"Stereotypes creep into almost all aspects of our culture including music, television, stories, and contemporary art. Ongoing diversity and inclusion efforts are necessary for maintaining awareness, dispelling stereotypes, and building more inclusive workplaces."

The A.R.T. of Diversity

Transforming Stereotypes

By Rich Smith and
Kittie W. Watson

Introduction

While organization leaders talk about how they value and understand the power of diversity, many fail to fully realize the significant benefits of leveraging a diverse workforce. A March 2008 report by Boston-based Novations Group (Hastings, 2008) claims the steady growth in diversity training within American corporations is creating "diversity fatigue." Many diversity initiatives lack clear business objectives, are U.S.-centric, ignore line management issues, and/or are trite (Hastings, 2008). Another reason for diversity fatigue is an assumption that diversity is only about race. Programs that appear to be directed at one group tend to alienate participants and encourage people to "hide" their biases (Kerckhove, 2007). While many organizations have made great strides, when fatigue prevails diversity initiatives like any initiative fail to achieve concrete business results.

Diversity and inclusion (D&I) practitioners confirm that many diversity efforts are underutilized and lack lasting impact. They understand the need for and seek new ways to engage their various stakeholder groups. Sustaining commitment to D&I efforts while avoiding diversity fatigue is challenging. Various popular culture media and visual images continue to bombard and influence individuals' perceptions and mental models. Without periodic awareness and training, new and old stereotypes may influence behavior and D&I efforts.

For organizations to realize the benefits of D&I efforts, leaders need to be reminded through creative approaches of the many ways diverse view points and experiences add value in the workplace. Merely creating a diverse talent pool is not enough (Whitney, 2007). Organizations must create an environment in which differences are engaged and leveraged to yield higher performance.

While organizational members often think they understand and apply inclusive practices, without ongoing renewal and reinforcement, most organizations fall back into old patterns, assumptions, and stereotypes especially when organizations use a programmatic approach (Whitney, 2005). Progressive leaders understand the wisdom of viewing diversity and inclusion (D&I) efforts as change initiatives rather than as a one-time event. Everyone in the business, regardless of role, is held accountable for developing and demonstrating their diversity and inclusion acumen, and thereby continually enhancing the organization's skill-base, culture, overall performance, and financial and business success (Miller & Katz, 2002).

OD practitioners are in an excellent position to influence the change process by offering fresh, compelling options for ongoing learning and development. This article demonstrates how contemporary art and artists provide OD and diversity practitioners with an innovative platform to stimulate individual, team, and organizational awareness, recognition, and transformation. It is designed to stimulate practitioners into considering new ways of learning and expanding curiosity about

how to use popular culture to create dialogue and change.

The article:

» Examines current stereotype research;
» Links stereotypes to popular culture and art/visual images;
» Highlights a presenting situation with a division of a global pharmaceutical company; and
» Describes an experimental program with contemporary art in which we tested the impact of popular culture on increasing awareness and recognition of stereotypes.

Stereotypes

A stereotype is a simplified or standardized conception or image often held in common by one group of people about another group. A stereotype can be a conventional and oversimplified conception, opinion, or image, based on the assumption that there are attributes that members of the other group hold in common. These typecasts often ignore the intricacies of individuality, resulting in trite or trivial clichés. Worse, identities based on stereotypes can be incorrect and damaging, encouraging prejudice and bigotry.

Sociologist Charles E. Hurst states that, "One reason for stereotypes is the lack of personal, concrete familiarity that individuals have with persons in other racial or ethnic groups. Lack of familiarity encourages the lumping together of unknown individuals" (Hurst, 2007, p. 6). The unfortunate thing about stereotypes is that all of us are vulnerable to their grip because they have become such a prevalent part of our societal thinking. This can be true of even the most enlightened among us. Since we all make judgments based on stereotypes, we must all remain diligent to continuously examining our thoughts and perceptions about those who are in some way different from ourselves to make certain that they are not based on erroneous and uniformed mental models. Stereotypes creep into almost all aspects of our culture including music, television, stories, and contemporary art. Ongoing diversity and inclusion efforts are necessary for maintaining awareness, dispelling

stereotypes, and building more inclusive workplaces.

Especially when diversity efforts have been in existence for many years, individuals and teams often assume and/or believe they have overcome the influence of stereotyping. One approach to furthering diversity efforts is to leverage internal and external practitioners as well as diversity committees. Each has an excellent platform to illuminate the impact of popular culture in reinforcing and/or influencing stereotypes. However, organizations often find that even when internal diversity committee members are trained to recognize and overcome stereotypes, sustaining momentum can be challenging, because many diversity committee team members:

» Serve as volunteers and do not have diversity as their primary job function.
» Think they understand diversity issues better than others.
» Lack credibility as business or functional leaders.
» Lose their fervor and commitment to challenge widely-held beliefs over time.
» Need to be re-energized and retrained periodically.
» Rotate off the committee eventually.

Without constant vigilance, employees and practitioners are likely to fall back into old patterns of behavior and ignore stereotypes that can obstruct the creation of more inclusive environments. Since contemporary art influences our perceptions, it also provides a venue to facilitate "safe" dialogue about elicited and visceral

responses. As stewards of change, internal and external OD practitioners are in the best position to offer new approaches to understanding culture and stereotypes as well as opening dialogues for new conversations about stereotypes. The A.R.T. of Diversity is one new approach.

> Since we all make judgments based on stereotypes, we must all remain diligent to continuously examining our thoughts and perceptions about those who are in some way different from ourselves to make certain that they are not based on erroneous and uniformed mental models. Stereotypes creep into almost all aspects of our culture including music, television, stories, and contemporary art. Ongoing diversity and inclusion efforts are necessary for maintaining awareness, dispelling stereotypes, and building more inclusive workplaces.

A.R.T. of Diversity Overview

Using images from various contemporary art forms, "The A.R.T. of Diversity" experience, was an original design created to challenge strongly held beliefs and examine the power of stereotypes in shaping individual behavior and organization norms/culture. Designed as a change process, the A.R.T. of Diversity provided a unique and provocative way to address some of the recruiting, retention and talent development issues many organizations face. Key components included: presentations by provocative contemporary artists, customized digital story-telling, a unique venue, facilitated dialogue, small group activities, and individual reflection and journaling.

The art selected intentionally highlighted the predilection to categorize people and objects and challenged biases both conscious and ones never considered. Guest artists shared images to stimulate powerful discussion and dialogue while addressing complex issues such as personal values, societal roles, age, disability, ethnic origins, religious affiliation, work experience/styles, and race. The A.R.T. acronym allowed participants to frame the experience.

A: *Awareness*—uncovering in oneself predominant and unconscious beliefs about people based on differences (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, education, religion, life style and/or socio economic status)

R: *Recognition*—discovering alternative realities to our unconscious beliefs

T: *Transformation*—interacting with people who are different with a more expansive mindset and greater valuing

Case Study: Division of a global pharmaceutical company

The A.R.T. of Diversity was selected by the leader of a D&I initiative to help jump start a somewhat stagnate internal corporate Diversity Action Committee (DAC) within Pfizer Animal Health. At the time of the initiative, DAC had been active for about two years. Overall, members were complacent, lacked momentum, and demonstrated varying levels of courage in addressing sensitive diversity issues directly. DAC included employees from various parts of the company who had either volunteered or were nominated by their manager to participate on the committee. The purpose of the DAC was to:

1. Advise senior management on approaches to increase diversity
2. Create a culture of inclusion in the workplace
3. Effect positive change in attracting, retaining, and developing diverse talent

New ideas and methods for pushing the organization to more proactively embrace diversity were in short supply. The effectiveness of members was in large part contingent upon their ability to become comfortable within themselves about issues of diversity. For individual members a level of skill and personal passion for diversity work are extremely important because the majority of the work is done by individuals outside of formal committee meetings. It is done by strategically asking the right questions at the right time;

in one-on-one meetings with managers encouraging the development of diverse slates of candidates before hiring decisions are made; and by challenging colleagues who make seemingly innocent off-color remarks. Each of these actions requires a level of skill, tact, and personal courage which are practically impossible without a personal level of comfort with the subject matter.

Like most people, the members of the DAC wanted to do the right thing, but

> For individual members a level of skill and personal passion for diversity work are extremely important because the majority of the work is done by individuals outside of formal committee meetings. It is done by strategically asking the right questions at the right time; in one-on-one meetings with managers encouraging the development of diverse slates of candidates before hiring decisions are made; and by challenging colleagues who make seemingly innocent off-color remarks.

wanting to do the right thing and knowing what to do and how to do it are very different things. The A.R.T. of Diversity experience provided a way to re-enlist team member commitment while addressing complex issues inherent in stereotypes. Committee members discussed some of their personal challenges with confronting stereotyping, asked for training to help know what to say, created action plans, and made verbal commitments to be more vigilant in their roles.

The A.R.T. of Diversity allowed individuals to thoroughly examine their own personal thinking in a nonthreatening

manner. To this end, the process included ground rules for participation and learning. Participants were encouraged to:

» Withhold judgment and use active listening
» Challenge one's own concepts about diversity and stereotypes
» Identify diversity issues and understand related tensions
» Increase intercultural curiosity and sensitivity
» Express respect and appreciation for differences
» Demonstrate courage by leading others to become similarly aware

Establishing a truly safe environment for personal reflection was especially important for a group of volunteers who could opt out at any time that the work became foreboding or uncomfortable. It is important to remember that DAC participation was in addition to committee members' full time job—the "real" work that they were being paid by the company to perform. Increasing the effectiveness of the DAC required stretching them beyond their comfort zones without pushing individual members too far.

Program Design

After asking key questions, consultants and DAC leaders agreed upon objectives and the learning approach:

1. Provide a unique venue to re-engage members as committed DAC members
2. Use Stereotypes Exhibit mounted by the McColl Center for Visual Art to foster fresh perspectives, increase understanding, and move the committee toward systemic behavioral change
3. Challenge members to develop a D&I "Point of View" by:
   » Challenging one's own views and the status quo
   » Entering with sensitivity and curiosity
   » Identifying diversity issues and tensions
   » Respecting and appreciating differences
   » Demonstrating courage
   » Using active listening

Program Components

The components are listed in the order of the program design.

1. **Exhibit Introduction.** Ce Scott, Director of Exhibitions, McColl Center for Visual Art, Charlotte, North Carolina, introduced the exhibit and featured artists. Ms. Scott made a presentation about the mission of McColl Center exhibitions based on the concept of the "Creative Crucible": a place or situation in which concentrated forces converge and interact to cause or influence change or development. Her presentation set the stage for the learning experience.

2. **Guest Lecture:** Artist provocateur Colin Quashie (*www.quashie.com*) presented a lecture on popular stereotypes and cultural assumptions featuring his art using a PowerPoint presentation format *(Figure 1)*. Using the images from his portfolio, Quashie and the program designer facilitated a dialogue after the presentation. Participants asked questions, provided reactions to the images, and made connections to the workplace on their own without prompting.

3. **Exhibit Tour: "Stereotypes: Confronting Clichés"**
   After the lecture, each participant received a written exhibit overview, a clipboard with instructions, and a set of questions designed to elicit their reactions to the images. Participants were given one hour to experience the exhibit as well as to answer the questions. The questions included:
   1. What, if any, preconceived ideas did you have about the content of the exhibition?
   2. Which specific works in the exhibit did you find the most challenging to view? How so?
   3. What, if anything, surprised you about the images/exhibit?
   4. What were the similarities and/or differences among the ways global stereotypes were presented?
   5. Which, if any, works changed your thoughts, perceptions, or ideas about a particular group of people?
   Some individuals elected to form small

Figure 1: From Colin Quashie's PowerPoint Presentation

Reprinted with permission of Colin Quashie

groups, while others viewed the exhibit on their own. Spontaneous discussions occurred along the way. Some of the images and the narrative descriptions caused participants to reflect/read individually.

The exhibit was created for the McColl Center for Visual Art as a part of an ongoing mission to address diversity issues and to make art accessible; however, practitioners are not constrained by current art exhibits. Other options include using images from popular culture and local diversity focused artists. Samples of images from diversity focused artists are provided in *Figure 2*.

These artists use a variety of media, expressing multiple viewpoints. Iona Reseal Brown uses imagery about the influence of Hip Hop culture on Japan's youth. Anne Kesler Shields simultaneously supports and challenges our assumptions about the ancient symbol of the cross. Shirin Neshat uses video and photographs to weave complex narratives about the "commonalities" of men and women in her native country as well as the interconnectedness of religion and politics.
Other diversity focused artists in the exhibition included:
» Roger Shimomura, who examines Japanese-American stereotypes.
» Lorna Simpson, who explores issues of recreating photo-based works that address the perceptions and reali-

ties of being a black woman in the United States.
» Loretta Lux, who constructs digitally manipulated photographs of children that challenge accepted ideas about portraiture, gender, and the presumed innocence of childhood.
» Tarek Al-Ghoussein, who employs self-portraits to dismantle media stereotypes of "Palestinian as terrorist."

While their approaches vary, all of these artists use stereotypes as a tool for personal exploration and to stimulate awareness and tolerance in the viewer. They are not afraid to tackle the most provocative stereotypes, including those surrounding ethnicity, religion, and gender. Ultimately, these seven artists intentionally highlight our predilection to categorize people and objects by challenging both our conscious and unconscious biases.

**Facilitated Dialogue: A.R.T.: Expanding Boundaries—Moving Past "Witnessing."** After the tour, the facilitators led the group in a facilitated dialogue, using their answers to the questions to initiate the discussion. The objectives of this dialogue were:
1. **Explore art as a vehicle to identify personal stereotypes** (e.g., provoke deeply held beliefs). Participants shared how stereotypes hurt and/or embarrassed them. In addition, they discovered how their own biases and prejudices impacted others negatively.

Iona Reseal Brown—
a3 blackface #48
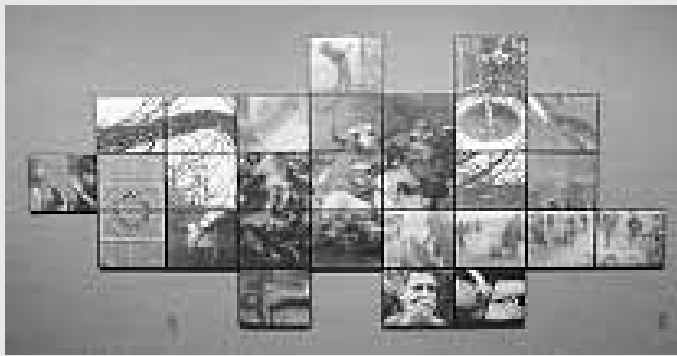
Anne Kesler Shields—
Entanglement

Shirin Neshat—Production still
from the film *Ferveor*, 2000

Reprinted with permission
of McColl Center

2. **Increase the cultural and world view diversity capacity of DAC using contemporary art.** Participants expressed how the images used during the session stretched their understanding of global cultures and differences that they hadn't considered even in the US. They also stated how the session reinforced the need to continue their efforts to

about their individual responsibility and accountability for taking a more active role in addressing negative stereotypes. In fact, participants found when they returned to their jobs they had more courage to address non-inclusive workplace behaviors directly.

4. **Address discrimination and prejudice expressed in art to build cul-**

intact workgroups, and they have recommended the learning method to others. The personal impact included comments such as, The "A.R.T. of Diversity" experience:

» Stimulated emotional, visceral responses
» Elicited responses they hadn't expected
» Unconsciously encouraged creation of a personal "story" to support an image
» Reminded them of past events/stories
» Reminded them to be "careful" and/or avoid certain situations
» Shaped future behavior—especially dialogue about past/present images
» Reinforced that each person has a unique perspective
» Images reminded them of both positive and negative events

The evaluations and narrative comments reinforced the value of art to stimulate awareness, recognition, and transformation. Participants requested additional opportunities to challenge personal assumptions and enhance sensitivity.

> **Establishing a venue outside the corporate boundaries and providing an opportunity for members to react to art (by definition a media where individual perception is key and any reaction is acceptable and no reaction is wrong) was a powerful way to allow members to be themselves without fear of overly critical evaluation. If one member saw something that elicited one thought about bias and yet another member saw something entirely different, a spirited and non judgmental discussion could ensue.**

address diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

3. **Apply the "witnessing" model to move from a passive to the higher levels of active and ethical witnessing** (Ishiyama, 2000). The witnessing model was used to show how bystanders who are passive and/or self-silenced, can expand their repertoire for how to respond in situations of stereotyping, racial discrimination, or non-inclusive treatment. Participants learned more

tural vitality and create a safer, more inclusive workplace or community. Based on the workshop, participants asked for more targeted training on how to give more direct feedback and how to engage senior leaders in DAC efforts.

Impact and Learning

Individuals who have participated in the "A.R.T. of Diversity" experiences include Diversity Action Committees as well as

For the DAC and other intact work groups, the A.R.T. of Diversity gave members a forum to re-examine their own biases while allowing them to recommit to the team goals. Establishing a venue outside the corporate boundaries and providing an opportunity for members to react to art (by definition a media where individual perception is key and any reaction is acceptable and no reaction is wrong) was a powerful way to allow members to be themselves without fear of overly critical evaluation. If one member saw something that elicited one thought about bias and yet

another member saw something entirely different, a spirited and non judgmental discussion could ensue. Members grew in their understanding of differences and more importantly their ability to have effective dialogue with their colleagues and even managers back at the workplace. The A.R.T. of Diversity was just the fresh approach that was needed to facilitate dialogue and growth without resorting to the same old training techniques that so often contribute to diversity fatigue by increasing participants' abilities to identify and confront stereotypes.

Conclusion

The A.R.T. of Diversity experience offered Diversity & Inclusion and OD professionals a new option for stimulating dialogue about diversity and building more inclusive environments. By examining images in popular culture, participants felt free to talk about their perceptions before making personal connections to their own stereotypes. Designed as an individual change process, it provided a provocative method for addressing stereotypes and stimulating dialogue concerning hidden diversity issues many organizations face. Rather than just impacting the individual, however, the process led to change within the DAC team as well as the overall organization.

Selected artists used various approaches and media to explore stereotypes. The visual stimulation and questions served as a tool for personal exploration, awareness, and tolerance in the viewer. Since many contemporary artists are not afraid to tackle the most provocative stereotypes, including those surrounding ethnicity, religion, and gender, art provides an excellent venue for diversity awareness renewal and reinforcement. The results encourage practitioners to integrate popular culture media to stimulate dialogue, learning, and change.

References

Hastings, R.R. (2008). Diversity training might contribute to 'diversity fatigue'. Retrieved February 19, 2009 from SHRM Web site: *www.shrm.org/ Publications/HRNews/.../diversityfatigue. aspx.*

Hurst, C. E. (2007). *Social inequality: Forms, causes, and consequences.* Boston: Pearson Education Inc.

Ishiyama, F.I. (2000, September). Toward organizational maturation: Active witnessing for prejudice reduction. Paper presented at Transcending Boundaries: Integrating, People, Processes and Systems Conference, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.

Miller, F.A., & Katz, J.H. (2002). *The inclusion breakthrough: Unleashing the real power of diversity.* San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Stereotypes: Confronting Clichés. Presented 2005 Exhibit of the McColl Center for Visual Arts, Charlotte, NC.

Kerchhove, C. V. (2007, May). Retrieved January 30, 2009, from Racialicious Web site: *http://www.racialicious. com/2007/04/.*

Whitney, K. (2005, June). Diversity is not a one-time learning event. Retrieved March 10, 2009, from Chief Learning Officer Web site: *http://www.clomedia. com/newsletters/2005/June/994/ index.php.*

Whitney, K. (April 2007). Training: Where it's been, Where it's going. Retrieved February 10, 2009, from Chief Learning Officer Web site: *http://www.clomedia.com/newsletters/ 2007/April/1762/index.php.*

Note: McColl Center for Visual Art, Charlotte, NC, provides an avenue for the public to expand their understanding of contemporary art through its exhibition program by showcasing curated or nationally acclaimed traveling shows as well as the work of the Artists-in-Residence and Affiliate Artists. During each residency, the community can see new contemporary work and meet the artists through Open Houses or Open Studio Saturdays. In addition, educational opportunities are offered through workshops and lectures, which are held in conjunction with curated or traveling exhibitions. *www.mccollcenter.org*

Rich Smith, MBA, JD, is Senior Director, HR for Pfizer's Corporate Groups. Rich has over twenty years of progressive Human Resources experience in corporate, division and field environments within manufacturing, distribution, and pharmaceuticals industries. Throughout his career, Rich's focus has been on partnering with line management to provide strategic human resources planning. Rich holds a master's degree in Business Administration from the University of Oklahoma and a law degree from Quinnipiac University. He can be reached at *res8636@aol.com.*

Kittie W. Watson, PhD, is President and founder of *Innolect Inc.* Innolect achieves global business results using Innovative Intelligence tools and methods to engage, assess, develop, and retain high impact leaders. Kittie works with the top leaders and teams of Fortune 500 companies such as: Entergy, Sysco, Pfizer, Abitibi-Bowater, and Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. Her books, articles, and assessment tools are used extensively by businesses and universities. A former chair of the Department of Communication at Tulane University, she has been featured on ABC's *20/20* and in other publications including: *American Medical News, Bottom-line Personal, Money, Glamour,* and *Home Office Computing.* Her latest books are *Leadership Coaching: Pathway to Peak Performance* and *Listen Up* (endorsed by Stephen Covey). She can be reached at *kittiew@innolectinc.com.*