

The Editor's Cut - Episode 065 - "Creatives Empowered Presents: Why Anti-Racism Still Matters"

Patti Pon:

As people of colour or marginalized communities, every day we walk through life, and every day we catch arrows, right? I'm the only person of colour. I'm the only woman. People say stupid things to me. They mistake me for the catering staff instead of the attendee at the conference, right? They're surprised when I don't have an accent. So every day, I get those arrows. And every day I have to come home and pull the arrows out all by myself, or with the support of my loved ones. You want to be an accomplice: how about, make it so that those arrows don't come at me in the first place?

Sarah Taylor:

Hello, and welcome to The Editor's Cut. I'm your host, Sarah Taylor. We would like to point out that the lands on which we have created this podcast, and that many of you may be listening to us from, are part of ancestral territory. It is important for all of us to deeply acknowledge that we are on ancestral territory that has long served as a place where Indigenous peoples have lived, met and interacted. We honour, respect and recognize these nations that have never relinquished their rights or sovereign authority over the lands and waters on which we stand today. We encourage you to reflect on the history of the land, the rich culture, the many contributions and the concerns that impact Indigenous individuals and communities. Land acknowledgements are the start to a deeper action.

Sarah Taylor:

Today, I'm talking with the executive director of Creatives Empowered, Shivani Saini, and sharing a panel that Creatives Empowered produced called "Why Anti-Racism Still Matters." Creatives Empowered is inspired by, and embodies, what is truly possible when racialized talent are empowered to thrive. Creatives Empowered is a federally incorporated, virtual non-profit organization founded by Shivani Saini and Atelier Culturati and made its inaugural public launch on November 16th, 2020. Their strong and growing membership demonstrates the need for this organization in Alberta and is already proving that the talent does exist. Their ownership, leadership, and board governance is 100% racialized and all Alberta-based. It's also important to know that Creatives Empowered inherently serves all racialized talent within Alberta.

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Sarah Taylor:

Shivani, thank you so much for joining us today on The Editor's Cut.

Shivani Saini:

My pleasure. Thank you for having me.

Sarah Taylor:

To start off, can you tell us a little bit about your background in film and television and how Creatives Empowered came to be?

Shivani Saini:

I've worked in professional film, television, media and the arts for over 25 years. I actually started my career when I was quite young, as a teenager, with the National Screen Institute. And I've had the opportunity throughout my career to work in virtually every discipline, every type of production, genre of production that exists, everything from the creative side to the business side. And in November of 2020, I launched Creatives Empowered alongside other established racialized professionals here in Alberta.

Sarah Taylor:

And now can you tell us a little bit about what Creatives Empowered is, and what the mission of Creatives Empowered is?

Shivani Saini:

So, Creatives Empowered is actually Alberta's first and only non-profit collective that's by and for BIPOC film, television, media and arts professionals who live and work in the colonial boundary known as Alberta. And we exist to be a safe and supportive community for BIPOC artists and creatives. We're here to advocate for and represent their interests and their needs. We work to increase professional opportunities for them, to provide empowering and educational resources, events, and professional development. And we also network, collaborate and share with like-minded individuals and organizations across Canada and also around the world.

Sarah Taylor:

Why did you feel like you needed to create an organization like this in Alberta?

Shivani Saini:

In 2019, I had a series of professional experiences that I would describe as empowering and disempowering, which I think every human being can relate to, regardless of background. For myself personally, I started to become consciously aware of the correlation, the relationship between the disempowering experiences I was having and systemic racism. And once I started to see this pattern and then really started to reflect back on my entire 25-plus-year career, I couldn't ignore what I was seeing anymore. And this conscious awareness was something I developed really at the tail end of 2019, so the timing of it was quite interesting. And then of course the pandemic began in 2020, and then the events of the summer of 2020 happened.

And, it was at that point that I realized it would just be really, really important to really consider doing something here. And this was actually an idea I had in 2019, because one of the empowering experiences I had actually involved working with the Reelworld Film Festival and Screen Institute, which was established over 20 years ago to advocate for equity in Canada's screen sector. And it was founded by Tonya Williams. So it was clear to me that it just would've been so incredible to have had access to something like that in my formative years, and I thought it would be great to set something up here in Alberta. Prior to the pandemic, it wasn't something I had the time and the energy to do, but after the events of the summer of 2020, I started to have a lot of conversations with other established, seasoned, racialized professionals here in Alberta, and also with folks across the country.

And these conversations were so interesting and they were really empowering because despite the fact that each of our respective experiences with systemic racism, of course, are going to be a little bit different because we're all different people—we're all different individuals with different journeys

and life paths—there was this commonality, this universality in our experiences that just created an inherent understanding of what being subjected to systemic racism is actually like, and that the understanding is almost unspoken. We just know. And it just became so clear to me that it would be tremendously valuable to have something here in Alberta that's by and for people who live and work here.

And I know that in Canada we've got film and television production regions that are bigger—places like Toronto, places like Vancouver—but the reality is there are a lot of really talented artists and creatives living and working in Alberta that want to tell stories. And some of those folks are also BIPOC, IBPOC, racialized, and it was just really clear we needed something that was really by and for us. And so after having a series of conversations, it just became very apparent in November that it was time to put something together. And one day I sat down in front of my computer and wrote out what Creatives Empowered was. I wrote out the vision mission and value statement, and this material really wrote itself. It did not take long to articulate what this was. And then shortly thereafter, the Canada Media Fund had come out with sector development support specifically for initiatives like this one. So the timing was quite serendipitous and obviously meant to be, and we applied and were successful, and that's what brings us to where we are today.

Sarah Taylor:

Amazing. Well, with that funding and I'm sure other people supporting Creatives Empowered, you've been able to put on a bunch of different workshops and events. And we, as the Canadian Cinema Editors, have joined Creatives Empowered as an ally partner. So we're going to share today on the podcast, an event that Creatives Empowered put on. Can you tell us a little bit about the panel that we're going to listen to today?

Shivani Saini:

So this event that you're going to listen to today is such a powerful conversation. It's called Why Anti-Racism Still Matters. It features Reneltta Arluk. She is the director of Indigenous Arts at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. She is also the founder of AKPIK Theatre. It features Patti Pon, who's the president and CEO of Calgary Arts Development. And Kizzie Sutton, the executive director of the Calgary Society of Independent Filmmakers. And to be honest, the idea for this event actually was a sticky note. I had just wrote down the words "why anti-racism still matters," and these three names came to mind. The sticky note was sitting in my notebook since last year, and I had a chance to reach out to the three of them and say, "Hey, I'd like to invite you to be a part of this event. What do you think?" They all said yes. And, the rest is history. These are three incredible women doing incredible work in their respective fields, and just absolute powerhouses. And we had such an incredible and enlightening conversation on why anti-racism still matters.

Sarah Taylor:

Oh, amazing. I can't wait to share with everybody. Before we jump to the panel, I want to know, how can people participate and/or join, and work with Creators Empowered?

Shivani Saini:

Sure. So we offer free lifetime membership to racialized individuals and any of the organizations they own and operate. And you can easily sign up for that on our website, you just have to go to the "join" page. And if you're interested in becoming an ally, that's something that organizations can also do, the information's available on that page. And we are, actually—because of the fact that we were born out of

the pandemic—a virtual nonprofit. And we have designed a website that allows us to deliver our mission online, and we do it through social media. So you can explore our website, you'll see that we have different events and resources just like the one that we mentioned, that are available for people to check out. We also have an opportunities page, which is basically a free classified section for Alberta's cultural sector. So if you have opportunities, job opportunities, project opportunities that you want to share with a diverse community, you can easily post them there. And there are other ways to support as well. We are always seeking supporters and partners, sponsors. So folks can absolutely feel free to get in touch with us. You can do that through our website too, and we can start some great conversation to see what might be possible.

Sarah Taylor:

Amazing. Well, I'm glad that we did, and I'm glad that we can share this panel with everyone today. Thank you so much for joining us.

Shivani Saini:

Thank you.

Crew Member 1:

And action.

Crew Member 2:

Action.

Shivani Saini:

Hello everyone. Thank you so much for joining us. Creatives Empowered is pleased to present “Why Anti-Racism Still Matters.” I'd like to start off with a land acknowledgement. Creatives Empowered is a virtual nonprofit that serves all racialized talent within the colonial boundary known as Alberta. We acknowledge that we live, work, and play on the traditional Treaty Territories of 4, 6, 7, 8, and 10, along with the Métis Nation regions of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. We also acknowledge that we are on stolen land. These are the traditional territories of many First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, specifically in Treaty 6, the Cree, the Dene, the Anishinaabe, the Saulteaux, Nokota Isga, the Nakota Sioux, and the Blackfoot peoples. Specifically in Treaty 7, the people of the Blackfoot Confederacy in Siksiká, Kainai and Piikani, the Tsuu T'ina First Nation and the people of Stoney Nakoda, and Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wellesley. And specifically in Treaty 8, the Cree, the Dene Tha', the Dane-zaa, the Denesuline, the Nakota Sioux, the Iroquois, and the Inuit peoples. We express, with the utmost of respect, our deepest gratitude for the manner in which these traditional peoples have honoured these treaties. And in the spirit of reconciliation, we are committed to doing the same in how we live, work, and play on their traditional lands.

Thank you once again, for joining us, I'd like to introduce you to our fantastic guests today. Let's start with Renelitta Arluk. She is the director of Indigenous Arts at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. She is Inuvialuit, Dene and Cree. She's a mom from the Northwest Territories. She's also the founder of AKPIK Theatre, which is a Northern-focused professional Indigenous theatre company. As we were just talking, it's the first and only professional Indigenous theatre company in the Northwest Territories.

We have Patti Pon, who is the president and the CEO of Calgary Arts Development. She is a veteran community and arts champion, and her extensive track record of leadership and service in

Calgary includes staff leadership positions at EPCOR Centre for the Performing Arts, Alberta Performing Arts Stabilization Fund, and the Alberta Theatre Projects, and volunteer positions with Calgary Foundation, Calgary Stampede, and the Asian Heritage Foundation of Southern Alberta.

We also have with us today Kizzie Sutton, and she is the executive director of the Calgary Society for Independent Filmmakers. She's an engaging arts and community professional, and is happy to be returning to her roots in film as the executive director of CISF. I want to thank you so much, each of you, for joining us today. And I just want to start off by mentioning that this event was inspired by a sticky note that had all three of your names written down. I wrote down the words, "Why anti-racism still matters." Your three names were the names that came to my mind. That sticky note lived in a notebook for months and then I finally got in touch with all of you to say, "Let's make this happen." So, thank you so much for being here today. I'm so excited to explore this really important topic.

And what we'd like to do is maybe just start off by taking a look at a definition of anti-racism. This is a source that comes from an organization called Race Forward, and I had the privilege of discovering this source through resources that Black Lives Matter had put together. "Anti-racism is defined as the work of actively opposing racism by advocating for changes in political, economic, and social life. Anti-racism tends to be an individualized approach, and set up in opposition to individual racist behaviours and impacts." So, I'd like to start by exploring, I think a really important question to start off with just coming off of the definition that we saw, which is what really is the distinction between racism and anti-racism? And I'd love to hear some thoughts on that. Kizzie, why don't you go first?

Kizzie Sutton:

I think the critical difference between racism and anti-racism is the direction in which people are putting their effort. At first, I was thinking, "Oh, it's actively opposing racism." But at the same time, when we look at systemic racism, when we look at how racism plays out within our daily lives, that is also active and very present and deliberate. So I no longer think that anti-racism is the counter, if you will, to racism as a means of where people are putting their energy, but it's also the intent behind. Anti-racism is also hoping to reduce harm—again, my perspective—and hopefully also encourage education and learning so that we can start to change people's perspectives and, most likely, learned patterns of behaviour. So for me, one of the biggest differences between racism and anti-racism is the act of work of trying to dismantle systems of systemic oppression, systemic racism, and impacting daily lives and trying to change the way we, as individuals, interact with each other.

Renelitta Arluk:

Yeah, I find it interesting that anti-racism seems to be an individual effort and that active racism is actually a systemic collaborative group effort. So that's kind of an interesting awareness when we look at anti-racism from that perspective.

Patti Pon:

Yeah. I think... Just before I go there, I just want to [introduces self in Siksiká]. I have the honour of being gifted a Blackfoot name, and I do that. And so, whenever I have a chance to speak publicly, I always want to acknowledge where I'm speaking from, and that is the Treaty Seven territory of the Niisitapi, the Blackfoot people. And it was an honour to be gifted that name, which stands for "Two Standing Headdress Woman." It also compliments my Chinese name, which is [says name in Mandarin], which is "the Goddess on the Moon." And then of course my English name, Patti Pon.

And I think anti-racism for me is very much what Renelitta talked to, which is, when you hear the term, I think there is an association with more of an individual approach versus when you hear the term “racism” where there's a tendency to apply it to a system, but not apply it to me. Not, kind of, embrace that I maybe have a role to play in that. Anti-racism in the way it has surfaced or maybe what the zeitgeist is, there appears to be an association that maybe there's something I need to do as an individual. And with the three ways in which I identify with my name, I think it attributes to—there is that many and *then* some ways I live and walk in this world, and that anti-racism has an application in every single one of those identities. And it recognizes that entirety of who you are and how you are in this time. So, that's what it means to me.

Kizzie Sutton:

It's, I guess, the pluralism of walking in the very many different facets that we as individuals take for granted and take space in. And, just like the other lovely women here shared, it's again that act of participation in trying to dismantle that individual versus system—us, them. I love the way that anti-racism is trying to deal with the individual. We also now need to add, how does anti-racism also deal with the larger, and the group thinks that we all interact with? So, yeah, I pretty much want to echo what has been said and reiterate the importance behind it.

Shivani Saini:

I'd love to just follow up with another question. What role does accountability play in helping to understand this distinction? How important is it, why is it important, for organizations to be able to take accountability, for example, for individuals to be able to take accountability. Let's talk a little bit about that and why that's needed.

Renelitta Arluk:

I mean, what's challenging and a gift is that... Yeah, I'm witnessing this now because it has become so apparent that, I think we've interpreted that anti-racism is neutrality, but it really isn't. Racism is active and anti-racism has to be equally, if not stronger, in activation. But when we think about silence and complacency, I don't think we really align that with racism. I think we align that with peace, or neutrality means that I don't agree with you. But in truth now, I'm really encouraging people to think about, anti-racism as voice. You have to actively state, you are not racist by being present, by speaking up, by witnessing. I think we have to activate our bodies and our minds and our voices to actually be an anti-activist. Whereas before, I think we're taught that by not engaging means that we're not agreeing, but actually now, what I'm witnessing and seeing is a need for us to actually say, "I am not a racist. I will not tolerate that. I will not stand here and listen to that. I disagree with what you're saying." That we have to activate our voices more when we witness situations that are happening, that are racist.

Shivani Saini:

Thank you, Renelitta. Patti, go ahead.

Patti Pon:

Well, and I think, absolutely. And to add onto that, there's been that adage around that if you're not racist, then you must be anti-racist. There's no in between. Like, that's it. They're binary, right? And they are mutually exclusive. And so in the same way that colonial systems, as an example, that racist systems that exist within that—we've had centuries to have that imposed and embedded in us, right? Even as people of colour, or visible minorities. or marginalized communities. So, we have to take that active

effort to apply it and actively have anti-racist systems in place. So part of the accountability, I think, is recognizing these two things actually are mutually exclusive. You can't be both. And so, pick a side. And for those who benefit or have had power and privilege because of the existing racist systems in place, you got to come clean.

It is a reckoning. And that doesn't mean that you have to completely give up everything. But as Renelitta said: call it when you see it, when you know it's wrong. And we know it's wrong. And use that power and privilege that you have been given the benefit from this system, to get us to a new system, a different system where everybody can derive. This isn't like a pie and there's only so many slices. It is infinite, if we're talking about an anti-racist system. And I think that's something that people don't get. We're not replacing one, we're starting a new one that has room for everybody. And you know, why wouldn't you want that? And why wouldn't you want to play your part in creating that system? And there's space for everyone.

Shivani Saini:

Thank you, Patti. Kizzie.

Kizzie Sutton:

I think I just want to highlight that it is a dual system. It's either on or off. It's not, "I'm going to be Switzerland and stay neutral," and "Oh, I don't want to offend grandpa so I'm just not going to bring my mixed-race boyfriend over to family dinner." Because you're actively denying something. And if you're actively denying something... if you look at it the other way around, you're actively perpetuating the same system that you're saying you're trying to pull down. I think that's one of the slippery slopes of allyship is that reckoning within, I guess, Caucasian and European-based families and homes, is recognizing that yes, me as an individual, we as a family, and us as a people have benefited from these systems and now it's been so long that it feels like you're right to be able to do whatever it is that you're doing.

However, we recognize that it's not right. And we recognize that we as people are all people. I say, "we." My hope is that all of us recognize that there are people out there that obviously do not. To be an ally means to have those tough conversations in places and spaces with loved ones that I wouldn't have access to, nor would they give me the time of day if some of their thoughts were as deeply embedded as they can be. So a part of the anti-racism state for me is really taking on that leadership role as an individual and trying to make change within the smaller circles or spheres of influence that we have.

Shivani Saini:

Thank you. Let's jump a little further into anti-racism and allyship. One of the things that I have seen repeatedly, in terms of accountability, I see a lot of folks that come from what used to be described as "the predominant culture." A lot of individuals, a lot of organizations in the cultural sector, really struggling to be able to take that accountability. And yet, despite the struggle, despite the reluctance or the aversion to taking accountability, simultaneously they are moving forward to demonstrate that they're trying to be as non-racist as possible. And I think we've all seen examples and situations of how this can actually start to become quite problematic and perpetuate further harm against people who are racialized. And I want to talk a little bit about that right now, and talk about what really should our allies be doing?

Renelitta Arluk:

Be uncomfortable. They should just really be uncomfortable and start being okay with being uncomfortable. I just finished listening to Jesse Wentz's "Unreconciled," which is very powerful, and we listened to it on our drive as an audio book. So he's actually narrating his own book, which made it even more powerful... crying and laughter. But listening to that and just reflecting that in my own life, my own journey, working at Banff Centre and the work that I do as an artist and arts leader in this country is that I think we've just... Indigenous, BIPOC, people of colour, we just have a capacity that we're born with. And we didn't choose to have this capacity, we just have it.

To be successful in what we do, we have to not only balance bias, racism, judgement, gender, age—everything—roles, family roles, patriarchy, matriarchy. We have to do all that and then still be successful, and so my capacity is larger than most people that I know, because I wouldn't be able to do what I do if I didn't have a large capacity that... And white people don't have to have capacity. They get to be born without suffering in a way that doesn't challenge them every moment of the day. And so when I listen to that, I go, "Okay, so how can we raise and elevate conversation changes, undo bias?" Reconciliation is not for us, right? It's not for our society. It's for society to... the predominant, as you mentioned, is about growing the capacity to be uncomfortable, in just a little way. I mean, there's techniques to do it. And I think that that would be a really great way to learn how to become more inclusive. [laughs] I'm sorry.

Kizzie Sutton:

Can I jump in? That just sparked a beautiful idea—a process, as well—is, I love that idea of the dominant culture needs to be uncomfortable because those of us that are not a part of the dominant culture have been uncomfortable for hundreds of years. So the one, two, three generations of discomfort that we hope that the dominant culture will have to deal with pales in comparison! [laughs] Generations of people of colour have been altered mentally, physically, in all areas. And that discomfort was not something that we chose. It was put upon us, but we were able to live through it and I believe we are stronger for that. And trust that, if you're a part of the dominant culture, that you too can make it through the discomfort. It's not, "Oh man, this bag is so heavy, I might as well just quit."

No, you're developing the muscles. You're learning how to sit in the silence and hear what others are saying, and then have that change and impact the way you, again, move through your life as an individual and as a leader through and through and through. I mean, if we go back to the family unit, which is a critical unit in most peoples of colours' backgrounds, all of the nationalities and nations that I have contacted with, the family unit is huge. And if we can really get the parents and the extended generation to connect and talk about these issues that have come to a head during our time, we really can deal with this and move forward with the anti-racism push, which will then hopefully get us to, dare I say, parity. But I think what Patti was saying is, we need to tear down the old system. We don't need parity. We don't need equity. What we need is a new system.

Patti Pon:

A hundred percent, Kizzie. And so, related to the... Like Shivani says, yes, the question, my immediate instant response was, "Welcome to my life. Welcome to the last... Welcome to my parents' life. Welcome to my grandfather's life when he came to build the railway." So, this five or 10 or 15 or 20 years of you feeling uncomfortable is going to give you a way to relate to me that maybe you haven't related to before. And we can do it in small doses. One thing I would say: go to a pow-wow and take in the environment, feel what it is. Be curious when you're there, because you don't know the protocol, you don't know the tradition, you might not know the meaning. But I promise you, when they see you, you

will be welcome. And then you will understand what a different system can look like and make you feel like when you are the other.

So there's those kinds of things we can do that aren't going to hurt you. At the same time, we then... I talk about a long game to those new systems, right? As a funder, as a granter, especially a public funder, right? All of the funds I invest into the sector, the vast majority of it is public. And so I'm very conscious that for decades, right, the Massey Commission report that created the Canada Council was written in like, the 1950s. And it's the same system that we run in as funders now. I don't know, call me crazy: a few things have changed. And what we've done as funders is we've worked on the margin, right? We've tried to change the system from within, and—kind of 18 months, two years ago, it occurred to me: This is no longer about working inside the system on the margins. This is about a new system. And if we don't come to that new system, we're never going to get to an anti-racist system of funding in the arts, of public funding.

And so some of the things we've done—like, we created an Indigenous arts granting program that was created by Indigenous artists. And it includes the things that the Indigenous communities who live in Treaty 7 territory believe should be supported. And then we support that community and our advisory to then do that. And so that's what I mean about how we use our power and privilege to support other ways of knowing, of being, of funding in this particular case. And my hope is we learn something from the original... Well, not hope. We *have* learned things from the original people's investment program that we are now going to transfer into our standard project grants and operating grants, and whatever other kind of grants exist from the old system. But we have to make our way there, and so for those in the dominant culture, you got to come with us on the ride. And the last thing I'll say about that—so there's a wonderful artist here, Adrian Stimson. I think he's from the Kainai nation, but he's from Treaty 7.

Renelitta Arluk:

I think he's from Siksiká.

Patti Pon:

Is he from Siksiká? Oh, sorry Adrian. For years he has said, "I don't need any more allies. I need accomplices." And I would even go so far as to say, we actually need co-conspirators. Who's interested in changing the system, however we got to do it? That's what we need right now. But I get that you got to start somewhere. And being an ally, trying to place yourself in our shoes, trying to feel that discomfort, that's the start. And then, come walk with us on that journey to co-conspiracies. I love that.

Shivani Saini:

In terms of allyship, maybe just to wrap up some thoughts on allyship because there are other aspects to the discussion we want to get into as well. I had asked like, what our allies should do. I would love to know what are our allies... From your perspective, what are our allies getting right, and what are they getting wrong?

Patti Pon:

I think what they're getting right is understanding and recognizing the necessity for the change, right? So that, there's a whole readiness for change that we talk about in systems change. That's a good thing. The challenge then becomes... So readiness for change, and then what do you do? What do you do is, recognize that your organizational journey cannot happen unless there's a personal journey for each and

every single person inside that organization to be a part of. So you can't just report to me and say, "Oh, we have the right representation on our stages," or... That's great, I'm glad, and I look forward to the day when you might have over-representation. However, then as you learn more, you do more.

And so don't just sit in on Calgary Arts Development town halls on commitments to equity, actually go inside your... What's the training you're doing, what's the learning? What are you offering people as resources? And there's a couple of resources that I sent over that we can put up whenever it's appropriate. Continue to learn, continue to be curious, and then apply it. Again, individual and organizational journeys have to go hand in hand. And I think that's sometimes what people get wrong is, they're just going to go through the motions. As a funder, right, I can do things. I can ask you what your representation is and you'll check the box, but you gotta mean it. You gotta understand why it's there and you won't, unless you take that personal individual approach and that... So back to, right, our very first question.

Renelitta Arluk:

Yeah, no, a hundred percent. And I think it's really important to just say that organizational and personal have to be aligned because, as an Indigenous woman who sits on juries, I can see through those checked boxes. So, it's not good lying. You're not a good liar, really, if you're looking at representation instead of embodiment and actual curiosity. And I think, saying earlier too how about, like, curiosity—be curious, you know? When I look at allyship... I see it on social media, when we look at the war that's happening in Ukraine and everyone's wearing the babushka scarves. That to me is anti-racism activism. When I see you posting pictures of things that aren't related to that, I start wondering how engaged you are in the global conversation of oppression and colonization.

And so, when we were going through the Indigenous Lives Matter, Black Lives Matter, I looked very closely at my non-BIPOC friends and saw them... If I saw them posting actual engagement with conversation and learning, I really value that as allyship. When I saw my non-BIPOC friends and colleagues just posting pictures of books they've read, or shows they've watched, and they're not engaged in what's happening, I go, "Hmm. I wonder how engaged you are with me as a colleague or as a friend." And I start wondering, who are my friends and who are my workmates, and how well do I know them? And that's that relational work. When we think about systems... We're not in a time of complacency. We're in a time of activism. We have to make decisions to be healthy, we have to make decisions to be alive. And so I don't think now's the time to sit back and scroll. I think we have to really be activists in that way.

So in a social media lens, that's how I'm seeing it. In a more in-person lens, it's about... it's really, you have to actively teach yourself what's going on and ask those questions. And I think the struggle that I'm starting to see a bit more is, these systems work because they work for how they are. And when we're introducing new systems—which are not new systems—but when we're introducing new systems, what's happening is that, it's learning how to undo what you know, and that's very uncomfortable and maybe won't work in the system that you're currently very comfortable in. And I think that's that fear of wrong. And so what I always say is: you're going to get it wrong, just do it. Just do the wrong so that you can learn the right. So that's like my big offer for allyship.

Kizzie Sutton:

Again, echoing what was said before, at the same time, I'm going to start with the end of the question of, what are some of our allies doing wrong? I'm going to say not calling out microaggressions. I think we, as people of colour, have become so good at tolerating and dealing with microaggressions on the outside, the full impact of what those microaggressions do to us as individuals, what it does to us in our physical

health and our mental health... It gets lost when we talk about allyship. Mainly because we're like, "Oh, Kizzy, that doesn't matter." I mean, one of the comments that I got when I was working in an arts organization that I thought was extremely liberal was, and I quote, "Oh, our coolness factor just went up because we hired you." Huh! You know what I mean? Like there's certain statements that you're just like, "Wow, a lovely compliment, that I'm cool because I'm Black?" Like, what are we saying?

And now, me as a professional, I need to smile and nod, otherwise, I become the angry Black woman. So there's weight that gets put on our shoulders, that if other people of the dominant culture could call them out so that the person who is being inflicted with these microaggressions don't have to... I think that would be a great step for allies to help out with lifting the weight on our shoulders.

And what they're doing right? Curiosity. And keep being curious. Keep sitting in that discomfort.

Patti Pon:

Super true. And I think there's something else, Kizzie, that actually, you just said that reminded me—and I'll try to do this short because it's a bit of a shaggy dog story, Shivani. So, one of the things that a great friend, JD Derbyshire, shared with me and I walk with it every day is that, as people of colour or marginalized communities, every day we walk through life and every day we catch arrows, right? I'm the only person of colour. I'm the only woman. I've helped increase a factor. People say stupid things to me. They mistake me for the catering staff instead of the attendee at the conference, right? They're surprised when I don't have an accent. So every day, I get those arrows. And every day I have to come home and pull the arrows out all by myself, or with the support of my loved ones.

You want to be an accomplice: how about make it so that those arrows don't come at me in the first place? How about, be a support to me to pull those arrows out? Every time you ask me, because I'm the only person in the room who can help you with an equity statement, or can help you understand, "Why do people get so mad? I didn't do it. It wasn't me who did it." All those, like—by the way, which is an incredibly racist comment. But, so, that's where the curiosity part becomes so important. But every day: those arrows. And I'm not saying that people in the dominant culture don't get arrows, but you sure as heck don't get the arrows that we get. And lately, they're big arrows. And when we're asked to help solve the problem, that actually, as Renelitta said, isn't actually my problem. Go figure it out! Like I've had to do for my whole life. That's what you need to do, that's what this discomfort means. And I know it isn't fun, but you know, try getting the arrows every day, and then tell me it's not fun. And then maybe we can get into a conversation that's meaningful and really starts to make those changes we need.

Shivani Saini:

Thank you, Patti. Amazing. I love the analogy of the arrows. I'm so glad microaggressions were brought up, just from my own personal perspective. Legit, if I had a dollar for every time a racial microaggression, which is just basically a racial micro-inequity, was thrown my way, I would be a very, very rich woman today, and I would probably be doing this event with you from my beach house somewhere tropical. No joke, no joke there. I would be rich. My personal experience embodies the onslaught of microaggressions. And I've heard this expression before, "it's like death by a thousand cuts." I also have had plenty of experiences where I've actually tried as a racialized person to call out the behaviour to identify it. And then what ends up happening is, I just get destroyed with more arrows. It can be really dangerous for you as a racialized person to call that behaviour out in particular, depending on who it's coming from.

One of the things that I've seen a lot of organizations—and say, specific individuals within those organizations—get wrong is that, when a racialized person, someone who's Black, someone who's

Indigenous, someone who's a person of colour, someone who comes from an underrepresented community, is actually taking on the emotional labour of legitimately raising a concern about something that they've experienced. It can be... I see this quite often, it can be really easy for those individuals and those organizations to just immediately get defensive. And instead of taking the time to actually listen and understand, it becomes about reacting and ensuring that they're not actually going to be labelled as racist.

And I want to bring this back to that point about being uncomfortable, because what people really need to do is they need to move away from fear. They need to move away from fear. We all need to move away from fear. Racism, in its... If you break it down to its most fundamental element, it is ultimately a fear of something that is different. A fear of an individual that is different. And that fear and the way that that fear can become the basis, the driving factor behind racial and unconscious biases and then how that behaviour can manifest is like... Oh my gosh, we could talk about that for days. But, you know, it's so important for everyone, allies that are listening to this and also folks who are racialized, to really become consciously aware of the fear that is driving a reaction, a response to something that might be driving how you want to respond to something that you've just heard.

And, it's important for cultural sector organizations to really pay particular attention to the fact that if you've got individuals that come from these underrepresented communities, and more than one individual is starting to raise the same concern about, whether it's microaggressions or systemically racist behaviour that's much more overt, that there is a need to pay very careful attention to what's going on. And like our incredible guests today have said, to be able to get to a place where you're willing to be uncomfortable so that you can start creating the right kind of change to ensure it doesn't keep continuing. Microaggressions, you really got me there with that one Kizzie, thank you.

So, we have a little bit of time left and I think what I'd like to do is see if we can also explore what anti-racism means to each of you personally. And I think it would be great to get some of your personal perspectives. Reneltta, let's start with you. I'd love to get your perspectives on what anti-racism means to you personally. I know you've touched a little bit on it, but... As an Indigenous woman, as an artist, as the director of Indigenous Arts at Banff Centre and the creator of AKPIK Theatre.

Reneltta Arluk:

Yeah I mean, there's a lot of different ways to look at anti-racism in those areas. I mean, the beautiful thing about working in community, being engaged in community, is that there's a value system. And that you learn your value system culturally, and then you carry those values forward. And then those values systems naturally adapt themselves into the systems that you surround yourself with. And I'm grateful for the teachings that I received in my life, and I continue to receive in my life, and how they can be adapted and applied to it. And then how systems that are systemic, or are oppressive or colonial, tend to not fit into those systems because of the value system.

So I really look at... So whenever I start having conversations with organizations or people that I don't know very well, I start looking at, "What is your value system, and do we align?" And if not, then how can we have conversations around changing those systems? I really value hearing, "It's not pie." I have said in so many rooms, "It is not pie, it's cake." It's a layered cake with lots of flavours and everybody loves cake. So let's look at cake and not pie. And I don't know why, and maybe it's the education system where we're taught the pie chart. Maybe that's the ultimate problem, is that we're taught to divide through our way of thinking, instead of looking at it from a collaborative, inclusive way of thinking.

And so, when we look at community and going into, say, Banff Centre, and doing the work that we're doing, it's affording that place of agency and self-determination. So I say Indigenous-led a lot and I say it purposefully, so that other people can start thinking "Indigenous-led" instead of thinking, "Oh, this is our Indigenous arts area under the Banff Centre guise." And this is, everyone's here, I'm like, "Hmm, we're Indigenous-led, which means we're running systems differently, so our systems are going to impact recruitment, impact production, impact technical, impact programming." And slowly, in my four years of being there, I have seen some really great change. And I feel like if you don't embody it, then you're just progressing a system that will clash. And so, I mean, keeping it short and tight and trying to encapsulate everything in there: value systems, systems that need to change. It's not pie, it's cake.

Kizzie Sutton:

Love the analogy of cake 'cause who doesn't love cake? As long as it has cream cheese icing. [laughs] So for me, and this is going to be a little obscure, but every time I think of what does anti-racism mean for me personally, I think about the fact that I am of Afro-Caribbean descent, living in Canada, which is clearly founded on, based on, systemic principles that lead to racism. But also the fact that I am benefitting from the fact that I'm living in Canada, which is a system that stole the Indigenous lands. And if we want... 'Cause sometimes we're faced with, "Well, I didn't do that. That's not my fault." Well, if I'm benefitting, even though I am one of the members of society that is being discriminated against, I too have to recognize that in my privilege, I too have to go through some discomfort of, "Yeah, I'm living on stolen land." And being a stolen group of people, like, that hits home for me in a way that I don't know if it hits home for other people. And I need to consistently think, "Okay, Kizzie, how is what you're doing either perpetuating or not perpetuating harm in communities and spaces where what you really want to do is build them up and encourage?"

And for me, I really like the idea of partnership. It's not about going into some community and bringing... Like the Christian period, they came over here to "civilize"... Everyone was civilized. There was nothing wrong with the people that were here. Our thought processes were what was wrong. And me being, again, of Afro-Caribbean descent, whose parents immigrated here for the better life, and I'm able to enjoy that better life while still knowing that I'm living and breathing and participating in a system that is oppressive to other people of colour, that really hits home for me. I don't know, I don't think I have an answer yet on how I've resolved that dissonance, 'cause I haven't. It's something that I'm working on. It's something that I'm dealing with. And I think about the fact that anti-racism hits us all individually and we have to recognize that my journey isn't going to be another person's journey, but we can at least share some of the discomfort. So again, move us to that full new system that will allow us all to be able to participate in our fullest way. So a little bit of a unique situation, but that's one of the things that's really hitting me.

Patti Pon:

I think that from a personal perspective, sometimes it's just about getting through the day. It's coping, right? And so moments like this, where I can have a shared conversation, where there's not a lexicon. Like we all get it, and we actually have embodied it. That's a salve, to me. It's sort of something I kind of have in immersing myself in. So that it gives me the courage to go into that day knowing I'm going to get the arrows, right? And, and so what I look for now is, if I'm asked to join a committee or sit on a board or be a part of an initiative, I use the power of three. And so there have to be at least two other people who are going to be in that circle who either look like me, or they think like me, or I know them to be accomplices or co-conspirators. I need that now. Because in the same way that we're asking others who

maybe haven't experienced discomfort in the past like I may have, it's not like it makes it less uncomfortable for me.

I know the rest of my life. I will continue to be in this place of discomfort. It is not going to change in my lifetime, or my work life that I have remaining. However, I hope that there is a shared experience. And so, knowing that, I look to find ways, look for that salve, look for that bandage, look for that moment where I can be in a shared community or in a shared circle. And that, the one thing that will happen in my lifetime is that circle will get bigger. And then we will all understand what our place is in that circle. I think sometimes for organizations who are finding their way, they're in the circle and that's awesome, but what they don't know is what everybody's place is around that circle. Why you're there. And so, I try personally to live my life and get through each day, making it clear what I think my place in the circle is, what I hope it is, and then also connecting the others in it to what their place is, and create that exchange.

Conventional colonial systems don't actually allow for that, right? Granting systems are competitive. You shouldn't know the other people. You can't know who the assessors are. We don't want to tell you why we didn't give you the grant. It's so secretive, right? And maybe, if we were a bit open, instead of being like this, if we were like *this*. So personally, for me, anti-racism is about trying to be like *this*. And it's really hard, by the way, for those of you who maybe don't have to find yourself looking like us in other circles. And so I guess I ask of any of you who are in the dominant culture who watch this—try to be like *this* with me, or with others who look like me, or who talk like me, and then we'll get there. And then we'll share in this discomfort together, and hopefully to a way where we don't have to have that anymore.

Shivani Saini:

Amazing. Thank you. Such great thoughts that are being shared. I'm so appreciative, so grateful to hear all of these different perspectives right now. And I also very much feel like the conversation has been a really nice salve as well. I wanted to see if there were any other thoughts about anti-racism in the cultural sector at large. Specifically, what has changed since 2020, and where do we still need to go?

Patti Pon:

I guess for better or for worse, what has changed? Not a lot. And I hesitate, because I see steps. But there's that adage about two steps forward, three steps back. And maybe it's because it speaks to the complexity of anti-racism and trying to create these new systems. To be fair, there are way more people who try to understand, who come from dominant cultures. My staff, my team at Calgary Arts Development are superheroes when it comes to really trying to see the world from 360 degrees, and I really appreciate that. So, I shouldn't be so glib to say, "not a lot."

It's the individual journeys that I would say that have really changed since 2020, that more and more people are recognizing, "I have a part to play as a person, let alone whatever organization I might be a part of," so I think that's a really good thing. And then in terms of your question, where do we need to go, it is: continue to be curious, continue to be vulnerable, continue to have humility, which as Reneltta said, these are not new things in other systems, in other ways of being. So that's where that curiosity comes into play. Everybody go read Jesse's book or go listen to his audiobook. Start somewhere, take the course at U of A. Come recognize the Lunar New Year and what that might mean to the majority of the world, by the way. There are more people who celebrate Lunar New Year than celebrate January 1st, thank you very much!

But anyway, that's the world we live in. In the same way that you're putting the blue and yellow on your Facebook profile, there's lots of other things that, as both Kizzie and Renelitta have said, you can do. And I would just welcome and invite you to continue to be on this journey, and know that it's a long journey. So pace yourself. And I look forward to welcoming you as part of the circle, being welcomed into your circle, and sharing in that journey.

Kizzie Sutton:

Yes, maintain that curiosity. And I think, organizationally, it's about checking in on my experience. It's about checking in on our racialized staff members, just talking about those arrows. There's been weights that's been put on our shoulders additional to the regular arrows that we normally live with. And if you notice a staff member who, two years ago was go-lucky and happy and da, da, da, and now they're no longer showing the characteristics and personality that you know is truly or traditionally them, I would encourage you to ask, "How are you doing?" And be there to truly listen and see if there's something that you can do as it relates to race, as it relates to being the shield for microaggressions. There are steps that us as racialized people can do, and there's lots of steps that dominant culture can do to, again, bring us to a space where we're not all covered in arrows at the end of the day.

And the other thing I'd like to just highlight as Patti shared: just because we live here in the West, our perspective is not the majority. There are more people that celebrate the Lunar New Year than January 1st. If we let that sink in and resonate, and allow that to be a bit of a compass or a way for us to reevaluate what is normal, I think that kind of curiosity would really allow for people to let go of systems that they thought they knew when they realized, "wait a second, if the majority rules, then what does that look like?" So, yeah.

Renelitta Arluk:

No, this has been such a powerful conversation. But I think what I'm walking away with and what I'm really hearing is that it's just really, institutionally, the systems are there to help you succeed, but they're helping you succeed in a way that maybe isn't actually the right way to succeed. And I think we have to look at success from, "What is success for me?" And individualizing that, like... I was offered to direct a workshop of a play, and I read the play and the play clearly was Two-Spirited and I just read it and I loved the play and I loved the people involved. And I finally just went, "I don't see myself here, because I'm not Two-Spirited in that way that this story could be brought forward in the best way." And so I echoed that back and I got such a welcomed response.

And so when we look at leadership, how are you a leader? And is it for you to lead because the opportunity has been given to you or you've worked somewhere for 10, 15 years and it's mandated that you get to rise? But is it really your voice that needs to be risen? And that's a challenging question of leadership. And I kind of go off the rules of acting where it's like, the first impulse is not the only impulse. And so it's like, yes, you're given the opportunity, it's your one opportunity... Eh, you're going to get two or three more opportunities somewhere else where you're better aligned to use your voice and bring that leadership. And so I don't... I say yes to a lot of things, because I think that I believe in a lot of things, but I also say no to a lot of things where I go, "I'm not the person for this."

And it's like looking at your ego, looking at your place. But when you look at it from the greater circle or as a hummingbird or however, you kind of realize, "I'm still involved, I'm still part of this community, I'm just not the voice that needs to be heard." And I think once you're okay with that, it's a better world, and it's better for you too, actually. But when you see the systems going, "Well, the chartered agreement says..." or, "The collective agreement says..." then it's like, does it though? Is that the right choice? And so when we do personal, I really value—I'm walking away with this, Patti—with the

personal to the systemic, it's like it has to be personally driven, and a better understanding. And so that's where, again, that discomfort and that knowing kind of comes in. So I'm just really grateful for today.

Shivani Saini:

Amazing. I'm so grateful for this conversation. I wish that we had more time. Clearly we could keep talking about the subject and unpack, deep dive a lot more. Patti had shared a few resources. What I'd like to do just before we wrap things up is, just bring them up. Patti, do you want to maybe just say a few quick words? We'll also put these up on our Creatives Empowered website as well.

Patti Pon:

For sure. Again, I think just in terms of feeding your curiosity and equipping you with resources, Stop Race-Based Hate, which I know Shivani already has up on the Creatives Empowered website, is a really great website. How to recognize those microaggressions, and how you might respond to them so that you understand why they're there. The repository from Belonging at Berkeley is, while it's predominantly US-based, so much literature and surveying and research is being done in the area of equity, diversity, inclusion, of language, all those things. This is one repository that offers a number of resources on how to address anti-racism. My hope is someday we might have a similar repository for Canada, but this is a good start. There's great reading there.

And then the last one, coco-net.org. There's a particular diagram called The "Problem" Woman of Color. And again, to give you some insight, you may empathize or relate to what's in that diagram. The thing you need to know about women of colour is, it happens *every* time. It's not just a one off. And so it just starts to give you some sense and context for the way in which someone else like me might walk in this world, might be in this world. Even as the CEO of an 18-million dollar granting agency in Calgary. And so, it's there to serve as a resource for anybody. It's not only for white people. People of colour, Black, Indigenous, also may find some comfort sometimes in knowing that it doesn't have to fall on you. That all you gotta do is give them the website and say, "Here you go. Go figure it out." Thanks very much Shivani.

Shivani Saini:

Amazing. Thank you, Patti. So two of those resources, Stop Race-Based Hate and the COCo diagram of The "Problem" Woman of Color. We have those up on the Events & Resources page of our website. That diagram, by the way, was sent to me by an Indigenous theatre maker in the summer of 2020. And when I first looked at it, I was like, "This is a diagram of my life! Wonderful, thank you!"

I just want to express my sincere gratitude to our three incredible guests today, Reneltta Arluk, Kizzie Sutton, and Patti Pon. Thank you so much for being a part of this conversation and for helping to manifest an idea that I wrote down on a sticky. It has been a fantastic discussion and I'm so happy that we'll be able to keep sharing this out with the world. Thank you so much to Matt Waterworth, our technical wizard behind the scenes, and just a heartfelt thanks to every single person who has tuned in, and to anyone else that might continue to watch this in the future. Thank you so much. And anytime you're looking for information, you want to learn more, please feel free to visit creativesempowered.ca. Thank you.

Sarah Taylor:

Thank you so much for joining us today. And a big thanks goes to Shivani and the folks at Creatives Empowered. If you would like to learn more about Creatives Empowered, please check out their website

at creativesempowered.ca. There you can find resources, information on training courses and, of course, join or support. The CCE is proud to be a Creatives Empowered ally. Special thanks goes to Jane MacRae.

The main title sound design was created by Jane Tattersall. Additional ADR recording by Andrea Rusch. Original music created by Chad Blain and Soundstripe. This episode was mixed and mastered by Tony Bao. The CCE has been supporting Indspire, an organization that provides funding and scholarships for Indigenous postsecondary students. We have a permanent portal on our website at cceditors.ca, or you can donate directly to indspire.ca. The CCE is taking steps to build a more equitable ecosystem within our industry, and we encourage our members to participate in any way they can. If you've enjoyed this podcast, please rate and review us on Apple Podcasts and tell your friends to tune in. Till next time, I'm your host, Sarah Taylor.

[Outro]:

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