Shanley Kane challenges the assumptions and practices of the criminally corrupt Silicon Valley Mafia

The Valley has bought into the idea of itself as a meritocracy: a world of self-starting, bootstrapping geniuses so much better and smarter than anyone else in the world that they deserve wildly disproportionate opportunities for wealth and power. The problem is that this is the exact opposite of what Silicon Valley *actually* is: a sexist and racist wealth distribution mechanism that relies on cronyism, corruption, and exclusion to function.

"We are not getting hired, and we are not getting promoted, and we are being systematically driven out of the industry."

You think technology companies take a kind of perverse pride in being unprofessionally managed.

The technology industry sees itself as in rebellion against corporate America: not corrupt, not buttoned-up, not empty. In fact, a tech company can be as corrupt, soulless, and empty as any corporation, but being unprofessional helps us maintain the belief that we are somehow different from Wall Street.

Technologists love to celebrate the hacker and the programmer. What corporate roles are undervalued by the industry?

Obviously, programmers are important, but a very common dysfunction, particularly at technology startups, is privileging programmers. When you don't value other skills, your engineering team becomes very entitled and even abusive of other parts of the company. Really important functions, like marketing, sales, business development, finance, and legal, become underfunded and under-resourced. We often end up with companies with great technology that are nonetheless dying because they could not execute from a nontechnical standpoint.

Why are there so few women in many tech companies? Is it a so-called pipeline problem, in that not enough women train as programmers and engineers? Or is it because women leave the industry, as you did?

Obviously the pipeline is a huge issue. But too often, our industry focuses on early stages of the pipeline that they have no control over. You see venture capitalists talk about the need to get more 10-year-old girls into programming, and that's so far removed from their direct sphere of influence. Meanwhile, there is attrition in every stage of the career path of women once they get into the industry. Over 50 percent of women will leave by the halfway point in their careers. We are not getting hired, and we are not getting promoted, and we are being systematically driven out of the industry.

Therefore, let elementary schools, high schools, and universities, which understand education, worry about the pipeline?

It's so typical of Silicon Valley's arrogance that these rich, white male venture capitalists—who have no conception of learning or how to educate young kids—make these grand declarations about the pipeline. It's gross.

But why would technology companies act against their best interests and not hire and promote competent women or people from other marginalized groups?

It comes down to what their interests actually are. If their interests were better serving the world, using technology as a force for social justice, and equitably distributing technology wealth to enrich society … sure, they'd be acting against their interests. But the reality is that tech companies centralize power and wealth in a small group of privileged white men. When that's the goal, then exploiting the labor of marginalized people and denying them access to power and wealth is 100 percent in line with the endgame. A more diverse tech industry would be better for its workers and everyone else, but it would be worse for the privileged white men at the top of it, because it would mean they would have to give up their monopoly on money and power. And they will fight that with everything they've got, which is why we see barriers to equality at every level of the industry.

"In the upper levels of tech, you

are generally dealing with white men who have been coddled their entire lives, and they have rarely encountered even mild criticism."

How often are women not given the credit that they deserve for the creation of a company?

When they are hired into early roles at the company, people from marginalized groups—including women—don't get the same amount of stock, and they are not given the titles. And many times they're not brought into the company until later stages of a company's development, so they miss out on the opportunity to be part of the founding team. We particularly see underrepresentation of black founders. And in general, we give too much credit to individual, white male founders when companies are comprised of many people who have [devoted] their lives to [making] their organizations work.

On Twitter, you blow the minds of people who've never seen a feminist critique before, especially one of technology. Can you explain this response? Male VCs and entrepreneurs seem riled that you don't take their good intentions very seriously.

They start with the premise that they deserve all these disproportionate advantages and privileges, and then they encounter a worldview that says, "Not only do you not deserve those things, but in order to fix the problems of the technology industry, you are not going to be able to have that stuff anymore." That's a profound challenge to how people see themselves, and it really hurts their feelings.

It makes them actively angry. Yet there's a sort of masochism to their interactions with you. They can't stop themselves from telling you why you're wrong.

In the upper levels of tech, you are generally dealing with white men who have been coddled their entire lives, and they have rarely encountered even mild criticism. They take it as a really crushing, violent blow to their egos. It's a big challenge for people from marginalized and underrepresented groups: we have to walk around the workplace all day on eggshells, treating them like soft kittens.

You've denigrated what you call "corporate feminism," as espoused by Sheryl Sandberg in her book *Lean In.* Why do you object to the ideology?

One of the fundamental objections is that it tends to ignore broader systems of sexism, racism, queer-phobia, trans-phobia, and these structural oppressions are the root of why women don't succeed in technology. Instead of talking about that, *Lean In* says, "You need to work harder and smarter, and you personally need to become very successful," which promotes exceptionalism rather than structural change. You know, many women are already working harder and smarter than everyone around them. Imani Gandy has a great post on how black women are already leaning in.

What advice would you give to your younger self, or to women who are considering a career in technology now?

I actually don't have a lot of advice. There's not a whole lot that you can do to keep your career from being crushed by misogyny. The idea that if we can tell people the right way to act, they will be able avoid all that structural discrimination and aggression—that's just not the case, based on my experience; so my main

advice is basically to do what you can and to take care of yourself.

But you *leaned out*, Shanley. You stepped away and decided to do something else. You created your own business.

Well, I had that option because, as a white woman, I had a lot of financial privilege and a lot of opportunities.

Why is Silicon Valley so dependent on alcohol to lubricate its interactions?

I'm not critical of alcohol; I drink a lot of wine. The problem is how alcohol functions in technology companies: if you can get everyone to go out drinking after work, they are spending a lot more time at work with their coworkers—thinking about and doing work. That leads to a total fusion of self-identity with a company, where the social and personal is blended with the professional. It's also really important to point out that tech events are places where assault and rape do happen, and alcohol is frequently used to facilitate the attacks.

Have you seen signs of improvement at all in some of these issues that you write about?

I'm not one to be optimistic about these things, but if pressed I can come up with a few examples. We are getting codes of conduct at events, and while that seems like a superficial thing, it does reflect awareness that our events are places where people are having bad experiences, where there is inequality and sometimes very serious abuse. Another thing I have seen over the past two years is that there is a lot more social-media organization and activism, which is helping to change the way people view tech and its problems. The final thing that's good is that this year the Rainbow PUSH Coalition did a ton of work to get technology companies to share all their diversity data, which is forcing a lot of these issues into the open. There's not any excuse for pretending that we don't know.

You have a magic wand. What are the first three things you would change about technology?

I think I would take Twitter away from Marc Andreessen. Well, I mean, honestly, I'd like to take Marc Andreessen from power in every way; but the broader point is that I would like these old, rich, white male *thought leaders* to stop being the center of our

field. There are brilliant, diverse technologists that aren't being given a chance to speak.

The second thing that I would change is that we have the worst tech media ever. TechCrunch is pages and pages of press releases; PandoDaily is so consumed with their writers' narcissistic petty dramas that it's just an incoherent mess; and so on. So I'd love to see like 10 new independent tech media companies that have more integrity, courage, and critical thought.

And the third thing I'd like to change is money. Changing the way money flows in Silicon Valley is critical. VCs will give a startup run by women $100,000, but then the company that is run by privileged men gets $500 million. So I would change the allocation of venture capital. What if we said that we are not going to invest in cisgender, heterosexual white men for the next 10 years, and we're going to fund a diversity of technologists instead?

Describe Silicon Valley in one word.

Maybe I'll go with "corrupt."