Episode 98: Antiracist by Design is Better By Design

with Crystal Hall, Associate Professor at the University of Washington's Evans School of Public Policy & Governance.

Drawing on her book Antiracist by Design, Crystal Hall shares an updated model for working on behavioural science projects. The model emphasizes actively and collaboratively planning and managing projects so that they involve the right people, ask the right questions, identify the correct problems, iteratively design fitting solutions, measure for differential impacts for different groups and downstream consequences, and share results through multiple channels.

Transcript:

KIRSTIN APPELT, HOST: Welcome to this edition of Calling DIBS. I'm your host, Kirstin Appelt, Research Director with UBC Decision Insights for Business and Society, or DIBS for short. Today, we're Calling DIBS on Crystal Hall.

Crystal is the John and Marguerite Walker Corbally Endowed Associate Professor in Public Service at the University of Washington's Evans School of Public Policy and Governance, and she's also an Adjunct Associate Professor with UW's Department of Psychology. Relevant to our interests, Crystal has served at multiple levels of government and partners with many applied behavioural science groups, including our own DIBS.

Crystal does really interesting research, and she's also a leading thinker about how we can reimagine applied behavioural science to be antiracist. In fact, she wrote a book about it, Antiracist By Design. We've got lots to cover today, so I figure we'll just dive right in. So welcome, Crystal.

CRYSTAL HALL, GUEST: Thank you. I'm glad to be here.

APPELT: Thanks for joining us. Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

HALL: Yes. Thank you for having me. I'm really excited to be here to talk about this work today. In addition to being a professor at the University of Washington, I am a mom, which is what is top of mind for me most of the time, most days. And I'm also someone who just really appreciates getting to understand people, getting to be around people and also thinking about the way that people interact with their built and physical environments.

And so I really love the outdoors. I love doing things that are physical. And as I've reflected on my work over the years, I see that showing up in a lot of interesting ways. And so that's just a little bit more beyond my appointment as a Professor at the University of Washington.

APPELT: Ooh, I like that. And I think that is going to be a nice segue into my next question, which is, we always like to ask about people's journeys to behavioural science, because it seems like everyone gets there in a different way. And I'm getting a sense of what maybe brought you to BI, but can you tell us a little more?

HALL: I actually really fell into doing this work. I started out in college as a physics major. I was studying physics, I loved physics, and in my second year really started to feel like, while I loved the work and I loved the problem solving nature of the work, I didn't really see my path forward in terms of my career in that space. And so I started taking a lot of different classes. I took a psychology class, and after taking that class, I actually got invited to work in the lab of that professor.

And in doing that work, I was exposed to research for the first time and was really excited to see what I'd been learning in terms of the scientific method showing up in psychology and really being able to take my interest in people and understanding people and apply a lot of the same high level perspectives of what it means to engage in in good science in that space.

And so when I was doing the work in that lab, my mentor encouraged me to consider going to graduate school. I had no idea what it meant to go to graduate school, but I was really fortunate that I had some really excellent mentors that helped me step into that process and consider what that might look like. And so that's how I ended up here. I actually also was doing that work and taking classes in public policy as well. And so very early on, I started thinking about that work in the context of public policy as well.

APPELT: You are so good at segueing me into question to question, because my next question is, I feel like we mostly talked with folks who are in psychology departments or in marketing departments or in practice, but I don't know that we've talked to many people who are in a public policy school. So can you talk a little bit about why you're in that setting and what that does?

HALL: Yeah, I was taking psychology classes. I was also taking public policy classes at the same time. And the first research project that I worked on as a research assistant was actually looking at how emotion had an impact on people's preferences for different types of social policies, specifically financial assistance for families experiencing poverty. I have to give a shout out to two of my mentors, Jen Lerner and Deborah Small, who I worked with on that project, and I was really excited about this idea that psychology could be a tool in the space of public policy, because as I was learning more about psychology, I was really engaging more in public policy as well and learning what public policy even was.

And so I ended up with this double major in decision science and policy and management, and was really excited to go to graduate school to get deeper knowledge in psychology, but really went in with this very early interest in taking that and applying those methods to public policy.

APPELT: That's so interesting. And I love how it just opens up so many applications, which is maybe a way to segue into the idea that you recently co-authored this book with Mindy Hernandez, Antiracist By Design, like we mentioned. And I'm wondering if you want to... we'll maybe dig into some specific pieces of the book, but do you want to maybe start us off by telling us a little bit about the purpose of the book and why you and Mindy wrote the book?

HALL: Sure. Mindy and I have been friends and colleagues for many years. We've worked on a wide range of work together, and in the summer of 2020, I think, a conversation thread that we'd had for a long time really synced up with what was happening in the world at that time.

And she and I both had had conversations about the way that our field applied behavioural science, often engaged or didn't engage with some of these harder questions tied to diversity and equity at a broad level. And that came up for us really strongly when we were working together and were challenged in a larger group about how the insights that we were teaching people about and training people on could be applicable, given

the big barriers that are faced, and in this case, faced by people of colour. And we came out of that experience really feeling this renewed sense of wanting to give some voice to some of these frustrations that were expressed by this person, but things that we also felt like we knew and had experienced on a very personal level.

And so we started writing, and the first piece that we wrote, we didn't even write it with a great vision of where we might publish it, how we might share it, but we ended up working with The Behavioural Scientist and publishing a commentary piece on this topic about how applied behavioural science was not effectively engaging with institutional and structural racism. And that piece became the seed for what eventually turned into the book.

And so we were really fortunate, and I have to also give that shout out to The Behavioural Scientist for their willingness to work with us on beginning to shape those ideas, because I think the work that we put into that short piece really helped us realize that this topic could be something that could be expanded to the scale of a book, and that there were just so many different areas in which we felt like an antiracist perspective was really needed in the field, and we were just fortunate that we had the opportunity to then flesh that out into the book.

APPELT: Yeah, that's so interesting. And I think it kind of flows naturally from your joint appointment in psychology and public policy, because a lot of the examples you use in the book are specifically about behavioural science that has been used in public policy. And so the book is fantastic. I highly recommend it. And I think we could probably do a whole episode on each chapter because there's so much in there.

But what I thought might be most interesting is to focus on your re-envision roadmap for how to do behavioural science, going back to your earlier point that behavioural science does have an underlying use of the scientific method, but there's ways to improve how that is done. And so in your re-envisioned roadmap, you start with a prepare phase that I think is a really great idea. Can you tell us about that phase and why it's important?

HALL: This was really important to us. As we were thinking about how to structure this book, we kept coming back to this idea that there is this very traditional approach that we typically take when we want to apply behavioural science into practical, applied problems. And we kept revisiting the way that we do this.

And as we were doing that, we realized that it felt like something was really missing. And there was this initial phase. And so for a long time, we were just referring to it as phase zero, and then we started calling it the prepare phase. And the idea is that we need, whether they're researchers or practitioners or even funders, we need people engaged in this space to really actively consider their own readiness. And often this is at a very personal level, to engage in an antiracist approach to the work. We often don't take the time to do that, and as a result, we can go into work being unintentionally ignorant of really important lived experiences and the impact of big systems. And not being aware of our own blind spots and our own biases.

And so we wanted to argue that this phase would be a way to pause and really think about, what are the important equity goals for any particular problem or research project or intervention? And so that might be about acknowledging and recognizing that you need to more intentionally recruit staff of colour or other partners of colour. That could be thinking about ways to educate your team on an area if they don't have lived experience there. And really just thinking about, what are the ways that you can not only set the goals in some space, but prepare the team to really actively engage in a way that is productive and that again acknowledges potential blind spots and biases?

APPELT: Yeah. And something I really like about this is I've found that over time you kind of slip into, I guess I would describe it as passive project management, where you kind of just... an idea comes to you and you kind of just fall into the project and you're just, oh, this grad student has been keen to work on something, so I'll work on this with them. But it's this idea of like, taking the time to have that active choice where you think, is this the right team? Is this the right time? Is this the right project? And make it that we carefully consider, rather than kind of falling into it and then realizing, oh, you know, back when we were first starting, we should have taken the time to make some of these more active decisions.

And so, like, I love that point about assembling the correct team, because different projects do need different teams in terms of all different kinds of dimensions. Like you said, having people from the population involved, but also like different disciplines. So I really, really love that point. I think that's really valuable.

HALL: I love the language that you use about making an active choice and like making that decision. And that could be about a research project, I think that could also even be about how you frame a grant application, or even just pitching funding for a project. I like that language a lot.

APPELT: So continuing on the theme of being active and how you approach things, once you've got that team prepared and assembled, you recommend partnering and codifying. And can you walk us through how that phase is a bit different from the quote unquote traditional model, and why it's important?

HALL: We really wanted to move away from the framing of this stage of the work as being set, and really driven by the folks that have the most power and privilege, which is often the researchers. Sometimes it's the funders. And we really wanted to stress that at this stage of the work, we should be listening and engaging with the communities that are most directly impacted to make sure that they define the problem in the same way that other folks involved define the problem. This can be something that you're thinking about at the phase of setting up a research project. It can be about applying for a grant.

I think this can show up in different spaces, but I think very often this is one of these places and I'll come back to this again. But I think this is one of these places where the researchers often are bringing their own assumptions and their own understanding of the space into the way that the problem is being defined, right? And, you know, there could be spaces where someone thinks that there's a problem, and the people that live in that context may not perceive it as a problem, right?

And so one example that often comes to mind when I think about this is when we think about various interventions to try to increase housing security for families that have unstable living situations. And policy approaches to this challenge have taken a lot of different forms over the decades that we've tried to engage this problem.

And I think often when we think about this, for a subpopulation of families with children, for example, we often think families want to be in neighborhoods with good schools, right? And I think we could put good schools in quotes. I think the way you define a good school or a good school district can be somewhat subjective. But if a researcher or a policymaker thinks that the goal is to give family access to a neighborhood with what they define as a better school, that might be making some big assumptions about what those families want. And it could be that a family with small children may feel like for them, they might want to prioritize their child having continuity in their school rather than moving them from one school to another, right?

And I think we could debate which one of those is more accurate, but the point is that when we've defined the problem without consulting the relevant community, we often are setting ourselves up for a lot of challenges

down the road if our understanding-- and I say "our" as the researcher-- if the researcher's understanding is different than those that experience that context. And so this is a place where we think to set yourself up, you've really got to make sure that that problem is understood in the same way by the others. And I would even say this isn't just about-- and this is why we call it co-defining-- it isn't just about getting feedback. Like, creating a problem statement and then asking. Ideally, this would really be about a genuine partnership for that process of defining what the challenge or problem is.

APPELT: I really like the way you talk about it, because I think a lot of times we focus on this idea of, are we looking at the right barriers and do the solutions match the barriers? But that assumes that you're in the right problem space. And you might be in the right barriers in the wrong problem space, and then you're not solving the problem that exists. And I think it also touches on this very human thing of, people get really excited when they start working on a problem and they jump to the solutions. And sometimes you don't listen as much as you think maybe you're listening.

I remember when I first started consulting with the BC Behavioural Insights Group, they had us do what they called like a policy bootcamp where we worked on a problem. And just watching all of us jump to solution because it was just so exciting, like, oh, what if we did this? What if we did that? And then having that moment of, oh wait, what's the problem we're solving? Are we even, you know, in the right space? And I think making it, again, going back to this idea of more intentional, more active and partnered, and so that you make sure you're validating assumptions. And making sure you're in the right space and you're doing it very collaboratively. I really like that.

And I assume that that would lead very nicely into the co-discovery phase. Do you want to tell us about that phase?

HALL: So the co-discovery phase is a phase that I do think pairs really closely with the definition phase. The co-discovery phase is the phase where we're trying to understand what's happening in whatever decision context we're looking at.

And we really like to contrast this to this language that we often use of diagnosing the behavioural challenges, right? And I think this has been a very natural way that we have all, myself included, often gone through this phase is we say, okay, we've defined this problem, and now we want to know what are the barrier? Or what's the lack of facilitators for some behaviours or some outcomes. When we use that language of diagnosis, I would argue we really are implicitly, again, we're letting the assumptions of the researcher be in the driver's seat often. Or maybe the funders again, or this could even be, you know, the leadership of a of a government entity or a nonprofit, right? But we wanted to push back on this diagnosis language, because this implies that there is this pathology or problem or something that needs to be addressed that has a very particular tone.

And instead, I think it should be about trying to understand the decision environment from the community that is experiencing that context. And so it's subtle, but I think it's really important. And I think it also when we think about it as discovery rather than diagnosis, I think it opens us up into really thinking about, what's the nature of the participatory processes that can be engaged here to really gain an authentic understanding of the context and really thinking about who are the relevant subgroups whose perspective might be missing, if, for example, we focus on administrative data or other secondary data. How might we use other tools like really targeted surveys or focus groups to really get at populations that might otherwise be left out?

And really thinking about how the frameworks that we approach this process with are very focused on systems and give the opportunity to understand the impacts of systems and how they might differentially impact different communities within those systems. And this is a piece that can be really hard because, to do

this well, I mean, I think most of us know if we do this work at all, doing this, whether we call it discovery or diagnosis, it takes a lot of time, it takes a lot of resources to do it well. And I think that what Mindy and I propose, it makes it even harder. And so really being mindful of the fact that this is something that we have to budget for often in terms of dollars and time.

And one of the examples that we use in the book was a study that I worked on with a big federally funded project, where we were looking at the experiences of non-custodial parents who had child support orders. And over the course of that project, we found that we were making a lot of assumptions because we didn't have good data to draw on-- quantitative, qualitative, any kind of data. And so we were able to engage in some focus groups.

And so we did a handful of small focus groups with folks that had been recently released from prison, and that allowed us to get some really important insights on what these processes of engaging with the child support system looked like for those folks that we wouldn't have gotten otherwise. And I think that that was really such an important piece of what ended up being what we saw as a very successful intervention designed at the end of the day.

APPELT: Yeah, I think that's really interesting. And I like your point around, sometimes, if you have that preexisting data and you look at it, you think you're getting a good summation of the problem, but that data can really bury a lot. And it's only through those more interactive qualitative methods that you get a lot of that.

And I also think this one is really important because sometimes when we, in my experience, when we've worked with partners who work with different populations on a problem, there's often a lot of reluctance to reach out to the population. I find that this is a phase where you often really do have to make the case for it with the partner, and how, if you don't do this step, there's a good chance whatever solution you design is not going to be relevant and isn't going to solve any problems.

HALL: It's typically just about what feels feasible, because I think often our projects feel rushed, because they are rushed too often and we don't have time, we don't have resources. And so I think, you know, very often we're being forced to make these really tough tradeoffs. And so I appreciate the question because I think what it highlights is that some of these are somewhat subtle shifts. And just thinking about where we're willing to make some of these tradeoffs. And I think that historically, we haven't often made those tradeoffs in the spirit of giving more opportunities for the communities that are most impacted to engage. And I think that that's an important way to potentially frame some of the shifts that we argue for in the book.

APPELT: Yeah, I really like that. Well, so assuming co-discovery goes well, we get to move into what many folks think is the most exciting part: co-design. How does co-design differ from the traditional design model?

HALL: Yeah, so this is the part that we often think is is really fun. And I think the theme here follows with the earlier stages as well, where often we're prioritizing what seems most interesting, what seems most feasible, what seems most accurate to the researcher, or maybe the policymaker or funder, without attending to what the community members think is interesting and feasible to implement. And so I think it's been more common that we seek out feedback on the proposed designs once they're done. But it's much more rare that community members in the communities that are impacted are actively involved in the research question or the intervention design.

And so this is a space where I think if you've done those first couple of steps well, it's easier to get to this point and do this part well because you will have established some of those relationships, hopefully, that even, you

know, if you've defined the problem in a way that is inclusive of everyone that has some involvement, when you get to this co-design phase, presumably it'll be easier. And the other thing that I would stress here that's really important is the opportunity to iterate. And really-- and again, this is another place where we think about these tricky trade offs, is just giving an opportunity to seek out additional feedback. Because even if you're engaging in genuine co-design, it may come to light that you realize, oh, the here's another subgroup that is uniquely impacted. So maybe we need time to get engagement from them, right?

And I think also it's important to be mindful that sometimes you come up with a study design that looks very different than what you thought it might be. And so I appreciate that you raise this point. Very often, we're back at the problem definition, and we've already got a sense of what needs to be done, right? We have a sense of what the challenges are, why the behaviour isn't in the place where we think it ought to be, and we've got an idea of what to do about it. And if we go through a genuine process of co-design, that means being open to the reality that things may move to a place that is not what you would have expected, right? And so I think that's one of the most important pieces to keep in mind here, is that you may end up in a different place, but that should be good.

We also talk about, just to give another couple of concrete examples, having in-person-- we've often called them design sessions or design workshops-- can be really, really useful for engaging in the steps up until this point, right? The definition, the understanding and the discovery, and the design. And so, Mindy and I have done this work together, both in the US and abroad, and we find that having the right, diverse set of folks in the room can help you do this authentically and often much more quickly than if those individuals were working in isolation.

Just conducting interviews with people that are involved in the implementation of programs with frontline workers, that engage with the populations that you're interested in, can be another place of the design phase to really help you not only understand what's happening in that space, but to really understand what's feasible in terms of an intervention. Because if I want to design an intervention to be implemented in a food bank, and I don't know what the flow of clients looks like in and out of that space, what I design may not be feasible to implement in that space. Mindy and I work together a lot.

One of the first projects we worked on was looking at folks getting assistance filing their taxes at free tax preparation sites in the in the US. And what we found was that the time that we spent sitting with the volunteer preparers and the managers of those spaces really helped us go a long way in understanding what might possibly be feasible. And so there's a lot of ways you can think about this, but really making sure, again, that you're not anchoring on the assumptions and the ideas of those that tend to have the most power and privilege in those spaces.

APPELT: Wow, I feel like I have so many threads there that I want to reiterate, because I think that, in some ways, it like brings up some of the things we talked about in previous phases. Because one of the things I was thinking about, as we talked about, sometimes there might be hesitance to bring certain populations in to reach out to them. But I found that in some of the projects I've been on, there's maybe an assumption that the population might not be interested. But if it's a problem that's truly affecting them, they're often like... I remember one survey we did, we thought we'd get like two responses and we just got, you know, like hundreds. And it was, everyone was just like, so excited to finally be heard.

So I think especially when there's the opportunity not only to talk about the experience, but also, like you said, weigh in on design and have it be an actual collaborative process. There's actually often like a lot of enthusiasm, and then you do get really good feedback about what is feasible.

It reminds me of a project I did with snowmobilers in BC, which is just an interesting subgroup because it's something that my colleagues and I didn't know about. And so we had all these ideas about, oh, we just need to provide them free maps. And they're like, if you give us a map, it's going to blow away and just get lost in the snow. And so just like the feasibility angle of, we had all these like great ideas, literally on paper, and then they were terrible.

And then also just going back to your food bank example, I think that's a really good one because, you know, there might be something like you're trying to increase donations, but then if you don't understand what makes a good food bank donation and you actually increase donations of products they can't use, then that puts more work on the staff. It might mean that the customers who use the food bank actually are getting less time and attention and product. So I think you raise a lot of really good ideas there.

And I also just really wanted to underscore the point about iteration and like... I think behavioural science, maybe "first idea, best idea" doesn't always apply. It's more like first idea, got a kernel, and then we go back and we iterate and we make it better. And also just really like you said, it has to be feasible in that situation. If it's a great idea that can't be implemented, it's no good.

HALL: Yeah, I think I think it's right. And I think, just listening to what you said, it's these spaces where like, you genuinely don't know what you don't know. And that can be so important, and not just for, you know, trying to do something that feels relevant to the community, but also just in terms of using scarce resources in a thoughtful and effective way. And often if we haven't done this work, it means we may just be sending resources to a space where they're destined to fail, right? And so I think that's a piece, and this is something we can come back to.

But I think that's a really fundamental argument that we make is that this isn't just about, you know, consulting with these communities because it's the right thing to do. Although I would argue that as well. I think it's also about being mindful and thoughtful about how we are investing resources into these types of approaches and really trying to do it effectively, because there are always going to be constraints and limitations.

APPELT: Absolutely. Well I think that's a good segue into the ideas around implementation and interpretation. Can you tell us a little bit about what happens in that phase and how it's distinct from other phases.

HALL: Yeah. So this is the phase where we're thinking about, you know, how we've come up with a design, and now we want to go out and implement it. And we want to make sense of what happens when we test it. And so this is a phase where we are trying to understand what worked, what didn't work, and very often that is impacted by the way that we implemented it, right?

And so there's a lot of good existing best practices on how to think about evaluation. And often behavioural scientists don't think a lot about effective implementation in these evaluation context. But we argue that we could take some of those existing best practices even farther by thinking about how do we engage in inclusivity. And to us, that means including the relevant diversity of populations that should be considered and really trying to make sense of who are the subcommunities that are most relevant, and especially who are the subcommunities that have been least likely to be represented up until this point?

And so instead of simply relying on quantitative data, what this often means is using qualitative methods to explore both the implementation of an intervention, but also to evaluate whether it did or did not work. And very often we stop at looking at the outcome of interest, but we don't think about, well, what happens even a little bit farther downstream.

And so at this stage, we encourage folks to think about, for example, when can we collect larger samples where we might have better representation of folks of colour? When do we need to think about nuanced variables that might show up in particular context?

So one of the things we talk about in the book is skin tone. And where, you know, racial identity may matter in some spaces, there may be other spaces where the real variable that matters is something that maybe doesn't show up in as clear of a way in the data that we have access to. We also need to think about where there might be important places to look at intersectional identities. And so there might be an intervention that's really focused on families that are experiencing housing insecurity or other types of economic instability. And it might be that when we look at those populations in the way that they engage with a service provider, we may need to also look at race and look at the intersection of those two as well.

And so what this means on a very practical level is we need to ask ourselves where are the spaces where we might want to disaggregate data? Where are the places where we might want to supplement our data collection with qualitative methods? And then again, another theme: how do we think about the time horizon of a project that allows for this, so that we can understand not only the impact of the primary outcomes, but also are there other unintended consequences or downstream consequences that we might also want to examine?

APPELT: Yeah, I love those points. And I also really appreciate the point around downstream consequences, because I think so often the projects are focused on the outcome, and then we don't look at how that translates into other outcomes.

And I really like the example from the book of, there's an assumption that more student loans is better, but do those student loans actually translate into successful graduations and job placements? And if not, if we're just loading people up with student debt, then that's obviously not a good outcome. So it's really difficult often to measure those downstream consequences. But it's so important to do so.

So I think that probably leads us into the final phase of sharing, adapting and scaling.

HALL: One of the most important things at a super high level is to think about, you know, a study isn't necessarily done when we think we've collected all the data, right? What are the other pieces that remain? And so we talk about this process of taking the results and thinking about how we might understand some of those differential impacts. And I talked about that already. But really trying to be nuanced to try to understand where we can disaggregate data, where we can take a more intersectional approach to get a better understanding of what's going on.

In addition, we also talk about the idea that we should describe the results with care. And so, for example, using a system centered language when appropriate. And so it's very common that we will describe certain populations or communities being at risk of some negative outcomes, and a more system centered approach would be that those communities are exposed to hazards, for example. And this is very subtle, but I think especially from a policy perspective, I think it's very important to be clear about the role that systems play for particular communities in spaces such as these.

Another thing that we talk about here is researchers should be mindful of what are the venues for dissemination. How do we recognize the contributions of people that are involved? And so, you know, very often a researcher might say, oh, we're going to make these community partners, coauthors on the study. That's great, and those folks should be offered that. At the same time, that's clearly something that is not

going to be as valuable across the board to everybody involved in a study. And so being mindful of that and thinking about, what are other ways that these community partners might want to communicate back to their communities in ways that will be valuable to them?

I describe a project that I worked on here in Seattle where, at the conclusion of the project, we had a community forum where we shared the results, and we invited many of the folks that had been involved from the community to share what their experiences had been and share about the findings in their own words. And so that was a really powerful experience, because it really meant that those of us affiliated with the university, we had to step outside the norms and our typical way of thinking about how we disseminate work. And we really relied heavily on those community partners to guide us in ways to do that, that would feel very relevant to those communities.

And so this is a place where I think for many of us, it pushes us even more outside of what we're typically comfortable with, because we think the report or the paper or whatever summary of the data that takes us very formal form is the end. And often for the communities that we've partnered with, there might be other ways to engage in ways that will feel much more inclusive and relevant to those communities.

APPELT: Yeah, that makes me think of a couple of things. One is just the idea that in a lot of academic training, we are trained in a very specific way of reporting results. And I remember the first time I ever did a partnered project, and I kind of just like handed off my like p-values and was like, check, done. And they were like, what is this? What does this mean? And I think that is something that takes a lot of practice, the idea of like, how can you translate those results into non-academic language that's actually useful for the organization or the people or the combination of partners that you're working with.

And the idea I just loved also that you said, like as researchers, you think of this as the last step. But for the partners, in many ways this might be the first step, because now that they have this idea of, what do we do with that? And so ways that we can make it more of either continuing partnership or warm handoff or like, evolve that phase is interesting.

HALL: Yeah, and I would stress, just to go along with something that that I heard you say, this is... it's often not just about the community members or the people that engage with a program. Sometimes it's about thinking about how we translate and make it relevant for the government entity that helped us get the data or the nonprofit that helped us engage with the community.

And so I think it's something that, this is a space where I think there's this unique tunnel vision that researchers have in these spaces. And I think being able to mindfully share the results can help us engage with a variety of the folks that were involved, not only the folks that might be the folks who engage directly with the program, but sometimes that's about the government or the nonprofit or other organizations as well.

APPELT: Yeah, in some ways, there should be as many different communications about the project as there are organizations or populations or bodies of governments or whatever it might be that are touching it, because they usually each have a different thing that they can do with the result, whether it's, you know, creating policy or community action plan or lobbying for policy. So, going back to behavioural insights, maybe making the translation of the results behaviourally informed as well.

HALL: Yeah, absolutely.

APPELT: Well, one of the things I really loved near the end of the book is, you talked about, if we put the updated model into practice, it should lead to recommendations that are more credible, actionable,

responsible, transportable. And then you add inclusive. And I thought that was a really nice little chunk of takeaways. Can you talk about what that means a little bit?

HALL: Yeah, I think that I would just summarize it at a high level about all of this, and this is something that I talked about a little bit before, but it just makes this work more effective. And we run the risk of just sending a lot of good resources after bad if we don't engage in these principles. And so I think, especially as we consider where this type of perspective sits right now in the political climate that we're in, you know, for sure, in my context in the US, is this idea that we engage in antiracism, diversity, inclusion work because it's about a value or it's about some kind of norm that people agree with or don't agree with.

And while I do very much personally believe in the social justice way of framing all of this, I think it's equally also important to note that when we do this, it helps us be more effective, and it's going to help us be much more smart with how we use our resources. And so I think this idea of credible, actionable, responsible, transportable, inclusive, I think that all comes back to that same place. And that's been something, as we've been talking about the book over these last couple of months, it's been something that we've really been stressing, is that it's not only about trying to give voice to communities that haven't been hurt. It's about governments, nonprofits, other organizations being able to use their limited resources in ways that are thoughtful and as efficient as possible. That's what I always come back to with that piece.

APPELT: You wouldn't could almost call the book Better by Design. Like, if we're doing these, it's actually better science. It's antiracist, which is important in and of itself, but it's also better science. And so that should be something we all can... well, I guess if we're anti-science, then we maybe that's not the goal. But for those of us who are still pursuing science, better science should be the goal. The book has so much in it, and there's a lot more to discover. But if you have a few other key insights you wanted to share, I'd be happy to to hear those.

HALL: Yeah, I think the biggest thing to me, and I think this is something that I think Mindy and I both really realize over the course of writing this book and researching this book, is that everyone has a role to play in these spaces and a place where they can speak up. And so I would encourage folks to really think hard about what's the role that they can play, because I think it can be really easy to think about the things that we can't do and what's hard, and there's a lot that's hard, especially right now. But I think, whether you're a researcher who's more junior or more senior, if you're a practitioner of some sort, if you're a funder, for sure, even folks that are early in their learning about this field, if you're a student, I think each perspective has a role to play in serving this work and the principles that we put forth. And so I think that would be my biggest final message is that I hope, and I think Mindy and I both would agree, that that's our ultimate goal is for people to just be able to to use this not only as a roadmap, but as a way for them to identify where are the places where they can work in service and improving the way that we engage in this field.

APPELT: I love that as a as a takeaway, and I think it really helps make it feel less overwhelming. Like you said, there's a lot that's hard. There's a lot you may not be able to do, but if we focus more on some of the things we can do, and then maybe over time we take on more and more. So I love that. We also always ask if folks have a message for folks who are new to the field. I know you included them in that message, but anything else you would say to folks who are new to BI?

HALL: I think challenge the status quo. Ask questions, ask hard questions. Don't be afraid to just engage all of us in the things that we think are fundamental or most important. You know, this whole project, I think, really owes part of the beginning of it to us being challenged by someone who wasn't, you know, in the center of our community, but really that helped us think about, yeah, there are things that we could do better. And so I

think just telling folks like, speak up, ask questions, challenge us, and that's how we keep evolving this really important science.

Mindy and I stress, we spent a lot of time really wanting to strike the right tone with how we concluded the book. And one of the most important things to us was to really stress that, you know, this book can, I think to some, can feel very critical of this field. But we really wrote this out of a place of genuine love, like we've spent our careers here. We think that these tools are so valuable, and our critique comes from a desire to make it all better. And so I think, I love that you said better by design, but I think that's really it's really genuine. And I think that folks that are new to the field, that'll be a huge role that they'll have an opportunity to play is to help us keep evolving this so that it is more effective.

APPELT: I think that's great. And I think, because we were saying, assumptions, and when you're new, it's often you're the folks who catch the assumptions because you're like, did you just assume? And so they're often the ones who can shine the light on those things. I really like that as an ending message, because I think it's important that behavioural science isn't static. If it was, then it would get quite boring. And so I think it's important that it changes and evolves. And we're fortunate to have people like you both doing the science and thinking about how we do the science. So thank you for doing the work and for sharing it widely, including here on Calling DIBS.

HALL: Thank you so much for helping us continue to share the book. We really appreciate spaces like this.

APPELT: Awesome. And thanks to our listeners for joining another episode of Calling DIBS.