CHAPTER 13

IDENTITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

My Personal and Academic Path

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LOOKING BACK: WHY I STUDY GENDER AND DIVERSITY

I am the oldest of four daughters, all born in Canada. My parents were both born in India and moved to England when they were very young (my mom at age 3 and my dad at age 13), before eventually immigrating to Canada in their 20s. I noticed early on that, within both Indian and Western cultures, having four girls was not only an anomaly, but also perceived as a very unfortunate thing. Indian people were more overtly negative and at times dramatic in their evaluation. People would openly try to console my parents for their misfortune, tsk in our general direction when we replied "no" to their question about if we had any brothers, or publicly pray at the Gurdwara (Sikh temple) that my parents might be blessed with a son, even when they were well past the thought of having more kids themselves. For my parents' part, they always shrugged off and dismissed these comments, saying that they were "silly" or "backward," and that they were happy to have four girls.

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I tried to ignore these comments too, but the same kind of sentiment—that having four girls was a problem in some way—was also expressed regularly by people from outside of the Indian community. I can remember multiple times when complete strangers would see our family and make a comment like, "Four girls! Oh you poor man!" to my dad, or "Four girls! Good luck when they're teenagers!" to my mom. In addition to a multitude of other signals, these comments drove home the message that boys were better and more desirable than girls, and that we were in a particularly bad spot because there were just way too many of us.

My sisters and I also experienced the sorts of tensions that are commonly felt by second-generation immigrants and bicultural children. We grew up and went to school in predominately White communities (the city we grew up in is currently 90% White, and that number was even higher when we were young). We were constantly battling between the norms and expectations of our parents and the relatively more lax norms and expectations we perceived our White friends to be enjoying. I always felt a sense of having to hide something, either from my friends and peers at school about my Indian identity, or from my parents and family about my Canadian identity. I felt like an outsider in both settings and that feeling stuck around, even through grad school, where I felt that most people had no awareness of, or desire to understand, the massive cultural gap I was trying to bridge.

Growing up as an Indo-Canadian girl with three sisters awakened my interest in identity, inequality, and injustice. I noticed inequality everywhere and remember being interested in social justice and inclusion from a young age. I was and still am hypersensitive to seeing people be disrespected, excluded, or undermined because of their identity, whether because of their age, race, gender, social class, or anything else. My interest in many of the concepts I study are rooted in these early experiences and the desire to understand and transcend what I perceived as barriers to my own and others' self-expression and accomplishment. These interests ultimately lead me to pursue graduate studies in social psychology. I am still driven by many of the same questions that emerged in my childhood. Why do people think boys and men are better than girls and women? Why do people care so much about gender anyway? How can people from diverse backgrounds live and work together happily and productively? How can people best manage the intersections of their various social identity groups? How can environments be set up so that everyone feels valued and included?

My sisters and I are all adults now, and three of us have kids of our own. Between us, we have five boys; none of us has a daughter. The fact that we have five boys is still, in 2020, met with almost universally positive commentary, from people of all types of cultural backgrounds. When I was pregnant with my first son, Ravi, I was convinced he was going to be a girl. I *wanted* him to be a girl. Not even necessarily because I truly wanted a girl,

but because I was fighting against anyone who might think that having a boy would be the preferred outcome. I could only imagine having a girl, and I was excited about the opportunity to "fix" the things that I felt were "wrong" with my upbringing. I was going to raise a strong feminist, and make sure she always felt valued and loved, and never felt like her gender meant she wasn't good enough. When I found out I was having a boy, I was terrified. I had basically no experience with boy babies; all of my sisters were girls, and most of my cousins were girls, too. I had no idea what to do with a boy! My husband was quick to remind me, "We do the exact same thing, take care of him and play with him and help him grow." I realized that despite fighting it my whole life, and despite having had similar conversations with other pregnant friends, I too had fallen victim to gender bias, assuming that only a girl could be raised to be feminist or an inequality disrupter. This completely shifted my perspective, and I realized what an amazing opportunity I had to raise a human, of whatever gender, to be comfortable and confident in his own skin and to be awake to the inequality around him. Now I have two boys, and being a mother has opened my eyes to the myriad struggles that parents face as they learn to inhabit a new identity, at home and at work. That knowledge, coupled with the desire to contribute in some small way to a society in which everyone feels valued and included, continues to invigorate my interest in gender and diversity.

A RECENT RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT: USING DEFAULTS TO ELIMINATE THE GENDER GAP IN COMPETITION

A recent study that I am particularly proud of uncovered a novel intervention for eliminating the gender gap in competition (He, Kang, & Lacetera, 2019, 2020). A robust body of research has demonstrated that, compared to men, women are less likely to participate in competition or take risks, less (over) confident, and less likely to self-promote or exaggerate accomplishments (e.g., Exley & Kessler, 2019; Flory, Leibbrandt, & List, 2015; Moss-Racusin & Rudman, 2010; Niederle & Vesterlund, 2007). However, most competitive selection processes, including those for deciding on promotions, academic admissions, and awards, require one to self-nominate and enroll in competition, which suggests that these kinds of processes could disadvantage women and create and perpetuate gender disparities in academic and professional life.

The typical organizational response to these gender disparities has fallen into two main camps. On the one hand, there have been millions of dollars spent on diversity or unconscious bias or implicit bias training (Chang et al., 2019; Leslie, 2018). These trainings are extremely widespread across the corporate world, and companies may offer them proactively or, as in

the case of some high profile examples like Starbucks and Papa John's, reactively following reputation-damaging public instances of discrimination. At best, these trainings have little to no effect (Chang et al., 2019; Dobbin & Kalev, 2016; Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006), and at worst, can be associated with a number of negative unintended consequences including reduced diversity and backlash against women and minorities (Kalev et al., 2006; Leslie, 2018). A second approach has been focused on "fixing the women," by coaching them on how to "lean in" (Sandberg, 2013), speak up, and be more assertive. Unfortunately, a classic double bind faced by professional women is that they experience discrimination for acting feminine, but also experience discrimination and backlash when they adopt the types of stereotypically masculine behaviors associated with "leaning in" (Moss-Racusin & Rudman, 2010; Phelan, Moss-Racusin, Rudman, 2008; Rudman & Glick, 1999, 2001).

The approaches mentioned above place the responsibility for both creating and solving the problem of gender discrimination onto individuals (see also Kim, Fitzsimons, & Kay, 2018). Unconscious bias training assumes that discrimination is rooted in people's minds and aims to reduce it by changing their attitudes and biases. Approaches that aim to fix the women insist that women could solve the problem of sexism themselves if they could only act more like men. Neither of these approaches works, and both completely ignore the structural and systemic biases that are built into many social systems and processes themselves.

Our work dispenses with attempts to change people's minds or fix the women and focuses instead on making structural changes to the way that the decision to compete is framed. In typical competitive processes, one must actively choose to engage, or opt-in, to compete. You have to apply for a scholarship or take some action to put yourself up for a promotion. The default response is to do nothing, specifically, to not compete. We know, however, that humans find defaults to be extremely sticky, even if they are completely arbitrary and irrelevant to the actual choice at hand (e.g., Downs, Loewenstein, & Wisdom, 2009; Johnson, Bellman, & Lohse, 2002; Thaler & Sunstein, 2009). Changing the default option can have powerful effects on behavior. For example, changing the default to one of enrollment from which people are free to opt-out has been successful in increasing rates of participation in retirement savings and organ donation programs (Carroll, Choi, Laibbson, Madrian, & Metrick, 2009; Choi, Laibbson, Madrian, & Metrick, 2002; Johnson & Goldstein, 2003; van Dalen & Henkens, 2014).

Our studies so far demonstrate that simply changing the way competition is framed—without changing anything about women themselves—can eliminate the traditionally observed gender gap. Women have been observed to compete at lower rates than men when competition is presented

as an active choice with the default of not competing (e.g., Niederle & Vesterlund, 2007). We set up our experiments to compare this typical opt-in condition to an experimental condition in which the default is that all applicants are automatically enrolled in a competition but can choose to opt-out. While we observed the standard gender gap in the traditional opt-in condition, we were able to completely eliminate the gender gap in the opt-out condition: women and men stayed enrolled in competition at the same rate (He et al., 2019, 2020). Our follow-up studies show that changing the default to one of competition shifts the perception of prevailing social norms without any negative downstream consequences for performance, well-being, or the likelihood of being selected for a job. These results should be of great interest to organizations and policy-makers who are serious about structural and systemic solutions to the problem of gender disparities in participation in competition. We hope that this and similar work will convince decision-makers that we need to move beyond trying to fix the women, or any group of individuals, but instead to fix the systems that give rise to and maintain inequality (Bohnet, 2016; Fitzsimons, Kay, & Kim, 2018; Kang & Kaplan, 2019; Kim et al., 2018).

Aside from the potential these results hold for reforming the framing of competitive selection processes, I am also very proud of this work because the lead author is my PhD student, Joyce He, a brilliant researcher and fantastic collaborator. Together with our coauthor, Professor Nico Lacetera, we have been developing this work over the past few years in a truly iterative and collaborative way. We are continuing to dig deeper into our initial findings as part of Joyce's dissertation, and I am very excited about the potential these results hold for application and policy reform.

LESSONS LEARNED: ADVICE FOR JUNIOR SCHOLARS

I have three pieces of advice for junior scholars as they work to incorporate their academic identities into their already multifaceted senses of self: (a) you do you, (b) haters gonna hate, and (c) everything is temporary. I continue to work on these themes myself and have found them to be particularly relevant as a woman and person of color working in academia. I hope that they will be encouraging to students whose social identities have been traditionally under-represented in this space. As emerging scholars of diversity and inclusion, they need to know that their experiences are valid and valued and that they are not alone in their fight to understand and, ultimately, break down injustices.

First, try not to get caught up in what other people think you should do or how you should act. There are many different paths to success and there is room for many different types of people in academia. You will not last

unless you carve out a path that works for you, and only you can decide what that path looks like. Despite all the terrific advice out there about how to succeed as an academic, there is no single template that works for everyone. People present advice based on what has worked *for them*, which does not mean that it will work for you. It is up to you to figure this out by experimenting and being honest about what feels right. As an example, when I first started grad school, I felt tremendous pressure to ask questions during talks. This was a completely foreign concept to me, coming from a cultural background in which power-distance is so deeply respected and from an academic background where that had not been the norm. It did not feel authentic to me and none of the constant advice I received to "just ask a question" did anything to change my mind or teach me the skill; it only made me feel bad about myself and contributed to the already strong sense I had that I did not belong. All academic skills and behaviors develop over time, and my advice is to allow yourself the space to develop these things in your own time, even if others do not. This is about meeting yourself where you are and being kind to yourself, and is probably one of the hardest things about academia. Many of us end up in academia because we are high-achievers and have very high standards for ourselves. Unfortunately, this also means that we can be particularly susceptible to guilt brought on by feeling like we are not meeting other's expectations or prescriptions. There are many different ways to get to the same place, and the way that works for you and honors your authentic self is the right way for you.

The second piece of advice basically boils down to "haters gonna hate." If people are unkind or outright mean to you, dismissive of your ideas or contributions, or undermine your sense of belonging or self-worth, please understand that that says more about them (they are an a-hole; Sutton, 2007, 2010) than it does about you. As someone who has an inherent need to feel liked, it took me years to acknowledge this as a possibility, and even though I firmly believe it now, I still sometimes find myself falling into the same trap. One particularly salient example, again from grad school, is when a senior student compared me to another student in my cohort, saying how good he thought she was but that I was not similarly cut out for the program. He told me this in a casual, off-hand way; it was nothing to him, but I obsessed over that interaction for years, trying to figure out ways to get him to take me seriously, to like me, to think I was good enough and smart enough to be in the same program. Eventually, I realized that he had absolutely no basis to make such a judgment call and that his words were meant to hurt me, or at least to undermine and shake me up a bit. It really said very little about me but spoke volumes about him. My advice here is to be open to constructive, productive, and respectful feedback—invite it, embrace it—but train yourself to dismiss immediately from your mind any personal, destructive criticisms which are meant to tear you down and make

you question your worth and belonging. There are many useful books and online tools from the cognitive behavioral therapy literature to help you with quieting excessive negativity from the haters you will encounter over the course of your life.

The final piece of advice I have for young scholars is to keep in mind that everything is temporary. You might not be happy with the way things are going right now in your personal or professional life, but these things will change . . . eventually. You have a finite amount of time, energy, and motivation in any given moment, so you will inevitably find yourself working on some things and completely failing at others all the time. The hard thing is that means you feel like you are always failing because there is always something that has to fall through the cracks; no one can do everything 100% perfectly all the time. The key is understanding that the things you think you are failing at now will be the things you feel like you are excelling at in the future and vice versa. One moment you will be struck by inspiration and the next you will feel completely stuck and overwhelmed. Everything changes; nothing stays the same. Life is full of highs and lows and ebbs and flows. Sometimes you just have to ride the wave.

LOOKING FORWARD: WHERE WE NEED TO GO NEXT

Gender and diversity are fascinating research topics because they develop and evolve in a constant conversation with our broader society. As recent examples, the #MeToo movement has launched renewed activity in research on sexual harassment (e.g., Jagsi, 2018; Jagsi et al., 2016; Kensbock, Bailey, Jennings, & Patiar, 2015; McLaughlin, Uggen, & Blackstone, 2017; O'Neil, Sojo, Fileborn, Scovelle, & Milner, 2018; Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019; Rosenthalm Smidt, & Freyd, 2016; Tenbrunsel, Rees, & Diekmann, 2019; Williams, 2018; Zeigler-Hill, Besser, Morag, & Keith Campbell, 2016); social discourse around *toxic masculinity* has given rise to new work on understanding male gender and modern masculinity (e.g., Berdahl, Cooper, Glick, Livingston, & Williams, 2018; Ely & Kimmel, 2018; Jivani, 2019; Ladge, Humberd, Baskerville Warkins, & Harrington, 2015; Pascoe, 2012; Pascoe & Bridges, 2016; PettyJohn, Muzzy, Maas, & McCauley, 2019; Stiller, 2019); and the "debate" around gender pronouns has motivated examinations of transgender identity and gender fluidity, highlighting the need for future gender research to think beyond the binary to understand how traditional gender stereotypes can affect people of all genders (e.g., Airton, 2018; Beauregard, Arevshatian, Booth, & Whittle, 2018; Collins, McFadden, Rocco, & Mathis, 2015; David, 2015; Davidson, 2016; Davis, 2017; Dietert & Dentice, 2015; Elias, Johnson, Ovando, & Ramirez, 2018; Fosbrook, 2019; Fosbrook & Kaplan, 2019; Goodman & Kaplan, 2018; Martinez, Sawyer, Thoroughgood,

Ruggs, & Smith, 2017; McFadden, 2015; Mizock et al., 2018; Ozturk & Tatli, 2016; Rudin et al., 2016; Ruggs, Martinez, Hebl, & Law, 2015; Sawyer, Thoroughgood, & Webster, 2016; Winter et al., 2016; Yoder & Mattheis, 2016). While by no means an exhaustive list, I think that these three areas are ripe for continued exploration by scholars and society and that their growth and development will significantly shape the direction of research on gender and diversity in the years to come. In addition, the management of multiple identities and their intersections (Gaither, 2015; Hirsh & Kang, 2016; Kang & Bodenhausen, 2015; Ramarajan, 2014; Ramarajan & Reid, 2013) remains a critical area for future research. Future work will hopefully continue to guide us toward a richer and more meaningful understanding of intersectionality across a variety of social group identities.

Aside from these content areas, it would be fruitful for future research on gender and diversity to harness the many insights we have gained from across the behavioral sciences to design and experiment with structural interventions (Bohnet, 2016; Kang & Kaplan, 2019; Thaler & Sunstein, 2009). I think the future of our field lies in taking a solution- and intervention-based approach moving forward. Our work on gender and competition mentioned above is one example of zooming out from a particular finding—women are less likely to participate in competition—to design and test a behaviorally informed intervention that could be easily applied across a variety of contexts (He et al., 2019, 2020). Similar intervention-focused work shows that defaults can be used to eliminate the gender gap in leadership selection (Erkal, Gangadharan, Xiao, 2019); that providing precise and objective qualification criteria on a job application reduces the gender gap in willingness to apply (Coffman, Collis, & Kulkarni, 2019); that an "evaluation nudge" wherein applicants are evaluated jointly rather than separately reduces gender bias in selection (Bohnet, van Geen, & Bazerman, 2016); and, relatedly, that making hiring and selection decisions for sets of applications rather than one-by-one increases gender diversity (Chang, Kirgios, Rai, & Milkman, 2020). Each of these studies tests structural and procedural interventions, and hopefully, the field will continue this move away from attempts to fix the women or fix the minorities and focus on fixing the systems and processes that create and perpetuate biases themselves. I hope that testing new and exciting interventions with laboratory and field experiments will become the next hot topic in gender and diversity science. These types of interventions should also allow us to focus on the "I" of "D&I"—inclusion. Researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers have spent at least 30 years now focusing on increasing representation of women and minorities (diversity), with relatively little attention paid to understanding what it takes to make them feel welcome and fostering a sense of belonging (inclusion). Hopefully, a move to a more intervention-based approach will help us to make progress on the inclusion side of the story as well.

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