"Working with Diversity"

A White Male Engineer's Inquiry into Merit, Justice, and Diversity in the Workplace

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Abstract

In this paper I'll explore the hidden dimensions of merit in the workplace and examine whether merit can really exist as long as some employees experience institutionalized barriers to success -- because of race, gender, and age -- while others enjoy privileges. I suggest that to achieve both merit and diversity, we must work for fairness and justice for all employees. In addition, the ethical challenge for white male managers is that we must use our positions of power to dismantle the institutionalized systems of barriers and privileges that gave us the power in the first place.

Prologue: On the Persistence of Sexism, Racism, and Other Institutionalized Oppressions

As I write this paper (Oct. 15, 1999), the odometer on my 1986 Chevy "Nova" reads 230,100 miles. I'd bought this car because it would do well in a crash, according to *Consumer Reports.* Overall, it's been a rather unremarkable car, except, like the Energizer Bunny, it just keeps on going and going and going.

About six years ago, when the odometer turned 125,000 miles, I realized I'd already driven half the distance from the Earth to the Moon. So, for no reason other than it amused me, I decided I'd like to get this car all the way to the Moon, or to 250,000 miles. And because I now drive about 1300 miles per month, I currently predict that my Nova and I will arrive at the Moon around January 1, 2001. To many people my arrival at the Moon might not seem like a big deal, but to an obsessive oil-changer like me it will be a satisfying accomplishment.

I've always changed the oil in this car myself, every 2000 miles, without fail, because I'd learned the hard way with a previous car that frequent oil changes are necessary for long engine life. And after each oil change, I'd take the used oil to a public recycling center. But three years ago I moved to a town without a recycling center, and, therefore, for its next oil change, I took my Nova, for the first time in my life, to "Jiffy Lube." After carefully instructing the service manager about what I wanted done, I settled into the waiting room and browsed through an old issue of *People* magazine. In about 15 minutes, I heard my name called, *"Mr. Foley?"* I looked up to make eye contact with a young woman, outfitted in baggy mechanic's garb. *"Hi, I'm Heather, your service technician,"* she said in a perky teenage voice, *"I just changed the oil in your car, and I want to go over my safety inspection with you."* Upon realizing that my oil changer was a girl, I instinctively reacted, *"Oh, no!"* I thought, *"Now I'm not going to make it to the Moon!"*

Inspection -- and Introspection

"Your air filter is OK," Heather said, as she reviewed her inspection checklist, *"but it should be changed on your next visit."*

But I wasn't OK! I quickly realized I'd gotten caught up in old sex- and age-based stereotypes, e.g., "women can't do mechanical things" and "young people are not responsible." I was embarrassed and ashamed that I'd reacted this way. And I should've known better because (1) I teach others how to reduce sexism and other institutionalized, or systemic, oppressions (e.g., racism, classism, ageism) in the workplace, and (2) I'm the father of three very responsible and very talented daughters. But here in the waiting room of Jiffy Lube, where the rubber meets the road, I was reminded once again of the persistence of sexism and other oppressions.

"Brake fluid level, OK."

For the past several years, I've taught a class titled, "Issues in Diversity in the Workplace," at the University of New Mexico-Los Alamos. I teach from the frame-of-reference of a white male scientist/manager who has struggled to understand diversity issues in the workplace. Most of my students are adults, many are managers and supervisors, and they take my class to learn about the institutionalized nature of discrimination and oppression, and how it influences our judgment about merit and success in the workplace. In addition to teaching, I give workshops to senior managers and staff in government agencies and corporations on how to manage a diverse workforce.

"Battery, OK."

I'm a physicist (B.S., New Mexico State University) and nuclear engineer (M.S., Ph.D., University of Arizona) by training, and I got into this business of teaching about diversity because of what I'd learned during the seven years (1986-1993) I was the Director of Human Resources at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). In this job, I was responsible for all the "people issues" of the 8000 employees at LANL, such as personnel policies, hiring, salaries, benefits, training, counseling, grievances, reductions-in-force, sexual-harassment, equal employment opportunity, affirmative action, and diversity programs.

"Head lights, tail lights, and turn signals, all OK."

I'd gone to work at LANL in 1969 as a research scientist and was involved in developing techniques -- based on neutron measurements -- to quantitatively determine the amounts of nuclear materials (e.g., plutonium and highly-enriched uranium) found throughout the nuclear fuel cycle. In 1981 I became the leader of a group of 70 people that supported both (1) the International Atomic Energy Agency, Vienna, Austria, in verifying compliance of nations to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and (2) the U. S. Department of Energy (DOE) in safeguarding nuclear materials in DOE nuclear weapons facilities.

"Your windshield wiper blades are OK, but you should change them before winter."

In 1986, I was named the first Director of Human Resources of LANL. Almost all of the technical managers at LANL were white and male, with educational backgrounds similar to mine. Many were confused, frustrated, and angry about our equal employment opportunity, affirmative action, and diversity programs. Some believed that if women and people of color experienced difficulties in the workplace, it was their own fault, not the result of institutionalized power hierarchies based on sex, race, class, age, sexual orientation, and other social classifications (see Roybal Rose, 1996; Tsui, Egan, and O'Reilly;

Wildman). And many felt that affirmative action was not only lowering the quality of the scientific staff, but it was also "reverse discrimination."

"I topped-off your windshield washer fluid."

But during the seven years I was the Director of Human Resources, I learned about patterns of domination and subordination, caused by imbalances in power, and of the cycles of oppression that women and people of color experience in the workplace. I also learned of the cycles of privilege that white male scientists and managers benefit from, but rarely see.

"And I vacuumed the floors and washed the windows."

In the fall, 1993, I took early retirement from LANL to teach about these important workplace issues.

"Your car is in good shape."

Also, I have three daughters, and they're all very responsible young women. My youngest daughter, Elizabeth, is a mechanical whiz. At age 14, she worked as a mechanic in a bicycle shop in Los Alamos. By age 17 she did the maintenance on her own car. Once she even repair the muffler on an old VW Beetle using a coffee can! So I know that young women can do mechanical things, e.g., that they can change oil in cars, and that they're responsible individuals. But yet, my experiences with my own daughters, as well as with other young women, whose abilities and attitudes disprove time and time again the old sex- and age-biases, didn't cause me to totally abandon the negative stereotypes. And that's the way it seems to be with these deeply embedded stereotypes -- the exceptions never disprove the rule. To preserve the stereotypes, we manipulate boundaries: "You're not like other girls," we say to a young woman with mechanical skills, "you're just like a boy!" We redefine girls as boys to preserve the stereotype. And in a similar way, the same thing happens to people of color. For example, Patricia J. Williams (pp. 9-10) writes that on being told by white people, "I don't even think of you as black," she feels herself "slip in and out of shadow, as I became nonblack for purposes of inclusion and black for purposes of exclusion. . ." And so the oppressions persist.

"Have a nice day!"

Institutionalized Cycles of Oppression and Privilege

I tell this story of the oil change in my moon-vehicle in my classes and workshops, and everyone laughs. And almost everyone, including many women, admit they probably would've had a similar reaction to this girl grease-monkey. Such biases against women and young people are deeply embedded in our society, so deep, in fact, that they're systemic or institutionalized.

And it's the institutionalized nature of sexism, racism, and the other oppressions, that we must examine to understand the invisible power structures that silently control the workplace. We must also examine the institutionalized nature of privilege, the flip side of oppression and discrimination, which results from these power structures.

Lillian Roybal Rose describes institutionalized oppression as a misuse of power by a dominant group (Roybal Rose, 1996, p. 29). It results from:

a belief or attitude that is woven into the fabric of the dominant society. In institutionalized oppression the laws, policies, practices, and traditions of a society reflect the beliefs and attitudes of the dominant group. Jim Crow laws, de facto segregation, unequal job opportunities, and discriminatory school policies are all examples of institutionalized racism.

In a similar way, Mark A. Chesler (1976, p. 21) describes institutionalized oppression in terms of three components: (1) prejudiced attitudes, (2) discriminatory patterns based on imbalances and misuses of power, and (3) inequitable economic, political, and social outcomes. These components support and reinforce one another.

An alternative, but equivalent, way to look at the effects of the misuse of power is to think in terms of institutionalized privileges rather than oppressions. Stephanie M. Wildman (p. 29) defines privilege as:

Privilege is the systemic conferral of benefit and advantage. Members of a privileged group gain this status by affiliation, conscious or not and chosen or not, to the dominant side of a power system.

By combining the ideas of Roybal Rose, Chesler, and Wildman, I've developed a model (Fig. 1) of misuse of power that includes both a "cycle of oppression" and a "cycle of privilege."

The oppression cycle, which is the lower half of Fig. 1, begins with the dominant group believing that the subordinate groups are inferior, i.e., less smart, less talented, less worthy. This belief is then institutionalized through power imbal-
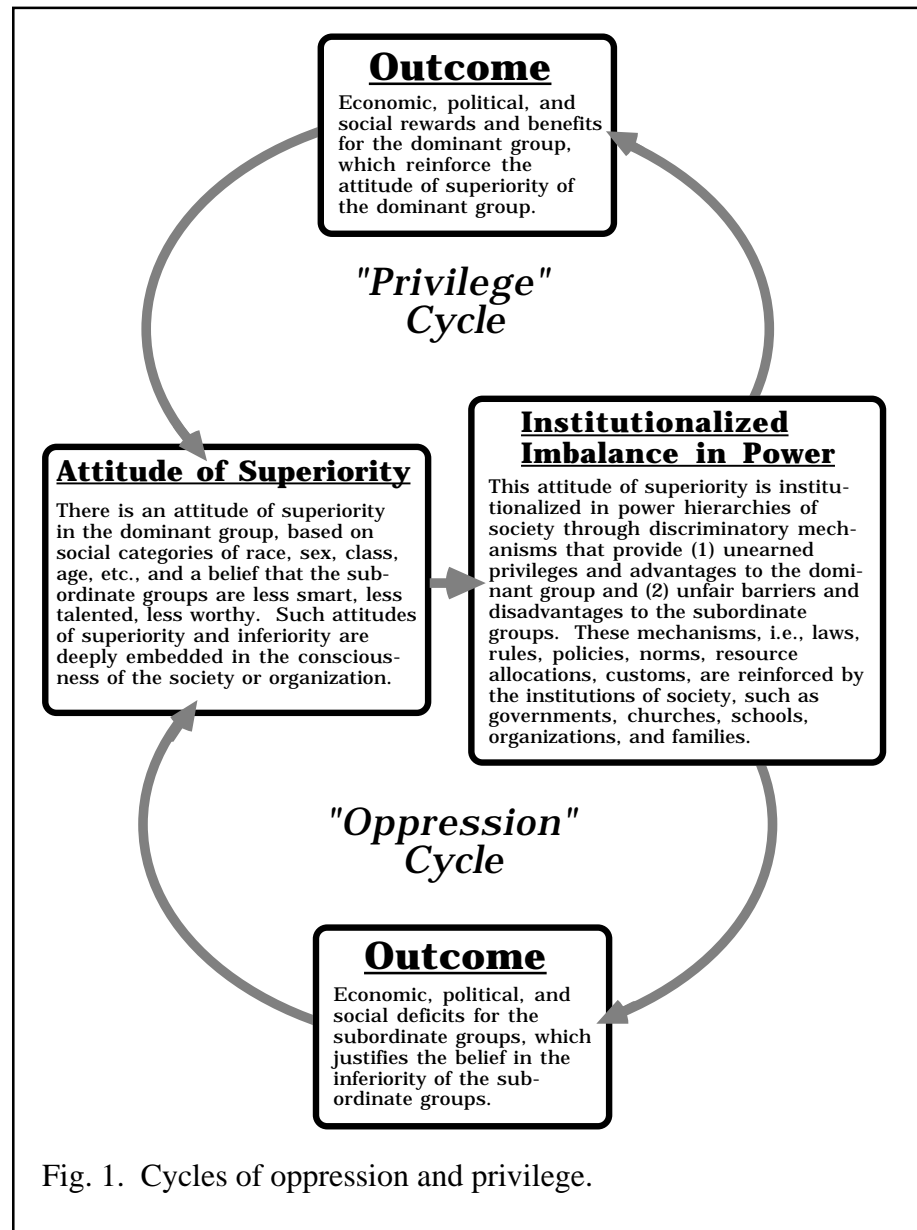
ances in discriminatory mechanisms that result in *unfair barriers and disadvantages* to the subordinate groups. These mechanisms -- i.e., laws, rules, policies, norms, customs, resource allocations -- are reinforced by the institutions of society, such as governments, churches, schools, organizations, and families. These imbalances of power lead to *economic, political, and social deficits* for the subordinate groups, which then justifies the original belief by the dominant group in the inferiority of the subordinate groups.

The privilege cycle, the upper cycle of Fig. 1,

Outcome
Economic, political, and social rewards and benefits for the dominant group, which reinforce the attitude of superiority of the dominant group.

"Privilege" Cycle

Attitude of Superiority
There is an attitude of superiority in the dominant group, based on social categories of race, sex, class, age, etc., and a belief that the subordinate groups are less smart, less talented, less worthy. Such attitudes of superiority and inferiority are deeply embedded in the consciousness of the society or organization.

Institutionalized Imbalance in Power
This attitude of superiority is institutionalized in power hierarchies of society through discriminatory mechanisms that provide (1) unearned privileges and advantages to the dominant group and (2) unfair barriers and disadvantages to the subordinate groups. These mechanisms, i.e., laws, rules, policies, norms, resource allocations, customs, are reinforced by the institutions of society, such as governments, churches, schools, organizations, and families.

"Oppression" Cycle

Outcome
Economic, political, and social deficits for the subordinate groups, which justifies the belief in the inferiority of the subordinate groups.

Fig. 1. Cycles of oppression and privilege.

begins with the dominant group believing it is superior (e.g., smarter, more talented, more worthy) to the subordinate groups, which is the flip side of believing that the subordinate groups are inferior (see discussion of "aversiveness" in Gaertner and Dovidio, pp. 208-209). This belief is then institutionalized through power structures that provide *unearned and unmerited privileges and advantages* (the flip side of unfair barriers and disadvantages) to the dominant group. The results are *economic, political, and social rewards and benefits* for the dominant group. These rewards and benefits then reinforce the original attitude of superiority.

It is important that we examine and understand *both* of these cycles. Adrienne D. Davis makes this point clearly (Wildman and Davis, p. 557),

Anti-discrimination activists are attacking the visible half of the domination/subordination dyad, trying bravely to chop it up into little pieces. These anti-discrimination activists fail to realize that the subordination will grow back from the ignored half of the dyad of privilege. Like a mythic double-headed hydra, which will inevitably grow a second head if both heads are not slain, discrimination cannot be ended by focusing only on subordination.

Also, if we look only at the oppression cycle, or discrimination, or subordination -- which is what is generally done -- we will be left, by default, with the impression that the dominant culture is the "norm," and that the subordinate cultures are the "other." In addition, by considering oppression only, we collude with the power structures that cause oppression by making invisible the unearned privileges and benefits of the dominant group.

Martha R. Mahoney (p. 331) points out that privilege is hidden, or invisible, to members of the dominant culture:
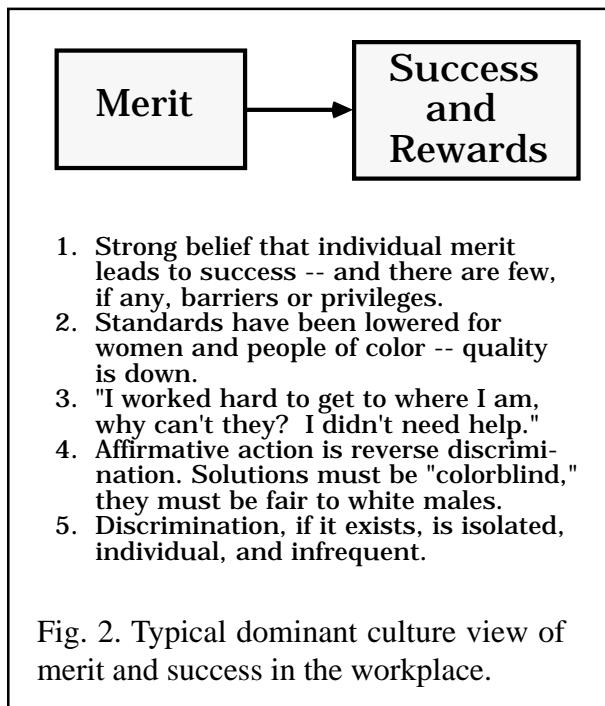
The privilege that facilitates mobility and com-

fort in ordinary life is particularly difficult for whites to see . . . White privilege therefore includes the ability to not-see whiteness and its privileges.

Peggy McIntosh (p. 294) suggests that white privilege is "an elusive and fugitive subject" and "[t]he pressure to avoid it is great, for in facing it I must give up the myth of meritocracy." Martha S. West (pp. 139-143) notes that in academic institutions hiring, promotion, and tenure are "based, in part, on merit, but also on race, gender, class, and a variety of miscellaneous attributes not related to academic qualifications."

The *Hidden* Dimensions of Merit

All employees believe that merit should lead to success and reward. This belief is one of the most fundamental and important tenets of the workplace and is referred to by Duncan Kennedy of the Harvard Law School as "colorblind meritocratic fundamentalism." Under this fundamental tenet, organizations such as the Ford Motor Company, "strive to maximize the production of valuable knowledge and also to reward and empower individual merit." In addition, the "race, sex, class, and indeed all the other personal attributes of the [employee] are irrelevant" (Kennedy, pp. 709-710).

Most white male managers and employees (the "dominant cultural") strongly believe in this fundamental tenet and feel there are few, if any, barriers to success because of race, sex, class, or age (see Hacker, Chapter 4). They believe that success is earned through individual effort and hard work, and they've been concerned that the efforts to increase diversity in the workplace through mandated affirmative action programs undermine this fundamental tenet of merit, i.e., affirmative action "was in conflict with corporate meritocracy, that companies were hiring unqualified women and minorities to meet affirmative action quotas, and that affirmative action meant a general lowering of standards" (Baker,

1. Strong belief that individual merit leads to success -- and there are few, if any, barriers or privileges.
2. Standards have been lowered for women and people of color -- quality is down.
3. "I worked hard to get to where I am, why can't they? I didn't need help."
4. Affirmative action is reverse discrimination. Solutions must be "colorblind," they must be fair to white males.
5. Discrimination, if it exists, is isolated, individual, and infrequent.

Fig. 2. Typical dominant culture view of merit and success in the workplace.

pp. 141-142). Examples of typical dominant group beliefs are shown in the simple model of Fig. 2.

Women and people of color ("subordinate culture" employees) also believe that success should result from merit and hard work, but many feel that (1) there are institutionalized barriers that limit their success because of race, sex, and class and (2) their white male colleagues enjoy unearned and unmerited privileges, i.e., they feel the fundamentalist model of Fig. 2 is too simplistic, incomplete, and unfair. Their more complex views and beliefs are shown in the model of Fig. 3, which includes the barriers and privileges that are generally invisible or hidden to members of the dominant culture.

The institutionalized barriers that women and people of color experience in the workplace -- and the effects of these barriers -- are well documented. For example, the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (p. 11) reports:

The body of research . . . reveals that in the private sector equally qualified and similarly situated citizens are being denied equal access to ad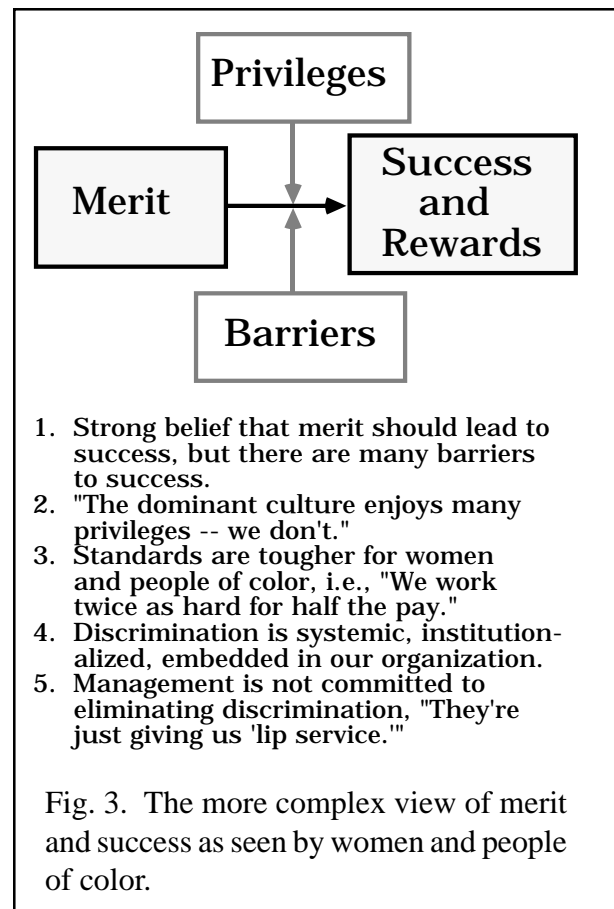vancement into senior-level management on the basis of gender, race or ethnicity. At the highest levels of corporations the promise of reward for preparation and pursuit of excellence is not equally available to members of all groups.

On the other hand, the institutionalized privileges that white men enjoy are rarely discussed or documented. Fortunately, a small, but growing, body of literature exists (see Delgado and Stefancic).

As long as both institutionalized barriers and privileges exist, merit does not necessarily lead to success — and success does not always result from individual merit; i.e., merit is to some extent an illusion.

"You All Treat Me Like the Junior Scientist"

As I mentioned earlier in this paper, in 1981 I became the leader of a nuclear research group at

1. Strong belief that merit should lead to success, but there are many barriers to success.
2. "The dominant culture enjoys many privileges -- we don't."
3. Standards are tougher for women and people of color, i.e., "We work twice as hard for half the pay."
4. Discrimination is systemic, institutionalized, embedded in our organization.
5. Management is not committed to eliminating discrimination, "They're just giving us 'lip service.'"

Fig. 3. The more complex view of merit and success as seen by women and people of color.

LANL with about 70 employees, of which 25 were scientists. Most of the scientists were white, male, 35-45 years old, and held Ph. D.s in nuclear engineering or physics. My involvement in diversity issues at the time was primarily *legal* -- we had affirmative action and equal opportunity programs because we were required to have them.

Soon after I became the leader of this group, a young (white) woman scientist -- I'll call her "Jane" -- talked to me about how "we all treated her like the junior scientist." She felt "junior" because she was treated differently; for example, she was never included in planning meetings that the other scientists (men, Ph. D.) attended, she was never invited to make presentations whenever our research program was reviewed, and she never participated in field exercises when we tested our instruments. Also, she felt that her work as a computer scientist was viewed as a support role, rather than as research. In short, she felt she was being treated unfairly because she was excluded from participation in important group activities. This exclusion was occurring, she felt, because she was different from the other scientists in the group, i.e., she was young, a woman, had "only" a master's degree, was not a physicist, and was doing support rather than research. Jane's situation is shown in Fig. 4.

Jane presented convincing arguments about her unfair treatment, and after several discussions (with careful listening on my part) over a period of time, I began to understand that I'd been oblivious to both the barriers and the unfairness in our group. Eventually, Jane and I came to an understanding that I would make affirmative efforts to include her fully in our group's activities and opportunities.

It turned out that Jane had tremendous talents that I (and "we") hadn't known about, and during the next few years she made significant original contributions to our research efforts -- contributions that were on a par with those of other

Fig. 4. The barriers to merit and success as seen by "Jane."
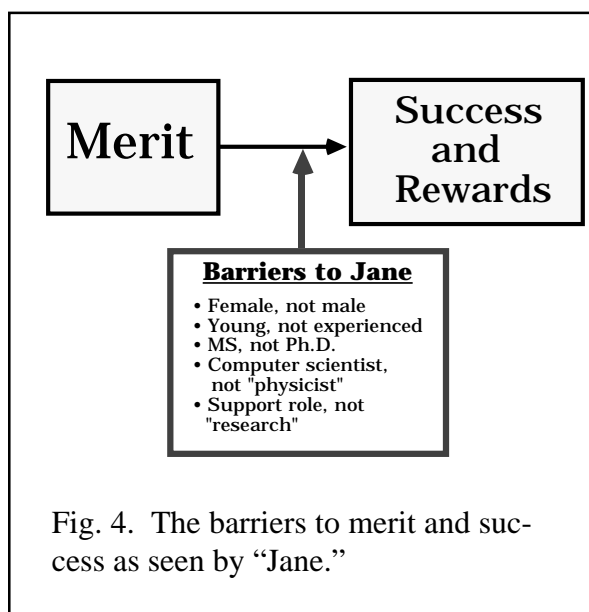
scientists in the group.

I didn't understand it in the early 1980s -- because then I didn't know the theories of institutionalized oppression and privilege based on sex, class, age, etc. -- but Jane's "junior" status was the result of deeply embedded institutionalized forces, shown in Figs. 1 and 3.

Jane helped me see and understand the barriers that she experienced to merit and success, but the unmerited privileges that others (including myself) enjoyed were much harder for me to see and understand -- they were nearly as invisible as the air.

I wasn't the only one that saw Jane as "junior," we all saw her that way. The barriers -- involving sex, class, and age -- were deeply embedded in the attitudes and beliefs of all members of the group and were institutionalized through norms of what a research scientist looks like. These norms not only resulted in barriers for Jane, but they also afforded "privileges" to those who looked like a research scientist, i.e., white, male, not too young (or too old), physicist, and Ph. D. Both the barriers and the privileges were largely invisible or hidden to the dominant members of the group. Unfortunately, it is easy and conve-

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nient to remain unaware or oblivious of them through mechanisms of *denial* or *blame* (these processes will be discussed later in this paper).

If these barriers had been due only to my personal prejudice against Jane, then this story would have been one of non-institutionalized oppression, rather than institutionalized oppression based on sex, class, and age. But since the beliefs were deeply embedded in the thinking of the group, Jane's "junior" status resulted from institutionalized discriminatory mechanisms that caused her to be treated differently from everyone else and to be excluded from activities and opportunities. This was not an individual act against another individual (see Robal Rose, 1996, p. 29), but it was the result of institutionalized beliefs that had been codified in discriminatory mechanisms of exclusion and marginalization.

Helping

Because of my positive experience with diversity, Jane's story being just one example, I became convinced that there was truth in the familiar argument that a diverse workforce is a better and more creative workforce. I was able to move quickly beyond the denial and blaming and became a believer in the *utility* of diversity in the workplace. And as opportunities occurred, I would "lend a hand" to help women and people of color (see Roybal Rose, 1996, p. 25).

"What Have You Done For Us Lately?"

In 1986 I became the first Director of Human Resources of LANL, and I was responsible for the human needs of nearly 8000 employees. In this position, I was able -- with the help of many people of good will and good intentions -- to champion the push for a more diverse workforce (see Kumagai, p. 64).

But by 1989, three years after becoming the Director of Human Resources, our diversity initiatives were not going well. I felt I was under siege from women and people of color -- as well as most of my white male colleagues -- because of their criticisms of our efforts. For example:

- Women and minority groups: These groups demanded we do more and more for them. Every time we did something to help them, they came back with additional demands for us to do even more. Our help never seemed to satisfy -- it was as if they were asking, "What have you done for us lately?" And our answers were always lacking.

- My white male colleagues: Most white male managers and employees resented our diversity initiatives. Some didn't believe women and people of color experienced barriers or unfairness (i.e., denial). Others felt that if women and people of color experienced problems, it was their own fault (i.e., blame). Frequently I was told, "I came here to do science, not social engineering. This has nothing to do with me." Many white male managers felt our affirmative action efforts were lowering the quality of the scientific staff at LANL. In addition, they argued strongly that affirmative action was reverse discrimination.

- My bosses: They wanted quick fixes to our diversity problems and concerns; i.e., "What's taking you so long?" (i.e., denial and blame), and they wanted the tensions involving race, sex, class, and age to just go away.

I didn't like the criticism I was getting for trying to help women and people of color, and I was sick and tired of being viewed as the bad guy by everyone.

I didn't have a clue as to why our efforts to establish a more diverse workforce were floundering. And I didn't understand that by trying to *help* women and people of color, we were doing diversity wrong.

"We Don't Want Help, We Want Justice"

In 1990, I attended a workshop on cross-cultural communications led by Lillian Roybal Rose. After the workshop, I had an opportunity to discuss with her my frustrations in trying to *help* women and people of color. She said (Roybal Rose, 1990),

John, don't ever do anything "to help" me. If you do, I'll eventually hate you for it because your actions will be condescending and patronizing -- and I don't want to hate you.

Her comments startled me because, as I mentioned earlier in this paper, I'd been hearing women and people of color say, "What have you done for us lately?" But from Roybal Rose, I heard something different.

I listened.

She explained that dominance is inherent in the phrase, "to help," and it's certainly a factor in why our attempts to help women and people of color are floundering. And because helping that comes from dominance is patronizing and demeaning, then "there is no trust, no respect, no real liking, on either side" (Roybal Rose, 1996, p. 28). By "helping" we are continuing the subtle dominance (subtle to white males, but not to women and people of color!) of men over women, whites over people of color, scientists over non-scientists, etc., which had been going on at LANL for nearly 50 years.

"We don't want 'help,'" Roybal Rose said, "we want justice."

She argued that we both must work for justice. My role, as a white male with power over her in the oppressions of racism and sexism, is "to act justly and not dominate," and for her part, "I say to white people that I will always see their humanness even if they never understand about racism" (Roybal Rose, 1996, p. 42). Neither of us can shrink from our commitments to justice, no matter how tough the struggle becomes.

Jane's Story -- Revisited

Before I'd met Roybal Rose, I'd always thought of Jane's story as a story about me "helping" Jane become a better scientist. But with new insights, I realized that Jane's story was not about "helping" -- *it was about justice.*

When Jane first came to talk to me, she was concerned about how we were treating her, i.e., *about the unfairness of being excluded from participation.* She wasn't suggesting that her talents weren't being used (although we were to discover that they weren't), she was concerned with fairness, with justice -- not with productivity.

And by removing the barriers to fairness (Fig. 4) and including her more in our group's activities, we became a more productive group. Jane didn't need my help because she lacked talent, or because she wanted special treatment. What she needed from me was help in removing the unjust barriers. And as the leader of the group, I was in a position of power to do this, i.e., I was in position to challenge -- in a small way -- the prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory mechanisms of the institutionalized oppressions (Fig. 1), which were embedded in our group and in our Laboratory.

And now when I discuss Jane's story in terms of "justice" rather than in terms of "helping," it goes something like this:

Jane didn't need my "help," she needed justice. And by working for justice, we became more productive. We also became more diverse.

Jane's story is, of course, only one story, but I've encountered many similar examples in the 20 years that I've been a manager.

Such examples of the utility, or benefits, of di-

versity, combined with insights about the importance of justice, lead me to the following conclusion about how we should think about both merit and diversity in the workplace:
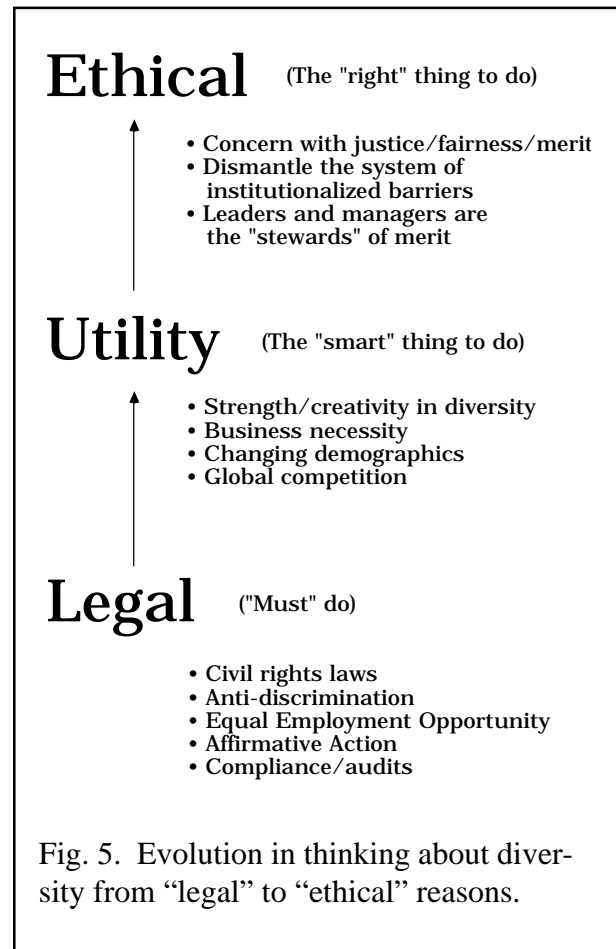
Justice is a prerequisite for merit -- it's also a prerequisite for diversity.

Justice is the most powerful argument for diversity because it requires that the institutionalized system of unfair barriers and unmerited privileges (i.e., Fig. 1, Fig. 3) be dismantled. Justice must become a fundamental part of the overall vision and strategy of organizations. Bernardo M. Ferdman and Sari Einy Brody (pp. 285-286) make similar arguments when they point out that attention to diversity must be based on moral imperatives, such as justice and equality, as well as legal and business necessity (i.e., utility) arguments.

The evolution in my thinking about diversity is summarized in Fig. 5. Initially I was involved in diversity issues because I was *legally* required to do so, based on civil rights laws. I think of such involvement as "must" do -- I had no choice. Then I learned that there were practical or *utility* reasons for paying attention to diversity -- it made good business sense, i.e., it was the "smart" thing to do. Finally, my understanding moved to *ethical* reasons, such as justice and merit -- the "right" thing to do. *It is only by dismantling the institutionalized system of unfair barriers and unmerited privileges that we can arrive at a truly meritorious workplace.* Also, if we do the right thing -- work for justice -- the utility and legal reasons will take care of themselves.

Towards Justice, Merit, and Diversity

The simplistic view of merit and success, as shown in Fig. 2, commonly held by many white male managers, involves (1) *denial* of the institutionalized barriers and privileges and (2) *blaming* of women and people of color for their marginal success in the workplace. These dominant

Ethical (The "right" thing to do)

- Concern with justice/fairness/merit
- Dismantle the system of institutionalized barriers
- Leaders and managers are the "stewards" of merit

Utility (The "smart" thing to do)

- Strength/creativity in diversity
- Business necessity
- Changing demographics
- Global competition

Legal ("Must" do)

- Civil rights laws
- Anti-discrimination
- Equal Employment Opportunity
- Affirmative Action
- Compliance/audits

Fig. 5. Evolution in thinking about diversity from "legal" to "ethical" reasons.

views are shown as the two lowest stages of the model in Fig. 6, which is a model of personal growth and commitment to justice. In the lower stages of this model, managers are found in three stages of (mis)understanding of race and gender issues in the workplace or in one stage of retreat and withdrawal. These stages are:

Denial: The manager is oblivious to the barriers and privileges, or he simply chooses to remain unaware (only members of the dominant culture have the luxury of such ignorance); i.e., "Discrimination is a thing of the past. We live in a colorblind society. I don't even see color. I've always been judged by merit, and I only judge merit."

Blame: The manager fails to see the institutionalized nature of the power structures in the workplace and believes that the gender and race prob-

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lems are caused by women and people of color; i.e., "They should just quit being victims and quit complaining. I've made it by my own efforts -- why can't they? They're getting more favorable treatment than they deserve (see West, p. 161). It's reverse discrimination."

Helper or "Nice Guy": The manager understands that some barriers exist for women and people of color, and he sincerely wants to help "them"; i.e., "Even though I've never discriminated against anyone, I feel a little guilty about the way they have been treated in the past by others, so I need to help out, to lend a hand."

Retreat and Withdrawal: The manager becomes frustrated with his efforts to "help." He is criticized by women and people of color for not doing enough to help, and, at the same time, he is criticized by his white male colleagues for doing too much. Consequently, his feelings get hurt be-

Fig. 6. Stages in personal growth from "Denial" to "Personal Commitment."

cause he isn't appreciated, and he fears losing the respect of other white males. Therefore, he becomes defensive -- he begins to pull back from helping, becomes captive to political correctness, and numbs out. This is the stage I discussed earlier concerning my frustrations about our floundering diversity efforts in 1989.

This person's politically correct behavior is motivated by the fear of acting inappropriately around women and people of color. For example, Samuel L. Gaertner and John F. Dovidio (p. 209) note that:

Instead of responding spontaneously and naturally in interracial situations, the . . . [manager

is] motivated primarily to avoid acting inappropriately.

Roybal Rose (1966, p. 42) points out that these defensive behaviors of white people, such as political correctness, lack of spontaneity, and pulling back, are difficult for women and people of color to deal with:

For People of Color, an encounter with a white person who knows what is right but has not processed it emotionally can be frustrating and exhausting. Every word, every signal breeds confusion. Whites busily guarding a politically correct posture are impossible to reach on a human level, because they have an image to protect.
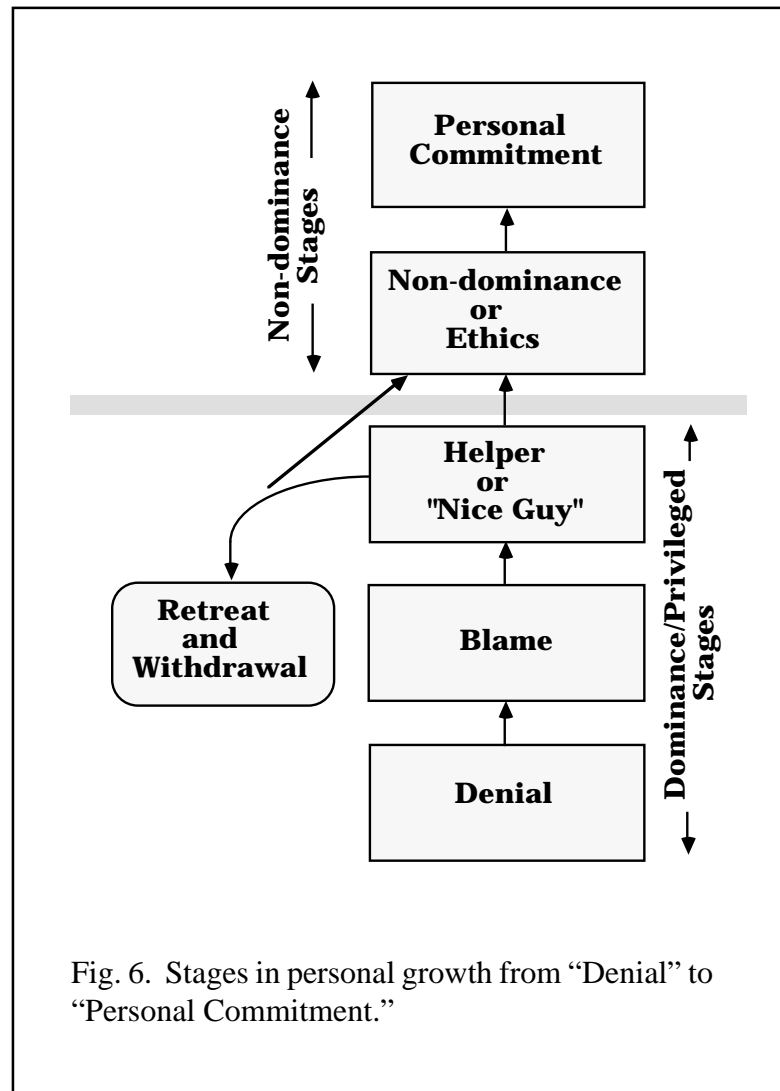
11

From Dominance to Diversity

Even though this pattern of denial, blame, helping, and retreat is common among white males, it is not inevitable. We can choose to break the pattern and move into the two highest stages of Fig. 6. Gary R. Howard (p. 37) asks the key question with regards to one's growth and passage into the non-dominance stages:

What must take place in the minds and hearts of white Americans to convince them that now is the time to begin their journey from dominance to diversity?

Non-dominance or Ethics: The manager understands that if we want diversity in the workplace, we must first achieve justice. And to achieve justice, the manager must become a *just* person.

He knows that real merit cannot be achieved until (1) the unfair barriers that women and people of color experience in the workplace are eliminated and (2) the privileges that white males enjoy are available to everyone.

This manager understands that in order to begin to dismantle the institutionalized system, which allows unfair barriers and provides unmerited privileges, both personal and collective efforts are necessary. For example, bell hooks points out (hooks, p. 195):

While it is important that individuals work to transform their consciousness, striving to be anti-racist, it is important for us to remember that the struggle to end . . . [racism] is a struggle to change a system, a structure. . . For our efforts . . . to be truly effective, individual struggle to change consciousness must be fundamentally linked to collective effort to transform those structures that reinforce and perpetuate white supremacy.

The collective effort must be directed at all three components of the institutionalized cycles of privilege and oppression (Fig. 1), i.e., at prejudiced attitudes, at imbalances of power, and at inequitable outcomes (see West, pp. 155-177; Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, pp. 38-56).

The process that one needs to go through in personal effort to unlearn subtle sexism and racism is both emotional and cognitive. Roybal Rose encouraged me "not to shrink from the emotional content of this process." She explained (Roybal Rose, 1996, p. 42):

When the process is emotional as well as cognitive, the state of being an ally [to women and people of color] becomes a matter of reclaiming one's own humanity. Then there is no fear, because there is no image to tear down, no posture to correct. The movement to a global, ethnic point of view requires tremendous grieving.

Derrick Bell (see Bell) suggests that whites need to study "whiteness:"

What does it really mean to be white, not as a matter of pride in cultural heritage, but as social and economic facts of life in the United States? And are whites willing to build a stable society, one that does not denigrate blacks in order to bind together whites across the vast chasms of income and social class? Healing the racial divide will require no less than a national acknowledgment that whites have many questions to ask of themselves.

This journey from dominance to diversity begins with *listening*. The white male manager:

- Learns to really listen to others, i.e., to pay attention without intention. (see Nouwen, pp. 89-92)
- Understands that a "colorblind" philosophy colludes with the power imbalances inherent in institutionalized cycles of oppression and privilege (see Frankenberg, p. 147). He becomes "color-conscious," especially to the

color "white," by examining such fundamental questions (see Flagg, p. 972; Bell) as: In what situations do you describe yourself as white? Do you attribute your successes or failures in life to your whiteness? How have your educational and occupational opportunities been enhanced by your whiteness? What about the life courses of others?

- Develops a new sense of personal honesty and humility about racism, sexism, and other oppressions, and about the privileges that he enjoys in the workplace and in society. He understands "that race makes a difference in people's lives and that racism makes a difference in U.S. society" (Frankenberg, p. 159). He learns that facing up to one's own biases, prejudices, and privileges is the beginning of liberation.

- Adopts a deliberate skepticism about his ability to make racial and gender neutral decisions. Involves others -- women and people of color, as well as other white men -- in decision making to uncover institutionalized barriers and privileges. (see Flagg, pp. 970-980; West, pp. 170-173)

- Engages in open and honest discussions about racism, sexism, and other oppressions and about privileges with white men, women and people of color, i.e., is willing to be vulnerable. (see Chesler, 1995)

- Reads and studies the works of others who have struggled with unlearning racism and sexism. (see Chesler, 1995; Frankenberg, Chapter 6)

- Studies the theories and applications of justice. (see Solomon; Brown, Chapter 8)

- Seeks out examples of institutionalized oppressions and privileges in the workplace and actively works with allies -- other white men, women, and people of color who are committed to justice -- to eliminate them by changing policies, procedures, beliefs, and attitudes. (see West, pp. 155-177; Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, pp. 38-56)

- Discovers white male pride and connects with the universality of all human experience. (see Roybal Rose, 1996; Howard)

And the journey leads *first to justice, then to both merit and diversity.*

Personal Commitment: Working with allies, the manager uses -- but not misuses -- his position of power and privilege in non-dominant ways to work for justice, merit, and diversity in the workplace. He does this because he understands the loss to himself and to others caused by the subtle and not-so-subtle injustices and privileges in the workplace.

The ethical challenge for white males, and others in dominant positions, is this: *We must use our positions of power to dismantle the institutionalized systems that gave us the power in the first place.* This is what we must do if we believe in merit and justice in the workplace. And we will be better off if we do it. We cannot shrink from this challenge, no matter how tough or uncomfortable the struggles become.

This is a difficult stage for the white male because he is under tremendous pressure from his colleagues -- who are still in the lower stages of Fig. 6 -- to return to his earlier dominant attitudes and behaviors. He must resists these pressures by remembering that in the long run the (1) dismantling of the existing system of institutionalized barriers and privileges (Figs. 1 and 3) and the (2) achievement of justice, merit, and diversity are in his and his organization's best interests.

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