



Pardon me, but do you mind if I take offence?

Speaking as a true Canadian who is likely to apologize to you for having run over my foot in your vintage Renault Le Car, I was wondering if I could, perhaps, just this once, get something off my chest.

No, it's not about the vehicular mishap. Hell, that could happen to anyone who's driving whilst texting his girlfriend about the dog poop his boss made him scoop in a morning meeting with an irate client.

I'm talking about the way you look. I don't like it. I thought you should know.

I wasn't going to say anything; just keep my opinions to myself, as usual. But Quebec Premier Pauline Marois and her "charter of values" have put wings to my tongue, and I now feel more certain than ever that you, my friend, are entitled to my opinion.

That's right, I'm talking to you over there in the corner of the sidewalk café where you're holding court with all your other hipster friends, where you look like brothers from another planet – like idiots, if you want to know what I think (and you should).

What is it with the skinny jeans and jeggings? Why the Gap-wear t-shirts and rolled sleeves? Do you think you're fooling anyone with the tats, the piercings, and the phosphorescent orange sneakers? Don't you know that that pork pie hat you're sporting is an offence to common, sartorial decency? And me?

My biggest problem with the way you look is, quite simply, you don't look like me, a 53-year-old, white guy who obsessively checks his belly-line as he strolls past the plate-glass windows of the world. You're too lean, too young, too underemployed, too demonstrably "internish" to take seriously.

What do you know? Do you even vote?

I do, and if I lived in Quebec and could trace my roots back to generations to some landed farm folk with a predilection for xenophobia, I'd vote *Partis Québécois* in the next provincial election. I'm no fonder of strangers in a strange land than it is.

Come to think of it, now that we're talking honestly, you're not the only type of character who offends me by the sheer look of him.

Tell your ethnically diverse pals to leave their religious symbols and articles of faith at home where they belong.



I don't much like clowns or mimes or bikers. When I meet a jogger on the street, I want to run a mile in the opposite direction. Cops make me nervous. Firefighters give me the willies. Beauty queens leave me cold. Talk-show hosts render me queasy. All except Oprah. She makes me physically ill.

I guess the point I'm trying to make is that we'd all be better off if we took every possible labour to look exactly like one another, to embrace conformity as a social good, and park our individual identities at the doorstep of the nanny state.

Imagine what a world that would be.

No more annoying diversity in the workplace. No more vexing Mardi Gras. No more folk singers or punk bands or heavy metal caterwauls. No more races or religions. No more creeds or colours of any kind. Only one, big, thick soup of human neutrality – a tad bland, for sure, but admirably inoffensive.

And, as studies show, the more we look alike, the less likely we are to think differently about anything. About science, poetry, literature, philosophy, economics. About communities, small businesses, poverty, entrepreneurship. About hope, faith, charity. About ourselves and our place in a suddenly explicable, unchallenging, unexceptional cosmos. About democracy.

We will want for nothing, because precisely nothing will occur to us when we are all the same.

So, hipster dude, maybe you can see my point. For the good of all of us, tear a page from Pauline Marois' charter of values and get with the program. Lose the hat, the earrings and the attitude. Get yourself a grey flannel suit and cover that ink.

While, you're at it, tell your ethnically diverse pals to leave their religious symbols and articles of faith at home where they belong.

In short, stop offending us before you regret your callous comportment.

After all, are we not all brothers under the sun, even though some of us may be bigger than others? | ABM

The views expressed in this column are those of the author and not necessarily those of Atlantic Business Magazine. Feedback: dchafe@atlanticbusinessmagazine.com