

The trap of one perspective: a very subjective approach

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ABSTRACT: In this paper I delve into the trap of one perspective relating to the concept of diversity via the reflection upon personal experiences and societal perceptions. Departing from traditional academic approaches I navigate through anecdotes and reflections, highlighting the dangers of a singular perspective. In the article structured into three sections—introduction, discussion, and conclusion—I examine the transformative potential of embracing diversity. From cultural exchanges to historical figures like Christopher Columbus, each narrative underscores the importance of diverse viewpoints. The aim is to provoke thought, inspire introspection, and spark meaningful dialogue, ultimately advocating for a more inclusive and empathetic society.

KEYWORDS: one perspective, single perspective, diversity, eurocentrism

INTRODUCTION

A few years back, my boyfriend and I took a trip to a castle in Denmark, a spot made famous by Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. To my shock, during our visit, my boyfriend confessed he had no clue about the play or even who Shakespeare was. It hit me like a ton of bricks. How had I missed such a big gap in his cultural knowledge after being together for two years? I even toyed with the idea of breaking up over it. For the next year, I kept it to myself, constantly questioning whether I should stay with someone who seemed so clueless about something as fundamental as *Hamlet*! It took a while, but eventually, I had a revelation. My boyfriend, who was from Pakistan, had every right not to know about *Hamlet*. I realised I had been unfair in expecting him to be well-versed in Western literature when I did not know anything about Pakistani or South Asian authors myself.

I mean, Pakistan alone has a population comparable to half of the EU, and South Asia as a whole is home to about a quarter of the world's population. This got me thinking about cultural exchange and the biases we carry. What if my boyfriend had expected me to know more about literature from his part of the world? It made me see our relationship in a new light, realising that understanding and appreciating each other's cultures goes both ways. It was a lesson in empathy and reciprocity that reshaped how I viewed not only our relationship, but people's cultural background in general.

In today's interconnected world as an academic I obviously recognise the paramount importance of embracing diversity and inclusivity, however, despite my awareness of the relevance of these social phenomena, I often find myself ensnared in the trap of a singular perspective. Although I see myself as a curious and open being, I still happen sometimes to view situations, issues, and individuals through a narrow lens, which inhibits my ability to fully appreciate the complexity of the world around me.

In this paper, I delve into the intricate dynamics surrounding the concept of diversity, shedding light on the perils of adopting a one-dimensional viewpoint. Departing from the confines of traditional academic approach, I embark on a journey of exploration guided by my personal insights and subjective reflections. Within these pages, I navigate through various examples and anecdotes, each serving as a poignant reminder of the limitations imposed by a singular perspective. My aim is to provoke thought, inspire introspection, and spark meaningful dialogue. Ultimately, my goal is to challenge pre-conceived notions, broaden perspectives, and make us all think and not take things for granted. As you have noticed by now, this paper diverges from the conventional academic style typically found in research publications. Yes, I take the freedom to deliberately present a subjective viewpoint, recognising the irony that even in doing so, I may inadvertently fall into the trap of a singular perspective.

Structured into three distinct sections—introduction, discussion, and concluding remarks—this paper unfolds as a thoughtful examination of the intricacies surrounding diversity. Through a series of illustrative examples, I illuminate the dangers inherent in clinging to a singular viewpoint, while also highlighting the transformative potential that lies in embracing diversity in all its forms. Please join me as I unravel the complexities of the trap of one perspective and embark on a journey towards greater understanding of diversity and bigger empathy for each other.

DISCUSSION

Getting back to my *Hamlet* anecdote, shortly after our castle trip, my Pakistani boyfriend and I found ourselves at a party where, apart from us, everyone else was Swedish. We joined in a game of "Who Am I?" or "Guess Who?", where each person wears a sticky note on their forehead with the name of a famous person and tries to guess who they are with only "yes" or "no" answers allowed. My partner ended up as Anne Frank - a Jewish

girl who documented her experiences during World War II while hiding from the Germans and later while imprisoned in a concentration camp. Instantly, I doubted he would have a clue who Anne Frank was. How could someone from Pakistan know about Anne Frank? Even I, despite thorough study of the Holocaust in Polish high school, had only a vague idea of her story. After all, Anne Frank's story is closely associated with the Netherlands, while Poland boasts its own World War II heroes. When it turned out that my boyfriend indeed did not know about Anne Frank, one friend dramatically rolled her eyes, while another questioned incredulously, "How can you not know Anne Frank?!". The rest remained uncomfortably silent before abruptly shifting to the kitchen for dessert, leaving us feeling like unwelcome intruders. We were never invited back.

Reflecting on the incident, it is clear that our friends made snap judgments without attempting to engage in a conversation with us. Instead of probing about Polish World War II history or Pakistan's school curriculum, they opted for silence. Ironically, they behaved like me during our trip. I realised I had fallen into the exactly same trap during our Danish adventure—I had judged my boyfriend solely from my own perspective, falling into the trap of one perspective. In the following text I will present a few more examples showing how easy it is to fall into the trap of one perspective. The provided examples represent a subjective mix of general and personal anecdotes, so it is just a friendly reminder that this article is definitely far from a typical academic paper.

Now let's dive straight into the 15th century. I am sure you have learned about the great geographical discoveries at school? Christopher Columbus is a name familiar to (almost) everyone, renowned for setting sail under the Spanish flag in pursuit of a route to India, ultimately stumbling upon a "new land." His voyage marked the genesis of European global dominance, particularly for Spain, which amassed wealth through the acquisition of gold and the exploitation of free labour. I vividly recall, during my fourth-grade year, our history teacher igniting our fascination with the 15th and 16th centuries by taking us aboard one of Columbus' vessels on an expedition into the unknown. The salty tang of the sea, the rhythmic crash of waves against the hull, and the cacophony of seagulls overhead—it was an immersive experience that left an indelible mark. Hail Christopher Columbus, the intrepid explorer! We eagerly embraced this narrative without question.

Yet, for the descendants of Native Americans, these were not mere "geographical discoveries", but brutal colonial conquests. The supposed "harvested" gold was, in truth, plundered natural resources. The so-called free human labour amounted to nothing short of exploitation and slavery. Columbus' colonial exploits ushered in an era of mass genocide, resulting in the torture and slaughter of countless indigenous peoples. He is not merely an "explorer," but a perpetrator of unspeakable atrocities responsible for a genocide. Descendants of Native Americans openly draw parallels between Columbus and Hitler. Now imagine a reality where approximately 400 statues of Adolf Hitler dot the landscapes of 33 countries, serving as scenery for holiday selfies or daily commutes to work. That is the number of Columbus statues scattered across the globe. From Colum-

bia in England to Colombo in Panama, Brazil, and Sri Lanka, numerous cities, towns, and squares bear Columbus's name. Spain, the US, and many South American countries still celebrate a national holiday in honour of his name and expedition. Our—European—one-sided perspective leads us to misjudge Columbus—a classic example of the trap of singular perspective. The example of the perception of Christopher Columbus serves as a perfect example of eurocentrism, the belief in Europe's and Europeans' superiority, which distorts history and fosters misunderstandings when we view the world from a single vantage point (Quijano, 2000). By perpetuating the notion that Columbus was merely a great explorer, we disregard the genocide and deny the Native Americans' right to truth, whereas striving for truth means embracing diverse perspectives.

I have deliberately chosen the term „native American” (in Polish “rdzenni Amerykanie”), which reflects a conscious effort to rectify historical misnomers perpetuated by Columbus' erroneous belief in reaching India. The persistence of “Indians” (in Polish “Indianie”) in Polish language usage, despite its linguistic inaccuracy, perpetuates a broader misconception regarding the inhabitants of India. In Polish discourse, “Hindus” typically denotes Indian citizens, creating a misleading portrayal of India's religious landscape. This misrepresentation is twofold: firstly, it inaccurately conflates citizenship with religious identity, overlooking India's significant Muslim population, comparable in size to Pakistan's entire Muslim demographic. With approximately 200 million Muslims residing in India, equating Hindus with Indian citizens fails to capture the religious diversity inherent to the nation. Secondly, this linguistic discrepancy fosters a disparity in societal attitudes, where greater tolerance towards Indians than Pakistanis often stems from misconceptions surrounding religious affiliation. Such observations underscore the interconnectedness of language, perception, and societal attitudes in shaping cultural understanding and intergroup dynamics.

Language, with its intricate web of semantics, holds profound sway over the messages we seek to impart. It serves not merely as a conduit for communication, but as a shaper of reality itself. Through the selection and arrangement of words, language assigns significance to our experiences, imbuing them with meaning and sculpting our perception of the world. Indeed, language is not merely a reflection of reality; it is an active participant in its construction, influencing how we perceive, interpret, and navigate the complexities of existence, so let's use our words carefully.

Getting back to the core discussion focused on the trap of one perspective. Do you know who Rigoberta Menchú is? Rigoberta Menchú has made history as the first refugee to be honored with the Nobel Peace Prize. She earned this recognition for her courageous work advocating for the rights of the Mayan people in Guatemala. Coming from the Mayan minority, she witnessed firsthand the tragic genocide in Guatemala during the 1980s. Winning the Nobel Prize in 1992 held special significance because it marked the 500th anniversary of the start of colonial conquests. Interestingly, until recently, she has been the one out of two Nobel laureate with refugee status. This makes her achievements

all the more remarkable, especially when compared to the widespread recognition of figures like Christopher Columbus. I have asked several times different audiences whether they know who Rigoberta Menchú is, *and* no one has ever had a clue about the role of this woman, which shows again how we are in the trap of one perspective.

Why is it so relevant to go beyond eurocentrism, and embrace diverse perspectives not only at the macro-level, but in our everyday life? In the following section I will once again refer to several very subjective examples highlighting the benefits and threats related to the trap of one perspective. These examples are solely tangible illustrations showcasing how diversity should not be taken for granted, and how easy it is to overlook basic solutions while not including various voices in the planning and creation of our reality. The concept of diversity in this article is defined as a broader concept encompassing not only the observable dimensions like gender, race, ethnicity, and age, but also a range of non-observable characteristics including cultural and cognitive differences among people (Kochan et al., 2003).

Ever wondered why women should constitute 50 per cent of decision-makers? Simply put, women make up half of humanity. Our presence alone warrants an equal share of power structures. This is it, and this is where the point about women's inclusion should end. However, due to the historical and consistent discrimination of women throughout the human existence I will share a few examples, which are totally subjective and definitely do not exhaust the conversation about the women's global impact. Consider something as mundane as a changing table at a university. Only after becoming a mother did I realise how many faculties lack this basic amenity. Parents attending university with young children must change diapers on tables or floors in corridors. Inclusive design, informed by diverse voices including mothers', could prevent such oversights in shared spaces. While a changing table may seem inconsequential, imagine a household where no one remembers to design a kitchen—a scenario that unfolded in Indian Gujarat and Sri Lanka during post-earthquake reconstruction efforts, neglecting women's input (Crisado-Perez, 2019).

These social insights find resonance within the corporate world. According to a McKinsey study, gender-diverse companies are 15 per cent more likely to surpass their national industry median in performance, while ethnically diverse companies are up to 35 per cent more likely to do so (McKinsey, 2015). Diverse teams are markedly more effective in problem-solving, ultimately leading to increased profits (McKinsey, 2015). Here is some encouraging news: in Poland, 44 per cent of managerial positions were held by women - a commendable achievement compared to the EU average of 34 per cent (McKinsey, 2015). However, Poland still has strides to make. A 2019 Deloitte report indicates that women lead only 6 per cent and comprise 13 per cent of board members in all listed companies (Deloitte, 2019). While women in Poland do hold managerial roles, these are predominantly at lower levels. To not fall into the trap of one perspective, in other words, to fully leverage the benefits of diversity, it is imperative to promote diversity across all

levels of management in organisations.

Since I have given myself the freedom to be subjective, now let me discuss an example of a very special organisation, which is an orchestra. For most of the 20th century, there were almost no women in the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. Their number suddenly increased in the 1980s due to blind auditions, i.e. auditions in which the committee does not see who is playing, but only hears. Today, women make up half of the orchestra. In the 1960s, the orchestra had only one black musician. Today, 70 years later in New York - a city where nearly a quarter of the population is black - there is still only one black musician in the orchestra among about 100 members. American orchestras remain the least racially diverse institutions. Blind auditions do not work. If you ask anyone in the industry, you will learn that due to the enormous professionalisation, the differences between musicians at the highest level are almost imperceptible. In an orchestra, just like in an elite university attracting only the best students, in addition to their excellent grades, it is worth taking into account diversity as a social value and creating an academic community that, in addition to scientific achievements, also brings other values. For the orchestra, in addition to the refinement of the craftsmanship, the skills of the ideal candidate should also include teaching talent, knowledge of unusual musical repertoire and the desire to create unique musical events. American orchestras should be able to embody these qualities, and it is the diverse composition of the orchestra that can help them do this. However, change will not happen by itself. Anthony Tommasini, a New York Times journalist covering the situation, signals that the lack of racial diversity begins even earlier with the lack of money to cover the high costs of traveling to auditions that are an integral part of mastering the craft (Tommasini, 2021). Additionally, it is important for youth from Black and Latino communities to see that people like them from their communities play in the orchestra. It gives them a sense of normality and faith that I can also play in the best orchestra in the future. Let's not forget how important it is for young people to have role models! For example, it is crucial for girls to see female politicians, female CEOs and female professors. There are too many studies in which children, when asked to draw a significant other, draw mostly men. When different organisations reflect the diversity of society, we give young people a point of reference that they can identify with and strive for! This means we draw from a much larger talent pool!

CONCLUSION

Research demonstrates that tackling problems within a diverse group significantly enhances the likelihood of success compared to addressing them within a homogenous group. Gender, cultural, religious, and cognitive differences shape distinct worldviews, approaches to various issues, and problem-solving methods. Consequently, group members with diverse knowledge and experiences bring forth a broader spectrum of solutions, facilitating more conscientious and effective decision-making processes.

Embracing diversity not only fosters the development of superior solutions but also draws from a broader talent pool, cultivates role models, and fosters a sense of belonging. By embracing diversity, we tap into a much larger talent pool. When organizations reflect the diversity of society, they provide young people with relatable figures to aspire towards, thereby drawing from a richer talent pool. At the same time, coexistence and communication in a highly diverse environment is a challenge as requires more effort, it is time-consuming, and thus is more costly. While our natural differences exist, let's concentrate on our commonalities to propel the creation of better solutions for all. This is a lesson that should permeate our lifelong learning journey. Unfortunately, lessons in kindness, respect, and openness to others often conclude by the end of high school, if not sooner.

However, the impact of such education should not be confined to academic institutions alone. Given that we dedicate a significant portion of our lives to work, why not impart knowledge about the advantages of diversity in the workplace? Many of us are both employees and consumers, regardless of our viewpoints, interests, age, sexual orientation, religion, culture, origin, or skin color. As patrons of businesses and corporations, it should be a given that these entities champion the rights of both their employees and customers, accepting them unconditionally. Some of us, employed within such organizations, hold sway over hiring and promotions. It is incumbent upon such individuals to view diversity and inclusion as strategic imperatives for company growth, enhancing innovation rather than merely ticking a box.

In wrapping up my “exploration” of diversity, I cannot help but feel like I have been on quite a self-reflective journey. From chatting about the dangers of seeing things from just one angle to digging into practices how we can enhance the inclusion of diverse perspectives, I have covered a lot of ground—I admit in a very superficial way—adding my tiny share to the discussion how crucial it is to embrace all the different voices and perspectives out there. This paper is a stark reminder that we have still got a long way to go in making things fair for everyone and not taking things for granted.

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