

**Episode 38 – Emotion at Work in Equality, Inclusion and Diversity
chatting with Mac Alonge (@theequalgroup)**

Phil: Hello and welcome to the Emotion at Work podcast where we take a deep dive into the human condition, having conversations that you might not necessarily expect. Now our topic today is one that I am very conscious of and aware of because as a middle aged white man I'm quite conscious of the advantages that this brings me in life and if I think back over my career that awareness or consciousness hasn't always been with me and whether that's because of the wider conversation that is happening around equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace or whether that's with age I have just become more aware of it, I am not really sure but our guest today has set out their stool and they are working hard to change that awareness and that consciousness around equality and diversity and inclusion in the workplace and it was that, being very open about the fact that those three aspects of equality and diversity and inclusion and how the three of those things linked together that drew me to getting our guest on today. So let's get him on the air, so welcome to the Emotion at Work podcast, Mac Alonge, hello Mac.

Mac: Hi Phil, how's it going?

Phil: I am good, how are you?

Mac: Very good.

Phil: Good, good, so as per usual with the Emotion at Work podcast I am going to open with an innocuous yet unexpected question and the intent of these questions is to get to know our guests a little better without doing the real classic and cliché, tell me what's your name and where do you come from type thing. So Mac my question for you, what shop or shops do you remember most vividly from your youth?

Mac: Oh wow, good question.

Phil: Thanks.

Mac: As soon as you said that the shop that stood out was Woolworths and I remember going there after school, getting pick and mix, listening to music, they had the really big CD collection, it was tapes at the time actually, CDs were a bit later on and just seeing what kind of new music was out in the charts and I think my mum used to go to the other sections to get stuff for the house and I would be running around the music section. That is the standout shop for me.

Phil: Okay, so is music still a big part of your life then?

Mac: Yeah I listen to it quite often. I think I have always got it on in the background when I am working or on my way to meetings so I would say it is quite a big part of my life.

Phil: I always found it fascinating working in offices when you either have the discussions on A was the music on or what the music off. If there was music on was it the radio and if so, which radio

station and was the time shared between different radio stations and was it okay to put your earphones in or not? I remember the lengthy discussions, almost arguments that used to be had about whether the music was A whether the music was on or not and then B which variety of music it was.

Mac: Yeah I think it is quite interesting as well, you mentioned obviously headphones in and headphones out and I've been at various places I've worked in my career and there have been different attitudes to earphones in. I think there is a conception that if you have got your earphones in you are not necessarily engaged in what is going on or you are less likely to have conversations that could be quite important for developing certain things in the workplace.

Phil: Yeah also I think there was a perception, sometimes accurate perception that people would use earphones as a way of trying to get either focus or concentration or just not be disturbed, so even if you were not necessarily listening to anything it was just a, "If I have got my earphones in leave me alone to get on with my work" type thing. So for me then, my most memorable shop from my youth was the Post Office at the bottom of my hill. So where I used to live was in a quite hilly part of Bristol and I used to have to go down the hill to get to the bus stop and stuff and there was a really nice Post Office at the bottom of the hill and I say really nice because it had similarly an amazing pick and mix section. I remember being able to go in and just pick up fruit salads and black jacks and the little pink and white mushroom sweets and the sugar covered jelly dummies and stuff like that. I used to love going there.

Mac: I think it tells a little bit about us as kids, the standout memories are to do with sweets.

Phil: Well you added music which I think is a bit more credible. Mine was just sweets, although to be fair one of my first ever paid, I wouldn't call it a job but the owners of the Post Office I got to know them really well because I kept going in and when I was about, I think I was about 13 they asked me if I wanted to do some painting in one of the rooms out the back of the Post Office and they paid me in sweets. "Do you want to paint this room for us?" "Yeah" well pay you in sweets!

Mac: I'm not sure what the work employment law would say about that.

Phil: Mmm child labour and all that (laughs) and I guess that gives us a nice segue into what we want to talk about in terms of those workplace expectations and what would have been okay a number of years ago and what would be okay now because I remember one of the most vivid memories that sticks with me when I was a child, so I was raised in a Christian house and if I look back on that now there were very few non-white people in the area that I lived in and/or that went to the church that I grew up in and I remember when I was 13 or 14 at school and somebody stopped me outside of the school and said, "Can you go and find so-and-so and ask them to pop out and see me". I can't remember why they stopped me, but I went in and found the individual and they said, "Oh who has asked for you?" and I said, "Oh I don't know, it's this coloured guy outside" and described what he was wearing and the guy I was talking to said, "He is not coloured, he is black" and I was like, "Oh, oh" and I felt really embarrassed. That was the word I knew to describe somebody that was black but I remembered the embarrassment I felt, "I've used the wrong word, I've said the wrong thing, I've embarrassed myself and/or insulted them at the same time," so lots of change overtime I guess.

Is that something you have experienced as well in the workplace? Have you experienced change overtime?

Mac: Yes so I think things have changed. I guess it's interesting as well because we are coming to a point of time now where a lot of things that were previously the case in terms of the workplace culture or lack of it is a better word that are acceptable now that weren't acceptable then. You know there is a whole tech industry that has ushered in this era of wearing hoodies and jeans to work on a daily basis and just being really casual in the way that work is done whereas when I entered the workplace I remember quite vividly that you had to wear a suit and tie, I think it was quite recently that people stopped wearing ties so much and there is an informality I guess that we are seeing now that wasn't the case 10, 15, 20 years ago now. So that has changed from a race and equality type scenario I guess we are seeing a lot more ethnic minority within the workplace so that brings with it its own dynamics. I guess we are seeing more women in leadership positions as well. We have got a female Prime Minister, the cabinet is quite gender balanced in some aspects so there is a lot more presence of other individuals other than middle aged white men within the workplace in a more professional environment.

Phil: One of the things you said has pressed a button for me. I was with a client recently and I got pulled up on my standard of dress.

Mac: I am guessing not in a good way.

Phil: Well if you get pulled up it's never in a good way but for me it was interesting in the difference of views on what makes for professional/credible. So clothes can be used as a credibility or in my experience/opinion, clothes can be used in a way to try and manage and attain credibility. My personal opinion is that they are unnecessary way of doing that, yet I also accept that that is what they are because your clothes are part of you. What you wear, other people will form an impression based on what you wear. The discussion that I had with the client was around the ways that professor's credibility is negotiated. My perspective was I think I have done enough in the way that I work and how I interact with other people to establish that credibility and that professionalism that it doesn't matter what I wear yet ultimately you're my client so if that is what you want me to do then I'll conform because that is the expectation that is being laid out and I guess in 2019 it surprised me that that was the case.

Mac: Yeah and I think it plays to this norm that perception is everything, so how you perceive somebody to be, whether that is professional or whether that is unprofessional is fact so if they look unprofessional their going to be unprofessional which is an absolute nonsense and it links to what we are talking about in terms of equality, diversity and inclusion. The quote unquote norm of leadership in business is the white middle aged middle classed to some extent man and that completely is at odds with people with individual capabilities, people's individual aptitudes. If we get so bogged down in appearances and bogged down in... because white middle class men have historically been in positions of power for the last couple of hundred years or whatever it is, we get so attached to that identity that we can't foresee anybody falling outside of that so when we are faced with people that have had a different life experience or come from a different gender of ethnicity, that kind of challenges peoples assumptions in terms of why is it that the default position

for a leader or a CEO or director or whatever it is, is a white man. Is that because they are genuinely better or is it because we have not actually given other people a chance.

Phil: Is that, there's lots of stuff I want to explore wrapped up into that and there is some societal norm stuff that you talked about but I am also interested and I think I am going to go first is in your personal experience then. So as a, I don't know how old you are Mac, I haven't asked that question?

Mac: (Laughs) do you want me to disclose?

Phil: Yeah go on.

Mac: Yeah 32.

Phil: So as a 32 year old black man then how have you found having to work with those identity norms and expectations in the workplace?

Mac: Yeah, I guess early on in my career I struggled a bit. I was very aware that I was a black man as I should be and I guess that awareness brought with it its own issues in terms of not wanting to conform to any of the negative stereo types and are still to date attached to the identity of the black man. There is all these kind of negative things that we see in the media around what black men are, around what black men do and it's very narrow and very closed in terms of, telling that story that black men are more than what we have been portrayed as in the media so it was a thing where when I entered rooms, when I entered meetings I was typically the only black person, I was typically, I was in the energy industry for the last ten years and I was typically the only person that was under the age of 35 and that speaks to the state of the energy industry to some extent. It kind of made me a little apprehensive or anxious around how I was being perceived so I kind of made an extra effort to make sure that I was on top of my game. I think I was at a very early age you have to work twice as hard to get half as much in this world and initially I took it as a challenge and I took it to be something that was just the case and so I went about working twice as hard and I did all of my research, I did everything that I needed to do from an academic point of view and actually made sure that I was able to articulate myself in a manner that I was seeing everybody else articulate themselves in. Making sure that I was professional, as you said before, the kind of dress code, the expectations around dress code, making sure that I was always groomed and represented and well put together and that is not unique to myself as a black man. I have talked to extensive people over the years and I think similar things, or similar experiences are shared with females. We found females that reached positions of power in either organisations or industry they actually tend to conform to the status quo to assimilate to your environment. I guess some of it is you don't want to be the one person that is different. I think early on in education as well at the workplace we are told that it is not necessarily advantageous to be the one different person so as much as possible we try and assimilate and try and make ourselves the same as everyone else.

Phil: So one of the things that I study is identity and I do worry or check myself I suppose sometimes that I am looking at identity through a very narrow lens because I am looking at it through my eyes I guess in a way but one of the things that I talk about or I am interested in, is identity with a capital "I" and identity with a lower case "i", so what I mean by that, or examples of what I mean by that is,

so if I think about identity with a lowercase “i” is the version of me that would be present or would show up to an interaction with a client, that would turn up to a workplace or the version of me that I would adapt slightly to the context or the situation that I am in. So I guess what I am trying to say, so I was having a conversation with a CEO a couple of years ago and we were talking about status symbols and was saying how he had done a lot of work to address cultural inequality by doing things like getting rid of executive car parking spaces by removing dress code, by removing expectations on working hours, by getting rid of some of these things. So I said have you truly got rid of those things, so on a hot summers day could I turn up in shorts and sunglasses and a t-shirt and a pair of flip flops and he said if you are going to meet the queen and you would dress appropriately wouldn’t you and I found that a really fascinating response to my question because my question was about wearing sunglasses and wearing things to an office and that got compared with going to meet the queen and I guess I am using that example to talk about that lower case “i” identity, the things that we adapt and change depending on the context and situation that we are in. Then there is what I would call the uppercase identity which is the values or beliefs that we hold, the things that we hold true to, the sense of individuality as to who we are and then I am interested in where do those two things merge and overlap and are there times where the lowercase identity that will be more malleable and will adapt and change, when does that encroach too much on somebodies broader capital identity, maybe you would say personality within that possibly I suppose or when does one encroach too far on the other so I guess as an example was my discussion with my client recently, was that allowing my uppercase “I” identity to encroach too much on my lowercase “i” identity in that actually I just rocked up in what I was comfortable in as opposed to thinking what would be most appropriate for the client or could it go the other way. Does that make any sense?

Mac: 100% and I think I guess one of the things that stuck out to me as you were talking was actually the variability around the lowercase “i” in terms of what you change and the uppercase “I” in terms of what your values are and who you are as an individual. The scope of flexibility around those two concepts depends very much on what your starting point is and what I mean by that is who you are, so you obviously spoke earlier on about being a white man, obviously I am a black man so I guess what society says is the norm, quote unquote norm for the business environment is very white centric, very middle aged potentially, somewhat middle classed. I used to work for a big consulting company and their primary demographic was very private school educated and Oxford, Cambridge type graduates. The dominant culture there was one of privilege, one of very middle class in terms of the culture, in terms of the values to some extent. I guess coming into that environment as a black man that wasn’t privately educated, that is so far away from being middle class that it then becomes very apparent in terms of how much of your day-to-day interactions or things that you think about, things that you talk about etcetera, it has to be adaptable, you develop this duality. In terms of not wanting to change who you are intrinsically but then also to be able to have conversations around whatever the conversational topic was that day and not wanting to feel like a complete alien so you have to, if you don’t like football, perhaps then everybody is talking about football, you want to feel included then you start to listen out to when football conversations are happening so you can be informed so that you don’t feel like an outsider coming into these conversations and that is very much the negotiability or the flexibility that you have to have in terms of that lowercase “i”, whereas if you’re part of the dominant culture, if you are part of the status quo, then you don’t have to change that at all. That is who you are, that is intrinsically linked, so if you like wearing suits on a day-to-day basis the culture within an organisation being to wear suits

isn't going to impact you at all, but if you like wearing shorts and t-shirts and flip flops but you have to wear suits etcetera because that is an organisational culture then that obviously encroaches and I guess that flexibility then becomes more apparent for you.

Phil: I think you articulated that better than I did I think so that is good. I like that (laughs). Okay, so earlier on I said that there are a couple of things that I want to pick up on. One was some of the societal aspects and then I said I wanted to find out a bit more about your personal experience. So can I nip back to the societal stuff for a minute if that is okay?

Mac: Yeah sure.

Phil: So part of me wonders that if this is something, if I put myself back as a HR or Organisational Development or just an individual within the workplace with this strong overlap or interplay between societal norms and expectations, workplace norms and expectations, whilst we can do some work to affect change within individuals or within teams or potentially within organisations as a whole, if the more societal aspects don't change are we ending up on a hiding to nothing I suppose in a way, do we end of just wasting our effort and energy because it is never going to stick because society doesn't want to change or won't change with it?

Mac: Yeah interesting questions and I think it one of the things I talk about with people that I come across on a day to day basis to say actually there's essentially a bit of a, not a misunderstanding but a misconception around what society is and I think for a lot of the time, for a large proportion of our lives we feel that society is something that happens to us without actually taking accountability to say actually we are part of society so what we allow to happen within society is generally what happens. For a long time, I don't want to get too difficult with this because we will be here forever, but if we look at the political class and the [indescrivable 00.27.33] class the norm historically has been that the privately educated people that went to Eaton and Oxford and Cambridge etcetera then get fast tracked into government and they get fast tracked into positions of leadership and positions of power and that affects the rest of us and you only have to look at what's happened with Brexit and what's happened with previous regimes in terms of weapons of mass destruction, the war in Iraq, financial crisis etcetera, etcetera and it gives you an indication that it's not working. The current climate just doesn't work because there is one perspective that is being elevated to the point of being the norm so as a community and a society we need to redress that. It is part of what we are saying about workplace culture as well, so individual within an organisation determine what that organisational culture is and it is a conversation to be had to say actually who are those individuals. Technically it has been those in congruent positions of power whereas we need to redefine that and say we are all in positions of power. We all have the ability to impact what is the quote unquote norm, what's the new norm is. As individuals we all inherit something so going into the workplace I inherited this dominant culture of dress code, in terms of values, corporate values, individual values, topical conversation etcetera etcetera but as an individual I have the opportunity every day to either accept or reject. So earlier on in your career plan when you don't know much and you are new to the working world, you're more likely to accept than to reject. Let's face it everybody needs a paycheque, everybody needs a job and there's the fear, whether that's perceived or actual. So the fear that you'll lose your job if you speak up about certain things but I always look to the power of movement, like the Me Too movement. As a collective we have the power to very

clearly set out what is acceptable and what is not acceptable whereas sexual harassment might have been something that was overlooked in previous generations, this generation is very clearly saying, “No we will not accept that” and the similar thing needs to happen in terms of, quote unquote, societal norms to say actually it’s not okay to bring your prejudice into the workplace. It is not okay to chant racist abuse from the side of the football match, it’s not okay for these things to happen and the more adamant we are about rejecting those things, the quicker that change will come.

Phil: One of the examples that popped into my mind is the sporting one whether it be about race or about sexual orientation both look at it from both perspectives because I remember back in my youth the kick it out campaign and when they came into being, kicking racism out of football and then, to then still have that occurring today just blows my mind.

Mac: I think for me it doesn’t necessarily blow my mind. That might seem like a controversial thing to say but for me I have always known that racism has existed, what has blown my mind more is that actually these organisations are happy to just continue to exist without actually fundamentally changing things. So as you said kick out racism and the narrative around it hasn’t changed much around it at all so then you need to question the millions and millions of pounds that have been spent on these campaigns and armbands and t-shirts and all of these very tokenage gestures. What is it? Who has benefited from it? Because it’s certainly not the black footballers that are continuing to be abused, it certainly not the black managers and coaches that can’t find jobs within the industry. So who has actually benefited and what tangible changes has been achieved?

Phil: And is that something that, and that tangible change aspect then, because when I hear you talk about that I could hear the passion in your voice for it. So it that something that you look for in the work that you do then in terms of being able to, I don’t know if evidence is the right word but to be able to demonstrate that tangible change with some of the work that you do with individuals or organisations?

Mac: Yeah definitely, so I guess one of the analogies that I always use is to say actually, if you’re aiming to lose weight you need to have a very clear idea of what your starting point is. Nobody says I am going to lose weight and then never measures it and never looks at the scales and never does comparisons to see where we are today compares to where we want to be on the next month and that is one of the big criticisms I have in terms of people that have been doing diversity and inclusion for a really long time. So what are the tangible metrics around this? How are you evidencing that you have changed? So as an organisation we are very data driven. So we collect data around diversity, around equality, around inclusion and the implications that that has, so it’s not just about diversity and inclusion in a silo, it is more about are there ways we can tie this to business outcomes as most business do have a profitability target or a revenue target, we very clearly tie that in with some of the stuff that we needs to be achieved around equality, diversity and inclusion. So it is more about growing the scope of this business case to say actually equality, diversity and inclusion is the right thing to do generally, philosophically and also it is the right thing to do from a business point of view. In terms of making an organisation more innovative, more productive, more profitable, when everybody feels included, tying it back to the work that you do around emotions within workplace. If you feel included, if you feel well represented, if you feel there are no barriers to your ability to progress either within an organisation or within an industry why wouldn’t you feel

more motivated, why wouldn't you bring your best to that organisation or to your career but what we are seeing now is a lot of waste from organisations and from individuals within those organisations to say actually, "If I know that my manager is not going to promote me because they only promote white middle class men or any other preference as an individual that doesn't fit what he is looking for, why would you give a 100% of your energy to that situation?" Broadly that's what we do in terms of providing data sets for organisations and individuals within those organisations to say this is the very clear business case as to why, as an organisation we need to tackle diversity and inclusion and we've seen it very recently in terms of gender pay gaps and the work that needs to be done in that aspect but also drawing alongside organisations, this is how you get from A to B because what we've seen historically is that companies have done a lot around unconscious bias training and things like tokenary hires, going out and hiring a black female as an executive just because you have ticked two boxes as opposed to actually doing the right thing. Who are the high performers, do you have people within your organisation that should be promoted based on the data rather than what companies have done historically. So within my career I have highly extensively over the years there was no kind of better way of hiring so the hiring process is very much based on personal biases or societal biases. Societal biases are things such as assuming that people that went to Oxford and Cambridge are more able to do a job than people that went to the University of Nottingham or the University of Manchester or Bristol or wherever it is to say, Oxford and Cambridge are the elite therefore everybody that comes from Oxford and Cambridge is intrinsically better than everyone else which is so far from the truth it is ridiculous.

Phil: So if I can pop back to what you were talking about just now about things like token hires or if that manager only ever seems to appoint somebody from a particular demographic, white middle aged men for example, could it be, or do you find that that is unconscious or out of awareness or is that deliberate and in-awareness or is it a mix of the two. What do you find in the work that you do?

Mac: Yeah I guess it would be unfair of me to say that it is all deliberate and similarly it would be very naïve of me to say it was all unconscious. I think it's a spectrum, in some cases it's very conscious and some cases it is very unconscious and I think even talking about my experiences as a hiring manager we made assumptions on people's abilities based on what's in front of me which is typically a CV and that in itself is a very quite redundant and unscientific process because we know a lot of people lie on their CVs, a lot of people lie on their LinkedIn profiles so you know, to take that approach to signing up to biases to certain extent. Everybody that works for X company previously is better than everybody else that works for B company previously which in itself is a bias. It would be very naïve to assume there is no bias within any of these processes because every single one of these processes is taking on the back of biases. In terms of the future in terms of how do you get past that because it's one thing to acknowledge the bias whether that is previously unconscious or deliberate is to say what are the ways we can remove bias from this process. As I mentioned before unconscious bias training is something that organisations do quite often, quite frequently but there has been no evidence out there to say that it works. So I guess the question that I have to some of these organisations is what's a better approach? Is it doing training every so often to remind people of the biases or the opportunities for bias to slip in to some of the decision making processes or is it to implement a new way of doing things that removes the possibility for people to apply biases to these processes. For me it's a no-brainer.

Phil: I think that links me into where I was going to go next then. So your question was do you do what you've done or do you look into new ways of trying to remove and/or reduce the bias then. So what would some of those new ways be?

Mac: So we promote, we've developed the system essentially that removes bias from the recruitment process. Anonymous application process, within any vacancies that you are hiring for you need to determine what are the key attributes that makes somebody successful in that role. Typically it is nothing to do with what a person's name is, what gender they are, what school they are educated in. It is more around the aptitude. We have developed an aptitude based system that allows companies to measure the aptitudes for specific roles. Within that we separate the admin of the recruitment process from the assessment so there is no need for the assessor to determine who gets through. For example, when you do an interview as long as there is a robust framework around how that interview is conducted, what questions are asked and what scoring is assigned to individual responses you're then able to build up a more holistic picture when you take into account somebody's aptitude that you have tested independently. I guess in today's world a lot of companies look at the interview process as well as what's called a CV sorter, looking at somebodies credentials, their claimed credentials and making a decision off the back of that in addition to how they have performed at an interview and our approach is to make that more aptitude based and make that actually, what can individuals demonstrate around their abilities. If you need somebody that can code websites, test their ability to code websites and so that more aptitude based recruitment approach is one of the things we suggest and promote. Other approaches in terms of managing internal networks to make sure that people feel their voice is heard. Having a more data driven and aptitude driven promotion and performance management framework as well as also providing a more robust framework within which to pay people. If people have some transparency in terms of how they are paid, how bonuses are paid then you can solve some of the issues that have cropped up around the gender pay gap.

Phil: Sorry Mac can you just hold on for me for just one second. Be back in one second. Hang on.

Mac: No worries.

Phil: Sorry the door to my office came open and I could hear my wife telling off, talking to my daughter, "Fi have you fed the guinea pigs yet today".

Mac: (Laughs).

Phil: So is there a risk then, do I want to get really nerdy and geeky into how the aptitude is decided. I guess part of me thinks is there a risk then that any of those biases could still manifest themselves in the aptitudes that are being assessed or tested against.

Mac: Yeah there are and that's just by nature of the makeup of organisations so when you design, as an individual, if I was to design an office space it would have everything that I want in that office space then if I was to take on perhaps a person who has a disability and we were to collaboratively design that space it would reflect both of our requirements in terms of what that office space needed to have. Essentially what we do from a technological point of view, we don't just provide

systems and then leave people to it, there has to be relationships there, there has to be some challenge in terms of what is it that this data is telling or what should you be doing on the back of this data. It's not enough to have data, it is not enough to have metrics, you also need some robust challenge in there to say, look, this is what you need to do better, this is what you are doing okay. So a lot of what we do is around challenge, so there are two fundamental aspects to how we operate. The first is data and tech, the second is consultancy. So providing more of a context to organisation to say look, this is what you should be looking to do, these are some of the ways that you can leverage what you have in order to get to a better position either in the next 12 months, 24 months, 36 months, whatever the timescale is.

Phil: What do you think is getting in the way of creating real change in some of these areas, whether it be, I suppose we haven't really talked about the links between equality and diversity and inclusion so maybe we'll come back to that in a moment, but from your experience what do you find is getting in the way or stopping real sustainable or sustained change happening around the aspects of equality and/or diversity and/or inclusion?

Mac: That is a really good question and I think for me it boils down to A privilege and B a lack of empathy. So to tackle the lack of empathy point a little bit more it's around the fact that we only have our own personal experiences to go off in any meaningful way and until we have conversations with people that come from a different background a different life experience we are never going to start to understand let alone fully understanding what the status quo means for them, what the status quo means for different communities for different demographics. I think there's currently quite a siloed approach to living. In essence there is a bit of barrier and you talked about it before in terms of the identity question. So looking at who we are as individuals. Sometimes when we get into a work environment or sometimes when we get into a professional environment we leave our human at the door and take on these corporate values that are so far removed from who we are as individuals. So I have seen people do and say things in a work environment that makes you sit up and think do you genuinely, genuinely believe this or are you saying it because that's what you feel is expected of you as a representative of this organisation and I think for me we need to marry those two things. So being a cooler person, being a professional shouldn't mean that you have to leave your human at the door and I mentioned before, the Me Too campaign and stuff like that and looking into the issues that happened around that. There was a lot of people that were complicit with these acts or patterns of sexual discrimination that were keeping, not keeping up, keeping ups is perhaps the wrong word, maybe facilitating whether willingly or otherwise facilitating these patterns of abuse and in essence that is. I guess as a society we have fostered this culture of the corporate being more important the human side of things. From your perspective also in what you deal with emotions at work, it's about actually, when you isolate those two aspects that is when you start to have all of these implications of mental health and stresses and anxieties that are attached to work because you don't necessarily feel you can be yourself. That is where the lack of empathy comes from because we've seen people in positions of power I guess, I don't want to get too political but looking at what is going on from a Brexit point of view, you've got people that are middle class and have experienced privilege all their lives making decisions in this Westminster bubble and not really A thinking or B understanding what the implications are for the quote unquote average person. So not everybody has a trust fund, not everybody has thousands and thousands in their bank that they can rely on. Even if the exchange rate does plummet and the pound becomes

worthless, they don't have estates and acres and farms and assets coming out of their eyeballs they can sell and divest. There are people that are on the breadline now or below the breadline now that if Brexit goes wrong are going to be in an even worse situation. So we are not talking about access to offshore funds and that kind of thing, these people living in this bubble of privilege that doesn't allow them to understand what the implications of these decisions are and I think to bring it back to the point that we are talking about in the workplace we don't have to look to Westminster. The decisions that we make on a day-to-day basis around who gets hired and who gets a pay rise and who gets given this opportunity to do X, Y and Z within the workplace and we actually need to start having a little bit more empathy around the narrative of inclusion. So understanding the implications of your day-to-day decisions and the potential that that could adversely or positively impact how somebody else feels. You might see it as a complete business decision that you need to be cold and hard about but again, even if you have to take a certain decision, the way that that is communicated or the visibility of transparency around those decisions actually helps people to feel like they are included and helps people to feel like they are of value within the workplace. Does that make sense? I have been talking for quite a while.

Phil: Yeah it does and so when you talked about lack of empathy and not understanding or awareness of it from someone else's perspective, I remember having and this might seem like a bit of a... I am worried or anxious that this seems like a trivial answer but in my head it was relevant, the revelation that women on LinkedIn get approached for dates/...

Mac: Harassed.

Phil: Well there is a spectrum, so some it is harassment where they get dick pics and stuff like that and that's just, that blew my mind to think that via one social media, granted that experience was more on Twitter than on LinkedIn but the idea that women would just get unsolicited photos of male genitalia that blew my mind but then also women will get connection requests that will overtly refer to their attractiveness or femininity or those sorts of things as a way to instil a connection through what is a professional network. I had no idea that would happen because that is a reflection of my own experience. My own experience is that that is not something that I do, it is not something that I have experienced therefore it doesn't happen and then when I found out it did again that just made me think wow, the experiences that I have on this particular point are so different to what, in this example, women have and then that makes me a mixture of ashamed of men and angry at men at the same time and then that also takes me on to something that is sometimes called "Whataboutery" where if you looked at the crimes statistics the vast majority of physical or sexual assaults against women come from men and then they'll be elements, people will rightly say that also women abuse men and yes they do, but the scale of that is very small in comparison to men that will abuse women. I don't know where I am going with that if I am honest but there are...

Mac: I think the point that you raised about the link of abuse really hit home for me as well. I guess I am privileged to have a number of professional females in both a personal and professional capacity. I have been screenshotted messages if people on LinkedIn reaching out saying you have wonderful eyes and stuff like that, what does that have to do with anything professional. We are having a conversation about work, why does the beauty or lack thereof, of my eyes have any bearing whatsoever and I guess, again that is a lack of empathy. In the same situation, I think on a gender

perspective we are quite privileged in that everybody has somebody of another gender that they can relate to or somebody that they have got a personal attachment with. So everybody has a mother, typically has a father whether their involved or not, so we can relate to the gender conversation a little bit more and I guess in the case of sexual harassment, those kind of things we really need to start thinking and questioning ourselves along the lines of, if that was my daughter, how would I feel? If that was my mother how would I feel? If that was my sister, how would I feel? I think when you start to have those conversations to say actually... you need to understand the person that you are messaging is somebody's sister, is somebody's daughter, is potentially somebody's mother the same expectations you would have around how somebody should or would treat your own mother or sister or daughter is the same way you should approach people of an opposite gender. So that is the conversations we need to have in it and it comes back to what we were saying about the separation of the professional and the personal and in essence we need to find a happy medium between both to say actually what values we have in our professional life actually have a large bearing on the values on our personal lives. The second thing you mentioned "Whataboutery" and it's a difficult one. In what we do, we don't focus on a specific diversity characteristic, we don't focus on gender, or ethnicity or disability, we tackle things holistically to say actually if there are barriers within a process for let's say females it probably the case that there are also barriers for disabled also barriers for people of a different ethnicity, also barriers for people with a different sexuality so it's about addressing all of them holistically to say look, there are barriers, let's remove them and I guess the danger if you don't do that is that you get into a hierarchically debate to say actually gender issues are more important than ethnicity issues which are more important than disability issues which are more important and so on and so forth and that is one of the critics, amongst the many critics I have of the government that in their approach to tackling the gender pay gap. The way that they have done it doesn't allow for conversations around intersectionality to say if, generally if women are paid less than men, ethnic minorities are paid even more less, that's not correct English.

Phil: Yeah that is fine.

Mac: Disproportionally less than men and within the gender, if we were to look at gender as a spectrum to say, okay, in the bucket of females and how females are paid what are the differences inside that demographic and then you start looking at disabilities and sexualities and ethnicities to say okay on that spectrum, ethnic minorities are paid disproportionately less than white women or even to look at socioeconomic backgrounds to say that working class ethnic minority women are paid significantly less than upper class white women for example so there needs to be holistic approach because if there isn't you miss the point to some extent.

Phil: And so the current approach do you think limits the ability to do that. It is just purely focused on the characteristic, or that single variable of gender, not delving deeper into some of the other aspects of facets of that whether that be sex orientation or class or ethnicity and so on?

Mac: Yeah definitely and even wider than that it misses the point entirely and it suggests that the only issue that women have within the workplace is the fact that they get paid less which is an absolute nonsense because we have seen that discrimination and things like sexual harassment and those kind of issues to say actually we've got a lot more work to do than just paying people the right

amount so it's entirely possible for companies to have an equal gender pay gap but for women to still be treated disproportionately worse than men in that organisation so by the government chasing this gender pay equality, you are still not solving some of the fundamental issues that have wider implications in terms of job satisfaction and how people feel when they enter the workplace on a day-to-day basis.

Phil: One of the questions that I prepared beforehand was around myths and misconceptions so it's a favourite question of mine that I ask a number of different guests that I get on the podcast and I think you have given me a nice segue into it by talking about one of the potential misconceptions, or one of the bigger issues with the gender pay gap is it hides other stuff that is happening and going on. So are there any other or what other myths or misconceptions around equality and/or inclusion and/or diversity would you like us to address or put to bed.

Mac: So I think one of my biggest irritants in this space is the misconception that unconscious bias training works and there is loads and loads of companies that unconscious bias training is the one and only thing that they do around diversity and inclusion and we have turned down work in the past because organisations have wanted us to do unconscious bias training and the answer to them is you can't just do unconscious bias training and expect all of your issues around diversity and inclusion to go away. So that is one of the biggest things that irritate me in this space. The second misconception I would say is that diversity and inclusion is a HR issue so that's one of the things that we hear a lot to say okay, individuals within an organisation don't need to do anything with diversity and inclusion because the HR person does that or there is a Diversity and Inclusion Manager, it is their role to look at diversity and inclusion when actually it impacts all of us and actually it is a conversation that we all need to have. We all need to be aware of, there are things we can do or can do on a day-to-day basis with a view to improve or worsen somebodies ability to function within the workplace. I guess other misconceptions would probably be around tokenary hires, so just having a black person within the leadership team doesn't mean that your organisation is diverse or inclusive. I guess I spoke earlier on of my experience with a big consulting firm and one thing that they did was to have ethnic minorities within their leadership team and when you speak to these ethnic minorities it becomes very apparent, very quickly the only thing that is different about is the skin colour, so they have had all of the same privileges as the white middle classed men have had. They have had the exact same education experience, they have had the exact same, even professional experience in terms of where they have been and what they have done and that limits you from a diversity point of view. So diversity isn't so much about one attribute, it's not about just gender, or just ethnicity but it's about actual, things that are deeper than that, so life experience and even looking at political leanings, political opinions, political perspectives to say if everybody thinks a certain way, you limit yourself as an organisation to the outcomes that you can have or the solutions that you can develop. I think that that is probably it in terms of misconceptions.

Phil: One of the things I would like to do for the listener then is to give, is to give them access to further reading and stuff like that, so if you have got any, I have got a couple that I already know of Mac, but if you have got any particular research or things that you sight, especially to do with the effectiveness of unconscious bias training that I could put in the show notes that sit alongside the podcast, if there is anything in particular that I include so that we can...one of the things, if I learnt myself in my list issues I try to take different perspectives then one of the things I want to be able to

do is to equip them with some stuff and they can then go away and use, if there are any particular resources or references or things that people can use to support them with any of those misconceptions that you have just talked about, whether it be effectiveness of unconscious bias training, about diversity and inclusion being a HR issue and then token hires. If there is any resources that you would recommend send them over to me after you finish and I'll make sure I put them in the show notes as well if that is okay.

Mac: I will do that.

Phil: Fab, thank you. Alright I think I want to wrap it up and pull it together then if that is okay. Are there any, beyond what we have talked about already are there any other suggestions that you would have for our listeners if they wanted to make some progress with equality and diversity and/or inclusion. Any other suggestions that you would have for them to say these are some of the things for you to consider, either reading or trying or doing or adopting?

Mac: For me I would always challenge individuals to think about the type of organisation that they want to work within professionally. We spoke a little bit earlier on about culture and the ability that we have as individuals to define what the social norm is. We also have that ability within our organisation to define what a cultural norm within that organisation. So one of the things that I would say is to challenge as much as possible, if you feel that there are things within your organisation that aren't correct from a diversity and inclusion point of view challenge. I am always happy to go in and speak to individuals or organisations around what can be done to improve what people are doing around diversity and inclusion and also facilitate conversations that to some extent aren't being had. So the starting point is always conversation to say why do we do things the way that we do things? Do we do them because we have always done them that way? Do we do it because they are the right thing to do? In terms of reading and research I would say there is stuff that we put on our website and engage with us on social media because we are always putting out our thoughts and our insights and happy to have conversations around these things. I guess probably link to what you do as well. Individuals have to take good care of themselves emotionally and mentally because some of these conversations are quite draining. I have spoken to people extensively that have worked in DNI roles and they have had to take breaks and refocus and take some time away because it was a, in certain aspects, certain industries perhaps, there is a sense of hopelessness that people get bogged down with, so I would say actually taking care of yourself is one of the key ways that you can ensure that you've got the energy to actually make a difference and make changes because it is not going to be a quick fix. As a society we have got serious issues when it comes to equality, diversity and inclusion and organisations are just a reflection of that. I think being equipped to course things out as and when we see them and I would say also don't limit yourself to one protected characteristic, to say as a black man it would be very easy for me to get bogged down in conversations about black people within the workplace but actually I need to understand that any injustice to one person is then an injustice to all of us and actually the opportunity to challenge all injustice rather than being what it is to my experience.

Phil: Okay I think leaving it on, "Challenging all injustice" is a really good place to leave it. Okay, alright so you mentioned about people getting in touch with you. So we've got the

<https://theequalgroup.com/> which is your website. If people wanted to find you on social media what's the best way for them to do that? What should they go looking for?

Mac: The Equal Group on social media as well so LinkedIn and Twitter. So Twitter is @theequalgroup.

Phil: Fab thank you and I'll put links to all of those in the show notes as well. Alright then Mac is there anything else then, anything else that you're thinking, feeling or want to say before I pull it all together and close?

Mac: Thinking, feeling or want to say? So I guess one of my favourite quotes is from Martin Luther King and it says, "Our lives begin to end the moment we stop talking about things that matter," so that is one of the things that I have held onto say, what is the value of our lives and we need to ensure that we leave a better legacy for the next generation than the one that was left to us.

Phil: Wonderful, well thank you Mac. Thank you very much for your time today, really appreciate it. It has been a really interesting and enjoyable conversation and I will make sure we will put links in the show notes to all of the research and data that we have talked about and also so people can find you if they want to carry on the conversation as well.

Mac: Thank you very much.

Phil: Mac thank you so much for your time today.

Mac: Thank you, thank you for having me today.

You've been listening to the emotion at work podcast, written, edited and presented by Phil Willcox. For more information why not visit our website, <https://www.emotionatwork.co.uk/>. If you enjoyed the podcast why not join the community at <https://www.emotionatwork.co.uk/> where you will find other resources such as videos, blogs, articles, research plus all the previous podcasts. It would be great to hear from you. Thanks for listening.