

# Tales from the Black Carpet: A Narrative Inquiry into Multicultural Programming

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## Prologue: A Black Carpet Fashion Showcase

MULTICULTURAL PROGRAMMING can take many forms. From workshops on social justice for general audiences to seminars on inequality for specific groups, the purpose of this type of programming is the cultivation of mutually inclusive college campuses that prepare students for living and working in an integrated world (Mallinckrodt, et al., 2014).

The intended outcomes associated with multicultural programming include increased empathy, intercultural awareness, and civic engagement (Jones, Sander, & Booker, 2013). These outcomes are assessed by a variety of measures, both qualitative and quantitative; however, there is a growing body of research that suggests that the unintended outcomes associated with multicultural programming are even more salient for individual growth and transformation (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Howard-Hamilton, Cuyjet, & Cooper, 2011; Hurtado, 2007).

Assessing these kinds of outcomes, especially when they provide answers to unasked questions, can be difficult. One of the ways that researchers can start to discover the subtle shifts in students' perceptions is through narrative inquiry (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007). By allowing the participants of multicultural programming, for example, to speak for themselves, it is possible to start unraveling the mysteries surrounding the interpretation of lived experience.

The purpose of this study is to explore the unintended outcomes of a student-run multicultural event, billed as a Black Carpet Fashion Showcase, for its impetus within the Black student community, at the pseudonymous Saint Solomon, a Catholic liberal arts university. In addition to components of an actual fashion show, such as a catwalk, this event also featured stand-up comedy, choreographed dance routines, and musical performances. Rather than presenting a

unified solution for assessment, this study promotes dialogic conversations about how institutions can inspire students through multicultural programming.

## **Review of the Literature on Multicultural Programming**

The importance of engaging diverse populations of students through multicultural programming is well established (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Howard-Hamilton, Cuyjet, & Cooper, 2011). Educational leaders have been urging their reports to implement diversity training since at least the 1980s, arguing that this kind of programming is necessary for helping students participate in a world that may not look anything like the one in which they grew up or attended school (Nagda, Gurin, Sorensen, & Zúñiga, 2009; Sand, 1989).

Multicultural initiatives traditionally attempt to cultivate intercultural competencies, such as empathy, tolerance, and understanding (Pope & Reynolds, 1997). The hope is that by developing dispositions for social justice, for example, students will be able to reflect on their experiences with diversity, including issues of race, religion, and ethnicity, and, as a result, learn how to effectively navigate difference (Casebeer, 2016). This kind of awareness affords students the opportunity to not only acknowledge, but also to appreciate the values, beliefs, and attitudes of others (Howard-Hamilton, 2000). By encouraging students to see the world from multiple perspectives, multicultural programming exposes them to conflicting worldviews, which is important for working toward more equitable models of education.

In this sense, initiatives that focus on the historical tensions between privileged and underserved populations have existed for decades, and colleges often task their employees to facilitate social change through education and service with varying degrees of insistence and success (Watt, 2013). Today, colleges and universities are as inclusive and culturally diverse as ever, although there is still a long way to go to achieve any sort of racial, cultural, or ethnic parity, and the structure and focus of programming at these institutions has had to adapt in order to work toward more equitable representations.

One way that colleges have become more sensitive to issues of diversity is by becoming conscious of the value of the varying philosophies, beliefs, and traditions that their students bring to campus (Howard-Hamilton, 2000). To this end, institutions such as Saint Solomon have been working to create spaces where all members of their communities can feel safe and appreciated. As higher education is often a reflection of society at large, college administrators need to foster a campus culture of awareness and acceptance, not only for the sake of campus harmony and its positive effects on student learning, but also for its ability to increase participant empathy, communication, and critical thinking skills, as well as overall student engagement and involvement (Astin, 1993; Cheng & Zhao, 2006). Accordingly, multicultural programming should model the dispositions and standards that institutions want their students to exhibit in society after they graduate.

In spite of its benefits, multicultural programming can be challenging to implement. It requires a particular style of creative thinking from practitioners, and furthermore calls for the creation of new concepts, procedures, and partnerships, which can entail a substantial amount of time and effort from those involved (Dodge & Jarratt, 2013). In order for an institution to situate diversity as a campus-wide initiative, for example, administrators must challenge students, faculty, and staff to explore and reflect on concepts such as identity, power, and privilege (Elkins, Morris, & Schimek, 2013).

Accomplishing such a task, however, can be difficult. Taylor (2014) explains that pushing for ideological change, such as cultural sensitivity, requires individuals to not only learn something new, but also to let go of a part of themselves, a conception they may have held for years, in order to reach a greater understanding. This process may be challenging or even frightening for participants, leading them to resist, rather than embrace, the experience.

DiAngelo (2011) further articulates this challenge through a discussion of fragility. Being presented with information about other racial groups and their perspectives can put White individuals, for example, in an unconscious state of defense, as they are not typically subjected to racial stress, so it can be overwhelming for them to not only acknowledge racism but also to recognize their own oppressive role within a system of privilege. Consider that White college students are often afforded the luxury of not examining race, as they tend to conceive of themselves as individuals rather than as members of a racial group. Because multicultural programming provides students with opportunities to see the world from different perspectives, it can trigger negative reactions from White students, such as anger and guilt, because they are not used to acknowledging their privilege, or framing themselves as unwitting oppressors.

By acknowledging the inherent complexity of multicultural programming, as such programming is rarely without its challenges, a gap appears in the literature. Research has yet to provide a definitive measure for determining whether or not the goals of multicultural programming are reached, and that makes it difficult for practitioners to determine exactly if, how, or why specific programs work. Oftentimes institutions implement programs and initiatives to promote cultural awareness and acceptance, and will even be congratulated and awarded for their efforts as these programs often result in “feel good moments,” when they are, in actuality, leaving organizational practice and systematic racism unchanged (Ahmed, 2012, p. 84). In this sense, institutional commitment to multicultural programming can be superficial, leaving the root causes of diversity issues unexamined. Rather than offering a universal solution for assessing multicultural programming, this study addresses the disconnect between the intended and the unintended outcomes of such events by helping the reader learn more about a particular multicultural collaboration in the words of those involved.

## Research Methods and Methodology

The researchers collected data from the participants, interchangeably referred to as the *protagonists*, during semi-structured interviews that encouraged them to reflect on their perceptions of multicultural programming in the context of the Black Carpet Fashion Showcase at Saint Solomon: Ruth (pseudonym, Black, female, usher), Paul (pseudonym, White, male, model), Sarah (pseudonym, Black, female, designer/stylist), Eve (pseudonym, White, female, stage manager), and Jonas (pseudonym, Black, male, event planner).

The researchers used narrative analysis to “restory” the participants’ lived experiences and appeal to the reader’s imagination (Polkinghorne, 1995). Rather than searching for generalizations that can be applied to all kinds of multicultural programming, this approach focuses on developing particular knowledge about how the protagonists felt about the fashion showcase (Kerby, 1991; Spence, 1986). The protagonists’ stories, which emerged from an ongoing collaboration between the researchers and the participants, and ultimately required the participants’ final approval, are constructed in the first person, using direct quotes whenever possible, to give them a sense of chronology and coherence (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

In addition to reflecting the positive outcomes that exist in multicultural programming at other institutions, this study also promotes empathetic understanding of the participants' lives through arts-based educational research (Samah, 2013). According to Barone and Eisner (1997), stories become texts for arts-based research through the use of evocative, contextualized, and vernacular forms of language that “[are] designed to stimulate imaginative faculties, inviting the reader to fill gaps in the text with personal meaning” (p. 97). By creating a virtual world for the reader to inhabit, it is possible to reduce the tensions between those who work in academia and those who do not, thus opening a space for deliberation where everyone has a stake.

### **Theoretical Framework: Bakhtinian Novelness**

In order to help the reader understand the participants' lived experiences and transform this understanding into significant implications for social and educational change, this study uses Bakhtinian novelness as a theoretical framework (Kim, 2006). This perspective is particularly suited to narrative analysis because it allows the protagonists to speak for themselves instead of permitting the researchers to merge their voices into one dominant point of view (Tanaka, 1997).

For Bakhtin (1981), stories can be classified either as *epics* or as *novels*. The difference is that epics are told with a centripetal force, which imposes monolithic unity, while novels are told with a centrifugal force, which allows multiple voices to emerge. In his explication of the dialogic imagination, Bakhtin (1981) also makes a distinction between *novels* and *novelness* that describes the former as examples of the literary genre and the latter as having the major features that all novels share: heteroglossia, polyphony, chronotope, and carnival.

Heteroglossia, or *differentiated speech*, refers to “another’s speech in another’s language, serving to express authorial intentions . . . in a refracted way” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 324). As both a historical and a normative construct, heteroglossia describes a textured discourse that serves multiple speakers at once. According to White (1993), “because languages are socially unequal, heteroglossia implies dialogic interaction in which the prestige languages try to extend their control and subordinated languages try to avoid, negotiate, or subvert that control” (p. 137).

Polyphony, or *a language of heteroglossia*, refers to “a plurality of independent, unmerged voices and consciousnesses” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 6). In the polyphonic novel, which is messy, rhizomatic, and incomplete, different voices are continually heard and *reheard* in relation to the others. For Kim (2006), this suggests that no one language, or voice, enjoys privilege in “the polyphonic, dialogized heteroglossia of the novel” (pp. 5–6).

Chronotope, or *a spatial/temporal frame*, refers to an instance when “time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the moment of time, plot and history” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 84). Because polyphony is not enough to promote dialogic conversation on its own, chronotope situates the participants' stories in a particular context, such as the Black Carpet Fashion Showcase, and reifies their individual experiences. According to Wang (2009), the “creative potentiality [of the chronotope] lies in the interconnectedness between and among the past, the present, and the future, while at the same time, something new emerges from concrete, specific contexts” (p. 2).

Finally, carnival, or *subversive liberation*, refers to the elements of “laughter, irony, humor, and . . . self-parody” in the novel that disrupt symbols of power and violence in the social milieu (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 7). Here, everyone is viewed as an active participant in the discourse, norms are reversed, and hierarchies are disassembled in favor of more egalitarian practices. For Elliot (1999),

“carnival shakes up the authoritative version of language and values, making room for a multiplicity of voices and meaning” (p. 129). In the carnivalesque novel, then, counter-narratives are celebrated rather than disregarded.

By incorporating the concepts of Bakhtinian novelness—heteroglossia, polyphony, chronotope, and carnival—into narrative analysis, it is possible to interrogate the nature of dominant stories by untangling complexity and situating multiple perspectives on a level playing field. Rather than leading the reader to a single conclusion, this approach stimulates critical thinking by encouraging multiple interpretations of the same inquiry. In the following vignettes, the protagonists’ narratives are meant to promote dialogic conversations about best practice for fostering socially just, inclusive communities, and the voice of the researchers, which is afforded equal rather than privileged space, is meant to be read with the same level of significance in mind.

### **The Voice of Ruth: Usher**

I was responsible for checking tickets and getting everyone to their seats. At Saint Solomon, I’ve always been, you know, *the Black girl, the girl with the hair or the girl that dresses that way*. I’m constantly labeled by how I look because I’m not in an environment where a lot of people look like me, and being able to attend the fashion showcase dressed how I would normally dress was therapeutic, because I finally felt like I could be myself. I don’t think that most people think about what it means to be a minority student, especially here, and it was nice to be free that night to act the way I normally act without, you know, being called *ghetto* or *ratchet*, or feeling like I was on display.

As an usher, I got to see almost everyone who came, and I think that one of the most interesting components was seeing some of the faculty and staff who were there, especially those from Campus Ministry. They weren’t there to gawk or anything like that, even though what they were seeing was outside of their normal experience. They genuinely wanted to be there, which was awesome, because it made me feel supported not just as a student, but also as a person. As far as other students were concerned, everyone, *literally everyone*, was there. There were athletes. There were the quiet kids that, you know, never seem to go out or do anything. I was overwhelmed, actually, not just because I had to find seats for hundreds of people, but because of the amount of support that we received from the Saint Solomon community.

On the surface, I guess you could say that our event aligned with the mission of the university to prepare students for merging into society. But I think that the real goal was to expose people to other people’s values, dreams, and goals. The purpose was not necessarily to make people agree with or even understand what was going on, but rather to provide a space for all kinds of people to be able to connect outside of their everyday experience.

I’m not sure if it would be possible to recreate this event—Jonas and the people who organized it, you know, were just so committed—but I would say that our success was based on more than just advertising for inclusion. You have to create the environment that allows for inclusion before you can put it out there and say that all are welcome. Otherwise, it might seem like you’re just catering the event toward a certain group of people, and then only that group of people is going show up or to want to be involved.

To me, creating an environment for inclusion comes from creating personal relationships, and that’s something that’s on us as students. Sure, the university can create spaces for different types of people to meet and interact, but people need to do more than just acknowledge that

difference exists. They have to learn what other people are passionate about. They have to engage in a constant networking kind of thing. Aside from this event, I have to look back at my experience as a freshman, you know, with all those icebreakers, to find a time that I had the opportunity to engage with so many different types of people.

I also think that it's important to be flexible with your vision, especially in terms of being open-minded to the possibilities that other people can create for you without deterring from what you're trying to accomplish. To this end, I think that we need to step away from being afraid of calling something what it is. There is a difference between catering an event toward a specific group and creating an event that represents a specific group. I think that there is a lack of respect for cultures because there's an ignorance that some people just don't want to fix. So, I think that being politically correct about cultural events is just fostering that continued ignorance. I think that by calling something what it is, such as a Black Carpet Fashion Showcase, you can open the door for conversation. People need to have a chance to respond to the way that a certain event is portrayed, if only to start a conversation about why it is being represented the way it is.

### **The Voice of Paul: Model**

I got involved with this event, which I would describe as a cultural event, a fashion and arts celebration, because of Jonas. He has the kind of personality that gets the best out of people. He's just really open and friendly in a way that makes you feel like he genuinely cares about what you have to offer. Instead of telling people what they had to do, he just gave people a tiny bit of direction and let them fill in the gaps for themselves.

In addition to helping make some last minute decisions with one of the designers, I worked as a model for three of the four fashion brands. It was something that I had never actually done before, and because of all of the hype, fueled by the students rather than Saint Solomon's staff, it wasn't just an event that you went to because it was something to do. It was one of those events that you actually wanted to be there for.

I think the goal of the program, in addition to offering something new and exciting on campus, was to give people a chance to celebrate their own talents, especially as they related to their individual backgrounds and cultures. It felt like we were entirely responsible for the content of the show, which I think also led to its success because we were free to express ourselves without feeling like there was someone always looking over our shoulders.

Another reason why I feel that we were so successful, in terms of having such a large and diverse turnout, was because of everything we did leading up to the event. Jonas, for example, was doing a lot of advertising and promoting: he put up flyers; he put the word out on social media and invited people from other campuses; he interviewed random people in the hall on the day of the show about what they were wearing to build hype. By having lots of different people participate—there were lots of different sports teams represented, for example—it made their friends and teammates want to go out and support them.

Honestly, when it was time for me to first step out on the catwalk, I thought that people were going to laugh at me. But they didn't. Everyone was really feeling it. I think this had something to do not only with the people but also with the atmosphere of the event. Saint Solomon, for example, gave us some funding and helped out with some of the backdrops. They could have just booked a room and left us to fend for ourselves, which would have made it feel like a middle school or a high school event, but everyone was really supportive.

I think that students who organize future events should be given the same amount of leeway to create their vision. Instead of being staff-driven, our event was definitely student-centric, and I think that's a big part of what made everyone want to be a part of it. It was something that we could claim as our own. Participating in student-driven events makes it feel like the university is putting the power in the hands of the students. It makes it feel like we're a part of something that lets us get the most out of our time here.

Instead of trying to incentivize students to attend a certain event—by bribing them with a chance to win a gift card, for example, or giving away free food—you have to get them excited about the event itself. I think the best way to do this is to get as many different people involved with visible roles as possible. The soccer team came out to support me, for example, and there were a lot of people from the football and basketball teams there as well.

The more groups you bring together, the better chance you have of getting people excited. Take one of the performances we had, for example. It was a duet. There were two different cultures represented, and that made a lot of people want to watch it. As much as I was interested in our event, I wouldn't have participated if it was put on by a group of people that I didn't like. But, if there were enough people involved that I connected with, then I would probably participate. Maybe I would even come to like the people I wasn't so sure of.

### **The Voice of Sarah: Designer/Stylist**

I initially agreed to participate in the showcase because I have my own clothing line back home, but this was the first time that anyone was going to see my brand outside of the Virgin Islands. In addition to showing my work, I also worked backstage, doing hair for the models. It was hectic, but the whole thing was just amazing. The energy was great!

Of course, there was more to it than just exposure for the designers and performers. We wanted to give the audience something new, something that other students might want to replicate, and show them that it was possible to organize similar events. There were so many different people there. Half the football team was there. The whole basketball team was there. I saw the field hockey team, people from track. I also saw music majors, art history majors, and chemistry majors. Even my biology class came out to support us.

Even though Jonas was responsible for getting the showcase started, he was open to other people's ideas. When he started the process, for example, he actually didn't know how to frame it. There was a girl on the committee who suggested that we should incorporate a New York theme into the event, and, even though the project was his idea, he was willing to run with it. From an organizational perspective, he wouldn't make a decision without making sure that he got input from the rest of us.

This made for a great atmosphere backstage. You got to learn so much about so many people. Like, there were a few British men who were there, and, even though I didn't know them, they would express interest in what I was doing. Another great thing was the way that people took on responsibility. There was one model, for example, who also did makeup. She was in four different segments, and everyone worked together to make sure that she was ready to go back out on stage.

Looking back, it was definitely more than just a normal fashion show. In addition to the designers and the models, there were singers and dancers, and we really tried to avoid anything stereotypical or cliché like, "Oh, she's going to sing a love song, or he's going to dance hip-hop."

We were open to anything, be it tap or even a waltz, as long as it fit within the overarching theme of New York. Sure, there were people who might not have liked the opening act, but maybe they liked the ending. Or maybe they didn't like the dancing, but they liked the singing. The point is that there was something for everyone, regardless of what they might normally be perceived as being into.

In order to replicate this kind of event in the future, I think it's important to let the students have as much creative control as possible. They still need to be mindful of authority—we made it a point to keep the music we played clean, for example—but I honestly think that people would be more interested in participating in student-generated events than faculty or staff inspired ones because they might feel like they won't have an opportunity to have their voices heard or their ideas taken into consideration. Sometimes it won't be like that, but when you put faith in students that are self-motivated and open to working with all kinds of people, you will probably get a better response.

With that being said, I really think that diversity is the key to planning a successful event at places like Saint Solomon. When it comes to a campus wide event, such as our showcase, I don't think that you leave it up to one group of people. Events should definitely be co-sponsored. You have to include people who are into sports, for example, because you never know what they can help you with. It's also important to be respectful of people's schedules. I mean, they're students. But they're usually into something else as well, so it's good to work with lots of different groups whose schedules and interests don't necessarily overlap.

### **The Voice of Eve: Stage Manager**

I got involved with the show after Jonas attended a spoken word reading that I helped put together. We've collaborated on several events in the past, so when he asked if I could help, there was no question, so long as it fit into my schedule. Originally, I was just going to support Jonas, because I knew how important this event was to him, but I ended up being the stage manager, making sure that everything was set up. In addition to making sure that the right people were changing and walking out, I did just about anything you could think of.

As far as a goal for the event is concerned, I'm not sure that I could give a single answer. Some people, such as the designers and the models, were looking for a way to promote all of the work that they've put in over the years, while other people, such as some of the performers, were there to support their friends, especially Jonas, in fleshing out the show and making sure that it was well-received by the Saint Solomon community.

Before the show, I helped Ruth put names on the reserved seats. Well, I was trying to help; the variety of people was so vast! There were nuns, for example, right next to students of different backgrounds and religions. So many interesting pairings. The faculty and staff was also well represented, which was awesome because the show was after hours, and there were students from neighboring universities because of all of the buzz on social media. I thought that the only people who were actually going to show were arts-based students from Saint Solomon, but after seeing who was on the guest list, I didn't know what to expect. At Saint Solomon, it can be hard to gauge what the audience for an event is going to look like. This place is strongly associated with sports, so the games are well-attended, but with something like our fashion showcase it's not so easy to predict who will be there because you can't always tell what people are interested in when you don't always see them outside of class.



Even though I'm kind of like a chameleon-type person, who is likely to go over to anybody and start a conversation, I think that the diverse participation of the designers, models, and performers was what led to the diverse audience. In addition to reaching out to our friends and teammates, we also made sure to invite everyone from our respective majors. That's why you could find science majors, for example, sitting next to graphic design majors.

In spite of how well-received the event was, I did hear some minor complaints from people who didn't understand what we were trying to achieve. They saw our fashion showcase as something that was exclusively for Black students or art majors, so I just think that they weren't open to whatever it might be like, which is ironic, because these are exactly the kind of people who need to be attending these kinds of events. Some people might have been intimidated because it seemed to cater to a Black audience, but, then again, some people might have just not been interested in fashion. Nevertheless, we had a great turnout, and I think the event might even have started to reach across some of the social barriers that we have here.

In order to recreate what we accomplished, I would suggest putting together an interest group or something like that. Institutions could get a small board of students together from different organizations and majors and sports. If you bring together an art major, a science major, and a basketball player with, let's say, someone who plays the cello, you're going to get a lot of really cool ideas, maybe something that you've never even heard of before. It's also important to make sure the atmosphere of the event fits what the institution is trying to do. The atmosphere for the fashion showcase, for example, was really cool, really young, really modern with the music and the lighting. Finally, I think it's important to get the word out early—early, early, early—especially to people that you think might not be interested, because, hey, you never know what someone is thinking until you ask them.

### **The Voice of Jonas: Event Planner**

I guess you could say that I was the puppeteer behind the event. I would not, however, describe the showcase as *my* event. There were lots of people who were responsible for lots of different things—there were other designers, there were other models—but, if I had to give credit to a certain group, I would say that it was the Future Greek Leaders who really put the time in and put this thing together. Even though a lot of people are calling what we did a fashion show, I never called it that. I called it a showcase. I never called it a fashion show because we had so much more than modeling going on. We had musicians, we had singers and athletes. In fact, I think there was only one person who had any modeling experience.

One of the reasons that we had such a great turnout was because I insisted that we get lots of different groups involved. I was adamant about having a mixed group of models, for example, because I knew that their friends and teams would come out to the support them. What was particularly great was that this gave different groups of people the opportunity to mingle, to participate in a shared experience. I saw different people connecting, for example, over something as simple as a compliment about what one of them was wearing, something that probably wouldn't happen on a typical night in the dining hall.

I think the purpose of the event was to demonstrate to the audience just how great of a place Saint Solomon can be if you just put yourself out there. Everyone has the same opportunity to accomplish what we did, but I feel like some people are too afraid to do anything. There are so many people who go to this school from so many different places, but once they actually get here,

they try to leave a lot of that behind, and when leaving that behind causes you not to take advantage of the opportunities the school provides, such as the opportunity to plan your own event, it can seem like there's nothing going on.

With that being said, I feel that events like ours are only possible when students reach out to the people around them. Not just to their roommates or whatever. Students need to realize that their experiences are interesting to other people. Just because what happens back home—in England, for example—might not seem interesting to you because it's something that you're familiar with, doesn't mean that it wouldn't be interesting to people who don't have a similar background. In fact, it would probably be the opposite. There is so much more to being a college student than just going to class, playing sports, wearing sweats, and going to eat.

Another problem is that I don't think that people want to feel like the odd one out. I don't know many people who want to be on their own or even feel comfortable being who they really are. Once they find a small group, they tend to stay there instead of trying to expand that group. I think that it's possible for faculty and staff to help ease students out of their shells, but that can be difficult because students often look at anybody that is their superior with suspicion. And students don't always want to be connected to their superiors because they're afraid to say or do anything that might reflect poorly with the higher-ups.

Honestly, I think that if institutions want to have events like this in the future, they have to build a team of students who can advocate for them on the student level. But this team can't be made up just of those people who want to be involved in everything, just to build their resumes or whatever. You have to handpick some people that you wouldn't initially think would be interested and make sure that they know that you see potential in them. Once you build these kinds of relationships, with students from all kinds of different groups, they're going to start trusting you and being honest with you. Even if it seems like you're putting on an event that appeals more to Black people than White people, for example, it's still possible for everyone to feel like their participation or interpretation means something.

### **The Voice of the Researchers**

The purpose of this monologue is to identify and briefly comment on the themes that emerged during our semi-structured interviews with the participants, including issues of autonomy, diversity, and leadership. Our hope is that the reader will start to think about best practice for multicultural programming through the perspectives and reflections of those who participated in the student-run Black Carpet Fashion Showcase at Saint Solomon. Furthermore, we also hope that the participants' stories will encourage conversations not only about how multicultural programming can help foster mutually inclusive campus communities, but also about how we can navigate some of its challenges and contradictions.

The theme of autonomy, defined here as creative control or an independence in terms of project design and implementation, is woven throughout all of the protagonists' narratives. Ruth and Sarah, for example, both spoke to the importance of providing students with the tools and encouragement they need to plan events of their own. Paul and Eve also talked about how important it was for Jonas, as the event planner, to allow the participants, regardless of their level of involvement, to take ownership of the event. Instead of scripting exactly what he expected people to do—he did not, for example, ask people to sing particular songs or demonstrate particular

dances—Jonas parceled out blocks of time and allowed the performers to make their own decisions and use their own talents within the event’s overarching theme.

In much the same way that Jonas granted autonomy to the people he worked with, however, Saint Solomon granted Jonas autonomy to plan the event. Instead of giving the students a set of rules to follow in terms of content and promotion, Saint Solomon offered the participants funding and took a passive role, keeping tabs in a logistical manner and offering support whenever the students ran into procedural problems that they were unsure of how to handle.

The theme of diversity, while varying in degrees of salience for the individual protagonists, was also discussed as an important element of the event’s success. Not only was a diverse audience needed for support, but a diverse crew was needed to handle the production and implementation as well. The protagonists felt that at an institution that often feels disjointed in terms of cross-cultural interactions, the level of diverse individual cohesion at the showcase not only inspired those involved, but also led to the success of the event as a truly multicultural program. Eve and Jonas, for example, talked about how including a diverse population of students in *visible* roles—people want to be able to see their friends, after all—inspired a diverse population of students, faculty, and staff to attend. Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003) argue for a reduction on “overgeneralizing too quickly about populations,” and encourage researchers to avoid generalizing statements based on single observations (p. 23). Therefore, it is important to note that the variance in individual salience, in regard to diversity for respondents, speaks to the fact that individuals interpret and make meaning of intercultural experiences differently. In this sense, this study’s individual narratives provide only an example of possible participant outcomes.

Finally, the theme of leadership, which encompasses the previous themes of autonomy and diversity, also played an important role in the protagonists’ discourse. For this study, leadership is viewed as not only the process of organizing and governing a group, but also as the process of charging others with creative freedom and inspiring them to do well. In this sense, the protagonists saw the opportunity for shared leadership as an important part of the event’s success. Ruth, Paul, Sarah, and Eve, for example, all spoke to the dynamic position that Jonas played in the process. Even without someone as open as Jonas, however, they all suggested that it was possible to replicate the results of their particular event by cultivating relationships with a diverse group of students who are willing to advocate for the institution on the student level. It is important, after all, for institutions to put trust in the students they are trying to serve.

### **Epilogue: An Invitation to Black Carpet Research**

Bakhtinian novelness provides us with opportunities to raise important questions, especially in terms of power relations and subject positions in the field of higher education, and rethink the principles that undergird certain aspects of our social practices (Kim, 2016). While it can be tempting to ascribe value to the protagonists’ individual voices—especially the voice of Jonas, as the event planner—or the voice of the researchers, the benefit lies in listening to what the participants had to say as “an eternal harmony of unmerged voices” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 30). Rather than producing a cacophony of conflicting worldviews, this eternal harmony is situated in a heteroglossic space where the participants’ opinions are held in the same esteem, where everyone has a stake and, accordingly, everyone has a say.

Unlike the practice of liberal pluralism, which, at the very least, endorses not only “the minimum conditions of public order, such as the rule of law and a public authority with the capacity

to enforce it,” but also “the moral and practical necessity of organizing public life so as to ward off, to the greatest extent possible, the great evils of the human condition,” the situation of polyphonic truths in a heteroglossia is anathema to rationalism (Galston, 2005, p. 3). It is asemic—*chaotic*, even—and space is not available to construct hierarchies, impose order, or create boundaries that the participants or their voices cannot cross.

At a time when so many of our students are feeling uneasy, or, in extreme cases, even marginalized by their chosen institutions, Bakhtinian novelness can provide educators, researchers, and college administrators alike with an opportunity to confront their own ideas about power and privilege. While it might be difficult for some of us to confront our own fragility, to peel back the myriad layers of oppression that continue to shroud issues of race in our society, consciously listening to and *valuing* what our students say is a place to start.

By interrogating the stories that shape our understanding of multicultural programming, such as the narratives that emerged from the Black Carpet Fashion Showcase at Saint Solomon, we can begin to create spaces for deliberation, challenge inequitable practices, and promote dialogic conversations among students and practitioners. While restoried narratives can, admittedly, be limited by issues of validity—which is why it is important for researchers to give the participants opportunities to approve their stories—the conversations they inspire can produce new stories that hold possibilities for best practice, not only for the students and the practitioners immediately involved, but also for those who read and interpret these stories.

Even though the students involved with this particular case of multicultural programming felt that their efforts were rewarded by the turnout of a large, diverse, and receptive audience, the researchers, as well as the participants, acknowledge that the process was not without its share of complications. All of the participants shouldered the burden of promoting a cultural event—that is, a *Black* event—on a predominantly White campus; however, in addition to attempting to educate their audience about some of their own unique perspectives through dance and fashion, the event’s unintended consequences included how much the participants were able to learn about autonomy, diversity, and leadership from each other.

What constitutes best practice, of course, is up for debate. Education is contested terrain, a shifting intellectual landscape of social eruptions and erosions, and what works for one group of students at a particular time and place will not necessarily work for another. Fortunately, there are ways, such as engaging in arts-based narrative inquiry, that allow researchers and participants alike to construct important knowledge about social phenomena that would otherwise be lost, and it is our hope that researchers will continue to listen to the narratives that students use to make sense of their experiences, especially as they relate to issues of difference.

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