

# Report for Change

The 2016 SinC Publishing Summit Report on  
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Mystery Community



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Report for Change: The 2016 Publishing Summit Report on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Mystery Community.

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*The mission of Sisters in Crime is to promote the ongoing advancement, recognition and professional development of women crime writers.*

This report is available online at  
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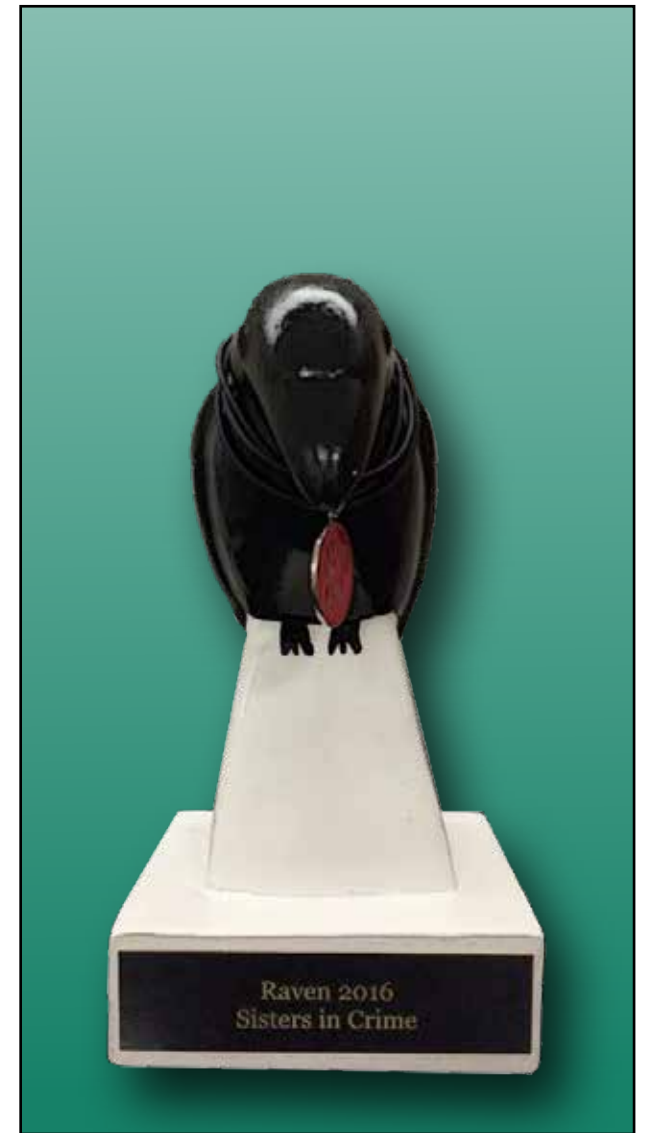
# Introduction

Becoming a successful writer is hard work. For writers who belong to the groups often referred to as “diverse,” there are factors that make it even harder. But talking about diversity can feel like walking across a minefield. Some people show angry resistance to having the conversation at all. Even those who see the need for change can be stuck because of fear: fear of getting it wrong; fear of seeming to pander; fear of being criticized; fear of making things worse.

Sisters in Crime (SinC) was founded on the belief that women crime writers deserved the same opportunities as male crime writers. Ignoring fear and working for fairness are in our DNA.

Our mission statement, revised in 2013, is to “promote the ongoing advancement, recognition, and professional development of women crime writers.” In 2015, we were awarded the MWA Raven for services to the mystery community in acknowledgement of our success. But to carry out our mission well we must pay attention to the whole experience of each member, not only their gender. In fact, we must widen our scope beyond gender to hold true to ourselves at all, because our vision statement is to “serve as the voice of excellence and diversity in crime writing” and the first of our values statements—our guiding principles—is to “promote respect and embrace diversity.”

So, this year’s publishing summit team (you will find our bios in Appendix C) is tackling diversity. We want to start with this understanding: all writers experience roadblocks along the way to being published. All writers face indifference, rejection and misunderstanding. SinC tries to help writers deal with and overcome the hurdles. But when writers of color (WOC) are turned down by editors because the last WOC on the books didn’t sell well, when LGBT writers are told by reviewers that their characters’ “lifestyle” should have come with a warning on the jacket, and when writers with disability (WWD) cannot attend the industry conventions where so many vital connections are made, then the bar to success has been raised to an unacceptable level.



What can SinC do? Our first step was one-on-one interviews with authors and publishers who agreed to help us determine the best direction for the study. (See Acknowledgements). We learned a great deal from that listening phase; the most important lesson being that listening is part of the work itself. Before then, we all assumed we would be turning a beady eye on the industry, perhaps even from some moral high ground. It quickly became clear, however, that there is work to be done within SinC itself to ensure that WWD, WOC, and LGBT writers have a happy home here as well as a fair shot at success in the business.

## **A Word About Words**

As writers, we care about words. As Sisters (and Mistery), we care about people. The first question we asked our interviewees was whether we were using good enough words—words that are inclusive, respectful and warm—when we said things like “diverse writers” and talked about “writers of color” or WOC, “writers with disabilities” or WWD, and “lesbian/gay/bi/transgender writers” or LGBTW. (See Appendix D for the interview questions and Appendix F for a glossary).]

The answer we got was a straightforward yes, but with some thoughtful extra guidance and information. For example:

- “Writers of color” will be understood by Latina and Native American writers to include them.
- “Transgender,” not “transgendered,” is preferred by trans people. (And “trans” is fine too.) “Cisgender” or “cis” is a useful way to identify non-trans people.
- There’s a whole ideology of language around disability. Person-first language, such as “a person who has a disability” or “a person who is blind” is preferred to “a disabled person” or “a blind person.” For the entire group, the preferred term is “the disability community,” not “the disabled community.” While outdated terms like “retarded” or “deaf and dumb” may be appropriate coming from a character in a fictional setting, the more respectful terms to use today are “a person with cognitive disabilities” or “a person who is deaf or hearing impaired and/or who does not speak aloud.” We acknowledge that the language is sometimes awkward.

- When talking directly with or about an individual, it's best to ask her how she'd like to be identified. If you assume, and you assume wrong and get corrected—no biggie. Again, we're writers and we're good with words. Switching to someone's preferred term isn't beyond us.

For this report, we're going to try to write plainly at all times, while choosing the words that ...

.....  
 "make the most people happy and the least people unhappy." ~Cindy Brown  
 .....



Cindy Brown

## The Scope of the Report

The needs of WWD are very different from the struggles of LGBTW, and these are somewhat different from the challenges facing WOC. Also, within the community of WOC, the issues pressing on Latina, African American, Asian American and Native writers are not the same. We were determined to encompass everyone in the study and take a small step rather than focus on just one group and take a bigger one.

## What We Did

- Survey the SinC membership to reveal diversity
- Compile a database of diverse writers
- Gather and report on the lived experience of diverse authors and publishers working today
- Identify best practices SinC should adopt
- Suggest concrete changes individuals in the wider mystery community can make for the better

We had to make several tough decisions along the way to keep things manageable, given our committee's small number and available time. For instance, we have not spoken to every writer we could have. And because we wanted to make sure lots of busy SinC members took the survey, we kept it short.

In one very practical way, anyone reading this report can help move things further forward. We have compiled for this report and for the SinC website a list of every WOC and LGBT published mystery writer we could identify, who is working in the US today. If you are or know someone who should be on the list and isn't, please email [webmaven@sistersincrime.org](mailto:webmaven@sistersincrime.org)



Eleanor Taylor Bland was a pioneer in crime fiction, the author of the first series featuring an African American female police detective, Marti MacAlister, a beloved and enduring heroine who defied many of the stereotypes that haunt African American women in popular culture. Eleanor died in 2010. To commemorate and celebrate her life and work, SinC instituted an annual grant in her name.

The Eleanor Taylor Bland Grant awards an emerging writer of color with a grant of \$1500 to support crime fiction writing and career development in any way the recipient chooses, be it workshops, seminars, conferences or retreat attendance; online course registration; or research activities. Details on how to apply are on the SinC website.

# Part 1. Who We Are



Attica Locke

**Attica Locke**, an African American crime writer, reported finding her first mystery convention, “so profoundly white I could not see myself in that world.” Even to white writers who might manage not to see unless they make a point of looking, the professional gatherings of our community appear remarkably lacking in diversity. We wanted to find out if there was perhaps greater diversity there than face-to-face meetings suggested, or if crime writing really is as white as it seems.

## SinC Member Survey

In March 2016, we sent an online survey to the 3400 SinC members (see Appendix E). Asking about race, we used the same categories as the US Census Bureau, but invited members to provide their own self-description as well or instead if they preferred. We asked about sexuality and gender identity using categories the report team devised in consultation with LGBT writers. We gave members who identified as having a disability the option of describing it.

Figure 1. SinC Members

	SinC Membership	US Population*
White, non-Hispanic	93%	62%
African American or Black	3%	13%
American Indian or Alaska Native	2%	2%
Asian or Pacific Islander	2%	5%
Hispanic/Latino	1%	17%
with a Disability	12%	19%
LGBT	6%	3.8%**

\*Sources for US population figures, United States Census Bureau (<http://census.gov>).

\*\* Gates' (2012) meta-study, reporting on individual studies finding between 1 and 6 percent, produced the 3.8 percent figure we are using here. Gary J. Gates, “LGBT Identity: A Demographer’s Perspective,” *Loyola of Law Angeles Law Review* 45 (2012) 693-714 (<http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/llr/vol45/iss3/2>)

## Demographic Results

More than a third of our members responded—a robust rate for an online survey.

The survey showed a SinC membership with a racial profile similar to that of the publishing industry overall (Lee and Low, 2015, see Appendix E), which makes it not at all like the national population in most measures. We are overwhelmingly white, non-Latina women. Although there were self-descriptions



in addition to the census categories (these included White Eastern European Jew (WEEJ), Italian-American, South Asian, Canadian, and Celtic), only three respondents objected to the demographic questions altogether, choosing not to identify, or to identify only as “human.”

We appear somewhat less likely to have disabilities than the general population and the types of disability accord with the age of our membership. 77% of SinC members are aged 55 or older.

The LGBT result, towards the top end of the range for the general population, also reflects publishing industry norms as far as we can gather. One publishing professional spoke of her informal sense that the business has lots of LGBT people working in it, and reported that 12.5% of the workforce in her current company identify as LGBT.

### Does The Survey Accurately Reflect The Membership?

While we must take the survey results as they stand, it’s tempting to assume that the WOC, WWD, and LGBTW in our membership might be over represented here and SinC might actually be even less diverse than the survey suggests. It is easy to imagine a straight, white, cis woman with no disabilities thinking this survey wasn’t about her and so not responding.

### Experiences and Perceptions

We tried to evaluate our members’ publishing experience by asking them such questions as whether they found the climate for their writing careers to be getting easier or harder and who published their last book.

By asking for the names of the most recent publishers, we were able to tease out and distinguish self-publishing, non-traditional publishers (e.g., micro, nano, and crowd-sourced), traditional specialist houses (e.g., Bella, Tyndale, Wings), and traditional mainstream houses, including New York’s Big 5 (Hachette, Harper Collins, Macmillan, Penguin Random House, Simon & Schuster).

A piece of good news was that there was no significant correlation between finding one’s writing career getting harder or much harder and being in one of the groups we are studying. WWD reported slightly higher rates of increasing difficulty, but WOC and LGBT writers spanned the spectrum.

Figure 2. Racial Identity

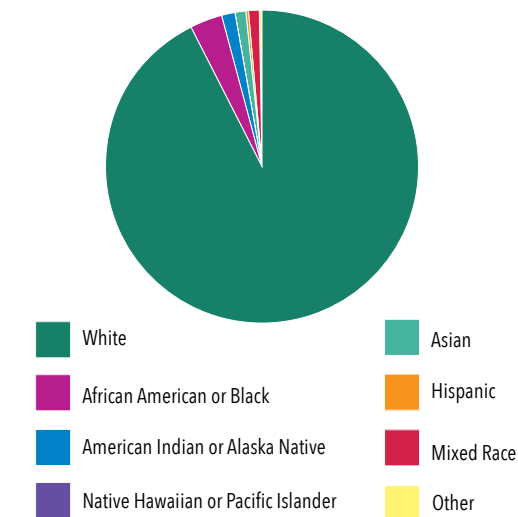
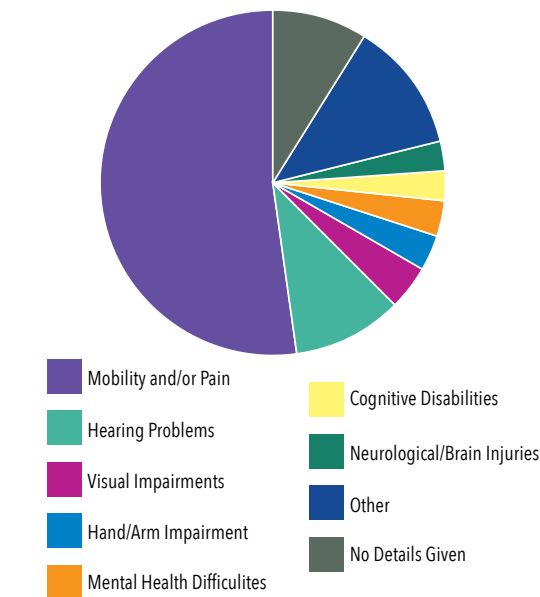


Figure 3. Types of Disability





Frankie Y. Bailey

Perhaps, mystery writers in general or SinC members particularly are simply cheerful and optimistic about writing. Certainly, if we use publication by New York's Big 5 as a measure of success, it is clear that being a writer of color, a writer with disability or an LGBT writer has an effect. Writers in each of the groups we are studying are roughly 30% less likely to be published by one of the Big 5 than writers without these extra identifications.

In Part 2, we will look in depth at each group's experience, but we also need to explain who is in these groups.

## Diverse Authors: Frankie's List

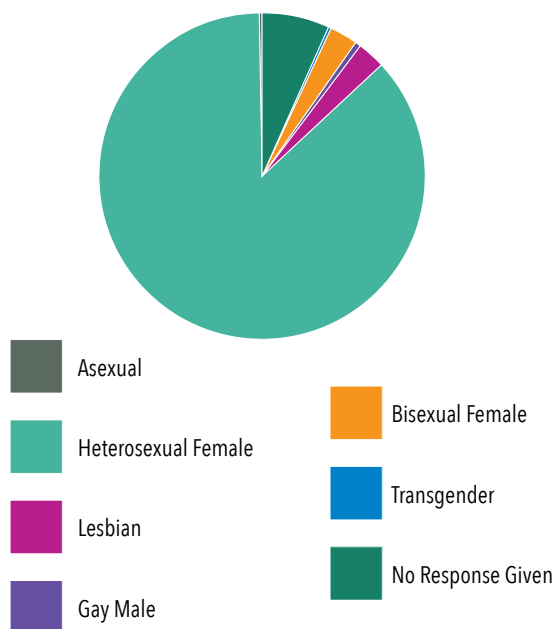
Frankie Y. Bailey, building on work started by the late Eleanor Taylor Bland, began to compile a list of published African American crime writers over a decade ago. As her part of this study, Frankie has expanded the list to include other WOC and LGBT writers. (See Appendix A.)

We fully acknowledge Eleanor's initial achievement as well as the contributions of Maria Kelson (the first Eleanor Taylor Bland Grant winner), and Jessie Chandler, both of whom provided content. Nevertheless, the rest of the publishing summit team are delighted to over-rule the protests of the list's author and name this important and ongoing resource *Frankie's List*, after SinC's first African American president.

## Why a List?

On the most practical level, it's a resource for any organizer of a convention, conference, or festival who is trying to make an event more diverse. It's a resource for librarians building collections that reflect their communities. It's a resource for teachers in need of role models for students. It's also an answer to anyone in the mystery community who claims that diverse authors are not there to be found.

Figure 4. Gender & Sexual Identities



## Who Is On It?

SinC has always been open to women and men, although our mission is to support women crime writers in achieving equity. We have taken the decision to include men of color and gay, bisexual and trans men on Frankie's List—in other words, to be “radically inclusive”—because we believe the difficulties experienced by men in these groups are so similar to the difficulties of women as a group, that to exclude them would be to take a step away from our core values. We have included any author with at least one published mystery novel or three short stories.

We haven't yet included writers with disabilities. When we discussed the makeup of *Frankie's List*, we had still to investigate the experiences of WWD. We suspected that disability might be an unwelcome identification for individuals, as well as being problematic to determine without intrusion. We will return to this topic in Part 2.

Though *Frankie's List* focuses on writers, not characters, you may find character lists online, for example at Stan Ulrich & Lucinda Surber's *Stop, You're Killing Me* website.

Figure 5. Who Published Your Last Book

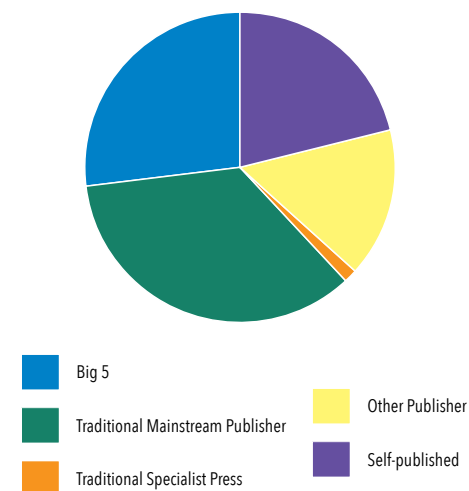
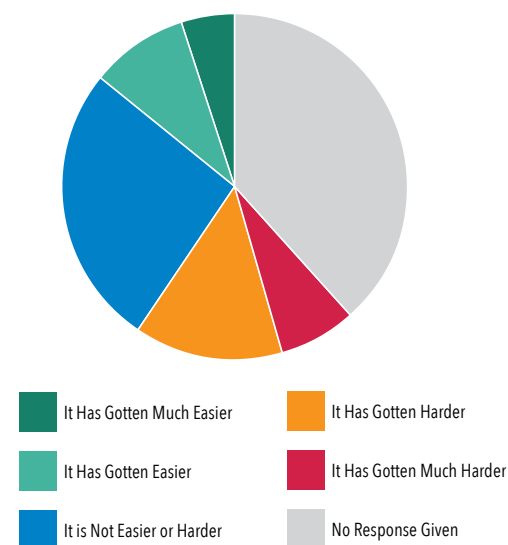


Figure 6. Has Publishing Gotten Easier or Harder?



# Part 2. Where Are We Now?

## Being a Writer of Color (WOC) in the Mystery Community



Linda Rodriguez

“It starts right inside your own mind. There’s a little voice saying ‘don’t write mysteries. Mysteries are written by white people. About white people.’ ~Linda Rodriguez

Everyone we spoke to acknowledged that it’s tough to get started in publishing, whether you’re trying to break in or building your brand. But there are extra obstacles and barriers set in front of WOC that other writers don’t have to navigate. At the most extreme, a WOC might be the only person of color in the room—at a workshop, her agency, her publishing house, her readings, or her first convention. The obstacle course that reality sets up goes something like this:

### When You’re The **Only One** . . . You Become **Every One**

Several WOC reported being assumed to represent the whole group of people of their race who write, even being held responsible for the whole group. That’s too heavy a burden.

*Thought experiment: A book by a white man is published and sells poorly. So the publisher doesn’t acquire any more books by white men for a while. Unfair? You bet. Or, think of it this way: A white man approaches a publisher and is rejected because they’ve already selected their “white guy” books for that year’s list. Those “white guy” books are all paranormal cozies and his book is Toronto noir but they’re still too similar because . . . “white guy.” Insane? Why yes.*

Being held responsible for your entire race can reduce your freedom in unexpected ways. **Attica Locke** noted a deep discomfort caused by her choice to write about disorder in law enforcement—in her books the reader can’t root for the cops—and she also contrasts the resistance to her writing disruptively about race with the acceptance of women writing disruptively about gender.

More generally, white writers get to take on a social issue, say whatever they like about it, and then move on. **Valerie Wilson Wesley** reported that a WOC who takes on a social issue risks being known ever after as “that writer who thinks ...” and notes that if “that writer” is a prominent African American, the effect can ripple out even further to become “Black people think ...”

But retreating from social issues and disruptive ideas brings its own trouble. Valerie spoke of the particular difficulty of an African American writer’s tackling a cozy. Cozies do not generally confront social issues head on (although the genre lines are blurry and some writers stretch the boundaries). But the reality of African American lives as lived in the US today means that one cannot, with any amount of authenticity, write an African American protagonist in a friendly small town where people get along and life is easy.



Valerie Wilson Wesley

**When You’re The Only One ...  
You Become Every One ... But Not A Single Extra One**

If one WOC can represent every member of her race and be held responsible for their failures, shouldn’t that single writer be able to take the next step and just represent “Everywoman,” or with one final step “Everyone”?

WOC report that this is not the case at all. They are told that the dominant culture “doesn’t know what to do with them” or that the story of a single person of color “doesn’t apply” to everyone. One Latina writer put it this way, “Romance is white people in love; sci-fi is white people in space; mystery is white people solving crime. Latino literature has sub-categories where Latino characters do all those things too, but it’s not romance, sci-fi or mystery . . . it’s Latino literature.”

As **Rachel Howzell Hall**, an African American writer, pointed out, “black readers have been crossing color lines in their reading all of their lives [because most books are by and about white people] and being able to put themselves into the fiction worlds. If black readers can do this, why can’t white readers do that in reverse?”

Rachel Howzell Hall



Photo by: Andre Ellis

.....  
“We can all get with vampires and werewolves . . . but black women are not like us?”

Come on!” ~X  
.....

**When You’re the *Only One*, You Become *Every One*, But Not a Single *Extra One* . . .  
and That’s All You Are**

Being defined completely by your race and denied any individuality at all is something that happens only to WOC. *Imagine a white writer who depicted a cold, comfortless marriage only to have her editor ask if that was the way all white people lived. And if not, could it be changed, please? Weird? Just a little.*

Then imagine how much worse it is to be defined by your race when the definers don’t even ask you if you reflect it, but rather tell you you don’t. One African American writer reported being told by a white editor that black people weren’t lawyers and, therefore, her characters were inauthentic. It’s a common experience for a Latina woman writer to meet with a sense of disbelief that she even exists.



Desiree Zamorano

.....  
“... because Mexican-American women aren’t writers. They’re hotties or they’re maids.”

~Desiree Zamorano  
.....

Being required to land on the pinhead of what someone else believes about your culture is wearisome. For every debut author told that her characters are “too black” there is another like **Rachel Howzell Hall** who reported: “Agents and editors said my voice wasn’t ‘urban’ enough—and we all know that in this instance, ‘urban’ is code for ‘black.’” Often, the same book is both “too” and “not enough.” **Desiree Zamorano** received early feedback on her Mexican American PI novel that included “good book but too much Mexican stuff” and “good novel but needs to be more Mexican.” Here “more Mexican” means “more stereotypical” because a book written by a Mexican is already 100% Mexican.

It adds insult to injury when the stereotypical beliefs regarding your own culture come from successful books written about it by outsiders. A Native American writer reported being told she got her own culture wrong when she departed from what an editor had read in Tony Hillerman’s Navajo novels. Hillerman wrote beautifully and with respect and understanding, but did not write the last word, surely.



## Power, Transparency and the Gatekeepers

“It seems harder these days to break in and stay in long enough to find a readership in traditional publishing, and the expectations of both sales and quantity of work are higher. As difficult as it is for white authors, it’s tougher for people of color. The mainstream publishing world is very white and privileged and disconnected from the reading audience. Editors have trouble imagining an audience that isn’t like them.”

~From the SinC survey

It’s impossible to tell what factors are in play in the decision to publish or not publish any single book. The language used to reject a submission—“not for us,” “no market,” “couldn’t sell it to the meeting”—has no transparency. One WOC we spoke to, feeling very unsure about the continuation of her series, knows that her uncozy sleuth is a stretch for her cozy publisher. If the series is discontinued it probably won’t be a decision based on her race. But there is an effect. Remember that WOC are only two-thirds as likely as white writers to be published by one of the Big 5.

No WOC suggested that the effect comes from malignant racism. More likely, when times get tough editors retreat to safety and when editors are white that means pulling away from stories they might not understand, about worlds that are unfamiliar. They can better predict the reception for work about familiar people in familiar cultures—or they believe they can—which increases their confidence. Even when the book is about “exotic others,” if its writer is just like the editor, that makes for one fewer unpredictable factor, in a business where predicting the future is the name of the game.

Frustrations come in many forms. When an editor can’t see how to place a book into the familiar markets, does not know anything about the other markets, and will not listen to an author who does know, that’s a tough situation for the author. **Linda Rodriguez** revealed, for example, that German book buyers are crazy for Native American culture. Germans attend Indian Camp reenactments the way Americans attend Renaissance fairs (which are unknown in Europe). A New York publisher who does not know this will see no reason to pursue German translation rights for a Native American novel.

One particularly problematic way publishing professionals “retreat to safety” is when they tell WOC simply not to be what they are. **Naomi Hirahara** reports the experience of her race having being treated as if it’s a political stance rather than a simple fact, as if it’s something that could perhaps go away to make life easier. “Take all that stuff out and concentrate on the mystery” is common advice. Of course, white writers writing about “exotic others” might well be told the same thing, but those writers can select a different project with their identity intact.



Sara Sue Hoklotubbe

.....  
“The first agent I encountered asked, ‘Why are you writing about Indians?’”

.....  
~Sara Sue Hoklotubbe  
.....

It seems clear that people of color are desperately needed in mystery publishing. But where are they? One anonymous African American New York publisher explained, telling us that publishing jobs are given via a network of contacts and the way into an editor’s job is via an assistant’s job. But assistants’ jobs are low paid, despite the fact that they are really two jobs in one (administrative assistant and apprentice editor). Indeed, the average pay for any woman in publishing is \$51K (men’s average \$70K) and working in New York means paying a lot for even the most modest apartment. (*Publishers Weekly*, publishing salary survey, 2015.) As a result, assistants’ jobs are more open to people with both wealth and connections. And, in this country, wealth still correlates strongly with race. For example, the median wealth holdings (equity, savings, pension, etc.) for African American households is 6% of that for white households (*Forbes*, March 26, 2015). Even unpaid internships for college credit, where the needed connections might be forged, are realistic only for students who are not working their way through school.

But what if a WOC does get her book onto the desk of an editor of color? Chances are that editor is exhausted. The extra burden of responsibility we found with WOC goes for editors as well. Our informant put it this way, “When you are the only POC in the editorial department or perhaps even in the entire publishing house, you feel responsible for acquiring all the stories you want to see in the world. You can’t trust that anyone else will do some of the work. And day-to-day, when you are the consultant for all things race-related, a lot of other people’s work gets ‘run past’ you. I’m happy to help because I want the books to be published but it’s tiring.”



## Once Inside the Gate

But say, against all odds, your book is acquired by a Big 5 publisher. What next? Some marketing questions that arise for WOC simply do not exist for white writers. For example, Harper Collins' imprint Amistad (described on the Harper Collins website as “multicultural”) publishes fiction and non-fiction by WOC and perhaps also for readers of color. Certainly, one of our interviewees reports that books with a buzz around them, books with the potential to “cross over”—i.e., be read by a white audience—are taken from Amistad into the general Harper Collins stable. Once there though, the pinhead returns as the book is scrutinized to check that it is not “too black.” The experience of a WOC taking part in a meeting about whether her work is too black is—to quote this author—“uncomfortable and confusing.”

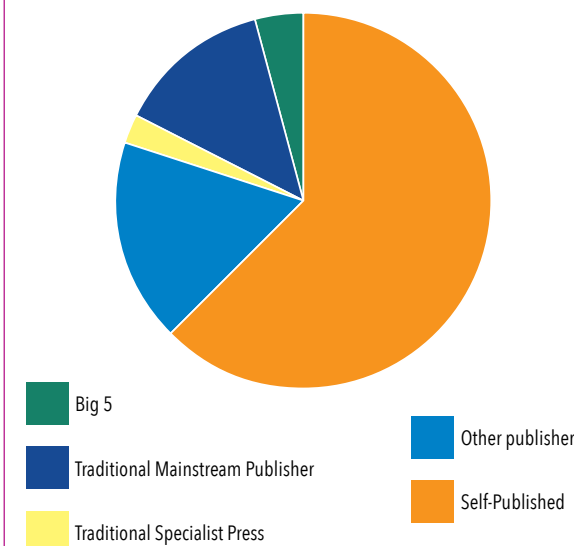
We heard from several writers that increasing time pressures in the workplace, and the rise of online communication in place of phone calls and actual meetings between publishers and author, can hurt WOC. If a white editor is uncomfortable or intimidated by the “otherness” of an author and never gets to meet her, the strangeness and caution might never go away. **Sara Sue Hoklotubbe** says, “I made a huge effort to develop relationships with people at my publisher (University of Arizona Press). I’ve gone down to Tucson just to talk to them ... This has made a world of difference.”

## Is Self-Publishing the Answer?

We asked our survey respondents to tell us who published their last book (see Figure 5, p. 7). The results for WOC contrast sharply with the findings for all respondents.

What do these divergent patterns tell us about how the self-publishing revolution has affected WOC? It has certainly been freely or at least gladly chosen by some beginning writers, and for good reason (traditionally-published authors now do a lot of their own promotion anyway and earn much less per book) but it is still true that the Big 5 in New York and the independent mainstream presses have the highest status, the best national distribution, and the smoothest path to major press attention. A WOC finding success only off this prestigious path causes the new problem of a two-tier system, with less pressure on the biggest houses to engineer change.

Figure 7. Writers of Color—Who Published Your Last Book?





Steph Cha

.....  
"Put bluntly, if people of color choose self-publishing freely, that's fine. If they choose it  
after rejection from their first choice ... that's a ghetto." ~Steph Cha  
.....

### Once You Are Published

Do WOC continue to face extra barriers after publication? Our interviews suggested that they do. The closing of independent bookstores is a problem for several reasons. For instance, a trusted bookseller can hand sell and thus allay a reader's fears of the unknown. Also, many black authors found their audience and started to build it through black book clubs which were organized by black bookstores, which are now closing. The reported recent uptick in new stores' opening is to be celebrated on this score, as on so many others.

Likewise, the demise of the book tour is lamentable. Meeting readers has advantages for all, but especially for WOC. **Naomi Hirahara** noted that in some parts of the US a friendly face attached to an obviously minority name can help develop new readers. Without face-to-face contact, this opportunity is lost.

### Conclusion

It seems clear that as tough as this business is for all writers, WOC have it tougher all the way from the moment they ask themselves if they can write a mystery to the point at which their book is available for readers to choose or not choose. The same frustrations were heard from multiple sources. Our respondents gave several examples.

We're sick of

- Being "othered"—being on panels about "outsiders" or even "foreign lands" at conventions in the country of our birth, in the city where we live, inside our own community of writers.
- "Raising awareness" over and over again. The disparity in our mystery community should be a point of shame, not something that people forget until it's re-raised.
- Being told what "our story" is. Nerds of color want to write fantasy, not slavery!

But there were little islands of hopefulness and we will end this section with them.

### The Good News (If You Look Hard)

- Writers of color are so thin on the ground at the moment they are all visible to one another. An established WOC can email another one who's coming up and offer help, advice, and encouragement.
- None of the WOC we spoke to reported feeling overt or even conscious racism from their publishers. We heard “publishers are as welcoming and unbiased as they know how to be.” (But “benevolent racism,” as **Steph Cha** put it, can be harder to call out.)
- Sometimes a WOC can walk through a door a white writer opened. **Sara Sue Hoklotubbe** saw white readers fascinated by Tony Hillerman's Navajo novels and was inspired to “do that for my people, the Cherokee.”
- Some WOC—especially younger writers—report that social media is changing things for the better, with #WeNeedDiverseBooks and #NotYourAsianSidekick offering spaces for thoughtful conversations. Other even more youthful—and more exhilarating—affinity groups include @TheMongrelCoalitionAgainstGringPo.
- It is possible to for a book to break out across all the barriers; and, when that happens it's not only one book or its writer to benefit. There was a moment in mainstream publishing when Walter Mosley and Terry MacMillan smashed the gate. Their success gave editors a model for how books by WOC could be marketed to a wide audience; however, at this moment we need to look to TV for a clear example of this marketing. Break-out, moneymaking shows like *Sleepy Hollow* make other gatekeepers sit up and notice; Shonda Rhimes, given the success of *How to Get Away with Murder*, *Grey's Anatomy*, and *Scandal*, now has enough power to ensure that her casts look like the United States. It will be interesting to see if there is a similar “*Hamilton* effect” on Broadway.

## Being a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and/or Transgender (LGBT) Writer in the Mystery Community



Ellen Hart

.....  
"I strongly believe that LGBT mysteries can be the bridges over which straight society  
can walk to a more mature understanding of who we are ...  
We're ordinary human beings." ~Ellen Hart  
.....

Many of the problems and frustrations experienced by WOC are mirrored in what we heard from LGBTW, but there is an extra level of unfairness and unkindness experienced by this group.

For example, while WOC did report occasionally being treated as though the plain fact of their race was some kind of protest they could perhaps overlook, most were careful to make clear that there is no malignant racism. It is LGBTW who must regularly contend with their identity's being labeled a "lifestyle choice" and one that they are "shoving down everyone's throats" unless they hide it completely.

Also, while WOC reported having to do what we are calling landing on a pinhead—black enough but not too black—for LGBTW trying to reach a mainstream audience there is no concept of "gay enough." Any gay at all is too much. We heard that even creative writing teachers, outside the commercial scope of publishing completely, will advise students at the start of their careers to "dump the gay content" if they want to succeed.

In a part-echo of/part-contrast to what **Valerie Wilson Wesley** shared about the difficulty of writing an authentic African American protagonist in a cozy, one lesbian author noted that LGBT characters might be more acceptable in cozy mysteries than in other sub-genres—and certainly more acceptable than in romantic suspense—because there are no sex scenes between characters in cozies. On the other hand, another gay author had her cozy mystery labelled as "soft-core porn" in a reader review because two female characters hold hands. Transgender author **Renee James** reported that her trans protagonist was a deal-killer for the mainstream as recently as 2011, when she received cold and at times hostile rejections.

Even an established, best-selling LGBT author is on thinner ice. **Val McDermid** reported to us that just two of her books failed to find a mainstream publisher in the US. She described

one book as “chockful of lesbians.” The other, second in a trilogy, was set in a women’s peace camp. The combination of lesbian protagonist and politics caused her New York publisher to judge it too hard to sell.

It was not always as grim as it is now for LGBTW. Fifteen or twenty years ago, gay mysteries were being acquired by large publishing houses and St. Martin’s Press had its own LGBT imprint, Stonewall. But while one or two writers acquired then have hung on, as [Ellen Hart](#) puts it, “most have been dropped as the midlist shrank and publishing overall stopped taking chances.” Stonewall is no more. Just as we saw with WOC, because the process has no transparency, it’s almost always impossible to tell why an individual book is being rejected.

Here is what we found out about the most recent publishing experiences of our members (compare Figure 5 on p. 7).

The most recent publishing experiences of our members are reflected in Figure 8, “Who published your last book?” But to what experiences do those proportions relate? How does the business feel for LGBTW today doing what all mystery authors are trying?

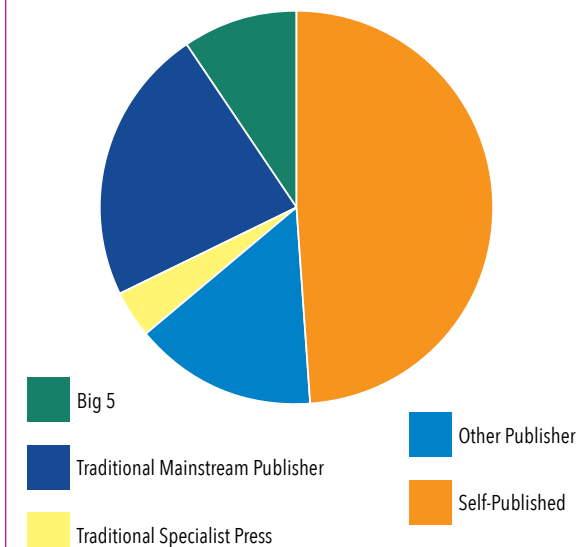
### Finding an Audience & Making a Living

There are vibrant lesbian and gay presses in the US today that add greatly to the health of our reading and writing culture but they are not an uncomplicated choice for LGBT authors. [Ellen Hart](#) summed matters up saying, “They offer great support; what they don’t offer is a substantial readership.” The acronym “LGBT” that trips off our tongues covers at least six distinct groups who are far from being a monolithic reading audience. In an extra twist on the truism that women read men but men don’t read women, one lesbian writer spoke of her sense that, broadly speaking, lesbians read gay male characters and trans characters, but gay men don’t—at least not in hordes—read lesbians or trans. And the transgender audience is tiny.

.....  
“The trans community prefers non-fiction memoir: Our lives are filled with  
fantasy already.” ~Renee James  
.....

When the pool of people exactly like you (who are also mystery fans) is too small to make a living selling books to, the mainstream is the only way to go. You can self-publish to a mainstream audience, seek a mainstream traditional publisher, or settle somewhere in between.

Figure 8. LGBTQ Writers—  
Who Published Your Last Book?



Renee James

Still, despite the healthy proportion of LGBT publishing professionals, LGBT writers struggle in mainstream houses. This echoes the position where women writers find themselves: Publishing is female, but sexism still operates there, covertly but effectively, by means of the playing the “no market card.” That is, agents advise that editors will not acquire books with LGBT content, editors claim that bookstores will not stock them, and everyone says that readers will avoid them. One writer we spoke to made the point that an LGBT writer who has heard the “no market” message a few hundred times might end up internalizing the homophobia it encodes until she herself decides not even to try to engage a straight audience for her writing.

Again, it must be stressed that publishers themselves need not be homophobic for this system to flourish. Publishers, in these tough times, want bestsellers more than ever before and bestsellers are books that sell to someone mystery editor **Terri Bischoff** described as “Everyreader” whom publishers court assiduously and try hard not to scare, which leads to great timidity.



Terri Bischoff

.....  
“Everyreader—our broadest customer base—can be typified as a middle-aged, white, straight, cis woman who gets her whole book club to read all books she enjoys.”  
.....

~Terri Bischoff

Shying away from LGBT content is certainly the timid choice. Even when a mainstream publisher does take a chance on a book, it will likely not be a lead title on which a lot of marketing and publicity money is to be spent. Two authors in the SinC member survey described how difficult it was make a limited publicity budget stretch across both the avenue leading to an LGBT audience and that leading to mainstream readers. It seems ironic, but the fact is that in courting a wide readership, the most obvious core audience might be lost.

### **So Is Self-Publishing the Answer?**

As we saw looking at WOC, self-publishing is not without problems. The two-tier effect—where New York is full of dominant culture writers and LGBT writers who self-publish because they think it’s their only choice—is not a healthy writing culture for anyone.

Also, while self-publishing is not difficult to do, it’s very difficult to do well. Many writers make the mistake of believing self-publishing can be tried, then dropped with no ill-effects.



Actually, lack-luster sales from a self-published book make a writer less likely to be acquired by a traditional publisher, should she try to make that switch down the line. Publishers love a debut author who might be the next big thing.

If that weren't bad enough, it's hard to interest a bricks and mortar bookstore in an event for a self-published book; thus, most promotion is done online. Just as with WOC, face-to-face interaction is essential to demystify a lesbian writer (for example) in the mind of a potential reader who might not have been exposed to members of LGBT communities. When going for a mainstream readership, friendly-face-to-friendly-face interaction is key.

Let's round off this section with some good news. Remember that one trans author writing a male-to-female trans character, who was brushed off very coldly by mainstream presses in 2011? She now has a mainstream publisher for her series. She has found what she calls "the one yes in a sea of rejections." And she reckons "Everyreader"—that middle-aged straight white cis woman getting her whole book club to read what she's reading—will identify completely with the trans character who, after all, has "the ultimate body issues."

## Being a Person with Disabilities in the Mystery Community

.....  
"This cohort of writers is sort of invisible." ~Joel Goldman  
.....

Writers with disabilities (WWD) are often left out of the diversity conversation and forgotten. A partial explanation comes from the fact that there is a great deal of fear around disability. The fears can be personal given that the disability community is "the only minority anyone can join." That very fact—that a WWD might be newly disabled—means that often people don't know what rights they have and what they can ask for. Instead they struggle in silence and feel stigma. But the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) means there is a requirement to provide access and an assumption that needs will be met. This in itself can lead to other fears—practical and financial—when those outside the disability community don't understand what is needed, what it will cost, and where the money might come from.

We'll look at whether WWD face the same invisible hurdles as WOC and LGBTW in a later section, but for now we're concentrating on the practical obstacles or barriers they face,



Joel Goldman

all along the spectrum from beginning to think about writing to being published and beyond. These challenges relate to access to text and websites and access to events.

### Access to Texts and Websites

This is problematic for writers with visual problems or dyslexia. Voice activated software is a partial solution; although developers of web platforms, social media, and apps are working to improve readability, people outside the disability community often overestimate the extent to which technology has solved all the problems.

Specific problem areas for WWD using voice-activated screen readers include (but are not limited to)

- PDFs
- Text in images, which can't be detected unless "alternate tags" are used
- Forms, "e-vites," and e-mail newsletter signups
- Captchas (those online challenge-response test aimed at determining whether a user is human or robot)

Writers with sensory disabilities may need to negotiate with their publishers to secure additional assistance with editing, especially punctuation—which can give extra challenges to people with visual impairment. They also need realistic deadlines that take into account their disability's impact on time management. **Cindy Brown** cited a study by the American Association for the Blind that found voice technology sometimes takes two to three times longer to access information than the human brain. A writer with a visual impairment may not be able to complete copyedits in the standard window if, for example, she can't read for extended periods or if the copy comes in a form that stymies her screen-reader.

### Access to Events

Events bring two areas of accessibility concern for WWD, programmatic and physical. These are particularly important for SinC given our survey's revelations about the types of disability within our membership. (see Figure 3, p. 5 )



## Programmatic Accessibility

The number of people who are hard of hearing is increasing because of aging and the use of earbuds. Writers with sensory disabilities, including visual and hearing impairments, may need accommodation to take full advantage of presentations, panel discussions, and critique sessions.

## Physical Accessibility

Two of the biggest challenges for people with mobility issues are bathrooms and parking. Hotels always say they comply with the ADA, but the reality sometimes falls short of the ideal. There is often “a step here and a step there” which, although they don’t make access impossible, make attendance a wearisome prospect, leading otherwise interested individuals to stay away.

## Invisible Barriers for WWD

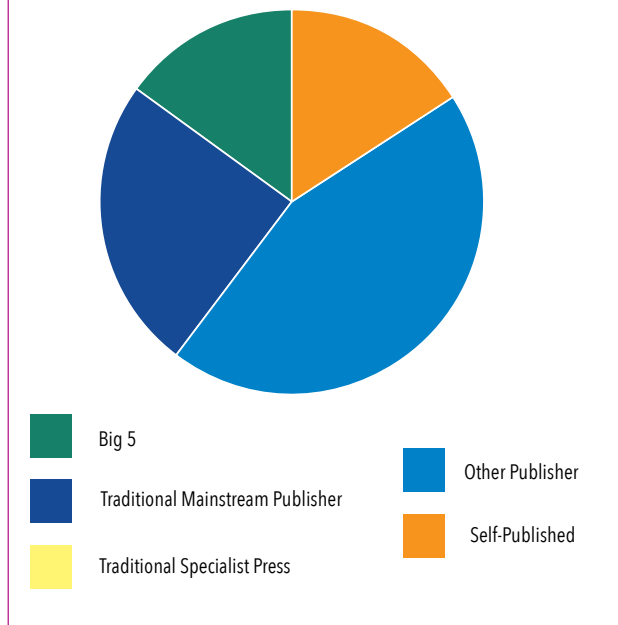
We wanted to explore whether writers with disabilities experience the same invisible barriers—so hard to call out—that are faced by WOC and LGBT writers. In our membership, WWD are least likely of all the groups to have been published by one of the Big 5. Interestingly, they are also least likely of all the groups to be self-published and most likely of all groups to be published by a non-traditional publisher.

How might we explain these findings? Perhaps WWD opt in great numbers for non-traditional publishers because self-publishing is very hard work, with editing, formatting, design, marketing, and extra publicity efforts on top of actually writing the book! Another possible explanation is that the findings actually correlate with age, rather than with disability. Rates of disability are often age-linked and 77% of SinC members are 55 or older.

We wondered if there is at least a chance that gatekeepers in the publishing industry are denying access to WWD. And so we asked.

**Joel Goldman** reported anecdotally that he’s never heard of an author’s not getting published because of a disability. He says giving his protagonist his own rare movement disorder was “a great way to process the changes in my life...[and] the publisher was very open and supportive, and readers have shown no resistance.”

Figure 9. Writers with Disabilities—Who Published Your Last Book?



This openness and assumption of no extra barriers—but awareness of possible problems—was supported by every other WWD to whom we spoke.

**Mysti Berry**, who has mobility issues said, “I’d let a publisher know about my disability before meeting them in person if needed (sorry I can’t meet you at the top of the Statue of Liberty, can we meet at the Gonk instead?) or if I had a story with my disability in it. I think people with more serious disabilities have a harder decision to make. Especially things like dyslexia (my brother has it) or ADHD (runs in my family) or depression, where ill-informed people sometimes leap to the wrong conclusions about a person’s ability to write. Also, I am a naturally open person which influences my choices. A naturally private person might feel very differently.”

**Linda Rodriguez**, who has Lupus said, “I won the Malice Domestic Award [St. Martin’s Press/Malice Domestic Best First Traditional Mystery], so there was no need or opportunity for disclosure before acceptance, but my disability is visible—I’m on a cane—and it was never an issue. [The publisher] met me in person to give the award soon after I won and my disability never seemed to make any difference.”

**Kathleen Assay**, who is published by a small hybrid press said “I told [my publisher] early on that I have MS and am somewhat limited in what I can do, but she did not care. She liked my book and is happy to have published it. So, in my case, having a disability made no difference. On the other hand, the MS is part of my story when I talk about my book. Meds for my symptoms are all serious downers. I was depressed for years and did not know why. But I suddenly had this story to tell and it was fun. It kept me going and made me laugh when I needed it. And for that reason I have also enjoyed talking about it.”

**John Clement**, who is carrying on **Blaize Clement’s** Dixie Hemingway series for St. Martin’s Press, spoke of his mother’s experience of paraplegia following polio as a young woman. “No, she never hid her disability from readers. She attended conferences and spoke and taught writing classes, and she wrote articles advocating disability rights. But, I think it’s true that most of her readers didn’t know unless they met her.”

One reason for this different state of affairs might be the very fact that the disability community is, as we said “the only minority anyone can join.” WWD certainly don’t report the same lack of identification with their characters as WOC and LGBTW found. “Everyreader”

can, it seems, see a whole character beyond disability, recognizing that it is just one element in a life. One writer wondered if that might be because we all face challenges we didn't choose and yet must choose how we respond. We can all identify with loss of control in life.

Even though individual readers can apparently connect with characters, there is still work to do to get panels of WWD who write their lives into fan conventions and writers' conferences. "I always suggest them," Joel Goldman told us, "but have never seen one chosen. We're okay with alcoholic PIs and cops, and personality disorders, but the writing community has not perceived disability as note-worthy." He'd like to see more discussion at the conventions, and elsewhere, about how disability affects writing "not because it's necessary, but because it's interesting. It's part of life."

# Part 3. Where We Go Next

“I wish we could stop the coded talk about “fresh perspectives” and “tapping into new voices” and instead just say out loud: We need more black people.” ~X

We asked what needs to change, how likely it is and what could get it going.

The good news came from several writers and publishers that they think change is already coming. **Terri Bischoff** was clear-eyed about the publishing world today. “I don’t know how to change it. The beliefs that diverse books don’t sell, or don’t sell enough, are ingrained.” She went on to say though, “There is a new and upcoming readership that is clamoring for stories and characters who reflect their way of life. Take a look at YA publishing. It is a thousand times greater than crime fiction, yet librarians and teachers are still begging for more diversity.” This echoes **Steph Cha’s** sense that, “we need a ‘youthquake’ in the business,” and another respondent’s belief that “kids are the arbiters of change.”

## How to Get that Change Rolling Inside Publishing

“If more publishers would hire editors and reviewers of color.” ~Sara Sue Hoklotubbe

“More diversity in publishing. Representation. Numbers.” ~X

“Editors need to reflect more of society.” ~Attica Locke

“More editors of color, giving non-white gatekeepers more of a chance” ~Steph Cha

But that will not happen without concerted effort.

“Publishers need to get together, make the lack of diversity an issue, and commit to change,” said X ... “Something that could make a big difference quickly would be for publishers to decide that a college degree is not necessary for an assistantship, opening up the first gate to people of color.”

But we must stress again it’s not just numbers of POC in publishing. There are two other important factors.

Lee and Low (2015) reported that Asian Americans are actually over-represented in the business, but that doesn’t translate into a level playing field for Asian American authors. People also need power, as **Steph Cha** said. Power, trust, and freedom to make positive change happen. Diverse writers need allies in the dominant culture who understand that advancement for WOC, WWD, and LGBTW benefits everyone.

Further, even if the publishing industry diversifies, there must be writers ready to jump in when the gate opens. There was widespread agreement about the best way to help bring that about.

## Mentoring for Belief and Craft

**Rachel Howzell Hall** spoke to us about her perception, as a young woman, that having a writing career was not a reachable goal. “I had no idea that I could be a novelist then. I didn’t know I could write about my world. I didn’t see myself or my world in the books I read, from childhood on.”

.....  
“Writing and publishing is a tough business. For anybody. It requires the writer to have a thick skin. Yet before that callus can develop, too many people feel the sting of the splinter and stop. I feel that once a writer can form a sense of belief in herself, she can face anything else this silly business can throw.” ~Ed Lin  
.....



Ed Lin

**Ellen Hart** says, “When I have the opportunity to mentor a gay/lesbian writer, my advice is always to read higher, dig deeper, and swing for the fences. Don’t assume you can’t take your book to an agent and then to a mainstream publisher. Every year I read LGBT mysteries [that] I feel might have a chance in New York. Cracks in the wall exist but if you don’t ever try to find them, you’ll never know what could have been.”

**Renee James** also believes strongly in local writers groups’ mentoring minority writers at the beginning of their careers, or even long before the start—at college age—to help these young people see themselves as potential writers. She notes that if indie bookstores prominently displayed books by local authors—including diverse local authors—youngsters would get the message, “people like me, who live round here, like me, are authors ... I could do this too.” But she was also very clear that, “We’re all fishing in the same played-out lake. Thousands of us have our lines in the water and only a few will catch anything. You have to be lucky to catch a fish, but you also have to be skilled to be lucky.”

**Ellen Hart** agreed, “We can do a lot to raise awareness, but we’ll be most effective if we can also find ways to help minority writers master their craft.”

## SinC’s Role

As **Linda Rodriguez** said, “SinC is not going to change New York publishing tomorrow,” but we have power to effect change by starting right here at home—within SinC itself. A large part of what we already do very well is the “mentoring for craft” to which Ellen and Renee give prominence. Our vision statement, after all, is not to be the voice of “diversity” but to be the voice of “excellence and diversity.” There is no benefit to anyone from lowering standards.

What we can do better is work for equity for our existing members of color, members with disabilities, and LGBT members and work to bring in more diverse writers, readers, librarians and blogger/reviewers. If we do our work well, we hope we can become models for others in the publishing industry.

.....  
“SinC needs to be inclusive and close-knit as a community where diverse writers  
support each other fully.” ~Rachel Howzell Hall  
.....

The question might arise—does arise—in the minds of dominant culture individuals (straight, white, able-bodied cis women and men) whether this is really “their” work. The resounding answer is yes. As allies who have thirty years’ experience advocating fairness in the publishing industry, SinC is supremely qualified for the job. An important first step is to let go of the fear of making mistakes. If you are genuinely trying to do the right thing and you find out you got it wrong; there’s usually an easy fix. The final section of the report on Page 33 offers

practical advice for individuals. Before that, we are going to look at what SinC chapters can do and, first, at what SinC as an organization can and will do.

## **SinC National's Role**

SinC needs to make sure that everyone—WOC, WWD, and LGBTW—who is considering joining feels that the organization is a safe, welcoming, and listening place. Members need to be able to talk about racism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism and know that others are willing to learn, not argue, and not dismiss. SinC should be an eye-roll-free zone.

Beyond that first commitment, we can also ensure access and increase diversity at every level of activity.

## **Sponsored and Partnered Events**

We will commit to work with all venues to make sure that events sponsored by SinC National are fully accessible and meet our members' need. We will invite partners and sponsored bodies to pay attention to diversity.

## **Presenters, Panelists, and Moderators**

Exposure in the public programs SinC creates and promotes can be a key to larger audience acceptance (and perhaps gain the attention of influencers in the publishing world). One WOC made the point that “stars need to share the spotlight.” **Ellen Hart** says, “Writers write because they have stories they want to tell. Bottom line: It might be important to preach to the choir, but it's also vital to get our stories into the hands of a broader audience.” For WWD, SinC can do the work of organizing accommodations and ensuring access.

## **More Inclusive Programming**

It's not just about individuals' being on programs, but also about shaping programs so they are themselves an exploration of diversity. Left Coast Crime 2015 in Portland had the first ever LGBTQ panel at a mainstream mystery convention. Another is planned for Bouchercon, New Orleans. New Orleans will also see a panel on disability: “Walk a Mile in my Shoes.” SinC can advocate for more, similar programs until they become staples.



## Signing Opportunities

At ALA and other programs where we are officially present as a leading organization of crime fiction authors we can do a better job of representing US crime writing by ensuring diversity and access at our booth.



Naomi Hirahara

.....  
“Diversity is not something extra. This is what America looks like and  
crime writing needs to reflect it.” ~Naomi Hirahara  
.....

## SinC’s Communications

We must actively seek regular participation from WOC, WWD, and LGBTW and visible representation of diversity issues for *inSinC*, SinCLinks and News from National. A call for *inSinC* articles should be sent to identified WOC, WWD, and LGBTW members and to the various SinC listservs. A follow-up note should be sent to the membership via e-Blast reminding folks to READ this *Report for Change*. We must be mindful that everyone doesn’t open email attachments when first distributed. It will also be important to update members regularly (perhaps monthly?) about new items on the SinC website. These updates should be brief teasers with live links directly to the relevant items.

## The SinC Board and Committees

All authors are doing more and more of their own publicity work, making it increasingly difficult to fill board and committee positions. We must, however, try every year to keep diversity prominent on our list of needs. The current demographics of the membership make for a small pool of these candidates, and travel is often challenging for people with disabilities, people of limited means, and those caring for others. With that in mind, SinC needs to address offering extra compensation for those who would then be able to serve.

Feedback on the member survey revealed a treasure trove of ideas, small and large, from actions easy to take today to major programs requiring long-term development.



### **Suggestions to Help Diverse Authors Get Started**

- Continue the Eleanor Taylor Bland Grant
- Consider publishing an anthology (or anthologies) focused on diversity
- Partner with other writers' groups (RWA, MWA)
- Identify publishers looking for diverse authors
- Create an online forum for members interested in diversity

### **Help Diverse Authors Find an Audience**

- Advocate for promoting diverse authors in libraries as part of mystery collections
- Develop ways to help readers discover diverse authors
- Join with diverse writers' organizations to sponsor events

### **Advocate Anywhere, Anytime**

- Routinely raise questions about accessibility, thus be a voice for accessibility issues
- Provide programs to help authors be more inclusive in their fiction
- Offer articles to *Kirkus/Library Journal/Publishers Weekly* that focus on diverse writers, adding why they would be crowd-pleasers as well as worthy

## **SinC Chapters**

Chapters are on the front line month in and month out when it comes to ensuring WWD are comfortable in their meetings and events. In addition to physical access, other accommodations could include

- Alternative forms of handouts, typically now digital
- Assisted listening devices
- Microphones
- Visuals explained orally for sight impaired
- ASL interpreters

It is essential for all speakers to use microphones, even if they have a loud voice, because volume levels vary, especially as the speaker moves, and assisted listening devices may have trouble adjusting. It is distressing to the person with the hearing impairment and distracting for the audience as a whole for a speaker to be repeatedly asked to speak up.

Captioning and interpreters can be expensive and it is illegal under the ADA to charge end-users for accommodations; but, with enough notice there are solutions. A meeting place, such as a library, may have assisted listening devices available for users of their facilities or may have access to them (again, given notice). Portable kits to help with audio description or surtitles can often be borrowed from local disability assistance centers or universities at no or low cost. Grants may be available for ASL interpreters. Large print materials are easy to create and make available.

**Accommodation for physical access** is mostly a matter of thoughtful venue choice via thoughtful choices of venue. If your chapter meets on the second floor of a bookstore in a building without an elevator, you can arrange for an accessible backup location, such as a public library meeting room, that can be used if an accommodation is requested. Along with that, ensure an efficient way to inform members of the meeting change. Better yet, move permanently to that accessible location.



Capitol Crimes, our Sacramento SinC Chapter

*The Report for Change* team contacted SinC chapter presidents to ask about accommodations and were cheered to discover that chapters are either clearly meeting the needs of their members with disabilities already or are aware and working to improve them. Examples included:

- Our meetings are at the South Pasadena Library. It's big, it's open, and it has a wheelchair ramp for access. The challenge appears to lie in outreach to attract new, diverse members. —LA Chapter
- Our issues are technological, which we have (to date) assumed members must solve on their own. Currently those relate to sight, but if we move classes into a webinar approach, we will have to address hearing issues for the first time. —Guppies (online chapter)
- We have one member in a wheelchair and a handful who use canes, so for those with disabilities, our meetings are in a sparkly new library, complete with ramps and easy access. But, we're clearly not serving the entire community considering we're in a highly diverse area. —North Dallas
- Diversity is not an issue for us! Our meetings are held at Makiki Library, which is handicap accessible. We hold meetings and luncheons only at handicap accessible venues. Our chapter includes active members from various Hawaiian Islands (and California) and island-to-island access is by air only. We have done some Skype interviews to circumvent this issue. —Hawaii.

The hospitality barriers of odd steps and distant elevators, as well as tiring and distressing (or even just annoying) PWD, can detract from the success of an event for everyone. For large events, it may be useful to contact the regional chapters of national disability rights organizations for lists of acceptable venues or summaries of experiences with specific venues (see Appendix B).

It's a good idea to relay requests for accommodations to a hotel or other venue and send a volunteer (who is attuned to disability!) to physically check that everything is ready. For example, if convention organizers know a speaker uses a wheelchair or motorized cart, check to make sure the platform will hold the weight, that a ramp is in place, and that the table or podium is at the right height. Also, check to ensure the physical layout provides enough space for people using canes, crutches, or walkers to move easily. No surprises on the day of the event is the goal.

## Summary

- Develop policies and procedures in advance.
- Provide a welcoming notice on every poster, brochure, website, and email announcement saying that accommodations are available, and give contact information for a person who can answer provide more information.
- Ensure that websites and blog posts are accessible to people with sensory disabilities. Take advantage of platforms with text-readable options. Ask for tech support, if necessary, and make clear that these features are important to you.
- Ensure that forms and other pages include text-readable options.
- Consider panel discussions on authors and characters with disabilities.
- Include ADA symbols prominently on your website and promotional materials for events.
- Physically confirm that requested accommodations have been made, and that accessible parking is available at all venues. Let the PWD know which handicap parking space is most convenient to the meeting room.
- Ask if a member [or volunteer] "aide" at the event would be helpful.

As well as providing these accommodations for PWD, the most important commitment chapters can make is to offer a warm welcome and that eye-roll-free zone to diverse members and to be aware of how big a step a newcomer might be taking.

As **Linda Rodriguez** said, “Any young minority writer walking into a room full of white ladies at a chapter meeting is going to bring all her experience of other rooms full of white ladies and might not stay long enough to feel the welcome.”

This point was echoed by a young man with disability, a beginning mystery author, who recently joined a SinC chapter and said, “It seemed like a perfect fit... except for the ‘sisters’ part. I was definitely nervous, as I am when going to any new place. But maybe even more so, not knowing for sure whether or not it was okay for men to attend. Thankfully, I wasn’t turned away or hissed at, and I learned a lot during the meeting. So afterwards, I paid my dues and officially joined. I’ve been a member ever since. And, nothing against [another writers’ group] but I still learn the most from attending the SinC meetings.”

Chapters can work to make that first step less daunting and to make the newcomer more likely to return. For instance, by partnering with local youth organizations serving diverse groups, SinC becomes familiar. By inviting these groups to share space at events (e.g., a signing table) SinC becomes a giver. Varying chapter meeting places (or at least event venues) can help. Consider partnering with local colleges to attract young people; predominantly black colleges to reach out to the black community; local churches that serve diverse communities; libraries in minority white neighborhoods. Chapters can target advertisements to local colleges and via youth groups when “cool” presenters are coming. One chapter has instigated a mystery reading and writing group in partnership with a local high school. Even something as simple as setting up ridesharing can make the difference by helping a newcomer take a smaller first step, by meeting one Sister ahead of the whole room.

Following that thought—that it is easier for especially a young writer, WOC, WWD, or LGBTW to engage one-to-one—the final part of this section concerns what individuals can do—every day, starting today.

## **Everyone Can**

Most readers of this report will not be LGBT people of color with disabilities. What you can do for a group of which you’re not a member is: Be an ally. Some of the six habits described below have been introduced or hinted at already but, to conclude our report, here they are in full.

## SinC Guide to Being a Good Ally

### 1. *Learn Rather Than Be Taught*

Being an ally means that it isn't up to people of color, people with disabilities, or LBGT folks to teach us. It is up to us to learn. Ask questions if you need to, but try to figure things out first. Make your websites and blogs accessible. Confirm that locations of readings and other book events are physically accessible, and that in all but the most intimate spaces a microphone is available. (And use it!) Don't come from a "tell me why this matters" place. Come from an "I want to do what I can to make this better. Help me do that!" place.

### 2. *Don't Expect to Be a Hero*

Being an ally means that you are jumping into the trench, trying to move the boulder of inequity up the hill. Many people have been doing that their whole lives. Because you've jumped in, don't expect a round of applause. The fact is, you can jump out of the trench, but those same folks have to keep pushing. An ally stays in, shoulder to the boulder, and pushes.

### 3. *Practice Radical Empathy*

What must it be like to be in another person's shoes? As writers, we imagine just that for a living. As allies, take empathy to a new level! When planning an event, think about what it would be like to go to the location if you were in a wheelchair. Could you get around? When trying to save money on A/V equipment, think about the person who is hearing impaired. Will s/he have the same experience as everyone else? When thinking about what to self-publish, consider large-print editions, audio books, and your state's Talking Books or Library for the Blind recordings. When using a phrase or metaphor, ask yourself it cuts anyone out? Will it hurt anyone? Consider what it must be like to be another person, and if you don't enjoy how you feel, use your super ally powers to make changes.

#### 4. *Practice Radical Inclusion*

What can you do to be more inclusive in your daily life? This doesn't just happen. It's easy to default to the "norm" unless we think about it. Embrace the "3 Rs"—**R**ead, **R**ever, and **R**ecommend diverse books. When someone asks you for your favorite writers, include authors whom they may not know. Before an event, ask sponsors—such as libraries, bookstores, and book festivals—to provide a welcoming notice and ensure accessibility for PWD. When planning the event, look at whom you have invited to participate. If you need to dig deeper to find other folks to invite to the table, do it. And then, when you've practiced inclusion, don't draw attention to it. (See "Don't Expect To Be A Hero" above.) Make inclusion the new normal. Once you practice being inclusive, it can become a habit. The habit of an ally.

#### 5. *Celebrate Difference*

So often people say "I don't see race" or "I don't see why people have to label themselves." Of course, that isn't true, not really. It comes from discomfort and sometimes disapproval. Being an ally means celebrating differences, and understanding that differences add richness not ranks. Different does not mean "other" any more than each person alive who is not "me" is "other." Inclusion is about leveling the playing field. Being an ally in that effort means celebrating our differences, and raising everyone.

#### 6. *Stand Up and Speak Out*

Being an ally means words and actions. As allies, it is our job to step in and say "not okay" about jokes and sneers. It is our job to stay in the accessible area of a partially accessible venue rather than walk away and leave behind someone who uses a wheelchair. It is our job to write letters of complaint when we see institutions getting it wrong. It is not only our job when convenient and comfortable or when we have allies; it is our job all the time, even when ours is the only voice.

## Conclusion

Each of us lives at an intersection of different experiences. A very few are straight, white, cis, rich, successful, able-bodied men and know only privilege (until aging takes it away), but most of us are members of some groups that enjoy privilege and wield power and other groups that do not.

There is always a choice between standing with people in other groups, learning and helping, or separating from them, looking in at and out for only ourselves.

In the mystery world, we write cozies, thrillers, procedurals, suspense, whodunits, spy stories, capers and more. We write traditional, speculative, experimental, soft-boiled, and noir. We write blockbusters, novellas, shorts, anthologies, and scripts. This is a community that already believes life is richer and more fun because of its glorious diversity. And we all write about wrongs being righted and justice being served. This is a community with a passion for fairness.

Working all out for greater equity and full inclusion is not such a big step after all.





# Acknowledgements

The *Report for Change* team extends thanks to the many people who gave so freely of their time, including the 1000+ SinC members who completed the member survey; to survey respondents who waived anonymity allowing us to open follow-up discussions about their experiences; and to chapter presidents who responded with their practical knowledge and hopes. We particularly thank Maria Kelson and Jessie Chandler who helped compile Frankie's List.

We also thank writers and publishers who took part in the one-to-one phone interviews and/or lengthy email exchanges.

**Terri Bischoff** started in the book business working at Kramer Books in Washington DC before buying and running Booked for Murder in Madison WI. Since 2009, she has been the acquiring editor at Midnight Ink, where she has dramatically increased the number of titles to the current 42 per year and over which she has final editorial direction.

**Cindy Brown** began working in arts access after becoming disabled in 1996. As the first director of ARTability, a national-award-winning organization, she presented at the National Endowment for the Arts/National Assembly of State Arts Agencies Conference, the National Spinal Cord Injury Conference, and the John F. Kennedy Center's LEAD conference, among others. While she continues to write about access for the Kennedy Center, Cindy became a full-time writer in 2007, authoring the Agatha-Award-nominated Ivy Meadows mystery series.

**Steph Cha** is the author of *Follow Her Home*, *Beware Beware*, and *Dead Soon Enough*, all published by St. Martin's Minotaur. She's the noir editor for the *LA Review of Books* and a regular contributor to the *Los Angeles Times*. She lives in her native city of Los Angeles with her husband and basset hound.

**Joel Goldman** is the bestselling author of four crime fiction series: the Lou Mason thrillers, the Jack Davis thrillers, the Alex Stone thrillers, and, his latest, the Ireland & Carter series co-authored with Lisa Klink. His books have been nominated for the Edgar and Shamus awards. Together with Lee Goldberg, he founded the crime fiction publisher Brash Books.

**Ellen Hart** is the author of thirty-two crime novels, a six-time winner of the Lambda Literary Award for Best Lesbian Mystery, a three-time-winner of the Golden Crown Literary Society (GCLS) Award, and a four-time winner of the Minnesota Book Award for Best Popular Fiction. In 2010, she received the GCLS Trailblazer Award for lifetime achievement in the field of lesbian literature. For the past seventeen years, she has taught at The Loft Literary Center, the largest independent writing community in the nation.

**Naomi Hirahara** is the Edgar Award-winning author of two mystery series set in Los Angeles. Her Mas Arai series, which features a Hiroshima survivor and gardener, has been translated into Japanese, Korean and French. The first, *Summer of the Big Bachi*, is being developed into an independent film. Her Officer Ellie Rush bicycle cop series received the 2014 T. Jefferson Parker Mystery Award. She has also published noir short stories, middle-grade fiction, and nonfiction books.

**Rachel Howzell Hall** is the author of the Detective Elouise Norton series which has twice been included on the *Los Angeles Times* “Books to Read This Summer.” *The New York Times* called Lou Norton “a formidable fighter—someone you want on your side.” A featured writer on NPR’s acclaimed “Crime in the City” series, Rachel also served as a mentor in the Association of Writers & Writing Program’s (AWP) Writer to Writer Program. She lives in Los Angeles.

**Sara Sue Hoklotubbe** is a Cherokee tribal citizen and the author of the award-winning Sadie Walela Mystery Series, published by the University of Arizona Press. She is the winner of the WILLA Literary Award for Original Softcover Fiction by Women Writing the West, the New Mexico-Arizona Book Award for Best Mystery, and Mystery of the Year by Wordcraft Circle of Native Writers and Storytellers. The WILLA is named for Pulitzer winner Willa Cather.

**Renee James** is a transgender author who began writing long fiction in 2010, after a career as a magazine writer and editor. Her first book, *Coming Out Can Be Murder* followed a protagonist during her first year of gender transition. It won book of the year honors from the Chicago Writers Association and a medal from *ForeWord Reviews*. The sequel, *A Kind of Justice*, will be released October 2016 by Oceanview Publishing.

**Ed Lin**, a native New Yorker of Taiwanese and Chinese descent, is the first author to win three Asian American Literary Awards. His books include *Waylaid* and *This Is a Bust*, published by Kaya Press in 2002 and 2007, respectively. *Snakes Can’t Run* and *One Red Bastard*, which continue the story of Robert Chow began in *This Is a Bust*, were published by Minotaur Books.

His latest title, *Ghost Month*, a Taipei-based mystery, was published by Soho Crime in July 2014. Lin lives in Brooklyn with his wife, actress Cindy Cheung, and son.

**Attica Locke's** first novel, *Black Water Rising*, was nominated for an Edgar Award, an NAACP Image Award, a *Los Angeles Times Book Prize*, and was short-listed for the prestigious Orange Prize in the UK. Her second book, *The Cutting Season* is a national bestseller and the winner of the Ernest Gaines Award for Literary Excellence. Her latest novel, *Pleasantville*, was shortlisted for the CWA Dagger Award, the biggest crime fiction award in the United Kingdom, and made many "Best of 2015" lists. She is a writer and producer on the Fox drama, *Empire*.

**Linda Rodriguez** writes the Skeet Bannion series, featuring a Cherokee campus police chief, as well as poetry. She has received numerous awards and fellowships, such as the Latina Book Club Best Book of 2014, St. Martin's Press/Malice Domestic Best First Traditional Mystery Novel, Barnes & Noble mystery pick, Midwest Voices and Visions Award, and Ragdale and Macondo fellowships. She was chair of the AWP Indigenous Writers' Caucus, vice president of Latino Writers Collective, and she belongs to Wordcraft Circle of Native American Writers, and Kansas City Cherokee Community.

**Valerie Wilson Wesley** is a former executive editor of *Essence Magazine*. She has served as artist-in-residence at Columbia College in Chicago and is currently artist-in-residence at the Cicely Tyson School of Performing Arts in New Jersey. She writes mysteries, novels, children's books. Under the pen name Savanna Welles she has written two paranormal romances. Most of her eight Tamara Hayle Mysteries have been Blackboard bestsellers. *Ain't Nobody's Business If I Do* received the 2000 award for excellence in adult fiction from the Black Caucus of the American Library Association.

**X** is an African American publishing industry professional who works in the editorial department of one of the Big 5 New York publishing houses and wishes to preserve anonymity.

**Desiree Zamorano**, a Pushcart prize nominee and award-winning short story writer, has wrestled with culture, identity, and the invisibility of Latinas most of her life and has written on these topics in the *Los Angeles Times*, NPR's *Latino USA* and *Publishers Weekly*. She explores contemporary issues of injustice and inequity via her mystery series featuring private investigator, Inez Leon. *Human Cargo* was *Latinidad's* mystery pick of the year. Her most recent novel, *The Amado Women* from Cinco Puntos Press, was optioned by Sony for a television series.



## Frankie's List Diverse Mystery Writers

### African American Writers

1. Abdul-Jabbar, Kareem
2. Bailey, Frankie Y.
3. Baker, Nikki
4. Bates, Karen Grigsby
5. Batts, Krys
6. Bland, Eleanor Taylor (deceased)
7. Brown, Elaine Meryl
8. Camacho, Austin S.
9. Canterbury, Patricia E.
10. Carter, Charlotte
11. Carter, Stephen L.
12. Chambers, Christopher
13. Coleman, Evelyn
14. Darden, Christopher
15. Davis, Kyra
16. DeLoach, Nora (deceased)
17. Dickey, Eric Jerome
18. Edwards, Grace F.
19. Flowers, R. Barri
20. Ford, Clyde
21. Fullilove, Eric James
22. Garland, Ardella (pen name of Yolanda Joe)
23. Garrett, Kellye
24. Greer, Robert
25. Grimes, Terris McMahan
26. Hall, Rachel Howzell
27. Hardwick, Gary
28. Hayes, Teddy
29. Haywood, Gar Anthony (also writes as Ray Shannon)
30. Henry, Angela
31. Holton, Hugh (deceased)
32. James, R. Franklin
33. Johnson, Keith Lee
34. Jolivet, Myra
35. Jones, Solomon
36. Kabongo, Gledé Browne
37. Kelley, Norman
38. Lamar, Jake
39. Locke, Attica
40. Lovell, Glenville
41. Mallette, Gloria
42. Meadows, Lee
43. Mickelbury, Penny
44. Miller, C.M.
45. Mosley, Walter
46. Neely, Barbara
47. Olden, Marc
48. Phillips, Gary

49. Quaterly, Kwei
50. Ramsey, Gail
51. Rhodes, Jewell Parker
52. Richardson, Gwen
53. Robinson, Angela (film and TV writer)
54. Rudolph, Wally
55. Ridley, John
56. Samuels-Young, Pamela
57. Singer, Gammy
58. Smith, Andrea
59. Smith, Brian W.
60. Smith, Ian
61. Smith-Levin, Judith (deceased)
62. Swafford, Erika Green (TV writer)
63. Thomas-Graham, Pamela
64. Tramble, Nichelle D.
65. Underwood, Blair
66. Walker, Persia
67. Wesley, Valerie Wilson
68. West, Chassie
69. Woods, Paula L.

### **Asian American/Asian Writers**

1. Cha, Steph
2. Chang, Henry
3. Chang, Leonard
4. Chupeco, Rin
5. Furutani, Dale
6. Gerritsen, Tess
7. Hirahara, Naomi
8. Lee, Don
9. Lee, YS
10. Lin, Ed
11. Ng, Celeste
12. Revoyr, Nina
13. Rowland, Laura Joh
14. Xiaolong, Qiu

### **South Asian American/South Asian/ South Asian British Writers**

1. Jacob, Mira
2. James, Tania
3. Khan, Ausma Zehanat
4. Massey, Sujata
5. Pandian, Gigi
6. Swarup, Vikas

### **Hispanic/Latino/a Writers**

1. Acevedo, Mario
2. Anaya, Rudolfo A.
3. Corpi, Lucha
4. Cortez, Sarah (editor of anthologies)
5. Garcia-Aguilera, Caroline
6. Gaspar de Alba, Alicia
7. Hinojosa-Smith, Rolando
8. Lantigua, John
9. LoPinto, Charles and Llamas LoPinto, Lidia
10. Narvaez, R.
11. Nava, Michael
12. Ortiz, Martin Hill
13. Ramos, Manuel
14. Roman, A. E.
15. Segura, Alex
16. Thurlo, Aimée (deceased)
17. Torres, Steven
18. Vasquez, Ian
19. Villatoro, Marcos McPeck

## Native American Writers

1. Cox, Jessie
2. Erdrich, Louise
3. Hogan, Linda
4. Hoklotubbe, Sara Sue
5. Holm, Tom
6. Owens, Louis
7. Rodriguez, Linda
8. Smith, Martin Cruz
9. Welch, James

## LGBT Writers

1. Chandler, Jessie
2. Forrest, Katherine V.
3. Friend, Catherine
4. Gordon, Josie
5. Griffiths, Nicola
6. Hart, Ellen
7. Herren, Greg
8. Hill, Gerri
9. Hunter, Fred
10. James, Renee
11. Lake, Lori L.
12. Lynch, Katie

13. Maiorisi, Catherine
14. McDermid, Val
15. MacGregor, K. G.
16. McNab, Claire
17. Marks, Jeffrey
18. Padgett, Abigail
19. Radclyffe
20. Redmann, J. M.
21. Roberts, Ann
22. Scoppettone, Sandra
23. Sherman, Scott
24. Silva, Linda Kay
25. Sims, Elizabeth
26. Sweeney, Kate
27. Summer, Mary Elizabeth
28. Vali, Ali
29. Waters, Sarah
30. Wilson, Jon Morgan

## Anthologies

- Bland, Eleanor Taylor (ed.) *Shades of Black: Crime and Mystery Stories by African American Authors*. Berkley (2004).
- Cortez, Sarah and Martinez, Liz (eds.) *Hit List: The Best of Latino Mystery*. Arte Publico Press (2009).
- Cortez, Sarah and Martinez, Liz (eds.). *Indian Country Noir*. Akashic Books (2010).
- Cortez, Sarah (ed.) *You Don't Have a Clue: Latino Mystery Stories for Teens*. Pinata Books (2011).
- Penzler, Otto (ed.) *Black Noir: Mystery, Crime, and Suspense Fiction by African-American Writers*. Pegasus (2009).
- Woods, Paula L. (ed.) *Spooks, Spies, and Private Eyes: Black Mystery, Crime, and Suspense Fiction of the 20TH Century*. Doubleday (1995).

## Research

- Bailey, Frankie Y. *Out of the Woodpile: Black Characters in Crime and Detective Fiction*. Praeger (1991).
- Bailey, Frankie Y. *African American Mystery Writers: A Historical and Thematic Study*. McFarland (2008).



Betz, Phyllis M. *Lesbian Detective Fiction: Woman as Author, Subject, and Reader*. McFarland (2006).

Crafton, Robert E. *The African American Experience in Crime Fiction: A Critical Study*. McFarland (2015).

Fischer-Hornung, Dorothea and Mueller, Monika. *Sleuthing Ethnicity: The Detective in Multiethnic Crime Fiction*. Fairleigh Dickson University Press (2003).

Gifford, Justin. *Pimping Fictions: African American Crime Literature and the Untold Story of Black Pulp Publishing*. Temple University Press (2013).

Klein, Kathleen Gregory, ed. *Diversity and Detective Fiction*. Popular Press (1999).

Macdonald, Gina and Macdonald, Andrew F. with Sheridan, MaryAnn. *Shaman or Sherlock?: The Native American Detective*. Praeger (2001).

Markowitz, Judith A. *The Gay Detective Novel: Lesbian and Gay Main Characters and Themes in Mystery Fiction*. McFarland (2004).

Reddy, Maureen T. *Traces, Codes, and Clues: Reading Race in Crime Fiction*. Rutgers University Press (2002).

Sotelo, Susan Baker. *Chicano Detective Fiction: A Critical Study of Five Novelists*. McFarland (2005).

Wu, William F. *The Yellow Peril: Chinese Americans in American Fiction, 1850-1940*. Archon (1982).

# Resources

### Resources for Writers of Color

Asian American Writers' workshop.

[www.aaww.org](http://www.aaww.org)

Writ Large Press (event sponsor)

[www.writlargepress.com](http://www.writlargepress.com)

Kaya Press (Asian diaspora fiction)

[www.kaya.com](http://www.kaya.com)

NBCC (African American authors and readers)

[www.nationalbookclubconference.com](http://www.nationalbookclubconference.com)

Online Latina group with monthly meetings

[www.lascomadres.com](http://www.lascomadres.com)

Career development award for emerging

WOC [www.sistersincrime.org/](http://www.sistersincrime.org/)

### Resources for LGBT writers

Mentoring young LGBT writers

[www.LambdaLiterary.org](http://www.LambdaLiterary.org)

Lesbian Writers

[www.goldencrown.org](http://www.goldencrown.org)

LGBT conference

[www.saintsandsinnersNOLA.com](http://www.saintsandsinnersNOLA.com)

Career development awards

[www.publishingtriangle.org](http://www.publishingtriangle.org)

### Resources for Writers with Disability

#### Access to the Arts

[www.kennedy-center.org/accessibility/education/lead/resources.html](http://www.kennedy-center.org/accessibility/education/lead/resources.html)

[arts.gov/accessibility/accessibility-resources](http://arts.gov/accessibility/accessibility-resources)

#### Access to Meetings

[www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/mental\\_physical\\_disability/](http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/mental_physical_disability/)

[Accessible\\_Meetings\\_Toolkit.auth-checkdam.pdf](#)

Live close-captioning

[cccaptioning.org](http://cccaptioning.org)

### Website Accessibility

[www.w3.org/WAI/intro/accessibility.php](http://www.w3.org/WAI/intro/accessibility.php)

### Accessible Travel and Hospitality

[sath.org](http://sath.org) (Society for Accessibility in Travel and Hospitality)

Americans with Disabilities National Network Hotline 800-949-4232 (For friendly answers to any ADA questions number goes straight to someone in your region!) [adata.org](http://adata.org)

### Local Knowledge

Independent living centers in cities throughout the US can help find a wheelchair ramp to rent or advise on the most accessible hotels.

[www.ilru.org/projects/cil-net/cil-center-and-association-directory](http://www.ilru.org/projects/cil-net/cil-center-and-association-directory)

## Resources For Further Study

### Who's Counting?

SinC annual monitoring project into gender parity

[www.sistersincrime.org/page/MonitoringProject](http://www.sistersincrime.org/page/MonitoringProject)

VIDA, annual Women in the Literary Arts Count

[www.vidaweb.org/the-2015-vida-count/](http://www.vidaweb.org/the-2015-vida-count/)

Roxane Gay's report on race and *The New York Times Book Review*

[therumpus.net/2012/06/where-things-stand/](http://therumpus.net/2012/06/where-things-stand/)

Rachel McCarthy James report on the history of race, gender and *The New York Times* (1916)

[lithub.com/women-in-publishing-100-years-ago-a-historical-vida-count/](http://lithub.com/women-in-publishing-100-years-ago-a-historical-vida-count/)

### What About the Children?

We Need Diverse Books

[weneeddiversebooks.org/](http://weneeddiversebooks.org/)

University of Wisconsin, Cooperative Children's Book Center annual count

[ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp](http://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp) and [nyti.ms/IgAnO2x](http://nyti.ms/IgAnO2x)

Pon and Lo's Diversity in YA blog

[www.diversityinya.com](http://www.diversityinya.com)

Kirkus Reviews policy on race in children's literature

[www.kirkusreviews.com/features/un-making-white-default/](http://www.kirkusreviews.com/features/un-making-white-default/)

### Exploring (the Lack of) Diversity in the Publishing Industry

Lee & Low's Publishing Baseline Survey

[preview.tinyurl.com/hpcvkw](http://preview.tinyurl.com/hpcvkw)

*Publishers Weekly* publishing salary survey

[preview.tinyurl.com/pk7ny50](http://preview.tinyurl.com/pk7ny50)

PEN roundtable

[www.pen.org/conversation/editorial-roundtable-diversity-equitypublishing](http://www.pen.org/conversation/editorial-roundtable-diversity-equitypublishing)

Mira Jacob's address on race in publishing

[preview.tinyurl.com/zumc84l](http://preview.tinyurl.com/zumc84l)

Ilana Masad

[preview.tinyurl.com/z7lfmaw](http://preview.tinyurl.com/z7lfmaw)

The situation in the UK

[preview.tinyurl.com/zoeqak3](http://preview.tinyurl.com/zoeqak3)

### Writing the Future

Chris Jackson's relaunch of One World

[preview.tinyurl.com/jbp37vl](http://preview.tinyurl.com/jbp37vl)

### Exploring Diverse Writers' Voices

'Black Characters are Still Revolutionary': Writers Talk about the Complexity of Race

[preview.tinyurl.com/hn3vfz8](http://preview.tinyurl.com/hn3vfz8)

How White People Can Respond to Book Publishing's Lack of Diversity

[preview.tinyurl.com/hgz8aoo](http://preview.tinyurl.com/hgz8aoo)

Kit DeWaal on Diverse Voices

[preview.tinyurl.com/guuk3z8](http://preview.tinyurl.com/guuk3z8)

# Publishing Summit Team



**Frankie Y. Bailey** is a criminal justice professor at UAlbany (SUNY). She received the George N. Dove Award in 2010 for her research on mystery and crime fiction. She

won the 2009 non-fiction Macavity Award for *African American Mystery Writers* and was an Edgar, Agatha, and Anthony finalist. In fiction, she writes a mystery series featuring a crime historian and a near-future police procedural series. Frankie is a former executive vice president of Mystery Writers of America and a past national president of SinC.



**Leslie Budewitz** blends her passion for food, great mysteries, and the Northwest in the Seattle Spice Shop Mysteries and the Food Lovers' Village Mysteries, both set in Jewel Bay, Montana.

The first author to win Agatha Awards for both fiction and nonfiction, she lives and cooks in northwest Montana. She is the national president of SinC.



**Barbara Fister** is the author of one thriller, two Anni Koskinen mysteries, and a YA novel, *If Then Else*. She lives in Minnesota where she works at a small college and writes a weekly column about libraries,

technology, and whatever else is on her mind for *Inside Higher Ed*. An open access collection of her essays, *Babel Fish Bouillabaisse*, is available at her website.



**Julie Hennrikus** writes the Clock Shop Mystery series as Julianne Holmes, writes short stories as J.A. Hennrikus, and runs StageSource, a service organization for the

New England theater community. She blogs with the Wicked Cozy Authors and Killer Characters. She is a proud member of SinC, and is also a member of Mystery Writers of America.



**Catriona McPherson** is the multi-award-winning author of a historical detective series and a strand of contemporary standalone novels which have been Edgar and

Mary Higgins Clark finalists. Catriona is a member of Mystery Writers of America, The Crime writers' Association (UK), The Society of Authors and Scottish PEN and is a former president and proud lifetime member of SinC.



**Molly Weston** is a lifelong mystery reader who has reviewed and lectured about the genre for nearly twenty-five years. She was given the Mystery Writers of America's Raven Award

for service to the mystery community—introducing literally hundreds of authors to North Carolina readers over several decades. A long-time member of SinC, she edits and produces the layout for *inSinC*.



**Susan C Shea**, secretary of SinC National, was a non-profit executive for more than two decades before leaving to write mysteries. Her newest series will debut in 2017 from St. Martin's Minotaur.

She is the immediate past president of the Norcal Chapter of SinC and a member of the Norcal Chapter of MWA.

# Interview Questions

## Round 1

SinC was formed 28 years ago to combat gender discrimination in the publishing universe. The 2015 Board wants to take a hard look at the larger issues of diversity in publishing. The project will focus on WOC, LGBT writers and writers with disabilities. Our goal, here as everywhere, is to support writers and foster change.

Thank you for your willingness to be a consultant to SinC as we develop the project.

- I. We're tentatively defining "diversity" for this reporting project as WOC, LGBT writers, and writers with disabilities. One question we have is about those terms— are they the right ones, are they inclusive enough, do they cover the meaning of diversity for a project like this?

2. In your own experience or from what colleagues have shared with you, where in the chain from beginner to published/reviewed/read author are writers coming up against subtle or unsubtle barriers in their careers?
3. Other than what can be expected for all writers, what additional obstacles do these writers face?
4. Are there groups and organizations working specifically to overcome these barriers that we ought to know about and include as sources in our final report?
5. Are there reports, data collections, other resources that we ought to be aware of?
6. Are there specific individuals we ought to try and interview as part of the project, and why do you recommend them?
7. What is the most important outcome you think our report could have?

NOTE: We would like to be able to quote you as appropriate in the final report, but we really want candid input, so if you'd prefer to be on background or to only be quoted without attribution for something you share with us, just say so, and we will honor that.

## Rounds 2 & 3

SinC was formed 30 years ago to combat gender discrimination in the publishing universe. The 2015 Board wants to take a hard look at the larger issues of diversity in publishing. The project will focus on WOC, LGBT writers and writers with disability. Our goal, here as everywhere, is to support writers and foster change.

Thank you for your willingness to be interviewed.

1. In your own experience or from what colleagues have shared with you, where in the chain from beginner to published/reviewed/read author are WOC, LGBT-writers, or writers with disability coming up against barriers in their careers?
2. Other than what can be expected for all writers, what barriers and obstacles do these writers face?
3. What one change in the publishing world would make the most difference and how likely do you think it is?
4. What could precipitate it?
5. What is the most important possible outcome of this SinC report?



## SinC Member Survey

This year's Summit Report will explore the state of diversity and inclusion in our organization and in the industry with the goal of identifying obstacles, providing resources, and proposing steps for positive change. We appreciate your help in completing this anonymous survey so that we can get a snapshot of our membership in 2016. It should take no more than 5 minutes to complete.

I. Do you identify as . . .

*(Please check all that apply. We are using current US census categories.)*

- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ African American or Black
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- ☐ White
- ☐ Other

2. Do You Identify as Latino/Latina/Hispanic?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

3. Do you identify your ethnicity using different terms than those of the census categories?

If so, what are your preferred terms?

4. Do you identify as . . .

- ☐ Bisexual, female
- ☐ Bisexual, male
- ☐ Gay
- ☐ Heterosexual, female
- ☐ Heterosexual, male
- ☐ Lesbian
- ☐ Transgender
- ☐ Other

5. Do you have a disability?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

6. If you answered yes and are willing to say more, could you name or describe the disability?

7. What is your age?

- ☐ Under 25
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 55-64
- ☐ Over 65

8. Are you a(n) *(Please check all that apply.)*
- ☐ Agent
  - ☐ Blogger
  - ☐ Bookseller
  - ☐ Editor
  - ☐ Librarian
  - ☐ Publisher
  - ☐ Reader
  - ☐ Reviewer
  - ☐ Writer
  - ☐ Other
9. If you are a crime fiction writer, are you a(n) *(Please check all that apply.)*
- ☐ Author of short stories published in a magazine or traditionally published anthology
  - ☐ Author of self-published short stories
  - ☐ Author of books published by a Big Five publisher (Hachette, Harper Collins, Macmillan, Penguin Random, or Simon & Schuster)
  - ☐ Author of books published by another press
  - ☐ Author of self-published books
  - ☐ Author of plays, film scripts, or TV scripts
  - ☐ Writer not yet published
10. If you are a traditionally-published crime fiction writer, please tell us who your most recent publisher is. If you have multiple publishers, please list up to three.
11. If you are a published crime fiction writer, in what year was your first mystery published? For short story authors, “published” includes work included in an anthology or magazine.
12. How would you characterize the climate for your writing career since then?
- ☐ It has gotten much easier
  - ☐ It has gotten easier
  - ☐ It has stayed the same
  - ☐ It has gotten harder
  - ☐ It has gotten much harder.
13. Any further thoughts on your publishing experience?
14. The vision of SinC is to “serve as the voice for excellence & diversity in crimewriting.” What could we do better to achieve that vision?
15. Would you be willing to be contacted by a Summit Report team member for further conversation?
- Please provide your name and email address. A team member may contact you for a follow-up interview as time permits. Your survey responses will remain confidential and your contact information will not be used for any other purpose.
16. Would you like to have your name entered in a drawing? Two winners will be selected to receive either a copy of the *Writes of Passage* anthology or a free 2017 membership.
- Please provide your name and email address. Your survey responses will remain confidential and your contact information will not be used for any other purpose.

## Glossary

**ADA:** Americans with Disabilities Act

**Ally:** someone outside a group who advocates and agitates for those inside it.

**Big 5:** Hachette, Harper Collins, Macmillan, Penguin Random House, Simon and Schuster and their imprints.

**cis, cisgender:** someone who still identifies with the gender to which they were assigned at birth.

**disability:** an interference in someone's participation in everyday activities, caused by a physical, mental, sensory or developmental impairment.

**diverse, diversity:** comprising people of all races, genders, abilities, sexualities, ages, classes and religions.

**dominant culture:** the individuals and institutions that embody and reflect the largest and/or most powerful group of people within the greater diversity. E.g. in the US: white, straight, able-bodied cisgender men.

**equity:** a way of treating people that ignores the effect of a dominant culture

**Hispanic:** Spanish-speaking.

**inclusion:** originally the practice of accommodating people with disabilities. Now the practice of accommodating diverse people without privileging the dominant culture.

**indie:** independent (usually independent bookstores)

**Latina/o:** originating from or identifying with Mexico, or Central/South America.

**LGBT:** lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender.

**LGBTW:** lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender writers

**mainstream publisher:** a (mystery) publisher that represents and caters to the dominant culture

**minority:** describing a group whose members are not representative of the dominant culture

**non-traditional publisher:** a company that serves some but not all of the functions of a traditional publisher. E.g. a crowd-source-funding publisher that uses pre-orders rather than editors' choices to determine which books will be published.

**othering:** rejecting someone from inclusion in an implied group

**parity:** the belief that individuals, no matter their differences, are inherently equal and behavior manifested by that belief

**POC:** person/people of color

**privilege:** the boost in goodwill or opportunities that comes from membership of one of the powerful groups that make up the dominant culture

**PWD:** person/people with disabilities

**specialist publisher:** a publisher catering for or representing a group outside the dominant culture

**traditional publisher:** a company that selects material according to perceived merit or expected sales, edits, designs, (typically) prints physical books, distributes and promotes, and pays authors by advance and royalty.

**trans, transgender:** someone who identifies with a gender different from the one they were assigned at birth

**WOC:** writer of color

**WWD:** writer with disabilities

**YA:** young adult



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