

June 2017. Vol. 21: No. 3 — Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI) in the Cultural Sector: What's next? — Antonio C. Cuyler

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Dear *CultureWork* readers,

Welcome to the Summer 2017 issue! This issue rounds out the special series of articles in celebration of *CultureWork*'s 20th year as a publication.

In this issue, Antonio C. Cuyler, Assistant Professor of Arts Administration at Florida State University, invites us to join and contribute to the ongoing journey of examining and researching diversity, equity, and inclusion within the field of arts administration. Cuyler introduces the range of his research around diversity in arts administration leadership and educational practices in the field. He further calls the field to conduct additional, purposeful research around markers of diversity such as race, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic class, indigeneity, and ability—as well as questions of equity and inclusion that his research has not yet engaged. This work is necessary to examine historical and contemporary structures, forms of knowledge, and ideologies that perpetuate and change the differentials and distribution of power in society as specifically represented in the arts and culture sector. Such research further builds the opportunities, teaching practices, content areas, analytical skills, and constructive thinking that are embedded into arts administration training programs that prepare arts and cultural sector leaders.

Regards,

Julie Voelker-Morris

Editor

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI) in the Cultural Sector: What's next?"

By Antonio C. Cuyler

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Introduction

I began studying Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) issues in Arts Administration over ten years ago. I hesitantly took on this task because some academicians view empirical investigations into the experiences and lives of marginalized and oppressed peoples as “me-search,” particularly when the researcher belongs to these groups (Sumerau, 2016; and Write Where It Hurts, 2015). In addition, as a person with multiple privilege-less social identities, I did not want to become the “diversity scholar” in Arts Administration. However, two rationales have cemented my resolve on the importance of studying DEI in the Arts.

First, reflective of U. S. society, ableism, adultism, ageism, heterosexism, racism, and sexism exists in the cultural sector. Capitalism is the root cause of the “isms” because it emboldens privilege. In this system, someone has to lose for someone to win. Because these “isms” exist in society and the cultural sector mirrors society, the sector can only reflect that which exists.

Secondly, large gaps have existed and continue to exist in the DEI arts scholarship, particularly in the peer-reviewed journals in Arts Administration. Furthermore, Toni Morrison’s quote, “If there is a book that you want to read, but it hasn’t been written yet, you must be the one to write it” has inspired me. I seek to produce the DEI scholarship that I want to read. Consequently, my goal has been to produce a sustained intellectual engagement with DEI in the arts to inform the work of arts administrators, educators, and students.

DEI in Cultural Organizations

One can categorize my DEI scholarship into two distinct categories: (1) DEI in cultural organizations and (2) DEI in Arts Administration education. In 2007, I initiated my scholarly investigation of DEI in cultural organizations by studying the career paths of non-European American executive opera administrators in the U. S. At that time, only four such executives: Henry Akina, Michael Ching, Linda Jackson, and Willie Anthony Waters, could participate in my dissertation. Only Ms. Jackson, Mr. Ching, and Mr. Waters participated in the study. A fifth opera executive of color, Torrie Allen, joined this distinctive group of opera executives in 2006. However, of the five of them, only Henry Akina currently works as an opera executive.

The study answered its primary research question, “what are the career paths of non-European American executive opera administrators in the U. S.?” However, a lack of diversity among opera executives persists which suggests that the field might benefit from additional research that continues the conversation about the careers of executive opera managers of color. Moreover, additional research questions emerged as a result of the study. These include: (1) what is the demographic composition of the U. S. Arts Management workforce (Cuyler, 2015b); (2) what effect does diversity have on U. S. arts managers’ managerial level and salary (Cuyler, 2017a); and, (3) to what extent does a diversity internship program in a

cultural organization successfully attract and retain arts managers from culturally diverse backgrounds in Arts Management (Cuyler, 2015a)?

Although these studies have made contributions to the literature, the cultural sector needs more research relative to DEI in cultural organizations. For example, a study that examines the impact of compensation and job satisfaction on the demographic diversity of executive arts managers in the U. S. would potentially illuminate two significant aspects of recruitment that could improve how the sector attracts and retains diverse executive arts managers. Additionally, a study that investigates the impact of demographic diversity on the career mobility of arts managers could also enlighten the cultural sector's endeavors to become diverse.

One finding that emerged from my qualitative dissertation is that early exposure to arts education was critical for cultivating executive opera managers of color. A quantitative study that further explores the relationship between early exposure to arts education and the demographic diversity of U. S. arts managers could enhance cultural organizations' practices relative to arts education. Such a study could also make the case for arts education policies that intentionally targets schools with large unrepresented populations to strengthen the potential pipeline of arts managers from diverse backgrounds. I plan to present a paper on this topic at the Social Theory, Politics & the Arts (STP&A) conference in October 2017.

Diversity has received the most attention in my scholarship thus far. This does not mean that equity and inclusion in cultural organizations is not important to me. In Cuyler (2017a), I discuss how women and LGBTQ+ arts managers are very well represented in the Arts Management workforce in comparison to U. S. society. This, however, does not mean that the workforce is inclusive for women or LGBTQ+ arts managers. To better understand how to make the workforce more inclusive for these populations, the cultural sector needs more research that seeks to understand what would make the workforce more inclusive from their perspectives.

The cultural sector's conversations about cultural equity have motivated service arts organizations such as Americans for the Arts (2016), Dance/USA (2017), Grantmakers in the Arts (2016), and the League of American Orchestras (2017) to develop statements on its importance. But what is cultural equity exactly? Furthermore, how should the sector operationalize this concept to make it more possible to implement in practice?

While statements are nice, they do not address the fundamental causes of the cultural sector's inequities. I am even more disturbed that conversations about inequity have excluded the sector's supreme victims of inequity historically, culturally specific arts organizations. To address this in more meaningful and substantive ways, the sector could benefit from a phenomenological study on how inequity has impacted culturally specific arts organizations.

DEI in Arts Administration Education

The second category of my scholarship examines DEI in Arts Administration education. In Cuyler (2013), I encouraged educators to consider Affirmative Action a formidable policy to support the pursuit of diversity in Arts Administration programs. However, nonexistent benchmarking data that assesses the diversity among faculty, staff, and students in programs has severely hindered progress on this goal. This is important because without this data Arts Administration has no way of evaluating the progress the discipline has made on diversifying educators, staff, and students. The Association of Arts Administration Educators (AAAE) could provide leadership in addressing this, but the organization's capacity to do so remains a serious challenge.

In Heidelberg and Cuyler (2014), my co-author and I advocated for teaching practices that yielded considerable results for our students relative to DEI in the arts. However, in retrospect, I should have started with my forthcoming study in the *Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* that surveys Arts Administration educators teaching on diversity issues (Cuyler, 2017). This study found that 86% of the educators surveyed reported that they teach about diversity issues in their courses. More profoundly, an educator was more likely to teach about diversity issues in their courses if they were female, of color, or LGBTQ+ (Cuyler, 2017a).

Of the methods used to teach about diversity issues, Arts Administration educators reported using discussion, course content (exercises, film, readings, etc.), guest speakers, lecture, assignments, and service learning. Although educators infrequently selected service learning as a method to teach about diversity issues, it is a method that educators should consider more earnestly. To deepen my students' understanding of DEI issues in the arts in my *Arts in Community Engagement* course, I require them to complete 50 hours of service with a culturally specific arts organization who provides culturally relevant experiences for people of color, people with disabilities, or LGBTQ+ people. At the 2017 AAAE conference in Edinburgh, Scotland, I presented a study that shows the benefits students have gained through my use of service learning to teach about social justice issues in the arts.

Although Cuyler (2017b) assessed if Arts Administration educators teach about diversity issues in their courses, why they teach about diversity issues, how they teach about diversity issues, and why they do not teach about diversity issues, this scholarly inquiry could continue momentarily by examining the precise approaches and practices educators employ to teach about social justice issues in their courses through qualitative research methodologies. In addition, a study should assess the benefits that accrue to Arts Administration students when they receive education on these issues, and if the benefits differ based on students' status as a graduate or undergraduate, or a student of privilege versus a student who has limited societal privilege based on their social identities.

Conclusions

My unremitting investigation into DEI issues in the arts has been compelling, disturbing, enlightening, frustrating, illuminating, insightful, and revealing. Nevertheless, the most urgent observations needing immediate attention to foster a safe intellectual space for the intentional

continuation of producing DEI scholarship include the following:

1. The cultural sector needs a shared understanding of the meaning of diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice. A misunderstanding of these terms has gravely obstructed its progress on these issues.
2. Because diversity, equity, and inclusion are different constructs, progress requires different strategies to achieve them and social justice.
3. The sector needs to also better understand how diversity, equity, and inclusion lead to the actualization of social justice.
4. The cultural sector needs a national organization that will hold it responsible for achieving DEI and social justice. With the mission, “to convene artists and cultural workers that are reflective of our pluralistic society to inform and advocate for democratic cultural policy,” the Association of American Cultures (TAAC) is the organization most poised to do this work. If not a national organization, then individual members of the cultural sector need to hold the sector accountable to ensure seismic progress on DEI. Without this, the sector is doomed to continue its cycle of a trending interest in DEI every 10 years.
5. Cultural funders such as the Doris Duke Foundation, Ford Foundation, the Mellon Foundation, and the Soros Foundation, among others appear most interested in funding the implementation of DEI. While I applaud this, they also need to fund research and better realize its potential to advance the cultural sector’s DEI efforts and initiatives.

My DEI research agenda in Arts Administration has produced knowledge that has enhanced the cultural sector’s ability to address enduring societal issues that challenge the sector. Even still, the sector needs more knowledge that will incite strategic action. Academic privilege has provided me a platform to make a transformative impact in the world. I invite scholars who aspire to contribute to this conversation to join me in tackling future studies on DEI in the arts.

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Author

Dr. Antonio C. Cuyler is Assistant Professor & Coordinator of Internships at Florida State University (FSU) where he teaches Master’s and Doctoral students. When it comes to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), Dr. Cuyler’s mantra is, “Everyone has the right to live a creative and expressive life.”

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