

## **Transcript of the Unlearning Channel episode: Bystander Intervention**

This episode of the Unlearning Channel was co-produced by CommunityWise Resource Centre.

Jacquie & MelVee: welcome to the unlearning channel.

Jacquie: This recording of the unlearning channel takes place on traditional territories of the Blackfoot which includes Siksika, Pikani and Kainai and well as the T'suu T'ina, Dene, and the Stony Nakota First Nations, which includes Wesley, Chinaki and Bearspaw. Treaty 7 is also home to the Metis Nation of Alberta region 3. We'd also like to recognize that there are other First Nations, Inuk, Metis, and Indigenous people of other lands who live, work and play here in Mokhinstsis.

MelVee: It is imperative to speak honestly about the colonial processes which have and continue to this place indigenous people from their lands and work together to dismantle the oppressive structures which are complicit in these abuses in a spirit of healing Truth and Reconciliation it is vital to acknowledge the continued struggle for indigenous rights here on Turtle Island.

M: so, on the unlearning Channel today is the amazing Thulasy Lettner. she is here to interview Jacquie and Mel Vee today so with no further ado let's get into it.

Thulasy: thanks so much for having me I'm really glad to be back on the podcast and yeah interview is maybe a strong word, I think.

Thulasy: I love to

Mel Vee: no pressure

T: I love to just be in conversation with you two about something that's been coming up a lot in our work Community Wise around anti-racist organizational change in AROC. So as part of this work myself and many of the people that are involved in the advisory group you two being very committed members of that group are kind of going out into the community not just through AROC but in your own capacities as well, to talk to people about our lived experiences of racism and other intersectional marginalities. And so work was showing up at panels, presentations, we're running workshops and trainings, and these are not the best places for us all the time, in fact most of the time. We could be the middle of a session and have inside a session talking about racism have racism happen to us, be directed to us and so you know we handle those things as best we can and we'll talk a little bit about what that's like our lived experiences of this of being in the front of the room and those in that role but interestingly after all of these sessions I'm getting calls from people that

are saying 'We want to know how to better handle those situations. What should we do?' Lots of requests for bystander training and I understand that bystander training is important and useful a useful thing for people to undertake but it's also very frustrating to receive such requests because I you know when talking to other folks that are out there doing this we just kind of kind of look and we kind of think, 'Well, just do something.' You know like this is we all are all in that room and we know something has just happened there's been an act of racial aggression and often nothing happens.

M: Mm-hmm.

T: Or the person that is the victim of the aggression has to has to deal with it. Which introduces a whole bunch of other consequences so today I just wanted I thought it would be great to take an episode at the unlearning channel to talk about this from the perspective of the folks that are being invited more and more so to bring diversity to these conversations

J & M: (laughing)

T: And what that what that experience is actually like what it's like

M: Absolutely.

T: so I wanted to start I wanted to start with if not examples but kind of breaking down the anatomy of the scene

M: 100%

T: a little bit right so I can throw it to one or both of you to maybe share a little bit about what it's like when you're in this situation

M: I think this idea of training or bystander training is interesting. I didn't have black people training and I'm expected to deal with my life as a black person so I think it's interesting that there's this that there's this notion that you'll be able to train away the feelings of discomfort that will that will come along with being in conversations that are directly challenging white supremacy because that's actually what's going on here is where we're decentering experiences of whiteness and centering ourselves so I sometimes the value of believing that that you can be properly trained in that way are kind of shirking the responsibility. Because I think you can get you can get ample training in in areas of diversity or how to be a good bystander and still and still do nothing in in that moment because

perhaps your life circumstances have never placed you in a position where your humanity has been directly under attack or under assault

T: Can you at like take us through when that's like when you're when you're there. When you're when you've been invited into a space what do you what is it like?

M: Well I will use the example of the training that that we facilitated together, and it was so in essence what had happened I was this was my bio. I was sharing my bio about me being a queer, black person and a white man in the audience asks "Well, do you mean queer as in happy or do you mean queer as in like gay?" and I said, "Well, bisexual, yeah." And he was like oh that's gross or disgusting something like that and I was like, 'Nope!' This is this is not happening here and so I you know I attempted to formulate this as best as I as I as I could and Thulasy backed me up on it but in that moment I knew that I could not let that go. Somebody was directly challenging my humanity and it wasn't just an innocent it wasn't an innocent question which is actually what some of the people in the room had said to me afterwards or had said when we were debriefing a little bit was he maybe he just didn't understand. So in essence I asked him to leave I said he wasn't he wasn't welcome here because he dug in his heels is what happened, and I decided that that was this was not the forum for him to do that. My humanity isn't up for debate and I think that that's what this you know what these really show me when I'm you know when I'm training and facilitating is my humanity is not up for question and so I asked him to be to be removed he left and we ended up trying to debrief a little bit and it's important to keep in mind that we were there for training on Diversity, Inclusion and Equity in the Arts and so we had we had no prior preparation that we would need to be debriefing anyone's experiences nothing like that. So here we are you know facilitating this training that is related to the arts and now we're having to debrief this this you know awful experience that has happened we didn't have training to do that but we had to figure it out on the spot. And so some of the people afterwards had said that they just didn't know I just didn't know what to do in that circumstance which presumes that I knew what to do in that circumstance or that I should be expected to know and carry everybody else in that room and to me it was like no this this is something that needed to be addressed. It would have been psychologically damaging for me to have not to not spoken up or ask that person to leave to leave the space. So, this is this is why I think it's a problematic idea that that these things can be trained away

T: Yeah, I'm gonna stop you there I want to ask Jacquie now if you wanted to share an experience you've had as well and then I'd love to get into you know talking more closely about what's happening in that moment

J: I'm gonna talk about a training that I did with Sameen from AROC as well and it was about it was with a board and we had to discuss just go through intersectionality, how the organization looked like and how they were committed to how in what ways they were either optically committed to diversity. We just talked about diversity wanted to move towards inclusion and equity, but we kept getting side railed by certain individual who had a lot of power in the organization. And we both, Sameen and I, tried to steer it back to the agenda, to the PowerPoint that was presented and everything we said I'm not even exaggerating it was like every sentence had a "brilliant idea" to derail to another interesting topic that was really, really important. Organizations sometimes can become used to a certain dynamic that perpetuates when they have meetings and so then when we're invited in, we just get swept into that. And we might not have had an idea that could have happened. Getting into those conversations we need to have some sort of at least people in in the group that can help us keep on track. Whether they're plants whether they're we speak to them beforehand I know we even tried doing that, but nobody said anything. And what's really frustrating is that like we're just stunned. I still think about it today and it was like more than a year ago and it and it never felt ...you know

T: Well I want to get to that that that feeling that you're still carrying. You're both still carrying to this day. It's not like, you know, we could just leave it in that room back there. So if we slow down that moment cause all of these things seem to go by really fast and in some cases people will be like I'd you know 'I'd freeze. 'I didn't know what to do.' You're going home on transit later that day and you're like 'Oh I should have said,' 'Should have done this, that or the other' often not more time not just not even not even aware that something had something harmful had happened in that room. But we walk away carrying that with us is like an emotional kind of scar. Can you explain a little bit what feels like what does it feel like in your body? What does it feel like emotionally when you're when you're there you're in the middle of that moment, what does it feel like from your perspective?

J: Well for me my mouth gets dry

T: Mm-hmm.

J: And I try to be polite about bringing it back but now I've developed some sort of muscle to least say I think we need to get back to what we came here to discuss. That's off topic, but even now I still it makes me breathe shallow and I just feel tense and confused because we were invited to share the learns and experience that we have in an in the framework that we work on and research and look up and prepare for and yet I think mmm in that situation and many others I think I think white fragility holds us hostage in being able to speak up and being able to really say why are we here and what is taking up the space at this moment

T: mm-hmm

J: and it's and hold a I think holding our mirror to that, and now in retrospect, is probably the what I will do next time but how I feel when that happens is just paralyzed. And then I have to go 'oh wait, these are things I need to do so I have a checklist of counter moves? yeah that's what I need to have prepared. It's kind of like going to karate class.

T: Just to do a presentation

M: Myself, I feel like the air has been taken out of my chest. It's a very physical sensation and feeling. And I feel I feel suddenly like I'm the only person in the room and that I'm completely vulnerable and exposed because now my blackness or my queerness or, you know, whatever other marker of identity that that is you know being publicly mocked or being you know publicly dismissed, now everybody can see that. And I have and I and I feel like I have nowhere to go

T: mmm-hmm

M: Right it's a feeling of being of being trapped. But because I know I have nowhere to go I have to do something in in that moment because if I if I don't it's very it's very dangerous to my mental health. So, it's a very very physical sensation and it's and it's very um it's an isolating moment.

T: Yeah, I think that when we look at the anatomy of that scene in slow motion it's really interesting to see the qualitative difference in the emotional experience. Because when I do trainings around anti-racism one of the first questions, I ask the group is if someone if you're in a setting and someone says a racist joke, what do you feel and how do you feel that. And then I get them to report back after they've reflected. And the reactions that you just shared are often what the racialized and indigenous folks will say. They'll say you know there's a strong sense of fear and threat, and unsafety and a wanting to leave. Or to freeze and then the white folks interestingly have like really different emotional reactions. They're embarrassed or they're ashamed or they're angry. For me these emotions are qualitatively different, and they demand different things to happen from different people. You know what I mean?

M: Being threatened or being embarrassed are very different considerations and they come from a very different place in positionality in the world. You know a sense of a sense of threat has physical sensations and stressors. Embarrassment has some of that too, but I can recover a lot faster from an embarrassment and sometimes that embarrassment only registers in that moment and then I move

on. But being feeling threatened because my humanity is being challenged, that can leave that can leave a lasting scar or it can be you know an extension of all of the other ways that you know my humanity has been being questioned or put on the line in the past. It can be you know not even a reopening because that would suggest the wounds healed and that's not the case, but it is it's a continuation. So that's far different from thinking oh that was weird that somebody said that thing yikes versus this is this is this is a continuation of the ways that I'm that I'm dehumanized in this in this society.

T: Mm-hmm

J: I almost find it ridiculous how it happens in and every time like we I think we talked about it before where we prepare and uh and we're ready to you know present our a-game and then it becomes derailed by a question that doesn't have anything to do with what we're discussing. And when it comes to a racist joke in the room, I think again the positionality changes the reaction and strangely it's not often a person who is non-racialized who will say something

T: Mm-hmm I know and it's interesting that that's the work that needs to be done is that for racialized and indigenous folks we need to overcome fear to get to do something about the situation, whereas overcoming discomfort like the bar is lower.

M: Mm-hmm.

T: And I think it should be there should be, so I think everything you've said about positionality really points to this. That there's a there's different roles to play in different bars that need to be kind of overcome.

M: when you have different when you when you don't have skin in the game right? There is there's a different way that that you interact with that situation that that is not going to be on the same level or at the same consideration of somebody who has skin in the game. And in these kinds of circumstances its racialized people BIPOC people who have skin in the game.

T: I want to talk a little bit about what happens if we go back to that scene, and again, in that slow-motion version. There's kind of two things that happen. For me there's the initial aggression and the impact of that which you described really well. Then there's what happens next or what doesn't happen next. And the impact of that

M: (Laughing)

T: Right? So we've just talked about how it's often the onus is now on us to overcome that fear, like you said, go back to like the a game armor that we do when we walk into these sessions with, to know do something and then there are consequences as a result of that. Can you say can you say a little bit about what happens when you take the onus? What the impact of that is or what are some of the consequences that you face. By bringing it up.

J: Well I think if we bring it up instead of somebody within the group then people shut down and they're no longer open to learning, they're no longer open to contributing. Arms get crossed, body language closes up and we have 20 more minutes! And it's still like a long a long 20 minutes where we're just waiting for people to respond to questions that should be really, really simple and how to make organizational change within that organization, and within that group how they're gonna contribute. It just gets quieter.

M: One of the one of the consequences I've noticed for myself is that I automatically feel like the aggressor

T: Mmm.

M: Once I have to stand my ground in these in these circumstances and one thing I noticed, well in this particular circumstance I noticed from the participants is many of them had mentally checked out of the room. So I did in this particular instance I did a couple of spoken word pieces and there was one of the participants who said I couldn't even hear what you said because my mind was still at this other place. So when you know when we're facilitating these workshops and an incident like this happens there to me it's there isn't this simple 'We're gonna get back to where we were at point 1. A. b' you know. It's now the emotional tone of the room has changed and there needs to be an acknowledgement that we may never be able to get we may not we may never be able to get back to where we were in that conversation not emotionally anyways right you can intellectually go through the points which again to me is as a is a problem in these in these circumstances because intellectually understanding anti-racism and challenging white supremacy is not the same as emotionally understanding and feeling that so. I think there is not a lot of competency around organizers and understanding that the emotional temperature changes in that room and it mean it may be changed for the entirety of that period for that workshop for that conference whatever the case may be. And also, and, I want to point this out, that there that there are reactions that are sometimes outright hostile. So, in this particular circumstance there was at least two white people who did speak up to say that guy shouldn't have been kicked out and this was a misunderstanding. So not only did they not have anything to say for my humanity being insulted and to have somebody

make whole you know openly homophobic remarks, but their response was to defend the person who got kicked out. So, I think I think it's also important for us to get over this this notion of white innocence that 'oh my god something's happened and you know the white folks there are just too shy or shocked to do anything.' There is also the actively hostile consequences and reactions to when we do speak and stand our ground.

T: Right. I think that you both bring up the point that when that that space has fundamentally changed Jacquie, you in your case you're where you're just not going to achieve the goals that you wanted that day or for you MelVee, when you're talking about how often the that instance itself will be the one learning point the one moment from the whole session that people will take away from them. I know that's happened to me personally. Um and but it happened off of our backs.

M: mm-hmm

T: Right? And that there seems to be that that's not a great feeling and that's also not a great way to create learning environments. The other thing that I wanted to point out was that in both the examples you brought up by stepping up, and standing your ground, and pointing things out you also risk that sort of the backlash of "You're not professional. We're not going to invite you back because of this."

M: mm-hmm

T: So there's a sort of gymnastics that's going on internally to figure out "What should I do in this situation to deal with what happened, but also like you know, not totally compromise my career, like my profession, my art, like whatever that might be right? So, there's that that sense too.

M: And I believe that's precisely what happens when the organizers are the or the people who are inviting us in not providing a framework or nurturing an environment where we're people who are attending these workshops are these sessions understand the risk involved understand what the what the goals are to me from what I've seen these you know anti-racist workshops are often they're offered as you know, in addition to something else, they're kind of tacked on or slapped on and too often they are this check-a-box you know check-a-box diversity approach to what our equity essentially what our equity issues and of course when you're going to a training session that you're simply checking off a box there is not going to be accountability there, right? So I think in a lot of ways we're unintentionally being set up for failure because there's an element of do-good-ism right that these organizations too often have when they're inviting us and you know into these conferences and to do and to do these workshops and that do-good-ism means there is there is no



more thought than 'We're gonna have these people of color come in and talk about anti-racism.' Not to say that that's how anyone ever frames it but that's exactly how it ends up happening.

J: I find that when I it's I'm in that situation I'm wondering exactly what you said about the organizers who invited us into that space. 'Who invited me here and how I did it get to this point?'

M & T: (laughing)

J: What was their purpose? And knowing who invited us in and the conversations that usually precede that training involve discussion of discomfort, a discussion of what does anti-racism mean and what type of accountability will you be agreeing to when you sign us up for this? I think there needs to be more scaffolding in understanding what this training means and not just to have it as a one-off but have it as a precursor to a relationship, an ongoing relationship. I don't know if I sign up or want to do any more you know solitary trainings for organizations because they don't really do anything. Unless if there is some sort of evaluation that continues after that, like whether it's like immediately after and then maybe six months down the road so that like they say they we understand what they want to commit to after that process.

M: Absolutely.

J: What they learned.

M: Before we switch gears a little bit to make sure that we cover what we need to as Jacquie was talking I realize you know what would be on my wish list of things that organizations can do before they invite anti-racist trainers is to have a dedicated session through their own people around tolerating discomfort right? And what that what that looks like and preparing people mentally in in that way. Because I think they're because we live in a society that centers whiteness and the protection and comfort of white people, but I think before we are even in these spaces there needs to be training for the staff around tolerating their own discomfort. To make sure that we cover what we want to cover I was thinking we could change gears a little bit and talk about diversity for optics and whiteness.

T: Right, well I think you both kind of were going there this idea that I think increasingly now there's a desire for these public events especially like panels for example to really represent a cross-section of identity. And I can see how if I already give people benefit the doubt that that's coming from a good place. You know it's great to have platforms from which racialized, indigenous folks people that live at different intersections -- can share their lived experiences I think we need to hear those stories

because we have not heard them for so long. However, I think what you've both pointed to is that it's just not enough to like insert, you know, checkbox-diversity into your event or your programming your own training your professional development training or whatever it might be where you're inviting folks in. It's a very vulnerable position to be in, to go in and talk about your lived experiences. Yeah, what does that mean when we walk into an event or wherever we are, workshop, or panel -- what does it mean to present your lived experience in in that culture of whiteness that you walk into?

J: I think Dr. Derald Wing Sue from the Teacher's college at Columbia University I think Dr. Derald Wing Sue from the Teachers College at Columbia summed it up best when he was doing a speech at Stanford University on Implicit Bias and Microaggressions. So, what a leadership group of homogeneously white cis het men do, specifically as a group of University deans he was presenting to on "Diversity" that Sue was referring to, is give 3 key environmental messages to Black, Indigenous and Racialized folkx, prospective faculty or students in that case: Those messages being:

1. As black, indigenous, racialized people, you are not welcome
2. If you choose to come here you will not feel comfortable
3. If you persist in coming here there is only so far up the hierarchy you will go. These

organizations are only looking for ways to subvert hiring people of color and indigenous people and bringing on racialized staff and just have the programming present what the organization stands for. And I think that's the problematic part about how often organizations that look to commit to diversity for optics fail to see that that is not empowering people. That is not giving self-representational, decision-making power to racialized and indigenous people in these organizations. It's only perpetuating white supremacy of how they've been staffing their organization.

M: But do they really fail to see it or is this exactly how power is maintained in a white supremacist structure. Because I feel as you've pointed out, to me where equity is most important and valuable is exactly in positions of leadership and authority. And when and when white folks are being trained to speak the language of these things and have no real intention or desire to have people of colour in these positions of power it's giving the appearance and then that that initial system of white supremacy is maintained.

J: 100% I've been to so many of these trainings as working in equity, diversity and inclusion and going to these provincially-led conferences where I talked to people who have organized these conferences themselves and they will say that they don't have any racialized or Indigenous people on staff. This is a joke that people say on the microphone! Non-racialized people saying, 'Look if you don't get it, if you don't get Equity and diversity and inclusion, great! That's job security for me! It's feeding into exactly what you just said, Mel.

T: mm-hmm yeah, I think I mean I don't get to technical here but from AROC, when we look at organizations and we look at organizational development there are these very clear barriers. So, when an organization is willing to talk diversity and inclusion it allows them to stay in a very, very comfortable place where not a lot has to change and a lot can change maybe at a surface level like you said, at a programmatic level. There's a great blog that I follow it's called Fake Equity and they have a great they have a great post about what's called "Programmatic Racial Equity" where an organization will build their programming from the outside will look incredibly diverse. And they may have frontline staff implementing that...maybe not even frontline staff, maybe frontline volunteers that are racialized and indigenous that are, you know, executing that programming so it looks great, feels great but hasn't really fundamentally changed the structure of the organization. And then we have when I go into trainings because I don't do diversity and inclusion trainings. I'm not interested in that. I will only talk about that if they're willing to talk about how systemic racism and other systemic discriminations are the key barriers to achieving any sort of diversity inclusion goal and that equity is both the road there and the goal.

M: If you're not talking about equity, you're not talking to me anymore.

T: Right so I feel like, you know, it's very comfortable and very easy to invite someone to talk about diversity but when I say well, I want to talk about anti-racism...do you still want me to come? Because like that I'm not willing to talk about anything else. Like is your organization ready for that? I ask that question.

M: And you know returning to your original question. In some ways I feel like I'm being paraded around, right? It's like here's you know we've invited this this black person and I check off you know I check off a few diversity boxes at that and I'm feeling more and more the older, doing these trainings and you know maturing and myself as a person as an artist that how many how many times do I have to say this stuff how many times do my experiences need to be paraded out or trotted out before any meaningful any meaningful change happens? So, more and more I feel I feel of being on display. And I mean, you know, as an emerging you know when I when I considered myself more of an emerging artist sure I would I would do that because it pays money but now I think you know does this does this organization, does this, you know workshop or whatever, do they deserve my experience? Do they deserve to have to have the benefit of what I have to offer because I do see it as an offering now and if that if that offering is to simply uphold these power structures that I'm that I'm attempting to change in my own life and practice I don't want to be a part of that anymore.

T: So, as a question we you know we've been talking about what it feels like kind of the bigger systemic issues in diversified sort of programming level what MelVee you kind of talked about early, but like what are we looking for? What do we want these organizations to be responsible for when they bring us into their spaces?

J: Well one, I think a great time to come into a training is when they're going to be rewriting their strategic plan if it already has if it hasn't been fleshed out in in addressing anti-racism in actively integrating not just HR changes of hiring programming and tacking it on into the HR department but really integrating it management into how that organization will fulfill a mission of equity. We'll attach the onion on onto this podcast, but I think a lot of organizations want to be able to look at how marketing, how HR, how programming how a very superficial layers of the onion feed into diversity equity inclusion. Inclusion. Inclusion into what, though really? Because at the center of it is how are they serving their mission statement, which needs to be looking at and addressing anti-racism and inequity from an intersectional lens and not just not just a feminist lens, not just one that serves their the mainstream of their staff but I think really looking beyond what's easy, pushing into discomfort because if they just want comfort I like you said when organization asks for inclusion and equity or diversity trainings and they're maybe they're not willing to talk about anti-racism you'd like not to show up because that's just not a good use of time on energy because you know that room will not be prepped for discomfort. mm-hmm

T: I've definitely had people say no but when people say yes, I'm starting to get better at saying 'Well, do you know what that means? Like do you know what the consequences of that are and like how are you gonna be prepared for that?'

M: right, Well, I'm thinking of even the language because language is so vital, in my opinion, diversity and inclusion maintain a distinction between us and them. And it's that core of who the "US" is that's inviting these others into. To me that says everything you need to know about an organization. 'We're including them. We want to have more of them.' So, you maintain the distinction between who is at the at the core of the center of power and who is and who is outside of that, right?

In terms of your question, Thulasy, about you know what needs to happen to facilitate to effectively facilitate these conversations I need to know what an organizer is going to be responsible for in these in these circumstances, knowing that, likely, the conversation is going to be derailed or feelings are going to be hurt, who is going to be responsible for moderating that, who's gonna be responsible for checking in to that. I want to know who I want to know what is that organization's commitment to having people of color or other historically marginalized groups of people in positions of power and authority. If you're not talking power and authority, you're also not saying

anything to me, right? And so, I need to know what their responsibility is going to be from the outset. I need to know how the participants have been prepped for this session. I need to know what kind of framework is in place. I need to know what their intentions are. If I don't know these things now, I don't want to be a part of that training anymore because these trainings cannot just be tacked on to say that we're doing this 'diversity' thing and to me these are fundamental responsibilities because organizers do have a responsibility to us when we're going into these spaces that are potentially hostile. Particularly if it's compulsory training, right? And sometimes that needs to be the case because people will not necessarily take this up on their own but if this is compulsory training how are the participants being properly prepared for that. So if I don't know those four things anymore I think I think we're being set up for failure and I also want to point out that when these training sessions are not successful or not successful in the way that perhaps the organization had intended there is a real risk of these conversations or these actions being shut down in that organization. 'See we brought in a person of color to talk about this stuff and it was awful and now we don't have to do this anymore.' This was too much for the organization and so that's what's really at stake here when the organizers are not being accountable to us they're also doing a disservice to the organization and the staff in that organization because that may effectively shut down any sort of forward movement. So, I think organizing organizations and you know organizations need to understand what's truly at stake here and I don't think I don't think sometimes they do.

T: Well it's interesting I think there is that difference we can draw that distinction between being not racist than being anti-racist. And being not racist is being the organizer or being the participant in the room that doesn't say anything. 'Well, I didn't see anything wrong,' and not doing anything whereas the anti-racist is going to attempt to do something to intervene and not be a passive bystander but being active bystander. And I'm not saying here that it's about being perfect a perfect bystander because it's not impossible. I mean we can all talk about that from our own experiences and privileges that we hold where we've misstep. But I think central to an anti-racist ethic is taking action and trying to learn from it. And so, in the example that you just provided, MelVee, it's like what is the organization do afterwards after a harm has been done. It's not liked the cause is lost. There's still a lot that can be done to learn from that and build the muscle, the discernment to know what to do next time and I feel like that's where the opportunity is lost and where I feel like anti-racism provides these helpful tools like a to do the action reflection praxis like that is part of the work, instead of just being not racist.

M: I want to make sure we don't we don't lose this this topic of conversation: the difference between racialized folks as bystanders versus white folks as bystanders. so, I'll let you take it, Thulasy.

T: yeah, we talked a lot we talked a little bit about that earlier around positionality and like the different experience and the different emotional bars that we have to jump up and over to do something. There's a there are really helpful tools online like that that that can help you know understand like what the things are I could do like the five D's of effective bystander being an active bystander like Direct, Distract, Delegate, Delay, Document. These are really well outlined by [ihollaback.org](http://ihollaback.org). I definitely recommend folks check out their website. Got a great little video got some great tools to describe those. For me it's less about I think, that some of these are quite—I don't want to say common sense but they're not they're rather intuitive. What concerns me more is that it seems that in the moment, white folks are not able to even just take the most intuitive action because of white fragility, because of you know, their positionality in the in the situation. where it is more of an embarrassment and less of a fear experience and so that's where that's where I like I love the tools I think there's a lot that could be trained around those five D's but the central question for me is like 'Why don't people do anything?' and I think we also talked a little bit earlier about how well racialized and indigenous folks often don't have the option of not doing anything out of a sense of self-preservation, protection they need to do something. They face the consequences of doing that thing and so it's like a double blow. Yeah so, I feel like there's some there's some differences there.

J: I think the difference that I've noticed with racialized and non-rationalized bystander behavior that I've heard is that bystander passivity increases with the larger the number like 2 or 3 more people higher than that people just become more passive. With groups of non-racialized people when you brought up a racist joke or a comment is made, not wanting to be the wet blanket is what I've heard as the justification for silence. And I'm shocked to hear that when comes from somebody who does our diversity, inclusion, equity work and I think there's a way to be able to say what needs to be said when you feel your heart pounding in your throat and after something's been said say something because it's not gonna get better by being silent.

M: I think it's important to keep in mind that you don't need to have an eloquent response and I think sometimes that can that can stop people you know particularly academic types you know really thoughtful types of people is there's this idea that we need to have this eloquent response that's going to touch on all these things and one of the most effective bystander interventions that I saw was a coffee shop. I was interviewing I was interviewing a participant for a photo project that I was doing and there was a—so we're both black—and the person beside us was being harassed by an older white man was it was a younger black guy. And the person I was interviewing just said 'This is not okay.' and or like 'Can I help you?' like directly to this to this person so it wasn't anything out of this world you know and I'm sure she was and she said afterwards it's like 'I didn't know what to say but I had to say I had to say something' and I said the thing that came to my mind and so that was

that was such a powerful moment for me because it gave me the permission to speak up in in circumstances where I think 'Well maybe I maybe I'm not allowed to say to say something.' That the that an intervention can be can be that simple it can be as simple as saying 'This is not okay' or 'Can we can we can we go back here' or I wait this there's something not sitting well with this right it's very simple and to me that the call is my heart's racing right or there's something physical happening where I know that something wrong has happened and to say to say something anything is okay, right?

J: Exactly what you just said right there feeling the need to say something beautifully and as a soundbite is often what can keep people from saying anything like even if a microaggression is committed in a workplace or in a social setting and I might not be able to oh my finger on it exactly

M: mm-hmm

J: Being able to say 'I think what you said just now makes you feel uncomfortable I'm not really sure why'

T: mmm that's really good

J: Maybe just looking at that as what it is to open a discussion or just to point it out can be a way of one protecting yourself or being an active ally.

T: I love that both your examples were not inserting yourself as the expert or speaking on behalf of someone else's experience to say you know I know what it's like to live this reality of living you know it's not assuming really more than just that bystander your role which is just like 'I don't feel comfortable' I don't think that's okay like those are really honest I think reactions but they also don't overstep your because there's always a risk and I think that people in with different privileges always fear you know I don't want to speak for someone else or

M: I don't want to say the wrong thing.

T: I don't want to say the wrong thing.

M: I'd rather somebody say the wrong thing trying to do something saying than nothing with this beautiful response crafted in their in their head. I would rather somebody stumble on their words and sound flustered because you know what that's how I feel in that moment I feel flustered I feel fear, I feel all these things and it's not gonna sound it's not gonna sound eloquent and so be that person

who's gonna be flustered and bumble along because that that to me beats doing the nothing that most people will do.

T: And we should reiterate that eloquence is it's part of whiteness. It's a part of a culture of whiteness. So waiting for the right words to arrive is a way of playing into the culture that is creating the situation as is happening. Yeah so interrupting that in and of itself the need for the perfect response. Perfectionism, also another one, yeah.

J: I'd be totally okay with being a bystander that's bumbling.

M: Absolutely.

T: A bumbling bystander. There should be memes on this, yeah.

M: and also, something that I that I that's coming to mind now is when somebody does speak up that can also be a time for you to echo that person, right? When somebody has bumbled and said a thing for this if you haven't been the person doing the bumbling well now you might want to echo the person who had who had the courage to say something and courage I think is to me what is needed in in bystander circumstances. I read this really beautiful quote yesterday about confidence is the is the result or by product of being willing to try a thing and do it badly over and over again but courage is what allows you to do that thing badly over and over again in the first place and so to me that is that is the lens that that is that is effective in in those moments is being courageous enough to say something and to be the person who will who will do something in in that circumstance. To me courage you know I don't even want to use the word trump anymore for obvious reasons but a courage to me is so it's so much more valuable in all other ways than then been confidence or having this you know perfect response that people feel they need to have in those circumstances.

T: And I think that we've talked a lot about the role of the organization, we've talked a lot of what the role of the audience, just kind of in this last little bit, but I feel like there is this role of the moderator and we've talked a little bit about this in the past. Like there is a role for that person to play and I just haven't seen a great moderator in a long time if ever. Can you tell me both like when you're there and you cause relying on the audience also at relying on individuals to step up is it's to like that's asking too much. There is there are these other roles. There is there is the role of a Moderator, for example. What would you love to see moderators do more of?

J: Hold the room accountable by setting up certain guidelines immediately that actually ask the room to participate in that accountability. When we start out these trainings will usually start with



accountable space guidelines and if we collaboratively create them then agreeing on them and having people say that they're also going to be mindful of that.

T: What would you love to see moderators in these situations do?

M: Well they have to set the guidelines for the room as in isn't how are how are they going to be accountable and how is everybody in that space going to be accountable. To me good moderation is about being willing to address those uncomfortable, hard things when they arise because it's I think it's pretty easy to moderate when everything is going well and according to according to the plan because I mean you have a plan right when you when you facilitate when you facilitate something but what is what is your plan for when things go off the rails because in these kind of conversations, likely, that that will happen right and to me this is where the importance of having those having those accountable space guidelines come into play and holding people to that. Because if you if you if you set these guidelines and then nobody is held accountable when things go off the rails then there was no point in trying to establish those in the first place. So that that to me is what a good moderator's role is to hold us accountable in that space when something happens how are they going to how are they didn't debrief that. And it may not, and I don't think it's necessarily appropriate or acceptable to expect the debriefing to happen after or to have or to have the like sometimes they're active listeners who are invited into the space. To me it's not only their role to address these hard things that happen and to and to keep rolling with whatever's just happened because like we touched on earlier when the conversation has been derailed sometimes you may not be able to get people back to that place so how are you going to effectively debrief in that moment when it happens and not just afterwards.

T: mm-hmm

J: I think and be able to have the courage to call things out in the moment is what I hope a great moderator has the ability to do.

T: I feel like there's some simple things moderators can do to elevate the voices of certain people to say, 'I'm sorry you just repeated what she just said' and throw it back to that person. Cutting people off when they take too much time, either asking a question or it's a great you know great moderation actually, the space feel a lot better even though it's kind of this stern, uncomfortable thing to do it actually dissipates the greater discomfort of just waiting for someone to get off their high horse saying really harmful things. I even I even went to a candidate's forum and it wasn't about race and racism but it was about water conservation and someone asked a question to the candidates that I actually thought was quite interesting around water infrastructure but it was clearly

out of scope for the reason the forum was convened and the moderators moderator was like I'm sorry but we're not gonna let that question be answered and we're moving on to the next question and for these reasons. And it was that great example of like that wasn't easy to do, um a lot of people would've been like 'oh that's a good question. Maybe we should just let it go, you know, uh-huh and that's a lot of it I feel like there's a lot of moderation that's like 'Uh...' and in this case it was like no and I even though I was like 'oh that was a good question' I was just really grateful that everything was back on track to where we were supposed to go and so I feel like there's that sense of relief that like well some there was a grown-up in the room. Someone just you know in a way which is which is ridiculous because I feel like this is a disservice to children. That's what I just said but it can it that's the that's the promise of good moderation. Is that it actually improves this space and the learning for everyone,

M: Mm-hmm

J: So, when it comes to moderate when you were talking about moderation as a really, really powerful role in the space when we do trainings or have these discussions there are layers of responsibility to a training that you referred to before, MelVee. That there are there's the organization that needs to be responsible for maintaining safety, if it goes beyond what the moderator can be responsible. If someone who's from outside of the community is getting escalated to a point where the moderator can't bring it back, the organizers the those who invited you into the space need to take control of the room. Whether it's security sometimes it would take that and then the moderator, of course staying on track and then the panelists if it's a panel there needs to be some sort of agreement on what is in line with the topic being discussed, of course, you want to have diverse opinions and perspectives but if somebody is perhaps saying something that is the antithesis of creating safe space or the antithesis of you know the land acknowledgment I don't know like a complete contradiction to what we are trying to create then I think there needs to be some sort of accountability before that table is filled with maybe a memorandum of understanding and I think we'll be talking about that in the next episodes. And then of course the audience so organization, moderator, panelists, audience. Those are the levels of responsibility that need to be addressed before you even bring people into the room.

M: mm-hmm

T: I would just add on to what you said about that kind of agreement between panelists because even in a workshop setting or a training setting I will sometimes purposefully bring a white co-facilitator with me if I'm training an all-white group because there is and then we'll have an agreement between the two of us around like what the roles and responsibilities are in that space.

Because sometimes it's just the things that I'm saying will be heard better if it comes out of someone else's mouth. Or if I if my lived experience sir being challenged someone else can interrupt that. Or if there's a lot of white fragility in the room there's a white person that can say 'These are my experiences white fragility' like these are like kind of owning that, owning and role modeling that like we're not gonna tiptoe around this thing it's a thing and we're gonna talk about that. So I think that there's also that sort of being strategic around who is gonna be in front of the room and sometimes it doesn't always look like do you think it should look and in some like in some cases right you bring in I'll white co-facilitator into an anti-racism training.

M: That's already more than enough in terms of the organizers and we touched on this already I believe it's their responsibility to create the framework and the conditions under which not only the panelists and the moderators will be will be working but to create to create and set the ground in in their own organizations for a culture that allows for that understanding and for and the ability to appreciate and respect and respect the teaching so and that's and that's work that needs to be done prior. That's foundational work and to me that's what the org that's what the organizer is there for to set that that framework well before we ever walk into walk into that space, right? And if organized if organizers are not doing that or not aware of that then they need to check that impulse to have person of color come in and save the organization you know from themselves right? It's not our job to do that so to me organizers need to understand competently the culture of their organization and to set the framework well in advance of us ever being in those spaces.

T: Maybe I'll finish this off on it on a meme because it's my favorite meme and I don't even know how to attribute it to because I think it was overheard at a rally and then memed. Anyway, the idea is that you can bring someone into a broken culture, but you won't fix the culture, you'll break the person.

M: mm-hmm

T: and that's kind of what we're talking about today and what you've just what you just described.

M: absolutely

T: great well thank you both for having me back to have this conversation. For me to kind of pick your brains around this question that keeps arising in my world and there's a lot to build on here, I think like Jacquie, you mentioned like what would an MoU look like between an organization and a presenter, for example. And I think there is room for training as well that can be built off this but what I loved about this conversation is that it really centered your experiences as racialized folks that

are out there doing this work and I think that that was a really great perspective to bring to the bystander kind of intervention kind of world conversation. So, thank you. I appreciate it.

M: It's always a pleasure to have you Thulasy and thank you to all those listening to us at the Unlearning channel.

J: This episode was made possible by a grant from the Calgary Foundation. And this episode was made in support of a project funded through the Government of Alberta's Anti-Racism Community Grant Program.

