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From: Lori Dwyer
Sent: Friday, July 3, 2020 12:59 PM
To: All Supervisors
Subject: Follow-up for Managers - anti-racism, equity, social justice work
Attachments: white-privilege-essay-mcintosh (002).pdf

Good afternoon, PCHC Managers:

It's been more than two weeks since I sent the email to all staff around PCHC's commitment to anti-racism, equity and social justice (see all staff email, 6/17/20). I wanted to follow up with an email to this group specifically, both because I recognize the difficult conversations this opened up and the difficulties some of you may be having with the subject and the statement. I also want to let you know that we are in the process of setting up a town hall (via zoom) where all managers can gather with me and other members of the diversity committee to talk about the email, the responses to it, your questions and your concerns. Stay tuned for details on that.

Many across the organization have registered strong feelings about the statement made in the email of 6/17. I want to be clear that this email was approved by PCHC's board of directors and executive leadership team before it was sent to staff. In other words, this comes from the very top of the organization – over my head – has my full support, and is a statement of our full commitment to combatting racism. That said, not all responses from PCHC staff to the email have been positive. Many do not have context for it, don't understand it, or feel they understand it but take a different position, take issue with some of the language used in the email ("white privilege," or support for Black Lives Matter), and so on. Some feel uncomfortable or even angry about what I shared. Others just don't know what to say or how to navigate through this. Wherever you fall on that spectrum, you probably are asking yourself where we go from here – what's next?

I want to share some observations and guidance with you, in the hope that this will provide more context for this work and thoughts around how you can manage conversations about race and strong feelings right now, even before we provide formal workforce training. Like many of you, I am new to this work and recognize we lack internal expertise to do this properly. I am in the process of hiring an expert to help us (we are looking for grants to support that work). In the meantime, I am reading, learning, and consulting with experts, and I have some insight to provide on how to interact with and manage staff around this emotionally charged subject while maintaining a respectful, inclusive and professional environment. We will make mistakes, but that cannot keep us from moving forward.

First, I want to reaffirm for you that my goal – and that of leadership and the board – is to make space for all employees to have reactions across the spectrum, from anger about highlighting issues of race and equity and white privilege, to full-throated embrace of the work we need to do, and everything in between (and most folks are in between). There has been and will continue to be a groundswell of reactions. That's what we want and will serve as a precursor to org-wide education, discussion and action. My 6/17 email was intentionally provocative (for those willing to read and think about it). By creating discomfort, I hope to make the space for progress and change. I do not have the answers, but I have a good idea at this point of what the important questions are. If you are struggling to recognize this as an imperative, talk with your supervisor, HR business partner, or me immediately. We must openly discuss reservations and concerns if we are ever to make progress. That starts with you, with us, the leaders in this organization.

Second, while we want to create a safe place for employees to voice their views and have strong reactions, it is also important to remind ourselves that language that constitutes hate speech or that is derogatory or demeaning will not be tolerated. This is a professional, working environment and we do not tolerate bigotry or discrimination, whether overt or implied. All of us bring our racial bias to work, whether we recognize it or not, and some are likely explicitly racist. An expert facilitator will help us learn to recognize and talk about these attitudes in a safe way. In the meantime, we have

to continue doing our jobs and wait for these structured, facilitated conversations to really dig into the issues. Until we receive that training and have those guided discussions, you must be clear with staff about expectations—that we will discuss issues of racial equity and racism respectfully, compassionately, and professionally. It's critical that you make that expectation clear. You must summon the courage to confront instances of insensitive or bad behavior, or stray or racist remarks. Do this work in consultation with HR who is there to help guide you through this. These are tough things to call out as a manager. I know I'm asking a lot of you, but it's vital and rewarding work, and I absolutely expect you to lean into it.

Third, we don't expect people to leave who they are at the door when they walk into the workplace. We're effective precisely because we bring our whole selves to work. That said, people are not free to say whatever they want, in whatever manner they wish, in a workplace that strives to be inclusive. Again – we will have trainings and experts in here to help us discuss issues like the history of racism and white supremacy in the U.S., what exactly we mean by “white privilege” (a term that invokes strong reactions), the impacts of racism in healthcare and health outcomes, how we can engage in anti-racist work, how other statuses – like gender, gender identity, socioeconomic status, and others – impact this work, and more. But in the meantime, it is perfectly ok to say to someone on your team who is struggling, or even hostile:

“Look – I'm new to this work too. I don't have the answers. I do know that I value equality and inclusion as does PCHC and I stand against racism, and I know that PCHC is hiring a consultant to help all of us learn about the issue and learn how to have these conversations. In the meantime, please come to me with concerns and questions, and I will make sure we get good answers and help facilitate discussions in a safe way. My ask of you is that you be patient with the process, be professional, and wait for the more formal educational opportunities to really talk about this in depth.”

This is process, and it will take time. In the meantime, we abide by the golden rule, and be kind to one another.

In sum, as a supervisor here, I expect you to reaffirm the basic message and explicitly do the following:

- Support the work that PCHC will be doing around the issues of systemic racism, discrimination, diversity and inclusion.
- Talk to your supervisor, or member of the management team, about your own views, even where (especially where) you do not support this organizational message or work. Do not voice your lack of support, however, to those you supervise. Your role as a supervisor is to be a representative of management of PCHC, and to support organizational prerogatives.
- Even if your personal views sit in opposition to this organizational message, I expect you to remain open and willing to engage in fact-based discussions, and to avoid contradicting the message except behind closed doors with your supervisor.
- Keep an open mind and an open heart. Come to this work with a learning and growth mindset. None of us is an expert in this work. I most certainly am not an expert nor do I have lived experience of racism; I am compelled to approach this with humility and openness, and I commit to that. Please commit to doing that with me.
- Understand that PCHC's role as a community health center is to deal with issues of racial inequity and disparity. That is our reason for being—to care for those who are historically marginalized, disenfranchised and discriminated against. As a supervisor here, this is also expected of you.
- Check on members of your team who are people of color. Hear them. Listen. Understand that they and their families may be stressed, uncomfortable, and/or dealing with the trauma of recent news relating to the killing by law enforcement/others of people of color. Connect them to resources and to HR for additional support.

Finally, take some time to learn more about these issues. Below is a short list of places you might start:

- NYT podcast, "1619" – all episodes are incredibly eye-opening. Episode 4 covers the racist history of healthcare and may be of particular interest to you as a healthcare professional.
- Fresh Air/Terri Gross' interview with Wes Moore
- Tonya Russell, Check in on your Black Employees, Now:
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/02/opinion/police-killings-black-mental-health.html>
- How U.S. Companies Can Support Employees of Color Through the Pandemic:
<https://hbr.org/2020/05/how-u-s-companies-can-support-employees-of-color-through-the-pandemic>
- Michele Evans, MD, et al: "Diagnosing and Treating Systemic Racism":
<https://www.neim.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMe2021693>

Attached is a famous (and now quite old) article about white privilege. Especially if that phrase bothers or confuses you, take 15 minutes to read this and see if any of it resonates. Again – approach this with a learning mindset. Use it as a jumping off point to examine where you are in this process.

I have just begun understand the concept of white privilege. I have pledged to keep reading and learning about this, and I expect that of all supervisors in this organization. PCHC will provide learning opportunities for you within the next few months and well beyond on this topic. But don't wait for that. Read now, have conversations, and start to wrestle with these concepts.

As always, thank you for all you do for PCHC, our patients, and your colleagues and direct reports. You – front line managers - are the lifeblood of this organization – directing, overseeing, and doing the critical work for patients, guests, members. All of us in leadership count on you to set the tone and lead people to a new understanding in this space. We have an amazing opportunity at this moment in to seize on the momentum and make real progress on race relations - in our small corner of the world. It's a lot to carry, and it's hard work, but we will give you the tools, and we will do this together.

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White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack

Privilege: an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. --Peggy McIntosh

Through work to bring materials from women's studies into the rest of the curriculum, I have often noticed men's unwillingness to grant that they are overprivileged, even though they may grant that women are disadvantaged. They may say they will work to improve women's status, in the society, the university, or the curriculum, but they can't or won't support the idea of lessening men's. Denials that amount to taboos surround the subject of advantages that men gain from women's disadvantages. These denials protect male privilege from being fully acknowledged, lessened, or ended.

Thinking through unacknowledged male privilege as a phenomenon, I realized that, since hierarchies in our society are interlocking, there was most likely a phenomenon of white privilege that was similarly denied and protected. As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage.

I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege. So I have begun in an untutored way to ask what it is like to have white privilege. I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks.

Describing white privilege makes one newly accountable. As we in women's studies work to reveal male privilege and ask men to give up some of their power, so one who writes about having white privilege must ask, "Having described it, what will I do to lessen or end it?"

After I realized the extent to which men work from a base of unacknowledged privilege, I understood that much of their oppressiveness was unconscious. Then I remembered the frequent charges from women of color that white women whom they encounter are oppressive. I began to understand why we are justly seen as oppressive, even when we don't see ourselves that way. I began to count the ways in which I enjoy unearned skin privilege and have been conditioned into oblivion about its existence.

My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture. I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will. My schooling followed the pattern my colleague Elizabeth Minnich has pointed out: whites are taught to think of

their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow “them” to be more like “us.”

Daily Effects of White Privilege

I decided to try to work on myself at least by identifying some of the daily effects of white privilege in my life. I have chosen those conditions that I think in my case *attach somewhat more to skin-color privilege* than to class, religion, ethnic status, or geographic location, though of course all these other factors are intricately intertwined. As far as I can tell, my African American coworkers, friends, and acquaintances with whom I come into daily or frequent contact in this particular time, place, and line of work cannot count on most of these conditions.

1. I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
2. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area that I can afford and in which I would want to live.
3. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
4. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
5. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.
6. When I am told about our national heritage or about “civilization,” I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
7. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
8. If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on white privilege.
9. I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods that fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser’s shop and find someone who can deal with my hair.
10. Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.
11. I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.
12. I can swear, or dress in second-hand clothes, or not answer letters without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.
13. I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.
14. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.
15. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
16. I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color, who constitute the world’s majority, without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.

17. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider.
18. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to "the person in charge" I will be facing a person of my race.
19. If a traffic cop pulls me over, or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.
20. I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children's magazines featuring people of my race.
21. I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in rather than isolated, out of place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared.
22. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having coworkers on the job suspect that I got it because of race.
23. I can choose public accommodation without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.
24. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help my race will not work against me.
25. If my day, week, or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has racial overtones.
26. I can choose blemish cover or bandages in "flesh" color that more or less match my skin.

Elusive and Fugitive

I repeatedly forgot each of the realizations on this list until I wrote it down. For me white privilege has turned out to be an elusive and fugitive subject. The pressure to avoid it is great, for in facing it I must give up the myth of meritocracy. If these things are true, this is not such a free country; one's life is not what one makes it; many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their own.

In unpacking this invisible knapsack of white privilege, I have listed conditions of daily experience that I once took for granted. Nor did I think of any of these prerequisites as bad for the holder. I now think that we need a more finely differentiated taxonomy of privilege, for some of these varieties are only what one would want for everyone in a just society, and others give license to be ignorant, oblivious, arrogant, and destructive.

I see a pattern running through the matrix of white privilege, a pattern of assumptions that were passed on to me as a white person. There was one main piece of cultural turf: it was my own turf, and I was among those who could control the turf. *My skin color was an asset for any move I was educated to want to make.* I could think of myself as belonging in major ways and of making social systems work for me. I could freely disparage, fear, neglect, or be oblivious to anything outside of the dominant cultural forms. Being of the main culture, I could also criticize it fairly freely.

In proportion as my racial group was being made confident, comfortable, and oblivious, other groups were likely being made unconfident, uncomfortable, and alienated. Whiteness protected me from many kinds of hostility, distress, and violence, which I was being subtly trained to visit, in turn, upon people of color.

For this reason, the word "privilege" now seems to me misleading. We usually think of privilege as being a favored state, whether earned or conferred by birth or luck. Yet some of the conditions I have described here work systematically to overempower certain groups. Such privilege simply *confers dominance* because of one's race or sex.

Earned Strength, Unearned Power

I want, then, to distinguish between earned strength and unearned power conferred systematically. Power from unearned privilege can look like strength when it is in fact permission to escape or to dominate. But not all of the privileges on my list are inevitably damaging. Some, like the expectation that neighbors will be decent to you, or that your race will not count against you in court, should be the norm in a just society. Others, like the privilege to ignore less powerful people, distort the humanity of the holders as well as the ignored groups.

We might at least start by distinguishing between positive advantages, which we can work to spread, and negative types of advantage, which unless rejected will always reinforce our present hierarchies. For example, the feeling that one belongs within the human circle, as Native Americans say, should not be seen as privilege for a few. Ideally it is an *unearned entitlement*. At present, since only a few have it, it is an *unearned advantage* for them. This paper results from a process of coming to see that some of the power that I originally saw as attendant on being a human being in the U.S. consisted in *unearned advantage and conferred dominance*.

I have met very few men who are truly distressed about systemic, unearned male advantage and conferred dominance. And so one question for me and others like me is whether we will be like them, or whether we will get truly distressed, even outraged, about unearned race advantage and conferred dominance and if so, what we will do to lessen them. In any case, we need to do more work in identifying how they actually affect our daily lives. Many, perhaps most, of our white students in the U.S. think that racism doesn't affect them because they are not people of color; they do not see "whiteness" as a racial identity. In addition, since race and sex are not the only advantaging systems at work, we need similarly to examine the daily experience of having age advantage, or ethnic advantage, or physical ability, or advantage related to nationality, religion, or sexual orientation.

Difficulties and dangers surrounding the task of finding parallels are many. Since racism, sexism, and heterosexism are not the same, the advantaging associated with them should

not be seen as the same. In addition, it is hard to disentangle aspects of unearned advantage which rest more on social class, economic class, race, religion, sex and ethnic identity than on other factors. Still, all of the oppressions are interlocking, as the Combahee River Collective Statement of 1977 continues to remind us eloquently.

One factor seems clear about all of the interlocking oppressions. They take both active forms which we can see and embedded forms which as a member of the dominant group one is taught not to see. In my class and place, I did not see myself as a racist because I was taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth.

Disapproving of the systems won't be enough to change them. I was taught to think that racism could end if white individuals changed their attitudes. But a white skin in the United States opens many doors for whites whether or not we approve of the way dominance has been conferred on us. Individual acts can palliate, but cannot end, these problems.

To redesign social systems we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions. The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tool here. They keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making these taboo subjects. Most talk by whites about equal opportunity seems to be now to be about equal opportunity to try to get into a position of dominance while denying that *systems* of dominance exist.

It seems to me that obliviousness about white advantage, like obliviousness about male advantage, is kept strongly inculturated in the United States so as to maintain the myth of meritocracy, the myth that democratic choice is equally available to all. Keeping most people unaware that freedom of confident action is there for just a small number of people props up those in power, and serves to keep power in the hands of the same groups that have most of it already.

Though systemic change takes many decades, there are pressing questions for me and I imagine for some others like me if we raise our daily consciousness on the perquisites of being light skinned. What will we do with such knowledge? As we know from watching men, it is an open question whether we will choose to use unearned advantage to weaken hidden systems of advantage, and whether we will use any of our arbitrarily awarded power to try to reconstruct power systems on a broader base.

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