

Political Inclusion: A Step forward or just more virtue signalling?

There has been much talk in the media recently about how inclusive the new Scottish parliament is. The election returned the highest number of MSPs from ethnic minority backgrounds along with record numbers of disabled politicians. There has been some concern that these individuals were prioritised over more senior colleagues because they “ticked a box”. I intend here to illustrate how this is simply not the case.

Lorna Slater co-leader of the green party is one of the few MSP’s who are open about their disability. She has autism, and I intend to show how some of the traits of autism make her uniquely suited to represent her constituents and the wider Scottish population.

In my opinion there are five key traits that many autistics have: Mindfulness; ability to forgive/move on; having no vices; no pretence; speak less yet say more. These in combination I would argue elevate autistic individuals to a level few neurotypicals can reach.

Mindfulness is defined as “maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment”. If this is correct then some autistic individuals can be masters of mindfulness - always living in the moment, relishing it, tasting its sweetness, chuckling on its spiciness, and making the most of it. This ability to be non-judgemental of others around them can open the door to true cross-party discussion and co-operation.

Autism is a complex neurological condition and can thus make individuals who have it feel different. Society doesn’t deal well with differences and often individuals with autism can feel maligned or discriminated against. The wonderful thing about autistics is that a lot of them have a unique ability to not get enraged or sulk, they are able to forgive and move on. This can be an invaluable trait in a politician – enabling them to put aside differences and work in a collaborative and constructive way with individuals with differing priorities or prejudices that plague many neurotypical individuals.

Have you ever seen young children? Their face has a particular innocence you will not find anywhere else. This is how many autistic individuals see the world. As neurotypicals grow more world-wise, they gain wisdom, they also take on a lot of vices - jealousy, deception, hatred, arrogance. Autistic individuals rarely have any of these. They have an ability to be strong and always genuinely believe in the causes they fight for. Because autistic individuals tend not to be deceptive - if you want a truly open and honest government you need more autistic politicians.

They say those with autism have a hard time understanding social cues. While this makes it difficult for them to navigate the world and interact with people, it is also a characteristic that makes them very special. They do not know how to put up a pretence. They speak/show their heart all the time – true inside out. While Neurotypicals have learned the art of pretence, putting up a different facade every time

a situation arises, they do not know how to do that. Autistic individuals are often honest, sincere, and transparent. A trait that is much envied by many in the neurotypical world and one that results in more trusting and meaningful working relationships with other government bodies.

I have said this multiple times, words are overrated. Autistic individuals often need additional time to process speech and understand what others are trying to say. But I would argue that this is no bad thing, what answer to a question would you rather have: the neurotypical's which is often a gut reaction or constructed to say what the individual wants to hear with nice platitudes or the autistic one which is carefully considered and gives a true answer? Most of us get entangled in the web of words – playing with words to sometimes sell and sometimes get sold, to be understood and many a time misunderstood, to hurt and to heal. Neurotypicals use words all the time but for someone autistic, communication is more than using words. It's in their actions, in the way their body moves, in how their eyes express what their heart wants to say. Sometimes the most beautiful things are said when they are unsaid. With the majority of communication being non-verbal, politicians would do well to take a leaf out of the autistics' playbook.

If you would notice, there is a theme to these qualities, they all arise out of the ability to appreciate life and judge none. I have seen this in almost every autistic individual I have come across. I don't call autistic individuals special because of their needs, I call them special because they genuinely are. The qualities that they possess, I wish more neurotypicals did. It would make the world a much better place. Others see autism and get blindsided by its "difference". They don't see the beauty that lies behind that uniqueness. If they did, they would embrace rather than ignore autistic individuals. They are like a rainbow, it is the world around them that is colour blind. I can only hope that this increase in the diversity of the Scottish Parliament is a true step forward in being a more inclusive government and not just virtue-signalling for political gain, as only true inclusion of people of all creeds colours and disabilities gives us a representative government.