Unpacking Our Right to Comfort: Power, Privilege & Systems

Wilma Marchbanks / Anakha Coman
2019 Diversity and Inclusion Conference
Taking Positive Action in a World of Difference
Our Focus for This Session

- Overview of Critical Transformation: Cycles of Socialization and Cycles of Liberation
- Becoming Aware of Social Constructs and Systemic Oppression
- Dismantling Privilege and Power
- A Vision of Change
- A Call to Alignment and Action
Our collective denial of racism, sexism and classism are having an adverse effect on our health, productivity, creativity and most significantly, on our sense of belonging and connection to one another.

– Dr. Christina Bethell, Professor and Researcher at Johns Hopkins University
Cycle of Socialization

- Born into a specific set of identities related to categories of difference:
  - Race, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, ability status, religion
- Social identities predispose us to unequal roles in the system of oppression
- Systemic oppression powerfully reinforced by institutions and culture
- Change comes with raising consciousness and taking action to interrupt and disrupt
Cycle of Liberation

- Uniting for Change - Sharing a Sense of Hope and Optimism
- Sharing a Authentic Human Connection Across Our Differences Rather Than Fear Because of Our Differences
- Obligation to Make a Contribution to Finding a Way Out of the Trouble We’re All In
- Liberation is the Practice of Love
Interlocking, Reinforcing Systems of Oppression

• Collective ideas about what is “right” and “normal”.

• Legal & education system, financial institutions, public policy, hiring practices, media.

• Actions, behaviors and language.

• Feelings, beliefs, biases, values.

• Collective ideas about what is “right” and “normal”.

Individual

Interpersonal

Societal/Cultural

Institutional

Feelings, beliefs, biases, values.

Actions, behaviors and language.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Identity Categories</th>
<th>Privileged Social Groups</th>
<th>Border Social Groups</th>
<th>Targeted Social Groups</th>
<th>Ism</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>White People</td>
<td>Biracial People</td>
<td>Asian, Black, Latino, Native People</td>
<td>Racism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Bio Men</td>
<td>Transsexual, Intersex People</td>
<td>Bio Women</td>
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<td>Gender Conforming Bio Men And Women</td>
<td>Gender Ambiguous Bio Men and Women</td>
<td>Transgender, Genderqueer, Intersex People</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
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<td>Lesbians, Gay Men</td>
<td>Heterosexism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Rich, Upper Class People</td>
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<td>Classism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ability/Disability</td>
<td>Temporarily Abled-Bodied People</td>
<td>People with Temporary Disabilities</td>
<td>People with Disabilities</td>
<td>Ableism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Protestants</td>
<td>Roman Catholic (historically)</td>
<td>Jews, Muslims, Hindus</td>
<td>Religious Oppression</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>Young Adults</td>
<td>Elders, Young People</td>
<td>Ageism/Adultism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Group Activity: Start Where You Are!

- Get into groups of 4-5 people
- Make a list of all we can do to make sure that we achieve the worst result imaginable in our shared purpose to create less oppressive and more inclusive, equitable systems
- Go down the list item by item and ask yourselves, “Is there anything that we are currently doing that in any way, shape or form resembles this?
- What must we stop doing to make progress?
- What must we start doing to make progress?
- Share your insights and awareness with the larger group

As powerful as systems of privilege are, they cannot stand the strain of lots of people doing something about it, beginning with the simplest act of naming the system out loud.
“As people come to a critical level of understanding of the nature of oppression and their roles within this systemic phenomenon, they seek new paths for creating social change and taking themselves towards empowerment or liberation.”

— Bobbie Harro, Visions and Strategies for Change
How Do We Make a Dent in Something So Big?

Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything.

Just do it.
What Risk for Change Will I Take Today?
What New Path for Creating Social Change Will You Seek?

• Taking a Stand In the Face of Non-Agreement and Resistance
• Beyond Comfort to New Thresholds of Discomfort
• Learning Comes with Discomfort and Change Comes with Disruption
• No Longer Being Blind to Racial Inequity and Oppression and Our Complicity in It
• Let’s Look at Privilege, Unearned Power and Systems
New Consciousness & Tools Are Needed to Dismantle the Master’s House

- **Power** — The ability to decide who has access to resources; the capacity to direct or influence the behavior of others, oneself, and/or the course of events.

- **Privilege** — Unearned access to resources, influence, opportunities only readily available to some people as a result of their advantaged social group membership and identity.

“Privilege exists when one group has something of value that is denied to others simply because of the groups they belong to, rather than because of anything they’ve done or failed to do. Access to privilege doesn’t determine one’s outcomes, but it is definitely an asset that makes it more likely that whatever talent, ability, and aspirations a person with privilege has will result in something positive for them.”

— Peggy McIntosh
Individual Activity: Unpacking Privilege

- Find the Privilege Inquiry worksheet on your table
- Take a moment to identify and write down the privileges you have (race, gender and class hold the most power)
- Identify the most obscure privilege you hold and write your responses to the following:
  - What words would you use to define this specific privilege? How does this privilege suppress others who are at a different level within this privilege? What evidence do you have that tells you that this privilege exists?
  - What are the 3-5 things you do not know about this specific privileged identity?
  - How will you use your privilege to elevate, amplify and include voices of those that don’t have this privilege? Based on your personality and work setting, strategize how you’ll put those voices and perspectives forward.

White privilege is an absence of the consequences of racism. An absence of structural discrimination, an absence of your race being viewed as a problem first and foremost.
“White privilege is a manipulative, suffocating blanket of power that envelops everything we know... It's brutal and oppressive, bullying you into not speaking up for fear of losing your loved ones, or job, or flat. It scares you into silencing yourself: you don't get the privilege of speaking honestly about your feelings without extensively assessing the consequences. Challenging it can have implications on your quality of life.”

— Reni Eddo-Lodge
From Awareness to Action…Now!

- What was the most important learning I had in the last 90 minutes?
- What will I risk to make change this week?
- What will I start doing?
- What will I stop doing?

Art By: Emily Lux, Sisters in Solidarity
We Get Free Together. Or Not At All!

“The function of freedom is to free someone else.”
— Toni Morrison

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