

# Shared Sisterhood

**Tina Opie:** [00:00:00] rather than saying that we have to have the good old boys network where we may compete with each other, what would happen if we collaborated?

What would happen if we developed trusting relationships? What would happen if we instead of, um, undermining each other, we empathized with each other? If instead of dominating each other, we demonstrated vulner. if we were willing to trust each other, and then if we took risks on each other's behalf instead of trying to stab each other in the in the back.

**Beth Livingston:** we talk about how do you change your workplace to be more equitable and well, you have to have people you trust who can stand by your side. None of this can be done alone.

**Debbie Sorensen:** That was tina opn beth livingston on psychologists off the clock

**Yael Schonbrun:** we are three clinical psychologists here to bring you cutting edge and science based ideas from [00:01:00] psychology to help you flourish in your relationships work and.

**Debbie Sorensen:** I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen, practicing in Mile High Denver, Colorado. Co-author of ACT Daily Journal, and an upcoming book on act for burnout.

**Yael Schonbrun:** I'm Dr. Yael Schonbrun, a Boston based clinical psychologist, assistant professor at Brown University, and author of the book Work Parent Thrive.

**Jill Stoddard:** from coastal New England, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard, author of Be Mighty, the big book of Act metaphors and the Upcoming Imposter. No more.

**Debbie Sorensen:** We hope you take what you learn here to build a rich and meaningful life.

**Jill Stoddard:** Thank you for listening to psychologists Off the clock.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Hi, this is Debbie. I'm here with Yael today to introduce an episode I have on a book called Shared Sisterhood, how to Take Collective

Action for Racial and Gender Equity at Work. And I was able to talk to both authors, Tina Opie and Beth Livingston for this interview, which was really fun to have the two of them together because they are true collaborators and also friends.

I could hear [00:02:00] them, you know, chatting at the start of the interview. It's like they really. You know, are united and care about each other and care about this work. And Yael, I wanted to hear you listened to the episode. I wanted to hear some of your, your thoughts about, about the conversation.

**Yael Schonbrun:** I, I love the conversation, and what I will say is it starts off with a lot of, , theoretical sort of framework kinds of things. And then they really, towards the middle and, and all the way through the rest of it offer a lot of really practical tips for, creating more just environments that we live in.

And one of the parts that really struck me, and this was probably a, I'm gonna misquote them, but, um, one of them stated that people are at the root of both injustice and liberation. And I think it gets to this idea that, you know, we all play a role in the social infrastructure that we live in, and it.

It's hard to sort of see that we indivi as individuals have power, but as part of a collective, we [00:03:00] can come together and make change. And to me that's very empowering. I also know that there's kind of this other side where we don't wanna sort of put the onus on the individual. So it's an interesting question of like how we can harness our power as individuals recognizing that we're part of a community. Taking on an overly unrealistic burden as as individuals who have a limited amount of power inside of that larger group.

**Debbie Sorensen:** I think that's so important. I grapple with that a lot personally. And we talked about it in the episode we did a few months back, the co-hosted an episode on Hope. And you know, when you look at these big problems, and so they really focus a lot specifically on injustice in the workplace. You know, racism, sexism, um, policies that are not humane toward groups of people.

And you think, well, what can I do? And it feels sometimes it. Too big or too demoralizing. And I love the way that they have this idea of collective action of coming together, starting with yourself. Like there's work you [00:04:00] can do toward that yourself. You can build bridges with people and then you can go into greater collection, act, collective action.

And I actually, honestly, as I was reading their book and talking to them, I felt so hopeful and empowered. Like, and that's what I'm looking for cuz like, yes, I know that things are terrible out there sometimes, but I wanna feel. What I do matters and I have a sense of what to do.

**Yael Schonbrun:** So you know, there are a number of things that they highlight that we can do as individuals. And one thing that I thought was really that back to an interview that I did with Dolly Chug who wrote, a more just future unlearning.

Right? And one thing that I think is really important about this idea of unlearning. is that it's not just like a one-off thing. It's not a one-time thing that we unlearn lessons that are inaccurate or unhelpful. But it's kind of a lifelong process. And I really love Adam Grant's book, think Again because he really suggests that this is something that we can practice and grow more [00:05:00] skilled at.

And that really serves us because we're getting exposed to messages that are not accurate and not helpful. That's just kind of a part of living in the world. And so having that muscle built of being aware that there might be ideas, narratives, uh, belief sets that. That are problematic and being willing to explore those within ourselves, look for evidence about, you know, what else might be out there that would work better as a framework and unlearn the past and learn better for the future, I think is such a powerful thing that we can do as individuals

**Debbie Sorensen:** I think we're all born into a world where there are certain scripts there and certain socialization that we go through from our parents, from just the world around us. And I think if we're going to. Unlearn those. If we're gonna change the narrative about some things, it's, it kind of starts with us to recognize those narratives and to take a look at them and to, to unlearn them.

because otherwise the cycle just sort of [00:06:00] keeps going of some of these, you know, problematic scripts that are, are not helpful. And I'm thinking specifically about, for instance, scripts around racism, um, sexism, that type of thing. And so, yeah, that's kind of a good first step, right? Is to, to pay attention and be aware and take a look inward.

**Yael Schonbrun:** Yeah.

One of my favorite tips that they, that they share is, is, has to do with listening and how to listen and how much to listen versus how much to talk. So I hope

that folks listen all the way through end of the episode for that, because that to me was a really powerful tip that, that we can each work on today, starting now.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah. Yeah. So we hope you find this episode hopeful and empowering as we.

Today I have Tina Opie and Beth Livingston here together to talk about their book *Shared Sisterhood, how to Take Collective Action for Racial and Gender Equity at Work*. And I'm gonna start with quick introductions of Tina and Beth.

Dr. Tina [00:07:00] Opie is an associate professor of management at Babson College and an award-winning teacher, researcher, and consultant. She is a sought after speaker and has advised large firms in the financial services, entertainment, media, beauty, educational, and healthcare industries.

Her research has appeared in such outlets as O Magazine, the Washington Post, the Boston Globe, and Harvard Business Review, and has been published in multiple academic journals. Welcome, Tina. I'm so happy you're here.

**Tina Opie:** Thanks for having me, Debbie.

**Debbie Sorensen:** And Dr. Beth Livingston is an associate professor in management and entrepreneurship at the University of Iowa's Tippie College of Business.

She is a researcher, speaker, and consultant working with large companies and nonprofits. Her research has been highlighted in the New York Times, Harvard Business Review, and on npr, and has been published in several top academic journals. Welcome, Beth.

**Beth Livingston:** Thanks, Debbie. Good to be here.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Well, it's good to have both of you here together. And actually [00:08:00] I kind of wanted to start by talking about the two of you doing this work together and being here together.

Your book is about women coming together to improve the workplace in terms of gender and racial equity. And it centers on black and white women, and you are a black woman and a white woman who came together to collaborate and to do this work. And I really loved reading the stories, the stories about your relationship that you wrote about in the book.

I thought to me it really was so touching and kind of brought it to life. Um, and so I was wondering if you could just tell the story of your relationship and how this collaboration came.

**Tina Opie:** Good. You want me to start, Beth?

**Beth Livingston:** Yeah, jump

**Tina Opie:** Well, well, I'll, I'll, I'll give a hint by starting from the end first, which is where Beth and I are, are good friends, we're sisters, and we are academic colleagues where we've done research and published things together. But it didn't start off that way where we, we jokingly say we first met [00:09:00] at an academic conference and we say, I joked that Beth sort of skipped up to me

**Beth Livingston:** I probably literally skipped, let's.

**Tina Opie:** and it was right after a conference, and there was a queue of people after I had given a paper. And she came, she bounded up to me and I didn't know her yet. And I was like, whoa, whoa, whoa. Who is this white lady? ? And I jokingly say that, but it was funny because, because I didn't know her, I didn't know.

if I should call security or , if everything was okay. And, but Beth was really kind. She was very friendly and I was always friendly towards Beth, but I didn't know what she wanted. And I think that was sort of, people may hear that and say, well, why? Why did you have your hackles up, Tina? And I think it's important for people in the workplace to understand that when you are from a historically marginalized background and you're in the workplace, you may [00:10:00] not trust people who are from historically power dominant groups because they may be coming to you with things that they want from you.

It is not necessarily a trusting relationship. It may be in fact a transactional relationship where people are coming to you because they view you as a resource that they can tap into, not as a human being that they want to authentically connect with. And I didn't know which path Beth was going to take.

And so, fortunately, We found out that, well, I found out that we had a friend in common who I really trusted, and then Beth and I started to ha and Beth persisted, and I'll let her talk about that part. But Beth and I began to have conversations and we started to connect on things that we we're both academics.

So we talked about our research, and then we found out that we also had personal roles. We're both moms, we're both wives. We both love to dance. We both love nineties hip hop, you know? Then we started to talk about things where we might differ. I'm a [00:11:00] Christian, Beth is an atheist. And then we began to have these more well-rounded conversations and we would, I think we would say, establish sort of a connection on the things that we had in common, which enabled us to then have disagreements in an authentic but trusting way. Uh, Beth, do you wanna add on.

**Beth Livingston:** No. Yeah, I, I think that that's, I think what you said there is really the key, right? Which is that we established a connection that was built in trust and authenticity, and it was that that allowed us to, to go deeper, right? And I think so many connections at work don't do that, right? They don't have that sort of trusting foundation that allows you to, to push and grow and be creative and be innovative.

And, and as we talk about in the book, to change your workplace, right? We, we talk about how do you change your [00:12:00] workplace to be more equitable and well, you have to have people you trust who can stand by your side. None of this can be done alone. And I think, so that's what Tina and I's relationship is kind of this, I think, microcosm of what we talk about, which is just, yes, you can.

you can be different in very, in very fundamental ways, in ways that mean a lot in our society, right? Racial differences in the United States, particularly between black and white women. We talk about this in the book. They're, these are in many ways, you know, huge chasms of a divide in terms of the way historically we have experienced the world, the way we currently experience the world.

And in some cases it's a, a bridge too far for some women to sort of traverse. And I think what we try to say is, you know, these sort of authentic connections can happen even if you don't get to a point where Tina and I are, where we're really good friends and we know each other's lives and we text each other and Right.

You don't have to become friends to have a trusting, to trust somebody to believe that this [00:13:00] person is going to stand up for you. It doesn't have to be. You know, a deep friendship to establish that sort of connection In our case, I'm very fortunate that it has become that, but doesn't have to be. And I think, you know, that's one thing we try to talk about in the book is that the, the process that we went through is replicated in historical examples and, and

demon and as demonstrative of these sort of social science principles that we've studied our whole life.

Um, but we also think that it demonstrates that it's doable. Like Tina and I could have stopped at just being collaborators that trusted each other to do the things that we are asked to do, to stand up. If one of us wasn't there for the other person, we could have stopped there. It didn't Right. For us, which is, I mean, I'm eternally grateful for that We have the relationship that we do, but it did.

I, I think our point is that it's accessible to anyone who wants to do this sort of work.

**Tina Opie:** We have, Beth and I together have initiated relationships with other [00:14:00] collaborators and we have sometimes decided to just keep research collaborations going. We have sort of, because of exchanges that may have taken place, we may have said, we don't know if we can continue to develop a friendship with that person, but we know that we can trust them to get the work done.

And, and that is critical because in the workplace I think people will say things like, well, gosh, I really wanna be friends with her, but I don't know how to do that. Listen, friendship, you can have a friendship with someone and never ever talk about power dynamics. And that's the, so I wanted to, to reiterate that point.

And the second thing is I really wanna make sure that your listeners understand. The term power, and I use the term historically marginalized and the term historically power dominant. By power. We're talking about access to and control over resources. So things like money, time, um, human resources, [00:15:00] capital norms, organizational policies, all of those things.

Things that determine the structure, of the world are often directed by people in power. And that is why this is important. The reason why we talk about issues of race is because the world has been structured typically by people who have had more power and less power. And in the United States and often around the world, people who have been historically power dominant have been white people.

People who have been historically marginalized, have been, have been largely everyone else. And I hear narratives where people want to underscore that, well, we're all the same, Tina and Beth, by talking about race by, by emphasizing how we're different, you are actually racist. That is a lie from the pit of hell.

You know that that is a lie. And, and I think the reason why we people say that is because they're [00:16:00] uncomfortable and really interrogating power. We would never say, well, let's not look at, let's just say we're all the same gender. Let's not talk. Let's not differentiate between male and female and everything.

Let's just say we're all the same. We're just human. People don't say that for the most part. And I, I think we need to ask ourselves why is that? Why is it okay to try to collapse race? But we would never do that with other human distinctions.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Yes. Thank you so much for, for making that point, cuz I think it's really important that today's conversation is really grounded in that reality and that that is kind of acknowledged and, and people don't overlook that

**Tina Opie:** And I've been talking too much, so I'm gonna let Beth say that cuz, but I think that's a really critical thing. I watched the congressional hearings and I heard certain sound bites and I was like, I, I, I need to say this on this podcast cuz this is driving me insane.

**Beth Livingston:** Yeah, I think, oh the, I mean, I think so many of our divides on this, and this is one of the things we spend so much time on the book, is just can you be honest with yourself and [00:17:00] ask yourself hard questions. Like we, I think a lot of times when you talk about d e I work, people think that so much d e I is, and what I mean by d e i, diversity, equity, inclusion work is like about pointing the fingers at other people.

And so, I mean, we don't do any of that in our book. It's really about turning the lens on yourself, right? Which is, what do you think about power? What do you know about power? What do you not know? And how is that, how are those roadblocks in your own education, in your own introspection, you know, preventing you from building these fulfilling, authentic connections with other people.

And I think the, there is a tendency. I think denigrate the work because you think that it's pointing the finger outward. Um, but so much of what actually makes change is pointing the finger inward and saying, well, what can I do to make the world better for people who are like me and people who are not like me?

And what, what has my, you know, misunderstandings of power in the past, how has that prevented me or stood in the way of connecting with people who would [00:18:00] otherwise fulfill my life in such great ways?



**Debbie Sorensen:** I think that the relationship between the two of you and the way that you've collaborated it and and the way that you've taken your relationship and also brought it, expanded it and brought it out into the world in, in several ways.

It's exactly the, it illustrates perfectly the shared sisterhood model, what you're trying to do, you know, to do your own work, your own internal work, build a relationship, and then take it out into collective action. And I think that's amazing. We're gonna delve into each of those a bit more in the interview, but I do wanna just go back to that history of the divide between black and white women.

Of course, this is a very complicated one, but you start your book in the very first paragraph with a quote, which is, when push comes to shove white women, choose race over gender. And to me reading that, uh, at first I was like, it felt like a bit of a punch in the gut, but then I was kind of like, wow, I think there's evidence of that all around.[00:19:00]

And I know this is big, but I was just wondering if you had anything else you wanted to say about, maybe about why this is hard and what I think for both white women and black women, again, that's just, you know, there are obviously other groups as well that, that, you know, play into the shared sisterhood.

But I think just looking at that lens of black and white women and what that evokes for us, I think when we're trying to do this work and to form these relationships, chips,

**Beth Livingston:** I think we started the book with that quote for that reason. It's evocative, I think. And we wanted people to understand that we weren't going to shy away from asking really hard questions throughout the book, um, because we had asked those questions of ourselves. And so we, you know, are not asking our readers to do anything that we haven't done.

And I think for me, as a white woman, when I, when I think about that, I think it's important we put those things in stark terms. I think as professors, as academics, we're very careful [00:20:00] in the language we use and for good reason. Um, because we know the power of language, and I think it is very important to say, okay, what does it mean for white women when we say white women chose race over gender every time, right?

In that quote, what does that mean? And it means that when, when things, when there were difficult situations, when there was a choice to be made between

standing on the side of your, you know, someone who shared your gender or standing on the side of someone who shared your race, historically what we saw was oftentimes, white women would stand next to white men before they would stand on the side of black women.

Um, and this is important because we are all comprised of different social identities that make us who we are, identities that make us who we are individually and identities that emphasize our connections with others. And that is just the nature of who we are. I mean, we, sports teams, we cheer for, we have, right, like gender, race, age, region, profession, like all of these different things that make us who we are.

Um, and [00:21:00] this divide, I think, you know, Tina, in her section, in the book, she talks about how she wondered like if we're all supposed to be feminists, if we're all supposed to be caring about women, you know, getting ahead at work, Why don't we see black and white women linking up in arms and fighting for all women?

Right. Um, and it was particularly salient for her as a black woman working in predominantly white workplaces. Um, and, and seeing that at this, this, well, we are assuming that we as women will have these connections. Why aren't we connecting? Um, and I think as we dug into the history of it, we saw more and more examples of white women saying, you know, whether, and we talk about the suffrage movement, white women saying, well, you know, there is.

And I think the way we break it down there is power and whiteness. We may not want to admit what that power is. We may not want to interrogate what it means that there's power and whiteness, but there is power in it. And me choosing specifically to step aside from that power. , right? Um, it [00:22:00] requires a sacrifice, a risk that I am uncomfortable taking.

And we wanted to really dig into that and say, what does it mean, right? To recognize what power means and what power does for us and what it takes away from us, right? In terms of our ability to connect. Um, and we wanted it to feel like a punch in the gut because we wanted you to be like, oh, this is not going to be a safe feel good book.

That just makes everyone feel good from the beginning, but hopefully by the end, what you feel is hopeful and ready to do the work.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Absolutely. Tina, did you wanna add to add to that? Anything to that?

**Tina Opie:** I mean, I think Beth encapsulates that. Well, it, it, it, it, one of the challenges that I've had in my different careers and throughout my lived experiences was that I would often feel it just, it felt. Political, what people would say. It was just lip service to check a box to appease the public. And, and so you see the [00:23:00] annual report, you see the quarterly statements, you see the press re you know, the, the press report or the press coverage.

And then you go to the town hall where, or the employee meeting, or you go to the employee, uh, water cooler. And it's a completely different conversation. There's such a huge gap between what people are saying and what's actually happening. And that has always frustrated me. I mean, I, people can tell you, but I am probably, um, I, I think human beings have a different, different levels of tolerance for inauthenticity.

I have a very low tolerance for inauthenticity, very low tolerance. I'm pretty much the same person. In front of a president versus whoever. It does not matter. And, and I don't mean when I define authentic and, and it has to do with when your external expression is aligned with your [00:24:00] internal experience.

And both of those are aligned with your deeply held values. So by authentic, it does not mean I'm a Christian, so it doesn't mean giving someone the finger when I'm driving. That just means that I lost control of my emotions. But so I saw so much inauthenticity around this conversation, around racism, around feminism, and that that quote really encapsulated that.

And it felt, I mean, and Beth is the one who suggested the quote, which I think is symbolic of the relationship that we have, because the quote that Beth came up really captured my feeling and sentiment about what we just discussed. So that's all I would add is that it really reflects. I think the need for us to have an honest conversation about this so that we can actually move forward, because the conversation is not the point.

The evocative quote is not the point. The point is, can we have this discussion so that we can actually have equity [00:25:00] at, at work and in society so that people are not hurting and suffering? That's, that's the point and, and can thrive.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Well, and I think by, by looking at hard questions like that, you know, things do get evoked, but that's what has to happen, right? To move the needle forward is that we have to be willing to go there to go into that more vulnerable. Sometimes it feels a little scary place. So yeah. I.

**Tina Opie:** And, and, and in what relationship? Every single relationship, whether it be in, you know, as a, as a child, as a parent, as a, as a partner. You know, when I, those difficult questions are the things that have caused my relationships to go to a higher, deeper, better, to evolve to a different level. And I think as a society, we're so comfortable asking ourselves these really easy, superficial surface level questions so we can just all go along to get along.

And shared sisterhood is about, we [00:26:00] have got to stop doing that because our society, as we can see, mm, those surface level questions are not going

**Beth Livingston:** They're not enough. They're not enough.

**Tina Opie:** not enough.

**Debbie Sorensen:** So I'm, I would consider myself a lifelong feminist. I think since I was old enough to, you know, know anything about any of this. I think that has been true for me. And I think for a long time as a white woman myself, I was a little oblivious to the white supremacy history of feminism and how so many people have felt excluded from traditional feminism.

And I think, you know, pretty much anyone who's not white, straight, cisgender, you know, sort of financially, education, privilege, all, you know, able-bodied, et cetera. Anyway, I think often have felt that. And so I was just wondering if there's anything that either of you want, uh, white feminists like me to know about where feminist movements fall short?

Do you have any thoughts on that?

**Beth Livingston:** So, you know, my journey towards this is [00:27:00] I, I find it interesting that you say that, and I think it's a really important conversation to have. Like, to Tina's point about us asking ourselves hard questions, I think. If we want people to grow, we have to recognize when we've fallen short and when our imagination has failed us, and recognize why those things are and improve them, right?

We can't, if we're always the same people that we were, what, what a boring life we live, right? Like we need to, we need to grow. And my journey towards this, and this is perhaps, you know, something unique, but I do think like my journey

came more towards the, towards understanding racial differences. And I was not paying attention to the feminist side of things.

I was, that was a hard thing for me to capture because I. Hadn't ex in the selfish and the way that teenagers are self-centered. Right? And the way that we see, like everything in our lives is through our own right. I had not, I hadn't seen the gender differences in the same way. And I grew up in a very, very conservative, very religious household.

And, you know, I wasn't seeing that in the same way. And I was a big [00:28:00] fish in a small pond, in a small town. And, you know, like I just didn't have those sort of experiences. And it wasn't until later in, like, much later that I was like, oh, there's a whole system of oppression here that's different than the system of oppression that I've been trying to understand and learn.

Um, and I don't understand it. And so I, I kind of added. Like, I remember reading bell hooks, for instance, as some of my initial entree and understanding, like I kind of started with intersectional feminism. Cause of that be because of where I start. Our journeys start in different places, but that's the important part is our journeys start in different places and we have to continue to grow and learn about those sort of things.

So I don't think what was a blind spot becomes an opportunity to learn and to grow and to, to, you know, and, and to say, well here's what my experience is. How does the square with those experiences, And I think our sort of socialmediafication of deep conversations has done us all a disservice because we're afraid to be [00:29:00] wrong.

We're afraid to, you know, put into writing the things that would've been around a campfire or around a, you know, glass of wine where we would've been having these conversations with people who care about us and want us to grow and want us to learn. Um, but also, you know, I, I think it is important for white feminists for instance, if you haven't spent that time thinking about race and power in those sort of ways to use the lenses you've learned to understand and critique the patriarchy to critique, you know, you know, the sort of anti-feminist, anti-woman misogyny that you see, those are important lenses.

Those help you to be able to break down the power around whiteness, for instance, around, you know, all of these other, um, systems of power and systems of oppression. And so I think. . If you go and you say, okay, the beauty in this is that the work is never done, then I can continue to get better. I can continue to grow.

And that doesn't mean that everything I learned about feminism [00:30:00] is wrong. It just means that I'm at the entry level, that I'm at the beginning of a journey that is beautiful and that I will grow to do. And I think we, we kind of get this feeling of achievement like, oh, I am now enlightened and I've reached the destination.

And I think if you think of it, it's all journey, right? It's all journey. There's never a moment where you've arrived at pure enlightenment, right? Like as much as we wanna talk about it, there are always more history to learn. There's always more understanding of ourselves to uncover. Um, and you have to learn to find the joy in that discovery, and you have to learn to that.

The humility you feel is not. A, a blow to your identity, but is an opportunity to build authentic relationships and to be more fulfilled as you do that. Um, there are important caveats around who, who helps you learn, right? And who you lean on, right? To do that and who has to help you do the work. And we talk about that sort of stuff in the book.

Um, but I think, you know, I say when I run [00:31:00] across white feminists who haven't done a lot of work on race, I'm like, awesome, you have thought so much about gender. We can use that. So now let's go deeper than what you've done before, right? Let's take you out of your self-centeredness of what you felt as a woman and experience these things, and let's build those empathy muscles.

Let's build those, right? Let's read more. Let's do, and not just stop at reading, but do more and, and learn to do. And so I, I often say like, if we've started there, then I know that you're, that you have the capability to do this work and so let's continue to do it. and I'm sure Tina Tina's experience with that, with white feminism is very different.

Right. Um, in terms of experiencing that.

**Tina Opie:** I mean, in, in the book I talk about how I did not identify as a feminist for a long time, and, and I am reminded, you know, Alice Walker, it's, it's a really popular quote that she has, uh, where she says Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender and what she's talking about. And then, [00:32:00] uh, there's Hudson Wheat, C Glenora, Hudson Weems, um, talks about Africana womanism.

And so before I get into more specific conversations and, and distinctions, I think one of the main things that I would say to white feminists is take a step back and recognize, uh, that. Your experience is happening in a much more

global, larger context. It is really easy to blow up the white feminist experience and think that it is the whole, but it is a shadow on a globe

There is a huge background and context, and if you are ignorant of that context and that backdrop, you cannot understand yourself as well. Th that is what I would say. So Alice Walker's [00:33:00] quote, you know, think about womanism is a larger umbrella. Feminism is a speci, a specific strain. It is one particular look.

You know, feminism is critiqued for being a male female, binary as a black woman. afri, black feminism, Africana, feminism. And by Africana, I mean just coming from the African diaspora, uh, I need black men. Black women are not going to su succeed without black men. We, we don't talk about black men in the same way that white men, women may talk about white men. It's just not the same dynamic because black men and black women were both. the auction block being enslaved by white enslavers. So it's a different conversation. And that's in the United States. That's in the United States, but you know, around the world, um, the, the nuclear [00:34:00] unit of the, of the family, the African diaspora, the, the, it is different. It's a different conversation. And I think, again, I'm Beth, I'm forget.

Is it like the figure in the, what, what is it, you know, in our, in our field, you know what I'm talking about? The figure in the scale, I can't think of the, the proper term, but it's really important to see ourselves in context. Uh,

**Beth Livingston:** Yeah, like the, like the, so

**Tina Opie:** it's it's the ecological systems. The ecological systems. Yeah. And, and it's, it's sort of, um, You can think that you are the, the whole, but when you take a step back, you realize, oh, there are patterns. There are other people who've experienced this at different times, in different countries, in different contexts, in different roles, in different hierarchies.

And it's not just about me. It's, it's important I think, for people who are from historically power dominant groups to study themselves [00:35:00] as and, and to recognize that this is a pattern and that power tends to replicate itself and, and repeat the way that it, it operates. That that would be the main thing that I say to white feminists,

**Debbie Sorensen:** Thank you. Thank

**Tina Opie:** you're welcome.

**Debbie Sorensen:** those thoughtful answers and certainly in the professional world, which is what you both specialize in. And really, your, your book is, your work is focused on this. Um, I think historically traditional, you know, kind of white feminism really focused on, you know, helping women assimilate into the workforce as it was, right.

This kind of more patriarchal place. Um, and I mean, clearly that is kind of falls short and, and your, I think your work offers more to that. Could you say a little bit about. You know, part one, how does that, that approach fall short of like, okay, let's all rise up the ranks within [00:36:00] these organizations and, and what the shared sisterhood model has to offer that might, you know, be better.

**Tina Opie:** So, so, I mean, Debbie, I can break that question. When you, when you say assimilate, I mean, I think it's, it's critical to, to recognize that most workplaces, and we can look at the United States, I'm, I'm sort of censoring that here, were begun by white men. The norms, the policies, the procedures that were established there were to cater to white men.

So when you have white women and other women entering the, the workplace, the norms and policies and procedures that were created there were such, where women were disadvantaged. I mean, there were examples of where there's no restroom for women to use, so they have to walk, you know, all the way across the campus.

I'm thinking about, uh, hidden Figures, that example, um, where there was a [00:37:00] black woman who she couldn't use the white restroom. She had to walk all the way across the, um, the. What is it called? The, the, the different layout on the, the property, because there was no facilities for her. That's just an example of how the structure was not created to, for women or for black people, or for whatever group was, uh, disadvantaged. in that way, women are expected to assimilate. And you could look at it in terms of the way that we were expected to dress. I mean, and at some point we were literally almost dressing like men. I mean, we had the little ties and the, the, this particular suits. And we were supposed to, I don't know, speak like a man, behave like a man, not show emotion, not be too feminine, not et cetera, et cetera.

And I think, and then comport ourselves in a quote masculine way. And [00:38:00] that's because what was rewarded in the workplace was things like, um, hyper competition. Aggression and shared sisterhood is very different where we're saying, let's try to take this idea of the brotherhood of success. So rather than saying that we have to have the good old boys network where we may compete with each other, what would happen if we collaborated?



What would happen if we developed trusting relationships? What would happen if we instead of, um, undermining each other, we empathized with each other? If instead of dominating each other, we demonstrated vulner. if we were willing to trust each other, and then if we took risks on each other's behalf instead of trying to stab each other in the in the back.

So those four things that I just mentioned are the underpinnings of authentic connection. So rather than keeping everything close to check close to the chest, what would happen if we sort of opened up to each other? [00:39:00] And cr, this is not about friendship again, remember that. But it is about creating a workplace where we know that we can trust each other to. Be honest, to be vulnerable, to be empathetic. That has implications for my wellbeing, for your wellbeing, for how we function as a team, for our productivity, for our engagement. It, it affects how we serve the client. It affects how the client sees us. It affects our creativity. I mean, it, to me, it has never made sense why we encourage sort of this mad men approach to work when, okay, yeah, you might get some decent outcomes, but what would happen if we trusted each other?

If we could get extraordinary outcomes and we could be having everyone on the team contribute, we wouldn't be, you know, in the case of women basically ignoring 50% of the population. [00:40:00] So I, I know that's a long answer to your question, but I hope that that got towards what you wanted to hear.

**Debbie Sorensen:** it's a great answer and I think it's so interesting to think about how it's such a. It's really a culture shift away from that. More competitive, you know, traditional male kind of workplace to something different. That honestly, in my opinion, it's good for everyone actually including men too, believe it or not, because I do think, you know, that's sort of competitive.

That more competitive, everybody looking out for themselves. Um, dynamic. That is the opposite of shared sisterhood. I mean, that's harmful. I think

**Tina Opie:** Well, well, it is, and that's the thing. I'm glad you said that, Debbie, because anyone can be a sister regardless of gender and the, the pa. So I initially started working on Shareds sisterhood in 2009, and then Beth, I, it was 2018 or 2000 2018. forgive me, you know, how to, with Covid, it feels like those were the [00:41:00] last years.

Um, and exactly as it's, it literally is a time warp. One of the, in that timeframe, over those years, over the last, the decade or so, plus that we've been working, I've been working on this, um, you know, I've done work on norms of professionalism, on authenticity. And what you see is that men feel trapped too.

White people feel trapped. White people. I mean, when, when we talk about these things, d e i, leadership, culture, people often try to, they narrow it. They pigeonhole it as, oh, this is gonna benefit women or this is going to benefit black people. Everyone benefits, and this is something that I think is critical.

We saw this with Covid when, when Covid happened, we saw that there was a huge issue with our insurance and medical infrastructure. We saw that there was a problem and one of the first places we saw that was with women who had to take care of their [00:42:00] children and their elders. Especially with people in the black communities, right?

So black women in particular were canaries in the coal mine for covid. It's the same thing in the workplace. If, if you ha, if you have issues with engagement, if you have issues with productivity, if you have issues with, people from historically marginalized groups offer deep insights. And if you can address the issues that are confronting. people from historically marginalized groups, everyone benefits. It's not ju I, I, I, so I deplore when people say, well, you're just trying to give them something. It's a, people frame it as a zero sum game. But that's because they're still st stuck in that old paradigm. The, the old boys network. We're trying to get people to shift to the shared sisterhood paradigm where, [00:43:00] wait a minute, what they're doing is it's, you know, all boats are rising and, and, and we're seeing organizations begin to do that.

And the Harvard Business Review article, we, we provide actual examples of companies that are doing this where ev all the employees are benefiting.

**Debbie Sorensen:** So when you think about the framework, and I wanna break down the framework a little bit with some specific questions about it, but before we do, like what, what's sort of the overarching goal, would you say, of the shared sisterhood approach?

**Tina Opie:** It is liberation. I mean, it's liberation. It's, it is dismantling systemic inequities for the purpose of liberation. People are not free at work. People. You saw that and then I'll, I'll let Beth break it. Say more, but over covid, people feel trapped. They called it the great resignation. I called it the great liberation because I think people are saying, listen, I'm at this fork in the road, and if I'm gonna drop dead anyway, I might as well do what I wanna do with my life.

Shared sisterhood is a way for organizations to say, okay, this is an opportunity. [00:44:00] rather than us continuing to lose all of these employees because we're failing them, and that is the case. Organizational leaders, you are failing your employees if you're not listening to them. This is an opportunity for you to

say, we can help our, we can dig, we can help our employees bridge and create those authentic connections, and then we can link arms and engage in collective action to dismantle the systemic inequities that are contributing to our employees leaving in droves.

Beth, I'll, I'll turn it over to

**Beth Livingston:** I mean, I think I like liberation is a really, if we were gonna distill it down to one word, I think it's the best one word, example of it. And I think, you know, the goal is L Collective liberation. , right? It's that, it's, it's distilling down the, we are none of us free until all of us are free mentality.

Because I think that we are, have been raised up in such an individualistic culture. And I love being myself, right? I love [00:45:00] myself, I have confidence in myself. I like doing things alone. But I recognize that there are certain things that I cannot do just by myself or that would not be as rich and fulfilling if I tried to do these things by myself.

And the liberation of our workforce from, from old ways of thinking, from old biases and systems of oppression, from inequities and injustices that have been replicated just by people not being brave enough or creative enough or innovative enough to actually change the thing that is what we are providing a solution for.

And I think. So many solutions are focused on changing one person's heart, right? Become, or by identifying the problems in the system. Both of those things are important, and what we do with shared sisterhood is say that there's a missing link [00:46:00] there, which is people are in charge of maintaining and creating these systems.

People make the decisions. We are active agents in recreating these systems of oppression and we, we do ourselves a disservice when we forget that people are in their relationships and the way they connect with other people are the root of oppression and injustice, and thus they must be at the root of the liberation from those things.

**Debbie Sorensen:** And you have three levels. I love that you look at it at the level of, you know, the individual, then the interpersonal, and then collective action kind of expanding outward. I just think it's so important to look at complicated things like this in that way. Um, and what I wanna do, if it's okay with you, is kind of go through each of those things.

I just have a couple questions about each one just to kind of tap into it. And then I think people who wanna learn more, I highly, highly recommend reading the book. It's so worth it. Um, [00:47:00] but starting with the individual level, um, and that's about digging. So can you talk about what is, what's happening there?

What's digging and why is it important for individuals to.

**Tina Opie:** Beth, do you wanna.

**Beth Livingston:** So dig is our very first step, and we tried to break this down to getting from the individual to the collective and dig. Is this. Individual step, this introspective step that allows people to look within themselves and ask themselves hard questions. So we are academics who I think we believe that our collective liberation lies in, in growth and learning.

And I, I think, or at least it starts there and dig, is that process. You want to dig into your own preconceptions about power, around race and around gender. Ask yourselves very difficult questions about that and learn from your own reactions. [00:48:00] This is where this dig process is where we ask people to interrogate themselves to say, what if I'm. What does that change for me? If the way that I've seen these situations is wrong, um, what are my values? What are they and, and are they truly in line in the way that authenticity requires? Right? That what I value and what I'm doing and what I'm saying, or in line with one another. And what does it mean if they're not?

And then we ask people, you know, again, if you're a person who bought a lot of really great books during the summer of 2020, for instance, what did you do with that information? How did you engage with it? How did it help you shift your mindset? Because so much of the next phases of shared sisterhood are reliant upon doing that dig work and always returning to it.

If you have a trouble building a connection with someone, the first thing you should do is look at yourself. Um, and we have a tendency, I think, to look at other people first, to point fingers again outward and say, well, who is preventing me [00:49:00] from connecting? And I think. this is not, you know, understanding where these systems of oppression and the histories around those things make it more important for us to dig and where they make our dig journeys different.

Right? Where in terms of I need to read different books. If I'm coming from a different place and starting my journey in a different place, then other, right? If you started your journey with, with, you know, um, white fem, you know, white

feminist thought leaders and I started my journey with Bell Hooks and Tina started her journey with being a lived experience of being a black woman in the United States.

We're all starting those dig journeys from different places, but they're equally important to our ability to build connections in relationships with one another.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Well, I wanted to ask you specifically, Beth, because I think one, one thing about white privilege that happens is that I think white women, white people can get away with never digging because we don't really have to in the way that, you know, maybe someone from a marginalized [00:50:00] group has to.

So I was just wondering actually, if I could ask you, as a white woman who has clearly done some digging yourself, um, and I'm sure you know, it's been a long process over the years and ongoing, as you said, I wonder if you could just share something about, like, maybe an example of a way that you personally have dug and done some of this hard work that might inspire other people in a privileged position to do something similar.

**Beth Livingston:** I think the first thing that I did very, very early on was embraced the humility around dig and myself, um, and let go of the defensiveness around what I don't know and don't understand, and I.

That in itself is a dig journey, right? To say, why am I so invested on being right on this? Why am I so invested in not taking this opportunity to listen and grow?

What is it that's keeping me stagnant in this place? And a lot of times it [00:51:00] was pride. It was, I feel like I'm a good person and if this is how I see the world, am I truly a good person? Um, and it was digging into what in my identity was keeping me from growing on these things that truly liberated me to grow and to, and, and to investigate.

And so, you know, I remember. Having a conversation years ago with a man who was in one of my college classes, and we are having a conversation, and I used a term, you know, about sexual orientation that was commonly used as a pejorative, you know, just in casual ways back in the late nineties, right? Like that we would talk about things and I remember him and we had built a relationship over the entire semester.

I remember him going, Beth, you know, I, I'm really disappointed that you would use that, that word like that, you know, I thought better of you and it

hurts me that you would use that word. And [00:52:00] I remember being so shook by someone caring enough about me to say something like that to me. And I had a choice in that moment.

I could have been, I could have cried right? And wielded my power that way to, to focus the attention on my hurt, right? Which would've stopped the conversation and would have prioritized my feelings. Like I could have done that. I could have been, you know, defensive and be like, I didn't mean it that way.

Like, you know, can't you take a joke like, I don't understand, or whatever. I could have again, focused on my own feelings, but instead, because I cared about this person, it, I recognized that he wouldn't have said something to me unless he was hurt and I cared about his hurt. And so my first question was to myself, which was why, why, why am I so invested in being able to say things that are hurtful to someone I care about?

Why? And I can honestly say that my, I am fortunate and perhaps lucky that my reaction was the, the latter, which was, I'm sorry. You're right. And I won't do it [00:53:00] again. And it didn't have to be a big deal. It didn't have to be a huge *Mia culpa* where, you know, I am basking in the shame of my mistake. It was, I owned it and I went forth and never did it again.

Ever. Right. And I think that is, that is what the lessons that I think so many of us who come from certain components of our identity that have power is we're, we're very defensive about that power instead of owning, it's not my fault that I was born white, right? Like, or that I live in a white supremacist culture.

It is my responsibility, however, to recognize when I can do my part to dismantle that. And that's the part, the part of the dig journey that I think is particular for white people in general, which is just like, it's not about feeling guilty, it's about feeling the great responsibility it is to be honest with yourself and to grow and to care about the people that you say you care about.

Well then make your actions align with that. And that's, I think the most important dig work [00:54:00] that I did was ask myself, why am I so invested in being right on this? And oftentimes the answer to that was because it makes me feel bad. And is that a good enough reason to go about hurting people? And no, it, it isn't.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Well, and that the way that you responded to that and apologized is actually the perfect segue to the next level, the interpersonal level.

Because what you did, you know, this was happening in a context of a relationship with this person. And instead of getting defensive, shutting down, denying, minimizing, you, you owned it and you apologized and you worked on it yourself, but you also did it within that relationship.

Um, and so let's talk about the interpersonal, because that you, you used the metaphor of bridging, right? Forming connections across differences. Tina, maybe you wanna, could you talk to us a little bit? What is that? What is bridging? What do you mean by that? And you know, how do we do this?

**Tina Opie:** Yes. So [00:55:00] bridge is an authentic connection between people who are different based on trust, empathy, risk taking, and vulnerability. And it's not about a friendship because you know, the, the authentic connection is, is based on people who discuss power. For example, we discuss power differentials. And so in the examples that we talk about in the book, you know, it might be, uh, Beth and I, for example, as a black woman, a black Christian woman, and a white atheist woman.

There are some times when we're talking about race, Beth is white, I'm black. Historically, black people have been historically marginalized. White people have been historically power dominant. Beth will listen more than she. But when we're talking about religion, Christian people have been historically power dominant, atheist people have been historically marginalized.

I will listen more than I talk. Hopefully, you know that that is the goal. So the [00:56:00] idea is I have a lot more to learn about Christianity, and we talk about that in the book. And I think it's important for us as individuals to recognize that each of us has different identities that are imbued with differing levels of power.

Now, I'm not saying that the every identity is equal because one of the things that implicit bias is an important training, and I'm glad we went through that movement. But one of the challenges I have with implicit bias training is there's always a money shot, a slide where there's all these different identities and they're treated as equal.

You have race, religion, height. Accent preference for this, you know, preference for spicy foods. They're all on one, all on one slide, as if they're the same thing. But remember, we have to talk about power. And so when you are creating a bridge, [00:57:00] when Beth first approached me, she could have chose, she was trying to create a bridge.

Well, she might have been trying to become friends, but what what happened was we had to create, we were trying to create a bridge eventually, and she had to persist because she could sense while I was friendly, I was not that I was not as open to her. I had to ask myself though, and as someone who realized that I was not trusting Beth, what is it about Beth?

Has Beth done anything to demonstrate that she's not trustworthy? And the answer was no. So what is it about Beth? And then I had to say, okay, I'm not trusting her cuz she's a white woman. Then I had to say, okay, well to those who are listening, you might say, well, Tina's racist. . Listen, I think for those people who say that, first of all, we define racism as power plus prejudice.

So it is possible, and I, some people will disagree with this. There are some very popular scholars who say, anybody can be racist. I vehemently disagree with that because I think that we [00:58:00] must have a way to distinguish the issue of power. So racism is power plus prejudice. Anyone can be racially prejudiced, meaning you can have attitudes where you prejudge someone based on their race.

You think that this person is going to be more, I don't know, faster or cleaner or dirtier based on just solely based on their race. That's racial prejudice. You also may have racial discrimination, which is where you behave in a way. You treat someone differently because of their race. You don't want this person to come to your house for dinner where we have racism.

is when you have the power to put the government behind your prejudice and your discrimination. So now you don't want somebody coming into your neighborhood, you can create a policy where now black people can't move into your neighborhood. I can't do that as a black person. So that's why we, we don't, we say black people are not [00:59:00] racist.

They may be racially discriminatory, they may be racially prejudiced, but you can, your listeners cannot tell me a time where black people as a group have discriminated against white people as a group writ large in the United States. So, uh, but you can probably name a lot of times vice versa. So, so anyway, I forgot why I went into that whole description, but part, part of the reason why I think it's critical that we do this is because a lot of the arguments that we have around power race politics is because we're using different definitions.

So we have these arguments, but we're talking about different things. I'm really interested in getting at the embedded, and Beth is interested, we're the embedded power differentials. There is a reason why people want us to have



these flippant, highly emotional conversations about these topics. We're like, no, let's not have heated conversations.

Cause heat is just, it blows up. Let's have insightful, instructive [01:00:00] conversations that lend light to the conversation. So that's what we're trying to do. To do

**Beth Livingston:** and and those emotions. Again, those emotions when you're trying to build bridges, when you're trying to connect with people who are different from you and you feel discomfort and something that they, they've made you feel that emotion is a data point, right? Like when I had that interaction with my friend who pointed out I had said something wrong, I did not have, my initial reaction was not this rational enlightener.

My initial reaction was that heat of pain that you feel in your chest, the embarrassment, the tears, the heat of the tears by my eyes, those were real emotions, but I did not have to immediately act on those emotions. I didn't have to burst into tears and say, well, I couldn't help it. I just felt like crying.

I could say, because I am a grown human adult, I could say, okay, what is that emotion telling me about myself and what do I want to say about myself? Your emotions become a [01:01:00] data point to help you decide how you want to react. Decide, choose how you want to interact with people. And to Tina's point about bridging, she could choose how she wanted to bridge with me after she was honest with herself about what those emotions were telling her and what she wanted to do about it.

And sometimes those emotions are self protective for really important reasons. And it's important that you dig into that. Okay, well this is a, this is a barrier I that's worth keeping up for me because the risk is too high, or the risk of not building this relationship is too high. But being honest with yourself is the key.

And using those things to build those connections. Because if it's just, you can connect with dozens of people every day and Hey, how you doing? How's your weekend? Great. How is it? Right? Like, oh, do you have that, that paper I'll meet at? We'll meet at 10. Those are interactions you're having all the time, but they don't necessarily mean that they're authentic connections with people that you could bring up.

I felt I was silenced in this [01:02:00] meeting because. I'm black. Right? Or because like you can't have those conversations with that person and it's having those conversations that we need to be able to have, we need to be able to say,

you may not have meant this, but you completely skipped over me every time I raised my hand.

Or, you know, Jim repeated exactly what I said and you were like, great idea. Like they, we have to get to a point where we can elevate these subtle, the implicit biases that we like to call them to explicit so we can fix them. Like we have to surface these things and we believe it's those authentic bridges that will allow us to do the work, to do that.

**Tina Opie:** Yeah. And, and I do think it's important that we recognize, as Beth said, the role of emotion when, when bridging and, and the role of power. Because one of the things, uh, you, you've asked Debbie in, in this conversation, what would be advice that we give to white feminists? Recognize the power [01:03:00] that you do have.

There are so many white feminists who I've seen, and, and, and this is something that may feel like a punch in the gut. I see a lot of white feminists who dissolve into tears as soon as they get feedback that they have engaged in some kind of racist behavior. Listen, we need you to ovary up. We need you to woman up for real.

We need you to, because if you crumble at the idea that you may have been subjective to societal notions of racism and oh my goodness, you may have imbibed some of those, so you're human, if you crumble at that, how in the world are you gonna stand up for people in a meeting? How are you going to actually change policy?

And it doesn't mean that it feels good. It doesn't mean that it will always be fair. Sometimes you may say, that [01:04:00] didn't even, I don't like the way that that was said, but can you chew up the meat and spit out the bone? It doesn't mean that you make yourself a punching bag. And I think, you know, Beth, we have seen those instances as well.

Uh, but I think sometimes it can be helpful for white women to have dig groups get together as white women and help each other dig. And then we can have interracial bridge groups, right? Where we try to connect with each other, who are different so that we can, we can demonstrate this. But I really do think it's important for us to learn how to, to do that.

So that would be another piece of advice that I would have. And then also, I've had to do a lot of dig work to get through racialized trauma as a black woman.

**Beth Livingston:** Yep.

**Tina Opie:** That is, that is another piece of work that I like to do with other black women. I know a lot of Latinx and Hispanic women are doing some of the same things.

So are Asian women, so are some Middle Eastern women. So are some Jewish women, you know, white women are doing some of the same thing. We have to dig through some of the intragroup trauma that [01:05:00] many of us have experienced as, and so are some white men. I mean, black men, people are, we have trauma as a result of some of the identities and, and, uh, labels that have been affixed to us.

**Beth Livingston:** And I think, you know, just, I'm sorry, you just to, to break in just a little bit, I do wanna take something that you said, Tina, which I think is really important. You said you might, you know, as you're doing your, to paraphrase Hamilton, Talk less, listen more, right? If you're, if you're doing, you're in the process of that from a kind of historically power dominant group. You might hear people working through, people from a different group working through their trauma or their feelings and ways that make you feel uncomfortable, that speak to that prejudice without power, right? That are like, wait a second, that doesn't feel fair, that doesn't feel, that feels unkind, or that feels hurtful.

And I think, you know, I, I have to deal with that too. There are times in, in the communities that I'm [01:06:00] in, and when I've been allowed into communities, there are times where things are said and I'm like, . I know that's so stereotypical and I know that's hurtful or whatever, but that's not my conversation to have at that point in time.

Right. That's not, and I, again, you get to choose how, what you react to and how you react to things. And so I always start with empathy in that moment and I'm like, okay, I can understand why someone would be hurtful, be hurt in that moment and, and still working through and on their own dig journey, not be ready to connect with me or connect with people like me.

They're not at that place and they may lash out in ways that's hurtful to me, but I don't, I don't have a connection with them. I don't have a bridge with them to be able to have this conversation. If Tina said something like that, I could be like, Tina, you know what, I know that that's, I know it's kind of funny or whatever, but that hurts me.

And we could have that conversation because we have that bridge and we can have that. We have that trust we've built up. We don't have to, again, the social media ation of it means, feels like we have to reply to all those things. We have to have [01:07:00] an opinion on all those things. We have to respond. We don't.

We can choose not to respond and allow people to have their space to work through things and build bridges where we can to build those connections up. And I think it's, I really want to press on that, right? That all of these prejudices are not the same, right? And they, we can be hurt by something and reason reasonably hurt by something, something that is hurtful, right?

Everybody, every race and gender and everything else can be hurtful, right? To other people. Um, but that doesn't mean we have to fight every single one of those battles. If our goal truly is liberation in the workplace, we don't have to pick up every one of those battles and have them.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah.

**Tina Opie:** and you can untag yourself just as quickly as you can reply.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Right.

**Tina Opie:** I have had to untag myself from social media comments because I'm like, you know what? I'm just not gonna reply to this.

**Debbie Sorensen:** right. You have to choose, make some choices and, and it's, it's nuanced. Right? Well, so lemme just really quickly kind of [01:08:00] reemphasize those four qualities of authentic relationships that, that Tina mentioned. Um, yeah. Yes, that's right. Uh, empathy, trust, vulnerability and risk taking. Cuz I think those are really important to kind of, you know, work toward those and to.

Those qualities, toward, toward bridging, creating these kinds of relationships. And then let's move on to the third level here, which is collective action, which I think is really, you know, if we're, we're doing some of these things and we don't go to that place of, collective action, it doesn't really create that broader systemic change that we're hoping for really.

So can you paint a picture of what, when you've seen collective action, what does that look like?

**Tina Opie:** Do you want me to start? Beth, do you wanna start? Okay. So, collective action is once people have done dig at the individual level, they've done bridge at the interpersonal level. Now they're ready to link arms.

[01:09:00] And together dismantle systemic inequity at the systemic or institutional level. And we like to say that they're at least in the workplace, eight people processes, eight core people processes from recruiting to onboarding, evaluation, promotion, pay, all of the training, all of those things.

And we are encouraging organizations to pick one of those. And we eventually want you to look at all, all eight. But pick one of those. So you might look at your pay, for example, have you ever examined by gender, by race, by level, your salary ranges? Most organizations have that data. Have you ever analyzed.

Are you, have you made it available to the people? Not necessarily each person's salary, but the salary ranges. Do the [01:10:00] employees know where they fall within your, would you be nervous to do that? If you're nervous? Why? Why would you be afraid to do that if you find that there are indeed discrepancies? You know, is it because of actual performance differences?

Okay, so then you say, yes, they're different performance differences. But I can give you an example. I was working with a huge law firm and they were saying, okay, well, you know, we're really good at this. We've been working on equity. And I said, cool, let's look at your evaluation tools. And one of them was, has this attorney served as first chair?

And first chair is a person who does the litigation in the, in the courtroom. And I said, okay, well is this a an objective question? Yeah. Dr. Opie, it's yes or no. Okay. Well, but who decides how, how do you decide who becomes first chair? Well, usually the partners do. Okay. Well, how do the partners decide? Well, they de who does the client like, [01:11:00] okay, well how do we, how, how does the client decide who they like?

It's often based on. where the person went to school, who they like, which all comes down to who's most like the client and the partners, which is Homophily. Birds of a feather flock together. The partners and the clients are often older white men. So guess what? Oftentimes a lot of the first chairs are white men.

Does that mean that that's always the case? But no, but that explains quite a bit of the variance. So all of a sudden you have this seemingly objective yes or no question that may in fact be highly subjective. So then the question becomes, okay, well what actually is the work that people are doing as first chair?

They're making briefs, they're writing briefs. Okay. So what would it look like if you had people evaluate briefs without names, looking for errors, looking for how tightly they connect this to the legal precedent? What would that look like? Well, that's gonna take a lot more time. So now we have it. Here [01:12:00] we here, we get down to what sort of what the cro, it takes a longer time to make these more objective decisions.

And so we have a conundrum. So, you know, people might think that I'm gonna say, okay, well now I want you to quadruple the cost of assessing your EV avail. I'm not saying that, but I do want you to understand that you're seemingly objective measures and instruments that you have in place may in fact have quite a bit of bias built into them.

And so you need to stop and pause and slow down and recognize that people may be disadvantaged. And that means your firm is disadvantaged. So collective action through the shared sisterhood lens requires that you pause long enough to ask yourself those questions. And so you see how we just looked at salary by race, by gender, by different division.

Okay. You see that you have a distinction and you say it's because of performance, but then you dig a little bit deeper and you say, okay, hmm, maybe it's not. So then you have to [01:13:00] unp, so it, it, it requires an unraveling, which a also requires a paradigm shift because in order to then address that issue, what do you need to do?

You need to train your attorneys on how to then grant people first chairs. Does that make sense?

**Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah,

**Tina Opie:** mm-hmm.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah. So we come together, we take collective action and kind of turn those, expand those bridges into these bigger networks of people speaking up about all these number of ways in which, um, the workplace can, can have biases.

**Tina Opie:** and, and I th I think it's important to say, so the example that I just led you through touched upon recruiting or, or touched upon pay. It touched upon evaluation, it touched upon training, it touched upon recruiting. So that can seem overwhelming. , believe it or not, we encourage people to start with one thing. start with one thing because many organizations make the mistake

[01:14:00] of starting with all eight things, and so they sort of superficially address each thing across the organization. Don't do that. Try to drill deep on one thing. And of course, each thing has tentacles. None of these things are exclusive.

They're not mutually exclusive. They, they all overlap. But what we're finding in our research and, and in the conversations that we're having with organizations in our, our different consulting practices is that when you dedicate the time to focus one, it sends a message to your employees that you're taking this serious. two, you get a better bang on your investment because you're not, I mean, who, nobody, it doesn't make sense to spend money here. A driven drab there. A driven, really focus your dollars in a particular area. And the third thing is, is that's just a best practice of the field. It makes more sense to focus.

[01:15:00] And then when you begin, and you can have some earlier wins there, and then, then you can have a snowball effect.

You begin to have positive momentum. There's positive effect that's created as a result of you all working together. People begin to trust you because you're showing some momentum, and then you can begin to potentially move on to some of the stickier, uh, more difficult, more conflict laden areas. So, so when you're picking an area, do not start with the most controversial, most difficult, uh, most expensive areas.

I start, if you can do something that's free. That's visible. That gets you far. Start with that.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Well, and there are a number of things that you've talked about today that are actions people can take in their individual lives, in their relationships, and in these collective action kind of ways. And, and your book has a number of calls to action and a as well that people can look at. But I think, again, I think your book does [01:16:00] end on a hopeful note and an inspiring note with some practical suggestions.

And so I really appreciate that. And I wanna thank you both so much again for your time today and for coming on and sharing. I'm so appreciative of your work. Um, can you both just quickly give us, um, your information where people can find out more about you and your work, uh, before we wrap up?

**Beth Livingston:** Yeah, so I am Beth a Livingston on Twitter and Instagram and LinkedIn, and hopefully you all can go to also to [bethalivingston.com](http://bethalivingston.com) to keep up with my. Research and what we're doing with the book. Tina?

**Tina Opie:** I am Dr. Tina Opie. That's d r Tina Op. across all social media, and that's also my website. So please find us there. You can check out my TEDx talk on Shared Sisterhood because it's a 12 minute talk. If you wanna quickly learn about shared sisterhood. And Beth and I, Beth, I think we should [01:17:00] make the Diversity Inc talk available too, because that's when Beth and I are in action together.

I think folks would like that. So we'll be posting some links of Beth and I in action in addition to this wonderful time with you. Debbie, thank you so much for having both of us together. It's fun.

**Beth Livingston:** Yes, it has been such a pleasure. It really has.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Thank you so much. I really appreciate, it's been nice to get to know you and um, I really appreciate your time today. Thank you so much. And we'll link to all those resources on our show notes.

**Tina Opie:** Thank you.

**Debbie Sorensen:** you so much.

**Yael Schonbrun:** Hey, psychologists, off the clock listeners, I'm gonna guess that if you got to the end of this episode that you also love to geek out about books in psychology.

**Michael Herold:** If you don't know where to store all your books and people are already complaining that you talk about this book that you're reading all the time, then why don't you join us once a.

To read a book together.

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