**Personal Examples of White Privilege**

Here are a few specific examples of white privilege and unearned advantages I have experienced. I was rushing to get to a doctor’s appointment on time. As I checked in with the receptionist to give her my credit card, I realized I’d left my wallet at home. She told me not to worry and to call later to give her the card number for billing. This next example has occurred numerous times. I often work out in hotel fitness centers when I am traveling. Far too often I forget my room key and have to ask the person at the front desk to make me another one so I can get back into my room. Sometimes they do it without any ID; other times they ask for my license. When I explain that my wallet is also locked in my room, the front desk attendant has always given me another key. They have never sent a security guard to accompany me to my room to make sure I am telling the truth.

I’m embarrassed to admit how it took me a long time to recognize the pervasiveness of white privilege during hiring interview processes in predominantly white organizations. During every interview I can remember, the members of the interviewing team were almost exclusively white. As I answered their questions they seemed to value and appreciate my style of engagement, relate to me, and easily recognize the skills and experiences I could bring to the position. More importantly, I never had to worry about what racist biases or microaggressions I might encounter. In each of these situations, I believe People of Color would most likely have very different experiences than I did.

In my personal life and in my work with organizations, I have observed every example of white privilege on my worksheet, *Examples of White Privilege, Unearned Advantages* (W31, <https://drkathyobear.com/leading/>). For instance, in meetings white people’s ideas and opinions are more likely heard and assumed to be worth considering from the start. We are assumed to belong and have the right to share our concerns and insights. If we are late to a meeting or make a mistake, we are often given the benefit of the doubt as our behavior is viewed as an isolated incident, not as evidence of a defect or character flaw. As white people we don't have to feel we are under constant scrutiny, fearing that any small error or misstep will be used as evidence that we are deficient. In fact, in these situations, white employees are more likely to be offered friendly advice as well as informal coaching and mentoring to help us improve.

In my experience, white people are initially assumed to be competent and smart until we prove over and over how we are not. We don’t have to carry the pressure of always having to prove our worth or our credibility. Our comments are not questioned or challenged as often nor our credentials and achievements viewed with suspicion and as frequently. In addition, we get to build greater self-esteem and self-confidence as we see people who look like us in senior positions both inside and outside of our organizations. We are also able to increase our sense of worthiness from the constant societal messaging that white people are better leaders, smarter, more competent, and have greater potential than People of Color and Indigenous Peoples.

White privilege not only manifests at the individual and interpersonal level, it also operates at the organizational level. White cultural practices are standardized and expected behavior in most every U.S. organization, in my experience. We can more easily fit in with the unwritten rules and norms for how to dress, communicate, participate in meetings, manage disagreement, and offer feedback. In fact, we are more likely to receive sponsoring, coaching, and mentoring that accelerate our success from other white colleagues who most likely feel far more comfortable building relationships with us. These same sponsors and mentors may shy away from providing equitable support for any colleagues of color as they engage in more impersonal and transactional ways for fear of being called out for saying something racist.

Given how relational most U.S organizations are and “who you know” may be valued far more than demonstrated competence and potential, this access to greater informal and formal networks and coaching impacts career advancement. White employees tend to get recommended and selected more often for stretch opportunities such as leading task forces, co-chairing committees, and managing special projects. Our increased visibility in these leadership roles better positions us to be considered for future promotions.

It took me a while to realize how white privilege manifests not only in the unearned, unfair advantages we receive, but also in all the racist dynamics we do not have to experience. For example, white employees have the advantage of focusing all their time and energy on just doing our jobs without having to be vigilant and self-protective to navigate the racist microaggressions that occur in so many interactions. We don’t carry the immense stress and exhaustion from trying to survive, much less thrive, in racist organizations.

Outside of our organization, we continue to experience white privilege. Since white people are assumed to be law abiding citizens, we are treated significantly different in numerous situations. Whenever I have been pulled over by a police officer for speeding, they have been extremely polite and friendly, almost apologetic for having to give me a ticket. And more often than not, I am only given a warning. I have never been stopped because I was thought to be in the “wrong neighborhood” or was driving too expensive a car to own. I grew up trusting and believing that police and the courts existed to protect and serve me without bias or prejudice. I am painfully reminded of how white privilege works as each week, if not daily, I learn about yet another police killing of an unarmed Black person who was just trying to go about their day.

So many societal institutional policies and practices advantage whites and create barriers and disadvantages for People of Color and Indigenous Peoples. White people are advantaged from the real estate and banking practices of redlining which results in lower mortgage and refinancing rates as well as lower interest rates to finance a car, secure a business loan, or pay for education. Given racist housing practices, neighborhoods are most likely more segregated by race and class than before integration policies were implemented. Because most public PK-12 education is financed by local real estate taxes, many schools in poor and working class districts are under-resourced. In addition, racial biases impact most every type of decision in every institution from hiring and promotional practices to how medical services and health care are provided.

U.S. societal institutions have been created and maintained by white people for the benefit of white citizens, especially those with class privilege. Research continues to highlight how the majority of white people have a very clouded understanding of the lived realities of most People of Color as they mistakenly believe racial dynamics are far better now than in the past. The persistence of the myths of meritocracy and the “American Dream” result in far too many white people clinging to the mistaken belief that we are now “post-racial” and anyone can make it if they work hard. As long as white people believe we have made significant progress and racist dynamics are only perpetuated by a small minority of hate-filled people, they can overlook and ignore the devastating, though less apparent, impact of institutional white privilege and systemic racism in the U.S. and around the world.

I was oblivious to all the types of white privilege I experienced in organizations and in society. I, like most white people I meet, believed my success was the result of my hard work and intelligence as well as my initiative to take advantage of opportunities that others let pass by. I had built my sense of self and self-worth on my accomplishments and resisted even considering the possibility that white privilege may have played a role in my success. Once I began to recognize the unearned advantages I had received, my sense of self was deeply shaken and began to collapse like a house of cards.

An activity that was critical to my development was to create a personal history of some examples of white privilege I had received, and continue to receive, in my life. In addition to relating to all of the examples in the previous sections, there is one significant example of white privilege that continues to deeply impact my success today. My white father was a veteran of WWII and received several GI benefits that accelerated our family’s advancement into the professional class. These benefits were not equally afforded to veterans of color (https://www.history.com/news/gi-bill-black-wwii-veterans-benefits). Not only did he receive financial support to complete a master’s degree in engineering, he also had easy access to a very low-interest mortgage to buy a house in an all-white middle, professional class suburb of Washington, D.C. These and many other federal laws were implemented and enforced in racist ways resulting in long-standing and cumulative advantages for our white family as well as millions of other white families. My parents’ ability to accrue wealth from these practices allowed them to financially support my high school and college education in private schools. This privileged foundation positioned me for each and every success I have had throughout my life. Yes, I have worked hard and put in many long hours, yet so do People of Color and Indigenous Peoples. The difference in my accelerated success, I believe, has been all the white and class privilege I have received in the process.