

Editor's Note: The Diversity Struggle

As a young teenager, my life-transforming event occurred when I read James Joyce's, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Writers such as Shakespeare, Chaucer, Dickens, D.H Lawrence, Milton, Naipaul, Walcott, C.LR James and many others were shaping my divergent thinking at the time, but the words below had the most profound effect on me.

“The soul is born, [Stephen] said vaguely, first in those moments I told you of. It has a slow and dark birth, more mysterious than the birth of the body. When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets. (5.1.117)

In the novel, the main character Stephen explains Ireland's plight as a nation whose interesting sense of nationhood puts it at risk of destroying itself, “Ireland is the old sow that eats her farrow.” (5.1.118). It was then that I realized that I was not powerless, that I was not doomed to being constrained by the many societal nets that were being flung at me; that I could escape the “isms”: ageism, classism, ethnocentrism, nationalism, racism, sexism, “islandism” if I may, and the host of others that exist. I was the product of an unsynchronized interplay of “intertwining roots and overlapping Diasporas” (Craig 1981)¹. I did not have to be singularly defined by my Hindu Indian ancestry; the Catholicism of my high school education; the bi-racial relationships I would later be embraced in; the parenting of children with very diverse racial, religious and ethnic identities; immersion in a very postmodern predominantly Caucasian atheist dynamic; and the navigation of multiple international alliances. These *trappings* were to act as wings for flight,

1. Craig, Susan, E. (1981). *Contemporary Caribbean: A Sociological Reader*. Sage Publication. W.I.

for freedom from the boundaries, categorizations and delineations. Flying by those nets meant forging a very fluid identity and that is how I can best explain diversity. It is reaching the realization that differences though, quite significant, is also often relevantly irrelevant.

Therefore, on Campus, when asked to explain the *diversity struggle*, I say that it is really a struggle for freedom from the nets that are flung by “others” and persons who are intent on “othering”¹. The diversity struggle is the struggle for the creation of safe and inclusive spaces where persons can co-exist and appreciate the uniqueness that everyone embodies; it is the removal of barriers and borders based on standardized notions of what is acceptable. It is the encouragement to explore, appreciate and accommodate deviations from the norm; letting go of the fear that the trappings that we hold on to so dearly crumbles leaving us vulnerable, ironically, to new experiences that can be wonderful rather than threatening. The diversity struggle requires that we put on those lenses of inclusion, so that we can see the young individual struggling to come to terms with a conflicting gender identity that confuses and scares them, beneath the façade of the rebel or the loner. We can identify the co-workers who find it difficult to face the day at work because the moment they walk into the workspace they are ‘racialized minority’ first, individual second; or the student who entertains suicidal thoughts too often to mention. Lens of inclusion allows us to share the pain of those students who are experiencing racist slurs in the corridors and classroom or on the bus on the way to campus, even by the bus driver; or the quiet ‘ruralite’ who feels intimidated by the trappings of modernity. It is looking at the Indigenous and Pride flags being flown high on campus for just a few minutes and tearfully witnessing it being pulled down again in a battle that is too complex and incomprehensible to even ascribe a name to. It is the recognition that mainstream is protected and privileged. It is the understanding that privilege brings with it an enormous responsibility and duty to protect the less privileged in our midst; the vulnerable; the ones who are at risk. Inclusion does not occur at the expense of mainstream, it can grow from collaboration. Dominant culture is very much part of the diversity conversation, oppression is not; these two entities can be mutually exclusive.

1. See “The Practice of Othering”, *The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, Third Edition (1999), p. 620 defined as the exclusion of persons who do not fit the norm of the social group, which is a version of the Self. The term was introduced by Georg Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) and later adopted and adapted by many philosophers, psychologists and sociologists such as Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) and others.

Zachary (2003)¹ notes in *Diversity Advantage* that ‘diversity defines the health and wealth of nations in a new century’.

“Mighty is the mongrel...The hybrid is hip. In a world of deepening connections, individuals, corporations and entire nations draw strength and personality from as near as the local neighbourhood and as far away as a distant continent. The impure, the *mélange*, the adulterated, the blemished, the rough, the blue-and-blue, the mix-and-match – these people are inheriting the earth. Mixing is the new norm”.

Being born in a “melting pot” of cultures and having grown up tasting the multitude of flavors that a diverse-rich Caribbean culture facilitates predisposes one to ‘mixing’² as one is exposed to a fusion of different knowledge schemes and this interaction forces perspective taking.

Inclusion is achieved when we can truly identify as a child of the world; when our internalization and expressions of grief at injustice becomes universal. It occurs when a massacre in Cambodia or bombing in Syria that leaves civilians including children dead and dismembered becomes as news worthy and repulsive as a mass shooting in the United States and when we identify with all with equal pain and passion at the injustice that filters into our one united world. Empathy is not an entitlement solely for the privileged. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) is the creation of a more embracing, empathetic and equitable society.

If we do not buy into the ideal that somehow as a nation, a society, an institution, a people that we ought to be guided by certain principles of integrity and democratic freedom and respect, then maybe the language of economics can sway us. The language of DEI has evolved over the years in the Canadian context, from being a legislatively mandated notion to being incorporated into companies’ policies and procedures and translated into practices that reflect organizations’ transparency and commitment to equity and inclusion. That soon transformed into a language of morality for embracing principles of inclusion were somehow seen as the noble undertaking that any business worth its grain of salt ought to invest in. Then came the third wave, where if any organization had any intention of keeping abreast of the business trends and being a viable and successful business, then they had

1. Zachary, G. Pascal, 2003, *The Diversity Advantage*. Boulder: Westview Press.
2. See M.G. Smith (1960). *Social and Cultural Pluralism*.

to speak the language of DEI as that translated into the language of Return on Investment (ROI). Thus, not only was it the legislated and the right thing to do but it was now also the smart thing to do, the profitable investment that would bring that much more on its returns! The '*diversity advantage*' became the phrase of the day, and remains this way to a large extent.

Diversity consultant, Kathy Gallagher-Louisy gives evidence that show the increases in income for employees and profits for companies when they diversify the composition of their executives, both in terms of gender and ethnicity¹. Sociologists Dobbin and Kalev² (2016) contend that diverse staff, at all levels, is a precondition for commercial success. Economist Marcus Noland seems to confirm this; he and his coworkers looked at the functioning of 21,980 companies from 91 countries, especially with an eye on gender diversity. Their findings strongly suggest that the presence of women in corporate leadership positions improve performance.³ They argue that this correlation could reflect either the payoff to non-discrimination or the fact that women increase a firm's skill diversity. Importantly for national policy: they further found that women's presence in corporate leadership is positively correlated with a country's features such as girls' math scores, the absence of discriminatory attitudes toward female executives, and the availability of paternal leave. HR specialists Tony Bingham and Marcia Conner⁴ foresee "a workplace [and implicitly a society] that uses the talents of everyone, connecting them in meaningful ways, regardless of differences in generation, gender and consumer outlook". It involves acting together in defining problems and finding solutions, optimizing skills, talents, building relationships and creating contexts in which social awareness, reflection and working together are at the center.

Leadership and ethics specialist, Katherine Phillips⁵, notes that diversity leads to "discomfort, rougher interactions, a lack of trust, greater perceived interpersonal conflict, lower communication, less cohesion, more concern about disrespect, and other problems", However, she also claims that it enhances creativity, encourages

1. <https://engineersnovascotia.ca/events/view/?event.id=580>. The ROI of D&I Accessed September 2017.

2. Dobbin, Frank and Alexandra Kalev, 2016, 'Why Diversity Programs Fail', Harvard Business Review, July-August Issue

3. <https://piie.com/publications/working-papers/gender-diversity-profitable-evidence-global-survey>. Accessed December 2017.

4. Bingham, Tony and Marcia Conner, 2010, *The New Social Learning: A Guide to Transforming Organizations Through Social Media*. San Francisco: ASTD & Berrett-Koehler.

5. Phillips, Katherine W., 2014, 'How Diversity Makes Us Smarter', Scientific American. 1 October.

the search for novel information, leading to better decision making and problem solving and improved financial performance. Her evidence suggests that interactions among persons of different backgrounds leads to the creation of a more diligent and creative workforce.

Erin Meyer¹, an academic and consultant to international businesspersons indicates that diverse groups are more creative. Political scientist Scott Page², in *The Diversity Bonus* draws on research in computer science, psychology and economics, to show that *cognitive diversity* – the way information is perceived, analyzed, structured and processed – combined with differences in gender and ethnic background produces ‘bonuses’ in all major fields, not only in organizations and business enterprises. The literary critic, Parul Sehgal³ frames ‘diversity’, and especially the contribution made by immigrants, in less commercial terms. She quotes Salman Rushdie who embraces immigrants for they teach us to be human, as they lost everything that gave shape to their humanity – roots, culture, and social knowledge.

The deeper value and benefits are indeed well formulated by UNESCO, the organization that counts almost every nation among its members. Interchangeably using the labels ‘culture’ and ‘diversity’ and ‘*cultural diversity*’, it recognizes the economic benefits of diversity, but goes beyond these and adds that “[cultural] diversity is...a means of leading a more fulfilling intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual life” ...and “a driving force of development...of economic growth”. It goes on to state that “...diversity is thus an asset that is indispensable for poverty reduction and the achievement of sustainable development”. This is supported by physicist Gino Segrè who sees science’s future, both in classrooms and in research labs, as being tied to an increased achievement of diversity in gender, race, ethnicity and class.⁴ Psychologist Marian Viorica, in her research on bilingualism as a diversity component found that although the monolinguals and bilinguals all worked accurately on their assignment and in the same amount of time, monolingual brains had to work a lot harder, especially in areas of inhibiting control to accomplish the same goal.⁵

1. Meyer, Erin, 2015, *The Culture Map*. New York: Public Affairs.

2. Page, Scott E., 2017, *The Diversity Bonus*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

3. <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2013/11/11/244505044/book-news-postal-service-strikes-sunday-delivery-deal-with-amazon>. Accessed January 2018.

4. <http://taller.iec.cat/4iceshs/documentacio/P4ESHHS.pdf>. Accessed November 2017.

5. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259640592_Bilingual_research_methods. Accessed November 2017.

Political scientist, Shamim Miah¹ in his study of Muslim communities in Great Britain supports this positive vision on diversity but also offers pointers to optimizing it. His conclusions are that most Muslims seek to be integrated in the wider society and do not wish to remain insulated from mainstream activities. Poverty, marginalization and social inequality rather than self-segregation are the main forces that keep them on the sidelines. It is noteworthy to recognize, that in the main, if one looks at the region of Durham, for example, one will observe that people belonging to minority, refugee and migrant groups, are usually actively looking for ways to ‘have a say’ in their communities and to better understand, participate in and contribute to the larger conversation. Internships in governmental agencies, such as the Muslim Youth Fellowship program in Toronto, in which young people pair up with councilors during a couple of months, is an attractive and feasible example of what local authorities can do to accommodate these wishes.

Opportunities like these abound. It is up to each of us to define them :- A college partnership with Pride at Work, Canada; a restorative justice process that allows for a student debate on controversial publications by the school newspaper²; classroom discussions of the issues of racism and oppression articulated in the movie *Black Panther*³; a Transgender panel hosting a discussion with students from the campus LGBTQ+ Network; classroom conversations on rights-based discourse increased opportunities to stand as a Hub for Experiential Learning (EL); Sessions on the range of LGBTQ+ terminologies along the diversity spectrum; and a welcome on campus for a screening of feature documentary *Abu*⁴ are all steps in the right direction.

“Abu is a journey to the center of a fragmented family while they grapple with religion, sexuality, colonialism and migration. Through a tapestry of narratives

1. Miah, Shamim, 2015, *Muslims, Schooling & The Question of Self-Segregation*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
2. “Thanks to Teresa Goff. Professor, Media, Arts and Design Program, Durham College, for her collaboration on this.”
3. <https://www.rollingstone.com/movies/news/black-superheroes-matter-why-black-panther-is-revolutionary-w509105>. Accessed February 2018.
4. <https://www.abumovie.com/>. Accessed January 2018. “Arshad always knew he was different. Soon after emigrating from Pakistan to Canada with his family, Arshad realized he was gay. Merging clips from Bollywood films, animation, and home movies that capture awkward teen phases as well as significant life revelations, Arshad narrates his own cathartic journey, alongside his entire family’s. With charming lyricism and a dash of good humor, director Arshad Khan shares a deeply personal story of self-discovery and familial reconciliation, as he explores the challenges that can threaten the bonds between children and their parents”. Sudeep Sharma LA Film Festival.

composed of family footage, observation and classic Bollywood films, gay-identifying Pakistani-Muslim filmmaker Arshad Khan takes viewers through the tense relationships between family and fate, conservatism and liberalism and modernity and familiarity”.

At Durham College, the past year saw a heavy dedication to LGBTQ + programming in its effort to create a space where students and staff can feel at home as their cisgender campus co-occupants. Targeted reforms were put in place to promote inclusive language on college documents and address gender and sexual-based discriminatory practices that result in ‘marginalization’ and ‘invisibility’ of this vulnerable group. The intent was to promote a supportive environment.

Everything, everywhere, is connected and increasingly subjected to processes that are usually captured by such labels as ‘diversification’, ‘globalization’ and ‘interdependence’. They indeed affect all domains of life, including those of the people who form the college community. We need to show agency and play an active role in this ever inter-linking dynamics so as to deepen and enrich the mission and vision of colleges everywhere. There is ample evidence that initiatives of this kind are only viable and sustainable when they are based on a firm administrative structure and horizontally and vertically embedded.

In conclusion, this optimistic expression is penned with the full realization that the *diversity struggle* may yet be a never-ending one. We all do not have to be experts in DEI to take ownership of the fact that we are all *duty bearers* and our vulnerable are certainly *rights-holders*; and the glue that unite us is the principle of *respect*.