

Allyship in the Arts

Discussion Rules:

- This is a free 40 minute session. When it kicks you off simply click the link again and log back on. If you have trouble you can email Ally, who will put her email in the chat.
- Please put your name in the chat if you have something to say, and we will call on you.
- Please keep your statements concise to make sure everyone has a chance to speak.
- We ask that you add your pronouns to your name so that we can respect each individual's identity. Click on the three dots in the top right corner of your video to update your name.

Guidelines:

These guidelines are not up for debate. We all acknowledge them as a baseline for this discussion.

- There is no IF when it comes to white supremacy, racism, homophobia, ableism, and all other forms of prejudice and discrimination. It all exists.
- Acknowledge your privilege when possible. Privileged individuals hold the responsibility to incite change. Be aware that you hold power.
- Avoid assigning blame or assuming anyone's perspective.
- Embrace discomfort.
- It is ok to make mistakes.
- Acknowledge that we have all been on land that was once a plantation or a part of the history of oppressing Black people.
- This is not the final step. There is always more work to be done.
- All art forms and all perspectives are welcome in this discussion.
- Acknowledge the complexities of these discussions. Recognize what is an idealized solution and what is possible right now.
- This discussion focuses on allyship *in* the arts, rather than using art as allyship.

Discussion Topics & Resources:

1. Actions speak louder than words
 - To what degree is it progressive or important for an arts organization to verbally support a statement or cause?
 - What more should organizations do beyond claiming support?
 - Are there any organizations you feel have taken appropriate and necessary action to address inequality and discrimination?
- Around May, many organizations issued "black lives matter" statements. But not many of them outlined concrete action plans to address the issues either explicitly or implicitly conceded by those statements.
 - Making a statement is easy and is the baseline for being a decent human being/organization; have to do more than that

- Need to make actionable steps and share them with the public
- This allows patrons and hired artists to hold organizations accountable
- Organization examples:
 - Many of the organizations who have taken appropriate and necessary action are organizations led by artists of color; they have already been doing the work
 - Gibney Dance - issued a statement followed by a list of 5 steps they are taking to address white supremacy in their organization; clarified that there is much more work that needs to be done and will take additional steps not listed
 - American Dance Therapy Association - took steps, sent out steps their constituents could take, and had open meeting in which they discussed edits to their guidelines and actions
- Seeking feedback from the communities an organization serves/works with
- Making note of the agency non administrative artists have - there is room to stand up and speak out as an actor/dance/other artist although there always seems to be a fine line between speaking up for what is right and risking your job. The “blame” however, is not entirely on the creatives and administrators, the artists within the organization are still a part of it and the problematic systems or art it may support
- Board of directors should reflect the statements that an organization claims to uphold
 - E.x. if the organization makes a statement that diversity is important to them, their board should be diverse, or else it’s an empty statement

2. Tokenism and colorblind casting

- o Tokenism vs. representation
- o Authentic representation - diverse cast, not just diverse characters
- o Seeing artists beyond just one identity
- *The Little Mermaid* on Broadway is an example of colorblind casting that gave opportunities to people to play characters they would otherwise never have had the chance to. Ephraim Sykes talks about being the only Black newsie in the original cast and how it was a problem that no one acknowledged how his race would affect the role - (colorblind vs. color conscious)
- How valuable is representation if it isn’t accurate or authentic? Ali Stroker was the first and only person in a wheelchair to be on Broadway. She made her Broadway debut in 2015 in Deaf West’s production of *Spring Awakening* which had half Deaf and half hearing actors. She did not play a character that was explicitly in a wheelchair (seen as more than her chair) - there have been Broadway shows that had characters in wheelchairs but to date none of them have ever been played by actors in chairs
- The colorblind casting of *Hamilton* is categorically different from other shows which although are implemented to increase diversity, are often used as a way to ignore racial identities in a destructive way
- Ciara Renée as Elsa in *Frozen* on Broadway; received lots of hate
 - Need to have mental health support
- Colorblind casting risks erasing the differences that make us who we are

- If all Broadway shows were colorblind casted, that removes the possibility of having shows that are celebratory of marginalized or minority cultures
- Sometimes the answer isn't to colorblind cast, rather to imagine a pre-written character so it is more relevant to the person playing it.
 - Audrey was adapted in the 2019 Pasadena Playhouse show of Little Shop of Horrors for MJ Rodriguez, an Afro-Latina trans woman.
 - Phil Chan, the author of Final Bow For Yellow Face, approached different ballet companies on how to make the second act of Nutcracker less cultural appropriation, and more cultural celebration. There are ways to adapt the show to be a celebration of different cultures and backgrounds without changing the plot.

3. Equitable recruitment of artists

- *Recruitment* - used as a general term to reflect any situation in which artists are hired or commissioned for a company or event
- What barriers hinder recruitment of diverse artists?
 - Are these barriers inherent in the recruitment process or can they be removed or modified to reduce their impact?
- What actions can we take to lessen the impact of these barriers (besides removing/modifying them)?
- Even when an arts organization states that it does not discriminate on any bases when it comes to recruitment, there are often hidden obstacles in the recruitment process that affect individuals lacking certain privileges.
- Barriers:
 - Audition/application fees – keeps many individuals from participating in the recruitment process if they cannot afford it
 - Prejudice (esp. subconscious/unintentional) - e.g. specific desirable body type in ballet favors white dancers
 - Also, dance companies having their auditions begin with ballet already sets up the “kind” of dancer they want
 - How can you be sure that the people doing the recruitment hold no prejudice?
 - Lack of funding going to arts education and arts organizations
 - Audience memberships that make it harder for those who don't see shows regularly to get tickets
 - Many companies have a specific body type in mind when casting which is most often seen on white dancers
 - Naturally makes it hard for artists of color to be cast/represented
 - In dance auditions ballet is most often the first part. This gives off the impression that all dancers must be technically sound in ballet and/or that ballet is at the top of the hierarchy
- Lessening barriers:
 - Providing more funding, especially to organizations that are serving marginalized communities and whose boards are reflective of the communities they serve

- Using funding as an incentive to get organizations to be more open and equitable
 - Self work/reflection to tackle own biases especially when in a position of power
 - Prejudice is often subconscious
4. Accessibility and defining art
- o Art is often defined in a non-inclusive way
 - o Considering how one's art can be perceived/enjoyed by all individuals
- Some fundamental examples include closed captioning and auditory descriptions. These can be added on YouTube and Instagram, as well as other platforms. We define dance as visual and music as auditory but it doesn't have to exclusively be defined that way. Think about ways in which you can make your art more accessible.
 - Music is generally seen to be non-inclusive of deaf individuals, but it doesn't have to be. The artist Jamie xx created a music video featuring deaf individuals dancing to his song, "Sleep Sound". He states in the beginning: "Here we explore how music can be created by only having silence and creating sound with the use of imagination."
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_Gx2-yeNlk

Additional Resources:

- Uprooted: The Journey of Jazz Dance <https://uprootedfilm.com/> (this film is not currently available for streaming but keep an eye out for if it becomes available again)
- Tomorrow (Today) Tix - Allyship is Earned (a conversation with Ariana Debose, Ashley Park, and Ephraim Sykes)
<https://www.todaytix.com/x/nyc/shows/22082-allyship-is-earned> - donation based streaming starting at \$0
- Broadway Advocacy Coalition* <https://www.bwayadvocacycoalition.org/>
- Broadway Black Podcast*
<https://www.broadwayblack.com/off-book-black-theatre-podcast/>
- We See You, White American Theater <https://www.weseeyouwat.com/>
- Imagining: A Gibney Journal -
<https://gibneydance.org/journal/imagining-a-gibney-journal/>
- Journal of Dance Education - Race in Dance Education
<https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/ujod20/20/3?nav=tocList&>
- Article on Color-blind casting
<https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2020/aug/11/its-dangerous-not-to-see-race-is-colour-blind-casting-all-its-cracked-up-to-be>
- Another one
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/08/arts/television/hamilton-colorblind-casting.html>
- Racism in the theater world article
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/10/theater/systemic-racism-theater.html>
- "What Inclusion and Equity Looks Like: From One Black Artistic Director's Point of View in Three Parts"

<https://www.westarts.org/news-updates/what-inclusion-and-equity-looks-like-from-one-black-artistic-directors-point-of-view-in-three-parts>

*Please note that Resources with “Broadway” in the title were created by professional theater artists including those who are a part of the Broadway community, however, these resources are not meant exclusively for Equity actors