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Building an Understanding of the Effects of Power and Privilege on Human Development

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Introduction

Human development textbooks and courses traditionally address diversity and sociocultural influences on development but seldom are these points extended to an understanding of the role privilege and power plays in human development. Students (particularly privileged students) do not make this jump by themselves. This project was developed to explicitly extend an understanding of sociocultural influences to the major influence that privilege plays to build a general understanding about how power and privilege function in our society

Working Definitions

- Power:
  "1. ability to act or produce an effect
  2. possession of control, authority, or influence over others"
  (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/power)
- Privilege: "a. A special advantage, immunity, permission, right, or benefit granted to or enjoyed by an individual, class, or caste.
  b. Such an advantage, immunity, or right held as a prerogative of status or rank, and exercised to the exclusion or detriment of others." (Free Dictionary)

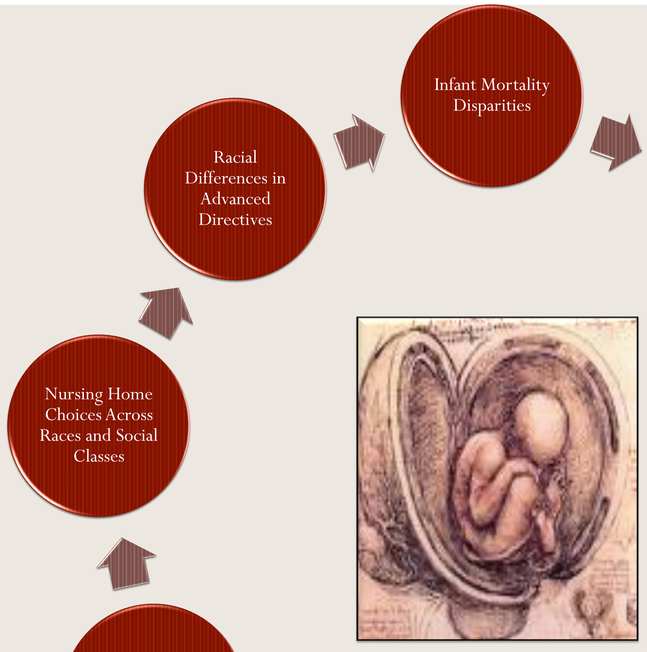
Method

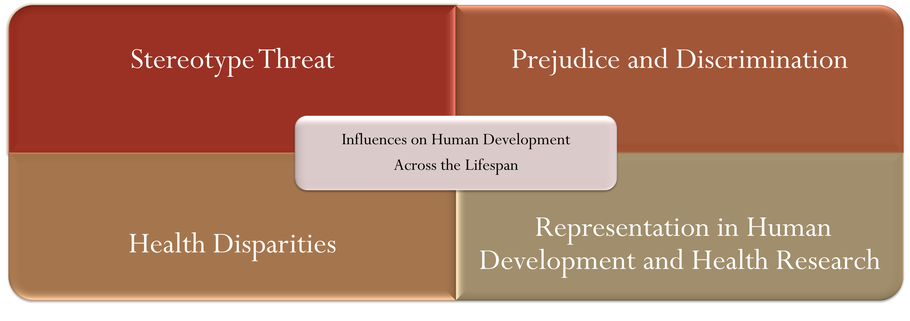
•Course Selection: HSV 2250: Human Growth and Development was selected for this pilot project. An honors section was selected due to the lower size of the course (22 vs.. 100) and the students' developed facility for analytic thinking.

•Teaching Method: The primary delivery of the course was a modified Socratic method of a series of questions based on a stimuli such as textbook readings, films, observations, etc (the RACE exhibit was one of the stimuli).

•Incorporating Power and Privilege: Influential points within the life cycle and influences across the life span that seemed to be good teaching moments were identified. A series of questions identifying power and privilege were used at those points in the curriculum.

Power and Privilege Within and Across the Life Cycle





Setting the Stage:

The first class was spent asking students to introduce themselves, telling the class a little about their self-identified racial and ethnic identities and particulars about their development as children. This had the desired affect of introducing diverse experience as an element in human development. It also introduced many of the students to ethnic/racial identities that were not immediately evident.

The importance of sociocultural forces (a theme of the textbook) was extended within the first week to an introduction of power and privilege as important elements of sociocultural forces.

This set the stage for questions regarding power and privilege throughout the semester.

Examples of Questions:

Topic: Representation in Human Growth and Health Research (early in the semester)

- How do you make sense of the fact that women and racial minorities are left out of so many studies yet those same studies generalize to populations that include women and minorities? (With some additional prompting students were able to identify that researchers and reviewers may have had "blind spots" regarding including participants outside of their own experiences)

Topic: the Race Exhibit.

- What did you see in the exhibit that indicates the privilege of one race over others? What advantages does this privilege carry?
- What did you see in the exhibit that indicated an abuse of power?