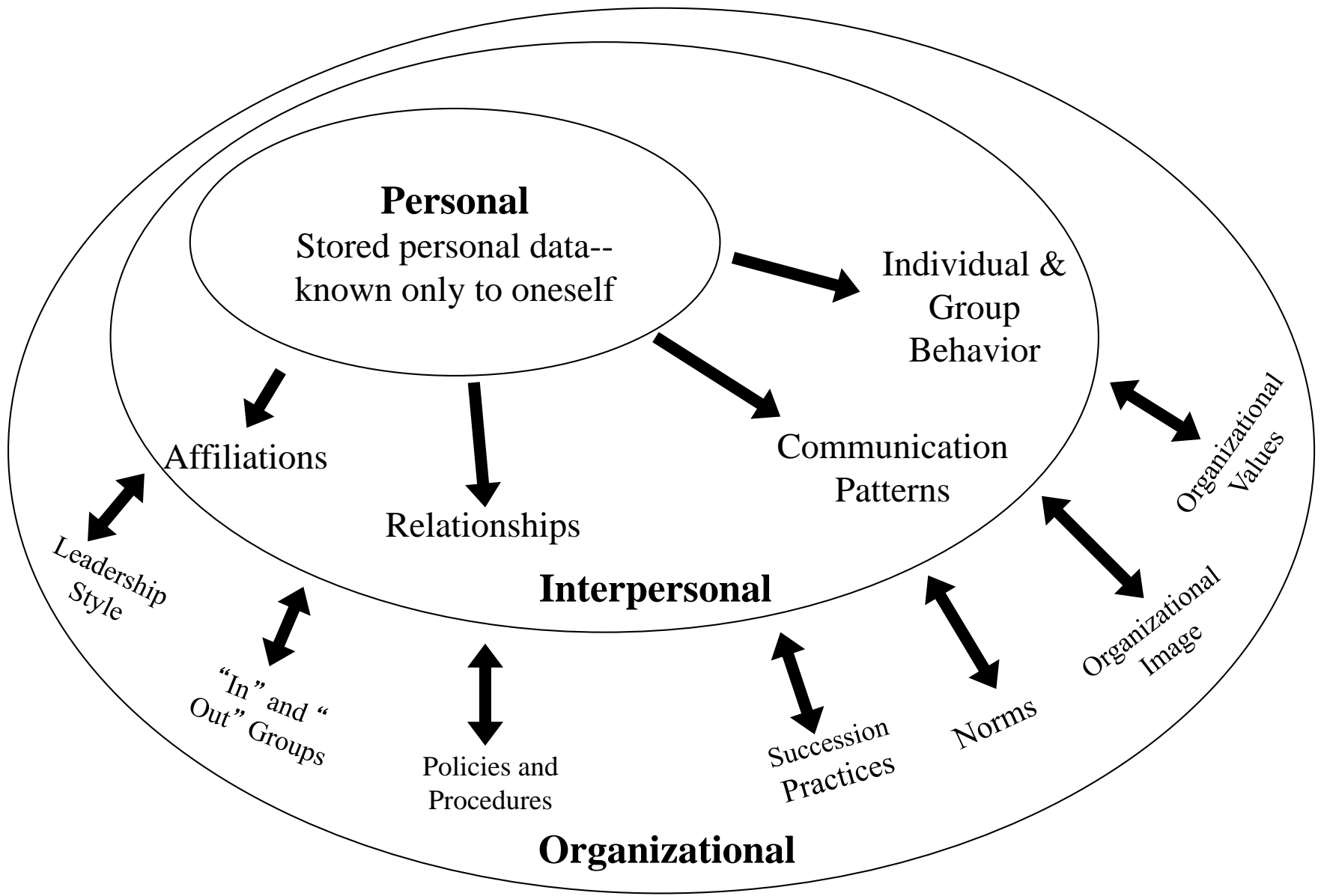


# Understanding White Privilege-- An Introduction

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# The Three Tiers



# Systems

- ❖ Every system is exquisitely designed to produce the results it gets. If you want to change the results, you have to change the systems.

Paul Batalden, M.D.

# Definition of Privilege

- ❖ “...a right, immunity, or benefit enjoyed only by a person beyond the advantages of most.”
  - *American Heritage Dictionary*

# Two Types of Privilege

1. “Unearned entitlements”: things that *all* people should have but are restricted to certain groups.
  - These “unearned entitlements” then become “unearned advantage,” giving those who are dominant a competitive edge.

*Power, Privilege, and Difference*

Allan Johnson, p. 25

# Two Types of Privilege (Cont' d)

2. “Conferred dominance”: the power of one group over another.

- It manifests itself systemically, whites dominant over people of color, men over women, heterosexuals over GLBT folks, Christians over people of other religions, people who are physically able-bodied over those who are not, and so on.

*Power, Privilege, and Difference*

Allan Johnson, p. 26.

# Privilege, cont' d

- ❖ Individuals within the dominant groups are able to use their systemically conferred dominance personally, and often do so without being aware of it.

# Privilege, cont' d

- ❖ “When it comes to privilege...it doesn't really matter who we really are. What matters is who other people *think* we are, which is to say, the social categories they put us in.”

*Power, Privilege, and Difference*

Allan Johnson, p. 35



# Aspects of White Privilege

- ❖ Privilege provides disproportional access to resources, to the ability to influence, and to power.
- ❖ Privileges are given by systems to individuals on the basis of position and/or identity.
- ❖ Privileges are granted because a group and its members are deemed more “worthy” than other groups.

# Aspects of White Privilege

- ❖ The superiority of whiteness is a social construct, created by some white men but in all our names.
- ❖ This construct informs both the past and the present and informs each of our lives daily.

# Aspects of White Privilege

- ❖ White privilege is an institutional, rather than personal set of benefits granted to those of us who, by race, resemble the people who hold the power positions in our institutions.
- Purely on the basis of our skin color doors are open to us that are not open to others.

# What Privilege “Looks Like”

## White Privilege

- ❖ Whites are less likely than Blacks (and perhaps Latinos) to be arrested; once arrested they are less likely to be convicted and, once convicted, less likely to go to prison, regardless of the crime or circumstances.
- ❖ Whites are more likely than Blacks to have loan applications approved and less likely to be given poor information or the runaround during the application process.
- ❖ Whites are charged lower prices for new cars and used cars than are people of color, and residential segregation gives whites access to higher-quality goods of all kinds at cheaper prices.

# What Privilege “Looks Like” (Cont’d)

## White Privilege (Cont’d)

- ❖ Whites have greater access to quality education and healthcare.
- ❖ White representation in government and the ruling circles of corporations, universities, and other organizations is disproportionately high.
- ❖ Whites can choose to be conscious of their racial identity or to ignore it and regard themselves as simply human beings without a race.
- ❖ Etc.....

# Aspects of White Privilege

- ❖ All of us who are white, by race, have white privilege.
  - Privileges based on other social categories, are given to us or withheld, depending on who we are.
    - Socioeconomic class
    - Gender
    - Sexual orientation
    - Ability/disability
    - Religion

# What Privilege “Looks Like” (Cont’d)

## Male Privilege

- ❖ In most professions and upper-level occupations, men are held to a lower standard than women. It is easier for a “good but not great” male lawyer to make partner than it is for a comparable woman.
- ❖ Men are charged lower prices for new and used cars.
- ❖ Men can generally assume that when they go out in public they won’t be sexually harassed or assaulted just because they’re male, and if they are victimized, they won’t be asked to explain what they’re doing there.

# What Privilege “Looks Like” (Cont’d)

## Male Privilege (Cont’d)

- ❖ Men are more likely to be given early opportunities to show what they can do at work, to be identified as potential candidates for promotion, to be mentored or given a second chance when they fail, and to be allowed to treat failure as a learning experience rather than an indication of who they are and the shortcomings of their gender.
- ❖ Men can succeed without other people being surprised.
- ❖ Etc....



# What Privilege “Looks Like” (Cont’d)

## Heterosexual Privilege

- ❖ Heterosexuals are free to reveal and live their intimate relationships openly—referring to their partners by name, recounting experiences, going out in public, displaying pictures on their desks at work—without being accused of flaunting their sexuality or risking discrimination.
- ❖ Heterosexuals don’t run the risk of being reduced to a single aspect of their lives, as if being heterosexual summed up the kind of person they are. Instead they can be viewed and treated as complex human beings who happen to be heterosexual

# What Privilege “Looks Like” (Cont’d)

## Heterosexual Privilege (Cont’d)

- ❖ Heterosexuals can move about in public without fear of being harassed or physically attacked because of their sexual orientation.
- ❖ Heterosexuals can live where they want without having to worry about neighbors who disapprove of their sexual orientation.
- ❖ Most heterosexuals can assume that their sexual orientation won’t be used to determine whether they’ll fit in at work or whether teammates will feel comfortable working with them.
- ❖ Etc....

# What Privilege “Looks Like” (Cont’d)

## Able-Bodied Privilege

- ❖ Nondisabled people have greater access to education and health care. They are less likely to be singled out based on stereotypes that underestimate their abilities and be put in “special education” classes that don’t allow them to develop their full potential
- ❖ Nondisabled people can live secure in other people’s assumptions that they are sexual beings capable of an active sex life, including the potential to have children and be parents.

# What Privilege “Looks Like” (Cont’d)

## Able-Bodied Privilege (Cont’ d)

- ❖ Nondisabled people can ask for help without people assuming they will need help with everything.
- ❖ Nondisabled people can succeed without people being surprised because of low expectations of their ability to contribute to society.
- ❖ Nondisabled people can assume that when they need to travel from one place to another, they will have access to buses, trains, airplanes and other means of transportation.
- ❖ Etc....

# Consequences of Privilege

- ❖ As data from the US Census and other sources show, one of the most visible consequences of privilege is the uneven distribution of jobs, wealth, and income, and all that goes with it, from decent housing and good schools to adequate health care.
- ❖ To have privilege is to be allowed to move through your life without being marked in ways that identify you as an outsider, as exceptional, as “other” to be excluded, or to be included but always with conditions.

# Aspects of White Privilege

- ❖ White privilege has absolutely nothing to do with whether or not we are “good” people.
- Privileges are bestowed on us by the institutions with which we interact solely because of our race, not because we are deserving as individuals.

# Aspects of White Privilege (Cont' d)

- ❖ The bestowal of white privilege was and is intentional, just as the withholding of privilege from people of color. In many instances the latter was also malicious and brutal. Historically, there are many, many examples of intentionality and/or cruelty.
  - It is *essential* to be conscious that the patterns set in history are continued today not only in the on-going systemic and systematic discrimination of people of color but also in the privileging of those of us who are white.

# Aspects of White Privilege

- ❖ Our race and skin color privileges are bestowed prenatally. They are not tied to who we are as individuals, rather we receive them as a consequence of the social categories to which we belong.
- ❖ We can't not get them and we cannot give them away, no matter how much we do not want them.



# Aspects of White Privilege (Cont' d)

- ❖ We erroneously believe that we do not have to take the issues of racism seriously because we think they don't really have to do with us.
- ❖ We have the privilege of not knowing how to deal with issues of race without looking incompetent.

# Aspects of White Privilege (Cont' d)

- ❖ White privilege is the ability to make decisions that affect everyone without taking others into account. This occurs at every level, from individual to international.
  - “Oops, I forgot to ask other people’s opinions as I planned this event” is classic behavior for white women in particular.

# Aspects of White Privilege (Cont' d)

- ❖ Being white enables us to decide whether we are going to listen to others, to hear them, or neither.
  - We also silence others without intending to or even being aware of it.

# Aspects of White Privilege (Cont' d)

- ❖ White privilege allows us not to see race in ourselves and to be angry at those who do.
- ❖ These feelings of anger come up frequently with white people who identify themselves as “liberal” or “progressive” because they see themselves as “getting it” and having no further personal work to do.

# Aspects of White Privilege (Cont' d)

❖ In *Talking Back*, bell hooks writes:

“When liberal whites fail to understand how they can and/or do embody white-supremacist values and beliefs even though they may not embrace racism as prejudice or domination (especially domination that involves coercive control), they cannot recognize the ways their actions support and affirm the very structure of racist domination and oppression that they profess to wish to see eradicated.”

(Boston: South End Press, 1989 p.113)

# Aspects of White Privilege (Cont' d)

- ❖ White people, who are also targets for systemic discrimination in other areas of their lives, frequently identify with being oppressed but don't see themselves as oppressors based on skin color privilege.
  - In other words, for those of us who are white, and are also women, and/or are gay or lesbian, or working class, our experience of being excluded from the mainstream blinds us to the fact that we still benefit from our skin color.
  - By seeing ourselves as removed from the privileged group we are all the more blind to our silencing of people of color.

# Aspects of White Privilege (Cont' d)

- ❖ Those of us who are white have the privilege of always seeing and keeping ourselves central, never marginal.
  - White people are our reference point, the ones to whom everyone else is compared.
  - In that way we remain able to see ourselves as individuals, not members of a racial group or groups, and see all others as defined by race.

# Aspects of White Privilege (Cont' d)

- ❖ As white people, we have the privilege and ability to discount an individual of color, her or his comments and behavior, and to alter the trajectory of his or her life based on our assessments, even though they might be offhand or glib.
  - “I don’ t think she’ s a good fit for our organization.” “I don’ t think his research is up to our standards.” “Her work is too focused on her own group—she’ s just too Chicana!”



# Aspects of White Privilege (Cont' d)

- ❖ We have and use the privilege of writing and teaching history only from the perspective of Manifest Destiny, so we live in absence of historical context.
- ❖ We are deprived of critical thinking by being given such a rudimentary and one-sided view of our history and our heritage, but our ignorance is not held against us.

# Aspects of White Privilege (Cont' d)

- ❖ We are able, almost always, to forget that everything that happens in our lives occurs *in the context of the supremacy of whiteness*.
- ❖ We are able to delude ourselves that people of all colors come to the table having been dealt the same hand of cards.

# Aspects of White Privilege (Cont' d)

- ❖ We can seriously examine ways that our lives are impacted by white privilege and begin to see a fuller picture of reality;
- ❖ Based on that new information and understanding, we can listen differently, act differently, make different decisions and make them differently because we have all voices at the table.