

The Problem with Privilege: Not Everyone Has It

As we work to create a diverse, inclusive, and equitable workplace, we realize it is important to understand what privilege is and what employees who do not currently have it experience. Here we provide a baseline of concepts you and your colleagues must understand to begin to address the problem of privilege.

Privilege: The Key to Understanding Lack of Equity

Privilege is an unearned and sustained advantage that comes from race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, socioeconomic status, age, or other differences.

GROUPS THAT ARE NOT PRIVILEGED MAY BE:

Marginalized:

Pushed to the fringes of a community or organization. For example, the needs of transgender people in the workplace have only been discussed openly in the last few years.

Underrepresented:

Statistically present in smaller numbers within a community or organization than they are in the larger population. For example, women make up more than 50% of humanity but less than 10% of Fortune 500 CEOs.

Underserved:

Not having their unique needs understood, discussed, or met. For example, people with physical disabilities have lacked access to, and in some places continue to struggle to access, a range of basic services such as bathrooms and signage that accommodate their needs.

EXPERIENCES OF MARGINALIZED GROUPS:

Microaggressions: A comment or action that unconsciously or unintentionally expresses or reveals a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group, such as a racial minority.

Gaslighting: A deliberate attempt to undermine a person's sense of reality or sanity. In a work context, it usually means behaviors that undermine the success, self-confidence, self-esteem, or well-being of the target.

Discrimination: The denial of justice and fair treatment by both individuals and institutions in many areas, including employment, education, housing, banking, and political rights. Discrimination is an action that can follow prejudiced thinking.

In America, racism, “the belief that racial differences produce or are associated with inherent superiority or inferiority,” is systemic.

OTHER FORMS OF BIAS:

Biological Sex: Assigned at birth usually based on a doctor's examination of a newborn's physical characteristics and considered binary with few exceptions; XX = female and XY = male.

Gender Identification: How an individual understands themselves as related to gender and includes female, male, transgender, intersex, and non-binary identities.

Gender Expression: How an individual expresses their gender externally through dress, behavior, voice, etc. It may or may not conform to cultural gender norms.