



LETTER

REFLECTIONS ON DIVERSITY & EXCLUSION

I have worked as a junior doctor in the NHS for over 10 years across England and Scotland and across a variety of specialties and hospital sites. I've had a full spectrum of experiences – some positive and some less so. We have all had those teams you instantly feel a part of, and those you struggle to feel accepted within. As a junior doctor this is a never-ending challenge with the constant rotations that make up our various training pathways across the UK.

I love what I do. Working in emergency medicine, no two shifts are the same. There is much I could write about why I love my job and my profession, but for me, the greatest inspiration about working in A&E is the variety of people you meet and interact with. I consider myself to be a people person, an extrovert many would say - I love to chat. Whether that be with colleagues, patients, or others along the way. I will nearly always end up finding someone to chat to, wherever I am. Most of the time it's a strength, and a pleasure, but there are times where it can become unpleasant and awkward.

Meeting new people is great and can lead to interesting conversations. But as a brown woman of mixed race, there's often an apprehension, at the back of my mind.

Only recently have I begun to be less afraid of the question "where are you from?" This is mostly because, in Scotland this question seems to focus on my 'English accent' and a curiosity as to why I ventured north and made Scotland my home. My answer is almost universally accepted when I refer to my hometown of Birmingham, even if some may question the authenticity of my accent (*my Brummie twang has mellowed over the years and merged with other influences as I've moved around*). Very rarely, do I get the dreaded follow up "But where are you really from?" Although it does happen occasionally. The older I am, the braver I am in gently calling this out, refusing to be defined by other people's judgments or prejudices and them not accepting my own definition of where I am from. And at times it can really infuriate me.

As a brown woman, I am used to being a minority most of the time. As a mixed-race woman, I am sadly too used to feeling like an outsider, like I don't belong. There is a debate whenever I fill in a form as to which ethnic group I belong to – even now well into my 30s. Aged 14 years, I remember writing a short essay alongside one such question on

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a form, where I did not feel like I fitted into any of the prescribed categories, only to be faced with the same restrictive and feeling quite 'excluded' trying to fit into these socially constructed boxes, again and again regardless.

Growing up in Birmingham, the communities I was a part of were diverse – or appeared so at least. Even so, I was often at the receiving end of negative comments due to judgements people made about the colour of my skin and that of those around me. Conscious that people might look and 'tut' at me walking with my white father, or my brother with his paler complexion, or not believe I was related to many of my other white family members.

As a teenager, I remember difficulties with many peers from Asian backgrounds, being called a 'coconut' and other derogatory comments, being bullied, or simply just being made to feel different.

This trend, has sadly continued although not as much as before. I recognise now that although I look brown, I often receive interactions and behaviours similar to a privileged 'white' person - meaning I may escape overt racism in a lot of the circumstances. The variable way I get treated by others has, at times, has left me with my own racial biases as a personal defensive mechanism. I have evolved through the years. I have not always felt able to be open about my feelings on experiencing bias, and discrimination, because it's often tricky for people to understand that I have suffered racism from so many different ethnicities.

And if I am truly honest much of the worst racism I have suffered, has been from people who look like me, but can often make me feel very excluded.

When I was asked to write this piece, I was initially a little puzzled. Why would BAPIO want to hear from me? Is that a group that would include me? I hadn't ever really thought so before. I identify as British, as mixed race, as brown - but never Indian. I was born in Birmingham and grew up there. My Dad is a proud Yorkshire man (my grandfather even more so). My Mum moved to the UK in the 1970s from Goa, where she spent most of her childhood and where I still have lots of family. The association with Portuguese is clear, and Catholicism too, but Indian is a label many of my family would feel uncomfortable with most of the time, myself included. Although it's hard to deny that I have Indian origins, too often both myself and my family have been made to feel different to a community that is technically ours too.

One of the things I love most about the NHS is its core principle to treat everyone based on their needs rather than anything else. The aim for equality runs through every part of the organisation. Sadly, right now it's clear that isn't always the case. For us as staff or our patients – racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination are sadly too familiar to too many of us. The NHS is made up of diverse staff and patient groups, with people from many different walks of life coming together. I hope that moving forward we can appreciate that we have more in common than our differences and learn to celebrate both our diversity and what unites us, equally.

We are a team, and one I am incredibly proud to belong to. The last few years have been tough, and undoubtedly there's more tough times to come, but I have no doubt that together we can make it through.