

QUEERING PRIVILEGE

Whiteness and Class

CONCEPTS OF WHITENESS AND PRIVILEGE

In discussions of racial and ethnic identity category, **whiteness** has very often been viewed as a “noncategory,” as the normative, often universalized one against which all others are defined by contrast and comparison. In the last few decades, this has begun to change, as scholars have begun to study whiteness as every bit a way of classifying and valuing individuals and groups of people as any other racial or ethnic grouping. It is often tied to the concept of **privilege**, conscious and unconscious benefits people accrue simply by being a member of a group that has historically had social and economic power. The next chapter examines in more detail the intersections between minority racial or ethnic identities and queer identity. This chapter focuses on how whiteness, privilege, and queerness both intersect and sometimes contradict each other.

What does it mean to be *white*? For some, it may be based in skin color, as well as certain biological features of appearance (what geneticists call *phenotypes*) that make one recognize oneself as white. Geneticists now state that the genetic differences between people of different heritage are much smaller than might have been supposed before the human genome was mapped. Are some ethnicities considered “whiter” than others in social hierarchies? Why? Is it simply a matter of skin tones, or are other elements at work? Changing demographics of intermarriage and parentage in the United States may be making the “science” of race, insofar as there is one, less important than the social and political values attached to it.

So, how is whiteness more complex than what it is not, as the default category for all those people and groups who do not fit easily into one of the historically racial and ethnic categories of differences? Complicating the question is the concept of *class*, the cultural and socioeconomic dimensions of identity; class itself is tied to the notion of privilege, conferring various material and other advantages by virtue of membership in a category.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING AND VIEWING

Allen, Samantha. *Real Queer America: LGBT Stories from Red States*. New York: Little, Brown, 2019.

Balay, Anne. *Semi Queer: Inside the World of Gay, Trans, and Black Truck Drivers*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018.

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Cuomo, Chris J., and Kim Q. Hall, eds. *Whiteness: Feminist Philosophical Reflections*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999.

Forster, E. M. *Maurice*. New York: Norton, 1971. (Note: A film version of this novel is available.)

Ma'ayan, Hadar Dubowsky. "A White Queer Geek at School: Intersections of Whiteness and Queer Identity." *Journal of LGBT Youth* 8.1 (2011): 84–98.

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Williams, Anthony J. "A Black Queer Man's Syllabus to Whiteness." *Medium*, December 27, 2016. <https://medium.com/anthoknees/a-black-queer-mans-syllabus-to-whiteness-c21d851b6016>.