning it as if you said it or did it. That's where we are in the racism/anti-racism thing. If you're not actively making progress and you're silent and not doing anything, then you're racist! And people don't like to hear that.

Yeah, that's one of the points of White Fragility, when we fail to speak-up, we're contributing.

All of us here have likely been othered in some fashion. There's lots of women here who I'm sure have been othered due to gender, and of course being a part of the LGBT community we're othered that way. We know what it's like. So, it's important to put yourself in that person shoes, to imagine if that was you being othered. And then the people that you care about were not speaking out against it. Then they're complicit with it. I struggle with this as the people who are around me (my family) aren't as outspoken as I think they should be.

You're judging them when you say that. You're laying your ideas on them when you say they don't care as much as they should.

If I am othered and my family is silent that's a problem. It just is. It's just the same as what I'm saying about silence with racism. I'm not saying I'm perfect, I've definitely done it. But silence is a stance. If you choose to be silent, if my parents choose to be silent, that's a stance. And that doesn't mean they're forever in that stance, that they're forever against me, but in that moment they were. Maybe they were scared, they were nervous, they were uncomfortable, or they didn't know what to say, how to do it, or what to do. And there's grace for that. I'm not saying that if they don't stand up for me once then I wipe my hands of them. However, there's actions I take for myself. I'm trying to learn and deconstruct and figure out how I can rewire my brain to not be so implicitly biased about people of color. Because I am, I just am. I've got to figure out how to fix it because it's a problem. And it's just 2<sup>nd</sup> nature. I'm saying if I don't make an effort to try to correct it, I'm part of the problem.

I was listening to an interview today. They were saying that we can talk about it all we want, but until we make a choice to take action and do something we're not actively moving forward. So, I hear what you're saying.

*(a personal situation was shared)*

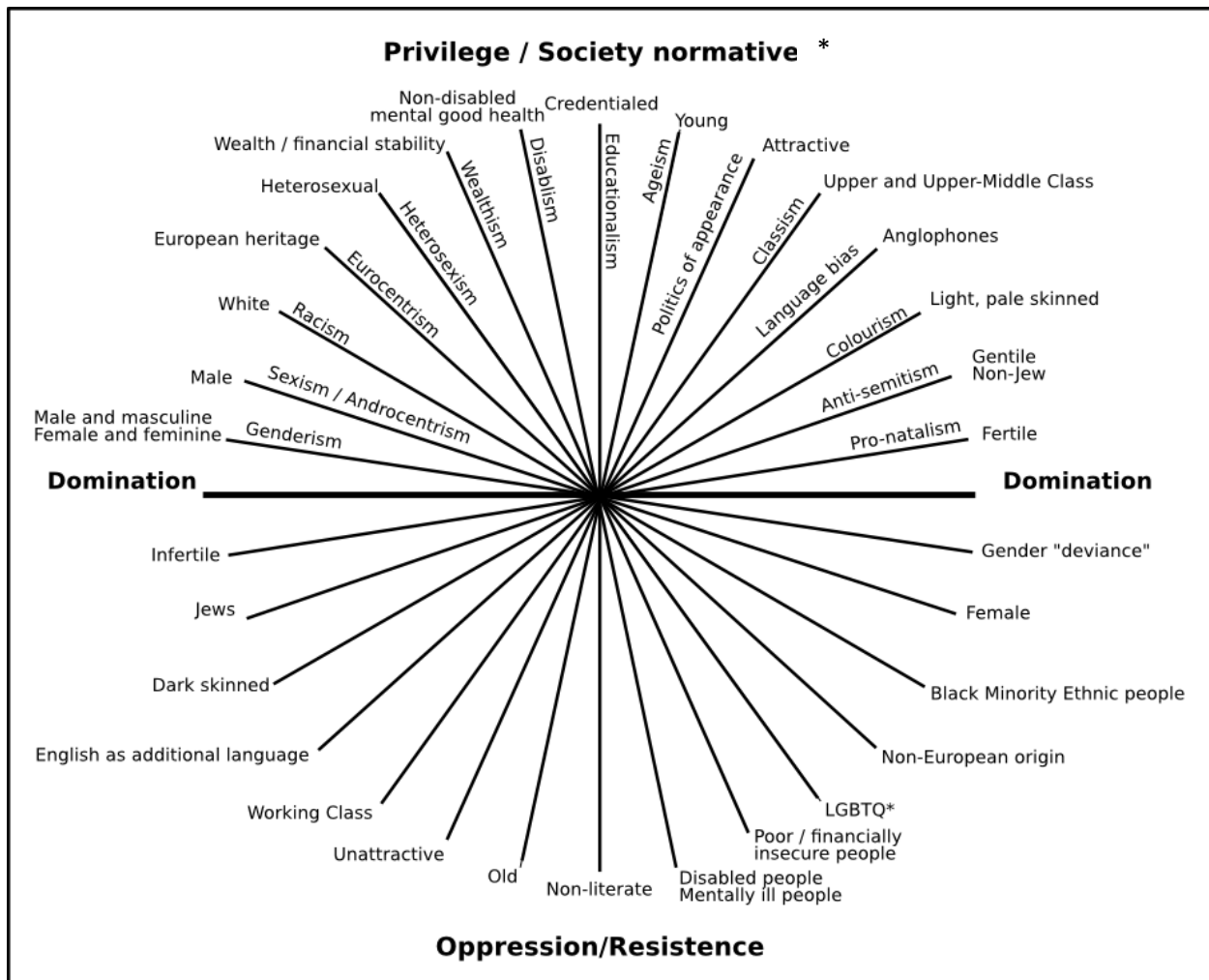
## REFERENCE INFORMATION

### Intersectionality

Intersectionality is rooted in the research and activism of women of color, extending back to Sojourner Truth's "Aint I a Woman" speech in 1851. Observing the absence of women of color in feminist and race-based social movements, scholars called for a deeper look at the interconnected factors that influence power, privilege, and oppression.

What is privilege? - An unearned right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to some people or groups of people, oppressing others. Often used in intersectionality when discussing the power afforded to those who meet the "normal" standards of society. Nuanced.

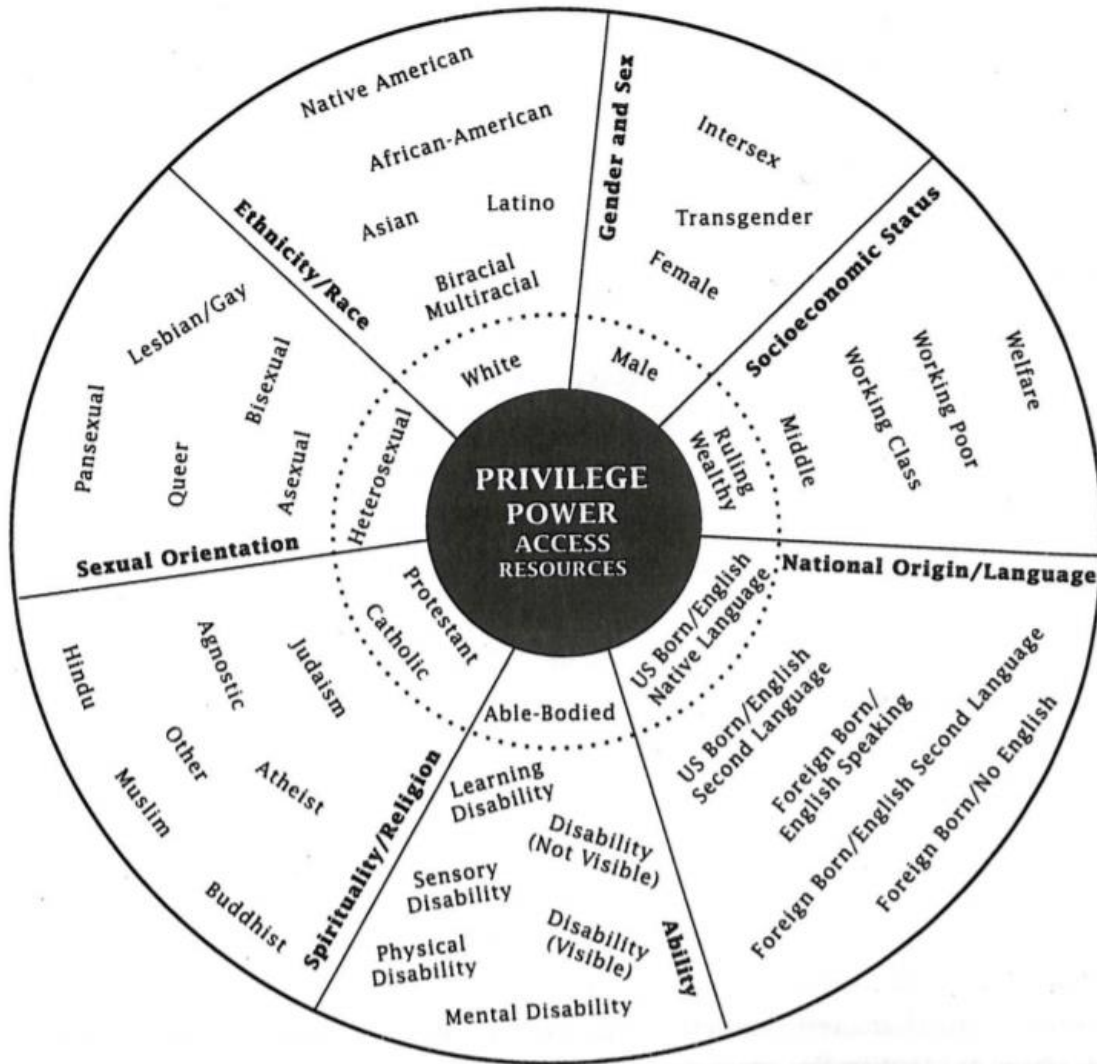
### Illustration: intersecting axes of privilege, domination, and oppression



Source: *adapted from* Morgan, K.P. Describing the Emperor's New Clothes: Three Myths of Education (In)Equality. In *The Gender Question in Education, Theory, Pedagogy & Politics*; Diller, A., Ed.; Westview: Boulder, CO, USA, 1996.

\* This illustration does not reflect all attributes by which individuals are privileged or oppressed in our society, for example it is missing religion (Christian vs non-Christian). Additionally, the term Gender "deviance" is derogatory and outdated. The most current terms include gender expansive, differently gendered, gender creative, gender variant, genderqueer, nonbinary, agender, gender fluid, gender neutral, bigender, androgynous, or gender diverse. (source pflag.org)

Figure 1: The Web of Oppression\*



Source: Sisneros, J., Stakeman, C., Joyner, M.C. & Schmitz, C.L. (2008). Critical Multicultural Social Work. Chicago, IL: Lyceum

**Pulse**

Brit mentions taking a run to Pulse while attending the conference. Pulse was a gay nightclub in Orlando, FL, that mostly served the Black and Latinx communities. (Example of intersectionality!) On June 12th, 2016, there was a homophobic shooting in which 49 people died and 53 more were wounded. This is an example of the violence at the end of the chain of othering.

**The Reformation Project**

The Reformation Project is a Bible-based, Christian organization that works to promote inclusion of LGBTQ people by reforming church teaching on sexual orientation and gender identity. They envision a



global church that honors scripture and fully affirms LGBTQ people. Some of you may be familiar with the life and work of Matthew Vines, its Founder and Executive Director. Learn more at <https://reformationproject.org/>

### **Talking to our kids about Race**

When discussing her childhood, Brit mentions her parents frequently talking to her about race from a young age. Very often, white parents wait to talk to their kids about race until they are a bit older. Black families and other families of color do not have that privilege. Saying "we're all equal," "I don't see color," and "we're all the same human race" trivializes the real-world injustices faced by BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color). Here is a [link](#) to an NPR interview that addresses talking to your white kids about race.

### **Racism 101 Guidebook**

Brit Barron has a Racism 101 Guidebook. Her website says, "If you have not had training, education, or even any conversations about Race and Racism in America, then this guide is absolutely for you. This is a springboard for your journey toward education and action and so we hope you take it seriously and know we don't give all the answers but ask you to do the work." It's available on her [website](#) for \$47 for people who are interested.