

COMPLEX IDENTITIES AND MINDFULNESS IN EQUITY TRAINING

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Equity Training

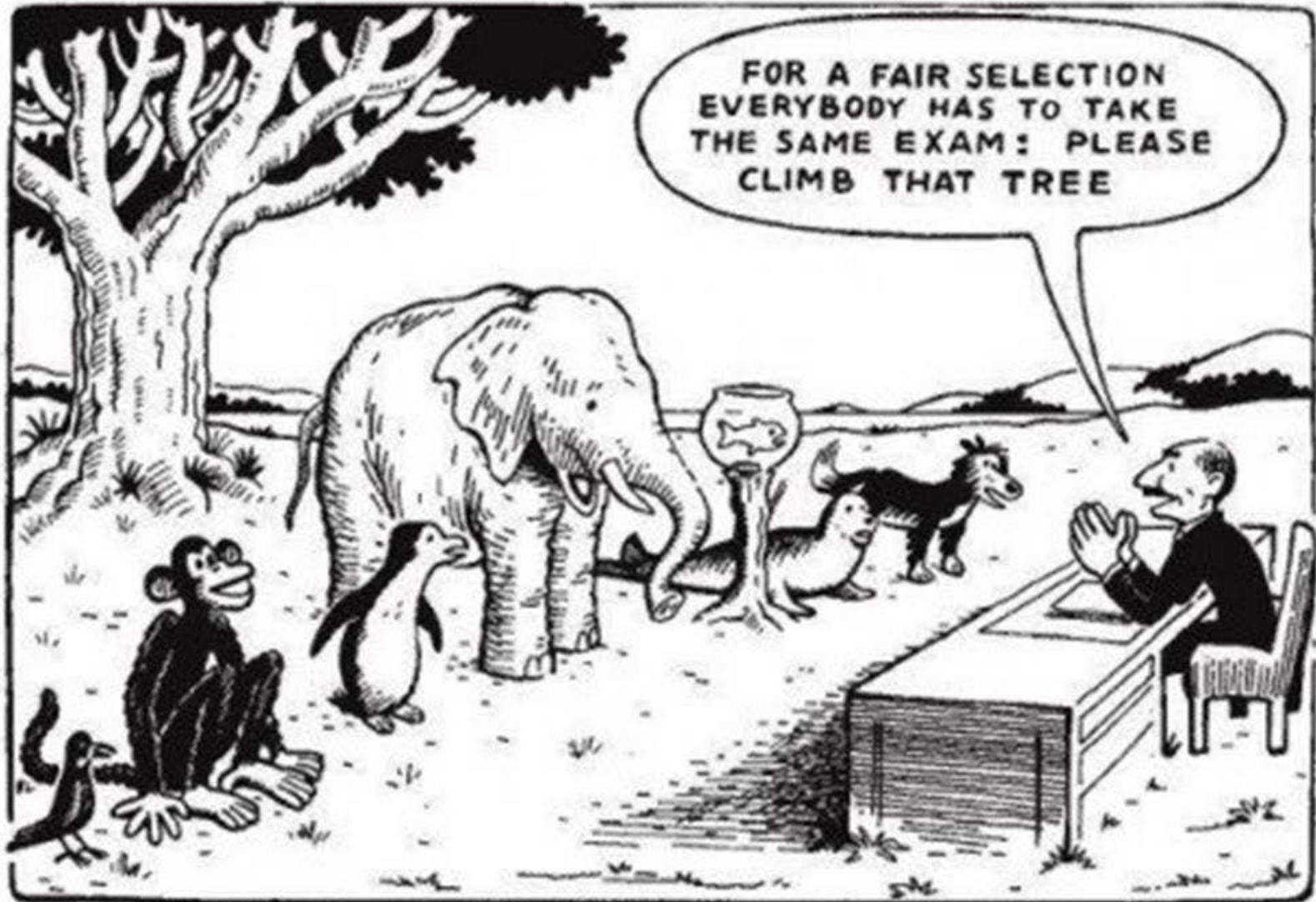
Teaching about awareness of:

- The different sources of privilege and disadvantage that mainstream culture perpetuates
- People's own complex social locations
- How to engage in a constant self-reflective effort to work towards equity in our everyday interactions amid diversity

Equality vs. Equity



Equality vs. Equity



“Uneven playing field”

- The literature confirms that **equity work** must recognize that the field is not even:
 - Realizing that we can be part of the system that creates suffering
 - Reflecting on our own privilege in an inequitable world is essential

Complex Identities

Various dimensions:

- Objective & Subjective
- Privilege & Disadvantage
- Intersectionality: Experience of various dimensions of disadvantage add up
 - Also, individuals may experience privilege and disadvantage at the same time

Awareness of Privilege

- Requires challenging our own prejudice
 - Constantly confirmed by the dominant culture
 - Wide-spread belief in individuality and meritocracy
- **Guilt** may be a signal that may trigger awareness of privilege
- But it is not sufficient **on its own** to elicit commitment to equity

Compassion

- Based on the **ideal of universal love**
- A “hermeneutics of the heart,” an understanding of our shared humanity:
 - Modern individual self is posed as rational, powerful, free (non-racialized male)
 - Actual human beings are vulnerable, fragile, moody and needy—especially as infants (feminist literature)
- Compassion is empowering as a source of appreciation for others and also for **one-self**



Self-compassion in Equity Work: A better way to deal with guilt (once acknowledged)

- Perceived inadequacy in having internalized prejudice
- Common humanity:
 - Equality in common human condition, forgiveness and less judgmental attitude towards one-self (Neff, 2003)
- Objective approach to our own emotions (mindfulness):
 - This approach prevents a non-acceptance of our negative emotions (towards ourselves, but also towards others)

Equity Training—The Project

- Two types of equity workshop, 17 participants:
 - Mindfulness approach-Equity workshop (**target**-9 participants)
 - Mostly Abstract Treatment of Equity (MATE) workshop (**comparison**-8 participants)
- Follow a qualitative research methodology (semi-structured interviews)
- Analysis of research data included a mixture of *apriori* categories and grounded theory methods
- Can the Mindfulness approach in equity training make participants more responsive to the ideas of equity and fairness? If so, in what way?

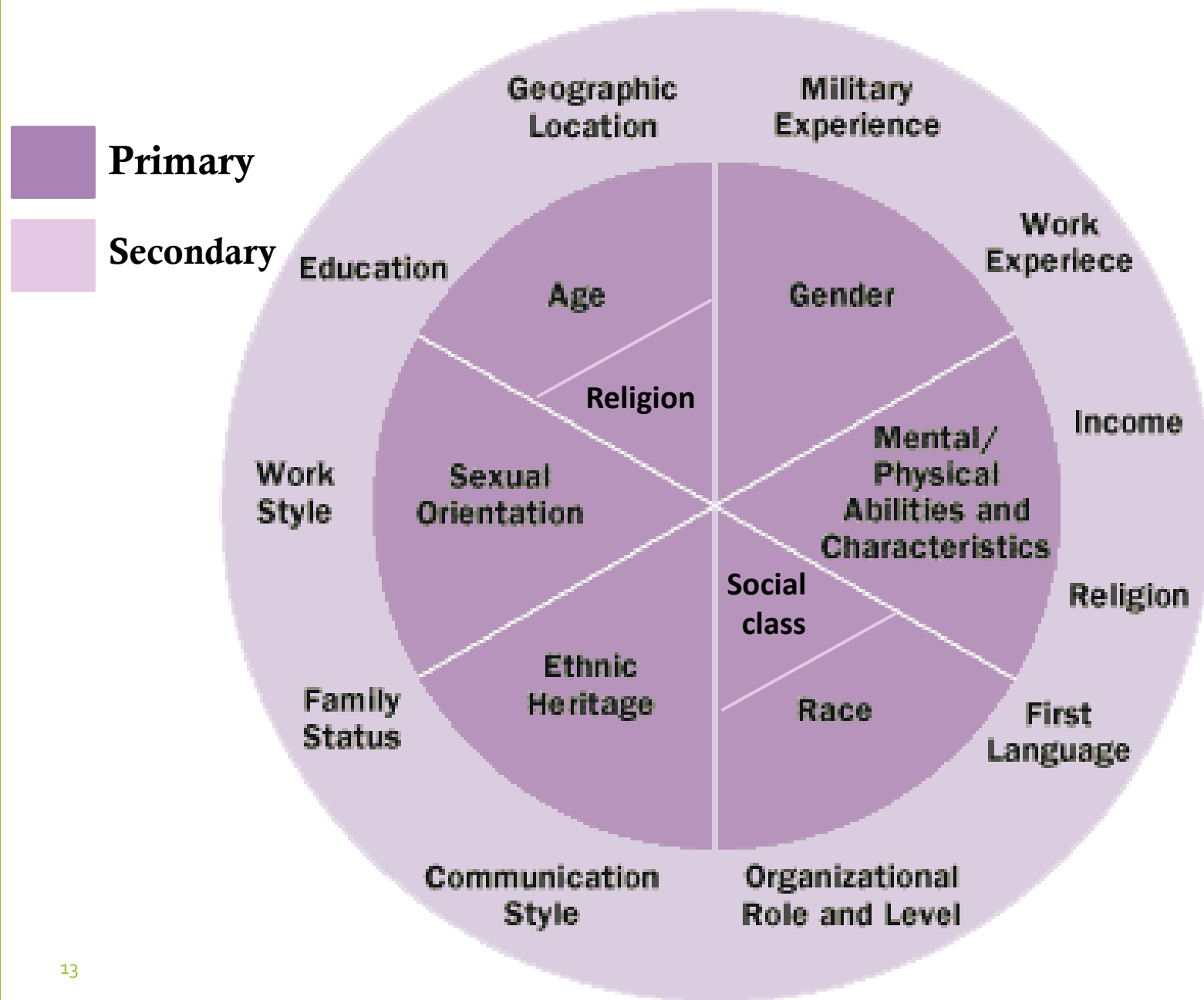
The Workshops

- Mostly Abstract Treatment of Equity (MATE) workshop (**comparison-8** participants)
 - Provided theory and information about equity and compassion, definitions, videos and some exercises
- Mindfulness approach-Equity workshop (**target-9** participants)
 - Provided the theory and information, but also involved participants in a series of mindfulness exercises that stressed the importance of compassion and self-compassion

Workshop exercise:

“Your Complex Identity”

- Think about **your own** identity
- Fill out **your own** specific characteristics in the sheet with the wheel of diversity provided
- What experiences have helped you mould your secondary dimension characteristics?
- Are they related to your characteristics in the primary dimension?
- Are they sources of privilege and/or disadvantage?



Workshop exercise:

“The Race of Life”

- Imagine that life is like a race track and that this race has:
 - **A Start Line**, where one has no assets and
 - **A Finish Line**, where one has achieved all the desirable assets in our society
- Do some people get a head-start in the “race of life”?

Sonder

n. the realization that each random passerby is living a life as vivid and complex as your own—populated with their own ambitions, friends, routines, worries and inherited craziness—an epic story that continues invisibly around you like an anthill sprawling deep underground, with elaborate passageways to thousands of other lives that you'll never know existed, in which you might appear only once, as an extra sipping coffee in the background, as a blur of traffic passing on the highway, as a lighted window at dusk.

By John Koenig from *The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows*

Sonder

- Rose and Jack at the centre of this film (Titanic), they are the main characters
- This mirrors how in our own personal story, we are ourselves the main character
 - We view the world and our lives through the prism of our own experiences, judgments, assumptions, prejudices, etc.
- But passersby—people we will never meet—are also people with hopes, dreams, fears, joys, relationships, tragedies...

Workshop exercise:

“Sonder”

- With your team, choose one of these two “extras” and come up with characteristics for him in the wheel of diversity
- Now, **make one of them the main character**, imagine a short story for this person, start by considering one or all of these questions:
 - Has he ever been in love? What happened in his love story?
 - Who at home will miss him the most when the ship goes down?
 - What has he always wanted to do but never got the chance to try?
- In terms of their social status consider, for example:
 - How hard has he had to work to make it to the ship vs Rose whose family money purchased her ticket?
 - Does he have any invisible characteristics? A mental health issue? An alternative sexuality?
 - What does he believe in?

Mindfulness

*Relating to one's experience within an orientation of curiosity, experiential openness, and acceptance. Gaining insight into our own mental, emotional, and bodily states. **De-centering one-self**, seeing one's own thoughts and feelings as relative and temporary. Mindfulness fosters compassion and self-compassion.*

Workshop Exercise

“Mindfulness Inventory”

- Mark with an 'X' only one of the four alternatives on frequency in experiences of mindfulness
- Characterize your most recent experience of connection to the present moment
- Think about the last 2 days as the time-frame to consider each item in this inventory
- There are neither 'right' nor 'wrong' answers, nor 'good' or 'bad' responses; what is important is to be aware of your own personal experience

Mindfulness & Diversity



Workshop Exercise:

“Being aware of our emotions”

- Have a look at the list of emotions you have been provided
- As each image emerges, notice the feelings and emotions that each image evokes in you
- If you choose to, record these emotions in the sheet provided

1



2



3





Exercise for later:

“Compassionate letter to one-self”

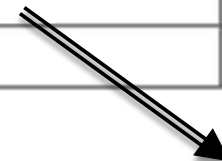
- All of us have feelings of inadequacy. Identify something about yourself that causes you to feel shame, to feel insecure, or not “good enough”
- Now think about an imaginary friend who is unconditionally loving, accepting, kind and compassionate
- Write a letter to yourself from the perspective of this imaginary friend – focusing on the perceived inadequacy you tend to judge yourself for, from the perspective of unlimited compassion
- After writing the letter, put it down for a little while. Then come back and read it again, really letting the words sink in. Feel the compassion as it pours into you, soothing and comforting you like a cool breeze on a hot day

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Participants

1 : Respondent 01	Male	Invisible Minority	Comparison
2 : Respondent 02	Female	Majority	Comparison
3 : Respondent 03	Female	Majority	Comparison
4 : Respondent 04	Female	Majority	Comparison
5 : Respondent 05	Male	Invisible Minority	Comparison
6 : Respondent 06	Female	Minority	Comparison
7 : Respondent 07	Male	Minority	Comparison
8 : Respondent 08	Female	Majority	Comparison
9 : Respondent 09	Female	Majority	Target
10 : Respondent 10	Female	Majority	Target
11 : Respondent 11	Female	Majority	Target
12 : Respondent 12	Female	Majority	Target
13 : Respondent 13	Female	Majority	Target
14 : Respondent 14	Female	Minority	Target
15 : Respondent 15	Female	Unknown	Target
16 : Respondent 16	Male	Majority	Target
17 : Respondent 17	Male	Minority	Target



Reconsiders this after
Second workshop

Nvivo Nodes

★	Name	Sources	References
[-]	Compassion-empathy	0	0
	For others	17	76
	Self-compassion	10	36
[-]	Emotions in general	2	3
	Guilt	16	49
	Not-guilt	10	28
	Equity in the workplace	16	47
[-]	Examples of equity or inequity	1	2
	Concrete examples	5	9
	Discrimination anecdotes	17	80
[-]	Mindfulness	17	180
	Mere intellectual awareness	16	123
	Self-awareness	17	142

Findings

- Respondents in the **comparison group** (MATE Workshop)
 - **LOW-SELF AWARENESS**
 - When being self-reflective, mostly doing so about their own identity and other people needing to be more self-aware
 - Appeared unaware of their own prejudice/privilege, and when aware, no clear emotional involvement (matter of fact - detached)
 - Exception: racialized minorities

Findings

- Respondents in the **target group** (Mindfulness-Equity Workshop) posed equity issues in a self-reflexive way

- **INCREASED SELF-AWARENESS**

- Awareness of equal possibilities (“what if that was me?”); concern about other people, their situation, their feelings

- **AWARENESS OF ONE’S OWN BIAS**, even revealing guilt

- **IMPORTANCE OF COMPASSION AND SELF-COMPASSION**

THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING!

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