

Title: Maria Dixon Hall, Becoming Culturally Intelligent
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Transcript

Chris Martin My guest today is Maria Dixon Hall. She runs the Campus Cultural Intelligence initiative at Southern Methodist University. Her work in cultural intelligence differs from the diversity training that's typically done on college campuses and has received a great deal of coverage in national media.

Maria will be one of the speakers at the Second Annual Heterodox Academy Conference, which will be held in New York on June 20th and 21st. For more information on the conference including the program and registration, visit heterodoxacademy.org/conference.

There will be 300 Heterodox Academy members, community leaders, administrators, philanthropists, and students to discuss viewpoint diversity and constructive disagreement.

Hi, Maria. Thanks for joining us on the show.

Maria Dixon Hall: I am so excited to be with you today, Chris.

Chris Martin: So you are directing the Cultural Intelligence Program at SMU. Tell me a bit about what cultural intelligence is.

Maria Dixon Hall: Well, cultural intelligence actually has a long life in academic circles particularly when we were looking at sending Americans abroad to do business as expats in China or other countries that we had not done business with. So, cultural intelligence was really a way of preparing a lot of executives who had only been steeped in American business to succeed in these new opportunities for markets.

What we have done at SMU is we've looked at that original framework and we've said, "What would happen if rather than looking abroad, we look internally to the US?" And so cultural intelligence is really nothing more than managing and communicating effectively across culturally diverse context, which means it's about management, effective communication, and strategizing, recognizing that each person we come to has their unique cultural language.

Chris Martin: So how does this differ from diversity training?

Maria Dixon Hall: Well, diversity training is basically nothing more than a requirement in current business today to make sure that we are managing risk, managing the compliance of individuals to play well together though they may look differently.

I like to say that diversity training is about getting people ready for dealing with different people around the table. That's really all diversity is. And then if you extend that to inclusion, then what inclusion is, is allowing the different people around the table to give their thoughts, their

energies, their strategies and their talents. But we really haven't had a framework that teaches the different people around the table to really work together for a common goal. And that's much different than the diversity training, which is basically HR compliance.

Chris Martin: So cultural intelligence training does give you a sense of what particular cultural traits people from a particular culture have whereas diversity training tends to skip over that. Is that fair?

Maria Dixon Hall: I would say it does. And diversity training is about stereotypes – don't engage in the stereotype. Recognize your biases. And it's almost like handing someone a book saying, "You're getting ready to go to Japan for six weeks." Recognize that they don't speak the same language as you and be respectful. That's diversity training.

Cultural intelligence says, "Let's make sure you understand things about the Japanese culture." Understand the difference between relationships in Japan, the way that dinner is conducted in Japan. What might be offensive that you may not even be aware of? And allowing the Japanese to be your guide rather than some academic.

So what cultural intelligence does is it says, "I'm my own best guide to telling you what are the different languages I speak and you're the best guide to tell me the different languages you speak."

What diversity training says is it says that you only speak one language, typically based on your race or maybe your gender. And cultural intelligence says you are a gamble of languages. It really takes intersectionality to that next level saying that, "Just because I'm an African-American woman doesn't mean that I speak one language. I'm also an adoptive mother. I'm a Gen-Xer. I'm a professor. I'm a member of a clergy. I'm politically moderate. I'm theologically liberal." All of those things create unique languages that if you are not aware of. Knowing one part of my language means you might turn off another part.

Chris Martin: OK. So you've said in some of your talks that people tend to dislike diversity training which is one of the reasons you wanted to move to something else. Have you been looking at whether people like or dislike cultural intelligence programming at SMU to some degree?

Maria Dixon Hall: Well, we have. And that was really important and that was one of the selling points that my president wanted to make sure that we understood was, is this just another – is this just putting it in a different bag and then submitting people to the same thing?

I think one of the things that diversity training has really failed at doing is one, it gives you a lot of diagnoses but it doesn't give you many prescriptions, doesn't give you really any action items. What we have found that people at SMU really enjoy is that they walk away with skills, they walk away with knowledge, and they walk away with the ability to create a strategy.

So I think the thing that I would share with you is our hidden scripts which is our implicit bias version has been booked solid for the last – since end of January. I can't schedule enough sessions. We have faculty, staff, and students, entire schools at our university, our Law School spend a whole running all of their dean and their assistant deans and their professors and their staff but the Business School is doing that actually on Friday. So there has been embraced of cultural intelligence in a way that diversity training simply had not been embraced on this campus.

Chris Martin: So, can you give me examples of something they might learn in that hidden scripts training that they wouldn't learn in that diversity training at another university?

Maria Dixon Hall: I think there are two things. Number one, we really get into what I consider the single story that we've learned to tell about other people. But we use a guiding framework, Chris. The framework is that we all belong to tribes and we really are using the work of Joshua Greene at Harvard in which he says that our tribal identities create our moral realities. And this was really different than diversity training.

Tribes are not bad, and that's the other thing. We belong to a lot of tribes but some tribes are more important than others. And so, what we tell people is that own your tribes. Own the tribes, own the affinities you have for your tribe and also identify the anxiety that some other tribes might bring to you. And understand how those tribes work in the work context, how that plays out in a budget meeting, how that plays out in a search committee meeting. So everything is really practical from that sense.

But one of the other things people leave with is understanding, you don't try to cover every bias, we cover the four biases we see most at the university; affinity bias, halo and devil bias, not made here bias, and blinded spot bias.

What people have said particularly is they are beginning to become really aware of how affinity bias has played into search committee decisions, scholarship committee decisions, promotion decisions. And Chris, that's huge for a university, for people who are making decisions that are deciding the landscape of the university to recognize that it's not always as subjective as we like to make it seem.

Chris Martin: Right. I mean universities do have a long tradition of people hiring people that they know or hiring people by calling up for coffee and saying, "Hey, do you know anyone who is available right now?" And you end up hiring people within your social network so ...

Maria Dixon Hall: Yeah, that's exactly it. But the other thing is we like to say we are hiring them because they are the best. We are hiring – and we use keywords like, "they are such a fit for our department." Well, what makes someone a fit is because they make us feel good. All of us want to work with someone that makes us feel good but that doesn't necessarily mean they are the best person for the job. And what we do is we try to put this out on the table and have people talk about it particularly halo effect and how that impacts promotion, how that impact opportunities, how that impacts the way we even look at our students and talk to our students.

Chris Martin: And by halo effect, are you talking about the fact that a candidate that does one thing really well is perceived as doing several things really well?

Maria Dixon Hall: Almost everything very well. I mean again, in the academy, what we've tended to do is we have those individuals who are star's powers or they are star teachers. And then all of a sudden we say, "They must be star managers."

Now, I'm going to tell you, I think I have great colleagues who teach and write very well but management and teaching and writing are two different things.

The same thing goes for students. We have students who do really well in the classroom and we assume they are ready for leadership. Or, we have students who have excelled in the classroom, who have excelled as student leaders but when they do something wrong, rather than holding them accountable, we make excuses for them and we cuddle them and we say, "You know what? I know that you will never do it again." Rather than holding them to the same standard that we would another student.

So halo effect is one of those things that is universal on a university campus. It impacts every single member of the campus.

Chris Martin: Now, what you are doing in terms of cultural intelligence has some similarity to the multicultural competence training that some educators have to do in the course of their graduate training and some clinical psychologists and counseling psychologists have to do as well. Are you doing those or is there a contrast between what you're doing in those types of programs?

Maria Dixon Hall: Well, what we have done with cultural intelligence at SMU or CIQ at SMU is we pulled from a number of disciplines. So rather than sticking just with the higher education model, we pulled from business, we pulled from sociology, we pulled from theology. So rather than just looking at a singular framework of multicultural education, what we've done is we've expanded that to look at executive. We have expanded that to look at staff-employee relationships.

So we broaden that quite a bit. So yes, it looks similar and it sounds similar because there are elements of it. But I think one of the differences that I would argue that we offer is that we are also talking about creating a framework that just not students and student affairs professionals utilize but also we can utilize in faculty development, that we can utilize in staff development that we can then put into the processes of tenure, promotion, leadership, mentoring, and those things which unfortunately for multicultural education tends to remain silently within student affairs.

Chris Martin: And one of the things that you've done that has received a lot of coverage is the Ask Me Anything survey because it's unique.

Maria Dixon Hall: Yeah.

Chris Martin: And this is where people can literally ask any question they have about people from a certain ethnic group or culture, very bland questions. I'm reading from an article here but some of the questions that have been asked are, why are white people trying to get darker? What's the difference between Koreans Chinese? Why are black women so angry?

Tell me a bit about how that program worked?

Maria Dixon Hall: Well, it worked too well, first of all. But one of the things I recognized is that most times, we are laboring under a fear of asking what we don't know. And I have three kids, Chris. I have a 6, a 7, and a 9-year-old. And I find that they are fearless about asking questions and that's the only way that they know the world. And I realized that when I would correct them and say, "That's not a polite question," what I was taking away from them was a means by which to learn the world that they are in, to get information from the people they needed to get information from so that they didn't make the mistakes that I might make or their father might make.

And so, we brought that to some of my students and I said, "If you could ask anything, what would you ask? And it stunned me what they really wanted to know. And so I said, "Let's try this larger and see what is it our campus wants to know about each other? We walk past each other every day. Without fear, what would you ask?" It has worked extremely well.

And when we got pushback from a lot of external players, from a university across the city, the biggest defenders I had were our students. Our students who said, "This was the first time I got to ask these questions in a safe place."

And so, through all the television coverage, through ending up on Telemundo when you don't speak Spanish to me is still a fantastic opportunity that I never would have expected. But our students depend on this because from this information, we knew how to help create a program that would benefit our university. I'd never say CIQ at SMU the way we do it can work at Georgia Tech or Emory or another school like that because what we've created has been for us. And that's the one message that we would say to any colleague school is that one of the biggest flaws about diversity training is that we continually think we can buy it off the shelf. And [0:15:34] [Indiscernible] for our campuses when it has got to address the needs of your particular campus.

Chris Martin: Speaking of particular campuses, you are in Texas.

Maria Dixon Hall: I am in Texas.

Chris Martin: Yeah, which means you are close to the Mexico border which also means immigration is a hot topic there and it's also a national topic right now. It's very contentious with people in camps being present in camps for very long periods. So that's probably a sensitive

topic on campus right now with liberals and conservatives having different perspectives on that. How are you coping with that?

Maria Dixon Hall: Well, you know honestly, Chris, across the board, there is dismay across both ideologies. And it's how can we participate? How can we make sure that these young children particularly? I think that's one thing that has helped on our campus, is that we are associated with a church, the United Methodist Church, for good or for bad that does help us frame some of these questions. So we are not just taking the political, we also take the theological, we also take the faith traditions of many of our students. And that's what motivates us. So that has allowed us to navigate the waters of immigration quite well.

I will tell you that during election time, particularly the senate race between Beto and Ted Cruz, it did get contentious on our campus. We had a number of speakers who are not necessarily big fans of Beto and we had a number of speakers who were not big fans of Ted Cruz. But what I found was, the faculty, the staff, and the students came to the most important part of cultural intelligence, which was civility, which was being present with our students, reminding them of the values of civility that at the end of the day, yes, we all belong to different tribes but we also belong to a larger tribe of SMU and how are we going to work together after this is over.

So while we have a lot of hot topics and particularly Texas, Texas is just a bed of hot topics. That's because we are so hot during the summer. I'm finding that on our campus, civility reigns. The best way I can say this is that a lot of campuses throughout Texas have had a lot of outside individuals coming to place white nationalism, white supremacists materials on campuses. They usually strike at dawn. Nobody sees them. And we've had it happened to us a number of times.

The most impressive thing I can say is that an individual came on our campus, they tried to do it on fraternity row, fraternity and sorority row where they thought they would get the biggest impact and what they found out was, it was the fraternities and the sororities who have been trained in cultural intelligence, who called the police, they move the fliers, and made sure that individual knew they were no longer welcomed on our campus. That to me are those moments that I know what we are doing is right.

Chris Martin: Right. And I think people have this stereotype of Texas as a conservative state but the urban areas in Texas do tend to be somewhat close to 50/50 liberal-conservative.

Maria Dixon Hall: I think people don't understand this about Texas that we are literally sometimes five or six states within one. So while West Texas is its own state, I mean it's literally the Western United States where there are not people, there are little tumbleweeds crossing the road, that is more of the wild west in the sense of these are folks who are having to defend their territory really on their own. Once you get past Midland in West Texas, there is nothing. No gas station, no anything.

But when you are in Austin, Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, you have really purple cities, if not blue. So this is a state in which we are learning to live in a dual language kind of reality, not just

Spanish and English but we are also a huge capital, particularly Dallas, for [0:20:27] [Indiscernible], for Somalis, for individuals from the Philippines and Korea.

So Dallas and Austin and San Antonio and Houston have had to become global cities. And that global nature is impacting the rest of the state. So we've turned from red to purple to blue just in a matter of an hour or two drive.

Chris Martin: And in terms of being a Methodist University, I mean it's in your name so you can't change that, I supposed you can't change it easily.

Maria Dixon Hall: No.

Chris Martin: How do you deal with the fact that the Methodist Church has certain positions on immigration or gay rights and students may have different positions on those issues?

Maria Dixon Hall: Well, first of all, we tell every student that we are nonsectarian, which means you don't have to be a Methodist to be a member of our university. And as a matter of fact, the largest denomination or faith on our campus is Catholic, which is to the chagrin of our Methodist Bishops often.

But the other thing I would say is that the United Methodist Church is more than our stance on sexuality. I'm a United Methodist clergy member and so no, I have not been pleased with the direction we've gone in but I would say that our standards on immigration, our standards on women's rights, our standards on social justice, health care, those things, align a lot with our student body.

Now, I got to be honest with you, most of our students have no idea with the social principles of the United Methodist Church are. I have to say, there are a lot of United Methodist who don't know what our social principles are. But the one that has gotten the most attention has been the one that passed in February. And I can tell you that our president said unequivocally that we are a campus that affirms our LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff. And that nothing was going to change that.

I think he delivered that message to the church. I think he delivered it students. I think he delivered it to the community that the church's internal mechanisms will work out. But as far as SMU is concerned, it is a place where all most things are valued. And I think that's what we are going to hold to.

Chris Martin: And for our international listeners, can you describe just to be within United Method Church in the United States right now?

Maria Dixon Hall: Well, one of the things that most people don't realize is that this is actually an international debate. It is a debate between the US church and our churches in the Philippines, in the continent of Africa, Russia, and Western Europe. It's how are we going to decide who gets to be members of the clergy? How are we going to move along?

What we have found is that many of our African brothers and sisters, our Russian brothers and sisters, our Filipino brothers and sisters are more reticent or more conservative and that they have created a very natural alliance with our colleagues that are in some of the portions of the south.

Whereas if you were to break it down by US church, we would be probably a much more opening – open, reconciling church. But because we are a global church, we must take into consideration the view of our colleagues across the world. And that’s what happened in February. It was a close vote but it gave everyone voice.

And in democracy as I’m beginning to find out, we love democracy when we win the vote. We hate democracy when we lose the vote.

One thing I love about being a Methodist, Chris, is that we can be reasonable. So we will continue to try to reason this out and figure out what does that mean next? Are we going to be able to stay in fellowship together? Are we going to be able to work across these literally cultural differences?

And that was one thing I really loved about our meeting in February where you saw all of these different cultural languages being spoken, who could speak, who couldn’t. Looking at how leadership was demonstrated by our folks in the Congo versus our folks from Russia and recognizing, and I had one of my students say, “That person is Asian. How can they see they are Russian?” I’m like, “Well, if you think about Eastern Russia, they are Asiatic.” So it was a learning lesson for so many Methodists to recognize the different colors, the different varieties that we come in.

So for our international listeners, what I would say is, this is where the rubber meets the road in terms of globalization of how do we begin to negotiate beyond just our national borders and into the complexities of the way that we see the world, we see each other, and we see our different faiths.

Chris Martin: So moving to a completely different topic now, how do you teach students about cultural characteristics without being accused as stereotyping? I feel like people in the US are pretty sensitive to the issue of stereotyping. It’s hard to even discuss accurate stereotypes whereas in Asia, I think it is pretty accurate that Asian parents, at least right now in this generation, really value academic achievement and put more pressure on their children to be high academic achievers. That might change in a generation or two. But right now, that’s pretty accurate at the same time some people don’t like that stereotype. So whether it comes to that stereotype or other stereotypes, how do you talk about them?

Maria Dixon Hall: One of the things that I think has been important for us to do is we have decided again to take this more as cultural tourism. Now, when I say that, I mean that we are allowing each group to speak to us as to what they think we should know to relate to them. So I don’t try to write our curriculum about Hispanic and Latinos by myself or even being engaged in it. We have students, staff, and faculty who work together from different generations, different

countries within Latin America as well as European Spain and have them help us understand what are important things.

So rather than trying to say, “Well, all Spaniards do this or all Mexicans do this,” we have asked them to say, “If you would give me a 2-minute course of what I need to do not to tick you off, I’d be able to work more effectively with you. What would you say?”

And so by allowing people to tell their own stories has been more effective. We actually had a review of our Asian content last night. One of my students from China disagreed with the way that the entire committee had characterized Taiwan and Hong Kong. Our committee made up of scholars from China, from India, from Japan, from Korea had said China and the countries of Taiwan and Hong Kong. The student from China said, “No, Taiwan is a part of China.” And I said, “Guys, what are we going to do with this because this is a legitimate claim?”

And I think those are the kind of things that we do in our program that may not be done anywhere else is that we allow the community to create the content and to debate it out. So I don’t sit in that room. I allow the individuals who have grown up, who have learned, who have taught, who lived this reality to decide what the story they want to tell me as someone who knows nothing about their culture.

So that’s one way I think we inoculate ourselves from stereotypes because, Chris, as an Asian male, you just told me something that is true. It’s your story. People who typically get emotional about stereotypes are not usually a) the people who are telling the narrative, and b) people who have fallen into stereotypes and don’t want to admit it. That’s what cultural intelligence requires.

Chris Martin: You now have 120 faculty and staff members involved with cultural intelligence which is a lot.

Maria Dixon Hall: Yes.

Chris Martin: So how do you coordinate all of that?

Maria Dixon Hall: Some days with lots of coffee and other adult beverages. But one of the ways we do it is we have editorial chiefs. So I have an editorial chief that oversees the African-American component, the Hispanic component, the Asian and Middle Eastern component, and the white component. So I act as sort of an editor-in-chief and I say, “Here’s the content we need.” I’m able to then put the pedagogical legs around it.

But in order to get that kind of compliance and collaboration, I have to promise my colleagues that I wasn’t going to be calling them every week. That they would have two weeks of intensive work that they had to do and then we would leave them alone for the rest of the semester.

So that’s one. The second thing is, we have now more than 120. We are close to 200 when we add in our train the trainers. And I have great assistance who help me do this. But I think what

has been easy about it is because people have really bought into it and they want to be a part of it.

Probably the more difficult part of managing things is the fact that we are getting more inquiries from other universities and school districts who want to know how we can start this for them. And the thing we tell them is we are saying that we want to make sure we get it right before we send it out to anyone else. And so, we are on a slow trajectory. We are now in year 3. We are going to year 7 because we are going to test and retest and evaluate.

I think the other problem with diversity training has been people put together a group of slides, a couple of books and say, “Hey! We are ready.” And nobody has tested. Nobody has evaluated. We want to do this right because we think if we do it right, we can have better conversations on our campus.

So managing all those different people is one, a pleasure, two, I learn a lot, and three, it creates buy-in. It creates buy-in at a level that I think most diversity programs on campus don’t get because usually most diversity programs are done by four or five people who nothing about the rest of the people. They’ve read it in books but they have not allowed the people to speak for themselves.

Chris Martin: Well, thank you for joining us on the show. It has been great having you. And all the best with the work you are doing at SMU.

Maria Dixon Hall: Hey, Chris. Thank you. Thank you for what you are doing. Thank you from what the academy is doing for those of us who believe new point diversity. And I hope you have a great day.

Chris Martin: Thank you. Thank you very much.

My next guest on Half Hour of Heterodoxy will be political philosopher, Teresa Bejan, author of the 2017 book, *Mere Civility: Disagreement and the Limits of Toleration*. Teresa is an Associate Professor of Political Theory at the University of Oxford.

After that, we will have Angie Maxwell, political scientist and director of the Diane D. Blair Center of Southern Politics and Society and professor at the University of Arkansas. Her upcoming book is *The Long Southern Strategy: How Chasing White Voters in the South Changed American Politics*. The book is co-authored by Todd Shields.

If you enjoyed the show, please leave us a review on iTunes. It helps other people find out about the show. As always, you can email me at Podcast@HeterodoxAcademy.org. And you can find me on Twitter @ChrisMartin76. Thanks for listening.

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