Using Popular Culture Resources to Build Affective Leadership Skills

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Abstract

This paper discusses an autodidactic approach for strengthening one's leadership skill set, in an informal, low-cost manner through intentional consumption of, and reflection on, popular culture resources. Popular culture is rife with learning opportunities for affective skill building to be used alongside more formal leadership trainings and professional development. This paper provides an approach that applies popular culture examples to strengthen one's leadership skills, such as empathy, listening, giving feedback, and dismantling biases to create a positive and inclusive work environment. Drawing on books, podcasts, television shows, and movies, this approach matches engagement with all types of media to intentional reflection to strengthen one's leadership skills.

Introduction

Movement into leadership positions often occurs due to the functional proficiency one shows in their work, but along with that functional expertise, formal leadership roles require affective skills often discovered only after moving into the new role. As Leeder (2013) notes, "Instead of being promoted to their new role because they displayed the requisite skills to perform well as a department head (or the potential to develop them), they have been plunged into an entirely new situation without much, if any, preparation." (p. 2) When the move into leadership occurs in the middle of a librarian's career, the management curriculum one encounters in their degree program is a vague memory, if they were lucky enough to have encountered it at all. Porter (2010) notes that graduate level library science curricula provide different levels of preparation for management, and specifically mentions the "minimal time dedicated to learning how to empower and motivate employees." (p. 199). High-quality formal professional development courses are often prohibitively expensive. This paper identifies affective skills useful in transitioning successfully to a formal leadership role and discusses an affordable self-directed approach for strengthening one's leadership skill set using entertaining popular culture resources.

Although pop culture bosses are often depicted as caricatures spanning the buffoonish (Michael Scott on the popular television sitcom, *The Office*) to overdemanding villains (Miranda Priestly in the book and movie, *The Devil Wears Prada*), popular culture is also rife with learning

opportunities for affective skill building foundational to success in leadership positions. Popular culture can be leveraged alongside more formal management curriculum, leadership trainings, and professional development to form a robust leadership skill set. Refinement of these skills can improve an existing manager's efficacy or be cultivated before gaining a positional leadership role, in order to proactively situate one for future advancement.

This paper outlines an approach to professional development where popular culture resources support the development of a selection of core affective skill areas, central to success in a leadership role: empathy and emotional intelligence, listening, accountability, and dismantling bias. These skills are not intended to represent an exhaustive list of all the important affective skills needed to succeed, but instead provide a variety of examples of engaging with popular culture and intentional reflection in relation to the development of specific work-related skills.

Many of the resources covered in this paper are easily accessible through popular streaming platforms, for free download on podcast catchers, or available from a local library, making this approach affordable and self-paced. This approach also provides an enjoyable and engaging alternative to management books or video tutorials.

Literature Review

Pop Culture in Library and Information Science

The library literature includes numerous examples of librarians incorporating popular culture into their workflows. Librarians make popular culture connections in their library instruction, such as Springer and Yelinek's (2011) use of the reality television series, *Jersey Shore*, in their information literacy instruction sessions, Ochsner's (2017) exploration of library programming around the board game Civilization to foster cultural competencies, Gunderman's (2021) blog post on Pokémon as a basis to teach research data management (RDM), and Burkholder's (2021) use of Taylor Swift's song, "Shake It Off" to explore the ACRL Information Literacy Framework. As Gunderman (2021) notes, using "a popular culture lens can make these topics more approachable and reduce learning barriers," as well as "challenge our preconceived notions about that topic, and incite emotions that can create a unique, engaging learning experience."

The literature also discusses the use of popular culture resources specifically in the education and professional development of librarians. Jordan and Hussey (2014) looked at its use in graduate curriculum to help students formulate a professional identity. One benefit they note is "to let students know that learning can be a good experience, can be enjoyable, and take place in other settings than a traditional classroom." (Jordan & Hussey, 2014, p.48).

An early example of using popular culture resources for leadership modeling can be found in an article from McCombs (1989) that uses lessons provided by teen sleuth, Nancy Drew, as inspiration for library leadership. One lesson McCombs particularly notes is Nancy Drew's "ability to deal with people…organizing, delegating, instructing; achieving her objectives through the art of gentle persuasion." (1989, paragraph 5). Martin (2016) provides another example of applying popular culture resources to develop insights into library leadership in his article looking at episodes of the sitcom, *30 Rock*, to explore Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence framework. These examples echo approaches from other disciplines using popular culture as a leadership development tool. Callahan, Whitener, and Sandlin (2007) discuss using popular culture artifacts (PCA) to teach different leadership theories in the human resources field. Narrative fiction, specifically, provides inspiration to Phillips (1995) and Cohen (1998) in the field of management. Phillips (1995) believes that fiction builds understanding for emotions found in organizational cultures and between different generations of employees. While Cohen (1998) finds commonality in the skills that make a good literary critic and in those that make a strong manager, such as "judgement, interpretation, evaluation" (p.168). English and Steffy (1997) explore film as a leadership development resource in educational administration, noting the medium's strength in providing "vivid examples of actions and depictions in context" (p.107). Scherr and Farber (2004) look at the opportunities popular culture affords to instruction in the legal profession providing clear examples of professionalism.

This article builds off of these approaches and applies them specifically to the development of affective skills valuable in the library workplace. The focus on affective skills aligns with numerous studies working to identify the affective skills key to success in library leadership. Hernon and Rossiter (2006) explored job ads and conducted follow-up interviews to determine which emotional intelligence traits were most highly valued in academic libraries. Hopper (2005) engaged with Hernon and Rossiter's findings, while in press, to compare them with previous writings on desirable library leadership skills, and then took the skills identified and mapped them to Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence framework, in support of the findings of Hernon and Rossiter's study. Kreitz (2009) compared and contrasted the emotional intelligence traits prized by library directors and their leadership teams. Sewell (2016) also notes the relevance of emotional intelligence to library managers along with recommendations for professional readings. Emotional intelligence has also been discussed as a benefit applied across library staffing levels. Lucas (2020) discusses the applicability of emotional intelligence across all job types. Klare, Behney, and Kenney (2014) discuss the development of competencies around emotional intelligence and empathy and incorporating those skills in job postings and interview questions.

The importance of affective skills more generally appear in other studies on library leadership. Ammons-Stephens, et al.'s (2009) study of core competencies for library leadership identified "four central leadership competencies, or meta-competencies"; one of which was "interpersonal effectiveness." (p.68). In their study of middle managers, Chang and Bright (2012) note the need to "exercise their people skills" with external partners, and "provide an environment for people to feel safe to express their perspectives" within their teams (p. 216 and 218). Wong (2019) studied the competencies valued by leaders throughout a library's hierarchy and found affective components, such as "Collaboration, Manage Change, Problem Solving, and Communication Skills" noted as significant (p.612). Wong (2019) follows that finding with the questions, "What knowledge and skills are involved in them? How can librarians go about developing such knowledge and skills?" illustrating the need for further exploration (p.612).

Other library managers have discussed their own individual experiences with affective skills in formal leadership roles. Klare (2017), discussing the experience of moving unexpectedly into a leadership role, mentions that "as one's level of responsibility increases, softer skills, often referred to as social skills, become increasingly more valuable than technical skills due to the need to work and communicate effectively with people at all levels of the organization." (p.1).

The importance of affective skill building can also be found in more formal approaches to professional development. Sheldon (2010) discusses some of the same skills outlined in this paper in the book, Interpersonal Skills, Theory and Practice. Topics such as listening and motivation get their own chapters that include exercises and worksheet templates that one can follow to cultivate affective skills. More formal management training courses, such as the Harvard Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians, and others outlined in a survey by Herold (2014), also include components addressing affective facets of leadership.

Affective Skills and Pop Culture Tools

The Approach

The approach outlined in this paper is intentionally lightweight with minimal barriers to entry. The strength of the approach lies in its flexibility and inclusiveness. The intention is that readers can take the examples below as illustrative and apply the approach of close and intentional engagement with popular culture, using a skills-development focus, and then apply it in a way that resonates with their own particular tastes and professional goals. This approach focuses on specific skill development, instead of looking to popular culture as illustrations of models, theories, or general concepts.

The first step in the approach is to identify affective skills that one hopes to cultivate. Outlined below are some of the skills the author has found most important in his own leadership trajectory, they have also been noted as important in the professional literature. For readers looking for guidance on skill areas to develop, they can be a great starting point; but they are meant to serve as illustrative examples. Identifying the skills outside of the examples below could occur in different ways: reviewing the literature on valued managerial or leadership skills, consulting with mentors, or looking at the leaders with whom one interacts with to identify valued skills.

After identifying a skill development focus, the next step is to look at one's own popular culture consumption and intentionally engage with these media products with specific attention towards skill development. The model often works particularly well with media one has already engaged with, so that the skills remain at the forefront, instead of the action or plot.

After identifying a skill focus and matching it to potential popular culture resources, the participant should decide how they might best engage with the skill. This engagement, too, can be customized to an individual's own preferred learning preferences. Some people might work best with internal reflection through journaling or periods of intentional thought. Others may want to partner with either a peer or a mentor to develop the skills through shared media consumption and conversation.

A limitation of describing the approach below using specific examples is that the examples may not resonate with all readers. It is likely that gaps in representation will be present in the examples provided. The examples are meant to be illustrative while the approach is flexible and adaptable. It may be applied using varied and diverse popular culture examples that meet any individual's needs and personal taste. The autodidactic nature of this approach allows for customization to maximize effectiveness.

The following sections will provide examples of this approach applied to the leadership skills, "Empathy and Emotion", "Listening", "Accountability", and "Inclusion and Dismantling of Bias".

Empathy and Emotion

One of the biggest changes one can find when moving into a positional leadership role, is the expanded role emotional labor plays in day-to-day work. The importance of this skill set is reflected in the library literature which includes a host of recent articles about emotional intelligence in libraries (Hopper, 2005; Hernon and Rossiter, 2006; Kreitz, 2009; Porter, 2010; Klare, Behney and Kenney, 2014; Martin, 2016; Sewell, 2016; Lucas, 2020).

Martin (2019) shows the importance for making space for emotions at work, noting, "Emotions are perfectly fine in a professional setting. They are simply energy that can lead to action, but they must be managed and expressed in productive ways. Not expressing emotions--keeping them bottled up—can lead to stress, anxiety, depression, and burnout. Not allowing emotions to be expressed leads to passive aggressive behavior and back channel sabotage" (p.2).

Two guides that one can turn to in fostering emotional intelligence and lessons of empathy are the very different popular culture sages, Dear Sugar and Mr. Rogers.

The author Cheryl Strayed collected many of her "Dear Sugar" advice columns in the book, *Tiny Beautiful Things* (2012). In this valuable resource, Strayed illustrates an approach to providing guidance that consistently centers empathy, from which any supervisor or leader supporting a colleague through a difficult time can learn. In numerous examples, Strayed acknowledges the letter writer's emotional state before moving on to giving any advice. Strayed provides empathy even when she ultimately disagrees with a writer's opinions or actions.

Strayed's response to an adult letter writer asking about building bridges with their father after a hurtful divorce provides an excellent example of this approach. Strayed (2012) starts the letter, "There's nothing good about one's father leaving one's mother for anyone, but especially for a younger woman, and especially after a period of having lied about it. I'm sorry for your pain" (p.62). This response shows an approach of acknowledging the emotions present before moving on to the development of productive next steps. After experiencing an emotional hurt, the emotions present must be recognized. The hurt in the professional setting likely looks different to the betrayal of a parent, it might be a bad interaction with a library user or hearing disappointing feedback, but the need for acknowledgement of the emotions will still be present. Strayed's approach provides a model for the library supervisor to pay witness to the emotions present.

In another letter a young man, "Odd Man Out," writes about overhearing old friends saying critical things about him and asks for advice on forgiving them or finding new friends (Strayed, 2012). Strayed (2012) opens her response, "What a disaster. How dreadful it must have been to hear your friends saying negative things about you….You have every reason to be upset and hurt…" (p.66). Again clearly acknowledging the emotion. Then the letter takes a turn as Strayed (2012) continues, "And yet…in the scheme of things this is quite small, quite ordinary." (p. 66). This excerpt gives an example where empathy does not result in a wholesale agreement with another person's perspective. As a leader, you can take time to hear and recognize hard feelings, even if you might need to ultimately reframe or disagree with your colleague's perspective. *Tiny*

Beautiful Things gives the library leader numerous examples to compare and contrast to their own workplace interactions.

The feature-length documentary, *Won't You Be My Neighbor?,* about the life and work of children's television innovator, Fred Rogers, gives another example for strong emotionally intelligent leadership. (Neville, 2018). At one point in the movie the filmmakers show a clip of a song written and performed by Fred Rogers playing Daniel Tiger that he sings with Betty Aberlin playing Lady Aberlin. In this song, Daniel discusses feelings akin to imposter syndrome and that's he's "a mistake" (Neville, 2018). Lady Aberlin responds in duet with reassurance that she likes Daniel, just as he is. After their individual solo conversational parts, the song repeats weaving their verses together in an overlapping duet (Neville, 2018).

An interview with Hedda Sharapan, a Child Development Advisor for the show follows that clip from *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*. Sharapan remarks on the power of the scene, "And I thought to myself, 'Thank you Fred for reminding us that it's not so easy to quiet a doubt.' But make it a duet so that it's not just your fear, but you'll have my support.'" (Neville, 2018).

This example shows another facet of using emotional intelligence in cultivating a strong supervisory relationship. Not all problems can, or need, to be solved. Just as powerful as providing external perspective for coaching and performance improvement, is the powerful role of supporting one's colleagues through reassurance and acknowledgement. It can be powerful to hear from one's supervisor that a library employee is doing enough, doing good work, and that the library appreciates their contribution – those sentiments should never be taken for granted. This acknowledgement can be key in supporting high performing team members. When working with high performers it can be easy to assume that they are aware of their strong performance without external validation, but one never knows the internal criticisms anyone might be dealing with at any time, and the power a supervisor has in showing appreciation to reinforce strong performance, creating that same sense of duet with their direct reports. As Rogers (1993) notes in her article on library supervision, "In spite of your best intentions and efforts, some employees may think that you harbor secret doubts about their performance. Letting them know that you are pleased with their performance will facilitate trust" (Rogers, 1993, p.155).

Listening

The importance of listening often comes up in the literature for effective leadership. Hernon and Rossiter (2006) found being a good listener identified in the top five results of their study. Similarly, Kreitz (2009) found that both library directors and their senior management teams listed listening as a top skill for success in their respective roles. In recounting their own individual

experience, Porter (2010) writes that "being able to effectively communicate and listen to others is critical." (p. 199). Sheldon (2010) devotes an entire chapter to listening, giving it the subtitle "The Most Powerful Tool; The Most Neglected Skill." (p. 21).

Drawing on a mental model of active listening in day-to-day interactions can be useful to intentionally cultivate listening skills. The television drama, *In Treatment*, gives a compelling example of active listening.

The show is unique in focusing so much attention to the action of listening. The first season of *In Treatment* had a structure of five episodes a week all focused on therapist Dr. Paul Weston, played by Gabriel Byrne, in therapy sessions. Since each episode is largely a face-to-face therapy session, the writers build a lot of the drama around Paul's listening and his responses to his patients' revelations. The first episode of season one, "Laura: Week One," provides a strong visual model for engaged listening (García, 2008). As Paul listens to his distraught patient, Laura, recount a difficult personal experience, he provides an ideal illustration of the active listener, an example that leaders could draw on in their own work. Paul nods regularly, provides steady but not overwhelming eye contact, allows silences to sit, and doesn't rush to fill them with his thoughts or analysis. The conversation unfolds with subtle direction and guiding questions of clarification. Paul makes his comprehension explicit through timely repetition of Laura's statements and asking relevant and thoughtful questions. When not speaking, Paul clearly communicates actively engaged listening through subtle facial expressions that reflect the emotions of the conversation: small smiles and laughs, raised eye brows of surprise, or a furrowed forehead of concern (García, 2008).

These actions exemplify the description of listening given by Martin (2018): "The key to being a good listener is to listen with empathy. Being a good listener also means being patient with the speaker, repeating back the message to make sure it was understood, giving honest responses instead of stock phrases, and making sure to not talk too much or too little." (p. 810). Good listening skills are an important success factor in a supervisory role. The level of deep and sustained listening required in regular check-in meetings with direct reports necessitates a different level of engagement than that necessary for success in other, non-supervisory, roles. Having a visual model to draw on, one can reflect and evaluate their own presence in a conversation or meeting in comparison to Gabriel Byrne's performance of listening. Visualizing the components of this performance can also be used proactively to prepare for a meeting, reminding one to be intentional in the making of space and use of active listening.

As Oren Jay Sofer (2018) describes in his book, *Say What You Mean: A Mindful Approach to Nonviolent Communication*, "Every conversation requires silence. Without it we can't listen,

and no real communication happens. The silence of listening isn't forced or strained. It's a natural quiet that arises from interest." (92).

Using Paul Weston as a model of constructive silence centers one's colleagues in meetings. Byrne's portrayal clearly demonstrates the "lovely call-and-response rhythm that strengthens the connection by confirming that listening and understanding are occurring." (Sofer, 2018, p. 93). The show provides a visual model for engaged silence.

The structure of the show allows for multiple examples of listening that might appeal to a wide audience. The fifth episode of every week of season one shows the approach of Dr. Gina Toll, played by Dianne Weist, for active and engaged listening, as she provides therapy to Paul in the patient role. Recently a fourth season of the show was released with a new lead character, Dr. Brooke Taylor, played by Uzo Aduba. This newest season, taking place during the COVID-19 pandemic, features a teleconference session that provides a model for remote listening that may resonate for those moving into a more hybrid workplace (Gabo, 2021).

Other popular culture examples that users may draw on for examples of listening can be found in movies made of sustained conversations such as *My Dinner with Andre* (Malle, 1981), *Before Sunset* (Linklater, 2004), or *Weekend* (Haigh, 2011). Although these movies, with their main focus on people conversing, provide the most overt examples, any movie or television program could be watched with a focus on how actors convey listening and demonstrate presence in the moment when not speaking. Live theatrical productions are another great place to draw lessons of active listening, by directing attention to the unspeaking cast members on stage when an actor presents their lines.

Gift of Accountability

Moving into a role of positional leadership requires a paradigm shift: You are no longer responsible for only your performance, but for that of your entire team. This shift includes a need to foster an environment of accountability.

Carucci (2020) defines accountability on the Harvard Business Review website as, "the formal and informal ways that leaders talk about, assess, and affirm the contributions of those they lead and the improvements they can make to strengthen those contributions." Accountability can often be poorly executed. The specter of being the tedious micromanager haunts many people in a supervisory role, as one seeks to balance individual agency with one's own accountability for the overall group's progress. On the opposite end of the spectrum of seeking to know everything that is going on, it can also be easy to be too hands off when working with high performers who need little accountability support. As Gallo (2009) notes that for the supervisor of

a high performer, it "can sometimes feel like you're being nitpicky or overdemanding" but as the supervisor, "it's your responsibility to help her [the employee] determine how to keep improving." A lesson quickly learned when moving into a supervisory role is that the need for accountability is universal, it should be administered to meet the needs of the individual, and it should be viewed as a kindness. Carucci believes that accountability presented well, "dignifies employees' work and challenges them to make greater achievements—without making them feel demeaned or insignificant" (Carucci, 2020).

Rogers (1993) explores giving both positive and negative feedback in her experience as a library supervisor. She believes that constructive criticism and formative feedback are also important as those she supervises "generally want to know where they stand with me" (Rogers, 1993, p. 155). Dorney (2012) believes that "As we consider how managers are being created, the ability to give and receive constructive criticism should be high on the list of desired traits" and advocates that these skills should be included in librarianship graduate school curriculum.

The richest popular culture resources for this skill set occur in reality television competition programs. Two different, but complementary, approaches can be found in the reality program stars, Mary Berry from The Great British Baking Program (or The Great British Bakeoff as it is known outside the U.S.) and RuPaul from RuPaul's Drag Race. Those interested in cultivating experience with giving feedback to meet the needs of the individual benefit from viewing and deconstructing Berry and RuPaul's approaches to consider how they might apply the lessons learned in their own workplace settings.

Episode one of the fourth series of The Great British Baking Program, "Cake," which is presented on the streaming platform Netflix in the United States as episode one of collection two, provides a strong example of Mary Berry administering thoughtful accountability (Tankard, 2013). The show opens with the statistic that the final thirteen contestants came from a pool of more than 10,000 applicants (Tankard, 2013). From the very start of the series, the viewer knows that the entire series provides examples of communicating opportunities for improvement to the most elite of performers. Reinforcing the valuable lesson that accountability should be facilitated across the spectrum of performance.

In this episode, the two judges, Berry and her counterpart Paul Hollywood, provide two distinct methods for giving feedback. An illustrative example comes as they interact with the contestant, Ruby, evaluating her "Ruby's Rhubarb and Custard Sandwich Cake." As they walk up, Mary Berry remarks upon the cake's appearance, "It does look a little bit untidy on the top, but you've got a very good sponge" (Tankard, 2013).

Here the viewer can pause and reflect. One notes immediately that Berry is not going to soft pedal any hard-to-hear feedback, she jumps right in with a critical analysis, but she also pairs that sentiment with a recognition of the contestant's strengths.

Paul Hollywood adds his thoughts after a bite of the cake's filling. "The crème patissiere is awful" (Tankard, 2013).

The harshness of the sentiment quickly gets softened by Berry's more productive approach, as she adds, "It's not quite thick enough. You see how the rhubarb and the custard have mixed together. But the actual sponge is very good" (Tankard, 2013).

The intentional viewer will notice that Berry provides concrete examples where the baker, Ruby, might improve on their next iteration, instead of only focusing on the disappointment of the outcome. Berry recognizes that the news may be difficult to hear, and couples it with a reaffirmation of the parts of the exercise that were a success.

Another valuable example of holding people accountable for their performance in a generous and productive manner, can be found in RuPaul's Drag Race. Again, the contestants have gone through a rigorous application and tryout process to be selected. Instead of Berry's approach of giving direct, prescriptive comments for specific changes to improve, RuPaul demonstrates the use of a coaching mirror, that allows individuals to reflect and consider their approach to success on their own, in episode seven of season four, "Dragazines" (Murray, 2012, March 12).

In this episode, the contestants are charged to create the cover of a magazine featuring their drag persona satirizing different magazine genres such as a food magazine, an exercise magazine, and a pet magazine, among others (Murray, 2012, March 12). RuPaul enters the work room while all the contestants are in the planning phases and provides feedback on their initial concepts. The viewer watching with an eye towards building their coaching skills may focus in on one particularly useful example of strong coaching in RuPaul's interaction with Phi Phi O'Hara, who is working on a mock travel magazine, *Sashay Away*. RuPaul listens to the concept and remarks, "This reminds me of when you told me you were going to make Lady Gaga really pop. Do you remember that conversation?" (Murray, 2012, March 12).

Here RuPaul is referring to a conversation from episode five, where O'Hara dressed up as the pop singer, Lady Gaga, after RuPaul warned of the potential difficulties of that choice. The result was a poorly reviewed performance for O'Hara (Murray, 2012, February 27). Instead of repeating those same warnings again, after they didn't resonate the first time, RuPaul calls back to the previous conversation to help O'Hara see a pattern of decision making, but does not give a firm directive on how O'Hara should proceed. This type of coaching allows the contestant

agency in choosing their own way forward, but also provides valuable external insight on patterns of behavior.

In this specific instance, O'Hara proceeded as originally planned and had great success with the magazine, providing another valuable lesson for those developing supervisory skills. Successful coaching and supervising require humility and openness. Just because an approach didn't work the first time, doesn't mean it won't succeed under other circumstances. The supervisor learns from this interaction the importance of remaining open to being proved wrong. The role of the supervisor isn't always to direct someone on how to proceed, but rather to help individuals see patterns in their performance that could potentially stand in the way of success. The examination of approach of reality competition judges provides a varied and valuable tool kit for developing different facets of giving feedback and facilitating accountability. There are a variety of competition-style reality television shows to draw from to speak to any interest including cooking, singing, gardening, clothing design and dancing, giving the genre a wide applicability.

Inclusion and Dismantling of Bias

Moving into a leadership role, the impact of one's work, and approach to work, has the potential to affect a much wider population of both colleagues and users, for both positive outcomes or potential harm. The extended impact of a supervisor's performance across a team or organization makes the necessity of identifying and dismantling biases and creating an actively inclusive workplace a top priority. Deards and Puente (2020) note the need to "develop leaders who [are]…actively working towards dismantling institutionalized structures of inequality while also addressing any loss of trust and trauma from previous or current policies, systems, administrators, coworkers, collaborators, or patrons" (p.46)

Popular culture provides an opportunity to gather insights into lived experiences different from one's own. The intentional use of popular culture can inform one's approach to inclusive leadership and dismantling bias and workplace inequities, without asking colleagues or other stakeholders to re-live trauma they may not wish to share, or carry a disproportionate burden of emotional labor in making change. The use of reading to cultivate wider awareness has been noted in such research as the review by Rowe (2018) looking specifically at the use of fiction where they find, "the effects that popular novels have on attitudes towards race, ethnicity, homosexuality, and refugees suggests that fiction can indeed be a positive force for addressing social issues and concerns" (p. 8). Jana and Baran (2020) go beyond reading materials, advising: "Try diversifying your media watching, your news sources, your podcasts, your book authors and your leisure activities" (p.154)

Library leaders can find books or other popular culture resources to learn more about lived experiences different from theirs to allow them to more easily see potential barriers or other inequities. The recent memoir, *You'll Never Believe What Happened to Lacey*, written by stand-up comedian and talk show host, Amber Ruffin, and her sister, Lacey Lamar (2021) showcases the relentlessness and damage of racist assumptions and aggressions in the workplace. The book details a wide variety of Lamar's experiences of day-to-day racism living and working in Omaha, Nebraska. Lacey encounters a variety of racist interactions throughout her professional and personal life. The book also provides examples of times when Lacey brings up concerns in the workplace and finds herself being reprimanded, or worse, fired. All strong examples of what not to do when concerns about racism are brought up.

The authors specifically address what white readers can get from the book, "And, hopefully, the white reader is gonna read this, feel sad, think a little about it, feel like an ally, come to a greater understanding of the DEPTH of this type of shit, and maybe walk away with a different point of view of what it's like to be a Black American in the twenty-first century" (Ruffin and Lamar, 2021, p.xiv).

The authors also provide a description of racism that helps those with the privilege of not being impacted directly to act when they encounter it. Ruffin and Lamar (2021) write, "There are going to be a lot of times while you're reading this book when you think, there is no motivation for this action. It seems like this story is missing a part because people aren't this nonsensically cruel. But where you see no motivation, you understand racism a little more. It's this weird, unprovoked lashing-out, and it never makes sense" (p.xxiii) This book makes clear to the reader that in cases of racism, motivation won't always be, or may even seldom be, a prerequisite, and a lack of an identified motivation should not justify a leader's inaction in seeking restorative action.

Becoming more self-aware can only be a part of the work of dismantling biases and creating an inclusive culture. Building awareness through reading must be coupled with concrete actions and changes in behavior. Self-education, in and of itself, is not enough. As Ossom-Williamson, et al. (2020) warn, "Inaction allows continued persecution, and self-growth becomes a mechanism through which inequality can continue" (p. 7).

There are a wide variety of podcasts that support the direct application of anti-racist and equity-focused action available. They provide invaluable, free, wisdom to the library leader. *Ten Percent Happier*, a podcast focused mostly on mindfulness, provided a resonant interview with activist Loretta Ross, about how to call people in (Harris, 2021). Ross starts by defining a call in as "a call out done with love and respect" (Harris, 2021). She then gives a concrete example of a call in she performed after hearing a sexist comment, "You know when you used that word the

other day, I'm not sure what you meant by it. Do you mind if we go out and have some coffee to talk about it?" (Harris, 2021). Another example she gives is to say, "'I beg your pardon' and then pause" (Harris, 2021). These concrete examples give one language and approaches to practice for future action.

On Being, a podcast of interviews hosted by Krista Tippett, includes wide-ranging interview subjects that provide unique insights on belief and living. In July, 2020, Tippett interviewed Robin DiAngelo and Resmaa Menakem on the topic of "Towards a Framework for Repair" in anti-racist work. In this interview, DiAngelo notes her belief, "I actually am getting to where I do think that we should not be having these conversations together until we've done a fair amount of our own personal work as white people, because we cause so much wounding in these conversations" (Tippett, 2020). DiAngelo's message is affirmed by fellow guest Menakem who notes, "White people gotta work that out amongst themselves. They have to work out that pus amongst themselves. They have to figure out, when all of that stuff comes up when they're in the room with each other, they have to work that out" (Tippett, 2020).

In this specific case, the experts share insights into the potential for harm in holding discussions on systemic inequities and racism. This podcast provides leaders the guidance of expert facilitators on the topic of addressing issues of systemic racism. The lessons learned here could be applied to many topics that inequitably impacts a section of your team from racism to sexism to homophobia. Popular culture provides tools not just for self-development in this area, but direct support for doing change work. Proactive preparation and intention allow a leader to consider how they might move forward with work in this area with more care towards the goal of minimizing additional harm to colleagues.

Intention and Reflection

Merely consuming popular culture won't improve one's leadership skills. Using the approaches listed above must combine intention while interacting with the popular culture resources and subsequent reflection, to be truly effective. As mentioned above, actions that can facilitate deeper engagement with popular culture materials could include a work journal, peer conversations, or a structured coaching relationship with a mentor using a shared popular culture resource as the starting point of a discussion. Readers inspired to try this approach will benefit from creating a plan for building accountability and progress checks into their professional practice to ensure that lessons learned get incorporated into their work performance.

Conclusion

The examples in this paper outline how popular culture can support the development of skills in empathy and emotional intelligence, listening, providing feedback, and dismantling bias to improve workplace inclusion and equity, aim to provide an approach for wider application. One's specific positionality and workplace environment might require the cultivation of different affective skills, but the core approach should prove extensible to a wide variety of unique needs. Professional development opportunities occur beyond the professional literature and formal training opportunities. Professional growth can be cultivated by exploring popular culture resources available from your existing set of streaming platforms, freely available content on the internet, or items available for checkout from a local library. Using these resources, librarians can cultivate skill development with minimal additional financial expenditure in a manner that complements formal trainings and professional texts.

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