

# Social Justice ‘Lite’? Using Emotion for Moral Reasoning in Diversity Practice

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Emotion is an aspect of diversity practice that is relatively overlooked in the literature. This paper expands Nussbaum’s theorization of emotion as a constituent part of moral reasoning and her proposal that compassion can promote gender equality. By discussing empirical examples from a study with diversity practitioners working in the United Kingdom, I suggest that emotion can be used as a means to a variety of ends and that the concept of ‘utility’ helps identify them. By being aware of how emotion is mobilized, it becomes possible to evaluate when emotion seeks to achieve social justice and where it is coopted to seek social justice ‘lite’, that is, instances where social justice is instrumental. Building on this, the notion of, compassion, articulated as the expansion of the ‘I’ — the positioning of oneself and the other as ends-in-themselves — offers potential to re-appropriate some of the neoliberal individualism that has hitherto been identified as problematic within the ‘managing diversity’ approach.

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‘Diversity management’ has become an increasingly dominant way in which differences among people are understood and governed within western organizations over the last 25 years (Kelly and Dobbin, 1998), and has featured in scholarly consideration of how organizations respond to gender inequality for some time (Kirton and Greene, 2010; Liff, 1997; Metcalfe and Woodhams, 2008). It has been considered a distinctive discourse (Ahmed, 2007; Liff, 1997; Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000) and set of practices (Prasad *et al.*, 1997; Swan, 2009, 2010). The philosophical writings of thinkers such as Bourdieu (Özbilgin and Tatli, 2011; Tatli, 2011), Foucault (Ahonen *et al.*, 2014; Ahonen and Tienari, 2009), and within psychoanalysis (Vachhani, 2014), have provided rich materials with which to explore and theorize what the managing diversity approach entails for marginalized individuals and groups. This paper seeks to contribute to this body of work by examining the use of emotion in the work of diversity practitioners.

The importance of emotion in diversity practice was an unexpected finding that emerged from a larger empirical study into the relations of power/knowledge involved in constructing the ‘diversity practitioner’ as a distinctive type of organizational expert and in (re)constructing the subject of the diversity trainee. Emotion has been considered to a limited extent in scholarship on diversity management, and on its predecessors, notably equal opportunities and affirmative action, traditions that were most embedded in the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, New Zealand and North America. Existing scholarship focuses on the ‘bad feelings’ in individuals that were elicited by former approaches, and the ‘good feelings’ that diversity promises to organizations. These discussions tend to position emotions as a by-product or outcome of diversity practice and only secondarily as a tool that is mobilized deliberately within interventions. This paper takes up Martha Nussbaum’s (2003) theory of emotion as a constituent part of thought, and her proposal that emotion, in the form of compassion, can act to promote gender equality by informing moral reasoning. I develop this by suggesting that emotion can potentially be used as a means to a variety of ends, providing illustrative

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examples from my empirical research with diversity practitioners operating in the UK. I suggest that 'utility', decoupled from utilitarianism in its classic forms, is a concept that can help us identify these ends. I argue that by being aware of the ways that emotion is mobilized, it becomes possible to evaluate where emotion seeks to achieve social justice and where it can be coopted to seek only social justice 'lite'. Considering emotion through utility highlights the danger in taking emotion for granted as having social justice at its heart — the heart, it is suggested, is vulnerable to misdirection.

Nevertheless, the paper returns to Nussbaum and the promise that emotion holds for equality. I articulate compassion as the expansion of an individual's concept of 'I' and the positioning of both oneself and the other as ends-in-themselves. It is argued that this understanding of emotion, as a tool of diversity practice, offers potential to promote equality by re-appropriating some of the individualism that has been identified as problematic in the managing diversity approach.

## Understanding emotion in relation to equality interventions

The core way in which emotion features in the literature on programmes that predate managing diversity but which also related to issues of equality and organising difference, is in reporting the emotional response to them from organizational actors. During the 1960s and 1970s, some organizations in the United States (US) commissioned 'cultural sensitivity' and 'group dynamics' training which aimed to change people's attitudes towards marginalised groups. These were reportedly positive in tone and used stories designed to promote understanding and the celebration of cultural differences (Lasch-Quinn, 2001, pp. 169-93). However, others were asked to take part in intensive 'encounter groups' wherein participants would engage in frank discussions on issues of inequality and prejudice. This technique directly addressed the matter of the unequal distribution of power in society and sought to elicit recognition from privileged groups that discrimination and inequality were rife. Encounter groups were criticised for becoming a 'ritual of racial reprimand' designed to exorcise 'white guilt' (Lasch-Quinn, 2001), for targeting and intimidating white men, and for dealing with emotionally charged issues in a public forum (Lindsay, 1994). In the UK, equal opportunities initiatives differed from those that took place in the US in terms of the inequalities that were of chief concern, and that the approach was sometimes assimilatory (for example, teaching immigrants about British culture and the English language). But the UK programmes also shared common ground with those of the US when taking an integrationist (or pluralist) approach that promoted learning about other cultures. As a response to the introduction of the Race Relations Act 1976, programmes in the UK also turned to educating white British people about their prejudice towards marginalised groups (Bhavnani, 2001, pp. 77-8). These too became associated with the solicitation of guilty feelings from white middle-class participants (Brown and Lawton, 1991, p. 26). There are also indications of hostile feelings toward the programmes more generally. In the US, the concept of 'political correctness', designed to ameliorate relations between social groups and foster mutual respect, was branded a contravention of rights to free speech (Crawley, 2007; Mobley and Payne, 1992; Penketh, 2000). Equality training in the UK was likened to preaching (Bennett and Keating, 2008) and brainwashing (Karp and Sutton, 1993; Hemphill and Haines, 1997). Added to this was a disengagement and fatigue from those on the receiving end of equality initiatives (Ahmed, 2007, p. 237) and a sense of isolation by those tasked with delivering them (Kirton *et al.*, 2007; Kirton and Greene, 2009). Discussion of emotion in this literature features largely as a negative reaction by members of privileged groups to interventions around the issue of inequality. In all, they are regarded as having a record of producing what we might refer to as 'bad feelings'.

Positioning itself in contrast with this, discussion of emotion in relation to the managing diversity approach focuses its rhetoric on being far more positive, even celebratory in tone (Prasad *et al.*, 1997), a tool for 'organisational pride' (Ahmed and Swan, 2006, p. 98). It seeks not only to be more understandable to staff by articulating itself in the language and concerns of the local organization, but also to be more palatable (Foster and Harris, 2005) and less confrontational (Taylor *et al.*, 1997). Instead of speaking directly to the inequality suffered by particular groups in organizations, managing diversity talks up the value of difference to staff recruitment, retention, absenteeism and

creativity (see Liff, 2003). It somewhat shifts attention away from group-based inequalities to render difference a characteristic of individuals, which can be utilised and managed. Ahmed (2010) argues that, ultimately, managing diversity appears to promise 'happiness' not only to individuals; by positioning the agenda as about value, skills, and making conditions better for everyone; but to the organization as a whole: a resolution to the conflicts that difference can cause. In this way, the managing diversity agenda distances itself emotionally from the bad feelings associated with former approaches.

I want to suggest, drawing on the work of Nussbaum and examples from my research with diversity practitioners, that emotion warrants further discussion in the critical analysis of diversity practices. Current literature tends to focus on whether approaches to diversity elicit the outcomes of good or bad feelings — it is the rarer exploration of emotion as a key part of how interventions are made that I wish to pursue here.

## Organizing difference — philosophical underpinnings

Two traditions of moral philosophy explain how difference has generally been conceived of and responded to in UK organizations: equal opportunities and managing diversity can be read as being underpinned by John Rawls's theory of justice and by utilitarianism (Gagnon and Cornelius, 2000; van Dijk *et al.*, 2012). The relationship between these approaches and their underpinnings in moral philosophy warrants some elucidation to introduce the dominant ways in which moral reasoning has hitherto been regarded in organizations.

Rawls's (1971) theory of justice centres on achieving fair and equitable treatment of all persons. His thinking is guided by the Kantian proposition that morality is something fundamental; independent of individuals and their circumstances. Rawls proposes that society should be organised per principles made from the 'original position'; a situation wherein actors are faced with a decision about how to organise society but do not know where in society they will subsequently find themselves. Moral reasoning is therefore conducted from a position of naivety about one's own fate; one is protected by a 'veil of ignorance'; to ensure that choices have justifiable effects on all members of that society. We see Rawlsian philosophy in how organizations develop practices that will treat people fairly, irrespective of characteristics such as gender, for example in recruitment and promotion. The notion of equal treatment is enshrined in anti-discrimination laws and the equal opportunities policies that they have precipitated.

Utilitarianism, most famously developed by Bentham (1748—1832) and later Mill (1806—1873), is also fundamentally concerned with fairness. Like Rawls's theory of justice, it is informed by the assumption that people are driven by psychological egoism and is mistrustful of the decisions that people would make if left to their own devices (Stewart, 2009, p. 15). A utilitarian logic responds to the challenge of ensuring actions are taken for the good of others in a different way to Rawls: it stipulates that an action may be deemed morally defensible if it maximises utility for the greatest number of people — the 'utility principle'. Commonly in the hedonic traditions of Bentham and of Mill utility is defined as 'happiness'. Happiness is regarded as the only end that is a good-in-itself, where other actions or outcomes are only instrumentally good in so far as they lead to happiness. Thus the utility principle is also known as the 'greatest happiness principle'. It helps to deal with questions of the type: 'what kind of conduct is morally optimal when we are facing different courses of action all of which will affect people in more or less positive ways?' (Jones *et al.*, 2005, p. 28). Utilitarianism provides a basis for moral reasoning that does not rely on religion or tradition, nor a veil of ignorance as proposed by Rawls.

Extrapolating this logic, the notion of utility can be defined in various other ways aside from a hedonic happiness, towards other societal goods such as health, economic prosperity, education and so on. Thus, the utilitarian stance can be seen within the 'business case' that is central to the managing diversity approach (Dickens, 1994; Kirton and Greene, 2010; Liff, 2003; Noon, 2007), wherein the rationale provided for promoting, for example, the numbers of women within an organization is closely tied to organizational performance concerns. Here, utility is defined as the prosperity of the organization. This approach gained popularity in the 1990s and is thought to have been a

response to the fact that equal opportunities policies often did not translate into action (Hoque and Noon, 2004). It may be argued that the utilitarian logic can also be seen to underpin equality legislation as it aims towards a societal good, but this is only true where happiness is equated with social justice, or if the utility is itself defined as social justice. The problem with connecting utilitarianism to equality legislation *per se* is that laws seek to protect the rights of the individual irrespective of whether this protection would contribute to maximising the overall happiness of the population, or a utility per some other definition, for example wealth.

Utilitarianism is referred to as a consequentialist position within ethical theory because it is concerned with the consequences of actions as being key to the judgement of whether they are to be considered morally defensible; the ends justify the means by which they are achieved (Freeman, 1994, p. 313). Kant takes a deontological, or so-called 'non-consequentialist', position with respect to moral reasoning. As Jones *et al.* point out, this term is somewhat misleading since Kant was indeed concerned with the consequences of actions as a consideration of their moral worth, but moral ends for Kant, and for Rawls, were solely what might be considered 'noble' rather than hedonistic goals — oriented toward justice, human dignity and freedom (2005, pp. 44–6). Noble ends are considered to be 'morally desirable features of states of affairs or of social institutions' (Scanlon, 1978, p. 99, cited in Gaus, 2001).

There are different variations of these moral philosophies ('rule' and 'act' utilitarianism, and 'hypothetical' and 'categorical' deontology) that differ in the type of rule for moral action that they produce, but these finer distinctions are not central to the concerns of this paper. It is important to acknowledge that nor is managing diversity a homogenous approach: previously, scholars have noted that it manifests in different ways in different organizational functions (Zanoni and Janssens, 2015) and sectors (Tomlinson and Schwabenland, 2010), and its distinctiveness from equal opportunities has been keenly debated (Liff, 1997; Liff and Dickens, 2000; Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000). Despite these complexities, the distinction between the two forms of moral philosophy, which guide the dominant approaches to organising difference, is an important one to focus on. This is because a distinction is made within them between fairness and equality: where both ethical approaches are concerned with morality by way of establishing actions that are fair, those who follow the Rawlsian formulation for moral reasoning are specifically concerned with equality understood as relating to distribution across the population. Utilitarianism is a logic for making fair decisions, but may result in highly unequal outcomes provided it maximises overall happiness. Without a specific connection between the notions of equality and fairness, people whose interests differ from those of the majority may get left out.

Further to this consideration of exactly how the collective acts as a basis for determining moral action, it is worth noting here that individualism has also been identified as a problematic aspect of the managing diversity approach. It has been voiced that the 'valuing difference' discourse within diversity (Liff, 1997) hides the 'histories of struggle' between social groups (Ahmed, 2007, p. 238) in the way that it frames organizational concern with difference in terms of the needs, preferences, and skills of each individual. An individual-focussed approach is also potentially damaging to the promotion of equality since more structural changes to organizations and actions such as collective bargaining can become sidelined. However, the notion of the individual has traction in today's organizations which operate within a society where a neoliberal discourse is strong. Neoliberalism privileges the individual as a site of agency, responsibility and fulfilment (Miller and Rose, 1990, p. 25; Rose and Miller, 2008, p. 18). The concern with both individualised and collective approaches to promoting equality is picked up again later in the discussion.

Returning to moral philosophy, a deontological approach is in danger of being too universal about outcomes that are deemed noble: it risks imposing objectives upon groups that do not share them. In response to these weaknesses, Martha Nussbaum (1999) proposes a 'capabilities approach' to women's equality, later articulated as a more general approach to addressing difference in organizations by Gagnon and Cornelius (2000). This framework builds on virtue ethics (van Dijk *et al.*, 2012) to walk a line between the other dominant approaches. It does so by defining the end of a moral action as one that allows a person the 'ability to fashion life in accordance with their own view of what is deepest and most important' (Nussbaum, 1999, p. 227). This applies not only to the freedom to make

choices but also to one's capability to make them. As a neo-Aristotelian approach, it draws on the notion of *eudaimonia* or 'human flourishing' as a defining characteristic of capability. For Nussbaum, a moral end is that which allows a person to lead a truly human life. This differs from what is known as 'preference utilitarianism' (for example, Singer, 2011/1980) because the goal is to satisfy those conditions that enable capabilities (Nussbaum, 1999, p. 228), and that which is needed to enable capability may not be manifest in conscious preferences.

The centrality of *eudaimonia* to Nussbaum's moral stance is key to understanding the role that she attributes to emotion in moral reasoning. The next passage discusses this alongside the place of emotions within moral philosophy.

### **Conceiving emotion in relation to moral reasoning**

Although there has been some challenge to it, the traditional view is that utilitarian moral philosophy asks the deliberator to set their feelings aside in favour of rational thinking, which is regarded as being separate from emotion (Baron, 2011). The utility principle is proposed as a way of doing just this, by offering an emotion-free calculation for moral reasoning. Nussbaum (2003) provides an alternative proposal, which suggests that pain and other bad feelings do not rational thought, but are an integral part of human thought and therefore human rationality. She attempts to foreground emotion in the promotion of equality across nations, arguing that emotion plays a vital role in moral reasoning: it anchors morality in equality while avoiding the danger of imposing a universal manifestation of this equality onto different cultures. Emotions, as part of thought (rather than as an effect of it), offer an evaluative dimension that relates to *eudaimonia*. Emotional response to an object, be it a situation or potential action, is understood to be informed by beliefs about that object that derive from 'one's most important goals and projects' (Nussbaum, 2004, p. 443).

Comparing this theory with a deontological position, there is no supposition of an original position nor veil of ignorance as prerequisites for moral deliberation. However, it does share a noble goal which privileges the humanity of each of society's members. In fact, Jones *et al.* propose that Kant's philosophical position relies less on rules than is often presumed, and that his injunctions for moral reasoning are designed to encourage 'looking into your own heart' (2005, p. 49). There is here an evident connection with Nussbaum and with the importance of the feelings that derive from one's core as an important moral guide.

Nussbaum also likens her ethical proposal to a 'eudaimonistic Utilitarianism in the spirit of Mill' (2004, p. 446). By this, she is explaining that her proposal may be regarded as a consequentialist form of moral philosophy, if capabilities are defined as a legitimate utility. In this comparison, Nussbaum separates utility from necessarily being defined as happiness. But if utility can be redefined, then there may well be other ways in which this can happen and that this does happen in practice. Going one step further to not only decouple utility from happiness but also from the greatest happiness principle, leaves the concept of utility simply as the 'ends' to which moral reasoning is oriented. In this sense, utility can act as a lens which can be used to identify the 'what'; what the intended purpose is of eliciting emotion of others in diversity practice, it can be used to ask: what are the ends to which emotional response is oriented? To illustrate how emotion may be used to different ends in diversity practice, I turn to data from my own research. These examples are not intended to give a comprehensive picture of the different ends that are in play within the field, but to show that emotion is a means that can be turned to different ends; different forms of utility; and that emotion continues to be a central part of interventions that address difference within organizations.

The empirical examples, which will be used to illustrate how emotion can be used in diversity practice to different ends, are taken from a larger piece of research with diversity practitioners. The role of emotion in diversity practice was an unexpected finding of the research and inspired an exploration into the philosophical underpinnings of moral reasoning in relation to diversity practice. In the wider study, the discourses used by diversity practitioners when accounting for their role and practices, as well as during diversity training itself, formed the basis for an exploration of the relations of power/knowledge involved in constructing the subject of the 'diversity practitioner' and in

seeking to (re)construct the diversity trainee. The 37 diversity practitioners who took part worked in a variety of regions in the UK, and in public, private and third sectors. Participants were interviewed and/or observed between October 2012 and October 2013. The examples show variations in the way that emotional response can be elicited from others, and are used to suggest that greater attention to how emotion features in diversity practice is essential to evaluating its potential to promote equality.

## Emotion for social justice

In their training practices, diversity practitioners sometimes seek to elicit an emotional response in their trainees. One resource that was drawn upon to achieve this was emotive narration of an individual's experience of discrimination or maltreatment. For example, an extract from my field notes describing part of a webinar on the topic of hate crime:

A picture of disabled young man appears on a slide — Stephen — the trainer describes how the boy was having an 18<sup>th</sup> birthday party, was disabled and openly gay. He was a victim of a homophobic hate crime and died from burn injuries. In another case, the trainer personalises the case by saying 'Francesca, or "Frankie" to her friends'. She was also eighteen years old and had a disability. Rather than a picture of Frankie, a picture of her mum, Fiona appears. Instead of using this image to enhance a description the affective fallout of the incident, like I had expected, the mum in the story turns out to be the perpetrator of the hate crime. Frankie was burnt so badly that she needed to be identified by her dental records. These are very violent stories. The final case involves Ian, who had previously attended a workshop conducted by the trainer. The openly gay man had been out drinking with a friend of his on a Monday night. He received verbal abuse from a 'young blonde lady' and, receiving a physical attack from another man, had 'crashed down to the ground' that led to his death. There must have been many people around but the teenagers attacked him anyway, we are told. The trainer also has personal connections to [the victim], she says: 'hate crime is not an academic issue for me, it touches my life constantly'. A picture of the young woman appears. Finally, the case of Stephen Lawrence is presented in detail. (Extract from field notes observing Erin<sup>1</sup>)

The real life nature of the case, connection to the trainer herself, and the accompanying photographs displayed on screen, seek to make the experiences of others more emotionally accessible to the trainees. Observing, I was struck by the gravity of the attacks and a painful feeling, which was enhanced by the humanising details used to describe the victims, such as their youth, personalities, and relationships with others. 'Frankie to her friends' juxtaposes with the serious and dehumanising nature of the crimes. Narratives such as these encourage an emotional response and an emotional identification with the victims. Given that this example is taken from a webinar on hate crime, the gravity of the pain elicited is greater than in other examples that diversity practitioners were observed using in other forms of training, but narratives of discrimination within the workplace or service-use were featured in the presentation of case studies which trainees were asked to discuss.

Diversity practitioners also used their own experiences as a resource to promote emotional identification, giving examples of discriminatory treatment from their lives. Three diversity practitioners talked about how they had experienced unjust treatment because of their disabled status, and another two described how their race had elicited prejudice. The narrating of experiences from one's own life, like the use of personalising details in the previous examples, served the diversity practitioners in promoting what might be termed 'emotional proximity'. These techniques attempt to bring the 'other' into the space of the self, to move others from the status of objects to subjects: as one diversity practitioner explained, 'I talk about some of my own personal experiences which really resonates with them because it makes it more human for them' (Rebecca). Some diversity practitioners further attempted to encourage emotional identification by asking that participants enunciate it. For example, one practitioner showed trainees the classic example of Jane Elliott's (1970<sup>2</sup>) 'Eye of the Storm', known as the 'blue-eyed/brown-eyed exercise', which depicts the emotional response of

children who are placed in a situation of inequality. This was used as a prompt to ask trainees to recount a time when they felt that they had been treated unfairly.

These examples seek to elicit the feeling of another's pain to motivate trainees to alleviate that pain wherever it is possible for them to do so. Gerry said:

People don't really feel things for abstract — you know 'because Africa is suffering' ... Jonny's suffering and he's having a hard time — 'Right? I can do that.' I try to do the same with the training, bring it down to the *person* in case studies, real videos showing people, so that people actually feel something. If they feel something, then they'll do something.

Gerry describes how emotional response and emotional identification is meant to lead to the reasoning that the moral action is to ease 'suffering'. The easing of suffering is positioned as utility. It is a social justice-oriented use of emotion, since the alleviation of pain is the end-in-itself.

In the example, above, a general claim is made about the nature of people — that people are motivated to act to relieve the pain of others and feel this to be a legitimate utility, if they can identify with it and feel that pain themselves. One diversity practitioner made a variation of this claim — that people might act sympathetically towards others when they themselves have experienced sympathy from others:

What's quite interesting working in the public sector is how ... is having to appeal to that more *human side* because it's that bit that appeals to the values of the people who have tended to enter the NHS [National Health Service] [...] because it's a worthwhile thing. They think it's good for society, good for community, quite often they join the NHS because they've had a personal experience either within their family or themselves they may want to give something back in a way. (Sophie)

Here the feelings of guilt previously identified of older training approaches give way to a feeling of pain on behalf of the other. Rather than being inwardly reflective (in the hopes of eliciting reform), the techniques described above are outwardly inflected; seeking identification by increasing emotional proximity (in the hopes of eliciting sympathy). This approach is ostensibly less threatening to the core of the individuals who participate in training and so are less likely to evoke a hostile response.

It may well be the case that this emotional technique was also used in older forms of training, but examples of the 'guilt' approach were not observed and did not feature in the accounts that I collected. The only response that contained echoes of this former approach, presented the reforming of individuals as a spontaneous repercussion of the training content:

People will leave the room and say I'm really sorry but I need to apologise to somebody. [...] You know, and then you get people who will say I've got to stop some of the things that I'm doing. [Some] don't leave the room but recognise that things that they've been doing are not acceptable. (Joan)

Despite the variations above, these examples have in common the utility of social justice as an end-in-itself. But this is not always the case in how emotional response is used, as the following examples will show.

## Emotion for social justice 'lite'

The way that emotion featured in accounts of diversity practice did not always align to social justice in a straightforward way. For instance, considering the needs of people suffering disadvantage was sometimes linked to a feeling of satisfaction: in a subsequent section of her interview to that quoted above, Sophie, asserted that considering the needs of others produces: 'that good feeling that you get from doing the right thing'. The utility of the emotional response being elicited is oriented to a personal concern. It is implicitly suggested that acting to alleviate the pain of others is a source of good feelings. This formulation of the use of emotion as part of moral reasoning is more individualised than that of those which are oriented to social justice proper. Social justice is an

instrumental utility rather than an end-in-itself, rendering it what can be considered social justice 'lite'. The adjective 'lite', coined originally to describe a low-fat version of a drink or food product, is often added to a noun postpositively to denote that it is lacking in substance or is unthreatening. Evoked here, 'lite' indicates the instrumental positioning of social justice, a transient good that is used to seek what is considered a more substantial or legitimate utility.

From my data, it was evident that emotion may also be tied to one's own feelings in an additional way: one diversity practitioner described how she articulated the 'moral case' by invoking hypothetical situations wherein the individual's own pain is in play, or a feeling of pain on behalf of another would usually be inescapable: 'Well it is but the moral case is, you know, "if this was you ..." and this is why we do the case studies — "if this was your mother, if this was your son or your daughter"' (Joan) This, I would like to argue does not make the wellbeing of the other an instrumental utility in quite the same way and I will return to discuss it later in this text. In the former articulation, though, by introducing the interests of the individual themselves, an assumption is made of a primarily self-interested nature to people, in keeping with the neoliberal discourses that position the individual as an entrepreneurial agent (Thorsen and Lie, 2006). This aligns with utilitarianism in that a key feature of the neoliberal rationality is the congruence it endeavours to achieve between a responsible and moral individual and an economic-rational individual. It aspires to construct responsible subjects whose moral quality is based on the fact that they rationally assess the costs and benefits of a certain act as opposed to other alternative acts (Lemke, 2002, p. 12). A further incarnation of this is to be found in accounts where emotional response is connected with interests of the organization's business:

[I get] people to think about a time when they were treated unfairly in some way or discriminated against and just to sort of talk about it and maybe share it with the person next to them, or whatever. And then what we do is look at the, you know, 'how did that make you feel?' and have a list of different responses to that situation, you know, whether people are upset, angry, or frustrated. And then sort of say to people well, 'what do we know about — if young people are feeling this — what do you know about how they are going to achieve at school?' And so I suppose in a way that is making a business case isn't it? (Amy)

One cannot say for certain whether the achievement of children is an instrumental utility for the business of the school or is a utility as end-in-itself; such a judgement could only be made based on what action is taken when the two interests are in conflict; but what the diversity practitioner is trying to do in this section of interview is to assert that she uses business case arguments in her work. The very seeking to establish a business case within her work in the public sector indicates that 'business', as utility, is valued within the field. Tomlinson and Schwabenland (2010) have previously argued that in the third sector, business and social justice cases can be reconciled, meaning that business utilities which are evoked in this sector may not necessarily entail a shift to social justice lite, as hinted towards in another account about diversity practice in the NHS:

I've noticed over the last year or so that we've found that the most successful organizations in changing culture around this work ... we're really tapping into the emotional the ethical — the human side — of equality. So now what I'm finding is that where I'm being asked to do work it's far less about policy governance, all of that kind of persuasion around business case, and it's far more about getting together staff stories, patient stories, what's gone wrong in complaints, what's going wrong in grievances, and trying to pull together information so people understand and feel, in a very human way, the impact of getting it right. (Sophie)

Although Sophie ostensibly seeks to step away from using a business case and describes her use of emotion as being distinct from it, her reference to using examples of 'complaints' and 'grievances' points to a business interest in caring for patients so that they are satisfied as customers. A positioning of the patient as customer and the public health service as business makes it possible for her to speak with business and social justice vocabularies at the same time. The fact that she does so indicates that the orientation of moral reasoning towards business concerns is still important. It is clear that in other

sectors emotion could also be directed towards organizational ends, for example towards the importance of ensuring satisfied employees, service users and customers as instrumental utilities of business. One cannot say that the use of emotion to reach utilities that are in the interest of a business is necessarily immoral, because in a philosophical sense it is guided by a utilitarianism that defines the population for which utility is to be maximised as being limited to the organization, or rather, the shareholders (or equivalent).

The examples show how emotion acts as a bridge between different forms of utility, it is used as a means to promote the achievement of different ends. Recognising this, means that emotion cannot be taken for granted as a positive force for equality within moral reasoning and thus greater attention needs to be paid to how emotion is used. In particular, those who seek better conditions for people of marginalised groups and who seek to promote greater equality in society, need to be vigilant that practices which involve promoting emotional response do not always have social justice at heart; that the heart can be coopted by organizations to make social justice contingent or to limit it. This caution is issued from a position wherein it is assumed that emotion can be useful as a force for social justice. I would like at this point to return to Nussbaum and to articulate in greater detail how her notion of 'compassion' can help us to understand the promise that emotion holds for social justice, as a part of moral reasoning. I also suggest that compassion also helps us to derive a position that mitigates the problematic elements of individualist and collectivist features of approaches to organising difference.

### Nussbaum's compassion as a vehicle for equality

As described in the opening sections of this piece, the concept of *eudaimonia* is central to Nussbaum's understanding of both the self and equality: following Aristotle, *eudaimonia* represents for her that which is qualitatively constituent of a person's existence as being truly human. This notion of humanity is closely connected with that of capabilities. Emotions, for Nussbaum, are that which not only texture one's own experience, turning them from a 'flat plane to a mountain range' (2005, p. 443), but also serve as a resource to evaluate the experience of others — we feel pain, when the capability for the *eudaimonia* of another is breached. Specifically, Nussbaum proposes that in this circumstance we feel what is described in the philosophical literature as 'pity' (*pitié*) but which she names compassion: 'Compassion is an emotion that has often been relied on to hook our imaginations to the good of others and to make them the object of our intense care'. (Nussbaum, 2004, p. 447).

Compassion is understood to be part of rational thinking: it refuses the idea, rooted in Stoicism, which is asserted in some modern moral theories that emotions can and must be separated from thought as not to 'mislead' moral deliberation (Nussbaum, 1996, p. 28). It is because we may experience compassion for others, and that this plays a role in the way we formulate morality, that emotion is regarded by Nussbaum as being central to the pursuit of social justice. To this end, she considers how compassion can be built into moral and civic education, political leadership, economic thought on welfare and development, legal rationality and public institutions (1996). But I would like to suggest that the work of diversity practitioners offers a window for compassion to become part of private enterprises as well as public and not-for-profit organizations; that diversity practitioners may act as a disruptive force to those discourses which either suppress emotion in favour of calculation alone — particularly in a utilitarian sense — or orient emotion towards an instrumental utility, and thus stifle compassion. Moreover, diversity practitioners occupy a pedagogical position and Nussbaum suggests that education can aid in moral development, that 'although knowledge does not guarantee good behaviour, ignorance is a virtual guarantee of bad behaviour: stigmatization of the other is much easier when people know nothing or nothing complicated, about religious or cultural tradition'. (Nussbaum, 2005, p. 10). Education about the conditions and experience of others can be said not only to seek the development of knowledge, but the increase in emotional proximity between persons.

In the analysis presented earlier, it was asserted that the method of connecting one's own pain to that of another did not represent a formulation of social justice lite in quite the same way as the other

examples given. Although it can be argued that the alleviation of other's pain is an instrumental utility to avoiding one's own pain, felt through identification, this identification is an essential root of being able to feel compassion for others. Nussbaum is careful to stipulate that compassion does not, and cannot, rest on the transference of one's own experience of pain onto the situation of another, she says: 'it is for *another*, and not for oneself, that one feels; and one is aware both of the bad lot of the sufferer and of the fact that it is, right now, not one's own. If one really had the experience of feeling the pain in one's own body, then one would precisely have failed to comprehend the pain of another *as other*.' (1996, p. 35). This is important when it comes to considering diversity with respect to differences among people — compassion needs to be able to travel across differences in experiences and values.

The key connection between 'separateness' of the experience of the self from the other and emotional identification with the other, is the vulnerability that is central to the human condition (1996, p. 37). The quote presented earlier proposes a hypothetical, '[what] if this was you?' (Joan). The fundamental uncertainty of life is common to us all and enables the pain of the other to be identified within a deep, existential and embodied way. One could interpret this as the other being taken into the self, the 'I', and made an end-in-itself on the basis of the very core of human life. Surprisingly, given her refutation of much of their thought, Nussbaum finds an eloquent example from the Stoics in how the process of taking the other into the 'I' might happen:

Imagine, they say, that each of us lives in a set of concentric circles — the nearest being one's own body, the furthest being the entire universe of human beings. The task of moral development is to move the circles progressively closer and closer to the center, so that one's parents become like oneself, one's relatives like one's parents, strangers like relatives, and so forth. (1996, p. 48)

There are a number of potential problems with compassion as a means to seeking social justice. First, practical concerns could be raised about the reliability of compassion and how far compassion can be extended; that diversity practitioners could risk losing support for equality initiatives that have beneficiaries who are less proximate or visible, who are too emotionally distant because they occupy different spaces, will not benefit until some years hence, or who seem too different. This may well be a practical problem if compassion is not achieved at the level proposed and if diversity practitioners become overly reliant on it without sufficient legal or institutional recourse: individual compassion cannot replace formal change at the level of societal or institutional practices. Second, a related challenge is that displays of emotion could act as lip-service simulacrum of compassion. Third, an ethical problem may also be posed: that seeking to influence the emotional experience of others amounts to an attempt to govern their 'souls' (Dean, 1994, p. 145; Rose, 1990); to promoting a neoliberal project of the self (Brewis, 1996); and that it tasks them with additional emotional labour. To the latter count, first of all, we might insist that Hochschild (2003/1983) did not necessarily position emotional work as something bad in itself, but rather drew attention to the exploitation and under-valuation of such work (see also Cornelius, 2002, p. 203). To the former count, it may be possible to argue that the utilities of social justice and equality justify such a use of power, something that I will explore in more detail elsewhere to discuss the research from which the empirical examples are taken. Therefore, at this juncture, we may wish to recommend a critical vigilance with regards to the use of emotion work for organizational utility.

I would like to close this discussion with a few words about the implications of the framework laid out in this paper with regards to the problematics of both individual and collective-focussed approaches that feature in the literature on organising difference. Where it has been recognised that individualism endangers the visibility of persistent group-based disadvantage (Ahmed, 2007, p. 237), as discussed, individualistic approaches also have currency in organizations as they are less threatening to those from privileged groups and aligns to the dominant neoliberal paradigm of the self. However, this research has also raised an aspect of focussing on the collective that is problematic. Where the collective is understood to be a population which is to be morally governed per the utility principle, *equality* is not necessarily safeguarded. What a person feels for another is important in

ensuring that others are utilities; are ends-in-themselves; and are not means to other utilities. Emotion, in the form of compassion toward individual others, offers a potential way to provide this safeguard by building a connection between fairness and the notion of equality. This middle-ground position is found by considering the individual both as ends-in-themselves and as part of the collective 'I', which is based on a shared experience of existential vulnerability. A recognition of shared vulnerability not only creates linkages across difference but gives access to an embodied sense of when the threat of harm is unequally distributed. In this view, being compassionate means (a) feeling the pain of each and every individual, while (b) reasoning that where the pain of compassion is felt, not only is this a sign that individual capabilities have been compromised, but also of a breach of equality. Moreover, as Nussbaum asserts, emotion is a means by which moral reasoning is focussed on the local, and protected from the danger of universalizing across different groups in the manifestation of equality (Nussbaum, 2004). Emotional identification can thus offer a mode of considering the other in both the particular and the general; as what might be termed a compassionate individualism. Finding this middle-ground is to somewhat re-appropriate individualism and to wrest moral reasoning from a neoliberal orientation.

## Conclusion

This piece has attempted to foreground emotion as an important part of interventions that seek to promote gender equality. It has argued that emotion is not only an outcome of such interventions, causing 'good' or 'bad feelings' as it has generally been the focus of discussion in the literature on diversity work so far, but is a key part of how they are made. This argument invites further examination of the dynamics of emotion within diversity work, for example in relation to the emotion work carried out by diversity practitioners and its implications for both practitioner and marginalised groups. It has also contributed to understanding the philosophical underpinnings of diversity work by suggesting that the concept of utility understood as 'ends' can help us to critically reflect on how emotion is mobilized in organizations. By looking at empirical examples of how emotion is used by diversity practitioners to increase emotional proximity, it has been argued that emotion can be used in different ways, some that promote social justice (where the capabilities of individuals are regarded as ends-in-themselves) and others that promote it instrumentally as social justice lite (where social justice is contingent on some other utility). Such insights may be built upon within the literature on diversity but also developed in the examination of other areas of organizational activity which seek to mobilize emotion as a tool to shape, direct, or transform, for example in corporate social responsibility' (CSR).

In the realm of equality work, this form of analysis inspired the introduction of Nussbaum's conceptualisation of emotion as a way to understand how emotion might serve to remedy some of the shortcomings in approaches to diversity practice. Inspired by Nussbaum's 'compassion', I have argued that the recognition of emotion as part of moral reasoning holds potential to promote consideration of marginalised groups through the tying of fairness to equality: since compassion is conceptualised as a pain that is felt for others where there is a breach of capabilities *and* where there is inequality. Moreover, the encouragement of emotional identification with each and every other, by taking the other into one's concept of 'I', offers a way of negotiating the problematic elements of individual and collective-focussed approaches to organising difference. Compassion is therefore not only put forward to safeguard equality but to protect against universalism in striving for it.

Although the promotion of compassion in diversity practice may present some practical and ethical challenges, it promises to do two important things: first, to mitigate some of the shortcomings of utilitarian and deontological approaches to moral reasoning and, second, to somewhat re-appropriate the problematic individualism that has such currency within the neoliberal discourse of managing diversity. We might call this strategy a sort of compassionate individualism. Nussbaum acknowledges that compassion for others cannot be a panacea for inequality, but provides a useful and important tool to battle with it: 'Compassion is not the entirety of justice; but it both contains a powerful, if partial, vision of just distribution and provides imperfect citizens with an essential bridge from self-interest to just conduct' (1996, p. 180). As such, the research raises questions about how the

notion of compassion for each and every other may be taken further and mobilized for social justice in other areas to confront neoliberal discourse and the individualism that it champions.

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The author has no relevant affiliations or conflicts to declare.

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## Notes

1. Participants were given pseudonyms.
2. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jo4JfbEZACU> (accessed 13 January 2017).

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