

B E Y O N D D I V E R S I T Y

Rohit Bhargava and Jennifer Brown

With: Andrius Alvarez-Backus, Chhavi Arya, Karen Dahms,
Sandhya Jain-Patel, Kaleena Sales, Monika Samtani

12 NON-OBVIOUS WAYS TO BUILD A MORE INCLUSIVE WORLD



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BEYOND DIVERSITY

**12 Non-Obvious Ways To
Build A More Inclusive World**

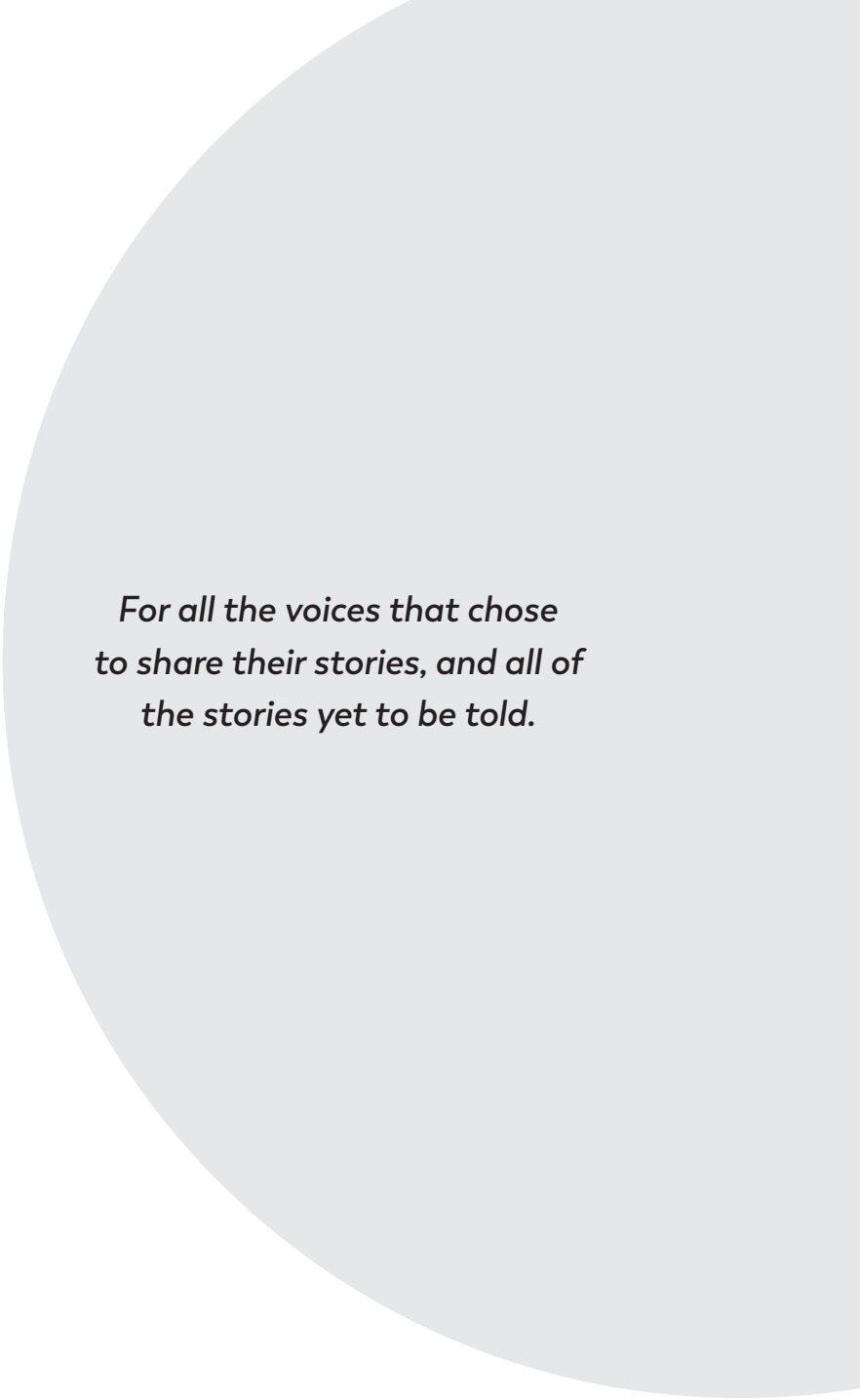
**ROHIT BHARGAVA
JENNIFER BROWN**

With:

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Sandhya Jain-Patel, Kaleena Sales, Monika Samtani**



WASHINGTON, D.C.



*For all the voices that chose
to share their stories, and all of
the stories yet to be told.*



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“There is always light. If only we’re brave enough to see it.
If only we’re brave enough to be it.”

— AMANDA GORMAN, AMERICAN POET



AUTHORS' NOTE

This ambitious book exists because more than two hundred people were willing to engage in difficult conversations. In January of 2021, we all gathered at the first annual Non-Obvious Beyond Diversity Summit. The ideas in this book are inspired by the themes we explored across that week-long virtual event.

Race, identity, gender, discrimination, equity, belonging and love are deeply emotional topics. To discuss them candidly in the company of others requires bravery.

Yet we know that creating a more equitable society has to go *beyond* conversation. Together with an amazing team of contributors, we wrote this book to imagine solutions and inspire actions. An inclusive world is worth making. Let's get started building it together.

— Rohit and Jennifer

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FULL LIST OF SESSIONS FROM THE 1st NON-OBVIOUS BEYOND DIVERSITY SUMMIT

STORYTELLING

- Sharing the Stage: #manels and More Inclusive Conference Speakers
- How to Own Your Creative Vision – Interview with Aneesh Chaganty
- Casting Calls: How to Include Underrepresented Voices in Film & TV
- Flipping the Script: Monika Samtani with Meera Menon + Deniese Davis
- Backstage: Lifting the Curtain on Theater's Diversity Problem
- Changing the Narrative: The Fight for More Diversity in Book Publishing
- Bigger Stories: Supporting More Diversity in Journalism + News Media

IDENTITY

- Just Be You: Embracing Our Bodies and Ourselves, Just as We Are
- Our Body is Power: Creating a Positive Representation of Ourselves
- Work It Out: Making Health and Fitness More Inclusive
- Shady Choices: Colorism and the Shifting "Face" of Fashion Brands

FAMILY

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- Ending Gender Based Violence: Interview with Indrani Goradia
- Anti-Dad? The Persistent Bias Against Fathers in The Workplace
- Shared Parenting: How the Pandemic Shifted Family Life Balance
- How To Talk to Racists: Interview with Dr. David Camppt

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- Breaking Through: How to Mentor & Champion More Women at Work
- Lost In Translation: How to Lead a Diverse & Inclusive Team
- How to Lead Diverse Teams: Rohit Bhargava with Beth Comstock
- Supporting Female Executives – Interview with Deepa Purushothaman

CULTURE

- How To Create a More Inclusive World: Rohit Bhargava w/ Maysoon Zayid
- Rethinking the Way Muslims Are Portrayed in Media & Entertainment
- Now United: How a Global Pop Music Group Brings the World Together
- New Flavors: The Role of Food in Creating a More Inclusive World
- Is Diversity Funny? How Comedians of Color Navigate a Sensitive Topic
- Remembering The Past: How Museums Amplify Diversity Conversations
- How Rock Stars Build Their Ensemble: Interview with Stacy Campbell

WATCH THESE SESSIONS ONLINE!

www.nonobviousdiversity.com

EDUCATION

- Starting Early: Why Creating Diverse Content for Kids Matters
- Diversity at College: How to Make Higher Education More Inclusive
- How To Teach Racial Literacy with Priya Vulchi and Winona Guo

RETAIL

- Bringing More Diverse Perspectives into Marketing, PR and Advertising
- Diversity In Retail: Creating More Welcoming Experiences for All
- Visualizing Diversity: How the Marketing Imagery Is Changing

WORKPLACE

- Master Collaborators: Leadership Lessons from Disabled Trailblazers
- Hire Equity: Transforming the Recruiting Process to Be More Inclusive
- Unique Talent: Neurodiversity in The Modern Workplace
- Never Too Old: Ageism + Integrating Older Talent into The Workforce
- How Men Can Be Better Advocates for Gender Equality

TECHNOLOGY

- Women in Tech: How to Get More Women into the Tech Industry
- Everyone Welcome: Using Tech to Create More Inclusive Workplaces
- Technically Biased: Solving the Plague of Algorithmic Bias in Technology
- Safe Havens: What Gaming Communities Teach Us About Inclusion

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

- Getting Funded: How Investors Support Diverse Startup Founders
- Main Street 2.0: Building Equitable and Inclusive Economic Engines
- The Rural Renaissance: How Rural Communities Get Connected

GOVERNMENT

- Represented: How Politics and Government Is Becoming More Diverse
- Social Impact and Racial Justice in the Age of Diversity
- How Diversity Fuels Bright Ideas for the Federal Government
- Health Equity: Why Diversity Matters in Public Health

FUTURE

- Toward the Future Normal: Futurists Share Diversity Predictions
- Diverse City: How to Create More Inclusive Cities of the Future
- Robot Citizens: How Artificial Beings Will Challenge Our Perceptions



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Our Words . . .

The language we use to describe situations, people, and issues is important. It can signal judgment and fuel division, or it can offer empathy and create dialogue.

Throughout this book we have tried to be thoughtful about our words. Every term, capitalization, or label was chosen with intention and tested not only by our team of contributors but also with nearly a dozen sensitivity readers.

To learn more about our language choices, turn to the appendix at the end of this book.



INTRODUCTION

“If there is a book that you want to read, but it hasn’t been written yet, you must be the one to write it.”

— **TONI MORRISON**

On a cavernous soundstage in Denmark, groups of people file in one by one. They are clearly different from one another. One group walks in with tattoos. Another, all female, is wearing medical uniforms in various colors. There is an all-White group, right alongside one that includes people visibly from multiple ethnicities. Each group stands apart, staring uncomfortably at one another for what seems like an eternity.

Finally, a host comes in to explain what is about to happen.

“I’m going to ask you some questions today,” he says. “Some of them may be a bit personal, but I hope you will answer them honestly.”

The first question immediately reduces the tension. “Which one of you was the class clown?” A smattering of people from each cluster comes forward. They line up together on the far side of the room and stand in front of a screen posing for a group photo. The session continues with a range of other unexpected questions. Who among you are stepparents? Who has been bullied? Who has *been* a bully? Who feels lonely? After each question, people come together, embrace, pose for a photograph, and return to their group.

The point of the exercise soon becomes clear to every participant: they are celebrating their similarities instead of their differences.



Watch the TV2 social experiment video at www.nonobviousdiversity.com/resources.

This social experiment was conceived and filmed several years ago to promote Denmark’s most-watched family of channels, TV2. Titled “All That We Share,” the campaign ran on Danish television and was later released globally on YouTube.¹ It quickly went viral, racking up nearly 300 million views and winning a prestigious Gold Cannes Lion award.

This focus on similarities is sadly missing in many conversations happening about diversity and inclusion across the world. It is a rarely spotlighted irony that so much of the dialogue about diversity ends up emphasizing what sets us apart instead.

You can see this splintered approach in the structure of many live and virtual events aimed at exploring the theme of diversity. There are conferences dedicated to racial justice, reducing gender discrimination at work, advocating for LGBTQ+ legislation, eliminating ageism at work, creating more accessible digital content for people with disabilities, making corporate boards more inclusive, and much more.

These conferences host important conversations—and they offer a safe space for people who have been excluded and marginalized to share their experiences freely and have their points of view heard and discussed. They play an essential role in our evolving conversation about diversity and equity.

And yet, they are not enough.

These often-insular conversations about diversity don't reflect the reality of our intersecting identities. As the TV2 viral experiment so powerfully illustrates, none of us fits neatly into a single category. We exist through intersections, but our conversations about diversity regularly push us to pick one dimension of ourselves at the expense of others. These dimensions are the lenses that shape how we perceive our place in the world. Being Hispanic, or female, or gay, or over 50, or disabled, or any combination of identities helps us zoom in on a unique perspective of the world. But while zoom lenses are helpful for focusing on details, they are intentionally designed to ignore the full picture.

If there is one shortcoming of the worldwide conversation about diversity and inclusion, it is this: focusing on only one aspect of our identities prevents the opportunity to better understand ourselves and others outside that one label.

Instead, there is a concept we will discuss frequently in this book known as *intersectionality*. The term, first coined by American lawyer and civil rights advocate Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, refers to the idea that none of us can be defined by a single label, but only through a combination of social identities.

Embracing the idea of intersectionality requires us to switch to a wide-angle lens. What if we had conferences, TV shows, or corporate recruiting programs dedicated to bringing people and perspectives together that might never otherwise share the same space? It is exciting to imagine the sorts of questions and topics that might arise.

How would someone fighting to end gender pay gaps relate to a disabled gamer demanding more accessible experiences? What would an advocate for racial literacy in schools say to a researcher studying how to end age-related biases at work? What might a local business fighting to expand broadband internet access for those living on Native American reservations ask a community organizer imagining how to transform a neglected local park into a vibrant urban garden? All of these people are pioneers fighting for equity, but they rarely (if ever) cross paths.

To truly create a more inclusive world, we need to move beyond the usual diversity conversations and break down the barriers between these topics.

“Sometimes the assumptions we make about others come not from what we have been told or what we have seen on television or in books, but rather from what we have not been told.”

Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum, Author and Psychologist

Vernā Myers, vice president of inclusion strategy at Netflix, once said, “diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance.” Her words are often shared by those who advocate for diversity, but for us, they inspired a question: what if everyone was not only invited to the party and asked to dance, but also left with a mixtape filled with music they would love, but had never had the chance to hear before?

In late 2020, we decided to try and host this type of party. It started with the idea of a one-day virtual event that would bring together a dozen or so diversity and inclusion experts from various fields. Over the next few months, that concept sparked a whirlwind of hundreds of conversations and 20-hour-days that would eventually result in the groundbreaking gathering of voices that inspired this book. It all began, as many great ideas do, with listening.

The World's Most Ambitious Conversation About Diversity

In 2020, an app called Clubhouse started to take off. A real-time audio chat room where anyone can start a conversation, the app owed much of its rapid growth to early popularity with Black creators and musicians. As a result, users of Clubhouse were highly likely to enter “rooms” on the platform and hear conversations hosted by people whose diverse opinions and expertise were frequently missing from mainstream media.

Plunging into this never-ending stream of conversations, at any given moment you could hear struggling professionals grappling with bias in the workplace, while minutes later, you might join a group of parents talking about accepting their transgender kids. In a single afternoon, you could participate in conversations about neurodivergent education, hear immigration questions from refugees, experience the daily heroism of doctors working on the front lines to fight COVID-19, debate cultural appropriation and learn about income inequality.

These are topics many of us who have contributed to this book deal with every day in our work. To add even more authentic perspectives to our efforts, we augmented our daily conversations about diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) by dipping in and out of rooms on Clubhouse and listening to real people share their experiences and challenges. We also spent the past year participating in virtual conferences, professional webinars, and

training sessions centered on DEI. We read dozens of reports, books and magazine articles.

Finally we started putting together a list of topics for our virtual event. It grew quickly: Women in tech. Inclusive higher education. Colorism in fashion. Body shaming. Neurodiverse recruiting. Accessible gaming. Workplace ageism. Racial justice. Image bias. Pay equity. Gender fluidity. White fragility. Social belonging. Diverse casting. Representative government. The list goes on.

Along the way, we discovered meaningful conversations already happening about all these topics amongst experts and advocates. We discovered that most of them were happening in isolation, completely separate from one another. It was like seeing an entire relay contest of athletes racing side by side, with no one passing any batons. It became clear that creating a conversation where we connected the dots between these topics would necessitate something more significant than gathering a dozen smart people together for one day. So we sent out more inquiries to more people and engaged the help of additional experts to expand our vision.

By the time the virtual event was broadcast live in late January 2021, we had lined up just over 200 speakers who participated in more than 50 sessions. Over 75 percent described themselves as belonging to an underrepresented group. More than two-thirds identified as a gender other than male. The range of expertise and topics represented was equally diverse.

Our panel of experts included a widely loved news anchor, a world record holder as the heaviest person to complete a marathon, multiple chief diversity officers, the popular voice of an animated children's TV show character, a master puppeteer, a child abuse survivor, a former Miss India winner and two hundred others.



Watch all 50+ sessions from the summit at
www.nonobviousdiversity.com/resources

We called the event the “Non-Obvious Beyond Diversity Summit.” It was *Non-Obvious* because of the types of conversations we hoped to curate. And it went *Beyond Diversity*, because we knew that if we were truly going to have an impact, we needed to focus every conversation on tangible actions we could all take to build a more inclusive world. Our tagline came from one of our speakers who remarked that the event sounded like “the world’s most ambitious conversation about diversity.”

Our “ambitious” conversation was a hit.

Thousands of people watched the event live and commented on the sessions in real time, and hundreds of thousands watched them on demand in the months afterward. But the day after the summit ended, we knew our work had only begun. To share the insights we heard with a wider audience, we started working on this book. The first step was to identify twelve themes that cut across all the sessions. Then we assembled a team of expert contributors and started writing.

The book you hold in your hands is the final product. It is a compilation of conversations that we hope will launch you into a journey to understand people unlike yourself. For us, and perhaps for you as well, it usually starts with a moment of awakening.

Where Every Diversity Journey Starts . . .

You may be thinking that the path to experiencing this moment is someone else's journey to take. Maybe you come from a marginalized group yourself. Some of you might even be DEI experts. Or you may already consider yourself to be an ally and advocate for equity and inclusion through your actions or beliefs. Wherever you are on your journey, we hope this book and the stories in it will inspire and motivate you to learn more, speak up and take action.

"The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people, but the silence over that by the good people."

■ ***Martin Luther King, Jr., Social Activist and Nobel Prize Winner***

The first thing you should know is that this book was compiled, edited and reviewed by dozens of people who believe in the power of standing up for others. The voices you will see spotlighted in this book regularly spend their days helping others to be more open-minded, inclusive and empathetic toward those from

different backgrounds. We all live and breathe this work . . . and yet for each of us, the process of writing this book has offered a moment of awakening that we very much needed.

No human is free from bias. What we all must try to do is recognize and overcome our biases and to see others as having equal potential.

In the fight for equity, there have always been three parties. Two are well understood. There are the *oppressors*, who benefit from inequity and leverage their power to maintain the status quo. And there are the *oppressed* who fight back—sometimes successfully and sometimes not. These two have been the participants in every social movement everywhere in the world, whether against racism and gender-based discrimination or ethnic struggles between majorities and minorities.

Yet there is, and has always been, a third regularly overlooked group: the *bystanders*. These are the people and institutions who remain on the sidelines by choice or ignorance. Many tell themselves that the fight isn't their fight. They may not be racist, but they are also not anti-racist. These are the bystanders, and their willful silence has also contributed to and shaped human history. It is time for that to change.

***This is a book about being more
than a bystander.***

No matter what combination of ethnic, social, gender or cultural groups you belong to, this book aims to help you and the people around you achieve a moment of awakening. Perhaps it may help to start by sharing some of our own.

For Rohit, one of these moments came when he became embroiled in controversy just months before our summit. In 2020, he accepted an invitation to deliver a recorded virtual keynote at an event in Asia about the future of marketing. When the organizers shared an image on social media promoting the entire list of headlining speakers, it was obvious that every one of them was male. The social media backlash started instantly.

Some commenters called for a boycott of the entire event. Others noted the irony of having only male speakers at an event for an industry that, by most estimates, is more than 50 percent female. Dozens suggested that the speakers themselves be held personally responsible for their complicity in agreeing to speak on a #manel (a male-only panel).

Despite years of work supporting and writing about more inclusivity in business, Rohit hadn't thought to check if women were represented on stage at a conference he had agreed to speak at. He didn't realize his mistake—until someone else pointed it out. Rohit apologized and immediately helped the event organizers seek out female speakers to include. He also converted his solo session into a panel discussion by inviting two female trend researchers from his network to share the stage as co-presenters.

The moment reminded Rohit that no matter what work he may have done in the past, being a vocal ally is a constant challenge. Today, he is a popular keynote speaker and the founder of the Non-Obvious Company where he leads a team that produces content, workshops and signature events designed to help leaders embrace “non-obvious” perspectives and see what others miss.

“If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

■ Lilla Watson, Murri (Indigenous Australian) Artist and Activist

Jennifer recalls a similar moment of awakening to the reality that the identities we carry can marginalize and separate us from the mainstream. When she came out as a member of the LGBTQ+ community in her 20s, Jennifer downplayed this part of her identity in a series of professional roles, from opera singer to corporate HR professional to entrepreneur. She saw few people who shared her story—at least publicly—and she didn’t feel safe bringing her full identity to the workplace.

Discovering the LGBTQ+ workplace equality movement shaped the way she understood her own story of not feeling heard or respected. The sad reality is that today’s work culture remains ill-suited to people from marginalized communities.

When Jennifer founded her own consulting company 15 years ago, her struggle for authenticity continued in what was a largely male-dominated space. She initially built a traditional hierarchy with many of her mentors and key hires being White men. She felt vulnerable about her identity as a new entrepreneur and a queer woman, and feared prospective clients would hold stereotypes or biases that might hamper her credibility or impact.

At the same time she came to recognize the privilege and advantages she holds as a White cisgender woman. She understood that privilege isn't just about what you've experienced personally during your lifetime; it's also about what you haven't had to experience.

Today Jennifer describes herself as an “aspiring ally,” and taking action against discrimination and inequities has become the mission of her company. Jennifer Brown Consulting is a highly diverse company—led by a diverse team—and has become a recognized leader in diversity, equity, and inclusion, working with hundreds of companies. Jennifer has become a renowned speaker, has written several books on diversity and inclusion, and she continually uses her platform to amplify the voices of underrepresented communities.

We are each many identities at once, and each one can influence our actions. At the same time, we all carry some degree of privilege. In moments when that privilege is laid bare, we can choose to silently benefit and remain a bystander, or we can stand up and try to fix something that is clearly wrong.

“To never think about race means that it doesn’t really shape your life, or more specifically, the race you have is not a burden to you.”

———— **Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Professor, Advocate and Author**

The ambition of this book is to inspire you to take action when that moment comes for you—or even better, to create that moment for yourself.

How To Read This Book . . .

In the chapters that follow, you’ll read about twelve themes that are shaping our world today. For each topic, we will explore how it is, how it could be, what needs to change on a systemic level (imperatives), and what you can do today to help bring about this change (actions).

This is not a research book. This is a do-something book.

By spotlighting the conversations that are already taking place and celebrating those who are making strides in the world of diversity, equity and inclusion, we hope to amplify their work, provide concrete and actionable strategies, and give you a roadmap to becoming personally involved.

By ending each chapter with specific “Conversation Starters,” we are hoping to spark new conversations that offer opportunities to align these important but isolated efforts.

The journey to build a more inclusive world must involve all of us. Along the way we will need to better understand culture, identity and family. We will have to ask big questions about how technology, government, education and our workplaces are structured. Entrepreneurship, leadership and the retail landscape that surround us also must be part of this conversation. And it all starts, in our humble opinion, by reimagining the stories we tell and share with the world.

Our lives, ultimately, are lived through our stories. So let’s get started in crafting a better and more inclusive one together.

Beyond Diversity ... The 12 Themes



Storytelling

Identity

Family

Culture

Education

Retail

The Workplace

Technology

Entrepreneurship

Leadership

Government

The Future

WHAT IF WE COULD GO BEYOND THE CONVERSATION ABOUT DIVERSITY AND TAKE REAL ACTION?

In early 2021, more than two hundred widely respected experts gathered virtually for the world's most ambitious conversation about diversity. The dialogue brought together casting directors, bookstore owners, disabled leaders, healthcare professionals, students, VCs, standup comedians, chief diversity officers, pro gamers, archaeologists, government insiders, startup founders, a master puppeteer and many others.

The insights they shared are compiled into this groundbreaking volume that explores twelve big themes from multiple perspectives. For newcomers to the topic of diversity and DEI experts alike, this book offers a much-needed actionable blueprint for creating a more inclusive world for us all.



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STORYTELLING | CULTURE | IDENTITY | FAMILY
RETAIL | EDUCATION | TECHNOLOGY | ENTREPRENEURSHIP
LEADERSHIP | GOVERNMENT | WORKPLACE | FUTURE



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