

Racialized design: developing a vocabulary of shared intention in design

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ABSTRACT

Racialized design will be analyzed through conversations focused on the ethics of knowing, shared vocabulary, and identifying racialized design on an international stage. The ability to identify and discuss the overgeneralization of historically powerless communities is imperative to guide the social shift in participatory design. Through the use of community agreements and a sharing of vocabulary, this conversation will allow participants to: 1) speak to their own social experiences with racialized design, or 2) convey knowledge and validation of said experiences. The learning of a shared vocabulary narrowing in on multiple elements of racialized design would enable collaborative partners from multiple disciplines to change patterns, working together to deter the continuum of this overgeneralization.

Author Keywords

Race; social impact; social issues; ethics; epistemic knowledge; racism; racialized design; pedagogy; diversity.

INTRODUCTION IDENTIFIERS

In order to exemplify different elements of racism in design, we determined three conclusive areas in which Racialized Design can be identified; artifacts, systems, and experiences. These three areas include comprehensive examples of racialized design which designers have the power and privilege to positively affect our society. It is imperative to incorporate these lessons into a diverse and inclusion pedagogy to ensure we design curricula that understands the implications of design within our culture and communities. The decision

was made to show both a historical and contemporary directive of artifacts, systems, and experiences, focused on different forms of racialized design. We curated a collection of the three categories as a resource for design educators.

Racism Untaught examines racialized design from the perspective of three identifiers: artifacts, systems, and experiences. The first category, artifacts, is defined as designed objects showing human workmanship or machine modification (Merriam-Webster, 2020). The second category, systems, is defined as an organized set of doctrines, ideas, or principles usually intended to explain the arrangement or working of a systematic whole (Merriam-Webster, 2020). The third category, experiences, is defined as something personally encountered, undergone, or lived through (Merriam-Webster, 2020).

An example of an internationally-recognized racialized artifact is the confederate flag. The confederate flag was originally designed in 1861 to represent the Confederate States of America, the southern states in the United States. The use of the flag in the United States Civil War of the 1860s and civil rights movement in the 1960s imbued the flag as a symbol for racism and hate (Leib, Webster, 2012). The flag is displayed internationally to support racist ideologies in the public domain.

An example of an internationally-recognized racialized system is the lack of sanctions put into place for racist experiences with the The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA). Continuously neglecting to develop or even enforce regulations of discriminatory practices on and off the field. On July 11th, 2019 FIFA released their new approach to disciplinary code and introducing their principle of zero tolerance on racism and any form of discrimination (FIFA Council, 2019, PDF). One of the four bullets they outline is, “The scope, definition and content of our anti-racism and anti-discrimination vision have been fully aligned

with the highest international standards, including the prosecution of any discrimination on account of race, skin colour, ethnic, national or social origin, gender, disability, sexual orientation, language, religion, political opinion, wealth, birth or any other status or any other reason. (PDF)” It is yet to be seen if these regulations will be enforced at continuum.

An internationally-recognized racialized experience is the trend of a banana being thrown at a Black football player during a game. Barcelona football player Danny Alves had a banana thrown at him during a game when he was prepared to take a corner kick. He bent down to pick up the banana, took a bite, and then kicked the ball (BBC Sport, 2019). The fan who threw the banana received a life ban from Villarreal, the Spanish football club (Jackson, 2014). In October of 2019 at a Bulgarian home game against England .



Figure 1. Racism Untaught workshop board and cards.

Bulgaria’s national soccer team was ordered by the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) to play its next home game behind closed doors as punishment for the racist behavior of its fans during a Euro 2020 qualifier against England.

Racism Untaught is focused on cultivating learning environments for people both in industry and in academia to further explore issues of race and racism, from the obvious to the invisible. It provides a reason for why it is necessary to create a framework for identifying, contextualizing, and re-imagining forms of racialized design. It is imperative that design educators and organizations possess the tools necessary to foster conversations and learning environments with a focus on diversity, inclusion, and equity.

The paper will outline the value of facilitating conversations focused on the shared ability to identify racialized design, the ethics of knowing a ‘shared intention,’

and the understanding of a shared vocabulary when discussing racialized design. In order to guide the conversation, we will be using examples to discuss these different elements of racism in design using the determined three conclusive areas in which racialized design can be identified; artifacts, systems, and experiences. These three areas include comprehensive examples of racialized design, which designers have the power and privilege to affect (Mercer, Moses, 2019).

Tools to support conversation

The entire toolkit for Racism Untaught includes a workboard and 255 cards that walks participants through the design research process focused on analyzing a racialized form of design. The steps are titled; context, define, ideate, prototype, and impact.

The steps walk participants through an iterative design research process that enables them to reimagine forms of racialized design.

The conversation we are proposing will focus on the first step, context, and 36 cards associated with that step. In this group of cards, elements of racism have been identified and defined for participants. Some of the words included in this grouping are:

- cultural appropriation: the adoption of the elements of a minority culture by members of the dominant culture without permission, respect, or knowledge about the culture.
- explicit bias: attitudes and beliefs about a person or group of people on a conscious level, usually expressed as a direct result of a perceived and/or socialized threat.
- institutional racism: racial discrimination that derives from individuals carrying out the dictates of a prejudiced institution or society.
- tokenism: making a symbolic effort to recruit a small number of people from underrepresented groups in order to give the appearance of equality.
- white washing: the removal of the voices and representation of People of Color by replacing them with White people, most commonly in the movie industry with White characters being cast in historically non-White roles.



Figure 2. Context step with the cards. These cards will be focused on with this conversation.

CONVERSATION

The conversation will be guided by the co-developers of Racism Untaught. Utilizing the first set of cards titled, context, and racialized design examples of artifacts, systems, and experiences.

The room will be divided into groups and each group will use the cards to determine why a specific term and definition do or do not apply to the identifier they were given. Racism Untaught is used to not only talk about the “whys” of racism, but “why nots” when identifying racialized elements.

This conversation will begin with a community agreement that will assist in defining how participants will work together in the space— creating vulnerable and brave conversations on racism. The agreement will include:

- listening actively and compassionately: try to understand others before being understood.
- every voice is important: more perspectives strengthen the conversation.
- self-moderate participation: step up and use your voice or step back and make space for others.
- feelings are as important as intellect: honor your emotions and speak from the heart.
- speak from your own lived experience: use “I” statements and refrain from telling other people’s stories.

Once our community agreement is completed, participants will be guided into critical conversations and assessments of racialized design. They will do this by using the Context deck of cards to identify what forms of racism show up in their given example. In this deck of cards, we also have blank cards so that participants

who outline another element of racism not found in the deck will have the opportunity to have their experience or expertise be used in discussion. Participants will then have the opportunity to share out on their findings and learnings toward the end of the session.

CONCLUSION

Context is the very foundation of understanding as participatory design moves toward defining a racialized design problem and creating new design approaches to these challenges. This is why Racism Untaught focuses heavily on understanding the elements of racism which often helping designers gain empathy to effectively create anti-racist design approaches. Participants should take away ways in which they might assess racialized design and how experience sharing can increase their cultural competency through participatory design.

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