Critical Race Theory, Design Education, and Change

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Due to several contributing factors, including tokenism, “Cultural Fit,” homogeneity, and Whiteness as property interests, diversity within the design fields is an ongoing problem. However, an often-overlooked factor stems from a dearth of a diverse pipeline of qualified candidates from selective public institutions of higher education (IHE). Historically, IHE’s and design programs have pursued missions and curriculums that embrace multicultural paradigms that promote inclusivity and produce graduates who serve the economy and as social agents and activists. However, through restrictive entrance requirements and hegemonic pedagogy, these same entities have perpetuated “symbolic racism” that denies existing racial inequalities patterns and sent implicit messages to minorities about what constitutes valid knowledge and who are the dominant and subordinate classes.

Critical race theory (CRT) has proven to be a useful tool in the examination of conscious and unconscious roles of racism within curriculum and highlighting discrimination stemming from the intersections of race and difference, (e.g., ethnicity, language, gender, sexual orientation, social class). Using the CRT framework, this paper asks: what role does personal, discipline, and institutional biases play in design curriculum decision making?: how can design programs challenge hegemonic structures and create curriculum that recognizes, respects, and uses diverse identities and backgrounds that encourages and supports students' pursuance and entrance into the design profession?
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Brian DeLevie is a digital artist, designer, author and an Associate Professor of Design at the University of Colorado Denver. He has served as the Co-Founder and Director of The Comcast Center for Media and Technology and the Center for Arts as Systemic Change, Chair of the Department of Visual Arts and Head of the Digital Design program. Through his research, he has presented and published numerous papers investigating the confluence of design, innovation, culture change, and experiential educational practices in higher education. His body of creative and artistic works investigates themes of technology, memory, history and Holocaust issues and has been exhibited and screened widely both nationally and internationally and led to a Fulbright Fellowship to study the influences of Film, Television and the Internet on German culture.