Diversity and Inclusion for All: Understanding the Intersection of Multiple Characteristics

A research symposium
September 19, 2014
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Introduction

Katherine Phillips
Senior Vice Dean
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As organizations in all sectors become increasingly global, the significance of identifying and capturing the value of diversity continues to grow. We all have multiple identities, thus considering characteristics such as race, gender, sexuality, or disability singularly often misses the complex intersectional dynamics that diversity entails. While organizations and academics alike have recognized the need for greater complexity, there has been little discussion or concerted efforts designed to bridge research and diversity practices that equally engage all members of a diverse community.

My collaborators, Professors Joan Williams of UC Hastings School of Law, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw of Columbia Law School and UCLA Law, and Susan Sturm of Columbia Law, and I looked to the literature to understand what we currently know about the influence of intersectionality and where it is heading in multiple research areas—law, psychology, sociology, and organizational scholarship. We decided that it would be fruitful to bring together an interdisciplinary group of scholars and diversity practitioners to discuss these issues. We convened the Diversity and Inclusion for All Working Group to address diversity and inclusion through a lens that takes multiple characteristics into consideration simultaneously, e.g., race and gender, sexual orientation, generational differences, and disabilities.

Systematic research in the area of diversity and inclusion that focuses on the underlying psychology and sociology of difference has the potential to transform our understanding of diversity issues, shape diversity policy, impact law reform, and change academic and research practices. Furthermore, it has the potential to improve how any company implements diversity initiatives to meet the needs of all members in its workforce. With this in mind, the working group commenced its first of four meetings in the Fall of 2012, and its work has culminated in a public symposium whose research insights are discussed in this brochure.

The symposium, “Diversity and Inclusion for All: Understanding the Intersection of Multiple Characteristics,” was held on Friday, September 19, 2014, and brought together over 200 researchers, professionals from the for-profit and nonprofit sectors, diversity practitioners, and business executives. What this diverse group had in common was a dedication to unveiling the underlying causes of diversity concerns in the workplace. The day was built around creating safe but challenging environments that push us to put our own knowledge of diversity and inclusion into practice is clear. I look forward to creating and participating in other 4.0 diversity and inclusion conversations in the future. This one was special.

The following report provides a comprehensive overview of some of the insights from the Diversity and Inclusion for All Symposium. I would like to thank the many individuals who made the working group and this culminating event possible. First and foremost, Joan Williams, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Susan Sturm, and the many members who participated in the full working group were amazing partners (see the list below). Second, we extend our sincerest thanks to Michelle Gadsden-Williams and Credit Suisse, and to Kara Helander at BlackRock, for their financial support of this project. Additionally, we would like to thank Ana Duarte-McCarthy, Karen Kwong and Ariette Jackson at Citi for hosting the event on September 19, 2015. We are also grateful to Elena Piercy and the hard work of her colleagues at the Office of External Relations at Columbia Business School. Finally, this event and the working group would not have been possible without the support of the Sanford C. Bernstein & Co. Center for Leadership and Ethics: Bruce Kogut, Sandra Navalli, Blanca Bellino, Heather Barbakoff, and the rest of the team.

Diversity Working Group Participants:

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- Heidi Brooks
- Devon Carbado
- Ashli Carter
- Kimberlé Crenshaw
- Gráinne de Búrca
- Frank Dobbin
- Ana Duarte McCarthy
- Robin J. Ely
- Michelle Gadsden-Williams
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- James Sidanius
- Susan P. Sturm
- Karen Sumberg
- Erin Thomas
- Negin Toosi
- Aníl Vazquez-Ubarri
- Joan C. Williams
- Kenji Yoshino
Within many workplaces, from global corporations to academic departments, there is a lot of talk about diversity. But are we really including everyone in the conversation? As Katherine Phillips, senior vice dean and the Paul Calello Professor of Leadership and Ethics at Columbia Business School, explained in her introduction, we all have multiple identities—derived from our gender and our ethnicity, for example—that intersect within ourselves and when we are interacting with others. However it is only recently that this notion of intersectionality, particularly as it applies to underrepresented groups, has become part of the diversity discussion.

How does the intersection of race and gender affect getting noticed at a company? How does the mere presence of diversity affect decision-making? How do the ideologies we employ when thinking about race fundamentally affect the participation and engagement of minorities? In the first panel, four researchers—two social psychologists, a management scholar and a law scholar—addressed questions relating to this topic, focusing on both the individual and the group, the ideological and the institutional.

Valerie Purdie-Vaughns, associate professor of psychology at Columbia University, discussed the importance of breaking down data when evaluating the impact of diversity practices. “Women of color are experiencing the workplace more negatively than white women,” she said. “So it’s important to look at dis-aggregating data, and not just broad categories.” The experiences of Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, who is female and Latina, and of Candace Gingrich, who is female and gay, in professional environments would likely reveal significant differences from the workplace experiences of a white heterosexual woman, for example.

While some studies have shown that women of color are more likely to lack an influential mentor compared with white women, other studies suggest that men of color experience significantly higher rates of overt bias compared with women of color, Purdie-Vaughns said. “This gives rise to the interesting possibility that people who have these types of intersectionality might have two different kinds of experiences,” she said. “They might have a feeling of invisibility, because they are atypical members of their constituent group. But they also might be sidestepping overt racism.”

Purdie-Vaughns and her research partners did a study of minority representation on TIME magazine covers from 1980 through 2008. They found that 90 percent of women who appeared on the cover were white, and that 80 percent of minorities who appeared on the cover were men. “This suggests literal invisibility for minority women,” Purdie-Vaughns said. In a separate study, she created trend graphs, using fake data, which purported to represent the well being of black men and women from the 1960s to today. Participants in the study were then asked to represent the trend for all black Americans. “We found, consistent with our hypotheses and our intuition, that people discount evidence that quality of life is not improving for black women,” she said. “This is important, because when we think of data on racial achievement gaps or other inequities, we might be discounting critical information about intersectionals.”

Katherine Phillips has spent much of the last two decades investigating how workplace teams can reap the benefits of diversity. “We don’t need to make the business case for diversity to people at the top,” she said. “But when you look at the middle layers of a company, the people who are actually experiencing the effects of diversity policies, you find that their experience isn’t always happy. And yet we know from empirical work that diversity does often lead to better performance and decision-making within groups.” (Figure 1).

As a management scholar, Phillips conducts studies of group decision-making that often involve videotaping
discussions and later interviewing the participants about their perceptions of how the group interacted. In one study, she tested how a four-person group performed at a decision-making task—in this case, solving a murder mystery—and then asked the members to rate their performance. She found groups that were diverse consistently outperformed groups that were not diverse—on average, performing about 50 percent better—but members of diverse groups didn’t believe that they had performed well. In comparison, homogenous groups tended to be confident about their performance. “Diverse groups can perform better, but they’re experiencing conflict, and they’re not as confident,” Phillips said. “And this uncertainty can hinder their ability to benefit from diversity.”

A further study investigated why diversity is beneficial. Does the value derive simply from having multiple perspectives? In fact, Phillips found, the presence of a social minority in a group changes the behavior of the social majority—with positive results. “In diverse groups, we find that whites work harder: they raise more novel questions, cite more missing evidence, and participate more,” she said. “We’re all cognitive misers; we’d rather not do the hard work that is required when we’re in diverse environments. But the pain that people experience in diverse settings is what leads to the gain.”

Research by Victoria Plaut, professor of law and social science at Berkeley Law, revealed another aspect of our tendency to be cognitive misers. “Because people find diversity difficult, they try to ignore difference and diversity altogether,” she said. A growing body of work on policies of ‘color blindness,’ or ignoring differences, sheds some light on the results. These results, Plaut has found, tend to be negative. In a study conducted at a large healthcare organization, she asked employees how they felt about diversity and if the organization should pay more attention to differences. She also interviewed the participants about their engagement with their work. The results showed that in departments where color blindness was higher, people of color felt less engaged and experienced more bias.

Other studies have shown that being instructed to ignore race, or reading about a color-blind policy, causes people to become more self-focused, thereby limiting interaction. Likewise, a directive to maintain a color-blind perspective when conducting interviews causes white interviewers to create more distance between themselves and black interviewees, compared with a directive to value diversity. A separate study showed that exposure to a color-blind philosophy left people of color feeling more cognitively impaired. “Color blindness can lead to alienation and exhaustion for people of color, and prejudice and distancing for whites,” Plaut said. But the answer isn’t simply to focus on differences, she noted. Studies have shown that a multicultural philosophy can alienate whites and limit interaction, while pigeonholing and stereotyping people of color. Attending to diversity is complicated, Plaut concluded. But ignoring or avoiding it doesn’t seem to build fair or inclusive environments.

### Reality vs. Perception

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Figure 1: Homogenous groups perceive that their work is more accurate and effective than a diverse group, but the reality shows otherwise. Source: Phillips, Liljenquist, & Neale (2009).
Devon Carbado, the Honorable Henry Pregerson Professor of Law at the UCLA School of Law, discussed ways that employers can pursue diversity. Many institutions, he noted, cite the “pipeline” problem, claiming that there aren’t enough diverse people in the workforce pipeline to satisfy demand. “The basic assumption is that the pipeline is outside of institutions,” Carbado said, “rather than an effect of institutional decision-making.” Pipelines are a function not just of inequality, but of the choices institutions make. He argued: “The law doesn’t require employers to fish in any particular pond. Where employers fish is an institutional choice that constructs the very thing they bemoan—the pipeline problem.”

In addition, Carbado analyzed the use of merit criteria to hire workers. “We all know that certain merit criteria produces disparate results with respect to particular groups,” Carbado said. “Rather than interrogating these criteria, the dominant institutional approach to this problem is to suggest that we must lower our standards to ensure that more members of the excluded group are included.” The effect of this approach is to burden the groups included to prove that they are truly qualified. A better approach would involve reevaluating the basis for the merit criteria, Carbado said. “When you broaden the pipeline, reevaluate the merit criteria, and decrease discrimination, diversity rises,” he concluded. “Institutional discussions about diversity should make clear that diversity isn’t at odds with merit.”

In the question and answer session, an audience member asked about a dilemma that arose in several of the presentations: efforts to increase diversity often result in unintended negative effects, such as stress for members of majority and minority groups. Is there a way to get the gain without the pain? “Diversity begets diversity,” Phillips answered. “When you add gender diversity and racial diversity to the same group, you actually get more equal participation. Gender differences between white men and white women actually decrease when you introduce racial diversity.” Such structural interventions diminish status differences among people in the group. Plaut concurred, adding, “You need to create conditions where people feel like they’ll be treated fairly, and with respect. If you do that, you can start making a difference.”

Reflections on Where We Are on Diversity and Inclusion for All: Practitioner Perspectives

In the research panel, scholars presented the latest findings on the current state of diversity practices in corporate America. But how are these practices perceived within organizations, particularly as policies filter down from the executive suite to the middle management level? And how are measures to increase inclusion experienced by those who are most affected by diversity policies within their organizations?

In a fireside chat moderated by Kimberlé Crenshaw, distinguished professor of law at UCLA School of Law, four practitioners—Ana Duarte-McCarthy, Chief Diversity Officer at Citi; Michelle Gadsden-Williams, Global Head of Diversity and Inclusion at Credit Suisse; Karen Sumberg, Global Diversity Lead of Tech Function at Google; and Anilu Vazquez-Ubarri, Americas Head of Leadership and Diversity at Goldman Sachs—discussed the challenges they have faced within their organizations, and what they hope to achieve in the future.

Crenshaw opened the discussion with a question about the effects of structural changes. “There are some people who might not see themselves as being included in the diversity mission,” she said. “They see it as contrary to their own interests.” At some organizations, managers as well as new hires might resist this message. In Vazquez-Ubarri’s role at Goldman Sachs, she faces this issue almost daily. “If I tell a new group of analysts, including white males, about what we do for our diverse population, the next question might be: ‘What about me?’” she said. “The approach I like to take is that diversity can only exist if you’re including everyone. It’s the organization that’s diverse; not one person. Diversity is at the macro level.”

Duarte-McCarthy of Citi discussed the difficulty of translating a firm’s diversity policy from the top tier to the management level. “Often in organizations, a vision of inclusion, meritocracy, and respect will trickle down to middle management—what’s known as the permafrost layer—as ‘You must hire diverse candidates,’” she said. “And that’s a big departure from the corporate vision.” Within this middle tier, managers are often struggling to accomplish multiple objectives, such as increasing revenue while also increasing the diversity of their staff.
For Sumberg, the greatest challenge is communicating the importance of diversity in an organization that sees itself as a strict meritocracy. "At Google, we aren't looking at different bars," she said. "We spend a lot of time talking about how 'diversity' does not become a password for meaning that we've lowered a bar. But we can't continue to bring in talent the same ways we always have, because we'll always bring in the same people." The company has started to think about broadening its recruitment channels and of new ways to ensure that its interview process is inclusive. "When you experiment, people say—especially at the middle-management level—that it's a knock against what we've always done," she said. "We spend a lot of time talking about how that's not true. People are here because they deserve to be here."

Gadsden-Williams of Credit Suisse also addressed the difficulty of communicating policy goals at various management levels. "I've spent a lot of time with senior leadership explaining the business case and the rationale behind it," she said. "We need to show how this is not just about talent and culture; this is good for business. The better we can articulate this message, the deeper it goes into the organization. It's a top-down, middle-out approach."

Crenshaw asked the participants about the most successful ways of communicating the benefits of diversity. The answer was unanimous: research. "Everything we do is anchored in research," said Gadsden-Williams. "When I stand in front of our senior leaders, they want to know what our competitors are doing, and who's best in class?" What has not worked, the practitioners said, is classic diversity training. "Bankers are assessed on revenue generation," Gadsden-Williams said. "This is an industry that's been successful without diversity for hundreds of years. Why change now? There's skepticism and cynicism. So I have to articulate why this is important to them, and to the business."

Sumberg concurred. "Research really works in driving the conversation," she said. "The way you fail is talking about feelings. Race gets into feelings, and that's really tricky. People can't always talk about these topics." Gender, she said, is a much easier topic; the opposite gender is seen as less of an unknown than someone of a different race.

Duarte-McCarthy spoke of her own firm's research on retention, which has focused on three categories of employees: those who were high performers but left the firm, those who are on the fence about leaving, and those who are successful despite having nontraditional careers. "Not surprisingly, manager capability and engagement with the employee was found to be critical," she said. "There's interest in how we can build manager capability at this level, which is where many decisions are made."

In response to a question from the audience, the panelists spoke about the need for more research on accountability. "We need to know how we can hold leaders accountable in addressing diversity issues and problem solving, so we can see some real wins in the end," said Gadsden-Williams. Crenshaw added that structural changes can go only so far; even with accountability measures, biases can creep in. As Vazquez-Ubarri put it: "Processes don't manage people; people manage people. And the dynamic can be complicated. Some managers, despite their best intentions, are actually ill-informed. And some senior leaders are very good at letting their people know the right thing to do, but they accomplish this in different ways."

Duarte-McCarthy concluded with a look toward the future. "We're building a new bridge, and we have this new generation of talent coming in," she said. "They are global, they are connected, and they have different expectations—about their work, and about the work we're doing today."
What Works for Women at Work: An Intersectional Perspective

As discussed in the research panel and fireside chat, organizations can increase diversity through various structural measures, such as broadening pipelines, reassessing merit criteria, and working to eliminate discrimination. But what are the options for individuals who experience bias in the workplace on a daily basis? What strategies work best when faced with an organization that resists change?

Joan Williams, distinguished professor of law, Hastings Foundation Chair, and the founding director of the Center for WorkLife Law at University of California, Hastings College of the Law, has been addressing these questions for more than 30 years. For her most recent book, What Works for Women at Work: Four Patterns Working Women Need to Know, coauthored with her daughter, Rachel Dempsey, she interviewed 127 highly successful women about the biases they faced in their careers and the practical strategies that worked for them. Over half of the participants were women of color.

Williams discussed the four distinct types of bias she uncovered through her research, which she categorized as: Prove It Again, Tightrope, Maternal Wall, and Tug of War. Overall, 96 percent of the women she interviewed reported experiencing at least one of these patterns in their workplace, she explained in her keynote address, “What Works for Women at Work: An Intersectional Perspective.” (Figure 2).

Picture a brilliant CEO, scientist, or lawyer. For most people, the first image that jumps into mind is a man. “Women don’t seem to fit quite as well,” Williams said. “So women have to Prove It Again: provide more evidence of competence than men to be judged as equally competent.” This bias was experienced by about two-thirds of the women she interviewed. In a classic Prove It Again scenario, a woman is judged on performance (such as total sales) whereas a man is judged on potential (such as the extent of his network). Another common effect is the poaching of a woman’s ideas by a male colleague. Williams suggests subtly drawing attention to this behavior with phrases such as “I’ve been pondering that idea ever since Pam first mentioned it” or “Thanks for picking up on that.”

Tightrope bias, which was reported by 73 percent of those interviewed, refers to the countervailing pressures women face to be liked and respected. Women who are seen as “too feminine” tend to be liked but not respected; those seen as “too masculine” may be respected but not liked. “There is pressure to behave in feminine ways,” Williams says. “On the other hand, if a woman is direct, outspoken, assertive, or competitive, then she often encounters push back.” One successful strategy used by almost every woman she surveyed: do a masculine thing in a feminine way. She gave the example of a CEO who said, “Be warm Ms. Mother 95 percent of the time, so that the 5 percent of the time when you need to be...
“Prof. Joan Williams described “gender judo” or, doing something typically seen as masculine in a feminine way.

It may be the least common type of bias,” Williams said. “But when a woman experiences it, it can be devastating.”

She has returned to this subject with a new approach detailed in the October 2014 issue of the *Harvard Business Review*. Her four-part strategy calls for conducting an assessment to determine how bias is affecting work interactions; developing an objective metric to measure the bias; implementing a bias interrupter to interrupt the bias in real time; and, if the metric does not change, ratcheting up to a strong bias interrupter.

In the question and answer session, Williams was asked about the use of interrupters. She discussed the example of the “office housework,” which includes tasks such as taking notes and planning parties which are typically allotted to women staffers, as well as expecting women to fill necessary but not career-enhancing roles such as keeping track of deadlines and timetables, or preparing the slide deck for men who actually give the presentation. “A gentle bias interrupter is to develop metrics to show the allocation between men and women of “office housework” versus “glamour work.”

Although Williams wrote the book to help women navigate bias in their own careers, she has since shifted her focus back to organizations. “Frankly, I started working on individual strategies because I’d given up on organizational change,” she explained. “Organizations have been flat-lined for decades. But doing this work, you have to remain exuberant; otherwise, you’d be depressed.”

It may be the least common type of bias, “Williams said. “But when a woman experiences it, it can be devastating.”

The final category, Tug of War, reported by 55 percent of women interviewed, occurs when gender bias fuels conflict among women. “It may be the least common type of bias,” Williams said. “But when a woman experiences it, it can be devastating.”

Individuals who have an intersectional identity face different challenges, Williams found. In university settings, for example, the stereotype that Asians are good at science appears to help Asian American women scientists with their students, but not with their colleagues, raising the question of whether that stereotype helps Asian American men, but not Asian American women. Asian American women scientists are more likely than other women to report pressure to fulfill traditionally feminine roles in their workplace, such as cleaning up after meetings, and to experience pushback if they refuse. “The tightrope is narrower for Asian American women, because they are expected to be feminine,” Williams said.

Latinas who were assertive reported being stereotyped as “hot-blooded Latinas,” and seen as angry, too emotional, or even crazy. African American women reported more leeway to behave in dominant ways—as long as they were not perceived as angry or upset, in which case they were stereotyped as “angry black women.”

Bias that falls in the Maternal Wall category, experienced by 59 percent of women interviewed, includes negative assumptions about a woman’s commitment to work. (One perception that demonstrates the lose-lose results of this bias: competent mothers are seen as less likeable and are held to higher performance standards, while incompetent mothers are seen as “bad people.”)

“Managers need scripts” when dealing with this bias, Williams said. “They are terrified, and they are confused.” If a manager has a stretch assignment for a woman who is pregnant, or the mother of a young child, the manager should say: “This is the logical next step for you, but if this isn’t a good time, that’s not a problem. These opportunities come up from time to time.”

Prof. Joan Williams described “gender judo” or, doing something typically seen as masculine in a feminine way.

tough, you can be.” She was doing something typically seen as masculine—being a leader—in a feminine way in order to avoid push back. Williams terms this tactic for navigating tightrope bias “gender judo.”
A robust interrupter would be a rule that no woman is allowed to perform more than two office housework tasks," she said, or implementing a more formal assignment system. "This goes back to Devon Carbado’s point about restructuring the basic norms," Williams said. "Strong interrupters will do that when the gentle ones don’t work."

As Valerie Purdie-Vaughns discussed in the research panel, bias plays out differently in different organizations. To fight it, women must figure out how it expresses itself in their workplaces, and how to interrupt it, Williams said. Which does not mean the fight is for everyone, she added. "I try to send this message to women: if this isn’t for you, I completely respect that," she said. "There is no reason why every woman should have to do this as part of her career plan." Women who support diversity and inclusion often get backlash, while men tend to get rewards, as one conference participant noted. Even in the most receptive environments, challenging bias is often extremely uncomfortable work.

Where Are We Going With Diversity & Inclusion for All: Research Presentations

In the fireside chat, Ana Duarte-McCarthy, the chief diversity officer at Citi, spoke of the next generation of talent and its vastly different expectations for the workplace. In a complementary presentation to the first research panel, three scholars—Modupe Akinola of Columbia Business School, Ashleigh Shelby Rosette of the Fuqua School of Business at Duke University, and Frank Dobbin of Harvard University—discussed their research on how to increase diversity and inclusion as we move forward. The discussion was moderated by Prof. Cecilia L. Ridgeway of Stanford University.

Akinola presented her research on how stress triggered by cross-race interactions can affect performance. By focusing on physiological responses, such as fluctuations in heart rate, she is able to gain a detailed and accurate understanding of how people experience workplace stress. "We tend to focus on how what we think, our psychology, affects behavior in organizations," she said. "And in doing so, we’re missing out on a critical component. Very early on, I realized that just asking people how they’re feeling or observing their behavior wouldn’t give me the full picture."

She described one experiment in which police officers were asked a racially charged question: How would you go about determining whether the acts of another officer were based on racially driven biases? The first participant, who was white, reported that answering this question made him anxious. The second, who was African American, described himself as not very anxious. However, measures of their blood pressure showed that their physiological responses were about the same; the second participant was, in fact, considerably more anxious than he reported himself to be. Furthermore, this anxiety affected both of the officers’ performance on a later test. Both performed twice as badly—with an error rate of 55 percent—in a shoot/don’t shoot decision making task, compared with other officer participants who had not been asked the same racially charged question.

In separate experiments, Akinola explored two related questions: Does having high status have a positive effect on health and performance, and do individuals perform better when working with someone of the same race, relative to someone of a different race? In the first study, participants in a lab were randomly assigned to be a leader or a supporter while working on a cooperative task—solving a maze puzzle—with a partner. At the end, the participant could give their partner a performance bonus based on how well the partner performed. During the exercise, various physiological responses were measured, including heart rate and testosterone levels, in an effort to examine whether one’s social status can create powerful changes in physiological reactivity, as well as performance and generosity.

The study found that participants in the high-status role,
relative to participants in low-status roles, had greater increase in heart rate, testosterone levels, and other physiological measures indicative of more adaptive physiological responses. Further, high-status participants performed better on the puzzles and were also more generous, compared with low-status participants. “They were more engaged,” Akinola explained. “High-status participants exhibited adaptive, approach-oriented physiology.”

However, the study involved white participants who were partnered, in most cases, with other white participants. In the second study, she paired white participants with African American partners. The results: “the beneficial effects of high status were muted,” Akinola said. “In cross-race interactions, being high status did not result in more adaptive physiological responses, enhanced performance, and greater generosity.” She is planning future studies to explore the various mechanisms that trigger intergroup anxiety. “We need to change the quality of interactions that people have, so that cross-race interactions are less stressful,” she said. “My hope is that we can come up with interventions that will help a broad range of people to be more effective, and even healthier, in our organizations.”

Ashleigh Shelby Rosette continued the discussion by presenting her research on the perceptions of status and inequity in organizations. “Few people would argue that social inequality does not exist in our society and in organizations,” she said. “But some people deny the idea of social inequity—that the observed inequality among social groups in our society at large and in our organizations, specifically, can come about because of some type of bias or unfairness in our social systems. In my research, I focus on social inequity.”

Rosette explored the effects of framing questions related to inequity in an atypical way: from the perspective of those who are privileged. “When we talk about social inequity, it is almost always from the perspective of a ‘disadvantaged’ group,” she said. “So if we talk about gender, it’s about women. When we discuss race, we’re considering the perspectives of racial minorities. And that is very limiting because social inequity encompasses a socially dominant or privileged perspective as well. And framing these issues through a privileged perspective has been shown to increase support for policies aimed at mitigating inequity.”

In her previous research, Rosette took on the task of investigating the conditions under which socially dominant groups were likely to recognize social inequity framed as privilege. In a series of studies, she and her co-author showed that occupying a subordinate position on one particular status dimension could enhance perceptions of one’s privilege on a different dimension. In two studies, she showed that white women (a subordinate gender group, but dominant racial group) were more likely to recognize their racial privilege when they perceived themselves as only moderately, as opposed to very, successful. In a third study, she showed a comparable effect for black men (a subordinate racial group, but dominant gender group). The contrast between one’s experiences of disadvantage on one domain enhanced privilege recognition on that same domain, which then helped to facilitate privilege recognition on a different domain.

Because of her previous research on the white standard of leadership, which showed that race—being white (and male), is a prototypical leadership characteristic, she wanted to investigate how white men perceived various types of privilege. “White men occupy decision-making positions,” Rosette said. “Alienating them is not what I set out to do.” To address this issue, she surveyed about 800 middle-class white men and asked if they felt disadvantaged in any context, such as race, sexual orientation, or gender. White men who experienced some disadvantage were more likely to recognize privilege, Rosette found. “Looking ahead, we should work on making individuals aware of their privilege,” Rosette concluded. “This not only activates the motivation to mitigate inequity, but places the motivation in the hands of the very people who are most empowered to address the problem.”

Frank Dobbin, an organizational sociologist, explored a different means of mitigating the effects of inequity.
and discrimination. As a white man, he often finds that managers—specifically, white male managers—are willing to give him a more accurate picture of how they feel about diversity measures. “Often I hear what a waste of time it all is,” he said. “How they hate being evaluated, how they hate going through diversity training.”

He started collecting data about which types of diversity practices are most effective, a question that had previously received little attention. “We knew a lot about what organizations were doing, and what kind of antidiscrimination practices they put into place,” he said. “But we knew very little about the effects of different kinds of programs on the diversity of the managerial workforce.”

Using federal data from for-profit companies dating back to 1971, which included the race, ethnic, and gender breakdowns of nine job categories, he was able to look at specifics—such as the number of African American women in management at a particular grocery chain over a period of decades. He also surveyed about 830 firms to get the history of their diversity practices, including hiring, promotion, and recruitment. With this data, he could see the impact of implementing a specific type of diversity practice. “The good news is, some things really work,” Dobbin said. “The bad news: the things that most companies are throwing all of their money at don’t really do that much.”

He discussed two theories that help explain why some practices are ineffective: labeling theory and self-determination theory. “Labeling theory argues that if people are labeled as biased or bigots, it will affect their subsequent behavior: they may come to see themselves as biased,” he explained. “Control theorists say if you try to control a person’s decisions, they’ll rebel.” Diversity measures such as training, evaluations, and scorecards all produce neutral or even negative results, because they tend to blame or label managers. Personnel management measures that try to control managers’ behavior—such as basing hiring on a test rather than on personal connections—also backfire, because they trigger the urge to resist external controls. “The worst practice is the use of grievance procedures,” Dobbin said. “People rarely use the procedures, but it pisses off white male managers to know that somebody they hadn’t promoted could challenge their decision and the firm could sanction them for bias.”

What does work? Putting managers in charge, Dobbin stated. Targeted recruitment programs, such as trying to recruit women and minorities at colleges, has been shown to be very effective, as have diversity task forces, diversity managers, and mentoring programs. “Mentoring programs mean that a lot of white males will suddenly interact with someone from a different race or gender,” he said. “They become sponsors and champions.”

The bottom line: as managers create the next wave of diversity programs, look for inclusion. “Don’t make managers part of the problem,” Dobbin said, concluding the panel. “Try to make them part of the solution.”

Changing Culture Through Collaboration: A View from Columbia Business School and Harvard

In the previous panels, researchers and practitioners outlined many of the barriers faced by those who strive to bring greater diversity and inclusion to their organizations. One is motivating those in power to support the effort. Another is ensuring that policies and practices are consistent throughout various levels of management. And a perennial challenge is framing questions and advocating for change in ways that will not alienate others and shut down the possibility of working together toward solutions.

and Harvard,” examined ways that three researchers and practitioners have overcome such challenges in their organizations. “This is about taking knowledge and weaving it into the institutional practices of our organizations, so there will be impact that is sustainable, that will have traction, and that will keep people at the table when we’re doing this difficult work,” said Susan Sturm, the George M. Jaffin Professor of Law and Social Responsibility at Columbia Law School, who moderated the panel. “There isn’t a silver bullet or any quick fix. And if we can’t do this in ways that make people feel connected to the goals, then we’re not going to sustain this effort over the long run.”

Katherine Phillips opened the talk by discussing her move to Columbia from Northwestern University’s Kellogg School of Management, where she was a tenured professor. “Before I arrived, Columbia Business School had a reputation for being a finance school, and very quantitatively focused,” she said. “Statistics and accounting were the first two classes, and that reinforced the status hierarchy: people who were already seen as ‘the best’ could show that they were the best, and others might feel like they didn’t have a voice or an opportunity to shape the culture.”

In her role as senior vice dean, Phillips sought to broaden the perception of who and what was seen as “the best.” One early effort was adding a leadership class to the first semester curriculum. “Whether you know it or not, you are socializing people into your system from the moment they walk in the door,” she said. “The things that you put in front of them—everything that they initially experience—will set the tone for the rest of the experience.”

Robin Ely, the Diane Doerge Wilson Professor of Business Administration and senior associate dean for culture and community at Harvard Business School, discussed her school’s initiative to increase inclusion. For many years, faculty members and students had questioned whether everyone could thrive in the school’s environment, and, if not, why certain groups were disadvantaged. It was widely known that the school had a significant and long-standing gender grade gap, with women students getting lower grades, on average, on tests. This began receiving more attention when a grassroots student movement launched a field study to research the causes of the grade gap.

When the current dean took office in 2010, he told faculty members that addressing these disparities would be a priority for his organization. Results quickly followed. “There were more women in the administration,” says Ely, who headed up an initiative on the grade gap. “And there were more leaders who understood the student culture very well, and were very conscious of issues of inequity.”

Erin Thomas, a social psychologist who is currently serving as the first gender diversity specialist for Argonne National Laboratory, discussed her efforts to increase the representation and advancement of women and minorities in an environment that is predominately male and white. The average age of Argonne’s 3,500 employees is 45 to 54, and the average tenure is about 20 years. Argonne is a national science and engineering laboratory that works on large-scale research projects for the federal government.

The nature of Thomas’ role has changed during the year and a half she has worked at Argonne. “My position was created because of a grassroots initiative,” she explained. “We have a very strong women’s advocacy group; these were scientists who became social scientists on the side. But coming in with just a gender focus, rather than a focus on inclusion for all, seemed myopic.” In her short time there, she has successfully made a case for looking at diversity more holistically, and at layers of diversity within gender groups. “It’s really about community,” she said, “and building a space where everyone can thrive.”

Once such initial efforts are off the ground, Sturm asked the panelists, what are the best ways to increase participation and motivate stakeholders? Phillips discussed the similarities between her experience...
at Columbia Business School and Ely’s experience at Harvard. “A year after I arrived, there was recognition that the top 10 percent of the class had only 27 percent women, even though the school was 36 percent women,” Phillips said. “And a number of things came together at the same time: there were discussions about gender, race and ethnicity, and sexual identity.” In addition, some students approached her and other members of the administration about doing a study on the achievements of women at the school.

In response to these efforts and to her own desire to create change, Phillips has worked to make diversity and inclusion part of everyday life at the school. “It’s getting institutionalized into the culture,” she said. “We can’t be there for every interaction students are having. But you can institutionalize it by getting everyone engaged and involved. It’s what you do in your interactions with other people that make them feel like they’re a part of the organization.”

Ely discussed the challenges of sustaining such efforts. “It’s especially difficult in terms of student initiatives,” she explained. “Students turn over every two years. So it can be hard to institutionalize the sort of cultural change that we’re undertaking.” Currently she is enacting aspects of a framework developed by Sturm, whose writing has focused on the architecture of inclusion. Like Phillips, Ely is working to incorporate social change into an array of the school’s activities, as well as ensuring that those in leadership positions make change a part of daily practice. “You need leaders who really understand and have a consciousness about what you’re doing,” she said. “And who have the credibility and the legitimacy to address the issues when they come up. That’s where we are now: building skills for people to raise these issues when they see them.”

For Thomas, an important move has proven to be taking a step back and approaching problems from the perspective of a researcher. “I ask a lot of how and why questions,” she said. “How do we get more diverse workers in the pipeline? How do we capture diverse talent? How do we nurture that talent? How do we train emerging leaders?”

Like Phillips and Ely, she stressed the importance of getting others involved throughout the organization. “I have a lot of energy, but I’m just one person,” she said. “So we’ve been very strategic at aligning my role, and matrixing in existing roles—in educational outreach, in talent acquisition, and in HR—and making sure that these individuals know that diversity and inclusion are now components of the job.” As other practitioners noted in previous panels, talking about diversity at the middle-management level presents its own set of challenges; often, managers below the senior level don’t understand why diversity is important, Thomas has found. “So we make a concerted effort to provide toolkits,” she said. “We’re not asking them to become diversity experts. We’re asking them to focus on the things they can do.”

The value of taking small steps toward achieving change was echoed by Phillips in her conclusion. “None of us have the solution,” she said. “But I am empowered by the small changes we can make and the positive impact we can have on someone’s life. Even if it’s just our own lives. So I encourage you to keep taking those steps.”
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