

Heather O'Neill 0:09

Hello, everyone, you are listening to the tech thinking aloud podcast. Each episode we bring tech articles to life by reading them aloud and discussing their importance to the tech community and the world. We're your hosts, Heather and Jim O'Neill. Today's article is titled The rise of black owned co working spaces. It's written by Sherrell Dorsey and the article is featured on the blog at TP insights calm. You can find a link to the article in the show notes below. Now, here's the article. On February 1 1964 students march to 134 South Elm Street in Greensboro, North Carolina, through the doors of an F w. Woolworth restaurant instead at the counter to order lunch, but they were hungry in the wrong place. There would be no lunch served to these young black students in the whites only restaurant that day. for black people in the early 20th century, wait only sanctioned spaces like theaters, bathrooms and stores were off limits. violation of the state sanctioned discrimination resulted in physical violence, arrest or worse. Today, over 50 years since Congress passed the 1964 Civil Rights Act outline segregation, access to safe spaces for black people remains a barrier amid growing gentrification of historically black neighborhoods in urban cities, and the ongoing practice of white people calling the police on black patrons at Starbucks or barbecuing in a public park. Enter the black owned co working space. At least 63 of these spaces have popped up in urban communities around the country over the last decade, with a particular focus on inclusive innovation, community building and safety for black patrons. That's a small fraction of the over 4000 coworking spaces that exist in some form across the country, supporting over 500,000 freelancers, startup companies, consultants and emerging founders. According to the experts at the global co working unconference conference, GC UC memberships at coworking spaces will double into well over a million, with physical co working environments reaching over 6000 but nationwide by 2022. To 63, black owned co working spaces emerged adjacent to this growth trend, providing more than conference rooms Wi Fi and limitless coffee. They're built to give black people a safe space to find themselves in the work of innovation, where they've been largely excluded. Data from a 2016 study by the Information Technology and Innovation foundation revealed that native born African Americans comprise just half a percent of us born innovators despite being over 13% of the overall population. Aaron Saunders, a computer scientist and owner of a mobile app development business, open to the inclusive innovation incubator in 2017. How's that Howard University in Washington DC. The 8000 square foot incubator space is one of the first to open on the campus of a black college in the country. At \$200 per month, entrepreneurs get a desk and access to special events, as well as a variety of classes on coding, app development, or growing a startup, most of which are taught by other technologists of color. Entrepreneurs know that when they come into the space, the instructor is going to look like them so Sanders. This helps when previously they didn't have a safe space to work through the challenges of taking their firm to the next level. Black people held their conversations about tech and innovation in bars or clubs. Well, co working spaces in this country's capital aren't hard to come by. sonder says that these spaces often find it difficult to find diverse groups of entrepreneurs to become members. There's no solid data on the number of people of color working in CO working environments, black owned or otherwise. The overall population of freelance workers is growing. However, with black workers making up just under 4% of that population of both incorporated and unincorporated self employed workers. That's

where we come in and own that effort. So I understand having a space that is black owned and supported by and attended mostly by people of color. It is a good thing, because it will help more black people come out when before black people held their conversations about tech and innovation in the bars or clubs. Felicia Hatcher, the co founder of CO fever and black tech week, spent the last two and a half years raising funds from the Knight Foundation and other donors and agonizing over the construction plans before opening tribe cowork and urban innovation lab with her husband Derek Pearson in Miami's overtown neighborhood this spring training His house in a two story 10,000 square foot historic building adjacent to family owned restaurants in Italian I shop and other black owned businesses. Hatcher said she had no doubts that this historically black community, established shortly after the incorporation of Miami in 1896. will begin to look a lot different actresses development projects continue to spread across the city. We are one of only two co working spaces in the entire state of Florida that exists in a black neighborhood, said Hatcher, who explained that tribe was created to provide resources for underserved high growth minority entrepreneur businesses. In overtown transformation is nigh with a forthcoming speed train and other developments breaking ground. hasher said that she and her team are using the physical coworking space to provide a platform to help educate the mostly black community about innovation and how they too can be involved. On Fridays, co working space at tribe is free. The promotion is meant to drive neighbors and give the greater community A sense of place and participation in the concept of innovation. Safe Space is important when we talk about the whole conversation on what a co working space can mean for our communities, Hatcher said and a space that is more forward thinking around who is focused on the future of what the black Miami means, or the culture or the business culture is important. Most businesses here are focused on survival. It's important but leaves very little room for organizations to think about once that is figured out what's next. ongoing development in neighborhood change in the urban space prevent challenges that urban planners like Justin more tired of policies like redlining that bread longtime inequality in communities of color, safe and equitable spaces, particularly for black people, is as economic as it is social Skidmore and executive director of the New York Public design commission, and part time professor at Columbia University. More also leads black space, New York, which were With new york city neighborhoods, helping to bridge the gap between developers and residents, by procuring conversations and planning sessions to determine how community identity remains amid forthcoming development. space itself can be designed to help people feel more inclusive. It's the programming or the design, a local artist doing interiors or graphics for the space. More said, there are lots of signifiers that build up to people's experience and connectedness to the space. The story is part of a series of stories produced in partnership with Vice media's motherboard. The article was written by Sherrell Dorsey. Sherrell Dorsey is a data journalist, social entrepreneur and speaker. She's also the founder of the plug providing in depth reporting and analysis on black innovation economy. Her work has been featured in ink, Bloomberg, Vice through and other notable publications as a founder of building a community development consulting company. charelle runs black tech interactive, North Carolina's first hub supporting over 2000 black entrepreneurs and technologists. As a speaker, moderator and journalist Sherrell has shared the stages with notable business leaders, including Steve Case founder availa and Damon Johnson of ABC Shark Tank, among others. She's also presented at South

by Southwest Amazon, and the Brookings Institution. She hasn't been a contributing reporter to Fast Company, the Charlotte Observer, Linux city lab and more. Her password includes serving as a marketing manager for Uber, which she established the first Boomer mentor campaign in Charlotte, connecting female executives with millennials. Sherrell

also served as a contractor with Google Fiber, helping to activate free high speed internet and public housing complexes. She holds a master's in data journalism from Columbia University, and a bachelor's and international trade and marketing from the Fashion Institute of Technology. You can reach me at At trail Dorsey calm or at her website for the plug TP insights calm. Now let's discuss coding spaces are a huge part of where tech happens. And like most shared spaces, they're highly likely to be slanted towards white people in their comfort. And white people tend to unconsciously behave like we own any space that we're in. The tech world believes in this myth of meritocracy, and the democratization of access to information entrepreneurship. But in almost every aspect, the same biases and barriers to access are still being perpetuated, and co working spaces are no different. All this is why the rise of black owned co working spaces is so important.

Jim O'Neill 9:46

And just to note, before we get any further in, we are very aware that we're two white people having this conversation which is kind of awkward, but part of our job as white people is to have these awkward conversations particularly about race. And gender and white supremacy so that it becomes normal to talk about these things. So will we get things wrong? Absolutely. But we completely welcome any feedback that you have as you're listening. Thank you.

Heather O'Neill 10:12

Yeah, our main goal here is to make all these conversations normal to make discussions about race and the impact of white supremacy on the world that we live in. And the society we live in normal. So we're not trying to be experts here. We're trying to be white people opening up the conversation for white people to talk about race more, and the fact that we've fucked it up so badly. So coming back to the idea of black co working spaces. The question that this article prompts for us is what do we do with this information? Obviously, having black owned safe spaces for black folks, is a critical need that will not go away anytime soon, if at all, but as white people, it's our responsibility to combat the effects of privilege and white supremacy on the speeches that we're in and interrogate how racism is at work in whatever context we find ourselves. It's also our responsibility to actually take action to make the spaces we inhabit safer and more inclusive for everybody. So with that in mind, Jim, I spent some time figuring out and looking up resources for how to start combating the effects of our privilege and white supremacy, and make the spaces that we're in more inclusive. And we've got a bunch of resources for you at the bottom, but we're going to spend some time now discussing them. And the first thing that we wanted to talk about was what if you run a space What if you own or are the manager of a co working space? What are some things that you can start to do to make sure that your space is actually inclusive is actually equitable, and welcoming to non white, non male, non cisgendered non able bodied people. And one of the most obvious and important

things that we came up with was having inclusive policies that are stated not just implied So having posted code of conduct, labeling bathrooms and ensuring that people can use whatever bathroom they feel most comfortable using, having policies that support, not just weight expectations and the weight ways of working. Now having things like a dress code, having really clear policies for what happens if someone, whether intentionally or not engages in some sort of micro aggression, having all those things documented is really important. And what's even more important with all those things, is ensuring that those policies are actually meaningfully enforced. And what I mean by that is that you're not using them as a hammer against people from groups that have been marginalized, but you're using them as a way to ensure that you're protecting people who've been marginalized in the past. So I've heard it said and I think this is so true, especially in CO working space. faces is whatever you tolerate. That's what your culture is. And because co working spaces aren't built around one particular company culture, but it's everybody who shows up there, the culture can vary greatly between co working spaces, which is why enforcing your policies and enforcing them to protect and to support the most marginalized people in your spaces is going to give you the most inclusive space.

Jim O'Neill 13:27

Yeah, it's hard to overstate how important it is that the policies actually be posted and that everybody has a similar shared set of expectations around exactly what is and is not tolerated. Because that really has a huge effect on people's comfort level, and what they feel that they can expect and demand really of the folks who are in charge because people do have and should have high expectations of how you know misconduct will be handled that kind of thing.

Heather O'Neill 14:00

also reminds me of the discussion that's been happening more and more around conferences as well, which in some respects are very similar to co working spaces. Because the only thing that binds people together is physically the space and then sometimes the obviously, the topic of the conference, but having a clear policy, not just for what people should do and how they should behave, but how you will handle when a transgression occurs or potentially occurs, and who you listen to what the process will be, who will be making the judgment on that. And basically, how far can you trust them is really important for ensuring people even feel safe entering a co working space.

Jim O'Neill 14:43

Yeah, and of course, the issue of thinking that your own way of doing things is the way that everybody does things is a hallmark of, you know, that tends to afflict privileged groups of folks. And so it's those folks who often Need the stated policies the most to make sure that they understand that we're that we understand that other folks may not come into the space with the same expectations that we have. So one other thing that it's important to consider, if you manage our own a space like this is the diversity of your current and potential customers. So things like do the ways that your marketing space signal that only a certain kind of person should seek to become your customer? Are you signaling in some ways, who is welcome and who is not welcome in your space? are you providing intentional mechanisms like sliding scale

pricing or opportunities for mentorship and sponsorship, those kind of things, to kind of counteract the systemic forces that limit access for some people to spaces like yours?

Heather O'Neill 15:51

I think that's a really good point. I think this is also really important to be clear. What we're not saying is don't do diversity marketing, where you go out and get pictures of people of color have disabled people. But it's not reflective of the actual people in your space. Because that can be really misleading. And I've actually heard that people felt catfished by those types of experiences before. And so we don't want you to do that. Please don't do that. And if your company does this on any scale, please help them to not do that anymore. But what you should be doing is thinking about what kind of words you're using, just in the same way that job postings when they're framed a certain way, will come off as more male sounding or more inclusive, and therefore more women will apply. The way that you present your space, the way that you structure your pricing, the way that you allow people to opt in and out of membership, to build community around your space will have a huge impact on who is actually showing up in your space and who's taking the time there. I think another part of this that is so important is considering the local community. As part of your potential customers, if you're in a community, say in New York, and you have mostly mostly white people in your space, but the local community is not mostly white, what's going on there, there's a big disconnect that you have to start thinking about, in how you're building this space, and who can actually access it. And if you're inadvertently or not participating in some sort of gentrification,

Jim O'Neill 17:26

yeah, absolutely. And back to some of what you were saying Heather earlier about, you know, the space itself and what people would see if they were to come on a tour, you know, before they actually sign up to be a member, you know, is the space in the way that it's designed, sending any signals as well? Is it you know, do you have conference rooms named after a bunch of famous white men? Do you you know, are you sending unconscious signals basically, with the way that your space is set up, so that not just your external marketing that people see you know, on the subway or whatever, but what they actually see when they come to your space itself, are those things sort of in sync.

Heather O'Neill 18:05

And childcare is a huge part of this too, because a lot of people need to be able to work in a child friendly space or have a place where their child can spend a few hours in order to be able to get some work done. And a lot of CO working spaces don't really allow for that the expectation is you come with your laptop, and you plug into your heads down at all these Open Table desks and a child running around just wouldn't make sense. And so that limits a lot of people who otherwise might be able to use your co working space from actually doing any work there, which is why they end up at places like Starbucks instead.

Jim O'Neill 18:38

Yeah, that's a very good point and childcare in this realm, as well as plenty of other realms out there, you know, often feels sort of under considered underappreciated. myths, you know, it's around where we have a lot of work to do.

Heather O'Neill 18:53

Absolutely. Yeah, I think it's so important. And then building off of that further, I think another thing that's really important to pay to Just the accessibility of your space. And the most obvious one is things like elevators and ramps. But there's so much more than that to make sure that your space is accessible. Like who can access the bathrooms? Is there a small step up that you didn't think about? Even though there's a ramp out front, your space still isn't accessible? After spending a lot of time listening to and engaging with a lot of disabled people on Twitter, and other places, I found that there's not just a yes no, in terms of accessibility, it's how accessible is your space actually thinking about, you know, non physical disabilities, where somebody might need quiet or certain types of lighting do you allow for that in your space? Or is it if somebody there's a bro having a conversation really loudly? What's the policy around shutting that down? And so the accessibility of your space on multiple levels is really important. And it's not just Is there a ramp out for Ours are an elevator instead of just stairs, accessibility extends far beyond that. And I feel like most spaces, don't take that into account. There's actually a recent article about a library that an architect just redesigned. It's so beautiful. But there's literally no ramp for anybody to get books and the shelves go up really high, and it's just a ladder. And the architect was like, Well, that wasn't my vision. And if disabled people are an afterthought, in the space that you're creating, then you have a huge problem. Oh,

Jim O'Neill 20:32

yeah. But it's the kind of problem that a lot of probably not just architects, but anybody who's designing a space, I would imagine that's pretty common. And we all need to do a much better job of making sure that we're broadening our horizons, you know, but before, we've paid a lot of money and installed a lot of things, to make sure that the space we're designing when we're designing it is actually accessible.

Heather O'Neill 20:55

Absolutely. And now that I go into spaces, I think about that I've noticed when there's just even just a half Finch little bump to get over, like a threshold from the hallway into the bathroom can be a deal breaker for some people. And it's wild that it's just not on people's radar. Not to mention it's completely illegal.

Jim O'Neill 21:14

Yeah. And then, you know, there's it's down to some of the details of the space as well, like, as you said, not just sort of railings and ramps, but as the coffee machine in an easy to reach area, can you get the mugs? If you are not six feet tall? Can you access the dishwasher? If it's an expectation that people are putting things in the dishwasher after they're done with them? those little details, you know, are just as important sometimes as the larger ones.

Heather O'Neill 21:40

Definitely. And I know that a lot of you might be building a space or working in a space where you don't have a lot of control over the accessibility, especially if you're working in a city like Boston or New York where there's a lot of old buildings that just haven't been updated. But do keep in mind that that's a federal requirement and you should push lease bet you're signing in any landlord that you're leasing space from, that that's an accessibility issue that they are legally required to accommodate people with disabilities. And so they absolutely have to do the work. And honestly, make it a deal breaker like, Yes, I know that it can be hard to find space or hard to find good space, but built a clause in that if within six months, they're not fixing the accommodations, then a you can sue them and be take your business elsewhere, or they have to refund your deposit or something like that. If we make it hard for people to continue to ignore the law, then they won't be able to as much and so even if it's not your own primary concern, if you have the privilege and if you have the opportunity, say something and put your foot down and be willing to walk away, even though that might make your life a little bit harder. Otherwise, you're making other people's lives harder. You're making it a space that's exclusive for a certain population.

Jim O'Neill 22:58

Yeah, that's a fantastic point and you know, it's, it's far too easy for all of us to sort of hand wave something and say, Well, you know, this is not going to work or it can't be done. Or, you know,

Heather O'Neill 23:08

or it's impossible to adjust our social network or society, but that's what they said, when the 40 Hour Workweek was proposed, oh, it's too impossible or when child labor was outlawed, oh, we won't be able to get anything done. Or when the minimum wage became a reality, even though it's shit. They said, Oh, we could never. But we did. And we all survived and adapted. And so we can for this to we can make spaces better and more inclusive. We can make policies that follow all of that. We just have to be willing to do it and willing to suffer through a bit of discomfort to get there and stand our ground.

Jim O'Neill 23:47

Absolutely. And so on the topic of folks who own spaces and manage spaces, the last thing that we wanted to bring up is to consider your own attitudes. So for example, are you fully invested in the physical and psychological safety of all of your customers. You know, are you in that headspace where you are ready to go to bat for folks who show up who, you know, need some accommodation that you may not fully understand at first, but you know, you're if you're looking to create the most inclusive space, you know, are you ready to learn and get feedback, get criticism, you know, even possibly be called out by people who are a little different from you, you know, again, in service of creating that most inclusive space. It's just a sort of, you know, an attitude check to make sure that you're ready for that.

Heather O'Neill 24:36

And I think this is sort of lifelong work, especially if you're white and privileged, is unlearning white supremacy and being willing to not have knee jerk reactions, right. There's a great book by Robin D'Angelo called white fragility, which I highly recommend everybody read and then start on another book by Layla side, which is me and weitzel supremacy. And they're both really powerful books for helping white people unpack this sort of air, we've been breathing of white supremacy that we don't even realize because it only positively impacts us. And just like a fish doesn't know it's in water, we don't know we're breathing it. And so these books and a bunch of other resources that we can share in the show notes will help you with that attitude adjustment. And again, don't be worried. If you can't solve it on one day. It's a lifelong unlearning. But commit to the unlearning, commit to the work that it will take for you to not have a knee jerk reaction. When somebody says something that you didn't intentionally set out to do, but you did that caused harm. The more you can do that, and the more you can demonstrate that the more inclusive your space will become. And I think a good indicator of this is, again, thinking about who you're willing to go to bat for, and who you're willing to Walk away from. So if there's, say, a startup that's run by white guys, and it turns out the white guys are being super racist or causing a bunch of problems or throwing weird parties on the weekend or something less egregious. Maybe they just have a few like off color micro aggressions or comments or something like that. Are you willing to go back to bat and kick them out to support the people that they're marginalizing? Or are you going to say, well, there's nothing I can do, and they're bringing a lot of money, so I don't want to let them go. That's a choice that you're making. And I know we all have to pay our bills, because capitalism, gay don't mean that, but those are still choices that you get to make. And so the more you tolerate bad behavior, the more that you tolerate micro aggressions, the more that you tolerate, people wielding their white supremacy, intentionally or not, the less inclusive A spatial have. So it's really comes down to a question of your attitude and your willingness to stand up and actually enforce the policies and the space that you want to have.

Jim O'Neill 27:11

Yeah, absolutely true. As white people, we have a lot of comfort afforded to us all the time, in a lot of spaces that we're in and a lot of spaces that we may manage or control. You know, we have a lot of people around us who are like us, and that comes with a certain comfort. And when you need to make a harder decision and enforce a policy that is going to stand up for somebody who may not being exactly like you. That's going to come at the cost of some of your comfort, and we need to figure out ways to be okay with that.

Heather O'Neill 27:44

And it's especially important because if you want people of color to come to your space, if you want disabled people to come to your space. If you want people who have been marginalized in the past to come to your space. They have to be willing to trust you or they're not going to stick around long. Don't leave Use your space when they need it, but not because they love it. So we talked a bunch about what you can do if you're running a space. Now I want to end with talking a bit about what you can do if you're white and privileged, and you're in a space, and some of this overlaps. So the last thing that Jim was talking about with considering our own attitudes and

doing the work of, you know, up ending white supremacy in our lives, basically becoming anti racist, and taking a look at how white supremacy has benefited us. I think it's important to remember that there is more you can do even if you're just a visitor and a spacing, you're not actually the owner of this space and you don't have a saying how it's run. There's always still things that you can do. One of the first things that I think we don't do enough or we do I see a lot of white people do this sort of after the fact to to prove their social good, but not actually risk much, which is to speak up and not stay silent about micro aggressions. About marginalization about any other thing that's happening. So in the moment, whenever possible, so if you see someone, you know, being racist against someone else, say something in that moment, don't go up to the person who was just marginalized after the fact and say, Oh, they shouldn't have said that. That's about you. But if you're white, you have a level of social capital and social clout. And what I love to see is more of us being willing to just straight up, spend as much of that as possible, because it doesn't cost you as much if I speak up to the manager about bro number two, who keeps making sexist comments and racist comments and other very important taste things are happening. I lose less than half the person that they're making racial comments to speaks up, I have less to lose and I have more opportunity to potentially help and so if you're really selling serious about it. And you really want to create an inclusive space wherever you go. That's one main way to do it is to speak up and say, That's not cool. Here's the thing, it's going to be awkward, it's going to be hard. And it's going to feel really fucking uncomfortable. But if you can push through that discomfort, you'll get better at it a and b, you'll be really glad afterwards that you've spoken up very rarely, and possibly never are people disappointed that they actually spoke up for injustice, it may end up costing you something you may get kicked out of the club. But is that a club you wanted to be a part of anyway? Is that a co working space that you wanted to be a part of if that's what they tolerate? Because by not speaking up, and by staying there, you're tolerating it as while you're saying this is okay enough with me?

Jim O'Neill 30:48

Yeah. And back to you know, talking about what is allowed what is tolerated. If you are a person with some privilege, knowing those codes of conduct in those policies. Understanding, you know, what's supposed to be allowed or not allowed. That's ammunition you can use when you see something happening that you need to stand up against. And it's a good idea to put yourself in that frame of mind so that if you know what the rules are, it keeps you more vigilant to those instances where somebody might be breaking them.

Heather O'Neill 31:22

Well, it's also like knowing the HR policies at your work, and the discrepancies between what the policy state and what's tolerated and again, deciding if that's something you're comfortable signing up for. Now may very well be the case that a lot of times and especially in CO working spaces, this is so true, that the actual management and the owners and the founders and people running the CO working space, aren't aware of all the things that happen in a co working space, they may just think everything is fine if nobody ever says anything. But you're the one who has the opportunity to say something and so knowing those policies and knowing what should be happening, that gives you your chance to give them the benefit of the doubt and the

first opportunity to do the thing they said they're going to do, if they're not aware of it, for whatever reason, I would argue and coming back to if you're running a co working space, you should absolutely know what's happening in your co working space. And you should find ways to make sure that you can keep a count of people, especially white people in your co working space to ensure that it's inclusive, inclusive as possible. But if for some reason that people running the space aren't doing that aren't able to and you know, stuff slips through, that we don't always catch. You have the opportunity as someone in that space to speak up in the moment and then speak up after the fact. There's a local user experience chapter. And they had a contest for UX strategy. And the judges that they had listed on their contest page, were all older white men. And so I actually sent them an email and said, hey, that's pretty awful as a look, you know, you should be doing better and not have this contest judged by white dudes. Because what that says is that only way to turn positions of authority. And you know, luckily, they took that feedback pretty well. And they had already started reaching out to other people in the community who weren't white dudes to get them on board. And they ended up having a couple judges who were women, couple women of color. And so it ended up being a more diverse judging panel, but just the initial launch, and the initial look was so jarring. And it didn't cost me that much to write that email. In a worst case scenario, they could have dismissed me entirely and said, whatever, it doesn't matter, we couldn't find them. I did actually offer them a couple people that I thought would make good judges in this space who weren't white men. Just the the speaking up was an opportunity that didn't cost me very much, and had a really positive impact in terms of the judging of that and who got to be seen as a leader and who is seen as a leader in the UX community in the area

Jim O'Neill 33:59

and that brings up a great point, which is it's not necessarily just about speaking up when it's somebody else who's in the space sharing the space with you, that might be doing something that's, you know, not okay. You, as a privileged person are likely to sort of more have the year of the folks in charge. If it's the, you know, the management of the space that, you know, maybe there aren't clear policies, maybe they're, you know, doing something that doesn't look good, and needs to be fixed.

Heather O'Neill 34:30

Yeah. And I think you can speak up, you don't have to be accusatory, I spoke up with the assumption that, of course, that they would want to do better. And maybe they hadn't thought about it, or whatever. The reason was, of course, they would immediately want to fix this problem. And here's the first three steps on how they could do so. So if you go in assuming that people will want to fix the thing that you're asking them to fix. It's a level of goodwill you can offer right at the beginning to keep that conversation going. And obviously, if they're like, No, we don't care, then you can be a little Well, now we know how you really feel. But it forces them to actively say, No, we don't care. And most people are know that they should care whether they do or not, and so are not willing to admit that they don't care. And so that's a really good place to sort of box somebody into actually behaving better than they might have normally, which I think is a really powerful way to wield your privilege.

Jim O'Neill 35:23

Yeah, that makes sense. And, you know, in that context, everybody's first reaction in large part is going to be to get defensive. But if you are going in with this attitude of goodwill and providing them sort of a way of out of that, it's much easier to keep the conversation going.

Heather O'Neill 35:39

And I want to be super clear about this is you're not obligated to people, it's 2020. And we have an obligation, I think, to educate ourselves, especially white people have an obligation to educate ourselves on how white supremacy benefits us the privileges we get from that and how we have to dismantle the system. systems that support white supremacy in order to create an equitable world. And so that's all on us as white people to you never have to offer the goodwill, but I found it to be a good way to force them to behave the way you want them to behave without getting into a fight about who's right or who's wrong here. And it does also force people, the people who really want to be racist, or sexist or terriblest. Anyway, they'll just say so and then you know exactly where they stand and then you can put them on blast and whatever way you need to. And then you can stop being kind, right. Especially if you're a white person with privilege. Another thing that I think is important, if you're in a co working space, and you're a white person you have privilege is to pay attention to the ways that you take up space, and probably more than your share space. You can liken this to the white guy on the airplane who's trying to take up all the armrest and actually read a Twitter account of someone recently who I was sitting next to this white woman. And the white woman brought up on her phone. She googled some sort of like armrest policy to prove that she deserved to have full access to both of the armrests because she was in the middle and preemptively told everybody that that was her space, and therefore no one could find her for it or have it. And she she said this to the person sitting next to her and it was so wild, people feel very entitled to space, and especially white people, we feel very entitled to the space that we have. So when you go into co working spaces, are you taking up a whole tables worth of space? Are you having loud conversations in the middle of an otherwise quiet working space? Are you paying attention to other people in the space and giving them the space they need and I don't mean other white people because we'll all take up the space we need. I mean other people of color other people who have different needs other Disabled people, things like that. So what kind of space Do you take up? And could you maybe take up less of it and still get done what you need to get done and make room for other people.

Jim O'Neill 38:10

This goes back to the idea of interrogating ourselves educating ourselves, you know, looking inward to just examine our own behavior. And the fact that white people, folks with privilege often have either consciously or unconsciously, to sort of feeling of ownership or entitlement, as you say to things that are in public spaces, things that other people might might not have. And we just need to recognize that when it's happening, which is not easy, but it's something that we need to get into the practice of doing.

Heather O'Neill 38:44

Absolutely. And this comes back to the idea of dismantling white supremacy in your own life and the ways that you have white privilege that are benefiting you. The way that you make assumptions. I saw a long time ago I read an article about this man who was like Yep, I crash parties all the time. One time I went with my daughter and let everybody let me and everywhere and I've made a bunch of networking contacts, he was a white guy. And so he could walk in and be assumed to be in the right space. As long as he was dressed on par with the other people in the space, everybody would assume that he would belong there. And on the flip side, I've read stories about students who were black and doing Model UN who were told that they weren't allowed in even when they showed that they were part of the Model UN club, and that they were here with a school, they were denied entry or cases of black people who are attending event being sent around to be the performers and trends. Because the only way black people would be at this event, obviously, was if they were performers. And so when we think about space as white people, it's very different than not white people. It's very different for people of color. And this is again, just what I've read, and what I've heard from talking to other people, and I imagine that it's much worse than I'm aware of. But when you think about the space you take up as a white person, remember that not everybody gets to take up that kind of space, not everybody is welcome, showing up somewhere, and not everybody will be admitted to a space that they didn't technically belong in, just because they have a white face. But we can. And so when you're in a co working space, there's still a power dynamic, there's still an amount of space that you're allowed to take up that other people may not be. And so you have to be aware of that. And you have to think about what that means not just in CO working spaces, but anywhere you go.

Jim O'Neill 40:34

Yeah. And Heather, when you mentioned, the idea of the conversation, and you know, having a loud conversation or the volume that you're using, that brings up an interesting aspect of this. Where it's not just necessarily physical space with your body and your possessions and things like that, but it's sort of how much space you're taking up with your whole being including the conversations. You're having the movie that you are projecting. And, you know, is that? Are you? Are you sending that out around you in a way that's affecting other people that you know is not letting them have the space, the psychological space or the air space for themselves. But you are sort of assuming that you have the right to just project your business in front of everybody else in a way that they can't really avoid.

Heather O'Neill 41:24

It's a really great call. I think that's a really important part of looking at the amount of space you take up. I was on a train and in the quiet car, and not 10 minutes into my train ride. The guy white guy who was sitting in the next row behind me, immediately gets on a sales call where he's the sales guy, so he's doing all the pitching. And I was like, Oh my gosh, I sat in the quiet car. Why are you here and it didn't even occur to him to care. Conductor came by eventually and told him to move or shut up, but just the audacity of like, Not worrying about whether or not

you could do this and just assuming that you can is something that we never question or rarely question that we need to question more as white people.

Jim O'Neill 42:10

Yeah. And you have to think about if the person in that scenario was non white or non male, what the consequence of the conductor visiting them might have been that would be different than what it was in this case.

Heather O'Neill 42:23

Yeah, easily kicked off the train. Right. I think another way. And this is a side note, and not related to co working spaces, but related to technology and conferences, that white people take up space that they shouldn't is in speaking. You know, it's been really good to see a lot of white speakers talking about white supremacy talking about diversity and inclusion, and the ways in which we white people are causing harm with white supremacy. But I also think there's an importance in turning things down and promoting instead other people who are doing this work who aren't white people. Who are doing this work and have been for much longer than any of us white people have because we haven't been doing this as long as our lives don't depend on it in the same way. You know, I'm guilty of this as well, like I've given talks about these topics. And it's only recently that I decided that I shouldn't be giving as many talks about these topics I should be recommending the black women, I know, the Latina x women. I know, the transgender people I know, to be giving a lot of these talks and said, because it's actually their lived experience, and they're also experts in the field, same as I am. And so that's a really important thing, too. Is that, should you actually give that talk or should you recommend someone else to give that talk? Question, ask yourself,

Jim O'Neill 43:42

yeah, that actually leads right into where we wanted to wrap up with this idea of what can we do if we're privileged folks in spaces like this, which is that you know, we need to acknowledge that regardless of what we have individually personally faced in our lives, we have this amount of honor and privilege and honor and being the key word. And it's been with us our whole lives and counteracting that privilege, by lifting up other folks and giving away our own opportunities and our own power in a way that helps other folks to come in and fill that space in a way that they absolutely should. All of that is not an unfair thing for us to have to go through the unfairness is what's been happening historically, for hundreds of years, we should recognize that it's somebody else's turn.

Heather O'Neill 44:37

Well, I'm not just recognized, but actually do it. And I know this is wild to say but what if you turned down a job and said, Hey, did you consider hiring this person of color or this disabled person who is in the industry and has struggling to get a job because of all the systemic bias against them, because there are systems of oppression in place because when we use algorithms to solve problems it just codifies racism and codifies white supremacy makes it worse instead of better, but we still do it. And so when you're going about your day and your week, just

consider, where's the place that I've got honor and privilege that I can actually give something up and it will be hard. I'm not saying this is easy. But if you're serious about equality and equity, if you're serious about adjust society, if you're serious about inclusion, and you're serious about diversity and about giving a shit about other humans, this is the work that we have to do. And so take a step back and I know we started talking about coworking spaces, and now we're talking about it everywhere. But where's their privilege in your life that you could give up some power to someone else? That would actually be possibly a hardship for you, but would benefit somebody else who wouldn't have otherwise had an opportunity or who has fewer opportunities than you? I think that's the question that you should come away with today. Asking yourself and looking at your life for. And if you've been listening along, we absolutely would love to hear from you. If you're a person of color, we'd love to hear from you about what you would like to see in CO working spaces, and especially from white people in those spaces about how to make them more inclusive for you, and anything else that you think about specialized co working spaces that really works for you or that you love. Feel free to also promote co working spaces run by people of color that you just think are amazing. If you're white person listening to this, especially someone who has lots of other privileges. Please let us know how you're going to use that privilege to make the spaces here and more inclusive and more equitable. How are you going to give up some of that power that you didn't earn? To make sure that it's a more equal distribution of power? We'd love to know. A big thanks to this week's author for sharing that article. And thank you also to our producer Melanie Scroggins to get details about anything we referenced in This episode, or to recommend an article for a future episode, visit [tech thinking aloud.com](https://techthinkingaloud.com) we'll see you in the next episode.

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