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## The Rules of the Diversity and Inclusion Racket

What white people really mean when they talk about diversity in higher education.



BY DR. CHANDA PRESCOD-WEINSTEIN

When I began my Ph.D. in astronomy in 2003, I thought discussions about diversity and inclusion were about me. Me, as in, the all-too-rare Black woman in physics and astronomy. I wrote about what it meant in my application for a prestigious graduate research fellowship from the National Science Foundation (NSF). When I was the only person in my world-renowned Ph.D. program at UC Santa Cruz to win the fellowship that year, I took my success as an affirmation that the right people were serious about promoting folks like me. I took advantage of the freedom that came with the money, which kept me from being dependent on the whims of an advisor or even my Ph.D. program itself, eventually departing for a hip new program in theoretical physics that was just getting started in Canada.

I also took advantage of that freedom by getting heavily involved in the one professional society that had ever felt like home to me, the National Society of Black Physicists (NSBP). At the time, I thought I was quite lucky that the NSBP leadership was nurturing a young leader, providing me with opportunities that no other professional society would give me. And they did. NSBP allowed me to be in the room for important meetings, like a grant renewal meeting with NSF officials, and taught me to articulate my positionality as a Black woman in astro/physics in spaces like the 2009 Women in Astronomy meeting. You'd think this wouldn't be a problem, but by the time I finished my Ph.D. in physics in 2011, I had figured out that discussions of diversity and inclusion weren't about me at all.

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Where I wanted to talk about racism and sexism, they wanted to talk about unconscious bias. When I wanted to talk about women of color, they said, “women and minorities.” Questions were raised about my tone. Those conversations weren’t about acknowledging my humanity or my human rights. They were about the intersection of workforce concerns with national security considerations; they were about appearances; they were about educating white students; and they were about how diversity and inclusion played in the public eye.

Along with these questionable intentions, there are a whole set of rules that govern the conversation, which I have come to call the “Diversity and Inclusion Racket.” Below, I present just 50 of them. They are not the rules as I would write them. They are the hellscape I’ve learned to live in.

Diversity and Inclusion Racket rule #1: If you have to choose between supporting a Black woman and supporting a white (male) ally you feel has been supportive of Black women, definitely blackball the Black woman because diversity and inclusion is about supporting allies.

#2: Allies always deserve awards and cake and cookies.

#3: It’s important to persist in saying “women and minorities” as if someone can’t be both. In relation, regularly point out that there are increasing numbers of women at your conference without ever noting that almost all of them are white.

#4: Use “intersectionality” a lot but never read Kimberlé Crenshaw’s papers.

#5: Say that you can’t challenge inappropriate behavior because the person engaging in it is a person of color, so you just have to watch terrible things happen and can’t step in.

#6: If you’re white, intentions are all that matter. If you’re not white, what matters is how you make white colleagues feel.

#7: When a white woman cries, it is sad. It’s too bad they’re so emotional but you just have to be sensitive. Black women having any kind of feelings is an overreaction, however.

#8: Pretend like Black, Indigenous, and POC (BIPOC) men don’t (sexually) harass Black, Indigenous and other women of color/nonbinary people and like we’re all one giant monolith.

#9: Treat “underrepresented minority” like it is a racial monolith. Never think through what it means when you categorize white Spaniards as people of color. Assume that Indigenous people and non-Black people of color are never anti-Black.

#10: It is always better to publish more (mediocre) papers than to make room for Black and Indigenous women to thrive, so always choose the white candidate with more traditional qualifications, even if your workplace is desperately white.

#11: Always assume Black women and other POC are not disabled. Assume all the disabled people are white. Also, assume disabled people are just being difficult when they ask for what they need and are entitled to, but also make sure to regularly say that inclusion and access matter a lot.

#12: Assume that you can just hire women from other countries to address your department's diversity issues. If you're international, complain that domestic people of color complain too much, and don't work hard enough.

#13: Assume women from other countries don't need support confronting racism, xenophobia and sexism, because America is great.

#14: Talk a good diversity, inclusion and equity game but also never report the racist and sexist comments you hear during hiring discussions to your affirmative action office or literally anyone who might do something.

#15: Give props (awards, cookies, cake, parties) to white people who do diversity work and question the basic competence and time management skills of everyone else who does it (especially if they seem better at it than your local white award winners).

#16: Diversity is important but not at the expense of excellence. Tell that to students of color wondering why their professors are all white. Tell that to the scholars you could be hiring to teach those students, if only they were excellent enough. Also remember that diversity of thought is important, which is why we value those who seek to debate the value of people of color and Indigenous humanity and cultures.

#17: It is totally fine to take in a Black mentee that you treat like a pet you saved from euthanasia, but please don't do anything radical like put up a sign saying your student's life matters. Anti-racism and diversity do not go together.

#18: Exploit strategic disagreements between Black/Indigenous/people of color (BIPOC). Exploit them for your own professional gain if you can! Especially if you are BIPOC: make sure you are the only one who gets through the door.

#19: Threaten white people who are being good accomplices to BIPOC with professional ruin. If you can, refer to them as, "witch hunters!"

#20: Publicly state that you want a diverse applicant pool, heavily recruit BIPOC candidates, take up their time with interviews, and never tell them there's no way the decision-makers see them as anything but a checkbox for the higher-ups. Hire a white guy.

#21: Assume that BIPOC with less prestigious institutional affiliations and professional accomplishments are individual failures, not people who might do well given the right circumstances. Assume those with lots of prestige didn't earn it.

#22: This one is very popular: Organize diversity fellowships and hiring programs with very little buy-in from the people who make the final hiring decision. Do nothing to incentivize buy-in from those people. Wonder and/or don't care why program fails.

#23: If you're a white queer man, demand access to programs designed to encourage people of color and white women's participation in your area of work. Forget to pretend that you care about non-binary people. Think only of yourself.

#24: Only hire BIPOC people who have secured lasting success somewhere else. Why increase overall numbers nationally when you can cheaply change your local numbers? Don't give new voices a chance — they're risky and too activist.

#25: Never ever talk about colorism. You don't even see color!!!

#26: Completely depend on intellectual work coming out of ethnic studies and feminist studies programs which shape social science research on diversity. Do nothing to support these programs when they are attacked by press and politicians.

#27: There is nothing more dangerous than a woman or non-binary (enby) person of color who knows what they are about and refuses to sell themselves to you. Literally, they are very dangerous. Shut them down.

#28: If you must stop a person of color from doing something harmful, do it in the most damaging way possible. Treating people like they are disposable is the best way to build a more diverse, inclusive and equitable world.

#29: Use "decolonization" and "diversity" interchangeably. Call Black people settlers. (Finally, something where white people and Black people are equally at fault!)

#30: If you're a university leader, hire a VP for diversity, equity and inclusion when students ask for more BIPOC tenure track faculty. If the new hire is a white man, tell students of color who complain that they are racist. If they are a BIPOC, give them very little institutional power.

#31: If you're going to hire Black people, only hire Black men. Remember, it's about "women and minorities." All the Blacks are men. Ignore the trail of sexual misconduct stories following him around because Black men have it hard, and Black women aren't even on your radar. Besides, he's Black, what else do you expect from him?

#32: Make sure to always talk to Black people about their tone. Until they sort out their tone, white people can't stop being racist. That's how that works. When Black people cater to white people's emotional well-being, white people will start treating Black people like they are equals.

#33: Assume BIPOC want to do diversity work and are competent to mentor other BIPOC. Never mind that BIPOC who get through the door have often been selected for their ability to mimic the ways of white academics.

#34: Extract work from Black women and enbies. Then extract some more. Then some more. Then some more. Note with curiosity that Black women academics seem to die young/lose their minds. Ask the local Black woman/enby to explain how to fix this.

#35: Say you support a woman of color, you're a big fan in fact, but also remember that her tweets come on too strong in your view. Make a point of excluding her from conferences and other events, thereby validating all of her angry tweets.

#36: If you're white, only listen to BIPOC that you're friends with or who make you comfortable.

#37: Start a Diversity and Inclusion business, take ideas from Black women and never credit them, privately gossip about how those Black women are a problem because of their tone and attitude. Build your business around saying you are pro-Black woman.

#38: Reading is not fundamental. Anyone who believes they care about diversity, equity and inclusion can be a leader on diversity and inclusion.

#39: Ignore the fact that Asia is a giant umbrella with over 50 ethnicities and national identities. Also, don't bother specifying Asian American when that's what you mean. Always just say "Asians."

#40: Because some Asian ethnic groups are overrepresented or fairly represented in science, act like they all are. I mean, is the difference

between Hmong and Taiwanese even important?

#41: Once you have a token BIPOC, preferably a woman and/or femme, to shut down the radicals, consider your work done for the decade.

#42: The BIPOC who agrees with you is the good one.

#43: Never go beyond the bare minimum of what the ADA requires. Like jeez, most of the time people don't even respect the ADA, so you're pretty cool.

#44: It doesn't matter whether the Native American you hired is in good relations with their community. All that matters is that they checked a box, and now you get to check one too! It also doesn't really matter if you ever learn anything about the tribal communities that are local to you.

#45: Instead of hiring minoritized tenure track faculty who are competent at mentoring marginalized students at your university, only hire lower-income full-time staff who have no hope of job stability at your institution.

#46: Proclaim poverty in the face of an endowment that is only \$300 million. Say you'd stop hiring only white faculty if you just had \$1 billion instead.

#47: Admonish minoritized people who, after years of begging for institutional support, organize wildly successful events without institutional buy-in. They should have let you get credit for their hard work and success!

#48: If they can't beat you, pressure them into joining you. Institutionalize critics with new, powerless administrative roles, ASAP. Then when things are still overall terrible, you can blame that person and say it was all the POC's idea.

#49: Organize events on diversity, intersectionality and decolonization. Confine abstract submission to "practical" suggestions that don't disrupt the status quo. Select participants by computer, because expertise and investment don't matter.

#50: Act like America hasn't always been racist. Act like America isn't a settler colonial nation. Act like Native American sovereignty is just a matter of inclusion.

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