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johnson's book
privilege, power, and
difference e...

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In this book the author, Allan Johnson tackles the issues of privilege and power. The book tackles question on inequality across all aspects in the system be it race, gender based roles even sexuality. In chapter 2 he tries to help the reader understand the existing social construction of difference, who we are given these existing differences in the even the most basic social construction. Allan defines privilege, he also gives the two types of it, and he highlights its flip side which is oppression while examining the paradox of the said privilege.

In the 2nd chapter the author explains how having differences in itself is not a bad thing, the trouble comes in how our ideas cause us to fear because of our differences. He goes on to show that people are judged based on how they are perceived. A suitable example is when “ the British treated the Irish as an inferior race. Even though their skin color was indistinguishable from that of those they considered white” [18]. “ Dominant groups have the power to define what is considered normal” [19]. In this case the Irish were oppressed because they did not follow what the British considered normal practices in religion and agriculture. This is not right neither does it hold true. Granted that which would be considered normal should be a blend of the majority and minority groups perception if the norm, it still leaves out the extreme cases of both groups. Therefore as it has been in the past and as is in the present there will always be people whose ideals are not captured in what society perceives as normal. And it is because of these simple differences the human race will continue judging each other with little incentive to try and understand the different backgrounds we each come from.

In essence “ 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” [Johnson, 21]. The two types of privilege the author addresses, the unearned entitlements [Johnson, 25] things that all people should have such as one being valued for who they are and the contribution they make or even feeling safe in public. When this entitlement is restricted to certain groups, it becomes an ‘ unearned advantage’. It can be noted that throughout the course of history, the white males have enjoyed such advantages. For instance until 1995 blacks were forced to give up their seats in buses if need prevailed because whites had priority seating. The other type is ‘ conferred dominance’ [Johnson, 27]. This gives one group power over another based on the perpetrated cultural assumptions such as women are to be submissive to men.

Privilege thus gives cultural authority to decide who is taken seriously as well as make judgments that other have to abide and fit their definition of reality by. It is more about social categories than who the people are. It does not necessarily make you happy [Johnson, 38]. The reluctance to change how we view others is what continues this trend in the present time. Though racism and gender based prejudice are not as widespread and extreme they are still a source of discrimination. I believe that when we accept that we will all never have the same ideals or be what is considered equals in the way we are socialized is when we will be able to eradicate oppression. We will not frustrate the efforts of those in pursuit of a good life. We will be able to empathize and understands the plight of the oppressed and thus negates the

idea that prejudice and oppression are a natural part of the human nature as the author tries to show us in this book.

Works Cited

Johnson, Allan. *Privilege, Power, and Difference*. Massachusetts: McGraw-Hill, 2005. Print.