



Diversity and Making: A Podcast and Video Series
A Collaboration of Purdue Libraries and School of Information Studies and
Purdue Asian American and Asian Resource and Cultural Center (AAARCC)

Episode 6: Cookie Art as Activism (Release Date: April 20, 2021)

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JC: I think more than anything, the world that I hope for, and that I envisioned through my cookies and beyond is, is a tender world. Like I wish people could just be softer and tender toward one another toward themselves. And I hope that, you know, sprinkling in that sugar, you know, not to be so punny, but yeah, like can help that, like to, to move the world in the sweetest way that I know how, there are these cookies that can help people pause and digest all these stories and in a way that might otherwise be difficult to do.

PS: Welcome to episode six of Diversity and Making. Diversity and Making is a collaboration between the Purdue Libraries and School of Information Studies and the Asian American and Asian Resource and Cultural Center also known as the AAARCC. My name is Pam Sari, the director of the AAARCC-

SH: My name is Sarah Huber and I'm an assistant professor in the Purdue Libraries and School of Information Studies.

PS: Asian Pacific American Heritage Month is observed every May to honor the history, contributions, and influences of Asian Pacific American individuals and communities. In joining the observances and speaking about the impacts of Asian American makers. Today, we have Jasmine Cho joining us. Jasmine Cho is a Pittsburgh based artist, author, and cookie activist, most known for using portrait cookies to elevate representation for Asian Pacific Americans. She's also a Food Network Christmas Cookie Challenge champion, and the founder of Yummyholic. Her cookie activism has been featured internationally on various media outlets that include the NPR, the Huffington post, CBS and the Korea daily in 2019. Jasmine gave a TEDx talk on her work that immediately went viral and has since reached over 47,000 views. Jasmine has received numerous accolades including creator of the year by the Pittsburgh Technology Council, the Small Business Community Champion Award by Citizens Bank and was also awarded a Mayor's Proclamation

declaring January 28, 2020 as Jasmine Cho day by the city of Pittsburgh. Expanding to traditional fine arts while pursuing art therapy studies, Jasmine wrote, illustrated, and published her first children's book: *Role Models Who Look Like Me: Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders Who Made History*. Thank you very much for being with us today, Jasmine. We're so excited for our Purdue community to get to know you through our conversation

JC: Thank you so much for having me.

PS: So Jasmine, can we start with- we'd like to know about your journey growing up and who influenced you to make and be creative?

JC: Yeah. You know, so as far back as I can personally remember, I think I always had an inclination naturally to drawing and coloring. Like I always loved art, but it was probably helpful that we had an actual artist in our family. My uncle is a painter. His name is Sung Kim, and he's actually known for these really beautiful landscape paintings and he had two sons. So one of them also, I believe inherited a lot of his artistic talents, but so that was my cousin Kiyong. And so I just grew up with them around my life quite a bit. And so it's probably undeniable that they influenced me in some ways, because my first dream as a kid was wanting to be an artist. And I remember saying, I want to be an artist just like gomobu and gomobu means uncle in Korean. So, um, yeah, that was one of my first dreams, but I even have memories of my dad, actually, my dad is a martial artist, but he's the head of an international martial arts association. And back in the day, he used to publish these newsletters and I have these vivid memories of him like hand cutting and pasting the paper newsletters for the organization. So, uh, I'm sure I've also inherited some creative tendencies even from my dad. So-

SH: Having permission to do, to make art, sometimes it's hard for people or, you know, we don't feel that we can, was there anyone that said you should pursue this or - because oftentimes we're held back.

JC: Oh, definitely. Like the second part of me saying, you know, I want to be just like gomobu is that immediately? My dad was like, no, don't be the starving artists. You know? So, um, yeah, I, I, that's sort of cliché, I guess, about my family as well. Um, my Korean immigrant parents were not too thrilled about me wanting to pursue the arts as a career and a cliché and trying to direct me to be a doctor or a lawyer instead. But, I would say that they didn't push me too hard compared to possibly other families or households, but they still, um, weren't super encouraging, which is kind of funny and ironic now because now, uh, as I got older and older, my dad recognized the sort of talents that I had and he started wanting me to pursue the arts, but like I, yeah, there's definitely a sense of me that wonders like, Oh, I wonder what if I had been encouraged from much earlier on to be in an environment that I was already naturally inclined toward and had so much interest in. Like I do wonder that, but also, um, one of my dad's famous sayings is too late can be on time. It's just another fun way of saying, you know, it's never too late. So yeah. I feel that all of this, that the path that I'm on right now as like a quote unquote cookie activist might not have happened, you know, if, if it weren't for all the difficult experiences that I went through, that basically defined sort of my purpose and mission of what I want to create and put out into the world.

PS: So Jasmine, did you then learn from gomobu?

JC: No, I wouldn't say I directly learned, I think even my cousin, Kiyong, um, probably I, it's funny,

he's actually the first person who told me to color inside the lines. I do have a very vivid memory of that. I was trying to color a Mickey mouse and I colored him red and I was just like, you know, scribbling. And he, like, gently was, like, Oh, that's really nice. But maybe like, stay inside the lines next time and try to use a color that actually resembles the no Mickey mouse. But, um, so maybe he gave me some pointers, but I also grew up attending Korean school. Um, again, I grew up, was born and raised in Los Angeles and I had access to that. And one of our like, uh, electives, I guess you could say was art. So, um, I did get to take some art classes growing up and all of my art teachers of the past probably helped me along the way.

SH: I just have one last lingering thought for the next question. We've talked with a couple people, the idea of, uh, I like to call myself a tactilian cause I like to touch stuff, you know, textiles and stuff. And so I'm just thinking with the baking and the hands, you know, there's a difference between drawing and painting, but you combine it all.

JC: Oh yeah, yeah, absolutely. Um, you know, currently I'm studying art therapy and that's sort of the field that has led me to sort of have this vision of introducing baking as essentially an art medium or modality that can be, you know, uh, in addition to say watercolor or clay and in the field of art therapy, you learn about like the different metaphors associated with each material that you choose, but also just, um, the different kinds of connections and relationships that we have with the materials and the types of emotions that can come forth. Like for example, I said watercolor, it's a very fluid type of medium and difficult to control. So, you know, you have to sort of be very aware of those kinds of relationships that you have to those materials versus say like a black marker. That's very permanent and not erasable. And that's actually my preferred, uh, other, uh, medium is a black marker pencil and eraser and all of that. But I think that speaks to, um, me kind of wanting a sense of control. Like honestly my book was done in watercolors, but it was a very controlled, um, sense of water coloring as well. So I think I thrive when I'm provided some sense of structure and expectation, which again, speaks to baking. I believe that it's such a methodical type of process. Um, and yes, tactile as well. Um, the dough I think can be, like, feel like clay sometimes when you're playing with the cookie dough and then your olfactory, you know, your, your sense of smell is the, you know, um, light it up as well. And so it's just such a sensory experience, which I think could be very helpful to some, but also, I don't think baking will be therapeutic for every population. You know, it could be very overstimulating for certain populations as well. Uh, but I just wanted to at least be offered out there because I believe that the more, um, diverse, well, I believe that healing modalities should be as diverse as us, you know, the, the people that are, are seeking healing. So-

SH: In your blog, you talk about a research study where you measured people's anxiety before and after therapeutic baking. Can you tell us about your vision for therapeutic baking? And I'm also curious about the response you've gotten from the mental health profession.

JC: Yeah, absolutely. So, um, let's see where to start there. Uh, I would say that the difference between therapeutic baking and bake therapy, if I had to really simplify the difference between those two, it would be objective. And again, I'm going to bring an art therapy here to sort of elucidate, but basically, uh, you see all those coloring books that are marketed to be therapeutic and that can be done on your own time, in your own space. It's very personal. And it's a way of, it's sort of like a mindful activity. And I think that that is a case for many things, like one of the most therapeutic acts for me is chopping chocolate, you know? So, so that is very just, Oh, it's so therapeutic and healing for me because it just helps me calm down, you know, versus, um, when you are in an art therapy session, you're meeting with somebody who is a licensed and trained, helping professional, who should have amassed at least a thousand clinically supervised hours. And

hopefully, you know, is now trusted and capable of holding space for you and your process as well as guiding that. And that's why I think of objective being the main difference where when you're in therapy, you're usually going there for some sort of goal or, or help, uh, with some sort of, to work through some sort of issue or whatever it is that you might be having.

And so, yeah, I, again, like, I, that's why I imagined it would be amazing. I mean, my big pie in the sky sort of vision is to just envision like at least creating like a thousand healing kitchens across the country where, you know, it could be used as the safe space to just explore baking in a very intentional way and to use that, um, like in the most like highest potential of power that it can hold. Um, because yeah, I think intuitively many of us know that baking is a very, it's a very powerful love language. You know, it connects us to one another, it makes us feel very extra accomplished, I think, compared to cooking, um, where cooking, that's the other difference. I think cooking, you can throw things together it's fast and you can improvise versus in baking again, like it's methodical, you measure out. And so that careful process that you go through and then you see like this, you know, banana bread or whatever it is like this, this kind of like, I dunno, there's a more magical feeling to it for me personally, when you bake this like beautiful pastry dessert or like a loaf of bread, um, you know, and then you just feel so much more empowered, like to create your own form of sustenance. But when you're talking about dessert, it's like extra, you know, like it's, it's like a treat.

And so I think that that is the true love language there where you're then motivated to be like, Oh, I want to share this. And at least I'm speaking from my own personal experiences. Every time I baked, the most fulfilling part was sharing it with everybody and like multiplying joy across my community. And so, yeah, I think that's, that's all the potential that bake therapy I think holds and even therapeutically baking as well, but I just want it to become more accessible for folks like the whole point of doing research. I know that when research goes well, it lends to funding. And so that's what I think a lot about access. I'm hoping that the kitchen space can become a more accessible space for healing and creativity, as well as sustenance.

PS: The idea of your, probably, aspiration dream of a thousand healing kitchens. You know, we think about origami and a thousand cranes as a belief of right, well wishes and blessing and luck. I was, my mind was just directly linking to that. We talked about your source of inspiration for the drawing and the art. Uh, did you have someone who became your role model for the baking side of it? Then the healing through food and baking?

JC: I don't know if there was specifically, um, a role model that I had that applied, healing in such a direct way with baking, like connecting it in the way that I've been dreaming of. But, um, definitely one of my role models that really inspired me to pursue pastry as a career at all is Joanne Chang. She's the founder of the flower, uh, bakery cafe changed throughout Boston, Massachusetts. Um, she also owns a restaurant. Uh, the name alludes me right now, but basically, yeah, so Joanne Chang was, was huge. It was just a random moment where I was like lost in my early twenties. Like wondering what am I going to do? And I was in, like, a Barnes and Noble and happened to pick out her book. And again, like saying representation matters, like to see. And she's a Taiwanese American woman, I believe, and like her on the cover and then reading through her story of how she was just actually totally in a different field of like mathematics and something like that, like physics or something. And then, but her true heart was always in like sharing chocolate chip cookies with her dorm mates and things like that. And just like, I remember when I read her biography, it just made my heart, like, flutter and like my eyes start to light up. And, uh, yeah, that's sort of, um, like th-that's, that's a perfect guide to where I should go. I feel that if I'm like this excited, like, almost like I can't contain it, then it's probably a hunch that I should pursue this. So I would definitely, yeah. Joanne Chang is the

first to come to my mind right now.

SH: I agree. I mean, talk therapy is not for everyone, right? Not everyone's comfortable going into a room and sitting in a chair and talking about what they're experiencing. So can you walk us through if someone, if I have this correct, even if someone has some trauma they want to work through and they choose to go to, um, you know, I don't know if you'd call it a big therapist or therapeutic baking kitchen. Can you walk us through what that would look like for them?

JC: Oh, wow. Yeah. So it's not an actual thing yet. So it's just something in my dreams, but I, I also don't want to force baking on anybody, but I guess if somebody volunteered to come into a healing kitchen space, you know, you talk in the therapeutic world, um, we talk a lot about the importance of building rapport, a good rapport or meaning like, uh, you know, your client has to kind of trust you and have a good relationship with, be, to release anything at all. That's, you know, difficult to release even on their own terms. And so, yeah, like baking, I feel again as sort of like this connector type of experience, so we could just bake, you know, like, Hey, you're here. Like, why don't we bake this? Or even if they wanted to learn something, we could do something really simple, but then there's that wait time, you know, in between baking you, you like make and everything, you're having a good time. And then it goes into the oven and now there's like this time of waiting for it to come together. And I think that, that it would be a good point to then introduce either art therapy or even talk therapy. If at that point they're feeling comfortable. But to just sort of now discuss, like, what are the objectives like, you know, and, and again, what are the metaphors that we can work through? Like, um, again, like metaphor is really powerful in art therapy. And I think that that metaphor can be introduced in Baker therapy as well. Like for example, um, the whole technique of folding, um, is sort of my go-to, but I think a lot about that. Like when I'm gently trying to fold something into the batter, it's because you don't want it to deflate. And so like that is like, maybe it's corny, but for me it's really meaningful and powerful that, you know, like of course things can become difficult if you add all this change right away and just try to like mix it all together.

And so the importance of trying to gently fold changes into your life, or, you know, something like that. Like, I believe that those are the types of metaphors that we can explore and, and then there's even a product at the end, which I think can be really empowering for the client. Um, they get to take home like a loaf of banana bread or whatever and share it. And, you know, so I, I'm still, you know, very much in I'm, like I say, I'm exploring the frontiers of this because I don't know yet what it could really look like. I am, I'm still in my master's program learning about, uh, populations that this really could actually be too activating for, or, you know, but my hope is that it can, um, particularly help people with anxiety or depression. Um, especially if, you know, uh, I think there's such an importance of a supportive network around you. And so I'm hoping again, baking can step in and become that connector to the community for folks and, uh, you know, just self, um, I don't under self-empowerment too. And just it's, I dunno, it's so healing, like, like you just smell wonderfully baked goods, like coming out of the oven, like then that increases your appetite in a lot of ways too. Again, that could be both a very literal, but metaphorical, maybe have some gained appetite for life, you know, so-

SH: There is research out there too about, um, I need to find the author's name, but the book is titled, *My Grandmother's Hands*. He's an author from Minneapolis and he talks about the trauma. We hold in our bodies due to racism. What does he call it? White body supremacy. It's a, it's very, it's fascinating to me. And a little bit of what you're talking resonates with that where anxiety, if this was applied with anxiety and depression, what we hold in our bodies and the physical act of holding and placing. It's like, it's, you're being reflective, but you're also physically working with that

medium, just really interesting.

PS: That was beautiful. The metaphor with folding.

SH: Yeah, yeah. I love it.

PS: And I think that's what you are doing right now is gently folding these changes, right, by making us understand, see, and even taste, uh, representation. You are well-known for your portrait cookies that celebrate the contributions of not only Asian American leaders, but also leaders from historically underrepresented communities. So what inspired you to start working on these cookies, Jasmine? And I wish our listeners could see the cookies. Like I wish that this is a video, right, where, um, everyone can see, but can you describe to our listeners, what are these portrait cookies also?

JC: Right. Absolutely. So they, I intentionally try to represent the faces that I'm sharing as realistically as possible, because I think that's, what's most, eye-catching about, you know, the, the medium is that, uh, they recognize, Oh, that, that, that is a face, but there's something really different about it because it's like sugar, you know, it's icing. And then that makes them pause longer and start to wonder like, Oh my gosh, is that a cookie? And then, uh, the next question after that is like, Oh, like, who is this? You know, who am I looking at any way? You know? And, and that's the thing, like, I am all about the pause, you know, I think the pause is so important and, um, you know, it was almost kind of forced on all of us around the world due to this pandemic and, you know, but I believe that a lot of good came about that as well, that pause forced us to reconcile with systems, you know, these long, deeply rooted, uh, systems of oppression. And I feel that over the last year I've witnessed this amazing, uh, like rise in collective consciousness. And I really credit the pause for doing that. I think a lot of people were able to take to the streets more because of that pause as well.

So what motivated me to, um, create those cookies is essentially I started my, uh, online bakery, Yummyholic, in the fall of 2015, not too long after, um, a friend asked me to put her face on a cookie or like, if I could do that. And that's kind of how naturally face cookies like were born. And yeah, again, like, it was just amazing the response that I witnessed to those cookies. And I'm like, you know, I think I have something here. Like if people are going to pay attention to something I create anyway, then I want to direct that attention to matters that mean something to me, that are important to me. And so, you know, representation has always been sort of this pain point for me growing up in this country, born and raised, but never seen stories that reflected my lived experiences, particularly in textbooks. Um, and that made a huge impact on me. Like I said, this, I, I forget if I said it in my TedTalk, but I say it in a few of my talks, like how I ended up kind of feeling like I was trying to piggyback off of the civil rights movement and the black experience, because that was the closest communication of oppression that I, that really resonated with me as like, I can now name myself as a woman of color, but ten-year-old Jasmine didn't know those words or like what, how to articulate all of that. And so those feelings of like, feeling really irrelevant and invisible were very dominant throughout my, my young life, you know? So I think there was always a motivator thereof like, what can I do? Like if this is a talent that I have, uh, what can I do to, um, use it, to make the world, the world that I want to be part of, you know? Yeah. So I think that's how it all came about.

PS: Which, um, cookie, um, the Asian American and BIPOC leaders that you did first do you remember Jasmine?

(minute 24:15) JS: Oh yeah. Well, the, the first intentional like portrait cookie gallery that I held was of, uh, six different Pittsburgh, Asian American movers and shakers. Uh, so that was my first intentional whole like collection of pieces. But, uh, they, again, this was back in 2016 and it was, uh, half of it. So three of these portraits were people who I felt were doing amazing things or have been doing amazing things in Pittsburgh's community, but who I really was like, I want to see more of them in the media and I just wasn't. Um, and then half were more well-known, uh Asian Americans but maybe people didn't realize that they had Pittsburgh connections. Like, for example, the actress Ming Na-Wen, uh, she, you know, was here attending Carnegie Mellon university, and her parents had owned the last standing building. Uh, actually it's called Chinatown Inn it's a restaurant, but it's the last ending building of Pittsburgh's old Chinatown, um, or even like Hines ward, um, you know, Steelers, MVP, Steelers, and football's huge here in the city, but I didn't know how many people really, uh, realize that he's half Korean and he's built a foundation specifically to support biracial children in Korea and, and things like that.

And then like now she's, well-known Leah Lizarondo. She was one of the portraits I also did. She's a Filipina American woman, um, who founded what's called four one, two food rescue, which is now evolving into a food rescue hero, because it's expanding beyond Pittsburgh's borders. But basically it's an app where volunteers from the community can just sign up to rescue food that would otherwise go into our landfills and direct them to our hungry communities. And so, um, now if you ask Alexa like Alexa, who inspires you, it'll tell you Leah Lizarondo and tell you her whole story. So it's just, like, been so amazing to just witness her, like, but back then, I'm like, people need to like, learn more about Leah Lizarondo. And so, like, I created that cookie and now, like, it's just amazing to have witnessed her journey too. And how, um, people are very aware of her, but, um, yeah, that was what motivated me in one of my first intentional galleries, I guess. Yeah.

SH: It's really pointing them what you're saying. Cause like, I honestly I've heard people say in recent, um, you know, what's in Atlanta and what's happening across the US with violence against Asians, really. I didn't know there was a problem or, you know, people are unaware of role models, of struggles, of history, of stories. It's just, hasn't been covered. And, and I, I certainly myself have had some awareness of how little of his history I learned growing up. Absolutely. It's definitely whitewashed.

JC: Yeah. Yeah. And male centered and yes. And yeah, and this is something I said in my TedTalk as well. But yeah, privilege is when your history is taught as core curriculum while mine is taught as an elective. And I very gratefully had the privilege of taking, like, it was literally, I took an elective course. It was like called a special three-week Maymester where I got to learn all about Asian American history. And so that was, uh, one of the first like moments, like so many emotions went through me when I took that class because, you know, I was 27 at that time. And it's like, Oh my gosh, I'm 27 years old. And I-I'm learning about this for the first time in my life. Uh, and yeah, so like that, that's another huge influence to why I want to make this history, um, more accessible, palatable, you know, like, like for people to just pay attention, you know, like, I know cookies can seem like such a trivial thing, but they are making their way into curriculum right now. Like I think one of the most rewarding things for me in this work is hearing from like ten-year-olds and like, you know, uh, elementary and middle school students across the country and saying, Oh, I'm learning about you. And all these people in, in my class right now. And I'm like, yes, because again, like that's the, that's the world I envisioned for, you know, the world that I wanted as ten-year-old Jasmine. I want that for all like 10 year olds, like Asian-American kids now, you know, so I'm so thrilled that, uh, cookies are making their way into the curriculum and in this unexpected way. So, so fun.

(28:56) SH: It's fun. I mean, I think, you know, again, there's research there. It's like when we can

connect with what we're learning, as opposed to just reading a time, a history timeline and a book there's, it's more memorable and it has, um, um, you know, yeah.

JC: Cookies leave a much stronger imprint, I think, than just text or even just a photograph in your textbooks. So I'm always curious, what was one of the most energizing comments that you got when you presented these school keys to some of these leaders? Well, energizing. Um, just the first person that comes to my head is Daniel Dae Kim, the actor, when I think of energizing because, um, yeah, I had the very, uh, you know, I had a really great opportunity to work with, um, cam, uh, they CAAM, Center for Asian American Media. Uh, they worked with PBS to release that documentary series called Asian Americans last year. And, uh, they invited me to use my cookies to help promote the series, but, um, those cookies were all dedicated to people who were, um, you know, either historical figures whose stories were included in the documentary series or people who were part of it, including Daniel Dae Kim, and Tamlyn Tomita, uh, actor and actress who, um, narrated the series. And so actually, yeah, both of them, um, Daniel Dae Kim, like holding up his face cookie next to his actual face and say, thank you, Jasmine. You know, that was, that was certainly energizing. Um, I was really grateful and Tamlyn Tomita, too like, Oh my gosh, she's become like, um, just, she's an awesome human being. I mean, she reached out and is always incredibly supportive. Um, she even like reached out and gave me her number and was like, call me anytime if you need, you know, a friend basically. And so it was just, yeah, those were some really certainly energizing moments. Um, but I would like to also mention that there were moments where I don't think energizing is the right word, but, um, just very, I was very moved when I would hear from, uh, relatives of passed on figures. Um, like for instance, Betty Ong, um, whose story that I'd like to talk about a lot, um, her relatives had reached out, um, I guess like to go over Betty Ong's story for your audience who is unaware, Betty Ong was a Chinese American flight attendant who was a board. Um, the American airlines, I believe it was flight 11 that crashed into, um, one of the towers. And, uh, it was her call that led to, um, the identification of all the hijackers on her plane, as well as the first shutdown of all domestic flights across the country, which potentially saved hundreds of other wives that day. And her last words were pray for us. Um, so I, you know, and I only learned about her like a few years ago. And you think about nine 11 heroes in the stories you hear, you don't particularly hear about any people of color. And so to learn about Betty Ong at that point, and then sharing her story and then hearing from her relatives that were thanking me in amplifying her story. Um, yeah, it, it meant a lot. It means a lot like maybe I'm doing something worthwhile after all, you know, so

SH: I'm so curious. I have a question it's like, how do we cram this all in here?

PS: This is just so, yeah, Sarah I'm like, Oh, this is just so amazing. I'm blanking on her name. Is it?

SH: I'm blanking on her name.

PS: Um, Grace Lee Boggs?

SH: Yes. Tell me a little bit about. She's a real inspiration. I'm just curious. I just remember when I was younger reading about her and being inspired by her. And so I wanted to know what your experience was with her and doing a cookie on her. And if you have a story behind that

JC: For her too, I didn't really learn about her until she passed away, which was, um, you know, not that long ago and like to learn that we had that this living ancestor walking among us who served, you know, so tirelessly and consistently until 100 years of age, I was just like, Oh my gosh, you know, why did I never learn about her? I was foremost, very infuriated that I didn't learn about her sooner

in my life. But, um, I think the thing that most impacted me about her whole, like, learning about her whole life journey is, um, I think it was her that talked about how revolution is evolution, you know, like that, that, that space is allowed for you to continue to learn and to continue to grow. Because I, from what I understood, I don't think she was not really on board with Dr. King. She was much more, um, in the party of Malcolm X's thoughts and believed, uh, in, in violence, in, in really, um, yeah, that, that violence needed to be met with violence and that revolution was violent. Uh, but it was like sort of later on in her life where she also embraced Dr. Kings. Also not to say Dr. King was incredibly radical as well, but it's just like, his message has been very filtered. But, um, I think right now when we're living in a world where, um, you know, I think that I talked about raised consciousness collectively and, uh, when people's consciousness is raised, I believe that it could be a very messy process. And so we've come to this stage of having "cancel culture" and all of that, which I think it is only effective to a certain degree. Like, yes, we need to call out people when there's wrongdoing, but to completely cancel. And then I don't know how that's making any space for reconciliation or, you know, so I don't know for me, Grace Lee Boggs and, and embracing this idea of revolution is evolution. And we need to continue to evolve and to grow. Like I even said it about like people who are all upset about us constantly changing our language to become more inclusive. And there's like a whole, you know, population of folks who are just tired of it and like up in arms about Dr. Seuss getting canceled or whatever. But like I said, this too recently, I'm at a Pittsburgh rally that, you know, we're, we're meant to evolve and we're meant to be better. And I don't know why that's a bad thing. Like we are meant to, to continue to evolve. And, um, yeah, I think that that's one of the most powerful lessons of Grace Lee Boggs that you just continue to grow. Like, yeah,

SH: It's a good point As a librarian, when people go on and on about Dr. Seuss, I'm like, you're never going to just take the book off the shelf, you know, like, you're never going to know, you're going to forget about it. There's zillions of other books on the shelf, you know, like there's so much great work in the world that we haven't heard of that doesn't get talked about. And somehow,

JC: Yeah.

PS: Okay. So in *Role Models Who Look Like Me*, you walk us through the influences and contributions of Asian Pacific American individuals that you said, I wish I learned about when I was young. What did you hope to achieve from writing this?

JC: Right? Yeah. Again, definitely. I think most, if not everything that I do, I think, again, back to ten-year-old Asian-American girl, you know, like what could have supported her, empowered her and, uh, that's really the big motivation of that book. Um, but also it was for me, like, you know, cause like, you know, and I dedicated that book to both kids and kids at heart, you know, that, uh, and, and that's, that was like the major, at least personal response that I've been able to witness because I, um, you know, I don't get to witness everybody who buys my book, but when I first started selling my book locally, it was mostly people my age, you know, like in their thirties or, or older or whatever, but like, it impacted them too, because they were learning about these folks for the first time. And, and it was like almost, I would like to hope that it's almost like a inner child healing process for them to read a children's book that is just as meaningful to them as it could be for their nibbling.

JC: Nibbling is another word I just learned, which I love. It's like the gender neutral gender neutral term for a niece or nephew, but yeah. So, you know, whether -- -- it's for them or for their nibbling, you know, like, I, I hope that for people around my age, that it could be really healing and for children that it could be really just empowering and comforting and

letting them know that they're part of the American story. I think that's the biggest thing. And it's not just for them either. Like, that's the thing I really want to say. I did entitle the book, thinking of the Asian American, you know, family out there, but it's so important for again, our collective community, because it, it just perpetuates this idea. If you don't see Asian people in your, in India, American history, then you think that they are all foreigners, even if there's actually fifth, sixth, seventh generation, you know, Asian immigrants that have been part of the American story forever.

JC: I mean, yeah. Even like before the revolutionary war where the first Filipino, well, they were, they jumped off ship basically. And then, and then, uh, created that whole Saint malos village in Louisiana. And so, you know, Asian Americans are just as much of the American story, but we've been completely left out and intentionally. So, and so I'm trying to intentionally put us back in basically into the curriculum and into the stories. And, uh, and it's not just me, which is so wonderful to witness. It's like, I do hope that one day my work becomes irrelevant because that would mean that the dream is done, you know, but it's wonderful to see, I think everyone around my generation grew up with the same type of experience and they all are now the creators that you're seeing, like in media and beyond who are trying to combat that, uh, narrative that we grew up with and replace it with a, with a greater one.

PS: 00:39:28 And I also, what I love about the book is I get to read Jasmine for the young readers in my life, including my two children. And it's just, they can see different role models in different fields. So, and you mentioned it in the beginning, right? The expectation of some of the Asian Americans and Asian parents, that their kids will become doctors and lawyers. And, but you present these people in their respective fields, phenomenal, phenomenal individuals. And I, and I also hope that they can take it and say that, you know, I can be successful in whatever fields that I choose. So I think I just want to appreciate you for doing this as well.

JC: Thank you so much.

SH: So you were honored with a Jasmine chill day. This is January 28, 2020 by the city of Pittsburgh. Can you walk us through the experience of receiving that honor? Um, how do you hope people will celebrate Jasmine Cho day going forward?

JC: So I was just, I still am. I'm very dumbfounded by the whole thing. I'm like, is this real, you know, uh, that was my whole initial response and a lot of that response remains, but I will say that like, and I said it when the mayor was like speech, you know, he told me to say something when I received the proclamation and I said this at that time, but it was really something that a friend of mine Alicia shared with me. Cause I was just like, I can't believe like it's so bizarre, you know, that I'm what have I really done? Like, that's kind of the place that I was coming from. I'm like, I don't feel like I've even done enough. And, uh, you know, my friend Alicia basically said, you know, sometimes like we receive these awards and accolades, not accolades, not for ourselves, but, uh, to inspire others, you know?

And, and she told me like how my work had inspired her. And so, yeah. And that really shifted my perspective. Like, and, and it made total sense because I keep talking about how representation does matter, especially for our young ones, our kiddos. And it matters them like, Oh, like there's an Asian American woman who is honored by the city of Pittsburgh, like what's Jasmine show day. And if they get to learn like about, and I love that they don't just get to learn about me, but like, because all my cookies are representing all these other people's histories. They it's like a, I'm like, almost like a gateway, I guess, like to the, the, all these histories of all the ancestors that proceeded me and,

and them. And so I think that's really, yeah, I'm just really grateful, I guess, for the honor. And it's still a, still a little bit, like, I can't believe that that's an actual thing.

JC: Um, and in terms of how I hope it can be celebrated, uh, I feel like this is a question I'll be asked and we'll keep changing, like as I evolve to and grow older. But I think most of all, I hope that they're inspired to explore what makes them come alive. You know, I definitely have been very inspired by that whole Howard Thurman quote of don't ask the world what it needs, but ask what makes you come alive because what the world needs is more people to come alive. And yeah, that's what I want. Like, I want people to become more engaged. Like even if they're, they're not immediately taking any action, I believe that, um, a sustained engagement and interest is also action. Like that's, that's the first step in raising your, your awareness and consciousness about the world around you. And so I hope that on Jasmine show day, people just take some time to like, learn something new, to learn a story. And if they are so inspired to then also take action that might make their, the community around them better. So, yeah,

Speaker 2 00:43:10 I would like to draw also connection. So in times to do Jasmine where anti-Asian racism, uh, rices and I at California state university Santa Barbara center for the study of hate extremism said that it rises now about 150%. And stop API here reported close to 3,800 incidents alone of anti-Asian racism. How does your making activity today become even more important to you and the communities who follow your work?

JC: For me personally, it's, it's an outlet like for me to channel the grief and the anger that I'm feeling. And so it's a very- everything, every cookie heart piece that I share on my Instagram is actually a very personal piece for me of like sitting down, it's a very slow art, you know, it takes, um, several hours spread out over a couple of days for me to just create one piece. And usually it's my way of just meditating on the person's story that I'm depicting. And so it's my way of just sitting and grieving. Um, so it's a very personal process, but as far as our community to that pause and that level of engagement and that sense of being alive, like I'm, unfortunately this morning, I woke up to the news of the two additional incidents that happened in New York city. And I wish I didn't see it, but it kind of automatically played on my Twitter feed of the video of, um, a 65 year old Asian woman getting attacked very brutally. But I think what was most disturbing to me about that footage were the two security guards who just watched and then closed the door on her. And I'm just thinking what, what is dead inside them that, that could lead to such apathy. And so I hope that cookies, again, it might sound so silly, but cookies are that universal thing that is very disarming to folks. It's that universally connecting like childhood thing that, um, is so unexpected, so disarming. And so I hope that it does create that pause in people to pay attention and to be softened, you know, like I think more than anything, the world that I hope for, and that I envisioned through my cookies and beyond is, is a tender world. Like I wish people could just be softer and tender toward one another, toward themselves. And I hope that, you know, sprinkling in that sugar, you know, not to be so punny, but yeah, like can help that, like to, to move the world in the sweetest way that I know how, um, there are these cookies that can help people pause and digest all these stories and in a way that might otherwise be difficult to do. Um, yeah.

SH: I love that word disarming. Yes. I love it because I, I often think that too. How are people's hearts going to be open? How did it get so hard? How did we get here? And what's going to speak to people's hearts and disarming them with a connection to their child and then a straight to the heart.

SH: This is our last interview for the academic school years programming. What an honor, it has been to be able to share it with you. Thank you for taking the time to talk with us. We're very grateful. And you've given us so much to think about, I know Pam has gotten your book, but I'm

patiently waiting for mine. And the mail. Role models who look like me, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders who made history. And because I got on your website, it's going to be a signed copy. So I'm excited for that. And now you've given us something to look forward to our maker project, which we will have available at the AAARCC, Asian American and Asian Resource Cultural Center, at 915 Fifth Street, which is at the corner of Fifth and Waldren on the Purdue campus. And it's open Monday through Friday, 8-4. So we'll have that ready for students to pick up, uh, Jasmine, can you tell us about it?

JC: Yeah. So the cookie kits I plan to share are, um, they're essentially paint your own type of cookies. So there's going to be like an edible paint palette made with food coloring. Um, and I like to just include, uh, the primary colors along with black, just so you could really practice the art, you know, the artist's self in you, uh, but there will be two pre iced, uh, blank cookies, um, in white icing so that you could essentially paint over the cookie. Um, there will be one I will include that is completely blank, uh, so that you can just free draw, whatever, um, role model inspires you. And I'm probably going to include one perhaps of Grace Lee Boggs or some other, you know, uh, important historical figure that is kind of, uh, iced. Like the outline will be iced out for you to just kind of color in as a practice first.

SH: So Jasmine Cho's website is jasminemcho.com. On this website, you will find stories about her making journey through connecting, baking art and activism. You will find examples of beautiful cookie portraits that she has made and information on how to order her cookies and books. So thank you again.

JC: Thank you.