

SMPTE Meeting Presentation

Why Diversity Programs Fail – And How to Fix Them

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Abstract. *In recent years there has been a rise in diversity initiatives throughout the entertainment and STEM industries in response to mounting criticism. While college programs have been found to represent the general population well in terms of diversity, that drops off sharply after graduation, and our industry becomes largely homogenous in top-tier positions. Many initiatives are struggling to make a meaningful impact, especially when it comes to changing the face of our industry's above-the-line professionals. This is because from entry-level through the development of top talent, the established system favors a narrow range of individuals who have fewer barriers to opportunity.*

This established system can easily be changed without major disruption. Having studied the efforts and impact of current programs, it is apparent that many tend to approach the issue backwards, addressing barriers from top down instead of from the bottom up. Through case studies and the application of research and theory, we will present analysis of current trends in diversity programs

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such as those offered by networks and studios for minority writers and directors. We'll offer practical adjustments, considerations and solutions to significantly improve the effectiveness of investments in diversity by companies and organizations across the film and television industry.

Those reading the paper or attending the session will have tangible, actionable takeaways they can implement within their organization right away. Rather than scold, this session is meant to educate and lead decision makers and influencers toward more effective uses of time and money spent on diversity, shifting the goal toward inclusiveness.

Keywords. Diversity; Women; People of color; Inclusiveness; Diversity programs

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Introduction

Over the last decade, there has been an increased focus on “diversity programs” across the entertainment industry, intersecting with science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) related fields. Research and media coverage has emerged that shines a light on the lack of women and people of color in these industries, with each study and article attempting to provide explanations for the phenomenon. Driven by assumptions of the baseline interest of minority groups in STEM and leadership, and hard science on implicit bias, programs emerged that sought to close the vast diversity gap.

However, in the years since these programs emerged, there has been no significant change in the representation of women and people of color in Hollywood’s creative or technical roles. While public perception of diversity has become more favorable and college programs are inclusive with well-represented communities, there has been no improvement in the professional landscape when compared to twenty years ago.

These diversity programs fail because they’re focused on the symptoms and not the disease. There is a lack of diversity at the top because there are in fact fewer minorities with the qualifications and experience required for those positions, and the minorities who are qualified are overlooked or leave the industry by mid-career.¹ The drive to success in this industry is fueled by privilege, and the more you have the further you are able to travel upward. The greatest barriers to inclusivity lie right at the starting line in the first five years of a career.

Instead of creating diversity programs, we must consider these barriers and take active steps to reducing them – and not just on visible, “above-the-line” roles, but on every type of job. Focusing on inclusive work environments will let more people through and allow more natural talent to thrive. We seek to make practical recommendations and provide realistic considerations for the evolution of more effective diversity programs in entertainment engineering.

The Diversity Gap Defined

First, it’s important to understand the diversity gap as it exists today. In technical roles across the entertainment industry, this gap can be explored by combining data on the broad STEM and media industries. The numbers paint a clear picture that there is indeed a much larger

¹ Scott, A., Klein, F., Onovakpuri, U., (2017) “Tech Leavers Study” The Kapor Center for Social Impact

proportion of white men in these professional positions than women and people of color, here in the US.

The diversity gap is well-documented by researchers at San Diego State University, USC, and UCLA, among many others. An estimated 20% of engineering graduates are women,² and 6% of undergraduates are black men,³ but they make up a mere 11% and 3% of engineering professionals respectively.

In 2014, the number of black graduates from prestigious undergraduate computer science and engineering programs was 4.5%, while Silicon Valley tech companies employed just 2%.⁴

In television, film, and media programs, women typically make up around 50% of graduates, but women are highest represented in picture editing at 18%, with other below-the-line crew such as engineers, camera operators and audio technicians dropping steadily beyond that.⁵

Women made up over 35% of programmers before 1984, dropping sharply to 18% in the following years.⁶ Women dominated film editing at the beginning of Hollywood before being effectively forced out when sound and picture were brought together.⁷

Hispanic, African-American, and Native American individuals comprise only 10% of STEM jobs in the US, even though these groups combined represent over 26% of the general population.⁸ This has improved only 3 percentage points in nearly thirty years of recorded data.

Upon seeing this gap and the controversy around it, studios and large corporations put together diversity teams and task forces to create programs that would place “diverse individuals” into the pipeline. Programs such as the Disney Directing Program, CBS Writer’s Program, and HBO

² According to the Society of Women Engineers.

³ As reported by the National Science Foundation in 2012. This number hasn’t changed since 2002.

⁴ A USA Today analysis reported the numbers in response to commentary that the low employment numbers were a result of a shortage of men of color.

⁵ The Celluloid Ceiling report by San Diego State University Center for Women in Television in Film reports numbers on women in top films each year, with little change since data was first collected in the early 1990s.

⁶ A Planet Money report on NPR compiled data from the National Science Foundation, suggesting the sudden dip in sharp comparison to law school, medical school, and physical sciences may be related to the emergence of personal computers in the home -- which were entirely marketed as toys for boys.

⁷ Cutting Women, an essay by Kristen Hatch, explores the dominance of early film by women and suggests these women were forced out once the field became perceived as technical and valuable: when sound and awards became popular.

⁸ Compiled research from the 2014 “Science and Engineering Indicators” report by the National Science Board.

All Access sought to find talented individuals and provide them training and skills that would in theory allow them to be successful behind the camera or in the writers' room.⁹

Many of these programs focus on above-the-line creative roles in the entertainment industry, such as directors, writers, and producers. They often have an entry fee, require a significant time commitment, and provide neither reimbursement for travel nor stipend for living expenses. Few individuals are selected to take part, and these exclusive programs typically provide only a short contract at the conclusion, if any employment is offered at all.

After at least a decade with active programs like these, a few people have emerged as notable successes who might not have otherwise made it to the top. However, these programs have not moved the statistics. Overall, the number of women and minorities at the intersection of entertainment and engineering is still low and largely unchanged. As Josh Welsh of Film Independent states, "if we're honest with ourselves, we have to realize there are a lot of well-meaning programs out there that are not having an impact".¹⁰

What *has* changed is the public perception of the diversity and inclusion crisis across these fields. Anecdotally, if you walk into a room of people and ask them what they think about diversity in Hollywood, most of them will probably tell you they think it's been largely resolved or it's on the right track. Many will cite the presence of a handful of minorities in their workplaces as a win for underrepresented people, but few acknowledge any systemic issues in the industry.

Misconceptions and Implicit Bias

Some infer that minority groups who aren't already present in STEM and entertainment jobs are simply not interested or suited for the roles. The data available on the disparity between college graduates and full-time employees¹¹ begins to create a more logical picture in which pieces of a systemic, implicit bias emerge to tell the whole story. To fully understand why diversity programs fail and how to fix them, it is necessary to understand that this pervasive bias exists and how it influences our thoughts and actions.

⁹ We also explored Film Independent's Project Involve, NBC Writers on the Verge, American Cinema Editors Internship program, Sundance Institute Fellowships, TriBeCa All Access, Universal Emerging Writers, Warner Brothers Director Workshop, Reel Grrls, and SMPTE/HPA's Young Entertainment Professionals program.

¹⁰ <http://www.indiewire.com/2016/07/diversity-film-industry-initiatives-1201703197/>

¹¹ According to a wide spectrum of news outlets reporting across entertainment and STEM including MTV News, San Diego State University, the National Science Board, National Science Foundation, Society of Women Engineers, and reports from leading schools.

An implicit bias cannot be explored through simple self-introspection and discussion. Rather, it is as defined by Ohio State University's Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity "the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner." Through factors such as locally developed societal expectations, the political leanings of our parents, or what we've come to believe through social interactions during key points in our development, subconscious biases exist in all of us that may not reflect our self-defined personal views. These biases are present in all people to some extent, by nature of how our society is constructed. Some biases exist because of cultural stereotypes, while many others remain long after stereotypes have gone away.

Many studies have proven how these inherent biases affect the ability of women and people of color to find and maintain a foothold in technical jobs, starting from early childhood education. A 2016 study by the Yale Child Study Center showed that when preschool teachers were told to watch a video to look for potential aggressive behavior, their tracked eye movements lingered longer on black children even though none of the children were actually aggressive. A selection of teachers were also given a behavior report of an aggressive child attached to either stereotypically black or white names. While the reports were otherwise identical, teachers who had the report attached to a "black name" were more likely to prescribe harsher punishment.

Data scientist Seth Stephens-Davidowitz cites that parents are two and a half times more likely to Google "is my son gifted" than "is my daughter gifted." This is despite the fact that in early education, girls are 11% more likely to be in gifted programs and score higher in tests for math and science than boys.¹² Parents were more concerned about the intelligence of their young sons than their daughters across several of these big-data studies. The concerns parents have about their daughters are twice as likely to be about appearance or weight.

Meanwhile, gender gaps in math and science increase during elementary school. Most first-graders rate themselves as good at all subjects when asked. By age 10, despite actual performance, girls consider themselves bad at math and science while boys are more likely to consider themselves good – even if they're failing.¹³

A global study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) of 15 year olds in 2012 showed that despite girls performing at an equal or higher level to boys in solving mathematical problems, when asked whether they *thought they could*, girls were much more likely to report that they would struggle. The margin expanded even more when the math problems were presented alongside stereotypically gendered roles such as calculating the gas consumption of a car, as opposed to abstract equations.

¹² Eccles, J. S. (1999). The Development of Children Ages 6 to 14. *The Future of Children*, 9(2), 30.

¹³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/19/opinion/sunday/google-tell-me-is-my-son-a-genius.html>

This same study also accounts for more than gender: it measures for minorities and disadvantaged communities. In these results, the self-reported perceived ability and participation by young people in mathematics is shown to drop, on average, around 25-30% for disadvantaged students regardless of actual performance in tests. Country-related cultural biases between the sexes correlate to these trends, putting girls with other disadvantages such as being part of a racial minority or below-average socio-economic position behind in confidence, encouragement and enjoyment of mathematics and STEM regardless of ability from an early age.

That is why programs like Girls Who Code and Black Girls Code are important. They aim to counteract some of the systemic cultural biases that begin at childhood. Unfortunately, we often see that later in life that programs have changed focus and are less effective. While early programs encourage children to be whatever they want to be – astronauts, doctors, nuclear physicists – by the start of college, individuals are being funneled into fulfilling a role based on biased expectations of race and gender combined with societal, intellectual, or other expectations. In other words, the environments they are allowed to enter as children are no longer welcoming as adults.

The importance of continued focused programs to support the transition into adulthood can be seen in historically black college programs. Compared to majority white colleges who serve some underrepresented minorities, the historically black colleges have a disproportionately higher rate of STEM graduates through focused programs. For example, in 2008 blacks represented 12% of the population but earned just 9% of STEM bachelors degrees. Despite low resources and small endowments, historically black colleges contributed nearly 20% of the 9% of total graduates. One study of many of these programs showed that a main difference in strategic approach for black colleges was to acknowledge and eliminate systemic cultural biases and barriers rather than forcing students to assimilate.¹⁴

Similarly, studies have shown that while the computing gap widens for girls in high school, those who are taught by women are more likely to pursue computer science as a career by the same virtue of the inherent removal of bias and obstacles.¹⁵ Similarly, racial minority or lower socio-

¹⁴ Whittaker, Joseph A., and Beronda L. Montgomery. "Cultivating Diversity and Competency in STEM: Challenges and Remedies for Removing Virtual Barriers to Constructing Diverse Higher Education Communities of Success." US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health, October 15, 2012.

¹⁵ By Accenture and Girls Who Code: <https://www.usnews.com/news/data-mine/articles/2016-10-20/study-computer-science-gender-gap-widens-despite-increase-in-jobs>

economic students are more likely to pursue and succeed in STEM careers if they have supportive communities, teachers and mentors with similar backgrounds.¹⁶

While there are some programs in place before high school that are working for underrepresented groups, it seems the interest is lost in maintaining focus on these proven strategies as individuals move into their early careers.

Implicit bias learned in childhood continues to thrive throughout higher education. A 2015 study of over 6000 faculty members across the US showed that traditionally white male names were most likely to get a response upon requesting a meeting to discuss research opportunities and graduate studies, while Asian female names were least likely to get a response even though the letter sent to each faculty person was otherwise identical.¹⁷ In another similar study, the National Bureau of Economic Research showed that people with “black-sounding” names had to send 50% more resumes to get one call-back from an employer. And a 2014 study on how implicit bias directly contributes to the gender gap in STEM shows that male candidates have twice the advantage over female candidates of equal ability.¹⁸

An August 2017 report on the gender wage gap found no noticeable correlation between commonly-cited reasons such as productivity, ability, the job market, motivation or bargaining power, and workplace gender disparity. The only explanatory factor found across this ten-year, pan-industry study is what the researchers refer to as “taste discrimination” – hiring managers chose to value men more than women based on stereotypes and implicit or explicit bias.¹⁹

When current diversity programs announce new initiatives or successful graduates, they’re met with celebratory press coverage. This uplifting media reporting drowns out the reality of actual downward trends for employment. This phenomenon can also be seen in how we perceive women and people of color in other spaces where they have not previously been present. One way this is reflected is through our media. A study by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media found that when crowds on screen in television and film were 17% female, viewers

¹⁶ Cantú, N., (2009) “Getting There Cuando No Hay Camino: Chicanas in Mathematics, Science and Engineering” *The Committee on Equal Opportunities in Science and Engineering National Science Foundation TERC, Inc.*

¹⁷ <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/04/24/study-finds-faculty-members-are-more-likely-respond-white-males-others>

¹⁸ Reuben, E., Sapienza, P., & Zingales, L. (2014). How stereotypes impair women’s careers in science. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 111(12), 4403–4408. <http://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1314788111>

¹⁹ Sin, I., Stillman, S., & Fabling, R. (2017) What drives the gender wage gap? Examining the roles of sorting, productivity differences, and discrimination. *Motu Working Paper 17-15, Motu Economic and Public Policy Research ISSN 1177-9047*

estimated the crowd to actually be 50% female. In the workplace, this persists: another peer-reviewed study showed that women speak less in meetings, but men perceive them to speak much more than they do.²⁰

Studies clearly show that the status quo for STEM jobs includes a general lack of visibility of women and people of color in conference rooms and research departments, and that our implicit bias prevents the majority from realizing it. This bias causes discomfort when more than a fifth of a room is made up of minorities – or when we’re comparing resumes from John and Jamal. This bias spills into our perception of how minorities are discussed when assessing their presence in STEM fields and the overall need or success of existing diversity programs. The good news is that implicit biases can evolve with the right tools and people, but only if its existence is recognized by everyone.

Diversity Math: Why it Matters

One might ask why the presence of minorities really matters at all if employers are simply choosing to hire the best people for the job regardless of their gender, race, or any other characteristic. Many would suggest that STEM job hires be based purely on merit and that the best candidates will succeed through their own talent and will alone. Building upon the pervasive bias that prevents employers from seeing the full pool of potential candidates, that question is best answered in three parts.

First, employers can’t choose to hire the best people for the job if they’re only looking at a small part of the global community.

Co-author Katie Hinsen, a world renowned media expert who has been on many stages and planning committees throughout her career, recently commented to an organization that an upcoming “panel of experts” was made up entirely of middle-aged white men. In response, the panel organizers said they were seeking to just have “experts” and that simply adding a woman, person of color, or younger person would undermine the integrity of the discussion.

Ms. Hinsen noted that “statistically that’s going to be a pretty narrow discussion because your panel represents just 1% of the population of expert voices on any topic. One percent is extremely homogenous, and doesn’t seem to hold much integrity at all.”

²⁰ Published in 1990, “Speaker Sex and the Appointment of Talk” was written as part of a psycholinguistics study and shows that the phenomenon is nothing new.

Her “Diversity Math” is now often referenced in these discussions, and the authors of this paper suggest it be widely considered as a thought experiment.

Consider the user base of any particular item being discussed. Since 51% of the general population are women and 63% of the US population is white,²¹ experts are already being sampled from only 31% of the user base. We might consider an “expert” to be in the top 20% of users. If panelists are all between 45-55 years old, that is 20% of the working age population. Breaking down the math step by step, you can see how the panel has effectively sampled a panel of experts from just 1% of the user base.

As we know, social biases and barriers to entry result in a user base that will not mirror the general population. We can apply this thought experiment to the statistics we have on our industry.

Very few studies focus on investigating the below-the-line workforce, so we need to look at combining the numbers we know by using research from STEM, computer science, engineering and film and television editing.

An estimated 25% of our combined technical workforce are women.²² Approximately 25% are non-white.²³ So in fact our hypothetical panel is starting to look a little more realistic, statistically -- while our workforce is not. If 75% of your employees are male and 75% of those men are white, even with diversity in age, you are selecting three-quarters of your staff from only 6% of the pool of qualified and high-performing candidates.

If this is the case, it would be advisable to explore and identify any common pitfalls that may be filtering out otherwise highly qualified candidates. We do know that there is a more diverse talent pool in entry-level and early-career roles. If efforts are focused on seeking out more

²¹ According to 2010 US Census data.

²² According to the Census Bureau's 2009 American Community Survey, women comprise 48 percent of the U.S. workforce but just 24 percent of workers in STEM fields. This number has increased an estimated 3% since. Across European nations, women account for between 10% - 30% of engineers. Women make up 24.2% of film editors, 17.5% of VFX artists and 15.1% of the audio department. However only 13% of editors at the highest level are women. 10% of STEM professionals are minority women. Note that minimal data has been recorded on below-the-line entertainment professionals.

²³ 73% of Science and Engineering professionals in the US are white. No data is available on minorities working below-the-line in the entertainment industry, but in 2015, 2% of Academy Members were hispanic, asian or native american. It is estimated that as little as 15% of below-the-line professionals are non-white. Note that minimal data has been recorded on below-the-line entertainment professionals, but most studies do not account for entry-level professionals - up to 40% of film school graduates and 12% of engineering graduates are people of color.

underrepresented professionals early and steps are taken to retain them, we will have a stronger, more diverse talent pool higher up.

And if you are putting together a “panel of experts” and hoping for a valuable discussion on a technical subject, Hinsen’s “Diversity Math” suggests you should aim for one in five panelists to be a woman, person of color, young person and/or underrepresented minority at minimum.

The second part of the argument of why this matters: mathematical algorithms show hard evidence of how efficient problem-solving strategies emerge when your pool of workers is not homogeneous. Subscribing to the myth that hiring “diverse people” will somehow lower the bar for the organization, a manager might choose a group of people who look, think, and experience life like him. Another hiring manager selects outside their network, making “random” hires. When put head to head with the same problems, a 2010 study shows that the “random” group performs better.²⁴

One of the many ways this has been demonstrated is through experiments with complex systems by University of Michigan Professor Scott Page. Page created a set of algorithms which represent individual people. A group of highly effective and similarly programmed algorithms are meant to represent people who graduated from the same prestigious universities and moved into the workplace together. Another group of technically less effective but much more varied algorithms represented individuals from many different backgrounds working together at a company. When put forth solving a complex problem, the high-performing similar algorithms would all get stuck at the same point. The diverse algorithms would easily create a new strategy to approach the problem when they hit a snag, eventually obtaining a solution.

Lastly, we come to the bottom line: diverse workforces in a global economy have never been more important. A 2011 Forbes study showed having diverse teams directly contributes to a company’s productivity and success. This also affects a company’s ability to attract and retain top talent, since up-and-coming professionals were reported to prioritize a diverse environment in the workplace. A 2015 study from Bersin by Deloitte²⁵ showed that companies with established and successful strategies for inclusion and diversity reported 2.3x higher cash flow per employee. And a McKinsey study²⁶ showed that gender diverse companies were 15% more likely to outperform other companies, while ethnically diverse companies were 35% more likely.

²⁴ “Diversity and Complexity” published by Scott Page explores how all kinds of diversity makes complex adaptive systems more efficient.

²⁵ This study, called “Diversity and Inclusion Top the List of Talent Practices Linked to Stronger Financial Outcomes” was of 454 organizations that generated more than \$750 million in 2013 worldwide.

²⁶ “Diversity Matters” is an annual report of nearly 400 businesses in the US, UK, Canada, and Latin America.

Correlation obviously does not equal causation. However, it's easy to see the patterns that emerge when companies recognize the importance of widening their search for different candidates. Prioritizing inclusive leadership strategies is shown to have mathematical and societal implications which are valuable for a company's success. The inclusion of women and people of color, especially early in their careers, does not automatically mean increased revenue and innovation. It does mean the internal culture of the company has shifted in an important way. This shift leads to a workplace that can support many different kinds of people -- which is fundamentally good for everyone.

On Privilege and the “D” Word

In tandem with the growth of more and more diversity programs, public perception of the word “diversity” has become entangled with a negative sentiment. The “D” word seems to be closely related to dry human resources training or “quota-based” hiring processes. To many individuals, “diversity” seems like a way to force individuals into roles for which they are poorly suited, merely for the sake of appearances. Many who have held the majority of entertainment engineering roles for the last century have vocally opposed diversity efforts, labeling these initiatives as a way to push out “better-qualified” individuals.

In fact, the surge in diversity programs seems to have made the discussion of inclusion even more divisive. In reality, underrepresented individuals often do not have the opportunity to showcase their skills, and diversity programs have done little to help bridge this gap.

The missing piece of the story is the concept of privilege – in STEM, most notably white male privilege. On the surface, the phrase itself seems like an accusation, making broad racial and gender generalizations or tearing down hard working white men for the sake of political correctness. However, a key to understanding how to fix diversity programs and remove implicit bias is to understand and accept privilege in whatever form it takes for you.

In a 1988 essay, Peggy McIntosh, Senior Research Associate of the Wellesley Centers for Women, defined privilege as “an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks.” Privilege is in many ways a set of unearned social benefits assigned to a person by nature of their gender, sex, ethnicity, geographic location, parents’ social status, or other characteristic.

Privilege is not something you have or do not have. While it is immutable, it *is* a thing we *all* have. It is a complex web of advancements in life based on things as varied as your race, the

neighborhood you grew up in, and where your birthday falls in the year. If for every tiny advantage you stumbled upon you got a dollar, and for every disadvantage you were given you lost a dollar, every reader of this paper will have a different-looking bank account. And to that end, your money is worth more or less depending on where you shop. Different attributes we have hold different levels of power in different spaces. Therefore there is no validity in arguments that because women are overrepresented in certain jobs, their underrepresentation in others is not oppression.

It is important to note that privilege itself is not something negative. Having privilege in a specific space does not make a person inherently bad. As a word, “privilege” seems to be tightly intertwined with other accusatory statements like “entitled” or “spoiled” when in reality it’s only meant to define an aspect of one’s place in the world created by chance. It doesn’t mean there isn’t hardship or struggle or that a person didn’t work hard to get where they are today. Looking at privilege a different way, you could equate it to starting a game at different difficulty levels, or simply rolling dice to determine who goes first.

When discussions of privilege and diversity as a concept are misunderstood as a threat, this negative sentiment remains present within many of those who hold the majority in the STEM fields. A recent memo circulated internally by a Google employee²⁷ exemplifies this: a young white man who claims to value diversity while interpreting Google’s approach as oppression of himself and his peers. His claims that women do not face systemic bias but are instead biologically unsuitable for technical jobs, while scientifically incorrect, are not uncommonly held beliefs in the US. The fact that privilege exists differently in different spaces is a core argument against this thinking because, as Faruk Ateş²⁸ points out, the lack of non-white people and women in STEM and technical environments is not as much of an issue in other cultures.

In India, for example, women make up 55% of computer science undergraduates, and STEM fields are seen as areas both genders should pursue. While Africa and Asia have given our global industry some of its greatest talent, technology and innovations, these continents are made up of cultures who are underrepresented minorities in the US. While 63% of immigrant tech workers in America come from Asia,²⁹ Asian women in technical careers in the US have a

²⁷ <https://gizmodo.com/exclusive-heres-the-full-10-page-anti-diversity-screed-1797564320>

²⁸ <https://hackernoon.com/a-brief-history-of-women-in-computing-e7253ac24306>

²⁹ <http://www.onlineuniversities.com/blog/2012/06/10-startling-stats-about-minorities-stem/>

significantly lower career trajectory and are among the groups least likely to hold senior positions.³⁰

Similar false assumptions can be found in Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg's celebrated book "Lean In" which ignores privilege and claims women are missing in tech because they lack the ambition to thrive in those environments. Numerous rebuttals to flawed resources like "Lean In" and the Google memo have emerged, including a point-by-point breakdown of incorrect information about the differences in gender and sex in the workplace by social scientist Adam Green,³¹ but the damage is already done. Women continue to face systemic barriers in the workplaces while the concept of privilege is dismissed outright by self-described so-called allies.

The authors of this paper acknowledge their own privilege: including being perceived as white, being born in key geographical areas, maturing within a system that provides accessible higher learning, and so on. Since privileged individuals hold institutional power over those who are oppressed, they can easily use their privilege to benefit people who are like them without realizing they are doing so at the expense of others. Therefore it is important to recognize one's own individual privilege to prevent their biases from impeding efforts toward improving diversity.

For example, many diversity committees tend to be full of older white women because their racial privilege often provides them an edge on jobs, salary, and household demands over many black or Latina women. These white women have a higher likelihood of being able to give up free time for volunteer purposes because of this economic advantage. The result of this is that the programs these committees create tend to primarily benefit women from similar cultural backgrounds, often pushing women of color further into the fringes.

While the authors of this paper acknowledge their racial privilege, they also acknowledge their gender-related oppression. These two facts do not negate each other. A poor white woman may be poor, but she is still racially privileged in many spaces across the Western world. A black woman under the same circumstances would likely have a more difficult life experience. Aspects of life in the United States are hard for disabled white men, but they're harder for disabled black men. Being a gay white woman can be difficult in many spaces, but being a gay Latina woman in most of those spaces will be more so.

³⁰ As reported to The Mini-Symposium on Women of Color in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) (2010) by Lilian S. Wu, Ph.D. Program Executive, Global University Programs, IBM Corporation

³¹ Green, Adam. "Differences Between Men and Women are Vast Exaggerated." 2017 August 5. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/differences-between-men-women-vastly-exaggerated-adam-grant>

While white men are 41% more likely to be executives than white women, they have an advantage of 260% over Asian women, 418% above Black women, and are 438% more likely to be executives than Latina women.³² Data reported to a 2010 symposium on diversity in STEM shows that historically, women of color have been and continue to be not advancing to leadership positions at the same pace as their male and white female counterparts, regardless of performance and level of education.³³

Researchers have also noted significant, consistent evidence that “white students, especially white males, by the virtue of the large numbers of available mentors are likely to benefit from informal interactions that arise from regular contact with mentors of similar racial/ethnic or sociocultural origins who identify with them personally and socially”.³⁴

Privilege is a great way to understand the barriers and struggles we face to improving diversity, as it is holistic and includes everyone. Traditional diversity initiatives tend to focus on single aspects of oppression: gender, race, disability – excluding others and sometimes alienating those who are good people who have no malice at all, only *privilege*. Ellen Pao, founder of Project Include, summarizes findings that limited, one-off, single-issue, and/or “non-intersectional” diversity efforts are generally doing more harm than good.³⁵

The relationship between the parts of our identities was defined as “intersectionality” by UCLA law professor and race theory scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in 1989 and is an important aspect of modern diversity efforts. Crenshaw wrote that black women “are discriminated against in ways that often do not fit neatly within the legal categories of either ‘racism’ or ‘sexism’....Yet the legal system has generally defined sexism as based upon an unspoken reference to the injustices confronted by all (including white) women, while defining racism to refer to those faced by all (including male) blacks and other people of color.”

This approach renders black women an invisible bystander of the effects at the intersection of race and gender. These diversity “blind spots” are frequent in current diversity programs which are constructed with no considerations for privilege and intersectionality. However, when privilege is acknowledged by those who hold it, the circumstances for blind spots shift dramatically.

³² Gee, B., Peck, D., and Wong, J. (May 2015). Hidden in Plain Sight: Asian American Leaders in Silicon Valley. Ascend Pan-Asian Leaders.

³³ Ong, M. (2010). The Mini-Symposium on Women of Color in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM): A summary of events, findings, and suggestions. Cambridge, MA: TERC.

³⁴ Whittaker, J. A., & Montgomery, B. L. (2012). Cultivating Diversity and Competency in STEM: Challenges and Remedies for Removing Virtual Barriers to Constructing Diverse Higher Education Communities of Success. *Journal of Undergraduate Neuroscience Education*, 11(1), A44–A51.

³⁵ <http://projectinclude.org/>

But it can be difficult to reach that point since without context, the word “privilege” may seem to imply that a person’s work or life is invalidated simply because they are male or white, just as the “D” word has come to mean women or people of color being promoted upward at the expense of more talented men. However, privilege is meant to better describe how we all wish to live and be perceived in our lives: with fewer artificial barriers, fewer assumptions, and a willingness by all to listen and accept one another at face value.

Five Things You Can Do To Fix Diversity Programs

1. Stop Pushing Diversity Programs

If “diversity” has become a dirty word, why use it at all? Overall, diversity programs in all their current and past forms have failed to serve the underrepresented communities in the entertainment and STEM industries. While there have been occasional successes which have been highlighted and celebrated, the statistics have remained the same. The first step toward fixing diversity programs is to get rid of them altogether.

Instead, the focus should shift on changing workplace culture. Instead of creating programs to place underrepresented individuals in environments where they cannot succeed, we should focus on making our organizations *inclusive* so *everyone* can succeed. Shift the resources we have placed into diversity committees, groups, and programs toward tools and deep training that can be used by everyone in our companies. It is easy for these disparate and isolated programs to become echo chambers that can be ignored by the majority, so we should take steps to prevent this. It is essential to move past the part of any initiative where the problems are repeatedly defined and take broad, inclusive action.

For example, having black employees attending a group to discuss their problems amongst themselves might make them feel better for an hour (and might make the company look good for caring enough to provide space), but the *culture* of the company doesn’t change unless everyone else is on board too.

There has been an increase in female engineer graduates, but 40% still leave the workforce by age thirty³⁶ because they feel their career is going nowhere -- and only a quarter of them are

³⁶ A presentation at the American Psychological Conference called “Leaning In but Getting Pushed Back” discussed a Project on Women Engineers Retention, an NSF-funded study in partnership with 30 universities. One major finding driving women out was lack of promotions.

leaving for family purposes. When compared to exit rates of men in these engineering industries, women are leaving at a much higher rate and most exits are to other industries, not unemployment, with women citing a lack of promotional opportunities and mentorship.³⁷ Solve this issue instead of creating spaces to talk about it ad naseum or programs to insert women into the industry.

One anonymous Asian aerospace engineer summed up the harm in ineffective diversity programs: "I truly get frustrated when I read all the articles in the magazines and the newspapers about the need for more programs and funds to encourage or entice girls or women to go into STEM fields. Sure, that would help but what is the point if we still encounter a hostile work environment?"³⁸

Taking the concepts of intersectionality, inclusiveness and privilege into account will also highlight that a group of individuals who share the same gender or race will not share the same needs, challenges and priorities.

There are examples of organizations already turning this corner when it comes to improving diversity efforts. Deloitte has discontinued its affinity groups in favor of focusing on managers, the majority of which are white men, in order to train them on making the firm more inclusive. WIN's national director Deepa Purushothaman was quoted as saying that "by having everyone in the room, you get more allies, advocates, and sponsors. A lot of our leaders are still older white men, and they need to be part of the conversation and advocate for women. But they're not going to do that as much if they don't hear the stories and understand what that means."

The next step to fixing your diversity efforts is to flip them upside down altogether.

2. Make an Effort to Focus from the Bottom Up

Nearly all diversity efforts in the entertainment industry tend to focus on above-the-line roles like executives, producers, writers, and directors. The individuals looking at roles like these are already long established in their careers. Placing one individual woman or person of color in a director role or executive leadership role is not going to change an organization's culture. Racial and gender related change does not trickle down in an organization³⁹ unless everyone within the company is on board for the change.

³⁷ <https://www.forbes.com/2010/06/08/science-engineering-gender-gap-forbes-woman-leadership-pay-promotion.html>

³⁸ <http://research.swe.org/climate-control/>

³⁹ "Trickle down feminism" is defined and dismantled by Dawn Foster in her book "Lean Out".

These programs essentially place individuals on an island where they must assimilate to the current culture or leave entirely. When they leave, critics hold them as an example of why minorities cannot succeed in Hollywood. Instead of focusing at the highest levels, we need to be looking at early career.

Colleges are already largely diverse and inclusive, with many programs built for getting minorities interested in STEM jobs. But as we've cited, more graduates doesn't mean more successful careers. There is a middle ground in between college and the highest levels of a career where change needs to occur. This gap is being created by implicit bias and ignored by privilege. We need to look around at our entry-level and mid-career individuals and see who is missing.

There are many reasons⁴⁰ why minorities leave these fields, and we must find a way to fix as many of those reasons as we can influence. Some consider this catering to certain groups, but we can't forget that many of these technical fields were shaped by and for men over the last century. Software engineer Kate Heddleston described this in her 2016 PyCon presentation:

"If you look back at the history of Silicon Valley, you can see that it was founded by men, almost exclusively white, who were aggressive pioneers in their field. These early tech founders instilled their beliefs in the cultures of the companies they started and funded. They instilled beliefs that worked well for them, beliefs like aggression, long work hours, and meritocracy....The original members of this field also removed obstacles that they faced. They were able to clear most of the institutional obstacles that existed for them as a group because humans are good at optimizing for themselves....So while a white guy might have some hurdles to overcome as an engineer, he's pretty much running the 100m dash thanks to his predecessors. Other groups are not quite as fortunate. Institutional obstacles have not been cleared for them. Not out of any particular malice; mostly out of ignorance that the problems even exist."

By looking around, noticing who is missing and building from the bottom up, we can change the culture and eradicate these obstacles at the point where they are most crucial: the beginning of a career.

⁴⁰ For television and film post production, co-author Kylee Peña broke down many of the reasons women leave: <http://kyleepena.com/2017/06/14/women-are-tired-and-im-watching-them-leave-post-production/>

3. Put a Stop to Unpaid Internships

There is a tremendous value placed on unpaid internships, particularly on the creative side of the entertainment engineering industry where many individuals find the starting point of their career. A resumé with three internships on it is automatically given more weight than one with zero. A 2016 survey by the Blue Collar Post Collective showed that the majority of post production professionals took on three internships before finding employment, and most of them were unpaid⁴¹. But when we fail to consider the full measure of a person's life – one that would grant them the ability to work for free for a number of weeks or even years – we're almost certainly removing important context from that person's career. The truth is that only privileged individuals can work for free – so get rid of that privilege by *paying everyone*.

For example, on average, women are paid less than men within the same industry while also taking on more household work regardless of their breadwinner status.⁴² Because of their economic and societal disadvantages combined with the gender-related expectations thrust upon them, it becomes infinitely more difficult for a woman to take an unpaid opportunity. A woman is less likely to have savings or a support system⁴³ willing to send her off to work for free for weeks on end.

A Blue Collar Post Collective survey of US-based post production professionals who studied an industry-based program at college shows that 40% of lower-income people of color worked in jobs outside of the industry to support themselves during their studies. This is the same number of white, middle-class film school students who did unpaid internships during their college years, and did not work to support themselves during this time.⁴⁴

Many career opportunities are built from an unpaid opportunity. Even diversity programs that place people in employment eventually have their starting point in unpaid fellowships and other work. But those without privilege cannot take time away from work to attend workshops or do actual work for free. They cannot be expected to pay rent in a major city or live in a hotel room for the duration of a program as a "stepping stone" to better things. Many people consider unpaid internships a rite of passage. In reality, they are just plain wrong and keep the industry exclusive for the sake of exclusivity.

⁴¹ <http://www.bluecollarpostcollective.com/surveys-studies/> for the full dataset and summary.

⁴² A 2016 study of American households by Whitman Insight Strategies showed that women do more household work and caregiving even in younger households.

⁴³ Deeper in Debt: Women and Student Loans (2017) a report from AAUW, and Hathaway, J., (2016) A Degree of Savings *STATE LEGISLATURES March 2016*, pp 20-23; show that women have more student debt, less savings and less financial support than men - while earning less and having a greater financial burden after graduation.

⁴⁴ <http://www.bluecollarpostcollective.com/surveys-studies/> for the full dataset and summary

Instead of unpaid programs and internships, value the people we are seeking to bring into the industry: pay them. Provide them an entry-level job instead of an internship.

4. Empower Hiring Managers with the Tools and Insight to Make a Difference

Part of the strategy of rethinking diversity programs also lies in empowering the people making hiring decisions to be more inclusive and welcoming.⁴⁵ As a result of diverse hiring managers being punished for tokenism when hiring “diverse people,” many of them back away from seeking out these individuals at all. In a recent study by the Harvard Business Review, women and non-white executives who participated frequently in diversity-valuing behaviors were rated lower in competence and performance by their bosses.⁴⁶ These same bosses also didn’t punish nor reward white male executives for participating in this behavior.

The study sought to replicate this behavior in another controlled study, providing these executives with a description of the candidate that had been hired and a photo of the hiring manager that revealed their gender and race. Women and minorities were consistently rated as less effective when they hired people who looked like them. The superficial solution to diversity – hiring a black recruiter or HR manager – becomes part of the problem through a systemic bias that places no actual value on diversity.

Many diversity programs as they exist are underfunded and ineffective. Since they are not really working anyway, we suggest instead funding a real effort to change the culture of our companies and organizations. This includes helping those with hiring power to understand and accept their responsibility in seeking out a wider range of individuals from the community – not just the 1% cross-section seen on “expert” panels. This effort expands far beyond blind-resume⁴⁷ hiring and diversity committees. This effort must evolve the organizational bias, starting with those in charge of hiring. They also must have the time and resources to do this.

Hiring managers must find who is missing in the organization and evaluate candidates holistically. They must be able to approach interviews differently, evaluating how a person got to where they are today instead of a superficial list of accomplishments. Companies can provide the resources needed to create bridges to schools and groups where underrepresented

⁴⁵ <https://hbr.org/2016/07/why-diversity-programs-fail>

⁴⁶ Women and Minorities Are Penalized for Promoting Diversity, March 2016

<https://hbr.org/2016/03/women-and-minorities-are-penalized-for-promoting-diversity>

⁴⁷ Blind resume evaluations can be misleading. Twitter’s only black engineer in a leadership position as of 2017 was named Leslie Miley. He submits himself as an example of why algorithms can’t sort resumes to seek diversity.

individuals can connect with the organization early in their career. This empowers hiring managers to make their company welcoming: a place where emerging individuals can see themselves doing good work.

5. Ask, Listen, Offer Help, Ask for Feedback (ALOHA)

One of the most overlooked parts of rethinking a program: asking those who are underrepresented to share their own thoughts and opinions based on their life experiences. So often, since diversity programs and committees are run by or made up of people who have the privilege to participate in them, the lack of expanded insight can make these approaches too narrow to be usefully applicable.

For those seeking to improve diversity efforts, we suggest taking steps to include and elicit feedback from individuals already in our organizations who are part of an underrepresented minority. Continue by seeking out individuals in the community who do not appear to be represented in your company at all. Ask them about their career trajectory and path so far, and listen to what they say. Accept that their life experiences are unique, and that doesn't invalidate either of you. In fact, these contrasting life experiences are what can make your company thrive.

Avoid placing the burden of responsibility on minority or underrepresented groups to offer solutions, because they cannot make changes alone. A systemic change must be accepted by the majority of the organization, and underrepresented individuals do not have the power to make this happen without including everyone. It is well-documented that they are often wrongly assigned this responsibility.⁴⁸

Moving forward, we must make real changes for underrepresented people, side by side with those in the majority at the helm. It's true that changing workplace culture is not nearly as alluring as neatly packaging a press release about giving three people an opportunity to spend 6 months in a diverse writer fellowship. The results of a shift in organizational culture may not be instantly measurable, but they create long-lasting opportunities for the entire community, and sustainable positive gains for the business.

⁴⁸ Beginning with Audre Lorde's famous essay, numerous authors, spokespeople and activists have pointed out that minorities are typically assumed to be responsible for educating others on race, gender, disability and other affecting issues. A summary of research from 1970-2008 of women and minorities across STEM at all levels based on research supported by the National Science Foundation, "Inside the Double Bind: A Synthesis of Literature on Women of Color in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics", reports that at a Research level, tenure-track women of color are "overloaded with committee assignments, campus diversity work".

Conclusion

Current diversity programs have existed for over a decade, but statistics in entertainment and STEM jobs continue to be unwavering. Even with an increased interest in these roles among minorities and an even gender split of graduates, women and people of color employed in these fields drop dramatically as they move into mid-career. The barriers that exist for people can not be solved with the artificial placement of underrepresented individuals in high levels. Change must rise from the bottom up in order to influence implicit bias and remove the layers of privilege that make the majority blind to the challenges others face.

It is our recommendation that organizations stop injecting resources into these ineffective diversity efforts and put their resources into change that can ripple throughout their company. Provide implicit bias training to the majority. Consider the stereotypes we have been taught since childhood, and how they negatively affect some people and positively reinforce others. With this in mind, we can not deny that any person who has overcome a lifetime of discouragement and still seeks out or succeeds in a STEM-related or entertainment industry job must be determined, passionate and talented. To overlook them would be a failure to consider what makes up a star employee.

We strongly recommend placing more resources into supporting the broad range of graduates and emerging talent who are in the first five years of their careers. Take steps to make them welcome in the work environment, design mentorship and workshops aimed at benefiting them in a way that enables them to participate without barriers such as cost or accessibility, and pay them so that they can focus on building a strong career foundation rather than having to work a second job or incur immense debt and stress to get by.

When researching this paper, it was striking how resources have been so far been entirely put toward reinforcing or trying to fix current top-down and single-issue theories of diversity efforts. It has been further noted in academia that published studies have failed to consider intersectionality, instead giving cursory glances to single-issue research -- women in STEM or racial minorities, for example.⁴⁹ The only available research on below-the-line workforce has been undertaken by us at the Blue Collar Post Collective. Even college and workforce development initiatives have failed to look beyond the practice of forcing a small number of quota-based individuals into above-the-line positions, failing to consider or report that many of those individuals in fact hold a great deal of privilege despite their skin color or gender and may have had an advantage already.

⁴⁹ In 2011, Editors of The Harvard Educational Review summarized the outcomes of a symposium on this matter, noting that while there had been many dissertations on exploring intersectional representation in STEM, none had ever been published.

This very practice can have the detrimental effect of undermining the people who benefit. While quotas have been shown to encourage the seeking-out of a wider range of qualified candidates, narrowly-based, above-the-line programs can also put the weight of the recipients' entire gender or race on their success while exposing them to accusations or assumptions of tokenism or unearned advantages. In other such programs, studies have shown that these initiatives can set recipients up to fail by placing them in positions they have not been adequately prepared for through the same strong foundation afforded to those with greater privilege.⁵⁰

Our preliminary research shows that it is the first five years of a person's career in the media industry that determines how high they will rise in their career. The average trajectory of a person after that first five years tends to be reasonably consistent, but the starting point varies immensely based on their level of privilege. We recommend strongly that research funding be allocated to look further into this hypothesis, as it is likely a dominant influence on the diversity problems our wider industry faces and can inform an even more targeted approach to fixing diversity programs in entertainment engineering.

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To those who work alongside us, we thank you for your support, and hope that you continue to strive to be better allies, coworkers, employers and professionals.

To those who come after us, never give up. We hope that our industry welcomes you and makes space for you to be your best.

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⁵⁰ See "Encouraging Minority Students to Pursue Science, Technology, Engineering and Math Careers." Briefing report by U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2010

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