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ARTICLE

System Imago: A New Perspective on Leadership and Power

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the idea of how an individual's sociocultural intersectional identities influence the amount of power and influence they can wield in their position as a leader in groups. Based on her experiences of facilitating international process groups, the author introduces the new concept of *system imago* and compares and contrasts it to the concept of group imago. The notion of system imago invites the reader to look at how systems self-organize and the different unconscious roles individuals end up taking in perpetuating systems that only promote people with certain intersectional identities. This article emphasizes how social conditioning and unconscious biases can continue to perpetuate cycles of systemic oppression and render leaders from an underprivileged background in a powerless position despite their positional power in systems. The article concludes with reflective questions to invite readers to look at how they might work as allies to support leaders from nonprivileged backgrounds and bring about social change.

KEYWORDS

Group imago; oppression; system imago; throne position; regions of leadership; intersectionality; "Be careful" driver; emotional labor; allyship; transactional analysis

The "Ouch" Moment

While facilitating an international process group composed of White participants from the United States (USA) and Central Europe, I often had a sense of helplessness and inadequacy as a facilitator. I caught myself walking on eggshells, being careful with my choice of words, fearful of provoking some of my participants. When I examined my countertransference reaction of fear, I recognized that it was a response to anger outbursts and what I perceived to be passive-aggressive treatment from some of my male participants.

In one session, I saw the group members talking for almost 45 minutes about inclusion as a value. I noticed that Shawn was struggling with the internet and hence had shared some of his thoughts and feelings on the Zoom chat. Nobody in the group acknowledged reading Shawn's chat or engaged with him. I had seen something similar happen before, so I gently pointed this out to the group members and invited them to explore what was going on. Iain, one of the White male participants,

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who was leading the conversation on inclusion, raised his voice and said, "I think that is an utterly rubbish observation. I am feeling very angry with you because I think you are trying to create conflict in the group and you are basically calling all of us hypocrites. I have just lost respect for you as a facilitator." I had to spend considerable time in assuaging Iain's anger before I could get him to be curious about my observation.

This behavior of mine was a clear indicator of my phenomenological experience of shame and how I used the "support others" pacifier (racket) instead of being true to what I was feeling (Pandya, 2023). I noticed this as a pattern in the group. On five consecutive occasions, when I had made an intervention or offered an observation to the group, it would result in Iain either disagreeing or getting angry with me. On watching the recording of that particular session, my supervisor asked me, "Whose group is this, Anisha? Who is the facilitator here?" The spontaneous answer in my head was "not me." I recognize that the powerlessness I was feeling might be illustrative of "scripty powerlessness" (Roshan, 2022) because my feeling seemed to emerge from an internalized "less than" position in relation to Whiteness. It appeared that an intrapsychic colonialist part in me had a silencing function on my Adult capacity to speak out against the oppressive White supremacist energy in this kind of exchange and is an example of the "colonization of the mind" (Chinnock & Minikin, 2015).

As I further explored my answer, I was reminded of Berne's (1963) leadership regions:

> There are three kinds of leadership, corresponding to the three aspects of the group structure. The responsible leader is the front man, the man who fills the role of the leader in the organizational structure (p. 105). [He] is the individual who is going to be called to account by higher authority if things go wrong (p. 106). The effective leader, who makes the actual decisions, may or may not have a role in the organizational structure. He may be the man in the back room, but he is the most important person in the individual structure (p. 105). The effective leader can be distinguished by watching the group in action. He is the one whose questions are most likely to be answered or whose suggestions are most likely to be followed in situations of stress. … They are members who attract attention because they are dominant, popular or show a special interest in the group activity (p. 106). The psychological leader is the one who is most powerful in the private structures of the members and occupies the leadership slot in their group imagoes (p. 105). [He] occupies a special position, whether or not he is also the responsible and effective leader. The members demand certain qualities of the psychological leader, the one who is likely to survive in the group as a euhemerus. And these are the qualities of a god. The leader is supposed to be omnipotent, omniscient, immortal, invulnerable, irresistible, incorruptible, unseducible, indefatigable and fearless (p. 106).

Reflecting on the group just described, I was clearly in the responsible leadership region as I was the designated facilitator of the group and was in charge of its administration. The members often expressed blame toward me when things did not go well within the group. I saw the effective leadership region shared between me and some of the male members in the group. Our interventions often helped the group to perform its task. However, I noticed that the group's mood and focus were often influenced by what was going on for Iain. He not only was the voice of dissent, but the group would not go ahead with any discussion if it did not have his approval/interest, thus indicating that the psychological leadership was with him.

As I reflected on Berne's writings about the psychological leader in relation to my own experience in the case described, I started wondering who gets to be a psychological leader. Why do some groups impart psychological leadership to people who seem to uplift others, whereas other groups do the same to people with destructive tendencies? I find that Berne's explanation of psychological leadership is limited in that he did not put the concept in a political or systemic environment. Perhaps this was due to some apprehension about naming such topics in his own time and place, or maybe it was due to a general lack of conscious awareness of such matters.

One of my frustrations with Berne's description of the group imago and psychological leadership is that it continues to focus on individual experiences of the group but does not account for the reality of the context in which the group is operating. In my work with groups, I have felt almost pushed into recognizing the force of the unconscious systemic influences and the way power, rank, and privilege find their way into the functioning of the group. Therefore, I feel inspired to bring a more contemporary perspective to Berne's significant insight into power and group leadership. I will begin by introducing the notion of *system imago*.

Introducing the System Imago

My working definition of the system imago is as follows: A system imago is the schema of power held in the collective unconscious and determines how systems and groups self-organize, including who is permitted within the leadership region. It is a representation of collective will to replicate a systemic template of power and privilege.

In my view, the system imago is typically hierarchical and ever-changing in accordance with the context. The Cultural Parent (Drego, 1996) seems to play a significant role in shaping the system imago. I wonder if what is valued by the collective unconscious in terms of power, rank, and privilege is often stored in the Cultural Parent. I imagine that the character of the system imago might be informed by the primal human hunger for authority, which is represented most symbolically through the concept of monarchy. This hunger is reflected in the infantile desire for the perfect other to help one survive in a chaotic world and is arguably reiterated in the adult world through dependency on the three "Gs": gods, gurus, and governments. The system imago perpetuates power differentials, promotes the entitlement of the haves, and keeps the have nots in a subservient position.

The system imago differs from the group imago in the following ways:

1. The group imago refers to the individual unconscious, whereas the system imago is about the collective unconscious.
2. The group imago emanates from past experiences of an individual encountered within groups, whereas a system imago appears to stem from the archetypal, ancestral, and political legacies across human history.

For any system to continue and function effectively, multiple roles are needed. However, they are oriented toward maintaining the status quo, which by implication means establishing a monarch.

Introducing the Throne Position

I am interested in expanding our current thinking about psychological leadership by introducing the concept of the *throne position*. I am curious whether the person who becomes the psychological leader depends on the representation of the unconscious values collectively held by the group. My thinking is that psychological leadership is not granted to a particular individual/s, but rather that the psychological leadership emerges as the group begins to unconsciously organize itself. Where and what is the invisible hand that facilitates the emergence of psychological leadership will be explored later when I introduce the notion of the kingmaker. In elaborating his writing about psychological leadership, Berne (1963) referred to the "emperor" (p. 145), and I imagine that what grants the emperor his power is that he is positioned on the throne. As an Indian, I am keenly aware that in my cultural tradition, embodied in the epic battle of Kurukshetra told in the Mahabharata, the prize for the victor was the throne of Hastinapura. The important point I want to make here is the succession imperative, reflected in the declaration of the passing of the monarch: "The king/queen is dead—long live the king/queen!" Who sits on the throne is crucial, but what is vital is that the throne remains occupied. In the context of thinking about group leadership, I am intrigued about who is eligible to ascend to kingship and who is ineligible to sit on the throne. What factors give rise to this selection, and how does unconscious bias, rooted in systemic patterns of power and oppression, influence this process?

In responding to these questions, I am influenced by Crenshaw's (1989) description of intersectionality:

> Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Often that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things. (p. 16)

I find this is a powerful way of recognizing how different aspects of identity can give power, or reduce it, depending on particular contexts. For example, as a cisgendered, Hindu Brahmin woman, I can leverage a lot of power within my society. But when I travel, for example, to the UK or the USA, my caste, class, and religious identity are overshadowed by my racial identity of being a brown Indian woman. Therefore, although within the parameters of my own culture I may be regarded as closer to the throne position, this is far less the case when I am in other systems where different intersectional identities are considered more powerful. As Baskerville (2022) pointed out, it is important to be aware of these intersectional identities and engage in radical openness and nondefended dialogue in order to deal with the variable impacts of systemic oppression. She emphasized

> the need for continued awareness of culture selves and intersectional identity in the Adult (A_2), for example, Adult awareness of the cultural constructs/introjects we hold in the Parent and where these are placed within systemic oppression as well as Adult awareness of how privilege and oppression have been internalized in the Child. (p. 238)

At this point I want to turn my focus briefly to the TA community and what I perceive to be the factors defining the throne position in terms of who gets to hold

power and authority. Generally speaking, the concept of intersectionality helps us to recognize factors that are most important for positioning individuals closer to the throne and thereby having greater access to psychological—and other forms—of leadership. In my experience to date in the TA community, I suggest that those racialized as White who are in the socioeconomic middle class, middle-aged, graduate educated, located in northwest Europe or the USA, able-bodied, neurotypical, cisgendered, fluent in English/first language, and specializing in psychotherapy will always be closer to the throne.

I think it is important to differentiate between psychological leadership and what I am referring to as the throne position:

1. I imagine that psychological leadership is a more individual view of leadership, whereas the throne position is a more collective view of leadership.
2. Psychological leadership is granted on the basis of individual characteristics, whereas one gets to occupy the throne position on the basis of one's intersectional identities and the context in which the group is operating.
3. The throne position has access to and influence over all the three regions of leadership. In fact, the three regions of leadership in a way serve the throne position, whereas psychological leadership may or may not be connected to the other two regions of leadership. For example, UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, a brown, Hindu, upper-caste man is apparently in charge of the country and may appear to be in the responsible leadership position, but he is not on the throne. He seems to be in service of the throne held by the patriarchal, White, Western, class-based system.

During the editorial process and response to feedback on this paper, one of my White supervisors made the observation that Berne would have individualized psychological leadership precisely because he was part of the "have" community and that the throne position would be more likely to emerge from the perspective of the "have nots" as they are subject to the inaccessibility of the throne position.

Although the throne position is central to what is being presented as a system imago, I suggest that the monarch is only able to reside in that seat because of those who choose to serve it. Consequently, there are other roles worth considering in the concept of system imago.

Other Roles/Positions in the System Imago

Sovereignty does not exist in isolation but through the perpetual support of a range of other positions held within a given context that serve the throne. Such positions can vary from context to context, and I offer an example from my own experience to illustrate one such arrangement. First though, it is important to acknowledge the significance of the "kingmaker," the power that enables the throne. The kingmaker is more likely to be in the form of a bigger system rather than an individual, although the system's influence may be represented by individual(s). For example, at the macro

level, such a kingmaker might be identified as global capitalism or, in many cultures, patriarchy.

Within our professional TA community, I imagine the kingmaker is the system that promotes a White, Western worldview. In the context of this observation, I will turn to a specific example drawn from the exam experience reported by one of my colleagues of color who had passed her TA exam but was left feeling traumatized by the exam process. She reported that the absolute lack of curiosity toward her diverse perspective left her with a feeling of not being met by her board. She also stated that she felt the pressure to overadapt, and there was no space for her to voice her disagreement with the board.

My Colleague's Dream About a TA Exam Process

In a peer supervision session, my colleague spoke about a repeated weird dream that she had been having after the exam. In her dream, she saw herself dressed as a dancer performing in front of her examiners, who appeared to be dressed as members of a royal court. She said that one of the examiners was sitting on a big throne, two of the examiners were standing at a distance, each on one side of the throne, and the fourth examiner was standing behind the throne. At the end of her dream, she saw herself begging in front of the court.

As we started making meaning of the dream, she was able to decipher that the examiner who seemed to be having central power on the board had appeared as a queen sitting on the big throne in her dream. The chair of the board appeared as a chamberlain, an administrator because my colleague experienced them as trying and failing to remind the board of the rules of the exam. She saw one of the examiners as a nobleman because she had heard him reminding the board of the values of fairness and offering advice to the examiner who had appeared as a queen. Finally, the fourth examiner, who appeared to be behind the throne, was seen as the lady-in-waiting, probably because of her non-Western status and also because my colleague experienced her as agreeing with everything that the queen said, even though she had not asked a single question of my colleague during the exam.

My colleague stated that this whole dream felt like she was auditioning for the queen before she could perform in the king's court (symbolized as the ITAA). As we focused on her image of herself as a dancer, she was able to see how she experienced herself as having to perform to the tunes of the exam board and give up on her agency. She reported experiencing herself as a "have not" in the exam board on account of her lack of fluency in English, her being a person of color, and her lack of positional power in the system.

On the basis of the meaning making of her dream through peer supervision, I hypothesize whether the examiners were, in effect, unconsciously serving a system based on White Western superiority in which other forms of potency had to be minimized. There seemed to be an absence of interest or appreciation of alternative expressions of agency and meaning making. I wonder whether at some level there might even have been jealousy and competition that drove the need to discount or even destroy the perceived "other."

System Imago Diagram

My colleague's dream helped me to expand my thinking as I could now see the significance of the other roles in perpetuating a system imago. In addition to the throne position and the kingmaker, I see the following roles emerging as shown in Figure 1:

1. Monarch: the king/queen who gets to sit on this invisible throne by virtue of their power/rank/privilege. The group seems to revolve around them; they get to make important decisions and also set the culture of the group.
2. Chamberlain: characteristically seems to be the administrator of the group and may occupy the effective and responsible leadership role. They appear to have an apparent rank but their power is in name only. They typically have responsibilities without any right to influence the group.
3. Nobleman: classically the elder within the group. They often bear the burden of carrying the group conscience and its sense of morality. They seem to be the voice of wisdom as they remind the members of the value of fairness and what seems to be the right thing to do.
4. Prince/princess: the apparent heirs and younger versions of the monarch. Therefore, the group tends to attend to their wishes and also tolerate their tantrums.

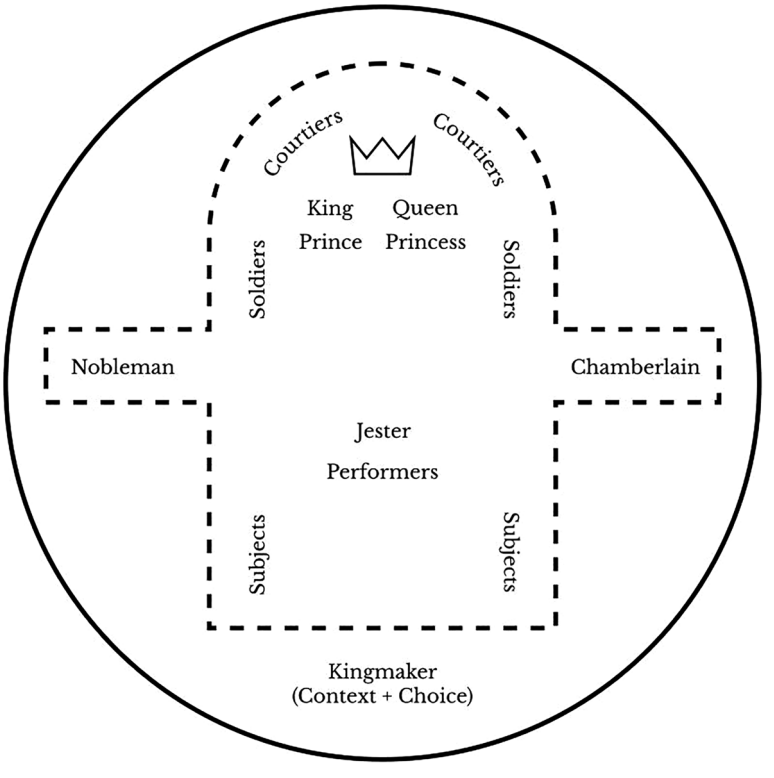

Figure 1. System Imago.

5. Jester: the member who has the liberty to speak truth to power and name the unnameable because of their closeness to the king/queen. Although they may not have any rank in the group, they seem to have the power to influence the monarch with insight. However, they also carry the risk of being severely punished.
6. Dancer/performer: the person whose skills seem to be used for entertainment purposes of the group. However, they are rarely taken seriously, and the amount of attention they may get solely depends on the mood of the monarch.
7. Soldiers: often seen as members picking fights with anybody and everybody in the group who challenges the power structures/rules. They seem to be coming to the defense of the king/queen and act as gatekeepers in protecting and promoting the monarchy.
8. Subjects: the passive members of the group who uphold the monarchy through their compliance
9. Courtier: usually quick at identifying the power center in the group at its early stages. They are overly attuned to the needs of the perceived monarch of the group and almost always agree with everything that is said/done by them. As can be seen in Figure 1, they tend to take on a subservient position (behind the monarch) that involves having to continually please the king/queen, often through flattery.

There is also a tenth role that I will describe later in this paper. The example I have given regarding my colleague's exam process is just one way of introducing the notion of system imago roles. Each role is in support of the throne position, which in turn represents the systemic power base. Not all roles are required, and other positions may emerge instead. Essentially, the system imago is a way of revealing the broader systemic power dynamics at play, which extend beyond the limits of the private, personal experience of individual group members.

I will offer a second scenario from my own experience with an Indian group. This demonstrates a different cultural encounter with the system imago.

Examples of the System Imago in Action

I was working with a group of applied behavioral scientists. During the work, one of the Brahmin male facilitators, who was also upper-middle class, often expressed anger at the few Muslim participants because of their inability to express their feelings with honesty and clarity. When I shared my observations and concerns about his behavior in facilitator meetings, all the facilitators chose to keep quiet but expressed their shock to me in private. None of them uttered a word of feedback to him. On a couple of occasions, the man interrupted the speech of the female dean of programs and drew attention back to himself. As the days went by, he continued to get more aggressive with participants, dismissive of other colleagues, and still nobody confronted him.

On the third day, during the facilitators' meeting, I cracked a joke about his aggression and spoke about how I worried that his attitude might be negatively impacting the participants. The man laughed in recognition at my comments and responded

by declaring that this behavior was simply about him being who he was. I responded by gently drawing attention to his role boundaries. There was tension in the room for a while, but my colleagues kept quiet and appreciated my courage in person after the meeting was over.

As I look back on that situation, I wonder if in that instance, the kingmaker was the traditional Brahminical patriarchal system that enabled that male facilitator to occupy the throne despite his condescending attitude to participants and colleagues. I saw myself in this scenario as being in the role of the court jester: the character who is able to speak truth to power, often via humor and by being allowed close proximity to the king (in that instance I also had a longstanding friendship with the male facilitator). I also saw how the other facilitators were taking on the role of foot soldiers to his kingship, mindlessly following orders. The dean of the program, a fellow facilitator, was taking administrative responsibility for the work, similar to that of chamberlain in the previous example, in tolerating the tantrums of the man and overaccommodating to ensure the event was peaceful.

Here is another example from my practice that illustrates how the system imago can keep people from the have-not position away from the throne. While facilitating one of my process groups (predominantly White participants), I used the analogy of a Swiss cuckoo clock to share with Richard how I experience his participation and leadership in the group as intermittent and hesitant. Richard paused for a while and said that he agreed with my observation. He attributed his participation style to his growing disinterest in the group. He also suggested that he would prefer to be part of groups that are based on themes around gender fluidity and sexual orientation. When the group probed for the reasons that he would not talk about those themes in our group, he shared multiple examples of heteronormative language used by the group, including labeling his ways of showing up as tender and feminine. He also stated that while the group seemed to accept his gay identity at the social level, it seemed to ignore and even suppress his queer identity.

In that situation, the kingmaker was heteronormativity, and it was reflected in the profile of the group with the exception of Richard. Since it was an all-White group, Richard's Whiteness and his physical gender did not give him any assumed power despite the fact that he was also the most educated member of the group. His queer identity and what the group described as his tender and feminine personality kept him away from the throne position. However, his high education gave him the subsidiary position of the nobleman such that the other White male members would use his ideas/interventions without giving him credit.

The system imago presents particular leadership challenges for those in the have-not position within group dynamics. They often end up having to spend more time and energy to establish their leadership and elicit cooperation, which sometimes sets them up for failure. I am acutely aware that in our changing times there is an aspiration to promote upward mobility and higher representation of have-not groups in society. However, because of the underlying systemic defaults, this frequently results in tokenism. A recent example of this might be the election of Barrack Obama as US president, which on the one hand was celebrated across the globe as the first Black president, and yet he seemed to spend so much of his tenure defending his position as a leader.

If we look closer to home at the leadership of the ITAA, we might ask how challenging it is for non-Europeans, people of color, to occupy the president role without having their authority minimized. I imagine this would be in sharp contrast to the experience of a European White male president. It is also worth noticing the shortage of people of color among those recognized for their efforts in service to the ITAA. Finally, it is also worth noticing how the ideas and work of Western trainers is promoted, and we often see them being invited to different parts of the world, whereas the reverse is rarely the case. I am sure it is not the lack of skill, intellect, or talent that explains this imbalance but rather the White supremacy held in the system.

Emotional Labor of Leaders From Underprivileged Backgrounds

Based on my experience of leading international groups and conversations with colleagues from nonprivileged backgrounds, I am acutely aware of the demanding call for emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983/2012) from us as leaders in order to be functional in our leadership role. Emotional labor refers to the unpaid, often invisible work done by one person to quell the needs or demands of others, both in the workplace and in social and domestic situations (Grandey et al. 2012). In my coaching practice, I have heard several Black, Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) leaders express their frustration and fear at the amount of energy they have to spend in dealing with the microaggressions of their White team members and the significant efforts they must make just to get the team to take them seriously. One of the common things that I have experienced in myself, as well from BIPOC coachees, is the sense that in order to be accepted as leaders, we must somehow shrink or merge with the majority and appear more similar to them. This can involve BIPOC colleagues controlling and suppressing any signs of upset in themselves and being wary of not provoking others on their team. I imagine that this sense of self-consciousness might stem from cultural injunctions of Don't Be You and/or Don't Be Important on account of belonging to the minority community.

I also wonder if this process of emotional labor activates a strong Parental message among BIPOC practitioners of "Be careful!," which might be a possible additional and specific driver behavior among people from underprivileged backgrounds and have-not positions in group dynamics. Several BIPOC coachees of mine have spoken about how they had to train their kids to be especially polite in the face of attacks from White people and to be hypervigilant about their tone of voice and choice of words in order to avoid being provocative. Many of my women and gay coachees report how they are programmed to constantly scan their environment to be attuned to any sign of distress in men and be quick in taking steps to assuage their anger. Although these messages may have helped them survive in the past, they block them from claiming their power as a leader. I am also reminded of the sixth driver—"Take it"—that was first coined by Keith Tudor (2008). In his paper, Tudor emphasized the psychopathology of the driver, paying attention to the narcissistic tendency that underpins this particular driver process. I am interested, though, in how this process can be applied within the context of systemic dynamics. In my experience, the "Take it" driver is probably more prevalent among people from the haves community that

tends to exploit those from the have-nots position, who in turn are programmed to overaccommodate and give in.

Despite all the emotional labor, it remains the case that leading from a less privileged position sometimes makes for a lonely and futile journey. A broader implication of this reality is that it can deeply discourage others within the same demographic to aspire to leadership.

Rebels and the Mavericks

Unlike the nine roles described previously in this paper that help in perpetuating a system imago, I now want to draw attention to two other roles, namely that of the Rebels and the Mavericks in the king's court. Their voices challenge the oppressiveness of the throne position and also call out the blind obedience of the other nine roles. Often these voices are beheaded as they represent a threat to the system imago. And yet there are times when we have seen systems change because of the personal power, contagious passion, and capacity in the rebels to draw attention to the cruelty inherent in systems and to take action against it.

To bring about systemic change, the rebels and mavericks from underprivileged backgrounds often must come together to support each other, draw attention to the energy that is wasted by engaging in unnecessary emotional labor, be unafraid of calling out power dynamics, protect their own mind, resist pressure to overaccommodate to the have culture, and also invite people in power into a dialogue. Examples of such individuals are Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela.

At the same time, we also have rebels and mavericks from privileged backgrounds whose hearts bleed to see social injustice. They are determined to use the power of their privilege to challenge the status quo, expose weaknesses and inequalities, denude the oppressive system, hold people in power accountable, mobilize collective action, and bring about social change. For example, in olden times, Hindus in India practiced the custom of "Sati" whereby a widow would either voluntarily or by compulsion immolate herself on her husband's cremation pyre. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, a Brahmin male activist, used passionate reasoning, nonviolent campaigns, and active persuasion to convince the British governor, Lord William Bentick, to ban the Sati system legally and make it a punishable offense.

In current times, such rebels and mavericks are often seen as allies to leaders from underprivileged backgrounds. Let us look now at the importance of this role in modern times to bring about social change.

The Importance of Allyship

By way of introducing a possible way forward, I want to focus on the notion of allyship. Earlier in this paper, I recounted my colleague's exam experience, which had clearly been difficult and, in my view, demonstrated the system imago in action. In contrast, I am reminded of my personal experience of evaluation as a nonviolent communication facilitator in an organization that also happens to have a predominantly White membership. I remember my assessor and mentor, who is a White American man, made four remarks that have stayed with me:

1. "How can we help you in Indianizing nonviolent communication [NVC] and making it relevant to your world?"
2. "How do you want to be assessed? What would really honor your journey as a nonviolent communication practitioner?"
3. "You come from the land of Gandhi—I am eager to learn from you how nonviolence can be used to speak truth to power and bring about social change."
4. "There is no one correct way of practicing and teaching NVC. We must account for the diversity of our certification candidates and honor and protect their agency and individuality."

The firm conviction in my assessor's voice and his audacity in challenging the system gave me firsthand experience of what good allyship looks like. The entire process left me with an experience of being lifted up as a brown woman leader, as one whose voice mattered and could be used to change the system. As I look back at the whole journey of certification as a nonviolent communication facilitator, I felt healed and empowered, with an awareness of having owned my authority.

"Allyship" is a term that has been around for many years, although it has recently been connected to the work of activists in the field of anti-oppression. It refers to the status or role of a person who advocates and actively works for the inclusion of a marginalized or politicized group in all areas of society, not as a member of that group but in solidarity with its struggle and point of view and under its leadership. I find this helpful to explain what is required to bring about a more diverse and potent approach to leadership both generally and, in my view, within the context of our TA community.

There are several components for those within privileged groups in a community to use to engage with in promoting change. For many individuals it is necessary to connect with the shame, guilt, and possible anger in acknowledging the unearned advantages that come with such privilege. It also requires individuals to act on a desire for progressive change while simultaneously resisting the urge to become the "White savior" (Aronson, 2017). Another critical factor is consciousness raising in terms of self-awareness, in other words, "doing one's own work" around personal stories relating to racialization, class, and gender, for cultivating allyship among those with power and privilege. The point is the need for those in a privileged position to be aware of systemic oppression in order to avoid it from becoming a systematically oppressive practice. The dictionary defines "systemic" as something that is pertaining to the system, whereas "systematic" means methodical. Power differentials are a reality of the world (systems) we exist in. However, when we do not name these power differentials or recognize their impact, we continue to foster systems that make sure that the have-nots remain in that position and thus what was true of the system continues to be systematically kept true by the beneficiaries of that system.

Allyship involves privileged individuals accounting for systemic disadvantage while committing to stop sustaining it. A brief example: I was facilitating a process group comprised of all White individuals from the United States. I noticed that the group was not just resisting my leadership but also undermining it by either ignoring or distracting from every intervention I made. The group leadership was clearly usurped by Todd, a senior White male psychoanalyst. Addison, one of the other elderly White

male members in the group, intervened by saying, "I am getting really angry right now with you, Todd, and the whole group as well. I have joined this group to learn from Anisha, and I imagine all of us are here because of her—but what are we all doing to her? I notice us resisting her leadership and undoing so many of her interventions. Can we just take a pause and have the courage to examine our own behavior? I also wonder how Anisha feels about all of this." Post his intervention, the whole group began exploring how White supremacy was playing out in the room, and suddenly I seemed to have become more visible to the group. My sense of my own leadership completely shifted after that day.

This vignette describes a classic example of how people from a privileged background can use their power to disrupt the existing system and yet not draw attention to themselves. I see allyship as a powerful force in bringing a system imago from the realm of the unconscious to the conscious level. This can then stimulate a dialogue within the membership around power/rank and privilege and thereby reduce or eliminate the possibility of perpetuating oppressive systems. It is important to recognize that allyship is not just a one-time confrontation but calls for a sustained commitment to addressing, challenging, and changing what is otherwise an ongoing unconscious process.

In the TA community, I see a glimpse of what allyship can look like in the recent developments initiated by the International Board of Certification (IBOC) and Professional Standards Committee (PSC): the technical changes in the examination system, the mandatory pause for process reflection around cultural differences, and expanded examiner training with an emphasis on ethics, diversity, language, and chairing exams to ensure protection and inclusion of all candidates. Also, the introduction of global conversations has opened the gates of the system that might now be ready to be disrupted by diverse perspectives. I see this move by the IBOC/PSC as a march toward creating a system that is more robust and does not reinforce or sustain the power of White supremacy.

Summary

In this paper I have offered an elaboration of Berne's early writing on group leadership, in particular, psychological leadership. In introducing the concept of system imago, I want to reinforce the importance of systemic privilege to better understand why some individuals are more likely to occupy what I referred to as the "throne" position. Furthermore, I want to draw attention to how this concept might relate to the TA professional community, citing personal experience in its systemic context. Finally, in terms of responding to the inevitable challenges that come with addressing unconscious privilege and pushing back on systemic oppression, I have advocated for allyship. To this end I offer the following questions, intended to help potential allies be married to their intention to make a difference in the world:

- What can I do to promote leaders from nonprivileged backgrounds?
- How can I use my privileged voice to stand up for my colleagues who may be at the receiving end of unfair treatment, either consciously or unconsciously?

- How can I be an ally to support my colleague(s) and set them up for success as leaders, rather than being a White savior/rescuer and robbing them of their limelight?
- How can I be vigilant in seeking out and bringing recognition to those who might be easily overlooked due to systemic bias and blindness?

Systemic change can seem daunting and beyond us, and yet it is in the small stories of our individual lives that we see glimpses of what an equitable world might look like. I have faith that there will be more allies and more leaders in the coming times who will use their voices to make our TA community the world we wish to live in.

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