

july 2020

tei the
empathy
institute.



the next chapter:

**our work
re-imagined +
re-focused.**

the **empathy** institute: re-imagined + re-focused

It's been a fascinating few years operating in the world of anti-oppression and equity. When I started this journey in 2017, all I knew was that I wanted to make the world a kinder place, and that equity, diversity, and inclusion-based education was the most effective way I could contribute.

The world isn't the same as it was 3 years ago. The presence of a white cisgender man in the equity, diversity, and inclusion space has always been complicated. It has become clearer than ever over the past many weeks that any positioning of a white cis-man as an authority on anti-oppression or anti-racism does more harm than good. I think it is only natural that this be a time of reflection and pause in order to figure out the necessary next steps.

There are lots of folks who identify as anti-oppression or anti-racism practitioners, and even more who identify their work via the age-old "equity, diversity, and inclusion" (EDI) lens. I think it is time that TEI departs from some of these norms in order to specialize in what we do best, in spaces that we more comfortably fit and can be accountable within.

What follows is a re-framing of what I think TEI's next chapter will look like. It's not a major departure from that original vision, and is still focused on using the tools and privileges I have access to in order to make the world better, kinder, and more livable for more people. But the change of scope, language, and framing of this work is significant, and it is time I shared these changes with you all.

our four **core** pillars.

rather than offering broad edi support, we'll be focusing our efforts in these areas.

1

**sexual
violence.**

2

**mental
health.**

3

**gender +
sexuality.**

4

**leadership
+ mindset.**

focus 1: sexual violence.

This is not a departure in any sense, but has become the part of our organization most consistently sought out, and thus has blossomed into some of the work we do best.

Targeting and specializing in the post-secondary context and branching out from there, we will offer training and consulting services focused on any (or a combination) of the following topics:

- Consent education (empathy-based, trauma-informed framework)
- Understanding, preventing, and addressing sexual violence
- Understanding, preventing, and addressing workplace sexual harassment
- Sexual violence on post-secondary campuses
- Gender-based violence
- Responding to disclosures of sexual violence (empathy-based, trauma-informed, survivor-centric framework)
- The relationship between harmful hegemonic ideals of masculinity and sexual violence

focus 2: mental health.

Back to our roots, mental health advocacy was the reason Growth Myndset, and eventually TEI, began in the first place. Our educational programming in this area will focus on helping individuals better understand themselves and each other within the context of mental illness + wellness.

We will offer speaking, training, and consulting services focused on:

- Accessible + intuitive self-care
- De-stigmatizing mental illness internally and externally
- Supporting someone with mental illness
- Showing self-compassion when living with mental illness
- Understanding and supporting eating disorder recovery
- The connective tissue between trauma and everyday life
- Understanding, preventing, and addressing addictions (empathy-based harm reduction framework)
- Mental health hygiene

focus 3: gender + sexuality.

Speaking of returning to "roots", here we focus on our area of academic and theoretical expertise, and are further refining the scope of our offerings to be more mindful so as to not take up space in areas where we hold significant privilege.

We plan to focus our training and consulting efforts on:

- Redefining masculinities
- Gender-inclusive language, spaces, and businesses
- Understanding the spectrum of gender + sexual diversity (terms + basic literacy)
- Understanding how to be supportive and inclusive of gender + sexual diversity (even when you're confused or missing information)
- Cis + straight privilege
- Guiding men through engaging with feminism
- Understanding + facilitating gender neutrality

focus 4: leadership + mindset.

Here, we take a turn from some more traditional "EDI" focuses to talk about the relationships we form with our brains, how to nurture and mobilize our emotional intelligence, and how we can grow into leaders that more people can accessibly and comfortably follow.

Our speaking, consulting, and coaching (new!) will focus on:

- Understanding and growing emotional intelligence
- The role of mindset, and how to move from fixed to growth
- Learning self-compassion and patience
- Inclusive leadership (power-conscious framework)
- Mastering core communication skills
- Getting better at being called in/out
- Empathy-based conflict management
- Inclusive and intuitive hiring
- Management essentials: maintaining integrity, practicing kindness, and getting results
- The role of mentorship and how to nurture it

what won't we be offering anymore?

we won't be offering programming **primarily** focused on:

unconscious bias, equity, diversity, anti-racism, anti-oppression, intersectional feminism, or inclusive product design.

though these are all inherently part of our intersectional programming, and while each of these is incredibly important to us, to position ourselves as an expert in these spaces is not the best use of our presence or privilege.

additionally, requests for programming focused on supporting specific human experiences or identities, such as trans/gender-diverse experiences, settler-colonialism, women in business, etc. will only be fulfilled if co-facilitation is made possible (so we can collaborate and share space with folks whose experiences and safety are at stake in these spaces).

next steps.

I do not come to the decision to restructure this practice lightly, but part of learning and growing in our ability to do this work is to be constantly re-assessing the efficacy, feasibility, appropriateness, and accountability of our efforts to actually help those we mean to.

Seeing as this work is grounded in intersectionality, it's important to note that none of the work we will do in the future will exclude things like race from the conversation. Rather, by incorporating it into the landscape of differently-focused dialogue, while re-directing opportunities for anti-racist dialogue to BIPOC practitioners, we are able to communicate that while we are not experts, we must all be doing the work of anti-racism when we are living + breathing in any other space.

We cannot speak about one of these social issues without thinking about the others. We should not talk about "inclusive leadership" practices without seeking out, amplifying, and centering the voices and experiences of BIPOC employees.

We have always been focused on connecting with people, and then turning around and helping those people connect to the issues we care most about. By focusing our efforts on our own lived experiences and expanding our ability to connect on a personal level through the practice of coaching, we think the best is yet to come.

We are not okay with a future where we inherently profit off of the oppression of folks whose experiences we will never have. By re-focusing and re-imagining our future, I am hopeful TEI will be a place of safety and pride rather than harm.

With love,

