



**Go Beyond Being an Ally.  
Be an Accomplice.**

Cynthia Sharpe  
Principal, Cultural Attractions + Research Thinkwell Group  
csharpe@thinkwellgroup.com • she/her

I didn't say this because others had (thanks y'all!). If you are speaking at a conference and no one has done so, take some time to thank all the labor that goes into these things. Not just the organizing entity and 'face of' the conference, though they do yeoman's work, but all that back of house, unseen or unremarked upon labor that goes into this. The venue staff - food service, janitorial, maintenance - the volunteers, etc.

Hello everyone! I am Cynthia Sharpe, my pronouns are she/her/hers, I'm Principal at Thinkwell for Cultural Attractions and Research, Co-Founder of Harriet B's Daughters, and....

I am  
**racist**



I am  
**sexist**



I am  
**ableist**



I am  
**classist**



I am  
**transphobic**



I am  
**homophobic**



I am  
**anti-Muslim**





I am  
**anti-Semitic**





I am  
**biased**



I am all of these things not because I am a Snidely Whiplash, mustache twirling villain, but because I have gotten these messages from media and culture from the moment I was born. The boundary breaking representation of Black Panther and Crazy Rich Asians was only *last* year. The media I saw, the hero's a white guy, and the brother always gets it. The Latino guy is the drug dealer, the Muslim is the Terrorist, the woman is the virgin or the whore and posed for the male gaze. The person with disabilities is to be pitied or is an inspiration, the queer guy is the creepy serial killer. I was bathed in it. We live in a culture which is racist. Which is sexist. Which is biased against all kinds of identities. So I have *unconscious or implicit bias*.



**And so are you.**




And the truth is, so are you.

## We all have unconscious bias

It is crucial that we recognize how we have been conditioned to embrace these horrible norms and work to combat it in ourselves.



Unconscious bias. It's pernicious. It's the social learnings and norms we've been steeped in, that drive how we unconsciously react to difference. There's amazing research out there from a variety of angles - of how the exact same resume with a female or "POC" name is ranked lower than one that has a seemingly 'white male' name. Of how we impart 'bad' emotional intent to black faces vs white. Of how people with obvious physical differences are treated. Of how four year old black boys in preschool are more likely to be disciplined for behavior than their white counterparts, and by middle school black girls are suspended 6 times more frequently than their white counterparts. In Germany, where it is not uncommon to include a headshot with a resume, an experiment showed a woman with a white name would get called for an interview 19% of the time; same resume, same picture, Turkish Muslim name, that drops to 11%; same resume, same Turkish Muslim name, but now the same woman is wearing a hijab? 4% We are culturally steeped in this. We're not forever doomed to be bad people for that, but if we refuse to admit we have these unconscious biases and work to counter them, then perpetuate the problem. We have to do the internal work alongside the external work of allyship and accomplicehood.



**The system is broken**  
And it is long past time that majority  
culture members do the work to fix it.



This is bad. It's bad for moral and ethical reasons. And it's bad, to be a cold hard capitalist, for financial reasons, which you heard earlier. Companies which have higher diversity scores see 45% average innovation revenue- rev tied to new or revamped offerings - vs 26% for companies with below average diversity scores, thank you world economic forum. We're in the business of engaging the public. And that public is huge - 850M visits to museums in the US alone, 7% of the world's population to theme parks run by the 10 largest operators? The opportunity for us to move the needle with that kind of exposure is enormous. And that public IS DIVERSE.

*Dear privileged folks:*  
You're going to screw this up.

**Repeatedly.**



So what can you do? What SHOULD you do? First, know that you are going to screw up on this journey. I have screwed this up. Repeatedly. I have been blind to my privilege. I have failed to use it to help others. I have been blissfully unaware of the challenges friends and colleagues faced, or been slow to help if at all. I designed some bad exhibits. When I championed girls in stem, there was probably a trans or nonbinary kid who no longer saw a place for themselves. I have gotten it very, very wrong. I can't fix the past. I can't build a time machine. I can only go 'oh shit, I really screwed that up, what could I have done differently, and apply those lessons going forward. You can do this too. You NEED to do this.. Learn to be uncomfortable, dissect why you are uncomfortable. And be ready to listen and apologize.

## Privilege and Intersectionality

**Privilege** is a set of benefits conferred on someone because of their social group(s) or identity/ies. And privilege shifts depending on context.

**Intersectionality** is “the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups.” (Merriam-Webster)



I'm white, middle-class, college educated – I am soaking in privilege. But I am also bisexual, female, Jewish – and there are spaces where any or all of those things are *not* privileged. You are not one lone identity. You contain multitudes. Some of your identity is visible - you look at me, I code as 'female'. But you don't necessarily see my sexual identity or my religion. But identity - and privilege and its opposing state, oppression or marginalization - don't exist in isolated facets.

You may have heard the term intersectionality, coined by law professor and and social theorist Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989 in a paper for the University of Chicago Law Review. As a theory, it's rooted in earlier work by black feminists. A black woman does not get to take off the mantle of being black and experience sexism the same way I, a white woman, do. Similarly, she does not get to take off the mantle of being a woman when facing racism or engaging in racial social justice work.

It is crucial that we recognize inequity shifts depending on context AND is not experienced the same way by all members of a single identity group. Inequity hits those of multiple oppressed identities harder.

## OK, so, what's an ally?

An ally:

- Stands **with** an individual or group that is marginalized
- Focuses on helping **people** and on the individual/group
- Examples of allyship in the workplace may sound familiar to you



Allyship is something you've probably heard about, or read examples of 'how to be an ally' over the past few years. Examples of allyship include amplifying others' voices, speaking up when you witness behavior or speech that is racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, ableist, etc.



## What's an accomplice?

The Latin root **com** means with or together.

An **accomplice**:

- Works with marginalized or oppressed groups to effect systemic change
- Uses their privilege to create and hold space *for others*
- Stands to lose in this equation



If Allyship is rooted in a nearly 1:1 relationship (I want to help *you*), Accomplicehood is rooted in working *with* others to dismantle systems of oppression.

An **ally** is for the **here and now**.

An **accomplice** is playing the  
**long game**.



## It's not binary\*. It's a spectrum.

Your day to day interactions are a great opportunity to be an ally and set the table for change.

When you have the ability to affect systemic change, it is imperative to utilize an accomplice mentality.

\*Just like sex and gender. Oh yes, I went there. Don't @me. Gender is informed by social and cultural norms and our personal identification (or lack thereof) with those norms. And If you really want to throw down about whether or not biological sex is binary, #1, please remember I'm a human geneticist by training and I quite literally taught medical genetics at one of the top medical schools in the U.S., and #2, find me at the bar later. You're buying.



Opportunities to be an ally, an accomplice, or both occur more frequently than you think - this is a mindset change you need to engage in. It is a modality of not simply taking at face value, but asking yourself: by making this choice - design choice, resource allocation choice, narrative choice - who am I welcoming and supporting. Who am I communicating 'this isn't for you' to? If I read a narrative if I can only see my white neighbors with their two charming children and their adorable lab puppy in that described experience, I know it's not inclusive. If I look at a design and can tell that anyone with a mobility disorder is going to have a heck of a time getting to a bathroom easily, I know it can do better. It's a shift in mental approach, and you're not going to get it right all the time - which is why it's so important you not be alone in this effort in your workplace. The collective you can catch and check each other.

Let's consider three buckets

- How we recruit and hire (where, who, portfolios, interviews)
- How we treat people (policies, culture)
- How we work and what we make (design standards, project parameters)



## How we recruit and hire – Allyship

### C-suite/Exec:

Hiring a search firm with a commitment to inclusion and diversity for a key hire.



- We've all done it. We have a key hire to make and go 'who do we know who'd be good and might be available'. But that makes an echo chamber.

How we recruit and hire – Allyship

**Middle Management:**

Making sure the interview panel for a position is inclusive.



- If you're assembling that portfolio review or interview panel, make sure not everyone looks the same, thinks the same.

How we recruit and hire – Allyship

**Entry Level/Junior:**

When your company posts a job opening, sharing it on as many platforms and affinity groups as possible.



- Share those job postings, y'all!

How we recruit and hire – **Accomplicehood**

**C-suite/Exec:**

Setting diversity targets, discussing them publicly and annually, holding yourself and company accountable; instituting diversity hiring pool/candidate requirements



- But all of those things hinge on the action of an individual. You leave, and that mindful D&I approach may disappear. So how do we change the SYSTEM?
- Execs - institute that Rooney Rule!



How we recruit and hire – **Accomplicehood**

**Middle Management:**

Unconscious bias training for all team members involved in resume and portfolio reviews + interviews.



- In a perfect world, everyone in the company has unconscious bias training. But budgets are a reality - it's imperative those in management and interview roles get it.

How we recruit and hire – **Accomplicehood**  
**Entry Level/Junior:**

If you have contacts with a university career office or emerging talent affinity groups that are highly diverse, provide those contacts to HR for recruiting and also send postings to those groups.



- If you went to college, get that career office in direct contact with your recruiting team. Take yourself out of the equation.

How we treat people – **Allyship**  
C-suite/Exec: Model trans-inclusive language, refuse to speak on non-inclusive panels, reinforce your institutional and personal D&I values in your public statements



If you're an exec, you are modeling. All the time. In everything you say, across every platform - internal comms, pr, presentations.

## How we treat people – Allyship

**Middle Management:** Make sure someone isn't the 'only' on a team, invite junior staffers to 'sit at the table', rotate note-taking duties, model behavior, believe victims



Please don't make someone the only on a team - the only woman, the only POC. And if for some reason there's no way around that, NEVER EVER ask them to speak for everyone of their group.

## How we treat people – Allyship

**Entry Level/Junior:** Amplify each other's voices in meetings, do the work of educating yourself, share materials as appropriate to help others learn



Y'all are the ones we often look to for the receipts - you are closer to current theory and education, and so leverage that.

## How we treat people – **Accomplicehood**

C-suite/Exec: Regular company-wide salary equity reviews, review of employee handbook for inclusive policies, mandatory 'living wage' policy; establishment and funding of cross-departmental, cross-hierarchy D&I task force with empowered exec advocate



Again, how to we change the system tho? Two of the biggest things you can do: salary and equity review, and a comprehensive overhaul of your handbook - dedicate the resources to it,

How we treat people – **Accomplicehood**

**Middle Management:** Transparency  
policy in professional development  
opportunities and allocations



One of the biggest factors in career advancement is access to professional development and how someone is resourced onto projects.

How we treat people – **Accomplicehood**

**Entry Level/Junior:** When you notice an inequitable policy or one which is an opportunity for improvement, ask about it (politely)



You are the ones who are actually reading the handbook. When you see something, say something.



How we work, what we make – Allyship  
C-suite/Exec: Model not working on  
vacation, review major project proposals  
for 'unreasonable' staffing models  
or demands



When you work on vacation you are telling your employees their time is not valuable and you do not respect it. Stop it. Stop it now.

And if that project you really want at the budget the client wants necessitates killing your staff? Think real long and hard about alternative ways to tackle it.

How we work, what we make – Allyship

**Middle Management:** Review creative materials through the 'diversity' lens, advocate to superiors for humane staffing models



The work is crossing your desks - the narratives, the drawings. View them through a diversity lens. If all the art features white heterosexual couples with 2 kids, the boy's into science and the girl's into crafts, that's a problem.

How we work, what we make – **Allyship**  
**Entry Level/Junior:** Educate yourself on how to represent various populations in art and narrative, read up on inclusive design, ask up front about schedules and hours



You're the ones actually producing a lot of the work - this is an opportunity.

## How we work, what we make – **Accomplicehood**

**C-suite/Exec:** Ask who is/isn't included in project development, ideation, and pitching; champion and actively promote examples of inclusion in design and ops planning; provide professional development and resources to staff to encourage inclusion as a matter of policy; don't reward bad actors



Are you seeing the same people pitching to you from your teams? I guarantee they did not do ALL the work. Ask who else did. Learn their names. Let them sit in when possible! Get them exposure to how this works. Make this POLICY. And If you have a genius on your team who is abusive, racist, sexist, homophobic, whatever - I guarantee they are not so critical that you cannot survive without them. Don't reward bad actors. And if you have a client that has been abusive to your team? Escalate. Don't just chase after the next contract with them and continue to subject your people to abuse.

How we work, what we make – **Accomplicehood**  
**Middle Management:** Incorporate  
inclusive representation into department  
standards and training materials (eg,  
art, narratives, planning); model swift  
intervention



If you make inclusive rep the standard, then you will not have to be the only eye on this.

How we work, what we make – **Accomplicehood**

**Entry Level/Junior:** Pointedly  
choose POC, differently abled, non-  
native speakers, LGBTQIA+ for play  
testing and focus groups, hold your  
peers accountable



## More Routes to Accomplishment

- Review your health care plans and family leave policies for queer-inclusion, including partner benefits, IVF coverage without 'failure to conceive naturally', and costs associated with transitioning.
- Review your health care plans for coverage for durable medical equipment, costs associated with cognitive or physical differences.
- Paid family leave, and not just for moms. Include adoption and fostering.
- Establish a policy on PTO and team resourcing w/r/t observances of non-Christian holidays.
- Incorporate pronouns, non-legal names into HR onboarding/announcements, roll out across systems.



There is so much more you can do. Reminder- this whole thing will be posted at both the Thinkwell website and on the Harriet B's Daughters website. Some of these systemic changes cost money. Some cost more money than others. Some of these are exec level strategic projects to mandate, fund, and champion. Others, the change can come from in the trenches. If you're an HR person and your HR software forces a gender binary, talk to your software vendor. Flag the issue internally, too.

## And more...

- Ensure any 'family related' language in handbook or employee materials is not heteronormative or assumes parent-child relationships only.
- Review your relocation policy for 'punishment' of trailing spouse (placing their career secondary, not counting work time overseas towards advancement).
- Create a race, school, and gender-blind resume review process.
- Review educational level requirements and 'mandatory' physical skills on job postings and promotion standards.
- Have clear, alternative paths to advancement that don't hinge on not having a maternity/paternity leave interrupting service or field placement.



Lots of change comes from the trenches of how people get in the door in the first place - the people writing those job postings, developing the review and interview process. Systemic change doesn't have to come from the corner office - in fact, frequently, it DOESN'T.



## And still yet more...

- Ensure uniforms are available in a wide range of sizes. Contract with uniform vendors who have adaptive clothing options.
- Review your handbook for discriminatory policies regarding hair, tattoos, piercings, and head coverings.
- Do you still have a policy in some long buried handbook mandating hose, heels, or skirts for women? Nuke that from orbit.
- Hire an accessibility consultant to do a staff training on inclusive design and the impact of exclusion or a site-walk to identify areas of improvement and successes.
- Have gender neutral bathroom options in your workplace.




There is obviously employment law about a number of these things. I am obviously not advocating that you do something illegal, but what I AM saying is, just because it is legal, for instance, to require women to wear makeup for work (Jesepersen V Harrahs, 2002) doesn't mean it's the inclusive thing to do. The legal bare minimum, as in the case of victims of domestic violence leave in California, isn't necessarily the humane thing.

If you read  
only 1 thing

Make it be this:  
**So You Want to  
Talk About Race,**  
*by Ijeoma Oluo*



Not because I think race is the only issue at play, far from it. But because this book does a phenomenal job of explaining unconscious bias, discussing its effects, addressing intersectionality, and providing a frank, unflinching path for not only what you can and should do, but also how to handle when you screw up. This book is transformative, and if it's the thing you pick up and read next, it will not be the last thing you read on the subject. There is a new edition as of September 2019 with a discussion guide - buy that version, blue cover



I tell my students, 'When you get these jobs that you have been so brilliantly trained for, just remember that your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else. This is not just a grab-bag candy game. - Toni Morrison



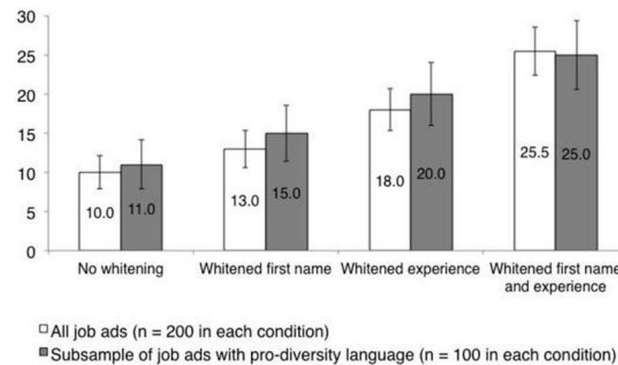
If you are in this room, you have power. Whether you are a next gen on scholarship or a 65 year old exec with several theme parks under their belt. You have power. You need to use your power to reach back and lift someone without power up.

Join me, in allyship AND accomplicehood. Thank you.

# Backup Data

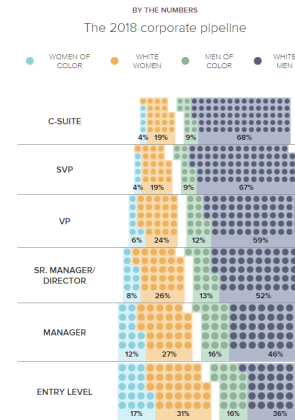


## Minority job seekers increase their callbacks if they 'whiten' their resumes.



This data is from a study conducted by researchers at Harvard Business School. Unconscious bias is a problem in hiring, full stop. Job candidates of color who 'whitened' their name, their experience, or both, had statistically significant increases in the number of callbacks they received in response to their job applications.

## The pipeline gets increasingly white and male higher up –McKinsey, 2018



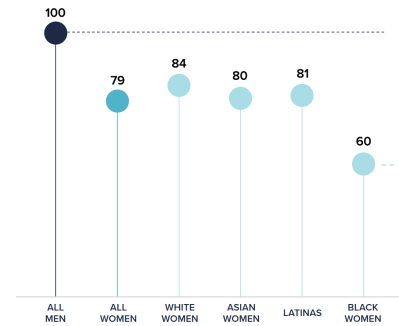
And once you're in the door, it's not smooth sailing. McKinsey's 2018 report on workplace diversity. And please allow me to take a moment and apologize: the data is far, far more robust when we look at men v women gender breakdown, due in large part to federally mandated reporting requirements and forms for companies above a certain size that historically have only those options on tickboxes. Gender-nonconforming, genderqueer, and transpeople face a narrowing pipeline as well.

# Black women are the least likely to be promoted to a managerial level.

WOMEN ARE FAR LESS LIKELY TO BE PROMOTED TO MANAGER

RATIO OF PROMOTIONS TO MANAGER FOR MEN VS. WOMEN

MEN WOMEN



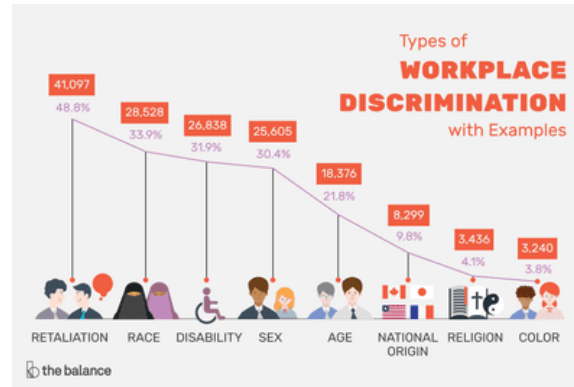
The disparity in the promotion rate to manager is even worse for women of color. Most notably, for every 100 men who are promoted to manager, just 60 Black women are promoted.



McKinsey and Lean in, 2018. The researchers surveyed 279 companies employing more than 13 million people and talked to 64,000 employees on their workplace experiences. More than 90 percent of the companies polled said prioritizing gender and racial diversity leads to better business results. Yet only 42 percent of employees surveyed said they see gender diversity as a company priority and only 22 percent see racial diversity as a company priority. 40 percent of black women have had their judgment questioned in their area of expertise; 27 percent of men have.

- Only 35 percent of black women said their manager promotes their contributions to others; 46 percent of men said their manager does.
- 41 percent of black women said they never have a substantive interaction with a senior leader about their work; just 27 percent of men said that.

## Percentage of EEOC complaints by type for 2017



Note that the number of complaints made does not reflect the aggregate number of discrimination events of that type: it's what people were comfortable reporting.