

EMBRACING DIVERSITY - A MAN'S PERSPECTIVE



What is a man's perspective on diversity?

The short answer is, it depends on the man!

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In Ireland and elsewhere, a lot of men in positions of power and leadership are obviously not convinced that we should embrace diversity. This includes business leaders, politicians, and those in the media.

This may come across as counter intuitive, because we often hear from those people that they are all in favour of diversity, that they are trying to bring in more women and ethnic minorities into their enterprises, and that they have launched a strategy for equality.

Yet, they are not trying very hard, because there are still very obvious inequalities in society, which have been there for decades. Sure, some men in positions of power genuinely wish we had more diversity, but this is not the case for the majority of them – otherwise, we'd already have more diversity, since they are the decision makers.



Let's focus our attention on women. There are many areas where improvements are necessary.

First, economics. There is an average gender pay gap of 16.3% in the European Union and 13.9% in Ireland. This means that among all men and women who work, women make 13.9% less per hour than men on average. For those who think this doesn't sound that bad, consider this: it is the equivalent of women working seven weeks for free every year!

And the gender pay gap only compares men and women who work – women who stay home to take care of kids, for example, are not included. Therefore it is a direct comparison of men and women in the workplace.

Why is there a gender pay gap? There are many reasons, including the facts that high-paying supervisory and management positions are mostly held by men; that men are promoted more often than women, which increases their pay; that only 4% of CEOs are women in Europe; that women spend more time than men on unpaid labour like

household work and child care; and that there is still discrimination based on stereotypes.

But some see no problem with any of this and even blame women for their lower income! They allege that men make more money because they are "more charismatic", "work harder", and are "more driven". In addition, they "get sick less frequently" and "seldom get pregnant".

Those are the words of Kevin Myers, printed in his last column for the Sunday Times, before his departure! But by those standards, one could also say that gays, blacks and other minorities are not paid as much as white men, because gays are "less charismatic", Latinos are "not driven", and blacks "are too often pregnant". But this makes no sense, just like Kevin Myers.

Myers wrote his column in the wake of the BBC revealing the list of its best paid presenters, among which only one woman could be found in the top-9. In Ireland, RTÉ's own list shows only three women in the top-10.

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These trends reflect those in the economy as a whole, where the richest are men. For example, in the UK, there are ten times more men than women who earn over one million pounds a year.

But salaries are only one side of the coin. The other side is the so-called “pink tax”. This refers to the fact that women are often charged more for equivalent consumer goods. My favorite example is hair cuts: women are systematically charged more for that service – often double – much more than whatever extra time it takes, if any, compared to gents’ cuts. Time your hair stylist next time you go to check it out!

Surveys of hundred of equivalent consumer goods have found that in the US for example, women face a 7% surcharge. For instance, a girl version of a toy will be 7% more expensive than the boy version.

But it's not all about gender. Race is another important issue. For example, in the US, black women are paid 67% of the dollar earned by white

men—and white women are paid 76%. So there's a racial wage gap for women is 9 percentage points.

Role models are also important, particularly the faces we see in pop culture. But unfortunately, a recent report on Hollywood found that the movie industry still excludes women, disabled people, ethnic minorities and LGBT people. White, straight male roles remain the norm on screen, based on an analysis of 900 popular films in the last 10 years. For example, in the top 100 movies of 2016, only 31% of speaking characters were women, and only 1% of speaking characters were gay, lesbian or bisexual.

Social class is often forgotten but also very important. It's one thing to talk about gender disparities in salaries among highly-paid individuals, but there is a larger divide between those at the top of the income scale and those further down below. For example, it is fine to compare Miriam O'Callaghan's c.€300k a year to Ryan Tubridy's c.€495k and call out the injustice. But let's not forget that 61% of RTÉ employees make less than



€60,000 a year and 18% make less than €40,000. Embracing diversity is also empowering those at the bottom of the income scale.

Apart from economic issues, there are a number of social issues on which women's freedom is constrained. For example, the fact that abortion is so restricted in Ireland is an obvious case. We're completely out of step with the overwhelming majority of Western countries. Irish women do not have control over their own bodies, even though a clear majority of the population is in favour of relaxing abortion laws. Blame the main political parties for lack of action on this front.

Sexual violence and harassment are also common occurrences for women. A recent major European Union report interviewed 42,000 women in the 28 EU member states. It found that 1 in 3 women have been the victim of physical or sexual abuse since the age of 15, with the majority of perpetrators being men. And this is not about inappropriate phone calls or emails – it is about real violence, such as being beaten, burned, slapped or forced into sexual intercourse. On top of that, about 50% of women in the EU have experienced sexual harassment – or 90 million women.

Add to this the countless times that girls and women have been told since childhood that they shouldn't be doing this or that, that this or that was too difficult, that they should do something easier, etc. Whereas boys and men are more often told to be leaders and take risks and rise up to challenges.

We could go on, but it's clear that there is a lot of work to be done to embrace diversity. Perhaps the most important point is that the above aspects of inequality should not be considered in isolation. They are all related – victories in one brings success in the others. For example, closing the gender wage gap gives more power to women, which gives them the capacity to get more assertive politically and influence policy. And this, in turn, will gradually erode negative stereotypes on women.

In other words, we need unity on these issues and constructive interactions between the various individuals and organisations that work on any issue related to diversity. Those who don't want to embrace diversity bet on divisions and atomisation of those who want change.

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