

Ep #229: Understanding Privilege and Centering



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Tobi Fairley

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Welcome to *The Design You Podcast*. A show where interior designers and creatives learn to say no to busy and say yes to more health, wealth and joy, here's your host, Tobi Fairley.

Hey friends, I hope you're well. Today I'm bringing you an episode that I hadn't really planned but I just don't want to put off. It's on my mind, it has been for a few weeks, and so I just really want to go ahead and tackle this. So let me say that there is a possibility that this episode could be triggering for you. It could be triggering for you if you're a person of color and it could for sure be triggering to you if you're a white person who is not open to working on becoming more inclusive and more equitable so just know that.

And because as usual I speak a lot of truth on this podcast and I'm very direct, and I don't beat around the bush, this episode will be no different. And that's the very reason why when we talk about things that typically go against comfort, go against a lot of our typical conversations that we're used to in culture, don't sort pussyfoot around issues that make white people uncomfortable then there's a good chance you could be.

Okay, so let me talk to you about my goal for this episode. So, my goal is to help my fellow white women or anyone who experiences more advantage because of their proximity to whiteness, so maybe you're a white passing person even though you're technically other race that is typically marginalized but you get a lot of benefit of what we're going to talk about today which is privilege. And also, you are prone to centering yourself. Now, let me just go ahead and say I am a white person with a lot of privilege and you will hear that a lot today.

And I have many, many times centered myself, sometimes on accident, sometimes before I even knew what centering was. And that's why I'm bringing you this episode today. So, if you are a white person, especially white woman, I've got your back and I hope you can be open to this information. So here we go.

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Now, let me remind you, very most important thing probably, I am not a teacher of diversity, equity and inclusion, although you may learn a lot from today's episode. I am a student of it. And it's really important to me that people teaching, technically teaching for a living, for profit, that are teaching this work are people who have the lived experience of being a person of color. Although the people who usually need this content are those of us who don't have that lived experience. So, I'm going to go ahead and share with you a lot today, a lot of what I've learned.

And for those of you who know me well, or who listen to this podcast regularly, when I say I'm a student, that's not what most people mean when they say student. No. I'm not saying that to put myself on a pedestal at all, or pretend as if I'm somehow morally better than anyone. I'm just saying that I freaking love, love, love learning. And I freaking love, love, love growing. And I especially love doing work on areas that really stretch me and that really make me uncomfortable.

And this happens to be one of those areas and it just happens to be really, really important to me that I do this work. Some of you may say that it sounds like I'm a glutton for punishment for doing the amount of learning that I do. But I would say that learning is my jam and learning hard shit is my jam. So, I bring you this episode today as your peer, not as an expert. I may get some of the stuff wrong, my coaches and experts may say, "You need to go back and talk about this part again, Tobi, because you missed something." And that's all okay.

And that's what I want you to see and learn through this conversation if you have never heard this, or if you've heard it but you didn't really know what it meant. That's what today's episode is about. Okay, so I wanted to share with you, with all of you that are listening, some awareness and some aha moments that I have had recently around the concepts of privilege, of centering, and also the concept of intersectionality that a lot of you may not have even been introduced to yet. You may not know this term and I'm going to give you this term.

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I'm going to help you understand what it means, why it's important, who created it, that kind of stuff. So first let's start with the concept of privilege. So, many white people get really confused about the concept of privilege. And let's just say many people in general but especially many white people. And you may be confused about it too and that's okay. You have an opportunity to get unconfused. So here is what privilege is. If you have privilege and especially unearned privilege like you have if you are white in a white supremacy society or supremacist society.

And I have that privilege, I'm white and I live and operate in a society that is based mostly on white supremacist systems and ideas. That's one way that you have unearned privilege. Or if you are male in a patriarchal society, so you're in the dominant identity of being male in a patriarchal society, same thing, you have unearned privilege. But here is what no one is trying to say when they talk about privilege. No one is saying that your life has been easy or that you haven't experienced bias or prejudice, or that you haven't had to work hard, or that you've had financial privilege.

No one is saying any of that to be true. Privilege does not mean that life has been easy. I hope you're hearing me on this especially when it comes to unearned privilege. Unearned privilege is something that you were born with. And skin color falls into that category and also by nature of identity being the one that is dominant or favored in society, or the culture, or the nation that you live in is also unearned identity. Because it gives you benefits that other people don't share or have if they don't share this identity.

So just to be clear, examples are a white person in a white supremacist society, a man in a patriarchal society, those are unearned privileges that give you benefits that other people don't have if they don't share this identity in this nation, culture, system, society. But again, you did not do anything to earn this privilege if you have it. It was just given to you, born to you. And let me say here that you sharing with other people all the ways that you've had hardships does not help you earn or justify unearned privilege. You cannot earn or justify it.

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And this is the hard, hard part for a lot of people. So, you may be feeling that discomfort I talked about right here because a lot of us think, well, I'm a good person, just because my skin is white or just because I'm a man in a patriarchal society, or fill in the blank of just because I have this privilege. Some of them may be not unearned like I'm a Christian in a mostly Christian society. If you align with, or have, or were given at no fault or no doing of your own, a privilege, trying to explain and justify it by giving the list of hard things you've been through does not ever justify it.

Now, I want to say that I get it is not comfortable having unearned privilege a lot of times especially depending on who you're speaking with about it, or who maybe is speaking with you about it. And I get that it can bring up guilt and it can bring up defensiveness for a lot of people. Let me just say before we go any further, I have almost all privileged identities except for gender. I literally have every single one of them meaning that I have all dominant identities in particular in the United States where I live.

So let me share with you what that means. I am white. I am straight, so I'm not LGBTQIA. I am cisgender. And if you don't know what that means it means I identify as the gender that I was assigned at birth. So, I'm not transgender. I am a Christian which is the dominant religion in the United States. Now, this one has nuance because I'm a progressive Christian. So not mainstream Christian, not Evangelical Christian. But I still identify with the dominant religion in my nation. So, I have that privilege.

I have thin privilege which again is relative. Some people would argue by looking at my body that I am not thin. But here's why I consider myself to have thin privilege and that is because I buy straight sizes, meaning I can walk into most stores and buy off the rack for straight sizes, not plus sizes. And I can find things that fit on my body in most clothing stores which is for sure a privilege. I am also able bodied, so I am not disabled or have not been disabled by living in a society built for the able bodied.

I am neurotypical which means I am not neurodivergent, I don't have ADHD, autism, learning disabilities, or things that fit into the definition of neurodivergence. And in addition to all of that I also have class privilege, or

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financial privilege. So, most of my life, well, all of my life really in most instances, all my 50 years have been in the top, I would say, 10%, if not 1% of financial privilege in any situation. So whichever way it resonates with you to describe money, or affluence, that's what we're talking about here.

I am also English speaking, I don't speak a language that is not the dominant language in my nation or culture. And you all, we could go on and on, and on, and on, and on with the list of privilege or dominant identities that I have or that I hold. The only one that's not on this list is that I am not male gendered, I am not a man. And men are of the dominant preferred privileged identity in the society I live in which is a society based on patriarchy.

But beyond that and I am married to a white man, on top of that, close proximity to it, benefit from the privilege my husband gets, my dad gets. So, I am in the dominant identity on almost every way. And I just want that to be clear as we're having this conversation because some of you are going to be frustrated, feel the need to get defensive about this. And I want you to see that I have all of those identities and none of that is anything positive. It's not that I'm morally superior. Most of the privilege I have is unearned but not all of it.

My Christian identity is a choice, class privilege mostly unearned, a lot of generational wealth and privilege passed down to me and afforded to me by my parents, the same for my husband and his parents. And if you know much about the history of race and slavery in America, and of Jim Crow Laws, and gerrymandering, and everything that has happened in our society, benefits given to white people from the GI Bill that's a whole other episode.

But a lot of my affluence, even though I have worked very hard, my parents have worked very hard, their parents worked very hard, the same for my husband, we did still have a lot of benefit around financial privilege just because we are white. So, I just want to be clear. A lot of unearned privilege some choice but again this does not make me morally superior or morally inferior just because I have these identities.

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Nor am I superior in other ways although our culture would say that I am by positioning most of these identities that I have in society as the superior one. Which means because of that my life is easier in many, many ways because of all of these identities. So, if you're feeling guilty, if you're feeling bad that you have something someone else has, know that it's normal. But know that you getting defensive or working to try to justify any of these things is not really helpful to you and it's certainly not helpful to your relationships with people that don't hold these identities.

So more on that in a minute, put a pin in that, we'll come back to it, it's all going to tie up later together and connect. But I want to move right now to the concept of centering. So, let's talk about centering. You might not know what it means and you might not understand it because as I said at the beginning of this episode, I've had some real aha moments about some of these things just recently.

So, I've been hearing and learning about the concept of centering for the last two and a half years at the very least ever since May of 2020 and the murder of George Floyd and the sort of, what would we even call it, racial reckoning, especially in America. I have been hearing this term, centering. And I probably heard it before but it's really been in this last two and a half years that it has been very front and center in a lot of conversations that I've been in, books I've been in, I mean well, I haven't been in books but I've read books. My brain has been in the book.

But I really had a new understanding just this past week or so as I was reading a book called Inclusion on Purpose. Now, I've had this book for a while, it's been sitting on a shelf. I buy things when I see them because I don't want to forget about them, that's why I have probably 50, maybe 80 books waiting for me to read right now but this is a fantastic book. And it was sitting on a shelf waiting for me to get to, it was in line in a queue.

And then I heard the author whose name is Ruchika Tulshyan and she specifically talks about in an episode on Brené Brown's podcast about people getting her name wrong, which I understand. My name gets wrong a lot and her name's, I'm sure specifically gets wrong a lot. So hopefully I did

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it justice but that episode that she was on Brené's podcast, her Dare to Lead Podcast was amazing and I highly recommend you listen to it. And when I listened to it, in fact one of my team members posted it in our Slack channel at work and was like, "This is a really moving podcast."

I immediately recognized Ruchika, her name that I had her book and I grabbed it, moved it to the front of the queue of what I was reading and started reading it. So, here's what is important for us, especially those of you that are white women because that's a lot of my audience, white people in general to understand about centering. So, when I first heard the term it was within the context of white women need to stop centering themselves in conversations and they need to center marginalized identities which I got in theory I thought.

But it was also confusing to me and I can see why it feels defensive to a lot of people because what we hear is you need to be quiet. And in kind of a sense a lot of us hear, "Your voice doesn't matter because you're white. You have less reason to be speaking and that you need to lift up people that have marginalized identities." That's what a lot of us heard. Now, that's not what it is totally. That's not exactly what it is but it's what a lot of us heard. And again, to be more specific a lot of this really happened in conversation just after George Floyd's murder.

And there was a lot of backlash in particular against white, diversity, equity and inclusion author and teacher, Robin DiAngelo who is the author of a book called White Fragility. And so, I was seeing in the circles I run in with coaches, with teachers, businessowners that a lot of people were really mad because a Black man was murdered again and we were in the strange time of the pandemic when we were all at home. We were all watching it. We had more time on our hands in a lot of ways.

And a lot of people started doing the work of what's called the great white awakening. I was one of those people. And a lot of us started with the book, White Fragility and a lot of white people were promoting the book, White Fragility. And it was really, really frustrating to a lot of people, especially diversity, equity and inclusion teachers who have been doing this

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for years who live in a Black or person of color, you know, a body of color and have had the lived experience of being discriminated against, experienced prejudice and bias.

And so, it was really frustrating to them that when all of this comes to light, the person whose business blows up in the most positive way is a white woman who wrote *White Fragility*. Now, I always like to be fully transparent if I can and to be really, really honest if I can. And I wouldn't be being honest if I wasn't admitting that as a white woman I actually got a whole lot out of the book, *White Fragility*. It was one of the first DEI books that I read. I had read a couple of other things prior to George Floyd's murder.

But in this great white awakening that they call it and I was part of, it was one of the very first books I read. I'm really serious about doing this work. And it was really, really helpful. And there is a possibility that because Robin is white and has the same lived experience as me, that it could have, it may have helped me to understand a lot of these concepts.

But the conversation at the time and still today from diversity, equity and inclusion experts of color is that centering a white woman and paying her five and six figure fees for speaking on topics that she does not have the lived experience of understanding because she's not a person of color. Seems in a lot of ways like a miscarriage of justice to these people because Black and Brown DEI experts often get less press, get less exposure and get unequal pay. Which makes perfect sense in a white supremacy and patriarchal society.

So, they contend that Robin is centering herself and profiting off of their oppression which I can completely see and understand. I absolutely see it. So, I use this example not for us to argue whether you think Robin should be a DEI teacher, or if you think she should get paid as much as she does or if you think her book is better received by people that are white. That is not the point here. I just want to use it to help be very clear because I think it's a very clear example of centering a person with a dominant identity in a conversation about marginalized identities and communities.

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And let me be clear that in May 2020 after the murder of George Floyd and all the other recent murders at that time, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery and there were so many. It was definitely a conversation about marginalized identities in communities. But this person who had most of the privileged identities like me was the person that was being centered or was centering herself. She was being centered by white people doing this work and she was centering herself.

So, the deeper understanding that really clicked with me this weekend when reading Ruchika's book is not that people with privileged identities don't have a lot to say, that can be helpful, that they need to absolutely shut up, that they never have a right to speak. None of that I believe to be true, nor does my own teacher in this work who is a person of color. But what I understood this aha moment from Ruchika's book is that the real reason or need for centering a marginalized identity is to solve problems of inequity. And I'm going to explain so stay with me if you don't know what that means.

So, for example if we are centering white women in a conversation about discrimination at work which is what Ruchika's book talks about, we are only addressing issues involving the systems that impact her which could be patriarchy and very well likely is. Because patriarchy is alive and well in our society and in the workplace.

But if we are not also addressing a marginalized race say by instead of centering a white woman in this conversation. We center a Black woman or Black women then we aren't solving for or addressing the issue or system of white supremacy that is also likely at play in workplaces where discrimination and bias is happening. So, I hope that you're getting this. Yes, we can center a white woman because yes, she has things happening to her, she is oppressed.

But if we instead center our work and we're not saying centering her as if she's better or moral, it's not a person's face, it's not like center Tobi. But centering the identities that Tobi holds leaves out a whole bunch of other identities that we need to solve for if we're going to create true equity in the

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place, the area we're talking about. So that could be at work, with George Floyd, it's just in society. So, think about who would be the most effective identities to center, if we want to solve all the problems.

So, this conversation of centering white women instead of Black women is the exact scenario that happened in the second wave of the feminist movement in particular in the United States which happened between 1960 and 1980. Where white women were fighting for equity in work, in the workplace, in wages. And what they did was they promised and a lot of them were sincere but they promised that if they achieved equity with men then they would work on equity for women of color.

But if you know anything about this history, that didn't happen. You can't really effectively start with part of the privilege or part of the identities, fix those and then hope it trickles down to all the other ones. And so as not to make that same mistake again now because we're in another wave of feminist movement, I'm sure of movement against the patriarchy. But also, a lot of movement against the culture of whiteness and white supremacy.

It's really important that this time we get this right, which means we need to center the most marginalized or intersectionality identity. And don't worry, I'm going to tell you what that is in a minute. Because if we solve for that then we will automatically be solving for the individual identities that are represented by that person, or persona, or identity that is and are most marginalized. So, hang with me here.

For example, if you solve for bias, and prejudice, and discrimination against Black women in the workplace you're solving for bias, and prejudice, and discrimination against the Black identity and also the female identity. Which then collectively fixes the female bias, or discrimination, or prejudice for white women as well. Because our female identity is collectively represented as a part of the identities of a Black female. But if we just solve for white females we do not solve the problems associated with having a Black identity or person of color.

So let me make this a little easier for you to understand. The way my teacher, Trudi Lebron explains this approach to equity because that's what

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we're talking about here is that if you put in an elevator in a building and the reason you put it in is to help people with disabilities, people that could not walk to the second floor, or the 14th floor, guess what?

That elevator not only helps people with disabilities or that are being disabled by a built environment not designed for them. But that elevator will also be used by and help a whole bunch of non-disabled users of the building who also get to ride it to the 14th floor and don't have to walk. So, I hope this is making sense. If you create something that helps, that removes barriers for people with the most marginalized identity, you're also helping people who don't have that identity. Everyone is helped with an elevator. So, I hope this is making sense.

Now, before we move on to the main reason that I did this podcast I also wanted to talk about one more concept because we've been using this whole first half hour or so to lay the groundwork. And then I'm going to tell you why I did this episode to begin with because it's important to me. And a lot of people are going to be impacted by this. But we first need to talk about the concept of intersectionality.

So, a lot of you have heard of this, a lot of you have not, but this term was created by a brilliant woman named Kimberlé Crenshaw and she created this concept in 1989. So, if you're not familiar with Kimberlé Crenshaw, she's an American civil rights advocate and a leading scholar for critical race theory. Now, don't shut down because you've heard something negative about critical race theory. This is not an episode about that. We could have a whole conversation about that but that's one of the things she's known for.

But one of the other things that she's known for that is so important is the concept of intersectionality. So Kimberlé is a professor currently at the UCLA School of Law and Columbia Law School, both where she specializes in race and gender issues. Now, intersectionality is the study of how overlapping or intersecting social identities particularly minority or non-dominant identities as we have called them today relate to systems and structures of oppression, domination or discrimination.

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So, her work further expands to include not only intersectionality and again, I'm going to tell you more about this in a minute, so if it sounds confusing it will clear up in a second I think. But her work further extends into intersexual feminism which we were just talking about a few minutes ago which is a subcategory related to intersectional theory. And intersectional feminism examines the overlapping systems of oppression and discrimination that women are subject to face due to their ethnicity, sexuality and economic background.

So, intersectionality is really a framework that helps us understand how interlocking systems of power in the world impact those that are most marginalized in society the most. For example, if you are impacted as we've been describing by both patriarchy and white supremacy because you have the two identities of being female and of being Black or a person of color, then you are up against more obstacles than people who only have one of those identities.

So up against more obstacles than a white woman or a Black man. And if you add to your identity in this conversation that you are also either gay, or transgender, or disabled, then that person has far more obstacles in their day-to-day life that they have to overcome to take care of their basic needs, to be successful. And it's not just about success though, it's about survival a lot of times. Now, I do want to say it is typically not helpful and not useful to fall into trauma comparing or trauma stacking to try to prove who is most marginalized by society.

This is not a competition. It is not about scorekeeping, it is not tit for tat. Not usually helpful or useful. So, it is knowledge for those of us doing work to create more diversity, equity and inclusion in our lives, in our businesses, in the world. And we can have a awareness on gender, on racial identities, on different abilities of bodies and how having multiple of these identities impact people in different ways so we can take all of this information into account especially as activists, or as leaders, or as businessowners when we are playing a role in creating change.

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So, intersectionality is just the place that if you have multiple identities that are not dominant, that are not privileged, if you're not like me and you don't have almost every privileged identity. The more that you have on that list that I read out earlier about myself that I don't have, the more marginalized identities you do have the more things you are likely going to be up against in trying to not only create survival and get your basic needs met in societies but also to really thrive.

So now there's one thing that I really want to talk about today and it's really one of the main reasons if not the main reason for this episode that's been on my mind. And it is to share my learning about being in relationship with people that are of different identities than me.

And in particular who hold intersectional identities especially if you're like me and you hold a lot of privilege and dominant identity. And you're in a relationship with people who don't hold those, it's really important for me to share with you the experience I've had to help you understand maybe a little bit better how to navigate those relationships.

So, I have learned the importance of understanding how to have impact or how to have my impact and my intention align and not cause more harm, or retraumatize someone, or trigger people accidentally by not knowing where I should be sharing my own story and who really and how, who and how to help support people with my learning. And this is what I want to break down for you.

So, one of my very best friends is a Black woman interior designer. And this relationship has been built really mostly over the last two and a half years and we have gotten very, very close. And as Brené Brown would say, we have earned the right to hear each other's stories and to hold space for each other. And we have a lot of trust. And as my coach, Trudi Lebron would also layer onto that because she's taught me, it is both rare and a privilege, and an honor, maybe that's a better word since we've used privilege to mean other things in this episode.

So, it's both rare and an honor for a white woman like me to have earned the trust at this level of a Black woman. And let me tell you why. White

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women, not me personally as a human Tobi, but white women collectively, the group I fall into with my skin color, that unearned privilege represent an identity that historically has oppressed and harmed Black women and their families. So, it's very important to me that I understand this context and that I am very clear and intentional about showing up and being a friend in a way that is not intentionally harmful.

And while I know that I will have blind spots and will unknowingly cause harm at times, I am open to being called in on those things by her and her helping me learn why it was problematic or triggering for her. And I am committed to not being defensive, or getting embarrassed about it, or getting angry at her, or having a fight or flight experience. But rather being compassionate towards her and towards myself as we navigate this deeper relationship. Because it's not one that is naturally set up for success in the white supremacist societies that we live in.

And I have to tell you that this relationship and this friendship has probably been, if not the most rewarding friendship, one of the most rewarding friendships with another woman in my entire life. But it has required me to be all in on this work which let's be honest, any thriving relationship really requires you to be on. So, after two and a half or so years of building this relationship at a very deep and committed level, we have built trust that allows us to both show up fully.

And my friend now assumes best intentions on my part and gives me a lot of the benefit of the doubt even when I get things wrong because she knows me and she trusts me. And we've built this relationship. So even when she's like, "Oh, girl, don't ever say that again", let me help you understand a better way to say this if you want it to be received by people of color. She can say that in a way that is loving and that is in a trusting container that she doesn't get really angry with me. Although she may roll her eyes occasionally.

And I don't get really defensive with her because we're in this together. So, she mentors me in the most loving way when I get things wrong which I will. And I appreciate that so much. And I'm fully aware that in her doing

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that she is also using her own emotional labor, her own physical labor to help me and educate me. But this is not something she owes me. And this is really important you all, because historically women of color have been expected to give their emotional and physical labor for free or even when they weren't free in slavery to help and support white women.

And so that also can be a very touchy situation. But because I get that she doesn't owe me helping me, she doesn't owe me explaining this to me, she doesn't owe me that she should call me in. But she's willing to pour this amount of energy into me and in our relationship because I am also pouring into her and have been for over two years that we've been building this close relationship. So, this is not a one sided relationship. I never expect or feel entitled to her wisdom or her help, or her compassion but she is very generous in giving that to me.

So, we support each other and it is now built on trust. And I also ask for her consent even now before I just start sharing something, where I'm going to ask her for help around anything to do with race, or any other identity, that where I'm in a dominant identity and she is not. Because by nature of the identities that we didn't earn that we were born into, and in this society that we live in, my identity has historically and continues to have more power than hers.

So, we want to make sure that in our relationship we are never replicating oppression, or entitlement intentionally and hopefully not unintentionally. And that we're not propping up this hierarchy inside our own friendship that assumes that I have more power at some level or that she owes me something. This is really important. This sounds really weird and touchy but it's exactly how this works if you are building a real relationship that's equitable between two people who don't have the same level of privilege.

So, the other part of this is that if I do ask her questions around race and other topics, around marginalized identity, not only do I ask her consent if I'm like, "Hey, would you be willing, is it okay if I ask you this question? Because I'm confused about this, or I need to have your feedback on this. Or I'd really love some help on this." And she's like, "Sure", or whatever.

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Some days she's like, "No, not today." And that's what this part is about. I don't get to control the narrative and I don't get to tell her when she has to help me.

And I also and this is really important, get to tell her when to stop just because I'm uncomfortable. Now, that doesn't mean that I can't protect myself and my nervous system, and that somehow she is more superior to me in this situation. It's just that if I bring it up and I ask about it, and I'm using her as a sounding board, and I want her help, when she starts helping me and the narrative that is being discussed which is going to be based in her lived experience at the very least and in the truth in a lot of ways. And I don't mean to mean that she's untrue.

But sometimes things are opinions, not actually facts. And a lot of things are facts. And so, when she's telling me both opinions and facts I don't get to just say, "Okay, okay, never mind, stop, this is uncomfortable for me, this is triggering for me. Don't tell me that. I don't want to hear about that." Because it is really not my place or for me even my desire for her to temper and tap down, and kind of shrink and control her thoughts or emotions because they may not feel warm and fuzzy to me.

So, in other words if I'm going to ask for her help and her opinion, and we are not recreating an unequal power dynamic then I don't get to just listen as long as it's making me uncomfortable and the minute I get uncomfortable say, "Okay, stop, stop, stop." Now, what I can say is, "That makes me really uncomfortable. Let's hold space for that for a minute." Let's talk about that for a minute. And she can be like, "Well, of course it makes you uncomfortable." And it's also a fact or the truth.

And that's what friends can do or people in relationship can do if they have built the trust. And let me be really, really clear, this is what our relationship looks like now two and a half years in. It's not how it started. We had to build this trust. We had to build this reciprocity. We had to build this equity in our relationship. And so, this is one of the main reasons I wanted to have this podcast episode because I want to help you understand that the dominant culture of whiteness really has its own culture in a lot of ways.

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And those of us who are white can't see what those things are. And some tenants of whiteness, this is the way it's referred to in a lot of learnings, books and courses, and things that I have experienced and continue to sign up for. But some of the tenants of whiteness are that, and you all, these are not made up and these are not opinions. This is fact. The tenants of whiteness and it comes out of a Eurocentric concept. We came to America from Europe. It's very European, white European also in a lot of ways.

But here's the things that we see in the culture of whiteness. So as white people and people in general, but especially white people, we like to be right. We like to have the last word. We like to explain ourselves a lot which instead of mansplaining, I would call this whitesplaining. This is what I mean when I'm like, "Just because you have a lot of privilege, you going and trying to explain how hard you've had it to a person in a marginalized identity is not a good idea and it's not going to land."

Because even still the difficulties we've all had in our lives because we've all had them, you still have a privilege that they could never have by nature of your skin color, or your gender, or something else. And so, we also as white people in the culture of whiteness have a tendency to center ourselves without even knowing we're doing it because it's such a habit, because it's what we've lived in our whole life. We have a tendency to feel entitled to interrupt, you all, this is my biggest one I'm working on.

I interrupt all the time. And to also take over in situations where we think we are more equipped than people that don't hold our white identity to be in charge. And a lot of this may be subconscious. You may be like, "Well, I don't think that and I would never do that. And I don't interrupt people, Tobi." But I'm just telling you, if you study this you will understand that collectively these are the tenants of the culture in a white supremacist society that white people often center ourselves, feel entitled, we interrupt people, especially people in marginalized identities.

And we take over situations. You see this all the time where white women want to go in and help with a movement or a cause that is not about

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whiteness, it's about a marginalized identity. And then next thing we know we're like, "Get out of the way and let me handle this. I'm really good at leading." And I'm really good at leading too but I know which times to lead and I know which times to be a support system. And if what I'm working towards is dismantling white supremacy I'm going to be in the support system role in that one.

If I'm dismantling feminism, well, if it's white feminism, which we've already talked about the problems with that, I might be in a support role. But let's just be honest centering myself does not create equity even in the feminist movement. So, this is stuff I had to learn. And you all, it feels uncomfortable because I'm a good leader. But guess what, I could also learn to be a good, incredible support system. I just haven't had as much practice at that because our society always props me up as a person with the dominant identity and so sure, you have a right to just get in there and lead.

And this is what I've been learning. So, I hope this helps you start to notice and become aware that these things are not the truth that we're better at any of this. But we've been socialized to believe this as white people in a dominantly white culture. Now, this is where I am going to lead you to a teacher of this content because again, I'm a messenger and a student. I'm not the teacher. And I get it, I get the assignment, I've done the work, I will keep doing the work. I have a lot of knowledge.

And I happen to be really good at reading and studying things, and remembering it, and being able to turn around and share it with other people. So, although I'm teaching you something and you're learning from me, I'm not the teacher that needs to be centered in this conversation. And here's the person that I want you to look to if you want to learn more about the culture of whiteness, which I highly recommend you do, especially if you're a white person.

There is a person named Louiza, she goes by Weeze Duran, and her business is called According to Weeze. And she has a course by the name of The Culture of Whyteness, she spells W-H-Y-T-E-N-E-S-S. And for those of you who know anything about the internet or social media when

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you see other spellings of white, even Y-T which a lot of people like YouTube know it's an abbreviation or kind of slang for white, that the algorithm won't pick up on and come and say you're having hate speech.

Because trust me, if you're in a marginalized identity you can't even speak truth about these topics. So, her course is called The Culture of Whiteness with a Y-T-E-N-E-S-S, it's \$297. It's some of the best \$297 you will ever spend if you're really committed to doing this work. I took it live in July of 2020 and I think that's still the recording she's selling. It's a multiweek course that I took with her. It's either four or six weeks. And I learned so much, including all the stuff that I just shared with you about what the culture of whiteness even is.

Because when I went into this I didn't even know there was a culture of whiteness. I'm just a white lady living in my whiteness, swimming in the sea of white out there experiencing and being privileged by being part of that dominant racial identity. And now I get it because of this course.

So, the maybe last thing I want to share is where all of this that we're talking about today comes into your relationships, especially if you're a white woman working to have friendships or relationships, even business relationships with Black or Brown women. It's really important to know how we do harm and we do. Now, in some ways we're going to do harm anyway even when we know it, but unintentionally have blind spots. And that's part of this process. And if we're open to it we can hopefully try to have conversations and make amends if we do harm.

And trust me, even people in marginalized identities are also doing intentional and unintentional harm and having blind spots. This is messy work, you all. Any time we're trying to dismantle something like we are in this scenario, or maybe multiple things that are oppressing people, it's messy. It is not clean. Whiteness says it should be clean, and tidy, and tied with a bow, and everybody should feel comfortable. But the culture of whiteness is a myth, that's why I want you to learn about it. It's made up, it's contrived.

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And the real work is messy. But here's a way that you can be less messy is that when you are in relationships where you haven't built the trust yet, so you haven't built that two and half years of trust, or longer that my friend and I have built. And you also haven't asked for consent. You haven't said, "Hey, can I run this by you? This is something I'm really struggling with, I'd love your opinion on." And trust me, if someone is going to give you a lot of labor around this work you can even, believe it or not, consider paying them.

So, whether they have a course or a program already, or they're just giving you a lot of time, unless you have something that's equally beneficial to them, and not that you think is beneficial but that they do. There are many people who I've learned so much from that I just go and Venmo them and they're not even DEI instructors. But they're really, they're people of color, they have lived experiences that have helped me learn. And I'm like, "Oh my God, I couldn't have paid for anything from an expert any more helpful."

And I literally say, "Here's some money for your time because you're in business and you have a family. And that is consulting." And some people won't take it. A lot of people will. But if you haven't built trust and you haven't asked for consent, and you really preferably need both, it's not the place to work out our thoughts or to try to justify our privilege which again is never a good idea. And I see this happening all the time. And before I knew everything I know now I'm sure I was doing this to people.

Early on my bestie who was so generous with me and did offer. "She's like, "I'm here for you." But my gosh, I was using her accidentally, not trying to use her, as a sounding board, and a source of knowledge. And we hadn't built the trust yet and she was so patient with me. And she was so loving and so giving, which she didn't have to be. But that has to be, unless you're going to recreate this power differential, this power difference that is not equitable, then it has to be the person in the most marginalized identity's choice and consent to participate.

They don't owe you. You don't get to just strike up a conversation and be like, "Well, hey, let me tell you about what's happened in my life", if there's

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a power differential or a lot of difference in the privilege that you hold. Now, it doesn't mean you can't get there if both parties are willing. And that's exactly what happened with my friend. We were both willing to building this relationship. But be really careful of this and don't just start talking about things with people that don't hold the same identities as you without consent and without trust.

In the brand new book that just came out in the last week or so by DEI educator and founder of Check Your Privilege, Myisha Hill, which by the way, Myisha's going to be on the podcast here soon. Her book is called Heal Your Way Forward. She describes this beautifully. Beautifully. So helpful to me. And it was very loving as a white person for me. She shared so much love and compassion for us as white people and white women to read in her book that she absolutely feels that there's even space and place for white women's tears.

And if you know anything about this work and you've studied or heard the concept of white women's tears, many people of color are very, very fearful of the power of white women's tears for good reason. Because white women's tears led to a lot of death, led to lynchings and murders of people of color, including Emmett Till. Because as you may know it just was recent in the last also few weeks that the woman that accused Emmett of looking at her and I'm not going to share all the details here because I don't know that I know them correctly.

But essentially he was tortured and murdered because she made a false accusation that he had somehow, I don't know if assault is the right word, but propositioned her or crossed a line with her. And she made the whole story up, including crying while she was telling the story. So, there's a history of white women's false tears because her performance was a lie.

And the fact that Myisha who is a person of color and does this work, absolutely honors and holds space for white women's tears is just, I don't know, full of compassion and humanity which I appreciate so much. Because yeah, we're going to cry sometimes. This work is messy and uncomfortable. But here's the part that was so helpful.

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In her book, Myisha honors our humanity as white women and says, “We absolutely deserve to cry and process our emotions and feel our feelings.” As we’re coming to terms with the discomfort and the heaviness that goes along with becoming aware of our privilege, and all the history and the things that go into this work. As we do the work of diversity, and equity, inclusion in our own lives, in our own businesses. But here’s the important part.

She makes it very clear that the place to do this work, to talk about your questions, your concerns, your confusion, bring your tears, your anger, your all the things around systems of oppression is not with women of color. So, if you’re out there right now feeling entitled to the opinions, the labor, the thoughts of women of color to help you do this work and you are white, please reconsider this approach and process your thoughts and your emotions either with a DEI consultant that you are paying to do this work for you or with you.

That’s when you could share this with a woman of color but because you’ve hired them or if someone is doing this work with you for free, please connect with a trusted and knowledgeable white friend or a peer that is also doing this work. And you all can look to other experts together and process this out loud. Or if you do have the honor like I have of processing this with a person of color, that it is fully with their consent and they have the right to check out at any point. Or tell you that this is not working for them or that they’ve been triggered or whatever. So, we’re not entitled to that work.

I also recommend that you read, take courses, use Google, hire a DEI consultant or coach before you just assume that anyone in a Black or Brown body or other marginalized identity is the right person to do any of this heavy lifting for you. Because now that my best friend is in identities that are marginalized and who don’t hold the privilege that mine do. And I’ve spent two and a half years getting to know her, and understand her, and hearing her story.

I’m super clear on how people of color, women of color are exhausted just from living their experiences. And they don’t need to relive it by answering

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your questions. And if they choose to, that's on them but it's not anything that they're obligated to. So, if you're getting defensive because you're like, "Well, I'm trying to do the work and this person of color won't even help me." I want you to check yourself. I also see this not just in people of color but in other marginalized identities.

So, one of my other friends whose not as close of a friend, she's more of an internet friend but I definitely call her a friend and I really admire her, who is part of the LGBTQ community. Often ask people not to respond to her posts on Instagram with all their questions, comments, especially potentially triggering one in response to her stories.

And there are people again from the dominant identity in which this case would be being straight, that feels so entitled to be able to respond or comment and have thoughts like, "Well, if she didn't want me to comment why is she posting this on social media?" And I want you to get this, you all, if you hold the dominant identity then you hold more power. And by you feeling entitled to come respond, or comment, or argue, or a lot of times share other traumatic stories which are also triggering for people.

It's what they call trauma porn, it's for the sake of sort of sensationalizing trauma against other people that hold the same marginalized identities that these people do. Don't do that. They know all of that. They have lived it. And it's more triggering. So, when someone asks you, don't comment, don't share, and you notice yourself feeling mad, or angry, or entitled, that's more work for you. And again, as your friend and a student of this work I hold all the dominant identities.

And I am here suggesting that you understand that unless you are their close friend who has built trust and earned the right to comment, and also on top of all of that, also ask for consent. Please don't do it. And if they ask you not to do something, please honor that. Now I will say that some of you may feel really frustrated by this podcast and by this conversation because you may be thinking, well, they want me to do this work and now they won't help me do it.

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And you also may think things like, why do I have to change who I am for them? I just always show up as me. And I'm just myself. And I'm not trying to marginalize or oppress anyone. Why should I have to change my behavior? And to that I will say to you, that that thought, that particular belief of why should I have to change is one of the ones that rooted in the culture of whiteness or whatever dominant identity you hold.

And it is what I was talking about earlier, that we feel entitled to just do whatever we want to and just be ourselves, and just post whatever we want to say and say whatever we want. And so, when 'just being yourself' also means that you are 'just being white' which how can we help ourselves, we are white. But we're not doing the work around awareness of how it impacts negatively other people who aren't white, that's where the problem comes in.

And not taking into account the fact that the people in marginalized identities have to spend more time than not changing themselves and contorting themselves, and holding their opinions because they could be confronted, or worse, even harmed if they don't, and then you want to come in and be like, "But I just should get to be myself." They should also get to be themselves but they don't have that privilege as we're talking about. So, I just want you to think about this.

And I really do thank you for those of you who have been open to this episode. Those of you that have already learned something and who are being curious and want to dig into these ideas more. And also, maybe you're noticing now where you may have inadvertently been centering yourself, or exploiting, or oppressing others that don't hold your privilege or your dominant identities, not because you meant to, not because you're a bad person. Not because you're out harming people on purpose.

But that is just the messiness of engaging with people in societies that are built on systems that oppress some people and don't oppress others. So, remember, this is not about whether you're a good person, it's work that we all have to do as people in dominant identities if we want to mitigate harm, create change, and cultivate meaningful relationships with people who

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have identities that are not dominant, that are more marginalized than ours, or even have multiple identities that intersect. So, they have that intersectionality that creates more obstacles for them.

And please also know that if you need another white girl on this journey with you to process things with, I'm here for you. I won't judge you, you all. This is hard stuff. And if what you need is outside my expertise I will be happy to refer you to one of the many, many sources of teachers, and books, and resources that I know and have used. And to get you started you can refer back to the show notes on this episode and see all the names of the teachers, and the books, and the podcast episodes, and courses that I've already mentioned today.

And you can also find there a resource we've created as a company, our Tobi Fairley Inc. essentially guide to the diversity, equity and inclusion resources that we've collected and that my team and I have used and benefitted from up to this point on our journey. And we keep adding to it, it's very robust. It's free, I'm not profiting off this, it's free. I'm just sharing it with you because I'm like, if I put all this together and learn from all these things and you need them, absolutely let me share them with you.

And that's it friends, so I'm here for you, hop in my DMs not to be ugly, don't be mean. Don't come there to attack me. This is my lived experience of doing this work as a white woman and building relationships with other people that you all, it's so worth the messiness, the reward is so worth the messiness of having these deep rich friendships with people that don't look and have experiences just like me.

But if you are going to come into my DMs because you want to do more of this work, or you have a question, or you're afraid you'll sound stupid, or you are afraid, you've been processing this on someone that as Myisha Hill would say is not the place to process it. Then come talk to me about it, I'm here for you. Now, again I appreciate you, this was a hard episode for a lot of you. It wasn't hard for me because I've been doing this work for a long time and it feels like just kind of the day-to-day work I do now.

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But if you're new to this work it's not going to feel like day-to-day work. It's going to feel hard, it's going to feel uncomfortable, it's going to feel terrifying at times. Your body might move into fight or flight, know that is all true. Take care of yourself, take care of your nervous system as you do this work, as you do the messy work of creating more diversity, equity and inclusion in your life and business. And in the meantime, if you are on this journey, again, compassion. Compassion for you, forgiveness for you, compassion for others, forgiveness for others. It's hard work.

But the more impacts you create in your life and others by doing the work is how we really change the world. Okay friends, thanks for listening, bye for now. Love to you all, I'll see you back real soon.

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