

THE ANXIETY DIVERSITY PARADIGM

Why anxious people can have a difficult time accepting diversity, why they, themselves, are diverse, and how we can help them, and our world.

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Diversity is defined as the state of being diverse, that is, having variety. In societal terms, and as we often hear it applied in today's world, it is the practice or quality of including or involving people from a range of different social and ethnic backgrounds and of different genders, sexual orientations, etc. Inclusion is defined as the action or state of including or of being included within a group or structure. In societal terms, and as we hear it applied in today's world, it is the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized.

Whereas familial and societal indoctrinations can play a large role in one's ability to accept and apply the parameters of diverse inclusion, this can also be affected by one's own intellectual and emotional level of functioning. A key factor in accepting any new or different stimuli is possessing a mind that is healthy enough to receive and assess that information. So, what happens when one's ability to accept new information is compromised by a mind that is routinely under siege from the harrowing effects of anxiety?

From the body, through the emotions, and into the brain

Anxiety is primarily a physical condition. It initially affects the body, and can cause agitation, avoidance behaviors, chest pains, fatigue, gastrointestinal problems, hot flashes, hyperventilation, increased heart rate, irritability and tension, palpitations, shortness of breath, sleeping difficulties and restlessness, sweating, trembling, and shaking.

Anxiety quickly moves to the emotions, where it initiates the fight to flight response, mood swings that can be mild, or cause one to go from zero to sixty in a matter of seconds, and progress to the point of uncontrollable panic attacks. Finally, anxiety causes a marked difficulty in intellectual processing. One can feel intellectually overwhelmed with everything moving too fast, and many thoughts invading the brain, seemingly, all at one time. Some of the most routine information can become difficult to understand, organization goes out the

neurological window, and new information being received seems to have no rational place to go.

Handicapped, misunderstood, and stereotyped

Anytime the body is under assault on any level, it makes the presentation of new information become difficult to understand, let alone assimilate into one's routine way of thinking and behaving. Though diversity is nothing more than being different in some fashion, and inclusion simply means including everyone in a group or structure, this new information is being presented to a person whose body, emotions, and intellectual processing are under attack. It's hard to process new information when your body is screaming from the inside, your emotions have you reacting unrealistically to even the simplest changes, and your brain can't understand what you are presenting it with.

All too often, people suffering from anxiety are handicapped in their ability to accept change, and new concepts are seen as difficult to understand. When they are presented with making adjustments to accept and include diversity into their mental framework, it can be difficult for them. As a result, are often viewed as discriminative in their reactions to other people. Anxiety can cause people whose intentions are warm and dignified to react to new information, and for that matter, diversity, in a protective and seemingly unaccepting fashion. Their bodies are operating at it a grossly accelerated pace, there emotions are reacting on the turn of a dime, and their brains have been bullied by this relentless internal demon to the point that they cannot understand the information they are being presented with. In the end, they may be mistakenly judged as unsympathetic discriminators who refused to accept changes, and differences in other people.

The ability to understand and accept different people, and their different points of view and living styles has so much to do with the way we as a culture treat each other. Whether we are talking about diverse populations, or any other members of the human family, we tend to be hard on each other. We judge quickly, and we can strike deep. Our culture tends use exclusionary methods as a default way of operating. We work so hard to keep each other segregated. It is, unfortunately, the underpinning for the way we treat each other.

Anxiety intensifies every human condition. It accelerates every part of a human being, and it can lay waste to even the most sophisticated minds. It is so difficult to turn one's attention to the need for social justice when what is happening right inside one's own body and mind interfere with sound reasoning,

and ordered thinking. When someone suffering from anxiety experiences the pain and horrors that this debilitating condition can cause each and every day, and must function in a world whose members have become masters at excluding each other and routinely inflicting injustices on each other, understanding, and then accepting diversification can be challenging. There is simply too much negative and conflicting information to process.

It's all in the presentation

So much of anxiety is misunderstood. People suffering from this condition are often cruelly judged and labeled as individuals who are weak, lazy, and undependable. Their condition, all too often, prevents others from understanding that they may be responding to change and social differences based upon what is happening to them physically, emotionally, and intellectually.

More often than not, people suffering from anxiety can be warm understanding people. They do have difficulties with new information, and with change. That, however, does not mean that they cannot understand and include the principles of diversity in their lives. It is all about the presentation. Attempts to communicate with a person whose entire life operates at a painful and accelerated pace demands a slower, easier delivery. It is important to keep the volume low, present facts, not opinions, allow for questions about the subject matter, and then provide the listener with the dignity and respect to consider any changes you are suggesting. Isn't that what we all need from each other?

Our failure to understand that anxious people who have a difficult time with change and new concepts are not discriminating goes hand in hand with our unwillingness to accept the difference in each other, regardless of whether or not diversity is involved. The truth of the matter is that we simply have a difficult time accepting each other. One does not have to be a member of the diverse part of the population to experience exclusion. It is everywhere.

Every human life is diverse. Every human who occupies this planet is different in their own way. We have, unfortunately, evolved as a human family that reacts and attacks quickly. So often, we don't understand the consequences of our actions. As we continue to attack each other, we raise the level of anxiety in the nation. This quick reaction, quick judgment way of living is creating much of the anxiety that interferes with the sound reasoning and intellectual processing which is so important to both understand and accept diversity. We are, in fact, judging what we are creating. This is something that has to change.

As our human fraternity moves forward, it is so important that we accept everyone as diverse people who have something unique and wonderful to offer our world. As we become more proficient in our willingness and our ability to understand that we are all different, diverse, and possessing an abundance of gifts that we may bestow on those we share this planet with, we may see diversity applied as a simple, everyday concept that moves us closer to a world of understanding, acceptance, and love for each other.

Anxious people, and in particular, those suffering from the more severe form of anxiety, and who often overreact, and make some questionable choices are part of that human fraternity. They are diverse, intelligent, beautiful people. We all are. Part of accepting our own diversity is learning how to become a *loving*, diverse person. Anxiety is an unwanted, but very real part of our culture, and it's not going anywhere soon. So, be different, and show the world that you are, but let everyone else be that way, too. If we do, we may just learn to understand how similar we all are. God bless!

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