

Aditi Desai

Grade 10

Livingston High School

DIVERSIFYING OUR MENTALITY: PROMOTING A CULTURE OF INCLUSION

A uniform blanket of dread diffused across the faces of my shocked family members. As they intensely watched the wedding ceremony proceed under the humming fluorescent lights, a sense of disapproval radiated from their distasteful expressions. My cousin, daughter of conforming Indian parents, walked down the aisle clutching the hand of a vibrant European man. Her hand melted into his firm grasp as they enthusiastically made their vows and accepted their new lives as a unified couple. My family congratulated the newly-wed couple with false smiles plastered across their faces and zealous nods. However, as the couple exited the room, wedding attendees turned around and expressed just how this untraditional interracial marriage should not have taken place. Guests asserted their firm views that the couple would not be able to work past the differences in culture, language, traditions, and ethics. They would be unable to accept each other and the relationship would essentially deteriorate.

Initially, I comprehended the position my concerned family members were coming from. They did not want my cousin, who had grown up in an orthodox Hindu household, to have to conform to novel views and customs. They feared that the differences in beliefs would drive a wedge between the newly-wed couple. However, eight years later as I reflect on this very situation, interracial marriage has become the new “norm.” Individuals have learned to adapt to traditions, languages, and religious beliefs other than their own when committing to a relationship. Couples have worked past the miniscule barriers to create a harmonious relationship comprised of undeniable affection. Although some have accepted this ethnic diversity, countless citizens have still been unable to endure the melding of discrete cultures. In the twenty-first century, as women take on revolutionizing roles, immigration rates swell, and individuals of all socioeconomic backgrounds assert their right to education, diversity is becoming key in corporate, educational, and social settings. Understanding the critical role which diversity plays along with ways to promote differences drives the formation of a culture of inclusion, awareness, and Acceptance.

Whether it concerns workplaces or universities, diversity comes in numerous profiles. Having individuals representative of various genders, socioeconomic backgrounds, ages, and ethnicities is essential to formulating a diverse community. Accepting individuals of various backgrounds and experiences is the first step towards creating a community that reflects the immense quantity of perspectives of the world.

Recently, business corporations have been encouraging a “Diversity Initiative,” which promotes the inclusion of assorted races and genders into high level positions. The need to include a varied workforce is becoming apparent as companies evaluate the monetary and social benefits created by diverse employees. According to The New York Times, “...only 54% of immigrants are part of the workforce...” (Ekman). A large resource, in the form of immigrants, goes untapped as companies do not invite individuals from unique cultural and educational backgrounds to contribute to their businesses. Company executives fear cultural clashes and differences in language causing miscommunication. However, including diverse employees enables all members of an organization to gain access to various perspectives and viewpoints. Accommodating various genders, races, and ages “promotes more thoughtful decision making...” (Wanserski). A 2015 McKinsey Report found that “...ethnically diverse companies are 35% more likely to outperform the national industry median...” (Wanserski). When employees are surrounded by people exactly like themselves, they fail to scrutinize certain situations, and are more prone to falling for their own incorrect answers. However, diversity is able to improve the mechanism of thinking. The variety of opinions and assertions in a diverse workplace promotes individuals to think harder and deeper, debate, detect errors, and consider impactful ideas which may have otherwise been unheard of.

Comparable to diverse workplace environments where employees grow intellectually on a daily basis, students in educational settings must likewise interact with peers who hold varying viewpoints. Interacting with peers who hold different opinions urges students to reevaluate their own perspectives and ask the question: “How can someone else feel so differently about the same issue?” Unconventional perspectives encourage students, just like employees, to embrace effective solutions proposed by their peers. Students of umpteen backgrounds are able to challenge each other, thus fostering competitiveness

and potential innovation. As mentioned by The Huffington Post, "...more students in elite colleges come from the top 1% of the income scale than from the entire bottom 60%..." (Cassidy). Talented lower-income students are unable to showcase their expertise and enrich others' educational experiences due to the lack of socioeconomic diversity present in the student body of numerous universities. Increasing diversity and equality within our society begins with the children who will make laws, take on professions, and invent in the future. Schools and universities must become more representative of the real world and reflect the varying backgrounds which all citizens and immigrants come from. Differences have now become the texture of daily life. Thus, by experiencing this sense of diversity from a younger age, children and students will be more adept at enveloping and benefiting from diversity in future occupations.

Despite the innumerable benefits posed by diversity in both corporate and educational settings, orthodox individuals are still reluctant to embrace heterogeneity. The simple explanation: fear of change. The idea of accepting multiple views and perspectives, adapting and conforming to discrete traditions provokes a sense of fear. Being taken out of comfort zones and propped into an unfamiliar sector with individuals of different backgrounds stimulates panic and dread. People fear diversity as it implies the loss power, status, and the deprivation of one's traditionalist views. This makes society intimidated by change and more willing to promote the status quo. However, embracing diversity does not necessarily mean abandoning one's personal principles. Instead, it simply implies accepting and recognizing views other than your own. Moreover, stepping out of one's comfort zone once in a while is a healthy habit. Challenging yourself to be open to, listen to, and appreciate what others have to say is a distinct step in promoting diversity and generating a culture of acceptance.