

## SMFA Summit Interview with Quincy Cho, premiering 25 May 2021, 4pm PDT

### Bonnie Gillespie

Everyone, I am so happy to bring to you one of my very favorite people. It's Quincy Cho.

### Quincy Cho

Hi.

### Bonnie Gillespie

I love the shimmy.

### Quincy Cho

Shimmy, shimmy, shimmy, shimmy.

### Bonnie Gillespie

Thank you, Quincy for sitting down with me. I'm so excited to chat with you. I want to dive straight in on something you said when we were talking about setting this up. Diversity and inclusion that doesn't just check a box. Like, let's go right in on that because I'm like, what, what does it look like when it checks a box? And what does it look like when it goes beyond that? And what is the work of that?

### Quincy Cho

I think diversity that checks the box, I think we all know it to some degree, because we can feel it. We can feel when it's just a filler role, or it's, you know, a primarily white-dominated cast, and then everyone else, just kind of background. Or, you know, you're in a story, you're in a world where there could be a lot of diverse people but they're not. Like, I love the show but a classic example is "Friends". It's set in New York and it's like how...? I think you could probably count the number of diverse people on that show in the long run that it had. So that's kind of where you would see like, okay, like why aren't there more, there isn't why isn't there more diverse representation in the show, right? And the reason it's important is -- Cheryl Bedford, who is the founder of the Women of Color Unite organization -- I just saw her speak to speak to this in a video, which is, you know, we learn a lot through, about other people and cultures, through media. And if we only show one segment of human life, then that's all we know about it, right?

Diversity that does not check a box... again, similarly I think you can feel that too, right? Like characters aren't used, aren't being used to move a storyline forward. For example, one of my favorite series that I love to watch is "The Boys" and the lead -- spoiler alert, just so you know -- the, the lead character, the male protagonist is with, he's he's a white/cis/het protagonist. He's with a BIPOC woman. And early on in the pilot -- spoiler alert -- she gets killed, and it kind of is the, the inciting event for him to go outside of himself. And it's like, well why did that need to happen and why...? And it's, and there's a trend where I feel like, you see BIPOC characters,

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Bonnie Gillespie

kind of, what is the word I'm looking for? They're just kind of put to the side, they're like fodder, it's just to move the story along versus having a meaningful impact on the story.

### **Bonnie Gillespie**

Okay, so is this like we need a form of the Bechdel Test, which is the test that we run to see if there's two female characters in a scene, can they have a conversation without it being about a man or who they're dating or the love of their life. Like there's certain tests that we run to know: "Was this actually written in a feminist or pro-female way." Like, is there a similar test for diversity and inclusion, and the way that characters are written?

### **Quincy Cho**

Yeah, I, yeah, I, you know, I think the, that, like I've never thought of something like that. I think that would be great, but I also think like that kind of change also has to begin from like the top and within the room, right? Because if you have people who aren't of that experience and of course, like, you know, that isn't to say you need to be a serial killer to write about serial killers, right? But like, you know, if you if there's, decision makers are making decisions about these, these things and they don't know how to speak to that experience, you know, like so, again, so if we were to do this quiz like who's making this quiz, right? Are people who want a seat at the table create, helping to create this test, right?

### **Bonnie Gillespie**

That's good. That's good. I like that. Now you mentioned being in the rooms, and having change come from up at that top level. You, you get in rooms, you've been in rooms. You've had the opportunity to work on writing teams and be in that culture. What is it, if you can tell, that makes it challenging for people of color, for women, to get into some of those rooms, other than just the inertia of the cis/het/straight/white male system?

### **Quincy Cho**

I think some of it has to do, you know, we want to hire who we know right? Because we like working with people we want to work with right?

### **Bonnie Gillespie**

Yeah, look at who's on the summit. It's like it's all my favorite people and I can't know who I don't know.

### **Quincy Cho**

Yeah, exactly. And if your population that you're pulling from isn't very diverse, then it's not going, you're, it's, you're gonna have a hard time filling those rooms. I also think too for BIPOC writers, or just BIPOCs in general, whether it's like a creative or non-creative industry, I feel like a lot of times we get hired for our experience versus maybe your average white dude might get hired for his potential to rise up to the challenge, you know? And so those things are kind of baked into the system, it's kind of hard to fight. And you could be the best person in the room

but if they don't think you can do the job, just because of whatever systematic ideas you have about certain types of people, then you're not going to get the job.

### **Bonnie Gillespie**

So, what is the work of leadership, with this? You know, let's say, say I'm someone who is on the inside. And I know that change can happen but I also know change happens slowly. What is what is allyship at that level? What is like the commitment of, "I know we have to do better?" What does that look like in practical terms?

### **Quincy Cho**

I feel like it's different for everyone because we're all in different places of our journey, but I think it starts with 1) I think checking in with yourself to know that you're probably going to eat some humble pie, and you don't know any, you might just not know anything about something and someone's going to tell you, like, your point of perspective is incorrect and that might hurt, or be jarring and to know that that's okay. And just to and to reach out to people, ask for referrals. I also, like, this is so silly because I used to read a lot of books growing up, but like, rediscovering books have been great because you have people who have studied a particular topic for like, God knows how long and then has decided to write a book about it. Like, go read that book, right?

And I think just like listening, and also like taking it in when someone corrects you. This is on like a smaller note, but I recently sent out an email to a group of mentees I'm a part of, with, through the Women of Color Unite, Start With 8 mentorship program. And I was like, "Hey guys, it's our monthly powwow. Let's get together." And someone privately, kindly reached out and was like "Quincy, I think 'powwow', you know, is insensitive. Like, just so, you know, and if you want to have a discussion about it, please let me know." And I was like, "Wow, she's right, like, yeah." I totally didn't even like, make the connection. And then the next morning I decided to reply to the entire group and say, "This person was kind enough to correct me and just so you know, I'm, I'm sorry. I'm sorry if I've offended anyone. And I learned and I didn't know. I had no idea." And then what was cool was by owning it, it allowed then everyone else to have a discussion about it and we got to have... I learned "master bedroom" also is a problematic term. "Rule of thumb". And so, because of that, it was like, "Oh," then everyone else felt safe to say something right? Someone said, "Oh, I thought it was problematic but you know I didn't know, but like, thank you for saying something." And so, then we got to have an open dialogue about it.

### **Bonnie Gillespie**

Hundred percent. So, there was someone we hired on my team years back, who still works with us, who said, "You've got a prompt on the Brandprov SMFA Hot Sheet of 'What's your spirit animal?'" She said, "You need, you need to not have that." And I remember, this is, you know, years ago and I was just like, "What?" And it took that moment of, "Whoa. Hold up. Yeah, what does that mean and where did we get that and we know what we're trying to do with the

Brandprov prompt, but there's a better way to do it." And so going through and just cleaning up things and the... the "powwow" word is another one that I went, I didn't catch that everywhere in the book itself, but.... I was able to change the introduction to say that as I'm doing this sixth printing of the fourth edition, we are in the process of updating our language around gender inclusivity, and I did find a few places where I could, on that printing, edit in some pronoun differences that showed greater inclusion. And just being aware that those things are happening, and being able to speak to I know I'm not getting it 100% right 100% of the time, and that's okay. I think it's such a big part of it, because it makes it okay for for others who are watching that chain to go, "I can be wrong and it doesn't mean the end of the world, either." You role modeled for everyone that you can be corrected and it's okay.

### **Quincy Cho**

Yeah, yeah, and I just didn't want to like, sit in it, like in the thing of like... let's say it had been like an even bigger... and that was the other thing too, like what if this was like a bigger thing right? And I think with 2020, last year we saw a lot of that happening. And you know you have to wonder like, "What would I do in that situation, had I been called out?" Right? And I think I was like, "Oh, this is also a good way to practice owning something that might not be cool on a small scale." And I think – you talk about this -- being able to talk about this when the stakes are so low, and being able to own... if I can own something this small and start practicing it, then I can own things that are much bigger. And I think that's, I don't know, that's so much easier, like owning that was...

### **Bonnie Gillespie**

It is. I so wish people would get okay with the the stress of being wrong, being corrected, making mistakes, being human, especially early on, while the stakes are so low. They're the lowest they'll ever be and it always feels high stakes, but right now your audience is the smallest it will ever be. So, now's the time to fall on your face and just... and you and I share the love for the phrase, you know, "fall forward" and "fail forward." It's like as long as that kind of failure is in service of growth, it can't even really be that embarrassing. It's it's like we've all been there and it humanizes that space of, "Oh wow I have room to grow and I'm going to grow in front of you." And make that feel okay.

### **Quincy Cho**

Yeah, and it's hard. Don't get me wrong; it's hard. It's hard but I have to keep telling myself, like, it might feel like everyone is watching, but everyone is thinking exactly what I'm thinking, which is, "Everyone is watching me." So, like there's no one, no one watching right now.

### **Bonnie Gillespie**

Which in a way is...

### **Quincy Cho**

Except for my dog and my cat.

### **Bonnie Gillespie**

...freeing. It's great. They are very judgy, your dog and cat. No, I'm kidding. They're not. So, let's talk about that from from looking at some of the nightmare things that happened with this in 2020 and that will always happen, because we can't erase our history. We can't, even if we tried to go scrub the internet of everything we've ever said that could be taken out of context or not even doesn't need to be taken out of context, it was just wrong and we didn't know at the time. How, how do we allow ourselves the freedom of self-expression, knowing that there's a moment where we're going to be public enough people that people bring something, an old tweet, whatever back up in front of us and ask us to reconcile that thing that we did or said?

### **Quincy Cho**

I think I look at... my brain is Swiss cheese, so like, I don't. I know in terms of like trolling, I know I have certain role models that I'm like, "Ooh, I'd love to be able to practice that," like Chrissy Teigen is a great example like how she handles that. Man, his name escapes me, but there's like certain comedians, too, who handle that very well. Seth Rogen this past year was great. He was just saying "fuck you" to all the trolls. But I think just looking to people who have... I think 1) just being genuine and having... first having, again, that conversation with yourself and 2) and then, and then also just talking to some real friends who will give you real advice because sometimes I see those apologies and I'm like, "Did you not talk to your...? Who okayed this?"

### **Bonnie Gillespie**

Yes. Oh my God, when the apology is so much worse than the first thing that they're apologizing for. That is insane, you're like, "Run it by your besties. Your squad." Like somebody needs to see that first.

### **Quincy Cho**

Yeah, yeah, yeah. But I think then that goes back to our earlier conversation like, "Do you have those friends with those diverse viewpoints who are going going to be able to then educate you, graciously -- because it's not their job -- about why you stand to be corrected," right? Because if you, if you don't have that, then you're just gonna have an echo chamber that then reinforces that and then the apology is like, "What is this half-baked apology?" But I think, looking at role models, I think looking at like, you know, I don't know... I think if something were to happen I for sure would run it by like, my "Bonnie filter" and be like, "What would Bonnie do about this?" Right? Or just looking at people you admire in your life and like, you know, seeing how they would handle it.

### **Bonnie Gillespie**

I like the playing it out of, you know, what, we use pace cars and lighthouses and phrases like that in the in the world of "Self-Management for Actors." Just the idea that there's, there's a lighthouse. There's someone out there who's many tiers above, that you go, "Yeah, I like how

she's doing it, they do it, he does it, whatever." But there's too much distance between where we are tier-wise and that person maybe, so we look at that pace car, the person that's maybe just one tier above, or even half a tier above. And we're able to go, "There's more relatable stuff that they are going through and that helps me check what that would look like and feel like." It requires a little bit of self-awareness though that I think a lot of people feel uncomfortable with. Do you have any thoughts on how we get comfortable, sometimes looking in an unflattering mirror or, or sitting with ourselves fully?

### **Quincy Cho**

You know, I don't know. I feel like I've been pretty self-aware most of my life, to my detriment. So, because, when you said that I was like, "Oh, I guess people must be..." and I was laughing because I was like, "It never occurred to me to like not be." You know what, there's a phrase, I forget where I heard it from. It might have been through meditation. It might have been through Abraham-Hicks. But there's a phrase where it's like, "Meditation is the time your time to sit with yourself." And it's like, who, if you're not going to sit with yourself, how can you expect anyone else to, right? And so, I think... and if you don't give yourself that space to be with yourself, then like how the hell do you know, like, who you are or what you are and what you're about and what you want? And I'm still figuring that out. Like, "What is it that I really want versus what is it that I was told that I should want?" Right? So, I think, also, and I think you have this one, you said this about like your picture and branding and like your mole, like you're gonna bring this with you everywhere, like you...

### **Bonnie Gillespie**

It comes in the room. Don't airbrush it out, yeah.

### **Quincy Cho**

Yeah. Similarly, like this body bag you're in, you have to lug it everywhere so you might as well make friends with it, right? Because otherwise, like, you can't leave her at the door, it's, you know, and it's so much more fun when you're like in it. I think people know when you're like, "I'm friends with me."

### **Bonnie Gillespie**

That is beautiful, because that explains enoughness, in such a clear way. Because there's this feeling of a lot of people, an energy that people bring into the room a lot of times and obviously Zoom room as well, that is, "Please don't see how much I don't like myself, but I need to convince you to like me so that you'll sign me or cast me or hire me." Or whatever the relationship is. And I really wish people could get on board with, "I so like me. I'm so invested in me that I'm meeting with you because maybe you think it's a good, good idea to invest in me too. And if you don't, it's all right because I already invested in me. I am so down this."

### **Quincy Cho**

Yeah.

### **Bonnie Gillespie**

There's a really challenging balance of "I'm going to go out and find someone to validate me." When we're not self-validating.

### **Quincy Cho**

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, I agree. And it's tough because it's like with our industry if you're, especially if you're an actor, like you put yourself out there so much and you don't hear back and one of my best friends was like, she literally sees my job as like being rejected all the time, because she's like, "You're literally going out. You don't hear back." And I never saw it that way. And then, then you get some auditions that you really want and that hurts, right? And I had a few recently where it was like, "Oh my god, this is so me. This is like me in my real life." And then I carried it around for a while and it wasn't a good place to be. And so, then when that came around again, my friend was like, "Congratulations on an awesome self-tape." And I was like, "Yes, that is all I want. And I'm gonna let it go because it hurts too much. And that is what I want is a congratulations."

But secondly, and this has helped, was like, I was like, if there's a role that I feel, like, has been written for me and I cannot get it, then it wasn't mine, right? And I might as well just do me, because what else can I do? And that has given me a lot of freedom in terms of, like, I think being my, my own friend in the audition room, because, yeah, like, you know?

### **Bonnie Gillespie**

I'm loving this because it's so about befriending yourself. Again, that theme is just so, so clear through this.

I want to I want to shift gears just a wee bit because you are you are a hyphenate. You are an incredible writer. You write amazing things on so many different levels. You have so many different types of writing skills, and of course you're a busy working actor that lots of people got to know in several ways over the past few months through all the national commercials you've got running. Like, it's a lot. You also obviously do a lot of stage work. You're just, you're busy. How do you balance all the various roles of Quincy?

### **Quincy Cho**

I think what, the thing you said. You said it recently, but also, I think it wasn't the first time I heard it. You said balance is movement, I think?

### **Bonnie Gillespie**

Constant state of motion. Constant...

**Quincy Cho**

Yeah, and I think again with like, balance, and also enoughness, like, we keep thinking it's like an end destination. And I keep thinking, "Once I get here, I'm gonna stop," Right?

**Bonnie Gillespie**

And it's just not true.

**Quincy Cho**

No, yeah, it doesn't stop. So as far as balance goes, this was a hard challenge for me early on, as you know like boundaries was a good thing, like understanding that was really important. I think taking care of yourself is really important. I tend to overwork, and that's my imbalance, so I'm really learning to like take care of myself and give myself space. Because I learned, I finally understand the lesson, like, you can either rest in between work, or you can overwork and your body will call it, and then you have... you have to rest, regardless.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

You're going to get the time off either way, it's just... build the time off in or it's sick days.

**Quincy Cho**

Yeah, like, at least choose, right? So, I think just doing that, being mindful... I also recently read a quote. It's an interview with this one Swedish actor and one of the -- and this is also how I'm trying to refocus I'm not so result-oriented -- is he makes the most... the thing he is doing right now the most important thing, right? And then he was like, "I don't worry about the career because I just focus on the job at hand, and then you look up one day and you have a career," right? Which also is easier said than done. Right?

**Bonnie Gillespie**

But even if I think about, you know, our relationship through through pole, like you cannot be working on other elements of your life when you're in the middle of a dangerous trick. Like, that's the surest way to injure yourself.

**Quincy Cho**

Yes.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

And so, everything you are working on is, actively, the most important thing, and the only thing because at that moment, it really is all that exists.

**Quincy Cho**

Yeah, yeah, and it's great because then you can just focus on the one thing. You know, because I think sometimes, we're like, we're, you know, if you are a multi hyphenate, or you're just in, you're in it, not just... but if you're an actor, and you have, you know, bills to pay, and we



always are like, "I want to do this thing. I just want to do this thing." So, then when that time comes, like do it. Because that's your time, you know? And I think it's so easy to be like, "Oh," like not... "now's not a good time. Like I'm, I'm tired. I'm sleepy. Blah blah blah." But like, and yes, like, and I think we know the difference between, like, "Okay, really not... I don't really need to do this right now," versus, like, "Yes, the conditions aren't great, but, like, I'm still going to show up for myself in spite of that."

### **Bonnie Gillespie**

That's launch at 85%. It's: Get to a point of readiness where it's like, "Yeah, I would still like to tweak a few things before hitting go on this but you know, fuck it, I just I've got to go."

### **Quincy Cho**

Yeah. Yeah, and if you show up your, for yourself now, in that way, down the line, when shit is not good and shit is really bad, you have credit now. And you will be able to show up with yourself, for yourself in, with less practice, with less time, with, you know, so it's it's either way, it's an investment.

### **Bonnie Gillespie**

I love that and I'm looking at how, especially right now, as so many more opportunity... opportunities exist for our BIPOC clients and for just the world of getting more equitable storytelling going on. Just looking at the breakdowns, you see more opportunity than ever, there's still a long way to go, but seeing more opportunity than ever. I'm like the enoughness work that has been going on all the time when there were only, you know, two roles a month that you could even go out on to now be able to go out three times every day, that enoughness work is why you can handle the volume when the volume gets turned up.

Because you don't control the volume, but you can control feeling enough so that when there's a spike in opportunity, you're like, "Of course I'm ready," rather than, "I wasn't ready for it to grow this fast." Like, well, how do you think it happens when suddenly, you know, no one knows your name, but then you're in a movie with with someone and you blow up and you're the Sundance darling and now everybody knows your name? You don't get like, "Oh, you need a few minutes before we put you all over TMZ?" Like, that doesn't happen.

### **Quincy Cho**

It's just GO.

### **Bonnie Gillespie**

It's go. It's go. So, what does your enoughness work look like for you in the in the day... I know relationships are really important to you, obviously, and that's a part of it.

**Quincy Cho**

Yes, relationships, definitely having the people you can reach out to for days. I always talk about like, borrowing confidence. If you don't feel confident in yourself knowing people, and obviously this like requires discernment, right? You don't want people just like feeding you, like blowing hot air up your ass, right? Like, and I think, again, we know, and I guess, too, like the theme that keeps coming up to, like, trust yourself, right? You know. And I think also like being in Expansive Capacity with you has been a huge help in terms of like... oh my goodness just...

**Bonnie Gillespie**

Who knew what that world was gonna become!

**Quincy Cho**

Exactly. Yeah...

**Bonnie Gillespie**

So necessary! Holy crap.

**Quincy Cho**

Yeah, yeah. just like the labeling that we do to like, you know dispassionate labeling we do. The tools, the techniques that help. And I think so much too, like, creativity and mental health lie hand-in-hand, right. If you're taking one... or the care of one of one or the other, like they feed each other. That has been helpful. I think, again taking time, noticing patterns also has helped in terms of being like, "Why does this keep happening?" And having, you know, practicing enough awareness to be like, "Oh, wait, like, this is not really what's happening right? This is something that's happening to me and I can choose how to react to it." I think journaling, counseling, counseling, counseling. It's great. There's a lot of, like, affordable places in LA you can go to on a sliding scale.

What else? I don't know. I love the graph you have. The, the, the, Get in Gear for the Next Tier. That I think is great because that because I was like, "What is the formula for this?" And I think that encapsulates everything.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

That framework is, as far as I can tell, it's really solid. Like, I keep looking for, "Where's the experience that a certain person has at a certain tier that isn't covered by keeping that whole system healthy," and I haven't found a hole yet. It really is just: Keep all those parts healthy, know which part you tend to undernourish, so that you can then create time on your calendar, that "Today, I gotta do the thing that I don't like doing." Because you'll know. It's like flossing your teeth... you'll eventually, you gotta go to the dentist and they're going to talk to you about your gums. So.

**Quincy Cho**

Yeah, it's not a fun visit. No, no, no.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

Like, they have to scrape more. Why don't you just do, do the thing that's less painful. Yeah, okay, Quincy, please tell everyone where they can stay in touch with you, find you, follow up on your journey.

**Quincy Cho**

I am... I almost said, "I am available." You can find me on all the social needs at @QuincyDinosaur or... and, if you want more, like, industry updates, on my website at QuincyCho.com.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

Awesome. Quincy, thank you so much. I love having you as a part of the Hollywood we're creating.

**Quincy Cho**

Yay.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

Thank you for being a part of the summit. I love you. Thank you.

**Quincy Cho**

I love you too.