

July 2020 Transcript

This Design Book Club conversation took place on July 9, 2020. It was facilitated by Kimberly Sutherland with participants Simon Boas, Lis Charman, Nicole Donsi, Robert Franklin, Clarissa Fredericks-Wright, Oskar Radon Kimball, Stephen Lee, Naomi Likayi, Savannah Quarum, Kristin Rogers Brown, and Mallary Wilson. All were asked to read two articles Decolonizing Means Many Things to Many People and Dori Tunstall: Decolonizing Design beforehand. The following is a transcription of this conversation, edited for accuracy and readability.

Hi.

Okay, I think we can get started and the other people will just join us when they do. Well. So, first of all, thank you for coming and registering and being interested in what we're doing. We're kind of surprised and very excited that so many people want to do this with us. I'm Ariel, Kris and Harrison are the other two organizers with Design Book Club. And this is our first real event, so that's cool. Kim is our first real facilitator, so that's even cooler.

We will be recording this and transcribing it later. We just want to make sure everyone is one hundred percent OK with having their name online, if you're not just let us know and we can omit that. But each thing that you say will be anonymous, because we aren't including name credits inside the transcript, just at the beginning. So feel free to say anything and don't worry about it coming off weird or having your name attached to a specific sentence. That's not a problem. Anything else? Oh, we're going to give you a survey when this is over. So you can give us feedback on how to do better and we'll send you the transcript. And I think that's all I have to say. I'll pass it over to Kim!

All right. Thank you. Hello, everybody. Pleasure to see all of you and really happy to be having this conversation. I know some of you and some of you and do not know. So that's fun. I thought we could maybe just start with... Well, first of all, I guess I'll introduce myself. I'm a designer. I live in Portland. I'm Associate Creative Director at OMFGCO, currently. I also teach at PSU and I run a design studio class through KSMoCA at the Dr. MLK Jr. Elementary School in North Portland. Yeah, and so I thought we could just start with a quick round of, say your name, and your pronoun and—she/her—and maybe where you are at in the world because I don't know if everybody is in Portland and also if you're a student or a teacher, or practitioner, would be good to know as well.

Oh, I can start. I am currently a student at PSU and I also do some work with KSMoCA.

I'm also a PSU student. And I'm currently actually in northern Idaho staying with some family. But yeah, my pronouns are he/him.

She/her pronouns. I am a senior in the graphic design program at PSU. I am a freelance graphic designer mostly and also do a lot of contemporary art and things like that under the moniker Midgray with my partner who is also here in the room. So, yeah, turn it over to whoever's next.

I guess that makes sense. Right? You can see the the continuity in the wall behind us. I'm an artist, designer, educator based in Portland. I do a lot of work with technology a lot of work around gender performance. I teach at PNCA, PSU, I taught at U of O, largely the interactive art and design and illustration classes. And I'm very excited to be here. Oh, and my pronouns are he/him.

Hi, pronouns are she/her. I'm a PSU design student and just made it through portfolio so I'm taking a big deep breath right now. Yay! And I'm also a writer. I primarily write about film.

Right. I'm also a sophomore. Who just got through the review. And my pronouns are she/her.

Pronouns are she/her. I am currently the in house graphic designer at PICA, the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art. I just graduated from PNCA this spring.

Hey, everyone. I'm a designer and a teacher at PSU. I've been there for three years. Pronouns he/him.

I'm here in Portland.

Hey, I'm a senior at PNCA. And my pronouns are he/him.

I just graduated the PSU design program in the Fall. I am working at Saint Friend, which is a little agency here in Portland, as a designer right now. And my pronouns are she/her.

Hi, I use she or they/them. I'm a graphic designer, art director and I teach design at PNCA.

Hi, been in Portland for about three years. Graphic designer, photographer videographer, do random stuff. Taught at PSU last term, which was kind of fun experience. Currently, I am the manager at the PSU Native American Student and Community Center. I tried to do the graphic design game for a little bit, but kind of gave up on that.

Are you on the radio? Is that a radio mic?

It's just a studio condenser mic. I used to do podcasts a long time ago. So I had all the equipment so once COVID hit, I was ready to go.

Looking very professional.

*Um, okay, so I think we went through everybody, that's awesome. Nice to meet you all. I'm glad that we have a mix of... I wasn't sure I thought it was gonna be students. So it's great that we have some instructors here as well. I thought that we could sort of structure the conversation with the forty minutes, or fifty minutes we have left, to talk about the sort of the what and the why, and then the how, the actions. So I think, you know, what does decolonized design mean? And and why should we do it? Maybe we should start with the *why*. Does anybody have anything they want to say about that?*

I guess I'll state the obvious, the majority of graphic designers are white. So we should probably have a little more diversity.

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Yeah, that's definitely one. Anyone else have anything else to add?

Yeah, I think a lot of it's about, like the culture itself, that graphic design is inherently coupled with capitalism. And these things are part of an oppressive system. And so being able to kind of like uncouple those things and see it as, I mean, it's just like, the whitest environment, I think, for the arts. And so, you know, not just diversifying, like actually like restructuring a lot of that environment so that it's not just like, inviting people to come into a very

white environment, but actually restructuring the environment itself.

Yeah, so as Dori says in one of our two readings “the pinnacle of design has long been defined by secular capitalist practice of design that is based on European values transported by Colonialism.” So the ways that we are learning about design and often teaching about design have been through this lens of white European men, usually. So why do we not want that? Because that is not the truth. We live in a very diverse world and there is a lot of value in different experiences and different ways of thinking and aesthetics. I think that is part of the reason why that is important. Does anyone else have anything to add about that?

I also think it’s about giving agency to those who have been marginalized for so long and just also amplifying their voices because of being so muffled over this very western European method and canon of design.

Definitely. Yeah I think it is definitely about also feeding power and who is telling stories and doing the teaching. Anyone else have anything to add?

I would say all of this—everything everybody is saying—just helps create more usable solutions when you’re designing something. If design has the power to change your mind and start conversations then it’s not necessarily only about feeding power but it’s just about making things that work better and doing it consciously. It doesn’t have to invite people in.

So through those two readings we can see that there are a lot of different definitions for what decolonizing means or is. I thought that maybe it could be helpful to compile a list of what those things are that we could continue to add to throughout the conversation and we could take away and continue to add to in the future. Potentially being able to refer back to it or share with someone when you’re having these conversations. So, in order to try to define it a little bit does anyone have anything they want to start to add to that list? I would say the first thing is what Dori

calls ‘respectful design,’ which is a cool term. She defines it as “untangling systems of oppression, silencing, and othering that are embedded in many design practices objects and structures” and it “creates a space that honors and enables indigenous practitioners and excluded voices” because she is working specifically in Canada. Anyone else have anything to add?

I really like in the AIGA article, Tejada talks about “decolonizing is about unearthing, shifting the glance, decentering, giving agency, being vulnerable, making mistakes, ideation, thinking about our communities and not so much about design.” I thought that was interesting. Also in the same paragraph they talk about making space and taking space and sort of that push and pull there. I thought that was really good.

Yeah, making; taking and giving up space. I like that.

I thought that was a really good part too where it was talking about acknowledging where lands were taken or ideas were stolen from people who originally had them. I thought that was really nice to have that as an acknowledgement. Maybe that sort of goes into something that has to do with research. So the responsibility of research for putting things out there.

In the article, the conversation between different designers, *Decolonizing Means Many Things to Many People*, there is a sentence that talks about empathy, and empathy over just kind of more simple understanding. They say, “the main tool of designers is to have empathy. There are cases where the designer studies people and says, ‘Yeah, I understand how they think,’ that’s not empathy,” they say, “It’s really being able to recognize the value of the other person understanding that the other point of view is also correct. And something we should work towards.” So yeah, really getting towards that, you know, working with and feeling as someone else as opposed to just looking at them from afar and trying to understand them.

Right. Like, what does true collaboration look like in a real way?

Hey, I don't know if this is like derailing and it doesn't need to be like a whole thing. But I recently have been in a few conversations about empathy. And I think it's important. I don't want to argue that empathy is a bad thing. I think it's really important. But I do think that we tend to value those with empathy over those with lived experience. And I think that in itself is often a form of what keeps white people in power a lot of the time is looking at empathy as the solution instead of actually speaking to people who are living in the situations, and when it comes to design working with whatever would be created.

And then I also think that it's important to remember that empathy can be very biased. And I think we tend to empathize with people who we feel like we have the most in common with or at least, like, I'll speak personally, I know I do. And so I think there's like all these facets to empathy that are important. And I think in the design world, empathy is one of those hot words that we hear a lot right now. Or it's like, 'oh, we'll just have empathy, and then you'll be good.' And so I just, I guess, I just wanted to say that I think it's important also to question that idea of empathy and where our empathy comes from as designers and maybe how that empathy is built and who do we empathize with most. But I also do think empathy is a good thing, and I don't think we should get rid of it. But just like, recognizing the complexity of the idea of empathy, I think is also important.

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Possibly empathy as a process and not an endpoint.

[General agreement]

Yeah, I kind of want to build on that. I have been thinking about that a lot too. And it's hard because as somebody who was brought up thinking really logically, valuing research and I think statements over I feel statements.

Mm hmm.

I think it's hard. I mean, I'm doing it now. I think it's hard to actually feel your feelings, let alone try to feel

somebody else's feelings in it. But I'm interested in the idea of if you couple empathy with a loss of ego, how you actually make space for other people to tell their stories or just, you don't have to always be the one talking or you don't have to be the one actively empathizing and taking up space.

Mm hmm.

I also kind of wanted to add on to the idea of ego because it's also discussed in the article, about designers kind of having this God complex. And I mean, that made me kind of think about always attaching a face to a movement in terms of the design canon. And I think decolonizing design is also trying to break away or just try to untangle the idea of the individual versus just the entire collective.

Yeah

Yeah, one of the things I had in my notes is piggybacking off of that, when they say "my approach to design is about creating value for people, rather than solving problems." And I feel like most designers are educated with the you are a problem solver and that kind of reduction of humanity. We start to look at people and their stories as a problem for us to solve, you know, because we're trying to accurately portray somebody's experience. And it is part of this whole idea of the unlearning process of a lot of stuff with design that we're seeing now. Yeah, that was a, I think, not even the most poignant sentence for me that I was just like, yeah, that, the value—I don't know any designer that would say that their point is to value a person and not solve a problem.

I think the unlearning part was definitely something that sat with me, because I think about that a lot as a teacher and as a student—how do you learn and unlearn at the same time? It's an interesting conundrum to be in, and I would love to talk about that. I don't know if right now is the right time, but maybe it is.

What were we talking about? The learning and unlearning part? Where did that come in?

Mallory just mentioned the quote from the reading.

Mallory, can you say it again?

Yeah. I can't remember who said it, but they said: "my approach to design is about creating value for people, rather than solving problems." And I was just referencing that most designers are taught that we are problem solvers.

Something else that I really liked about that idea. They kind of mentioned it around when they were talking about 'making for mom' and how they were saying that as an audience we're legitimate. And I think that kind of ties in with the idea of creating value and instead of solving these like, quantifiable things. Design is more who you're making things for than what you're making. That is the takeaway that I got, which really blew my mind.

Right. It's mentioned in one of the texts, and I talk about that a lot with my students. It's the power that you hold as a designer and the responsibility of that. You are actually engaging and communicating content to actual people that will maybe help them, or not help them, navigate their lives in some way. And that is something that should really be stressed in our education.

I think it's really easy for designers—like they said in the article—to be like: "we know best and we're educated in design, so we should tell you what's best for you." I can't remember where I read it...it might have been a Christo thing or something, but he's like, you have to remember the design isn't for you at all. It's for whatever you're designing for. And that seems super obvious, but it's just a really good thing to remind ourselves of.

I think Naomi brought up something that I've been thinking a lot about recently in that idea of individual versus collective. And I don't have any answers or really much to say other than I would like to hear people's thoughts on what does collective mean? Because I think there's the collective of working, but what does the collective look like in altering to become part of the collective in

the design process in an actionable way? In this moment, what does that look like?

Also, I think there's a negative connotation, around design by committee, that's something that I feel like is talked a lot about. In the more traditional sense, there's the client and then there's the people who are doing the work and there's all these jokes and stuff about how you don't want to get the client too involved, and you don't want them to be making the decisions. I'm just curious if anybody has done work around that and knows what that looks like in an actionable way?

Like real co-creation of designing together with a client?

Yeah. Or just whoever you're working with. I feel like client is kind of a weird word, but yeah.

Does anybody have a comment?

I don't know if this is the solution, but just in my own practice I feel like I've had the most success—and by success, I mean everybody involved is really satisfied and feels a part of it—when it is a process of co-creation. I think it makes its way into a more complicated system design, like a full website, interaction, or even a publication or system where you're drawing along the way—even like a post-it exercise or a process where everybody is getting their physical body involved and their ideas involved and making some stuff that's really ugly sometimes, so that it can be sorted and become whatever it's meant to be.

I think, personally when I was just starting out, I thought one of the articles said something I resonated with a lot, that they were taught that their portfolio should only be stuff where they made all of it. The more experience I've gotten, the more I feel like people hire me because I've got a team or I know who to bring together to make something with them. It's less about 'for' and more about 'with'. But that almost sounds jargony... I'm curious what other people think. It's hard to let go of the thing that you think is beautiful and show some stuff that's really gross.

I found it really interesting in the reading that talked about designing for mom, how that one woman was working with her mom to design a business card for her shop that she had. Like two years ago she would have just like done it in the way that she thought looked good, which was like sleek, but like doesn't actually fit what her mother's store aesthetic or what she finds interesting. And I think that in a client situation—I'm speaking from a client situation, because I'm working directly with clients all the time—but it's really, a challenge to give up the reins. But it's a really interesting challenge. And I think, is there ways that it could actually get brought into the process at the beginning of a project where you write that in to be part of the process of working together? Because usually you're on such a tight timeframe and you've got to produce these things, and they just want the thing, and then you're done.

So I think working from within an organization, or business, or institution to make space for that would be really interesting. And also that then ties into what we value as like what looks good. And that then ties back into decolonizing design, right? Because there's a sort of standard aesthetic in the industry of what's good design? And so how do we change that and expand that to be more than one thing? Not that it's just one thing, but to be more expansive.

I feel like the question is almost... there's a little bit of an existential threat in it, in a way. This idea of giving up the reins to the person that you're working with and letting them kind of be the ones to take the lead on the design decisions, and even this idea of judgment. In the very last paragraph, they said something about how judging is a form of violence, which makes it very hard to make design decisions if that's the perspective you have. It just makes me think, well, what is the role of the designer then? Are we just technicians to execute this plan with the skill set that we have? I don't know where the roles of judgment and 'expertise' lands in that context?

That caught me too. I was just thinking.... how violent have I been in my past? In my experience, the majority

of my work has been so one-on-one with clients that it's hard for me to think about doing something on my own and just showing it to them. Even in school, we did a lot of either really specific research based projects that had to speak to a certain voice, or we had clients that we were working with in school. And for me, I've always seen it as the amplification of the client. I'm here to distill what they're thinking and then help amplify that voice. And I mean, it does end up with a lot of work where I'm like, this isn't really my style, but I still consider it successful because it communicated their concepts.

But there's stuff I've done for work that I'm like, I have no idea where to start this process for coming up with something that's literally somebody else's artwork. How do I start to visualize that? It's just been so much one-on-one with clients and having to meet with them at so many points throughout and having this list of questions to always check back in on. I think it's an interesting thing because I'm always afraid of being judged. I mean we all judge everybody, but in those moments I'm the one that's always afraid that I didn't fully or successfully create something based off of their original concepts. A lot of times I'm just like, the majority of our work is going to be you telling me what you do not like. Because it's so much easier to pick out what you don't like versus specifically verbalizing exactly how you see this process. So that's been my experience.

I think what I was hoping is that we would sort of have this kind of definition of what decolonizing design is and the different ways that people talk about it or that it can be accessed so that we can try and dismantle it. And then I want to save time for talking about actual action. So how are people actually trying to address these things within the resources that we have and the institutions that we're in? And how can we keep pushing that?

Did someone say anything about inclusive design as far as kind of being a definition? Because you're including all different types of voices and cultural importance, other than what we're kind of used to.

Did we already write listening? Active listening I think is important. Maybe that is on there?

I don't know if somebody said it, but accessibility probably should be included in there.

I think also, there's kind of two ways of coming at it. And for me, it seems like it's like through education, like Dori is doing, for example. So either as a student or as an educator, there's different ways that you can address decolonizing design. So there's that side. and then there's also through practice and process so as a practicing designer, how are you practicing? What content are you putting out in the world? How are you engaging with people and things like that.

I was wondering if you would include sort of like, client relations, in addition to that? When you say practice, you also mean like, running the business, or working with clients and kind of building that community or like, just changing the mindset?

No, I mean, like, the whole thing. Your practice as a designer working in the world, and like all the things that are involved in that. Who you're hiring, what jobs you're taking on, all that.

Right. I just think of this process as something that needs to kind of go across everything. Like, we can change it in education, but if the the business side doesn't change it'll be tough. But but maybe changing education is the path to change it.

Yeah. I wasn't trying to say either/or with those things. But for me, it seems like those are the ways in. And I definitely think that they're both very important. With education it's because the designers will be getting out into the world and going off, and then how are they integrating into places? Dori said something—this might have been actually through a talk I listened to—but she was saying I want my students to get out there in the world and not necessarily go work for Greenpeace, but go work for oil companies or something like that. So that you can take your knowledge that you have and your way of engaging

with this sort of decolonized design practice to an organization and push from the inside. And I think that's really important.

I tell my students this all the time. I'm like, 'you know I want you to be able to get out of here and go and get resources. I want you to be able to make money. And in order for you to do that, I feel like I need to teach you this certain way of making of doing design. And it's a game and I want you to know that you're playing a game. And you can go and play it, but push from the inside, or take those resources and do other things with them.' Because that's just the reality in the world that we currently live in. But if we educate people and continue to do that, then the world will change. And we won't have to play that game anymore. Hopefully.

I have a question about that then, because we're talking about resources and the amount of time and money there is for something. And it's one thing for all of us to be having this conversation, but with the model of design we have with, we're working for a client, or we're working for someone who hires us, or is giving us money. How would you all say that we encourage this kind of thought and decolonizing in the people who are asking for the work? An example of the person who is making this design with their mother, they want to make it all sleek, originally and you know, follow certain design trends, but how do we justify those design trends in a way where they're not just trends and that people are asking for work want things that are that are decolonize, that are expanded, that don't really fit what we've seen before.

Intuitively, it seems like that starts with education, right? So you have people, new grads, come out with a more expanded idea of what's cool and interesting in design and then eventually that would change the broader trends or whatever. But I don't know as a more than that?

Well, I was gonna say that, it's weird because in terms of talking about decolonizing design we're also trying to talk about kind of steering away from capitalism. But then at the same time it's this weird loop where capitalism

is kind of feeding this weird monster of, say if there is a new group of graduates who come up with awesome, cool design concepts and then that kind of has this grassroots type of movement where you have a lot of followers, then it seems as if big designer firms or corporations will see that those trends taking on and then they'll go ahead and adopt those trends or adopt some of those people from those collectives. Yeah.

Very true, happens all the time. I mean, yeah, I am very interested in design that's not in service to capitalism, but that's not often the type of design that you make any money doing so that's not great. But yeah, I think that that's the problem, right? But if we expand what's valued as good in design to be many different things, many different ways, then it's harder for them to pinpoint something that they can just grab and use. Maybe?

I think also an interesting point to that is what we consider quote unquote 'good' in design, has also been a lot of stuff that people stole.

Oh, yeah, for sure.

It got popular because it technically wasn't good design, but because people got bored with what was good or that narrative started to shift. My husband works at Nike and so we talk about this a lot. That there is this role of, he's going back and forth on this, I'm part of like a gigantic capitalist venture, and trying to move change from the inside. And I work at a nonprofit, the the money issue is definitely there.

I fully stan for Dori. I just love her so much. And she was talking about if as in education, we don't educate in graphic design, specifically stripping away the voice of the artist. And we also teach designers how to do multiple types of design, then also have their own voice, then the options for that kind of, yeah, I'm gonna be part of a collective and make things on my own. And then if people see that and they want to hire me for that, then you can make money off that. It doesn't always happen that way, but it still gives you a little bit more of that choice.

Yeah, and I would also say that every decision that you make, and I think this is touched on in the text too, every micro decision is an opportunity. And so it doesn't have to be viewed as this huge, big thing like how am I going to push this massive monster? There's ways of addressing it and handling it in all the decisions you're making in relationship to design, and how you're engaging with clients and what questions you're asking them. Yeah.

So, we've got fifteen minutes left, I am interested in talking about actions. And so we've kind of talked about, why is it important? What is it? And so what do? How do we do it? What do we do to make it happen? Dori is doing it through this revision of pedagogical models working within this institution. She's helping to really shift decision making, by hiring indigenous people to be the people that are in power making decisions. So they're changing classes, they're introducing new types of projects and reshaping the ethos of that program. So she's doing that through her education angle and through talking. And the designers in the other interview are sort of tackling it through their different practices. So whether they're artists or teachers through collaboration and things like that.

So I'm interested in what within the different roles that you guys find yourself in—I know a lot of you are students—are there things that you want to see happening within the institutions that you're in, or the situations that you're in, that could result in actions? And how do we use the resources that we just have now, you know? How do we use what we have to move forward from this point on?

I mean, I think on an individual level, I'm a huge proponent of research. I see a lot of people designing for things that they don't seem to understand the community of. For example, I live in northeast Portland, and every few months a high-end restaurant will just pop up with this sort of branding that doesn't really fit anything around or any of the people around. And that could be so, so easily avoided if someone took the time to find out anything about this area. If you're going to put something in an area that's maybe predominantly black residents don't use

all European looking people in the stock photos for the website. It can be very, very simple to at least do something on the individual level.

Another thing education-wise is Briar [Levit] does a really good job with her History of Modern Design class. I think that was the first time I'd ever even seen a Native American designer presented in anything. There's so much out there and I think if we could have maybe a special studies course taught by... I don't know I'm trying to think of an example... Maybe some kind of craft that is non-Eurocentric that we can just get some more exposure to. Because really, there's so much out there and a lot of it is not words on a poster in a Bauhaus style. We don't need to have just that.

I just wanted to add to your first point that, I wonder if the designer that did that project was a black designer or not. And if not, maybe, I think that's important, is thinking about who are you hiring to do certain projects?

So that's where the issue really is with decolonizing design is, that it's very much from a white perspective. There are no diverse perspectives going on there in the design process. Speaking for my own indigenous, my community that I'm a part of now, those positions, those opportunities rarely ever show up. In addition to that, it's already tough to find indigenous Native American designers in general. Those who are working at a professional level, for whatever reasons, we're less than what, one percent, two percent, in the design area. I mean, I gave up on that dream. Luckily, I found a job that I do enjoy, but I still find time for design on the side. But the big chunk of it is just to decolonize design, you need to include more people into those communities and those networks.

If you're in an office with just white people with that white lens, you're not going to get a very diverse product at all. Those perspectives that are missing from that won't be heard, won't be seen. And also, for example, this group is predominantly white people. There's not a whole lot of diverse perspectives going on. So you guys are talking about decolonizing design, but there's not that perspective there to kind of add stuff.

So it's tough and it's weird being in Portland. Being an indigenous person in Portland has been, at this low level, kind of annoyance that just is the baseline across. Because our design and our stuff is appropriated all over the place. Pendleton's big and huge out here. They have their own fake issues going on. And then they partner with Nike and Nike does an N7 thing. And it's like, wait, what's going on, but at the same time, they're also profiting off of Redskins merch? I mean, that's changed—just now—but they haven't made a statement. So there's a lot of stuff going on there.

Most of the time when I see design or when I see it used in capitalist systems, it's like, where does the old white guy prosper? Where's he getting money from? You know? So it's interesting. It's interesting. Anyway.

Yeah, thank you for sharing. It's incredibly problematic for sure. And I think, if only we were having these conversations years ago, but at least they're happening now. Yeah.

And also, just to add a way to have a solution is just to include more people of color designers within your circles. I actually got a chance to listen to the “Where Are the Black Designers?” panel and so it was really interesting hearing someone say that having to be... I guess this person was just talking about how they were living in Chicago. And that area being predominantly black, and also just trying to get more black people within the design field. But somehow a majority of the design industry in Chicago was still predominantly white. And pretty much what happened when she was taking these surveys was figuring out that a good chunk of these designers don't have access or don't really know a lot of people of color designers, BIPOC designers. And so that's pretty much why the whole design industry over there is predominantly white. Solely because in terms of getting these jobs, it's a word of mouth kind of thing. And who's ever close in proximity and whoever you know, is able to get these jobs because of that.

Right.

Yeah, I am always a proponent of being an active participant in these communities. Not so much to be... I struggle with the word inclusive, because that kind of insinuates or lends to the idea that the white culture is the main culture and they're trying to be inclusive to these other people. So I hesitate in using that word. But I think that if you want to create this diversity, a true diversity, a true collaboration, it's being an active participant in the community, whether it be a larger community, a small community. But actually engaging these people on the level and doing that collaboration there on the ground level, not just bringing them in as a consult once you've already done all the work, which is what what I get a lot in my line of work. It almost feels tokenizing at that point. So it needs to be a true collaboration. For sure.

One of my favorite things that Dori said at the “Where Are the Black Designers?”, because I was at that too, was she was, and multiple people brought this up, but about if you’re trying to be inclusive or diverse then it’s already a misstep, because if you’re trying to do that, then you’re just—what’d she say—one of the panelists said, I don’t want to be the black sprinkled into your white culture, I want to participate in creating a culture. And if you have people, if you’re interested in actually having a culture that works together, then, you know, she was like, forty percent is minimum for having BIPOC designers or employees. You can’t expect to have any kind of true culture that doesn’t manifest a kinda of tokenism unless, you’re looking at a minimum of forty percent.

Then that question happens on its own. You’re not trying to force anything, you’re actually letting people be themselves. You’re not policing. And what she was talking about was how white culture polices black behavior. And that is just part of this system of aggression, also micro-aggressions. If you can’t feel like you can be yourself as an artist and then somebody says, ‘What do you think?’ And you’re like, ‘Uh, you know, what am I gonna say...’ It doesn’t create an atmosphere where people can truly feel uninhibited and honest.

They don't feel like they can fail the same way. Because white people, we can fail one hundred times and be like, 'Cool, that's awesome, we learn stuff.' But from her perspective, it was like, if I fail, I feel like I don't get another chance. And so I lose part of that learning aspect because I don't have the same rights to fail.

Yeah, I think that that's, that was like one of the most profound things for me, it's how many times I've looked at my situation and been like, 'Oh my god, this is totally inclusive,' from my own very shallow white perspective. When in reality, I was like, 'Please come into my whiteness.' It wasn't actually inviting somebody else's culture. I was like, 'You participate in mine.'

Also, I just wanted to say about thinking about diversity at the workplace and where we are in America. There was also a point that was brought up in that panel about too much diversity. And then if there's too much diversity, then it seems as if it's just completely overrun by BIPOC creatives, which, technically, it's not a bad thing at all. I guess I feel like there can be, especially in the US, when you look at where BIPOC people are like peppered in and out of the United States. I feel like there's going to be different ratios of what diversity looks like in the workplace.

For example, my dad is in North Dakota, Williston, and there's a small amount of black people there. And so he's normally the only black person working over there. I don't expect a whole chunk of black people to work at that specific place, because when you look at the count of black people or BIPOC people there's not many of them. So I think there is there is going to be different ratios of what diversity looks like in the workplace. But I think, it shouldn't be a bad thing that that there should be a lot of BIPOC people in a working place.

Yeah. And I would say specifically in positions of power that can make decisions, because that's really I think where change can happen. You know? Yes, all the decisions you're making are micro decisions that can affect change. But if you're talking about big change, the positions of power are the ones that have that control.

We have one minute left you guys. That just flew by, we could make a whole course about this. [Group Laughter] Which I would love to be part of—and just in. Does anyone have anything to add at the end? I hope that it was somewhat nice and informative to be with each other and have these conversations and I hope that we keep having them. I know that I definitely am in my place of work. And that's been really interesting. Yeah, so I hope that, you know, we continue, it continues to happen. And I'm really excited about the Design Book Club for continuing to have this conversation and inviting different people in to talk. And I'm excited to see where it goes.

Yes, thank you, Kim, so much for joining us. And thank you all, for being here. We're gonna send a link to the chat with a little survey you can take. We'll also email it to you. But it's to help us with improving the experience for future attendees. Hopefully you will be one too. So thank you!

Thanks so much, you all.

Thank you.

Thank you.

July Readings:

Khandwala, A. (2020, February 20). “Decolonizing Means Many Things to Many People”—Four Practitioners Discuss Decolonizing Design [Web log post]. Retrieved from <https://eyeondesign.aiga.org/decolonizing-means-many-things-to-many-people-four-practitioners-discuss-decolonizing-design/>

Saporta Tagiuri, L. (2019, August 23). Dori Tunstall: Decolonizing Design [Web log post]. Retrieved from <https://a-d-o.com/journal/dori-tunstall-decolonizing-design-interview>