

# An Introduction to White Privilege

An introduction to privilege

By Hardy Groening

*Hardy Groening is White and the result of generations of story tellers. Growing up on a small family farm in Manitoba without the benefit of a TV, his family could rarely finish a meal without someone's story being challenged by a better one. Hardy and his wife Nellie have had the opportunity to live in several locations in North and South America and are currently members of Crossroads Mennonite Brethren Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba.*

And now, I have the privilege of introducing ... Me!

Thank you, thank you very much!

Have you heard this one? A White guy walks into an inner-city mission one day ... and gets offered a job! Actually, this is not a joke.

I'm asked at the interview, "What is your vision?" I can't bluff my way through this one and so I answer, "I have no idea. But I am Hardy, I have been everywhere, done everything, I can help you!"

And they bought it! I tried to turn it down, but the job was already mine!

It's not just that I have experience. It's not just that I'm middle-aged. It's not just that I'm White. It's that I'm a White, middle-aged man with world experience. I can take charge, solve problems.

So I do. And they hire me.

I have had the privilege of introducing myself over and over. And people accept me in my new role, in the office, on the street.

"Grab a vest," he tells me. "We're going out on the street." I reach for the best one. "Typical White guy," he laughs and hands me a torn, dirty one instead. When I complain, he says, "Then it will look like you're the only one working hard!" Which is fine on the street, with the garbage cans and

garbage pickers. But when we put down our tools and enter an office, I end up having to introduce myself to men in suits, women in heels.

“I’m the new manager,” I inform them and they all shake my hand, accept the change in leadership. Is it because of the ratty old vest with the dirty logo? Or is it because I’m the only White guy in the group?

After only three weeks of introducing myself, I’m ready for a vacation. Before I leave, he talks to me about writing a resume. “Don’t you already have one?”, I ask.

“That’s not me. That’s what someone else wrote about me.”

What a privilege it is to introduce myself. He is always being introduced by others, being explained, being categorized, being “fixed” by others.

Four months later, while he is trying to collect EI (“It’s a technicality,” they say), I am telling stories about him to a high-school class. I suddenly realize that I am at the front of the class because I am a White, middle-aged man who can use other people’s stories to engender sympathy for the mission. I confess this to the students.

My supervisor tells me later that it’s not because I was White that I was hired, but because of my experience and because I “think outside of the box.” As I try to explain that this White man’s mission hires White guys like me because they will fit *in* the “box” without challenging the White mind-set ... I suddenly remember that he was the one who offered me the job!

What a privilege!

## Biblical reflection

“An introduction to privilege”

Proverbs 29: *Where there is no vision, the people perish* (v. 18).

- 1) Where am I in this passage? Where are we in this passage?
- 2) How does White privilege allow you to live without a vision?
- 3) What vision emerges as you reflect on White privilege?
- 4) As we contemplate White privilege, what is God calling us to in this passage?

## Humour and White privilege

**Level of challenge for participants:** Appropriate for all levels of awareness

**Level of challenge for facilitator:** Easy

**Supplies:** A copy of "Qualities of authentic relationships across differences" for each participant (see page 16). Chart paper, markers and tape.

**Introduction:** The author of this piece uses humour to talk about White Privilege. In "Qualities of authentic relationships across differences," Dionardo Pizaña and Karen Pace encourage us to have a "willingness to express and nurture humour." "Humour can be a uniting and healing force. It can provide levity in times of deep emotions."

**Activity:** What's so funny about White privilege or things that White people do? It is OK to laugh!

**Part One:** Write a list of things that strike you as funny about White privilege or share with your group. Having a hard time coming up with some? Check out <http://stuffwhitepeoplelike.com/> or Beverly Slapin's *Basic Skills Caucasian Americans Workbook*. Sonoma, CA: Oyate. 1994.

**Part Two:** What qualities of authentic relationships across differences do you feel that you own? Which ones are you good at? Celebrate them!