

Equity as Strategy: Revolutionizing Consumer Research for Authentic & Actionable Results

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Let's Connect!



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A Changing Consumer



Jessica Harris

Dr. Jessica Harris – American Historian and Journalist.
Author of *High on the Hog*, adapted into a Netflix series by the same name.

Consumers are
changing...

They don't want
to be marketed
to, they want **to
be seen.**



85% of consumers
say brands need to
listen to them before
creating new products
or services.



75% of consumers are more likely to support a brand when their culture or ethnicity is represented.





Our world is changing too –
as demographics shift, consumer
buying power is now more
diverse than ever.

- African-American: grew by 61% (\$1.6T)
- Asian-American: grew by 111% (\$1.3T)
- Hispanic-American: grew by 87% (\$1.9T)
- Women account for \$5 trillion in spending and control 85% of purchases across categories.

A Changed **Perspective**

To stay relevant in a changing world, we must evolve how we connect with an ever-changing audience.

- ① From **Goodwill** to **Growth**
- ② From **Hypothesis** to **Human Truth**
- ③ From **Data** to **Dignity**

From Goodwill to Growth

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Goodwill to Growth:

Not a DEI strategy

A young woman with a pink cap and a striped shirt is skateboarding in a hallway. She is pointing forward with a smile, looking towards the right. The hallway has white walls and doors. In the background, another person is sitting on the floor.

DEI should shape internal company culture. Inclusive research and brand strategy **should aim grow** the business by authentically engaging with diverse consumers.

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Goodwill to Growth:

Not a social media declaration

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Salesforce @salesforce · Follow

We stand with the Black community against racism, violence, and hate. Now more than ever we must support one another as allies and speak up for justice and equality.



We stand with the Black community against racism, violence, and hate. Now more than ever we must support one another as allies and speak up for justice and equality.

PlayStation @PlayStation · Jun 1, 2020 · Follow

We denounce systemic racism and violence against the Black community. We will continue to work towards a future marked by empathy and inclusion and stand with our Black creators, players, employees, families, and friends.

#BlackLivesMatter

CBS @CBS · Follow

**BLACK LIVES MATTER.
BLACK CULTURE MATTERS.
BLACK COMMUNITIES MATTER.**

We stand in solidarity with our Black colleagues, creators, partners, and audiences and condemn all acts of racism, discrimination, and senseless acts of violence.

CBS

TikTok US @tiktok_us · Follow

At TikTok we deeply value the diverse voices among our users, creators, artists, partners, and employees.

We stand with the Black community and are proud to provide a platform where #BlackLivesMatter and #GeorgeFloyd generate powerful and important content with over 1 billion views.

We are committed to fostering a space where everyone is seen and heard.

TikTok

MTV @MTV · Follow

#BlackLivesMatter

Black Lives Matter. Watch on Twitter

We stand with the #BlackLivesMatter movement and call for the end of systemic racism.

These racist and violent attacks must end.

We call for justice.

Amazon @amazon · May 31, 2020 · Follow

The inequitable and brutal treatment of Black people in our country must stop.

Together we stand in solidarity with the Black community – our employees, customers, and partners – in the fight against systemic racism and injustice.

amazon

Madden NFL 23 @EAMaddenNFL · Follow

An official statement from EA SPORTS

IT'S GAME TIME

Tomorrow, we had committed to celebrating Madden NFL 21 with you, but we're not going to do that now.

We stand with our African American / Black community of friends, players, colleagues and partners. Our immediate attention is on actions we can take to drive change against the unjust treatment and systemic bias that is plaguing the nation and our world.

We'll find another time to talk football with you. Because this is bigger than a game, bigger than sports, and needs all of us to stand together and commit to change.

EA

We at [Brand] are committed to fighting injustice by posting images to Twitter that express our commitment to fighting injustice.

To that end, we offer this solemn white-on-black .jpeg that expresses vague solidarity with the Black community, but will quietly elide the specifics of what is wrong, what needs to change, or in what ways we will do anything about it. This is doubly true if [Brand] is particularly guilty of exacerbating these issues.

We hope this action encourages you to view [Brand] positively without, you know, expecting anything from us.

[BRAND]
You know the ones.™

Disney @Disney · Follow

We stand against racism.

We stand for inclusion.

We stand with our fellow Black employees, storytellers, creators and the entire Black community.

We must unite and speak out.

Goodwill to Growth:

It is a business imperative

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TIE inclusive research to at least one KPI like revenue growth, customer acquisition, or increased engagement. Measure ROI to shift from “doing good” to “doing what works.”

DEFINE the market opportunity. Use data to show how inclusive research unlocks access to untapped or underserved markets, building in as much specificity as possible.

IDENTIFY the competitive advantage, how might this help develop a more nuanced range of consumer needs and create differentiated offerings.

SPEAK the language of growth in ways that resonate with leadership, tying into scalability, efficiency, and long-term brand positioning – rather than a separate or ethical initiative.

Case Study

Increase brand engagement with Black consumers through critical touchpoints throughout the year.

Activation – Chose partners strategically, based on insights and developed “Soul-Cuterie” boards for a Black History Month campaign.

Insight – 64% percent express that they find joy in cooking at home versus eating out, 88% follow cooking influencers, and are **more likely** to believe in something greater guiding them.

ROI – Contributed to McCormick being ranked among the top 10 brands resonating with Black American consumers in 2023.



A close-up, high-resolution photograph of a man's face, focusing on his eyes, nose, and forehead. The man has a serious, contemplative expression. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of his skin and the intensity of his gaze. The background is blurred, showing hints of green and white, suggesting an outdoor setting.

From Hypothesis to Human Truth

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How do **HUMANS** navigate a complicated world?

- We **predict** through past experiences
- We **process** through biases & heuristics
- We **remember** through story
- We **act** through emotion

**Empathy allows us
to navigate the
ever-shifting
marketplace**

**Our brain is wired
to understand
others' emotions**



The challenge of empathy: Empathy is cognitively tiring and more difficult to extend to those who aren't "like us"

10 Keys to Inclusive Listening

- 1 **Listen** with an open mind
- 2 **Listen** for feeling words & the meaning attributed to them
- 3 **Listen** for metaphor
- 4 **Listen** for unsolicited denials
- 5 **Listen** for lens-shifting language
- 6 **Listen** for what isn't being said
- 7 **Listen** to the non-verbal
- 8 **Listen** for the big picture
- 9 **Listen** with analytical curiosity
- 10 **Listen** without distraction

02.

Listen for feeling words and
the meaning attributed to them



Connect to your feelings to build understanding

Ask Yourself:

- “What times in life have I felt this way?”
- “When I felt this way, what did I need?”
- “What does that make me wonder about this person’s experience? What could they need?”
- “What questions should I be asking myself based on this understanding?”



03.

Listen for
metaphor



Questions to help elicit metaphor

- What's something else in life that makes you feel this way?
- How else would you describe [experience]?
- What's another moment that made you feel this kind of [emotion]?

04.

**Listen for
unsolicited
denials**

“ It’s
not like I
was...”

“ Not
that I
need...”

Case Study:

“Are Black Consumers more tech-savvy?”



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From Data to Dignity



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Without story, data lacks meaning

- When looking at data, we see our own preconceived notions of the world, which can reinforce bias.
- As researchers and strategists, it's our responsibility to effectively socialize diverse consumer insights.
- **How might we** socialize “data” with dignity?

Respondent Photos

“Who is the Ageless Woman?”



Composite Narrative

“Can women
be both old *and*
beautiful?”



Contextualizing Insights

Cultural Context Mapping

Providing cultural, social, and historical contexts of the insights to avoid oversimplifications.

Micro-Macro Connections

Connecting individual stories or data points to broader societal trends, and vice versa.

Intersectionality Frameworks

Illuminating how intersections of identity become more salient in different context.

Strategic Activation Guardrails

Outlining boundaries and guiding principles designed to ensure insights are activated in ways that avoid stereotypes.



Case Study:

Parents use play to instill values and inspire their children to envision their dreams and potential.

Play fosters responsibility, connection, and identity in children, while also building trust. It provides parents with meaningful opportunities to deepen communication and understanding with their child.



“Play is a part of them exploring the world. It helps with their understanding of the world.... It’s important because it’s shaping up who they’re going to be. It helps with their sense of self and who they are as people.... It's escapism.”

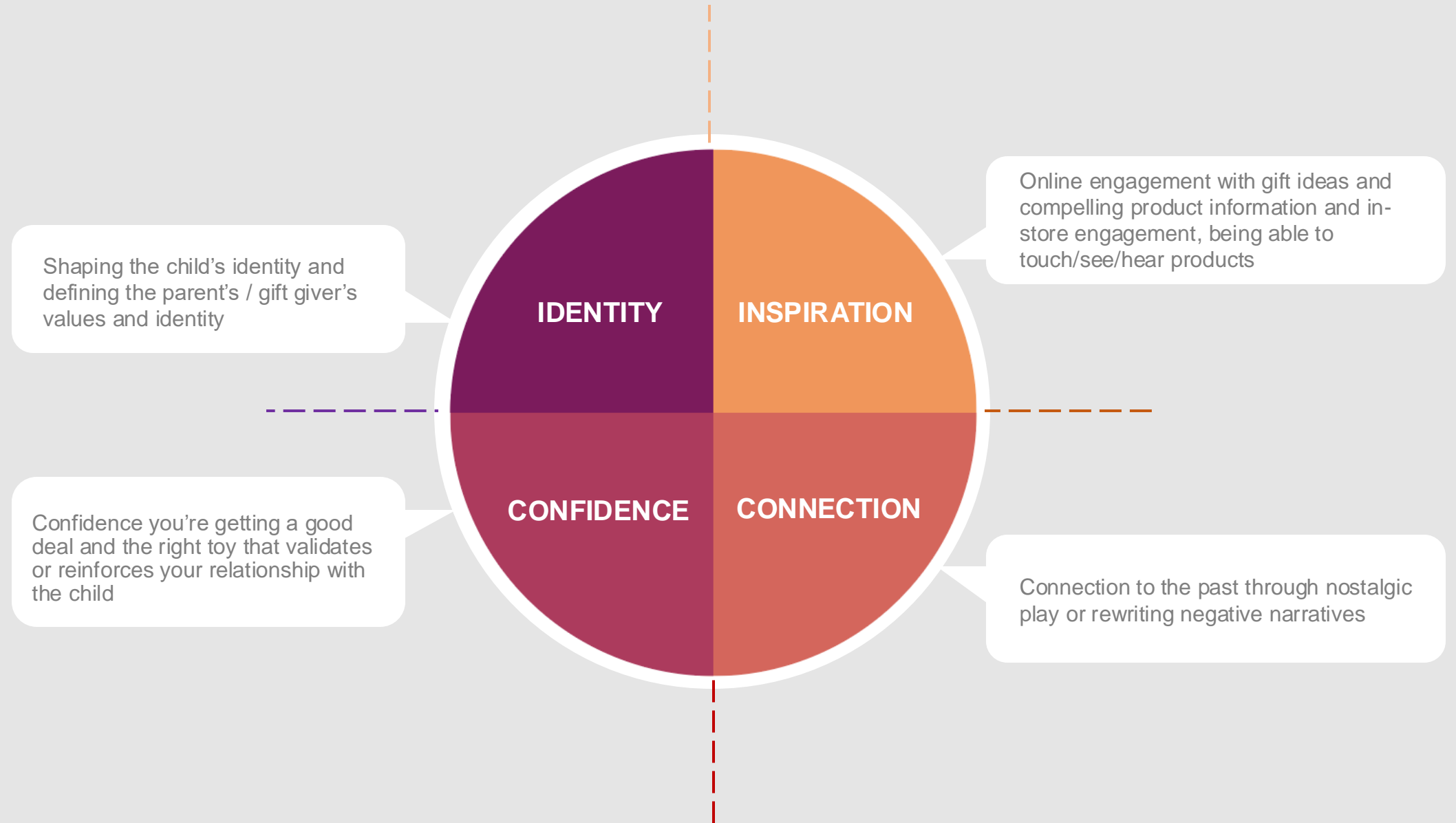
—*Kyle*



CULTURAL CONTEXT

Play empowers Black children to experience **the innocence** of childhood – **combating adultification bias** and affirming their right to simply be children. By reclaiming these spaces, Black children **assert their humanity** in environments that frequently deny it.

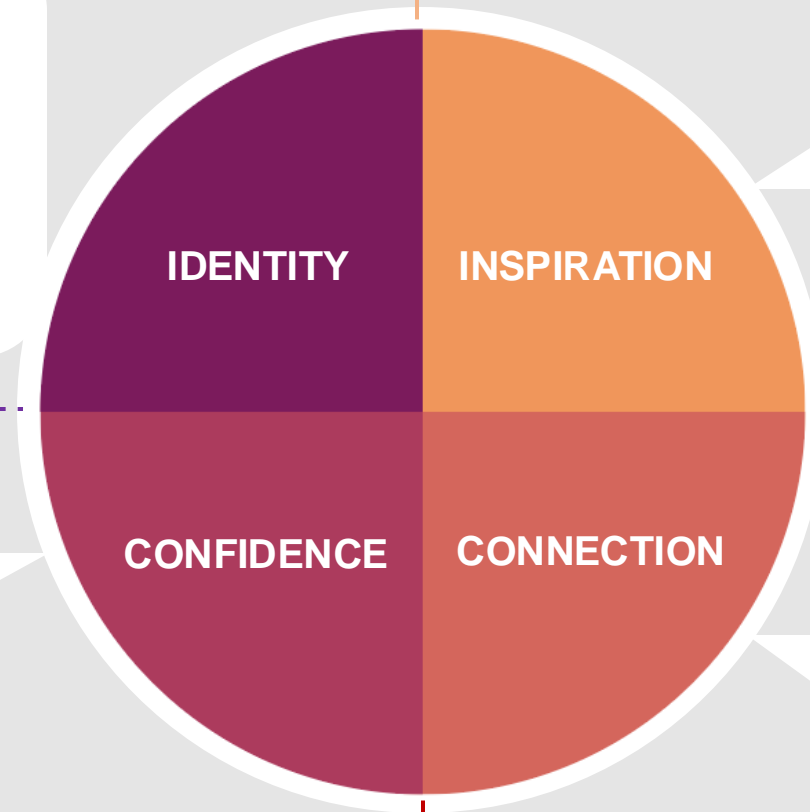
Case Study:



Case Study:

- What values, ideals, esteem will this instill in my child?
- Does this toy reflect my personal values as a parent / gift giver?
- Does this toy reflect the beauty of my culture and my child?
- Does this toy counteract negative societal messages?
- How might this toy inspire my child to imagine who he/she can be?

Confidence you're getting a good deal and the right toy that validates or reinforces your relationship with the child



Online engagement with gift ideas and compelling product information and in-store engagement, being able to touch/see/hear products

Connection to the past through nostalgic play or rewriting negative narratives

Case Study:



Key Takeaways



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Key Takeaways: Equity is Not Just an Outcome, It's a Strategy

- **Inclusivity is a business imperative** – we can authentically engage diverse consumers *and* drive measurable ROI.
- **Empathy is essential** to uncovering human truth, allowing us to move beyond surface-level insights.
- **Without story, data lacks meaning** and risks reinforcing biases.



Q&A

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