



Using Equality and Diversity as a Façade for Control

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Diversity of person and diversity of thought are the crux of innovation and scientific breakthrough. We cannot make new discoveries if we surround ourselves with persons who promise to think and act just as we do. Multiple perspectives allow us to grow personally, professionally and scientifically. Equality means valuing the ideas of others as much we do our own. Equality means welcoming the viewpoints of others, and acknowledging our own fallibility in thinking. Equality means tolerating and even encouraging thinking that is different from our own.

While many dutifully recite the definitions of true diversity and equality, one can easily find twisted and abusive variations on these altruistic themes. An all-too-common variation is the power-hungry leader who spouts diversity and feigns equality through statistics, while playing his pawns to keep full control of the kingdom. The aim of such a leader is to be served, not challenged by his subjects. Collaboration and cooperation in science are the presented goals. But the carefully composed working group is, in fact, built with persons who will remain submissive, and above all fiercely loyal to the leader. The line between loyalty and hostage becomes blurred. The subjects must assume the scientific thinking, the scientific models, and even the personal and scientific enemies of the leader. The last of these reaches into the soul of the subject. In return, the influential leader provides the occasional gumdrop by nominating the most loyal fans for awards, among other morsels, to assure continued allegiance and loyalty. Such a hierarchy and working environment gives leadership power through the demand for loyalty, rather than fostering excellence through independent thinking. Victims are controlled by fear of the leader's capacity to destroy their careers if their allegiance falters. This is a perilous example for the next generation of young scientists.

This scenario is most commonly played out by a male leader and his hand-picked court of The Faithful. Typically, the underlings are early career scientists, or women and other minority scientists of any age, as these persons struggle most for due (or undue) recognition. Such persons may even outwardly exclaim that they owe their careers to the abuser. Most unbecoming are relationships where a scientist knowingly allows herself to be held hostage, as she sees this as her only way to move forward. Most tragic are leader-subject relationships where the hostage scientist is unknowingly used and abused.

This power structure is surprisingly common and runs counter to the hard work of the many pushing for true diversity and equality. Beware of leaders who loudly proclaim their compliance to diversity and equality initiatives. Continued self-righteous proclamation is a sure signal of underlying issues. Awareness is the first step toward freeing imprisoned underlings. Next is acquiring the strength to act. Equality is not a destination; it is a journey.