

## CCDI Diversity & Inclusion Week

*Speech by Fumi Kurihara*

*16 September 2022*

First of all, I want to extend a huge thank you to Gudrun, Christian, Aida, and the whole CCDI team for squeezing me in last minute and providing me with this incredible platform to speak on this important issue.

Before I dive in my talk, I thought I quickly introduce myself to those of you who do not know me yet as I thought it might contextualize the talk I will be giving you in the next 15 minutes.

I'm Fumi Kurihara and I'm the producer and host of a podcast series called #OUR\_racism. In a nutshell, my series explores the various manifestations that racism takes around the world. How do I do this? Well, in every episode, I have one person share their lived experiences and reflections on issues related to race and racism.

The backgrounds of these participants are diverse. I have people of different nationalities, race, genders, sexuality, age, religion, professions, socioeconomic and educational backgrounds speak on my platform.

The reason I invite people with diverse backgrounds is for two main reasons: First, to view the subject of racism from an intersectional perspective, or in other words, to see how different aspects of one's identity influences their experiences of racism. And second, to highlight the importance of accounting for the specific context when addressing issues of racism.

Now, I'll elaborate more on what I mean by "context" in my talk, but before I do, I want to highlight that my expertise comes from engaging with different people at the interpersonal level. So you can see me almost like a journalist gaining knowledge on racism by interacting with people.

And my work really aims to complement the work that is done at the more systemic level, such as those conducted by policymakers, by making people think about their interpersonal engagements with their friends, colleagues, and family members. Ultimately, through my podcast, I hope to help listeners to identify and critically think about their own subconscious biases in their daily actions and inactions, with a view to breaking the reproduction of oppressive structures.

What does that mean? Well, that means my job is to make people reflect on themselves.

And the way I'm going to attempt to do this in the next 13 minutes is by talking about a word that is essential when addressing this week's theme on exclusion, inclusion, and (in)visibility. It also happens to be a word that makes a lot of people uncomfortable... Can you guess what that word might be?

Well, I'm going to be talking about privilege.

The first thing I'm going to do is throw out a question to everyone in this room. I will then respond to this question myself using my own experiences as a PhD student in three specific

contexts: HSG, St. Gallen, and Japan. Then, I'm going to reflect upon my experiences, and end my talk with three main action points which I hope you will be able to take away with you.

And I do want to point out here that I intentionally will not be defining privilege for you, because I would like to invite you to think about this yourselves.

Now, I want to start off my talk by asking everyone in this room, including myself, to ask ourselves the following question: What are my privileges?

Don't worry, I'm not going to point out at each one of you and have you answer that question out loud. But I would like you to keep this at the back of your mind as I will attempt to take you through how I would answer this question myself.

First of all, if I'm going to answer this question, I'm going to have to identify myself.

So, who am I?

Amongst others, I am a Japanese citizen. I am "Asian" – however one wants to define "Asian". I am a cisgendered, heterosexual woman. I am Catholic and able-bodied. I was also lucky to be born into a family that provided for me financially and enabled me to obtain some of the best education in the world. There's of course a lot more to my identity, but I'm just highlighting some of them for you.

Now, it is important to contextualize these aspects of my identity to reflect on my positionality and privilege. Some of these social categories make me tremendously privileged in certain contexts – a point I will pick up later – but how do they play out at HSG, especially on the PhD level?

Well, for one thing, I'm one of the few non-EU/EFTA citizens. I'm also one of the few non-fluent German speakers. I'm also one of the few non-White women in my programme.

What does this mean in practice? Many things.

For one thing, I consistently feel like I have to deliver, to work harder than everyone else, so I can prove to my employers that they didn't "waste" time, resources and expectations, to hire me. And just quickly for those of you who are unaware, if you are a non-EU/EFTA citizen in Switzerland, your employer needs to write a letter to the canton to explain why no other Swiss or EU/EFTA citizen was suitable for the position.

And I want to make a note here that even though your employers tell you that you were hired because of your competencies, and you want to believe it, the setting in which you are embedded in makes it difficult to believe that yourself. It gives you the feeling that you constantly have to justify your professional existence, especially if both your career and legal status in this continent depends on it.

I also often feel excluded because official university emails, documents and many events are all in German, not to mention how many of my colleagues only speak German amongst themselves, making it difficult for me to easily engage with them.

Now here, some of you may be thinking, “What on earth does language have to do with the topic of Diversity & Inclusion?”

Everything.

We’re talking about inclusion today, which means making people feel like they belong. And belonging means making people feel welcomed, that they can participate and follow in whatever event or meeting they want to participate or contribute to. So inclusion really just means allowing people to have the ability to communicate with each other, and that starts by having a common language in the workplace.

And I’m putting an emphasis on language here as well because we are talking about a university that has the ambition and understands itself as an “international” context. If they didn’t understand themselves in this way, I wouldn’t be bringing this up.

And let us not forget that language is power, and issues around Diversity and Inclusion revolve around power relations: it’s about who you choose to **include** and **exclude** from certain discussions and groups. It’s about who is able to address issues of Diversity and Inclusion and who is not. And having a common language is essential for that. [pause]

But let us be clear that even if the usage of a language is inclusive, this is just one of the many steps to tackle the fundamental problem of racism. For instance, even if people around me use English, I very often experience what some people call “microaggressions”, which I personally think is a false terminology because it tends to belittle those aggressions.

To give you some examples, people have told me “Ching chang chong” and other statements that are embedded in racism. But I’m not able to report this to someone up the food chain because I know that if some official email goes out, it will be traced back to me because I am one of the few minorities in the context of my programme.

And to bring this “microaggression” example a bit closer to some of the people in this audience, and particularly the women here, racist statements are similar to sexist statements.

Let’s say you are one of the only women in your office. One day, you are having coffee, and your male colleagues start making a remark – just for fun – about your boobs, or touch your butt to make a statement about it.

How would *you* feel?

I don’t know about you, but if I were in your shoes, I would feel harassed. You feel like you want to tell someone about this incident. But you can’t. Because you are the only woman in that context, and you don’t want to engage with anything that might negatively affect your relationship with your work colleagues, or your work in general, such as losing your job. And

so this form of harassment continues, and at one point you grow to become numb to these harassments. This is how I feel in the context of racism.

I want to highlight here that at least in the context in which I was sharing with you regarding the various experiences I go through as a minority, I hold no personal grudges towards any of my colleagues. And I'm not saying it's okay that this is happening; what I'm saying is, I understand why such things happen.

Because of course, if you only have people of similar backgrounds in the same place, you're not going to see certain problems because you're not affected by them. You may not see a problem with language because you speak the majority language. You may not see a problem with racism because you are the majority in that setting.

But this is exactly why diversity in all its shapes and sizes matters, right? Because by bringing in people of different backgrounds and experiences, you start seeing issues that you used to not see, and as a result, you start tackling them.

So, I go through all these things on a daily basis, right.

But I constantly remind myself of my privileges within the university. Because I am extremely privileged. I am pursuing a PhD in one of the most prestigious business universities in Europe because I had the privilege to study in good and "western" universities prior to this.

My passport privilege enabled me to apply and reapply for visas more easily than those who hold "less privileged" passports. You may laugh, but my religion privilege also facilitated my visa application. I still vividly remember how all my Swiss friends were like, "Write your Catholic background on your CV because that gives them no reason to not accept you in the Canton of St. Gallen".

And when I leave the realm of HSG and walk in the streets of St. Gallen, my privileges stand out even more. I've engaged multiple times with Asian ladies working in restaurants, food stands, stores, and they consistently remind me of my privileges:

Again, my passport privilege that enabled me to obtain a solid visa that they cannot easily obtain; my socioeconomic privilege – I might not be the richest person out there because I live off a student income, but it's probably a lot more than what these Asian people I engage with make in a month. And my salary enables me to afford living in a nice apartment in the city centre. I also have a work contract that enables me to have access to a health insurance. So things like that.

And then when I go to Japan, my privileges are even more abundant. As a Japanese citizen, I am a majority from every dimension imaginable:

I am a Japanese citizen in a society that is created by and for Japanese citizens; I am heterosexual in a society that still heavily stigmatizes non-heterosexual people; my Catholic religion is part of the majority and welcomed; I am also an educated woman with a degree beyond the bachelor level, so I have many job prospects and don't have to worry about visas

– if I were to quit my job in the morning, I could, if I wanted to, very easily find a new job by the afternoon.

The reason I'm shedding light to the different contexts I am embedded in – from HSG, St. Gallen, to Japan – is to illustrate to you how my privileges shift depending on the context I am in.

And it's really important for all of us to be aware of our positionality in the specific contexts we are in. Because this influences everything we do, from the research topics we pursue, the discussions we are able to hold and not hold, and to the ways we can contribute to discussions around Diversity & Inclusion.

I unfortunately don't have the time today to go into the technical aspects of allyship because we can have a whole session about this, but what is important here is that, if, we, as individuals, are serious about tackling issues around Diversity & Inclusion, we all need to do, at the bare minimum, the following three things:

- First, **check our privileges**. We have to ask ourselves, and by "we", again I am talking about everyone in this room including myself: "What privileges do I hold in this specific context?" Because then that will clarify your position in that specific context. And once you clarify your position, the subjects you can or cannot engage in, and how you can engage in those subjects will become clearer.

For example, if you are someone from the "Global North" pursuing some research either academically or for consultancy purposes on an issue somewhere in the "Global South", you have to be extremely careful to state and reflect upon your positionality, that you are not trying to do some kind of saviorism work.

In addition, businesses drawing on other cultures should carefully think about the question of whether they are or could be appropriating something for a commercial benefit, and what that may do to those being appropriated.

- Second, **take allyship seriously**. Especially if you are one of the more privileged persons in the setting, listen to the things the less privileged persons in the same setting have to say.

You know, allyship should be a means to an end, not an end in itself that puts privileged people in the centre again.

In addition, don't just stand there and let your colleagues or friends say something racist or sexist or anything problematic really in front of you and pretend you didn't see or hear anything. Don't excuse it with, "Oh but they're a nice person," or "They didn't mean it, it was just a joke". No. Take the issues of people affected by racism or sexism seriously and actively find solutions together to make their experiences better – because that's how you become an ally to issues around Diversity & Inclusion.

And when you're doing this, make sure you openly communicate your privileges to indicate that you are aware of your position in that context, which leads me to my third and final point;

- **Be open to admit that you are imperfect and have a lot to learn.** We all make mistakes. And this is something I often call upon the “less privileged” or the “minority” in a given context to remember as well. You know, everyone makes mistakes and deserve chances to work on ourselves. So from the minority's end, we also need to have that level of patience and understanding, *given* – and this is an important point – given, that the more privileged in that setting will work on themselves as well.

And by work, I mean people actively learning from their mistakes and working hard to not repeat them. Because this is also something that often happens when you are in a privileged position in a particular context: you don't have to put your money where your mouth is.

And especially if you are a leader in your team, you need to do these three points I just referred to: Check your privileges, openly communicate your awareness of your own privileges, and openly and genuinely communicate that you are a work-in-progress. Because if the top doesn't lead by example, no one is going to do this.

And with this, I'd like to end my talk. If you have any questions or would like to exchange reflections and ideas, I am happy to do so afterwards.

Thank you for your attention, and I wish everyone a lovely lunch break!