

The System of Oppression in Our Workplace Is Limiting All of Us

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It's time for all of us to look inward to our industry and begin the conversation about diversity and inclusion. In my experience, at most agencies and companies in Los Angeles, most creatives are white, a few are Asians, but only one or two, if not zero, are Black or brown people. And many leaders are men with one or two that are women—usually white. The systemic oppression is not only in criminal justice, education, financial institutions, etc.—it's in our work and our workplace.

Take a look at the company roster: co-workers' races, genders and roles. Is it balanced? Is it diverse? During the hiring process, we could say they weren't qualified for the role either by lack of experience or skills. And we could say their personality wasn't a good fit, but what culture are we basing that off of? Looking at education, we'd prefer a bachelor's degree over an associate degree, Ivy League over state school. All of what we could say to deny a candidate can be a reflection of the overall oppression that's kept women and minorities from a quality education that snowballed up to this very moment.

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When we work with different genders and races, we press against our own stereotypes and comfort zones. It will shift the team dynamic. We learn empathy, compassion, teamwork, acceptance and, most importantly, we will learn humanity. And we learn that the creative genius has no gender or race.

Having a balance of genders and races represented, we become connected to who we are as human beings—and who we are advertising to. In the absence of balance, we are limited to mirrors of our own culture and the rest remain unrelatable and unimportant.

Ideating scenarios and scenes

Based on what we're selling and who we're selling to, we devise our plans and our narratives. But so often we default to white people and their lives—that's what's upheld as the ideal American Dream. This is the low hanging fruit; it's a dead horse we've been beating for decades. The dream shouldn't be to be white. While inclusion of minorities can be found in ads and movies as supporting characters and some as leads in recent years, somehow it still doesn't seem balanced because it's often posed as a token.

We as advertisers have the power to create new stories and visions—we have agency to set the new ideal. We have so much impact on viewers and consumers. We help shape and define what's popular, what's in fashion and what's desired. We bring to the front and exploit insecurities—insecurities that are defined by white standards. We are accountable for reinforcing these subliminal notions. With new views and angles contributed by different genders and races, creativity itself is challenged, and we can finally stop treating minorities as PR props. We can build new visions of the American ideal, the standard, the life.

With recent events, a few brands have posted content in support of the Black Lives Matter movement on their social channels. This corporate solidarity content likely came from one of us. Some clients will ask for it, some agencies will pitch it and some will choose to avoid it from either or both ends. Is it not weird that Covid-19 is worthy of compassionate content but standing beside the fight against injustice isn't? Many brands remain silent, fearing backlash, from entering

political conversations, but their silence is its own political statement. And this silence is grotesque.

We must tell ourselves and our clients: Don't fear the conversations becoming messy and heavy. And while most people in our industry seem progressive, it's in moments like these that it's revealed to us that many actually uphold conservative views or superficial stances by choosing to remain silent and declining to take action in our work and workplaces. Jumping on the bandwagon for our clients and for our own social reputations is dishonest and disingenuous when internally, we're still abetting the problem. How dare we take part in these conversations and show "solidarity" when we're also guilty of being complicit, when we ourselves are not hiring minorities and female creatives, the subjects of the conversations we're having?

Recruiters are doing their jobs in following the description and the parameters defined by a creative lead, and neither factors systematic oppressions into the criteria. We must look beyond education—at their portfolio and their creative genius, seeking their potential, their talent. The blame falls on all of us for not wanting and creating the balance in diversity within our own walls.

Are we doing absolutely everything to hire and empower women and minorities? Are we actually invested in change? Are we offering tools, classes, internships and mentorships to help prepare and advise them? Are we donating not just our money but also our time and knowledge? Are we offering them jobs? Give them not only a chance but our trust and faith. Empower them. Believe in them. Our society can change when we are also invested in the change. Be a part of this creative solution. Don't just tweet, check the box and think we've done the part. Don't be satisfied with empty words. Be a part of the change, and be a part of the new era of advertising.

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