

A place ^{to} be heard,
a space ^{to} feel held

Black Perspectives on Creativity, Trustworthiness, Welcome and Well-Being—
Findings From a Qualitative Study

November 2021

sloverlinett
AUDIENCE RESEARCH

**CULTURE +
COMMUNITY**

IN A TIME OF
TRANSFORMATION
A SPECIAL EDITION OF
CULTURE TRACK.



a collaboration with

**LaPlaca
Cohen**

 **Yancey Consulting**

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Black Perspectives on Creativity, Trustworthiness, Welcome and Well-Being—Findings From a Qualitative Study

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Cover image generously provided by NYC-based photographer Deb Fong (debong.com, Instagram [@deb_fong_photography](https://www.instagram.com/deb_fong_photography)). Taken at a 2021 Juneteenth [drum circle](#) in Brooklyn hosted by [MNFST](#) ("Manifest"). This organization, founded by [OMG Cornelio](#), creates participatory, drum-based musical experiences open to all. Deb told us, "The image I captured shows a mix of musicians and people who were moved to dance. Manifest's events are always peaceful and joyous celebrations of community, full of positive and welcoming energy." (See more of Deb's images on pages 20 and 70.)

CULTURE + COMMUNITY

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Foreword

By **Lisa Yancey**
President, Yancey Consulting



It was May 2020 when Peter Linett emailed me. I remember because I was surprised to see his name in my inbox. Peter and I hadn't chatted in some time. It had been seven years to the month, in fact, since we had completed a project together as members of a petite transnational cohort of consultants working with Helicon Collaborative to evaluate The Rockefeller Foundation's Cultural Innovation Fund. The memory of our work together was pleasant, but our exchanges then were facilitated – somewhat transactional and pertinent to the various aspects of our work. So, I hadn't imagined relationship seeds taking root. But possibility is the charm of relationship formations. Although it had been seven years, Peter's outreach watered – unbeknownst to both of us at the time – a relationship seed in gestation. His communication resurfaced an opening through which, once past idle pleasantries, we could potentially see the values, desires, and life experiences that define and connect each of us.

Again, it was May 2020. #SayHerName had become a proclamation defying the historical dehumanization of Black women, girls, and femme who were slain, assaulted, or brutalized by police without retribution. In May, it reached a crescendo. Breonna Taylor's murderers fit an all too familiar profile: police officers shielded from accountability by their badge and a justice system that devalues Black lives. We also learned that Ahmaud Arbery, a twenty-five-year-old Black man jogging in his community, was hunted and executed without provocation by three white men with guns in a pickup truck. Although Arbery was fatally shot on February 23, 2020, it wasn't until May that the video of the murder was released and went viral, causing the assailant and accomplices to finally be arrested and charged with felony murder, among other crimes. Before the month ended, eight minutes, forty-six seconds would memorialize police violence. Eight minutes, forty-six seconds – later confirmed to be nine minutes, twenty-nine seconds – was how long Derek Chauvin, a Minneapolis police officer, anchored his weight

on George Floyd's neck with his knee. That was May 25. Floyd's public homicide catalyzed a global movement for racial justice and Black lives. Brew all of this with an escalating coronavirus pandemic where people were dying in droves, and private homes became open windows to the outside world through

Needless to say, in May 2020, there was no space for idle pleasantries."

Zoom; we were on the brink of something breaking. There were no solutions in sight as our government politicized whether mask-wearing was an individual right. Needless to say, in May 2020, there was no space for idle pleasantries.

Peter wanted to chat about Slover Linett's work in partnership with LaPlaca Cohen on a national audience research survey called Culture and Community in a Time of Crisis (CCTC). The "crisis" of

reference was the absolute gutting of arts and culture communities nationwide by COVID-19. They had conducted a sweeping survey with thousands of respondents, but the primary voices of “community,” which came from the arts and culture organizations that participated, heavily and disproportionately reflected the experiences of white-racialized persons. At no time should a diminutive representation of Black, Indigenous, and people of color and their broader experiences, values, and desires be footnoted or overlooked, but May 2020 was certainly not that time. The challenge the CCTC team was attempting to negotiate was the dearth of existing bonds with non-white communities. An artery of exclusionary systems within the arts and culture sector was in plain sight. To mitigate this issue, Peter and his team had also leveraged their relationship with NORC at the University of Chicago to reach a second sample of respondents that better reflected the demographics of the country, which they used as the main benchmark for analysis. They also employed analytical tactics to amplify the voices of respondents of color in the survey, which they spoke about in detail in their “Centering the Picture” report. Slover Linett recognized the importance of ensuring that data reflecting disproportionately white voices do not leave those with different realities and priorities on frayed edges when it comes to analysis, recommendations, and philanthropic investment decisions.

When I spoke with the Slover Linett team in June 2020, three pressing realities were apparent. One, the CCTC report was in the final hour, so they were constrained by time in determining how best to integrate more racially diverse perspectives. Two, they wanted to be more mindful and intentional about how their work advanced social justice. Three, subsequent activities would focus on the stories of Black, Indigenous, and broader communities of color. This meeting ignited a rolling wave of conversations between Yancey Consulting and Slover Linett. We explored questions like, *What does representation mean? To what end are we collecting this data? How does our tax on people’s time, relationships, and insights directly benefit them? When does statistical weighting cause harm? How do we, as story gatherers and interpreters, perpetuate the problem? What can we do differently?*

Slover Linett’s centering of Black and African American voices is an immediate answer to these questions. The first decided act was shifting from a quantitative inquiry framework to curating qualitative

conversations. “A Place to Be Heard, a Space to Feel Held: Black Perspectives on Creativity, Trustworthiness, Welcome, and Well-Being – Findings from a Qualitative Study” reflects Slover Linett’s realization that we are living in a time when *listening* to stories versus *capturing* responses could have the most catalytic effect toward social transformation.

Slover Linett cast a mirror on their motivations when

sharing, “[we] explored respondents’ experiences in relation to their racial and ethnic identities to highlight and amplify what people of color have been going through and what they would like to see changed in the future.” Thus, this qualitative study isn’t about sampling. It is about being directed by voices that are too often muted or overly generalized. That’s one of the things that I most appreciate about this effort. You can’t connect to people, bridging and building with hearts and minds, without knowing their experiences and feeling their stories. Numbers can certainly shock and affirm, but when the shock wanes, there is no heart-memory. Our hearts are where the possibility for social transformation toward just and equitable conditions takes root.




This qualitative study isn’t about sampling. It is about being directed by voices that are too often muted or overly generalized.”

It is not surprising that themes of creativity, self-care, welcome, and trustworthiness emerged as ways Black folks stay connected in culture (and life). The acuity of self-expression sharpens for those often “silenced or sidelined,” as Slover Linett notes. I’m curious as to how the findings around digital versus in-person experiences will evolve. We’re social beings, and in many ways this pandemic has starved us of the experiential context of three-dimensional human energy, which often factors into cultural experiences. Whether (and perhaps how) we see the prevalence of personal creativity as inroads to more cultural connections and bridging differences is an open chapter with imaginative endings.

And thank goodness for self-care and well-being! Self-care is also self-advocacy. When I first learned about the [nap ministry](#), I knew that times were a-changin’. What’s interesting about the respondents’ stories regarding self-care and programming within cultural institutions is that they suggest the benefit of intentionally weaving self-care and well-being into programming design. The part that’s interesting is that to do so – to effectively understand and design what self-care means for diverse populations – requires relationships with an array of communities. This is an act of considering the care and well-being of the masses, not simply the few. To do so, you need people in decision-making positions who understand from their lived experiences what emanates as care. Imagine what could be different if holding up the needs of the masses was standard practice. If this were the case – when this BECOMES the case – the recommendations around welcome and belonging would emerge as natural outputs.

I left the trustworthiness theme for last because I find the distinction between trust and trustworthiness a resplendent example of what lies at the core of both relationship building and change. Whereas trust is a destination, trustworthiness requires an active, ongoing, and current assessment – like relationship-

building and change. Symbiotic in this context, trustworthiness, relationship building, and change each necessitate accountability and action to actualize the full extent of their potential over time. The active accountability and relationship-building create space for empathy-derived behavioral shifts; that’s when transformation is possible. The thematic nuances that emerged from this study are rich with possibilities if fully unpacked, understood personally, and institutionalized in organizational culture.



Whereas trust is a destination, trustworthiness requires an active, ongoing assessment – like relationship-building and change.

At a glance, fifty interviews could appear quantitatively scant. But one should never underestimate the potentiality of Black voices. Transformational. See these interviews as fertile seeds from which to build. What happens next is up to us. I hope those who read this report take these findings as an opening for more conversations and relationship building with communities they see, hear, and understand the least. Decenter whiteness to embrace the authentic tapestry of our nation. Variety is immensely more fulfilling than homogeneity. The future thrives with color.

With love and abundance,

Lisa Yancey
November 2021



Executive summary

Introduction

Culture + Community in a Time of Transformation: A Special Edition of Culture Track is a collaborative effort to keep the cultural sector in dialogue with its communities and participants during the pandemic and inform deeper equity and justice in the years to come. The project pivoted from examining public attitudes and behaviors in a “time of crisis” in 2020 to doing so in a “time of transformation” in 2021, with a crucial focus around racialized experiences in connection with cultural participation and cultural organizations.

The first phase of the research, conducted in Spring 2020, was a large-scale survey intended to inform not just resilience but also innovation and progress toward equity in the cultural sector, and to give the U.S. public a voice in the future of cultural engagement. But that first phase was designed and conducted before the murder of George Floyd ignited a national upswell of anger, sadness, and activism and the Movement for Black Lives began to reshape the discourse around racism in every aspect of American life. In a follow-up statistical analysis of the same (early 2020) data published in

December as “Centering the Picture,” we and our colleagues explored respondents’ experiences in relation to their racial and ethnic identities to highlight and amplify what people of color have been going through and what they would like to see changed in the future. The report revealed some unique experiences and perspectives that Black and African American¹ adults in the U.S. have in relation to cultural engagement, digital connection with arts and culture, and social change. The Slover Linett team, knowing that qualitative methods would be necessary to

understand those perspectives in a more nuanced and holistic way, advocated for an additional phase of research in 2021 that would offer a triangulation with – as well as departure point from – the two-wave quantitative survey.

To that end, and in order **to authentically amplify Black voices and stories, we dedicated this qualitative phase of the research solely to Black and African American participants’ perspectives**, since those viewpoints have historically been excluded or sidelined in most research studies and planning efforts in the cultural field. We intentionally took a broad approach to this inquiry, exploring general dynamics of creativity, trustworthiness, welcome, and community support rather than focusing narrowly on arts and culture organizations and attendance. This allowed us to hear and explore how

A strategic synthesis and summary of this qualitative research is also forthcoming from our partners at LaPlaca Cohen. Please visit culturetrack.com/research/reports.

¹ The terms “Black” and “African American” are often used together in survey research, and we’ve elected to use both in this qualitative study, as well. They are not interchangeable, since not all Black people living in the U.S. identify as African American. We include both in order to be as representative as possible, honoring immigrant Black experiences as well as those of Black people born in the U.S.

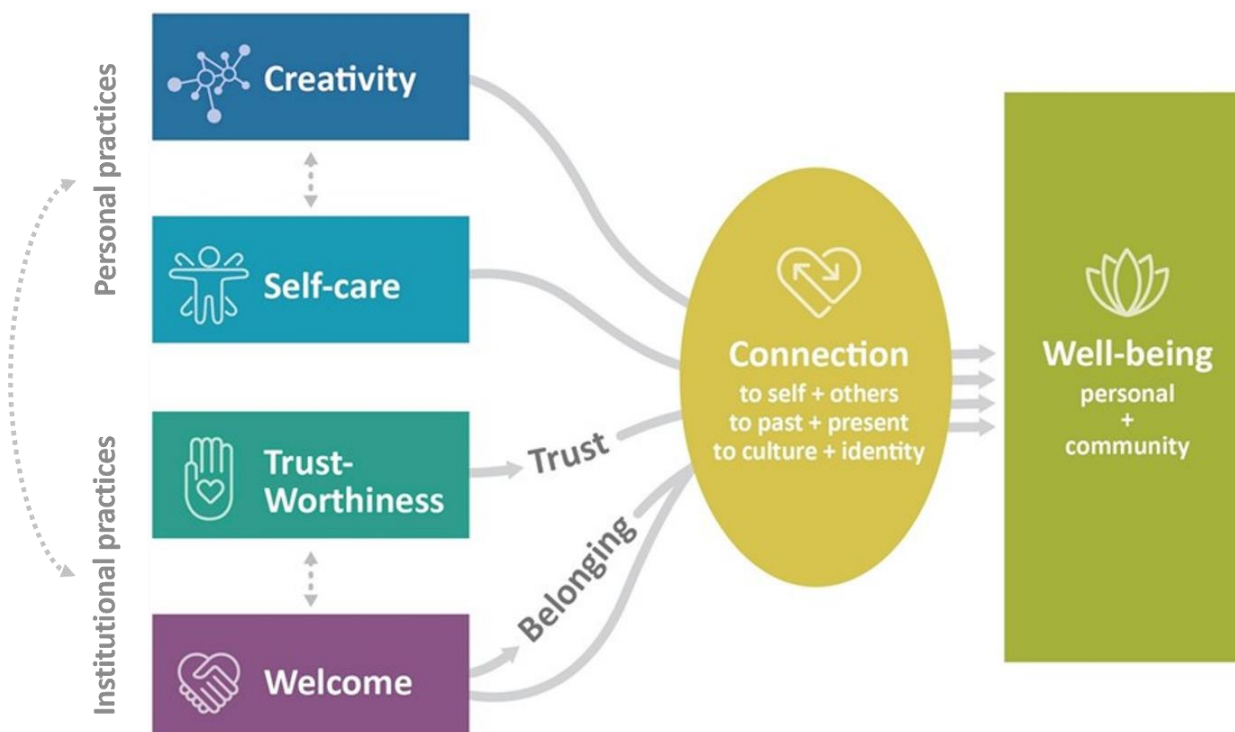
culture and community experiences and organizations naturally fit into peoples' lives, and it led to rich insights that can inform practice, funding, and policy.

Methodology

In this study, we conducted open-ended interviews with 50 Black adults from around the U.S. We aimed to recruit a diverse range of people along the following dimensions: people living in all four broad geographical regions in the U.S.; metropolitan, rural and suburban residents; those with immigrant experiences, LGBTQIA+ identities, and multiracial or multiethnic backgrounds; people with a variety of abilities, ages, and genders; and people with varied participation and attendance patterns at arts and cultural institutions. Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes and covered a wide range of topics including pandemic-era activities, creativity, trustworthiness, welcome and belonging, and community support. The qualitative approach we took for this study allows a deeper exploration of people's viewpoints, actions, and conceptual framing. Because this method is not about quantitative measurement but about individual stories, we intentionally refrain from making conclusions about the prevalence of viewpoints or actions in a broader population; these fifty participants don't represent "the Black community." (Please refer to the forthcoming companion report from the Culture + Community in a Time of Transformation Wave 2 survey report for a quantitative assessment that can be extrapolated to the U.S. population.)

Findings: Overview

As our team debriefed and analyzed points of resonance and difference across the fifty conversations, we were able to develop a conceptual model of the themes participants expressed. Their stories and reflections helped us understand both the mechanics of each theme in their lives and how they experienced the themes in relation to each other. As shown in the diagram below, the first four themes



– *creativity*, *self-care*, *trustworthiness*, and *welcome* – are practices that help foster better *connection*, both to oneself and to others, ultimately leading to personal and community-level *well-being*.

As noted on the left side of the diagram, the themes of *creativity* and *self-care* emerged from deeply personal practices and values, while *trustworthiness* and *welcome* were expressed by groups, organizations, and spaces. Each of these four practices, on their own or working in tandem, can lead to connection, through which well-being can blossom. And while connection may be just one pathway among many that can lead to well-being, both at a personal and community level, we heard often in this study about how essential it is.

Below we summarize the key findings for those four practices shown on the diagram, synthesizing patterns that we heard across multiple interviews. To help readers of this report reflect on how these findings may be applicable in their own contexts and work, we also share potential extensions and provocations. These draw on the interview findings but also go beyond them, based on our own experiences and perspectives as researchers in the arts and culture sector and other fields, and on our discussions with the community-connected advisors about this research (see page 16).

1. Creativity

FINDINGS SUMMARY ►

Every person we spoke with valued and practiced creativity and self-expression in their lives – although not everyone identified as creative or artistic. We heard about participation in a wide variety of creative activities (see pages 25-31), and a number of people noted that being Black and practicing Black culture was a creative activity on its own. Some participants used creativity to bring coherence and clarity to their personal life-stories, often by processing the past in order to feel grounded across generations; others used it to live more fully during a time of limitation like the pandemic – a way of finding meaning, freedom, and joy in the present moment. For many, the pandemic was a time when they could focus on deepening connections with close friends and family through shared creative moments or activities.

Some said they feel most creative when seeing the world from a different perspective. Many noted culture and community organizations that were important for this kind of creativity, as spaces that allowed and encouraged a creative mindset to flourish. A number of participants pursued creative activities as a path toward a better individual or collective future, and several spoke about creativity and the arts as key to creating sustained societal dialogue that could foster much-needed change.

STRATEGIC EXTENSIONS ►

- The current study suggests that creativity is an inherent part of being human. But while people don't need help being creative, culture-and-community organizations and funders may be missing opportunities to *validate* and *celebrate* community members' creative actions or to connect them with others who enjoy similar kinds of creativity. **What would it look like for more culture-and-community practitioners to do this work?** In many cases, personal creativity is linked closely to self-care, connection (in multiple senses), and overall well-being. And there's a wide spectrum of creativity already in play. Providing more programs and experiences that validate, amplify, and extend those varied forms of creativity could contribute directly to important outcomes for both individuals and communities. Some practitioners might

consider broadening the definitions of creativity they work with, while others may want to experiment with new ways of connecting “everyday creativity” with the professional, presentational experiences they offer.

- Nonprofessional, “everyday creativity” is in part about imagining new possibilities, and as some participants in this research suggest, it’s crucial to social change and healthier communities. **How can culture-and-community practitioners create a bridge from creativity to positive community impact?** Findings in this study suggest there may be a need to think differently about the definition, value, and outcomes of creativity. Not just artists but all kinds of creators, professional and everyday, are engaged in the work of envisioning new possibilities and imagining alternate versions of the world. Involving and empowering them in roles, domains, and institutions of all kinds could be a powerful engine of healing and progress.
- Digital experiences of culture are, for the participants in this study, rarely preferable to in-person engagement. But they also offer new possibilities in terms of accessibility and reach. **How could culture-and-community practitioners better navigate this tension?** Online arts and culture offerings are generally considered poor substitutes for in-person experiences – yet we heard that they were a valuable lifeline during the pandemic, helping keep people connected, creative, and engaged. Moreover, the artists and organization leaders we spoke with as advisors to this study noted the importance of digital programs in ensuring physical and financial accessibility for people with disabilities and people with lower incomes. The current experiential limitations of online offerings may be offset by big gains in accessibility and reach. There’s also room for digital experiences to evolve to become more distinct from in-person experiences and more valuable to users, e.g., by better incorporating social connection, fostering individual or collective creativity, and facilitating civic or social reimagination.

2. Self-care

FINDINGS SUMMARY ►

During the pandemic era, many participants have been focusing on their mental and physical health to mitigate the negativity and challenges of the pandemic and racist violence (see finding on pages 34-37 for specific examples of self-care activities). For many, self-care has also meant making meaningful connections with family, friends, and community members. A number of participants regularly brought themselves into peaceful, healing environments (e.g., spiritual or religious spaces, but also any space of collective processing) to support mental, physical, and communal well-being. These were typically physical places, but we also heard examples of virtual spaces and environments that provided this support also.

Some participants also took care of themselves by reflecting on their past and renewing or reevaluating their plans for the future, marked by a sense of optimism.

STRATEGIC EXTENSIONS ►

- Participants in this research spoke of self-care as something essential to their lives, not superficial or an add-on. **What would it look like for more culture-and-community organizations to make self-care a core programmatic or experiential frame?** Self-care practices have a particularly deep importance for Black people, given historical inequities that Black communities have faced – and continue to face – in the U.S. In the words of poet and

activist Audre Lorde, “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.” For the people we spoke with, there are already deep links between self-care, creativity, and connection as well as powerful resonances among individual wellness, arts and culture experiences, and self-expression. How might the field build more intentionally and creatively on those connections and use them to support both personal and collective healing and well-being?

- The pandemic may be spurring public recognition, questioning, and reimagining of pre-pandemic habits and norms around self- and community-level care. **How could culture-and-community practitioners be a bigger part of this reimagining, avoid a return to pre-pandemic norms, and recognize the importance of individual and collective self-care?** Some organizations, practitioners, and funders are already centering the work of healing, balance, and equitable access in various ways, while others could make a stronger commitment to that goal. Findings from this research reveal a range of reasons to consider integrating individual and social processing and other therapeutic approaches into cultural experiences, both digitally and in person. Similar thinking could be applied to supporting artists and other culture-sector workers and creators, for example through safe and accessible facilities and spaces.
- The participants in this research are already using and experiencing all kinds of cultural programs – institutional and informal, in-person and digital – for self-care and well-being. This suggests that self-care and well-being can easily co-exist with artistic and cultural spaces and missions. **How could culture-and-community organizations meet genuine needs in their communities by embracing a connection between creativity and well-being?** For the people we spoke with, cultural spaces are, in part, refuges: they’re often viewed and used as therapeutic, meditative, spiritual, and/or psychological tools. Indeed, many artists are working with those concepts and bringing new creativity to bear on the outcomes of mental health, social connection, and community well-being. How can the field learn from, and work more closely with, such artists and innovators and with other kinds of social-sector organizations already doing that work? How can they build those intentions and outcomes more overtly into their programs and places?

3. Trustworthiness

FINDINGS SUMMARY ►

In this project, we prioritized *trustworthiness* over *trust* because that places the responsibility of being or becoming trustworthy on the cultural or community organization (rather than placing the responsibility of trusting that organization on the community member). Many people we spoke with made that distinction and described trust as dependent on trustworthiness. For many, “doing the research” and evaluating evidence across a variety of sources of information were instrumental in judging trustworthiness (see pages 41-43 for examples of different kinds of research). Most saw trust as a concept that is dynamic and provisional, subject to change as new evidence or contrasting information arrives.

When it comes to institutional change that signals trustworthiness, our participants emphasized that meaningful and consistent action speaks louder than words. Additionally, many shared examples of

organizations earning trust by meeting immediate community needs during the recent crises – but only a few of these were arts and culture organizations.

STRATEGIC EXTENSIONS ►

- As participants in this study indicated, becoming trustworthy may take a long time, and consistent action is key. **What does it look like for culture-and-community practitioners to practice trustworthiness as an ongoing process, not as a task with an endpoint?** Trustworthiness precedes trust. It's important for culture-and-community leaders to acknowledge that the burden of trust lies on their organizations, not on the communities and people who may not trust them yet; institutions need to earn trust by behaving in ways that are trustworthy. For our participants, trust is dynamic: it can rise and fall as an organization's new actions send updated (though not always intentional) signals to its constituents. When taking actions and making decisions, it's important to consider who's in the room, who has authority, and who will be affected.
- A strong theme in this research is that you can't "signal" trustworthiness; you have to live it. **How can culture-and-community practitioners take actions that speak louder than words?** The people we spoke with do their research, and they actively update their perceptions of an organization's trustworthiness over time. Public statements of support or commitment aren't considered evidence on their own; they're only as real as the actions, policies, and investments that follow them. It also helps to acknowledge shortcomings and show how the organization and its leaders have learned and grown from their mistakes.
- This study indicates that attending an organization or program doesn't mean that the person attending trusts it. The people we spoke with can hold a "double consciousness" about cultural organizations' trustworthiness and experiential value. When they visit or attend some arts spaces (particularly large, well-known cultural destinations and historically significant institutions), they can enjoy the experience even though they don't have a trusting relationship with it. They're used to some amount of cognitive dissonance in these experiences: they can relish the art and overall experience even while knowing it's problematic in important ways. **How can culture-and-community practitioners measure the success of their efforts if attendance is not a good indicator of building a trustworthy relationship?** Practitioners may want to think of measuring attendance as just a starting point – and perhaps a flawed feedback loop. Additional modes of feedback are important, as is acknowledging and processing historical injustices in public ways, as a pathway to enacting and embodying trustworthiness.
- Meeting real needs in the community and "showing up" to work alongside others is a strong indication of trustworthiness. **What does it look like for culture-and-community practitioners to show up in a consistent way?** The people we heard from in this study are quick to see the difference between organizations that are self-interested or absent during a crisis and those that join in to tackle the collective challenge. Organizations that come out of their own space or programmatic domain to support others in meeting community needs, and those that build alliances with other organizations that are already doing such work, are much more likely to earn trust. This is especially important during times of pain and change, but also in more everyday circumstances.

4. Welcome and Belonging

FINDINGS SUMMARY ►

Participants clearly distinguished between the concepts of *welcome* and *belonging*, describing welcome as a function of the actions and attributes of a space or event and belonging as an internal feeling that can be present or absent independent of the space.

Many shared stories where small acts of kindness could be mutually reinforcing, adding up to making a space highly welcoming. They mentioned perceiving both visible and invisible cues in a space, and they noted that both are important in signaling welcome (please see pages 51-52 for examples of these cues).

For many, the most welcoming spaces were those that allowed them to express their authentic selves. When it comes to arts and culture spaces, participants expressed the critical importance of holistic (rather than narrow or stereotyped) representations of Black people and Black experiences in contributing to welcome.

STRATEGIC EXTENSIONS ►

- Small gestures of kindness can have a big positive effect on feeling welcome. **How can culture-and-community practitioners foster welcome more intentionally?** As with trustworthiness leading to trust, welcoming spaces can help affirm and encourage a sense of belonging. Welcoming spaces can be created through acts of kindness and support, which are remembered and appreciated by the people we spoke with. Our participants noted that all kinds of experiences are racialized in this country, which can make rudeness and racism functionally indistinguishable (see page 54). As a result, rudeness invites worries of racism. Culture-and-community practitioners should consider multiple ways to create environments of active, unmistakable welcome, where even the briefest of interactions becomes a positive connection.
- Real representation means celebrating all kinds of Black experiences and meeting all kinds of needs that Black people have. **What would it look like for this diversity to be expressed and acknowledged in different kinds of arts and culture settings** (e.g., across a wide range of museums, performing arts, and other culture-and-community spaces)? Black people, cultures and experiences are diverse and multifarious. Culture-and-community practitioners and organizations have a responsibility to affirm and celebrate that richness and breadth and avoid promulgating a view of Black stories and themes limited to slavery, trauma, and police brutality. This research reminds us that Black audiences want the full human range of stories and experiences in arts and culture programs. Practitioners and funders should make time to question and defuse any impulses that tokenize Black people and affirm only one type of Blackness that is “palatable” to White people.
- Representation is important in all organizational levels and roles, not just on the front lines. **What would it look like to enhance representation in your organization or area of cultural practice?** Spaces and institutions where Black people are represented only in front-line service positions don’t engender trust. The participants in this study want to know that Black people and other people of color are also in positions of authority and creativity behind the scenes – and when that’s not the case, they can recognize it (see page 52 for examples). Addressing this gap requires bringing Black voices into all kinds of messaging and content developed by an

organization, especially messaging and content specifically about Black people and Black experiences.

- It's important to celebrate, affirm, and support Black innovators and creators as trailblazers *within* an art form or cultural category rather than dubbing them “outsiders” to it. **How might this affirmation be created – or extended – within different parts of the culture-and-community sector?** The people we talked with are sensitive to the kinds of marginalization of Black creativity that keeps Black genius out of some domains and locked into others. Practitioners and funders should find ways of encouraging and rewarding Black artists who work “outside the box” in a given art-form or discipline, rather than othering them by defining their innovations as “something else.” Celebrating Black visionaries and innovators can help generate a sense of both welcome and trustworthiness.

Provocations for the culture-and-community field

In this section of the summary (and more fully in the body of the report, pages 59-64), we share our own reflections on the study findings as a whole and also go beyond them, considering ways this study may challenge and reframe common themes in the culture-and-community field and impact culture-and-community practitioners.

Rethinking creativity

Humans are social beings, so it's no surprise that all of the forms of culture we talked with participants about – their own creativity and self-expression, experiences with arts venues, and preferred community gatherings, etc. – were valued in part as opportunities or tools for connection with family, friends, and even strangers. But that connection isn't just with others; it's also with ourselves and our heritage and identities, and with our pasts and futures. In this sense, connection is an intermediate outcome that can contribute to a more fundamental one: greater well-being at both an individual and collective level. For the arts, culture, and community sector, our findings suggest that it's worth considering ways of placing even greater value on artists and creators of all kinds, professional and everyday, *as visionaries*: possibility-seers, divergent thinkers, imaginers, reframers, and do-ers who are integral to social change and healthy communities. This would include valuing Black artists and creatives and embracing their innovations by widening the definitions of existing fields and genres to amplify them.

Moving beyond formality vs. informality

Our interviews revealed that institutional formality or scale is not in itself a barrier to relevance and enjoyment. Many brought up, unprompted, meaningful and valuable experiences in larger cultural spaces like encyclopedic museums or performing arts centers. The people we spoke with are comfortable in many different spaces, scales, and modes of participation, and they often find real value and relevance in each. The problem arises when the space, whatever its size or formality, proves inhospitable: unwelcoming, untrustworthy, uncaring, or even unsafe. We learned that this is less about the conventions of the experience or the scale or design of the space and more about the people one encounters – both the staff or volunteers and one's fellow audience members or participants.

Challenging “relevance”

The framing of “relevance” in the arts and culture sector in relation to Black audiences and communities is sometimes based on assumptions about Black people's needs and interests, which are often too narrowly focused on Black histories and experiences of trauma and injustice. Our participants said they

want a broader, fuller view of their humanity when it comes to arts and culture programming and content, one that also highlights Black joy, leisure, connection, innovation, and brilliance. They also want perspectives that highlight shared humanity and meaning *across* identities, experiences, and cultures.

Striving for consonance

For many of the people we spoke with, otherwise richly meaningful experiences in specific cultural settings (e.g., museums) were often tainted by a cognitive dissonance brought about by the problematic histories of objects and practices in that environment. Cultural organizations of all kinds and sizes could work harder to make that cognitive dissonance less acute and strive instead to ensure *cognitive consonance*: a sense that everything fits; that problematic aspects of the content or creators are acknowledged and made part of the experience; that Black stories and themes are not limited to trauma stories; that welcome is overt and authentic belonging encouraged; that trustworthiness is prioritized over trust and is accepted as a long-term process; that meeting community needs is part of the institution's goals and missions; that the value of self-care and connection is embraced and doesn't need to be "hidden" or suppressed; and that the everyday creativity and self-expressive range of Black participants and communities are acknowledged and affirmed along with, and in dynamic relationship to, Black professional forms of creativity on display.

Sparking collective change

For some kinds of arts and culture organizations, some or all of these things are already the mission and the program; for others they would represent, and require, a radical reimagining. But if the global pandemic and the country's overdue grappling with race don't serve to accelerate that reimagining consistently across the culture-and-community field, the sector will truly have wasted an opportunity to adapt and contribute to an evolving world.

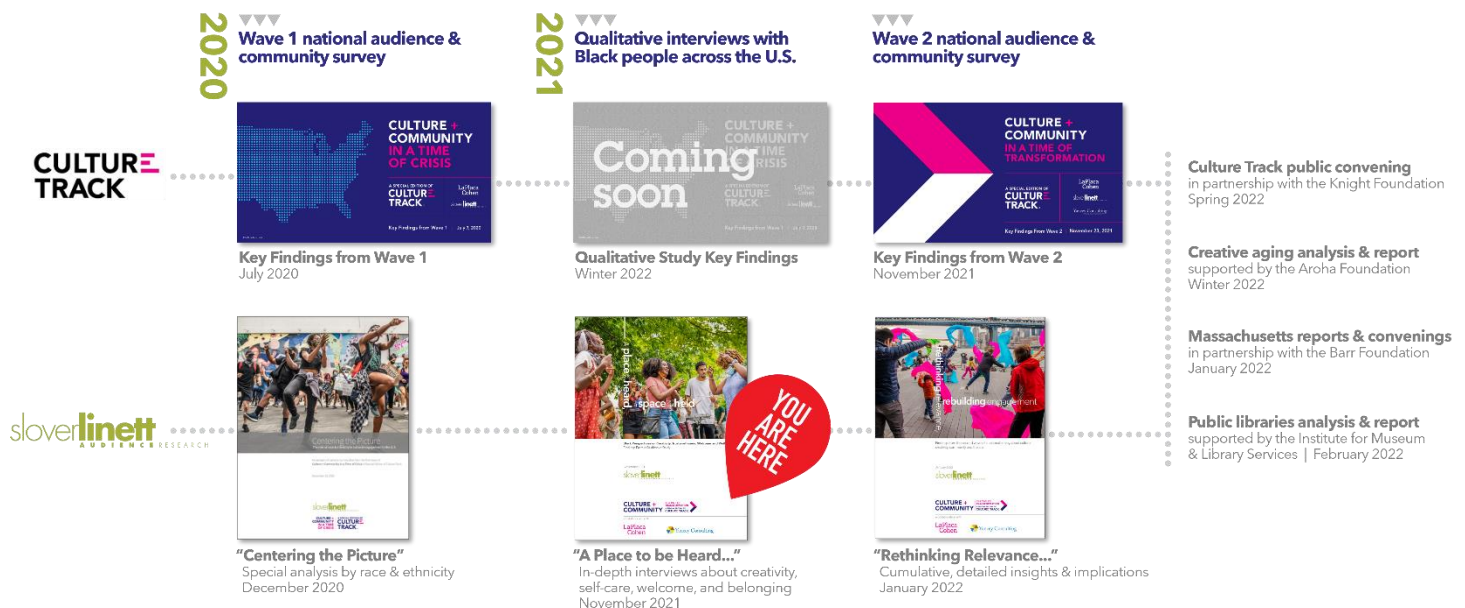
Introduction

Background

Culture + Community in a Time of Transformation: A Special Edition of Culture Track is a collaborative effort to keep the cultural sector in dialogue with its communities and participants during the pandemic and inform deeper equity and justice in the years to come. The project pivoted from examining public attitudes and behaviors in a “time of crisis” in 2020 to doing so in a “time of transformation” in 2021, with a crucial focus around racialized experiences in connection with cultural participation.

Our colleagues at **Slover Linett** began this work in Spring 2020 with a large-scale online survey of cultural participants and the general U.S. population, undertaken in collaboration with the Culture Track team at **LaPlaca Cohen** and with lead funding from the **Wallace Foundation**. That survey became one of the largest cultural research studies ever conducted in the U.S., with 124,000 respondents. Culture + Community in a Time of Crisis was intended to inform not just resilience but also innovation and progress toward equity in the cultural sector, and to give the public a voice in the future of cultural engagement. The project team understood that the pandemic would accelerate fundamental change in the sector and, as such, represented a crucial opportunity to address decades, even centuries of structural exclusion and Eurocentric cultural norms. But that first phase of research was designed and

Fig. 1. Overview of the research initiative, with current and forthcoming reports from Culture Track and Slover Linett. (Click links in this pdf to view reports.)



conducted before the murder of George Floyd ignited a national upswell of anger, grief, and activism and the Movement for Black Lives began to reshape the discourse around racism in every aspect of American life. In a follow-up statistical analysis of the same (early 2020) data published in December, 2020 as “Centering the Picture: The Role of Race & Ethnicity in Cultural Engagement in the U.S.”² one of the co-authors of the present study (Melody Buyukozur Dawkins) and other Slover Linett colleagues explored respondents’ experiences in relation to their racial and ethnic identities in order to highlight and amplify what people of color have been going through and what they would like to see changed in the future.

At the same time, equity and transformation experts Lisa Yancey and Kelli Lane at **Yancey Consulting** joined the project team, as did consulting researcher **Katrina Bledsoe**. Their insights, along with those of the **Barr Foundation** and other new funders, helped refocus the work that would take place in 2021. The collaboration was renamed Culture + Community in a Time of Transformation, with the continued designation as a special edition of Culture Track. (More information about the overall initiative is available at sloverlinett.com/cctt and culturetrack.com/transformation/.)

Study impetus

The “Centering the Picture” report from Wave 1 had revealed some unique experiences and perspectives that Black and African American participants have in relation to cultural engagement, digital connection with arts and culture, and social change (see “our research questions” section for the relevant findings). The Slover Linett team, knowing that qualitative methods would be necessary to understand those perspectives in a more nuanced and holistic way, advocated for an additional phase of research that would offer a triangulation with – as well as a departure point from – the two-wave quantitative study. At this point, the four authors of the present report began to design and conduct this next phase of work. We took seriously the principles of equitable research and evaluation, aiming for transparency between the research team and the participants and building in multiple moments for the research team, partners, and advisors to critically examine our own assumptions (see Methodology section, below).

To authentically amplify Black voices and stories, we dedicated this phase solely to Black and African American participants’ perspectives, since those viewpoints have historically been excluded or sidelined in most research studies and planning efforts in the cultural field. We intentionally took a broad approach to this inquiry, exploring general dynamics of creativity, trustworthiness, welcome, and self-care rather than focusing narrowly on arts and culture organizations and attendance. This allowed us to hear and explore how culture and community experiences and organizations naturally fit into peoples’ lives, and we believe it led to rich insights that can inform practice, funding, and policy.

Who this report is for

Primarily, we hope that this study will be useful to what we’re calling the culture-and-community sector: practitioners at organizations large and small, funders, policymakers, artists, activists, etc., and especially progressive changemakers working with and through the arts, culture, and creativity. In it, we aim to

² Benoit-Bryan, J., Smith, M., Jenetopoulos, M., Linett, P. (2020). Centering the picture: The role of race & ethnicity in cultural engagement. Slover Linett Audience Research. <https://sloverlinett.com/insights/centering-the-picture-the-role-of-race-ethnicity-in-cultural-engagement/>

speak both to readers who are already far along in their journey toward fostering trustworthiness and welcome in their institutions and communities, and to those who may be just beginning that journey. Secondly, we hope the study is valuable to actors and entities in other community, placemaking, philanthropic, social service, and social justice domains, whose work may sometimes intersect with or involve cultural strategies or arts and culture partners. We offer these findings as a contribution to the current discourse about how the cultural sector, broadly and democratically defined, can better understand and internalize the dynamics of equity and provide more engaging, valuable, and inclusive experiences for people and communities.

We want to emphasize that this study is not meant to speak for “the” Black or African American community in the U.S. Black people are not monolithic; the participants in this study are multifaceted individuals with diverse identities and unique life-experiences. The findings and implications offered here are reflective *only* of the experiences of the fifty people we interviewed – and possibly other Black and African American adults with similar identities and experiences. We hope readers will join us in resisting the urge to generalize or compare these findings to other racial/ethnic groups and instead take them on their own terms, as insights to help culture-and-community practitioners reflect on the role of creativity, self-care, trustworthiness, welcome, well-being, and other dynamics in their work. We as authors are honored to be able to have the space to highlight Black perspectives on their own, without requiring the justification of comparison to other groups.

Our research questions

We developed the guiding questions for this qualitative study based on particular findings from the 2020 Culture + Community/Culture Track quantitative survey, on topics of interest to our partners and community advisors, and on our reviews of the existing literature. At the time of this report’s release, we’re not aware of a previous research study in the arts and culture field that has asked this range of foundational questions with a deep focus on Black and African American perspectives.

That Wave 1 survey revealed specific questions about how Black and African American respondents were participating in culture and creativity, including what kinds of institutions and experiences they engaged in. On average, Black/African American respondents participated in fewer listed cultural activities than the overall sample (although those who did participate in activities did so with similar frequency to the overall population). In this qualitative phase, we wanted to further explore the range of activities people participated in, to determine whether and how we might broaden our measurement frame in the Wave 2 survey to better reflect Black and African American experiences. The Wave 1 survey findings also suggested that, in those early days of the pandemic, Black and African American people were more likely than other Americans to engage online with kinds of arts and culture activities that they hadn’t attended in person before the lockdowns, and that they had a higher desire for “trusted sources of information.” We wanted to understand the reasons underlying these two findings.

In multiple conversations, our project advisors (see below), partners, and funders also expressed an interest in knowing more about the dynamics of trust, trustworthiness, and welcome and how to foster them. The advisors, many of whom lead community-connected cultural organizations or networks, were particularly interested in deepening their community-building work, especially in solidarity and partnership with those who share similar missions. They saw this qualitative research as an opportunity

to explore ways that culture-and-community organizations could foster those dynamics and forge better partnerships – in part by sharing the frameworks and perspectives that might emerge from the study.

With all that in mind, we framed these qualitative interviews around the following broad research topics and questions:

- **Creativity** | What roles do creativity and self-expression play in participants' lives? How do arts and culture experiences (including digital experiences) relate to creativity? How have recent events (not just the Covid-19 pandemic but also the Black Lives Matter resurgence, racial reckoning in the U.S., etc.) affected their creative and self-expressive pursuits?
- **Trustworthiness** | What does "trust" mean, and what earns it? What spaces or relationships feel trustworthy? What are the characteristics of information sources, spaces or relationships that are trustworthy?
- **Welcome and Belonging** | What are characteristics of a welcoming place or community? What components or signals are most likely to foster a sense of welcome? How effectively do arts and cultural organizations foster a sense of welcome? What does belonging mean?
- **Community support** | How do organizations make authentic gestures of community support? What kind of organizations are perceived as "showing up" for their communities during crises like the current ones, and how do arts and culture organizations factor in?

We knew that it would be impossible to comprehensively explore all of these topics, and that our interviews would leave many important questions unexamined. However, we hope that, by amplifying these fifty voices at this moment, we will contribute to the hard work of reflection, rebalancing, and transformation in the cultural field and illuminate potential research pathways for future efforts with similar goals.

Study advisors

As noted, we had the privilege of talking with the leaders and sometimes other staff at eight community-connected cultural organizations as we designed this study. We're grateful for the generosity and honesty they brought to those conversations during a challenging period, for the time and energy they spent helping us invite people from their communities to participate in this research, and for the feedback some of them provided on an early draft of this report. They are:

Esther Anthony-Thomas
Black Storytellers

Ellice Patterson
Abilities Dance

Jessica Anne Bratt
Grand Rapids Public Library

Hatuey Ramos-Fermín
Laundromat Project

Leila Haile
Ori Art Gallery

Carlton Turner
SIPP Culture

David Norville
Castle of Our Skins

Tiffany LaTrice Williams
TILA Studios



Methodology

This study used in-depth conversations to explore the varied insights and unique experiences of fifty Black and African American adults living around the U.S. Our approach centered on principles from culturally responsive and equitable research.^{3,4} Those values informed what each of us tried to bring to the study, how we recruited the participants, how we structured the conversations, and how we wrote and organized this report.

Who we are

In any qualitative study, the researchers themselves are part of the research instrument,⁵ especially in the kind of exploratory, semi-structured interviews we used in this project. The two main interviewers for all fifty conversations, Melody Buyukozer Dawkins and Ciara C. Knight, share Black and African American heritage, with unique differences of ethnicity and background. The other two co-authors of this report, Tanya Treptow and Camila Guerrero, joined the interview sessions as note-takers, and it's important to acknowledge that neither is Black; although they were not the primary conversant with the participant, they participated in the conversations at times. Each conversation included some combination of these four team members (see bios on page 70). We were aware that different combinations of researchers, particularly in terms of racial background, may have brought up different dynamics in each interview, as noted in other studies.⁶

Whom we spoke with

In recruiting participants for this study, we focused on reaching a diverse group of Black and African American adults living in all four broad geographical regions of the U.S.: Northeast (11 people), West (8 people), South (21 people), and Midwest (10 people); a mix of metropolitan, rural and suburban residents; people with immigrant experiences, LGBTQIA+ identities, and/or multiracial and multiethnic Black backgrounds; people with a variety of abilities, incomes, ages, and genders; and people with varied participation and attendance patterns at arts and cultural institutions. We achieved some representation on all of these dimensions, but one of the limitations of the study was that women and people from the South were over-represented (see Appendix for more details on demographics).

³ Mizock, L., Harkins, D., & Morant, R. (2011). Researcher interjecting in qualitative race research. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12(13). <https://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1566/3183>

⁴ Oregon Museum of Science and Industry. (n.d.). Reveal: Culturally responsive research framework. *Oregon Museum of Science and Industry*. https://omsi.edu/sites/default/files/CRR_Framework_REVEAL.pdf

⁵ Pezalla, A. E., Pettigrew, J., & Miller-Day, M. (2012). Researching the researcher-as-instrument: an exercise in interviewer self-reflexivity. *Qualitative Research*, 12(2), 165–185. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1487941111422107>

⁶ Mizock, L., Harkins, D., & Morant, R. (2011). Researcher interjecting in qualitative race research. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12(13). <https://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1566/3183>

We recruited a subset of the fifty participants through a third-party research recruiter and a subset by reaching out to Wave 1 survey respondents who had opted-in to be contacted for future studies. (By referring to their survey responses, we could ensure varied participation in arts and culture activities.) We also reached out to a few people referred by our community-connected organization advisors. We weren't able to intentionally recruit across the digital divide, given that our main method of reaching out to people was via email. So people who don't have reliable or unlimited internet access might not have been as well represented in our study as those who do.

Interview approach

Prior to developing the goals of the study, we had conversations with the advisors and other project partners to think with them about the intentions and desired outcomes of the study. These conversations guided us in writing a semi-structured "discussion guide" for these interviews (provided in the Appendix). The main topics in the guide, after an ice-breaker exercise intended to disrupt potential hierarchical divisions, were pandemic-era activities, creative activities, trust, and welcome.

The research design was reviewed and approved by a third-party institutional review board (IRB), Missouri-based **Ethical and Independent Review Services**. For more information about the study consent and interview protocols, please see the Appendix.

We conducted fifty interviews, mostly via Zoom videoconferencing but some by phone (audio only), each lasting approximately 90 minutes. During the interviews, we consulted the guide loosely rather than using it as a script, so that we could be responsive to each participant's unique contributions. This practice is key in culturally responsive research.^{7,8} Although we didn't ask participants about traumatic experiences, instead inquiring about what brings them joy, some participants did share negative, painful, or traumatic experiences. In those cases, we made sure to listen and affirm rather than interrupt or change the subject. And we tried to ensure that those interviews ended on a good note by asking about positive memories, to decrease any stressful feelings the participants might be feeling.

Throughout this report, we display and discuss quotations from the interviews without attribution. This was to ensure participants' anonymity and privacy as well as to encourage candor and intimacy in the conversations. In the quotes included in the report, we typically share several sentences in order to fully convey the intent and emotions of the speaker. We have condensed some of them for clarity or to remove potentially identifying details.

⁷ Moffatt, K., George, U., Lee, B., & McGrath, S. (2005). Community practice researchers as reflective learners. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 35(1), 89-104. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bch164>

⁸ Rappaport, J. (1995). Empowerment meets narrative: Listening to stories and creating settings. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 23(5), 795-807. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF0250699>

Notes on

language

In the process of designing this research and writing this report, the research team spent time discussing several important decisions about language. How would we speak with our interview participants in ways that wouldn't subtly direct their responses? How would we use inclusive and equitable terminology in this document—and avoid making assumptions about participants? Here we share some context about a few of those decisions.

Black and African American

We interviewed individuals living in the United States who identify as either Black or African American. We use both terms because people of African ancestry often have varied cultural backgrounds and may be immigrants or temporary residents in this country. "Black" is a more inclusive word to describe people of African ancestry; "African American" is limited to those of African ancestry who were born in the U.S.⁹ Accordingly, throughout our report we use Black to be inclusive of people across the world with African ancestry.

gender & pronouns

Because most participants didn't discuss gender with us, we use gender-neutral pronouns (they, their, etc.) and descriptors ("people we spoke with," "participants") in this report. This is to ensure we're not making assumptions in cases where participants didn't mention their pronouns and gender identity.

arts & culture

We deliberately didn't use the phrase "arts and culture" in our interviews, nor did we define those words for participants. Instead, we tried to create an open-ended inquiry about what those concepts might mean for each participant, asking about things like creativity, activities, spaces, expression, and joy – and following the lead of participants who did bring up words like "arts" or "culture." Yet those terms are obviously important in this report, and we've tried to use them in ways that reflect how the participants think and talk rather than how the "arts and culture" field has traditionally viewed itself.

belonging

Similarly, we didn't mention "belonging" unless the participants used this word specifically, because we wanted to avoid the negative implication that there are spaces in which some people "do not belong." Instead, based on prior research on belonging (which we preview briefly in the Welcome section), we asked about things like comfort, safety, and feeling heard and cherished.

community

In this study, we consider "community" to be people who are connected by geography, attributes, and/or interests. We acknowledge that one common use of the word "community" is to refer to people from marginalized groups. We refrain from that implication here, since marginalized groups are not monoliths and contain a great deal of difference and diversity of experiences, opinions, interests, and identities – in other words, may not be unitary "communities."

small & large organizations

Although we didn't define these terms explicitly in the interviews, we did ask participants about their experiences in larger and smaller kinds of places or organizations. (We were talking about cultural and community organizations, although, as noted, we didn't use those terms ourselves.) We wanted to understand if people felt differently about the large, often higher-budget institutions with national reputations that they've attended and the small, often neighborhood-based and lower-budget spaces and organizations they've interacted with – especially if they mentioned those factors themselves. We wanted this research to speak to practitioners at both small and large organizations, and we wanted to avoid the assumption that "small" equals community-based and BIPOC-serving.

community-connected organizations

We consider arts and culture organizations to be "community-connected" when their values, mission and programs center on community building, service, access, and equity. Many but not all of these are small organizations, and many but not all are led by, and focus on serving or engaging, people of color. For us, "community-connected organizations" is an alternative to common terms like "community arts," which have been used to divide the field rather than unite it around a shared ideal. We believe *all* cultural organizations should be community-connected. In keeping with that aspiration, we also use the phrase "culture-and-community organizations" here to blend the traditional "arts & culture" category and the community-serving, community-connected field.

⁹ American Psychological Association, 2020. Publication manual of the American Psychological Association (7th ed.).

Photo: Courtesy of NYC-based photographer Deb Fong (debfong.com, IG @deb_fong_photography). Taken in August 2021 at the 40th annual Battery Dance Festival in Battery Park City, NYC. Contemporary and Afro-Cuban dance artist Beatrice Capote led an audience through a post-performance lesson, a tradition that follows each evening's performances at the festival.

Findings & EXTENSIONS



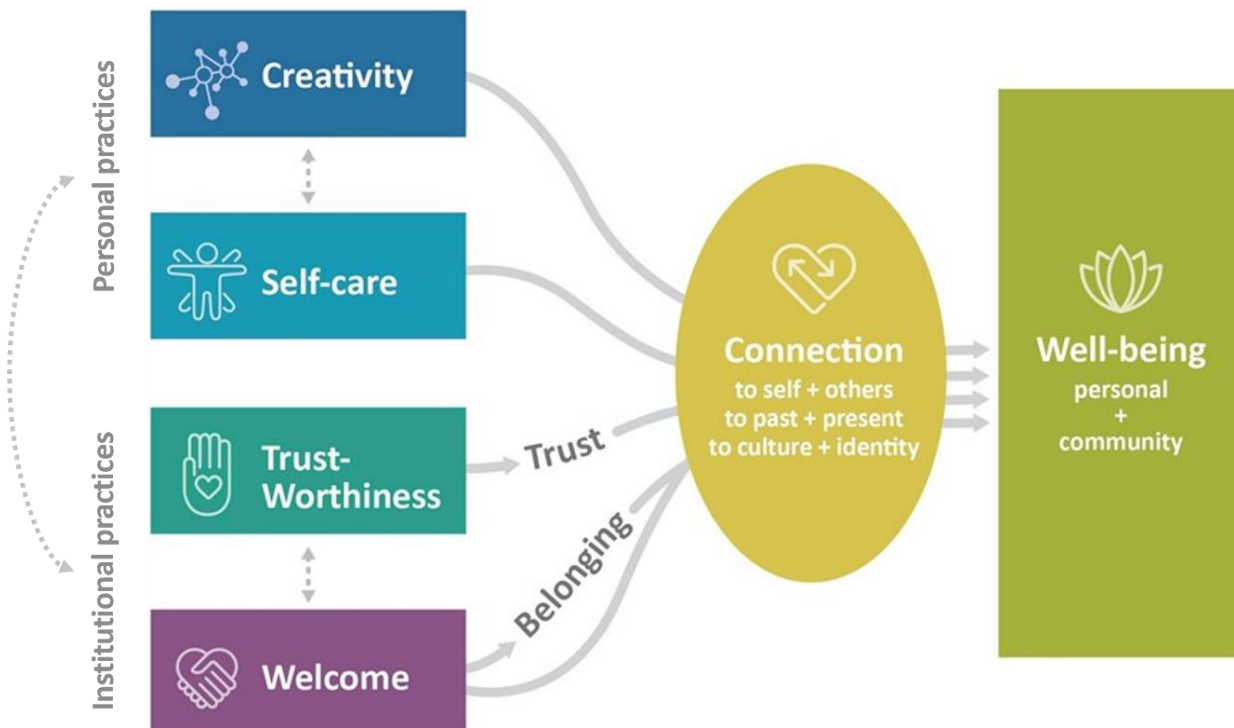
findings & EXTENSIONS

Overview

While we had a defined set of research questions going into the study (as described above, around themes of creativity, trust, and welcome), we felt it was important to remain open to unexpected themes that emerged from the conversations – an important practice that allows for correcting assumptions and getting a deeper, more authentic sense of how participants experience the world and themselves. Indeed, the themes of self-care and well-being emerged in that way, and we were able to develop a conceptual model based on four practices – *creativity*, *self-care*, *trustworthiness*, and *welcome* – that participants said foster connection both to oneself and to others, ultimately leading to personal and community level *well-being*. These relationships are represented in the diagram below (Figure 2).

As noted on the left side of the diagram, the themes of *creativity* and *self-care* were described by our participants as deeply personal practices and values, while *trustworthiness* and *welcome* were described as values expressed (or not) by groups, organizations, and spaces. When and where these practices occur, on their own or in tandem, they contribute to the deeper human goal of *connection*, not just with others but also with self, with past and future, and with one's culture and identity. In turn, connection

Fig. 2. An emergent framework relating personal and institutional practices to connection and well-being, based on interviews with Black and African American adults one year into the pandemic.



contributes to the larger aspiration of *well-being* at both an individual and community level. And while connection may be just one pathway toward well-being, in this study we heard that it is often a crucial element.

This conceptual model became the organizing principle for this report, which includes chapters on the first four themes (*creativity*, *self-care*, *trustworthiness*, and *welcome* and its correlate, *belonging*), with reflections on how they relate to cultural spaces, activities, and organizations. We also note crosscurrents among these themes and potential stepping-stones toward them, to help culture-and-community practitioners and funders working to advance individual and community well-being.

Since *connection* and *well-being* aren't featured in their own chapters, we'll share a few brief findings about them here.

Connection and well-being in context

Although we've placed well-being as the ultimate goal in our conceptual model, the theme of connection and how it works emerged as central to many of our conversations. Connection can focus inward (i.e., connection to oneself) as well as outward (connecting to others in one's family, friend group, or wider social context or group), and it was also sometimes framed in terms of connecting to one's past (e.g., ancestry), present (via mindfulness), or future (passing on a legacy). We explore some of the mechanisms of building connection on those three dimensions in our discussions of creativity, self-care, trustworthiness, and welcome in the following chapters, which we hope will be highly relevant to

culture-and-community practitioners. But we also highlight the further aspiration of individual and communal well-being, because so many of our participants described it as central to their thinking about these dynamics.

Like so much else in this study, our participants' focus on well-being may be universal to human experience, but it also clearly has a specific relation to being Black or African American. Participants spoke of the importance of well-being and self-care to counter the stresses of this moment for Black people. Some shared their life experiences in relation to a chaotic external landscape, meaning the Covid-19 pandemic and many additional events and issues: they mentioned the disparities in Covid-19 hospitalizations and death rates, the televised murder of George Floyd and the conviction of

former police officer Derek Chauvin for his murder, the murders of many other Black people by law enforcement and White supremacists (e.g., Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Daunte Wright, and many

George Floyd dying was bad but bringing up Black racial issues to the forefront is a good thing. Racial justice was a breaking point for a lot of people. This election did really recede into their echo chambers, which resulted in the January 6th thing. But people are more politically aware and socially aware."

I also felt so much joy and brilliance and affirmation. My sister calls it everyday Black genius. One of the anthems became, 'you about to lose your job.' And all the conversations it started among us."

others),¹⁰ the increase in anti-Asian hate incidents,¹¹ the 2020 U.S. election and capitol insurrection that followed, immigration challenges at the U.S.-Mexico border, and socioeconomic challenges worsened by the pandemic (job loss, evictions, healthcare, childcare). These events and their direct impact on Black people and communities formed not just a backdrop but a shared context for many of our



Being angry, being sad, being even more angry. Being exhausted to such an extent I don't know an English word for it... None of the ways that government has treated people like me, as a Black person, as a woman, hasn't been affirmed. I also felt deep sorrow, to see what I knew was happening all the time, had always happened, to see it play out again in 2020."



We can do hard things together is my mantra. Even [my] son knows this mantra. It's been hard. But it's helpful in thinking that we can do this together. It's going to be a while, but I'm not alone in this. I have my family."

participants, apparent across age, gender, and geography. Reactions to them ranged from grief to joy and everything in between – and beyond. Many participants expressed anger and sorrow over the “needless nonsense noise” (as one put it) of racist acts they had experienced or witnessed during this time, along with a deep-rooted frustration and disbelief over the state of affairs in the country.

Yet many people also expressed *positive* responses to the events of the past year, especially in appreciation of other Black people and the importance of solidarity during a challenging time. Some reflected on the increase in societal awareness, caused by the events of the past years, and on the deep importance of authentic and trusting connections between people.

Given these reactions, it is no surprise that almost everyone we spoke with described their activities during this time as centered on wellness and well-being. Even creativity was often discussed in that frame, as we'll see in the next chapter.

¹⁰ The Washington Post. (2020). Fatal force: Police shootings database. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/investigations/police-shootings-database/>

¹¹ Campbell, J. (2021). Anti-Asian hate crimes surged in early 2021, study says. *CNN*. <https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/05/us/anti-asian-hate-crimes-study/index.html>

Summary

From the outset of Culture + Community in a Time of Transformation: A Special Edition of Culture Track, the research has taken a broad, inclusive view of “culture” and the arts. That view includes personal, participatory creativity as well as professional, presentational forms of engagement. After the 2020 national survey, we wanted to know more about how creativity works in the lives of Black and African American adults during these challenging times.

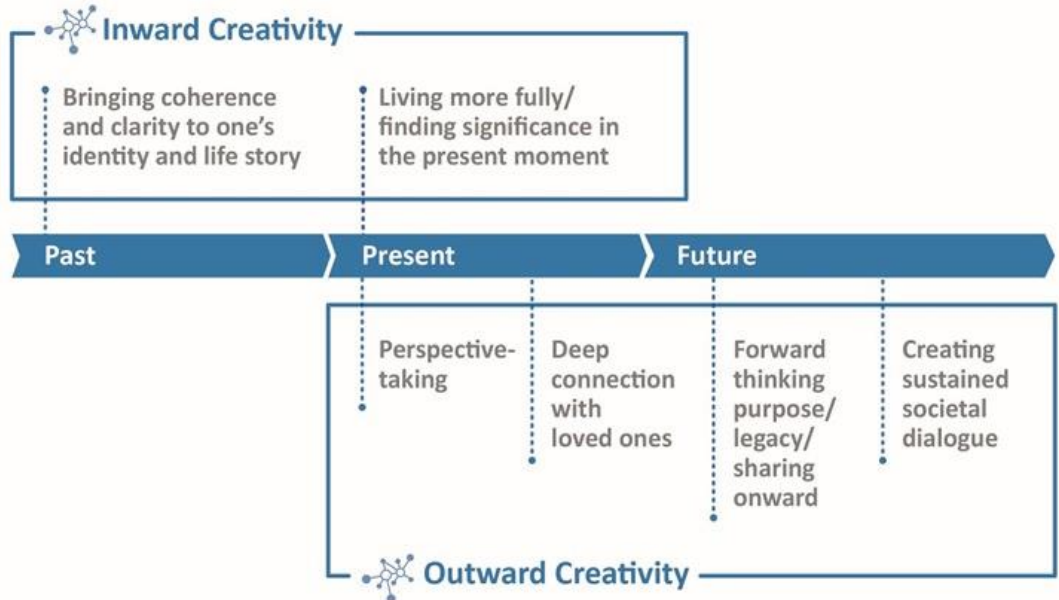
1. **Everyone we spoke with valued and practiced creativity and self-expression** in their lives – although not everyone identified as creative or artistic.
2. Some participants used creativity to **bring coherence and clarity to their personal life-stories**, often by processing the past in order to feel grounded across generations.
3. Many used creativity, self-expression, or artistic practice in order to **live more fully during a time of limitation** like the pandemic – a way of finding meaning, freedom, and joy in the present moment.
4. Some said they feel most creative when **seeing the world from a different perspective** – and that culture and community organizations provide important spaces for this to occur.
5. For many, the pandemic was a time when they could focus **on deepening connections with close friends and family** through shared creative moments or activities.
6. A number of participants pursued creative activities as **a contribution to the future**, by ensuring that things that are meaningful in the present are available to future generations.
7. Several spoke about creativity and the arts as key to **creating sustained societal dialogue** that could foster social change.

Introduction

During times of uncertainty and change, it can be important to find meaning within one's own circumstances to process that change;¹² creative expression can be a path toward that goal. Research in positive psychology suggests that, for many people, this is about reflecting on where you are currently, where you're coming from, and where you're going – or, in academic terms, questions of coherence, significance, and purpose.¹³ Coherence emerges from reflecting on and making sense of one's past life experiences; significance from finding inherent value in the present (e.g., activities, relationships, moods); and purpose from gaining a sense of direction or legacy in one's life. While creativity is only one means to these ends, it can serve all three dimensions.¹⁴ And these dimensions are inherently relational,¹⁵ connecting people to each other through time and space, connecting the past to the future, generating resonance with others, and evolving a shared sense of culture.

In our conversations, we heard vivid stories and examples of meaning-making through creativity that help deepen the above frameworks of creativity as a connective and relational act. The diagram below (Figure 3) shows some of the key motivations of creativity that emerged in our conversations, focusing both inward on one's own identity and outward on developing relationships with others.

Fig. 3. Creativity takes both inward and outward forms, and it points to past, present, and future.



¹² Kapoor, H., & Kaufman, J. C. (2020). Meaning-making through creativity during COVID-19. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 595990. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.595990>

¹³ Martela, F., & Steger, M. F. (2016). The three meanings of meaning in life: Distinguishing coherence, purpose, and significance. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 11(5), 531-545. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2015.1137623>

¹⁴ Kaufman, J. C. (2018). Finding meaning with creativity in the past, present, and future. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 13(6), 734-749. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691618771981>

¹⁵ Glăveanu, V. P. (2011). Creativity as cultural participation. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 41(1), 48-67. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5914.2010.00445.x>

In the discussion that follows, our goal is not to define creativity, but instead to unpack some of its key facets through the experiences of our participants. Obviously, arts and cultural practices and programs are often part of creativity and self-expression, and while a few of our participants described working creatively at a professional level or having careers in the arts, many shared a more varied range of everyday forms of creativity, sometimes described in the literature as people's "expressive lives."^{16,17} It's important to note that, although Blackness and Black culture were important components of creativity and self-expression for many, they weren't the only relevant factors or sources.

Inward creativity

Everyone we spoke with valued and practiced creativity and self-expression in their lives — although not everyone identified as creative or artistic.

All fifty of our participants valued and practiced creativity and self-expression in their lives, whether or not they felt that they were "creative" or "artistic." Most brought up at least one example from the past year where they had used physical or technical skills and creative thinking to make something. Some preferred to frame their creativity as a state of mind ("feeling like an artist inside"), an attitude they

I love to draw and charcoal. The human form is amazing. I love the lines on people's faces, it's never the same... It's been lifelong. I don't remember a time I wasn't drawing."

I got a paint-by-numbers thing. It's just sitting there whenever I get the inspiration to paint. It's just so many little details. Whenever I get bored I bring it out and work on it. That's kind of my thinking time."

viewed as fundamental to guiding one's life. One participant described this as an active rather than spectatorial process: "It's not just about appreciating creativity, but about bringing creativity from the world into yourself." Others seemed hesitant to call themselves creative, especially if there were people in their lives who had pursued creative careers. "I am very in awe of art and artists," said one participant. "I think we all have creative sides, I think mine is not as expressed as others.'" Those people were more comfortable with terms like *self-expression*, which resonated with their sense of their activities and abilities and didn't carry the same connotations as *creativity*.

Some participants used creativity to bring coherence and clarity to their personal life-stories, often by processing the past in order to feel grounded across generations.

We heard many examples of reflecting on oneself and one's roots as a core value and benefit of creative activities. For some, this was the motivation for creative writing during the pandemic, which was a way of

¹⁶ Jones, S. (Ed.). (2009). *Expressive lives*. Demos. https://www.demos.co.uk/files/ExpressiveLives_web_ii.pdf

¹⁷ Kaufman, J. C., & Beghetto, R. A. (2009). Beyond Big and Little: The Four C Model of Creativity. *Review of General Psychology*, 13(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013688>

“ [During my trip to Ghana], every place you looked, there were beautiful Black, dark-skinned people, bodies who looked like me, big hips, big thighs, and it was seen as beautiful. Even though it exposed me to a lot of historical multi-generational trauma, you can track some of me there. My people were there. I got to see my traditions. Seeing that culturally was so beautiful. That trip really opened my eyes to how big the world is, how traditions are dancing through my blood. You came back different, with a knowing.”

“ [I draw on] cultural and ancestral resources for grounding, talking to my parents. My dad is an older Black man. He says out of turmoil comes newness. With the pandemic and social uprising, it's true. It's happening. Chewing on all of these things has kept me good, writing toward Black futures. We have a lot of shoulders we can stand on.”

reframing family histories and childhood experiences: “A lot of my everyday writing is memories... It's been a source of healing for me, to really get some of those experiences out.” Writing was also a way of connecting to one's tradition and using it to reimagine the future (see quote below left). Not everyone we spoke with has been writing creatively during the pandemic; but others spoke to similar goals in other contexts, such as that could be achieved by seeing the creative expression of others who they felt connected to through a shared culture and ancestry (see quote below right).

Many used creativity, self-expression, or artistic practice in order to live more fully during a time of limitation like the pandemic — a way of finding meaning, freedom, and joy in the present moment.

The pandemic provided many participants opportunities to explore new ways to be creative: activities they tried for the first time or were able to pursue in a deeper way than they had in the past. These included artistic practices in the visual arts and photography, movement arts, creative writing, etc. as well

“ Over the last year, especially when I was down, I was just engaging in play [with the piano], even becoming a songwriter. I'm going to play around with this keyboard for twenty minutes and I feel good about it. I had never given myself the time for that.”

“ I started painting [during the pandemic]. I don't think I painted since I was a kid. I feel like my paintings look like other worlds to me. Sometimes I say I'm painting what I'm feeling inside. They are very vibrant. I can let it out and be one hundred percent authentically myself. That feeling of pleasure isn't always translated to other folks, so I keep that feeling to myself.”

as a wide variety of hands-on making and doing that wasn't always considered artistic or even creative by the participants themselves: singing, origami, crocheting, making clothing, making soaps, papier-mâché, paint-by-numbers artwork, gardening, refurbishing, interior design, etc. Food came up often in this context, as well (see also Self-Care, below), sometimes as a personal challenge (e.g., to try making a new dish or decorating a cake) and sometimes a way of sharing and connecting with others. While some participants shared these activities early in the conversation and with pride, others didn't reveal them until late in the interview, either because they didn't feel their creative products were of high-enough quality or because they felt highly personal. That fact that, in the study, participants reported participating in a wide range of creative

activities (even before the pandemic) is in tension with the Wave 1 survey findings, in which Black respondents participated in fewer listed cultural activities on average than respondents generally.

A few people expressed the idea that creativity, self-expression, and artistry, rather than being specific or defined activities, are present in all aspects of life and a fundamental part of being human. They noted that creativity can happen anywhere: bars, cafes, businesses, hair salons, street corners, farmers markets, vintage stores, casinos, etc. And that idea of creativity as ubiquitous and lived was, for some, specifically tied to being Black and practicing Black culture as an important form of creative expression. Examples included language, memes, fashion sense, hair styles, and even how one carries oneself. As one participant put it, "I think that everybody, particularly Black people, are just living works of art, in our culture and being."

Outward creativity

Some said they feel most creative when seeing the world from a different perspective — and that cultural organizations provide important spaces for this to occur.

When we prompted people to share any creative activities, some brought up examples that weren't about art or making, but instead about a creative mode of thinking and perspective-taking — often in relation to other people. For instance, several described international travel as an inherently creative activity, because through it you see the world from new angles, and it can provoke new ways of thinking.



Traveling was a creative space for me, experiencing different foods and culture. You're a different person when you're out there. I miss all of that. I would say that my creativity has been slightly stifled [during Covid]."

Others spoke in similar terms about blogging, coding, building a family business, or buying/selling stocks. (Those examples came up only once, but their benefits were framed in consistent ways across participants.)

Cultural institutions like museums and performing arts venues were mentioned spontaneously in many of our interviews (e.g., art

museums, ballet, opera), and participants often described them as fostering that relational sense, going beyond themselves and seeing the world from a new perspective. As one put it, part of the value of such places and experiences lies in how they facilitate empathy, which can be a creative act: "seeing people as different, accepting people, letting people be who they are." It's worth noting that several people shared stories with highly positive emotions about moments in which cultural institutions felt transcendent.

Museums were often top-of-mind when people shared these stories, and many initially brought up the larger, nationally prominent museums in their community. Perhaps these were an easy starting point for conversation; one person noted that "the biggest organizations make the biggest noise," and, as such, were visited most frequently.



I think a museum is the best place to go if you want to understand humanity and yourself. You can look at a painting, but I'd also look at people, and see which painting they gravitate to. Museums cross cultures and eras. There's art and color, photography, insight."



venues, burlesque shows, and drag shows (Some of these spaces, such as places of worship, had not been included in the first wave of the Culture + Community quantitative survey. Our initial debriefs after our interviews for this qualitative study informed our colleagues' design of the second wave of the survey, helping make the lists of cultural spaces and activities more comprehensive). Many participants framed these kinds of environments as providing opportunities to look outward on the world or bring outside, larger perspectives into yourself, resulting in a deeper connection with oneself and sometimes others. The few people we spoke with who work professionally in the arts were even more likely to note how seeing and reflecting on other perspectives in the world helped them refine their own artistic approaches.

Some people we spoke with had attended or participated in digital activities during the pandemic, and a number of these were hosted by cultural institutions. However, a majority framed digital engagement as a placeholder for the "real," in-person activities, and some avoided digital content entirely. Others considered these kinds of activities a valuable lifeline to mitigate the effects of boredom during the pandemic, helping keep people connected, creative, and engaged. This finding offers another point of difference with the Culture + Community Wave 1 survey findings, where Black respondents reported



I listen to poetry readings online. I'm also able to join sessions and still have that feeling of in-person, because the poet is able to present themselves and shine light through their words, no matter whether they are in person or on Zoom. It's live, and because I like writing I'm able to connect with them."



But museums weren't the only spaces they associated with that sort of creativity; we heard stories about a wide range of places and events that enable it, including art fairs, local galleries, zoos, botanic gardens, national parks, amusement parks, film festivals, music festivals, concerts, food festivals, wine festivals, city festivals, movies, jazz clubs, places of worship, science programs, fashion shows, stand-up

higher levels of experimentation with new types of digital activities than respondents generally. However, it's important to note the different timing of these research phases. While the Wave 1 survey findings were collected early in the pandemic, these qualitative interviews were conducted almost a year later, as vaccines were becoming available and before the emergence of the Delta variant – when it appeared likely that in-person activities would resume in the near future. Almost everyone we interviewed yearned

for that return to in-person connection, and many described digital cultural activities as missing a critical ingredient even when they're positive experiences overall – ingredients like the physical space or setting, the holistic experience of seeing art in three dimensions, and especially the presence of other people sharing and shaping that experience. Without those ingredients, the pleasurable and valuable sense of seeing the world from a different perspective was harder to achieve, so digital content was no match for in-person cultural engagement. That being said, some people did describe having participated in live digital experiences that felt comparable to in-person experiences and provided moments of connection and shared emotionality (see quote above). Others noted that they engaged

with online content in order to support the artists. And a few who were themselves artists mentioned using digital avenues to expand their opportunities in auditioning and connecting with other artists.

For many, the pandemic was a time when they could focus on deepening connections with close friends and family through shared creative moments or activities.

A number of people we spoke with said creative activities were an important focal point for interactions with close friends and family during the pandemic, allowing them to find a shared sense of significance. The collaborative activity could be a new recipe, a card game, a renovation project, or even just the creativity of conversational banter. Participants mentioned similar connective activities they had done

before Covid (e.g., paint-and-sip parties, crocheting groups, book groups), but noted that the pandemic had helped them see the value of such activities more clearly. It also led to experimentation, as people tried to find ways of doing those kinds of activities virtually in order to stay connected. For example, one participant reimaged a paint-and-sip party online by buying and shipping blank canvases to friends, who then used Zoom and Facetime to share their works-in-progress while they talked. Others found ways to connect around creativity even if they didn't both work together in the creation: making a quilt for a family member, growing and cooking food for neighbors, or making and giving away buttons with positive messages (see quotes at left). All of these examples mix creativity with elements of practicality, wellness, and communal consciousness.

Over this last year, I've been making art for others. That week of George Floyd, we had an especially hard week. I remember I sent out buttons to everyone with affirmative messages. I needed that extra connection. I realize its impact more now."

From my own garden I've sliced the squash and sprinkled kosher salt and pressure cooked it, then gave it away to different people and let them see what good food tasted like. I also crochet and make blankets – I give them to older people who are on wheelchairs, and they put it on their legs or lap. My neighbor had a stroke and I gave her one, and I see her with it."

A number of participants pursued creative activities as a contribution to the future, by ensuring that things that are meaningful in the present are available to future generations.

Several interviewees noted the importance of documenting important events and family history to pass along to future generations. For some, this was about countering the pandemic's disruption of family cohesion by passing on specific stories and traditions, such as beloved food recipes or memories of

My granddad kept a journal every year and I have one for the year I was born. I feel like I know a little piece of his life because of that. I have been trying to keep a journal for my son about how life is right now."

ancestors (see quotes at left and below). For others, creativity was a way of documenting and celebrating the racial reckoning and Black Lives Matter movement. One participant who photographs local social-justice events told us, "There are so many things happening in my neighborhood; I want to make sure there is a



One thing I did start is my own cookbook, because so many of the things I make, just the family knows about it. So many of people have asked, what's that recipe? When I cook, I'll take a picture of it and write it. I want to carry it on. When I'm not here, then they'll have it."

Several spoke about creativity and the arts as key to creating sustained societal dialogue that could foster social change.

Perhaps the deepest notion of creativity participants discussed was the importance of creativity in fostering emotional and spiritual health at a community level, helping to feed people's souls and build stronger communities. Some shared stories with us about cultural and community workers or organizations that sponsored moments of creative connection-making for large groups. One described an event that was about therapeutic processing and shared empathy: attendees stood around a bonfire

and were invited by an artist to burn "whatever needs to be released" – to let things go and not continue carrying negative emotions.



A lot of activists and groups are trying hard to strengthen a neighborhood through monetary support, but also emotionally and spiritually. I've seen different artists organize a yoga group at a park. I've seen folks really organize around urban farming. All last year, and before last year, there have been so many murals that have been legally contracted, some with political statements, social statements, all over Atlanta, and it's so amazing to see."

Other participants observed that creativity plays a central role in shifting people's attitudes and thereby changing the world. Because it opens the door to imagining things that didn't exist before, creativity can be a catalyst for innovation, progress, and social change. One participant enthused about sci-fi books and the power of the people who envision them: "I feel like those people move society forward. You get to imagine this world." Another noted the importance of having networks of creative people in society, because when creatives come together, they inspire each other to push boundaries. Some emphasized the important role that Black artists play in highlighting and reframing Black narratives and perspectives in the world, creating a rippling impact of individual creativity at a community level (see quote at left).



There's a unique way that artists can contribute to society. It's not just for fun, but something of absolute necessity, especially for Black artists or people of color. Think about what Amanda Gorman expressed at Biden's inauguration through words that people were able to digest in that form, that perhaps they weren't able to previously. It crosses barriers and breaks down barriers, and at the same time, it's a healing process, because you're creating it for yourself and others."

Strategic extensions

To help readers of this report reflect on how the findings may be applicable in their own contexts, we share some potential extensions and strategic questions here. These draw on the interview findings but also go beyond them, bringing in our own experience and perspectives as researchers in the arts and culture sector (and other fields) as well as our discussions with the community-connected advisors about this study.

1. The current study suggests that creativity is an inherent part of being human. But while people don't need help being creative, culture-and-community organizations and funders may be missing opportunities to validate and celebrate community members' creative actions, or to connect them with others who have similar kinds of creativity. **What would it look like for more culture-and-community practitioners to do this work?** In many cases, personal creativity is linked closely to self-care, connection (in multiple senses), and overall well-being. And there's a wide spectrum of creativity already in play. Providing more programs and experiences that validate, amplify, and extend those varied forms of creativity could contribute directly to important outcomes for both individuals and communities. Some practitioners might consider broadening the definitions of creativity they work with, while others may want to experiment with new ways of connecting "everyday creativity" with the professional, presentational experiences they offer.
2. Non-professional, "everyday" creativity is in part about imagining new possibilities, and as some participants in this research suggest, it's crucial to social change and healthier communities. **How can culture-and-community practitioners create a bridge from creativity to positive community impact?** Findings in this study suggest that there may be a need to think differently about the definition, value, and outcomes of creativity. Not just artists but all kinds of creators, professional and everyday, are engaged in the work of envisioning new possibilities and imagining alternate versions of the world. Involving and empowering them in roles, domains, and institutions of all kinds could be a powerful engine of healing and progress.
3. Digital experiences of culture are, for the participants in this study, rarely preferable to in-person engagement. But they also offer new possibilities in terms of accessibility and reach. **How could culture-and-community practitioners better navigate this tension?** Online arts and culture offerings are generally considered poor substitutes for in-person experiences – yet we heard that they were a valuable lifeline during the pandemic, helping keep people connected, creative, and engaged. Moreover, the artists and organization leaders we spoke with as advisors to this study noted the importance of digital programs in ensuring physical and financial accessibility for people with disabilities and people with lower incomes. The current experiential limitations of online offerings may be offset by big gains in accessibility and reach. There's also room for digital experiences to evolve to become more distinct from in-person experiences and more valuable to users, e.g., by better incorporating social connection, fostering individual or collective creativity, and facilitating civic or social reimagination.

Summary

In the months that followed George Floyd's murder, words like healing and self-care have been heard frequently in the arts and culture sector, especially in arts philanthropy, and artists, musicians, and creative placemakers who view their work in those terms became more visible. These concepts also emerged naturally in our conversations, and in this section we highlight how Black and African American people are taking care of themselves – often in relation to culture, creativity, and human connection.

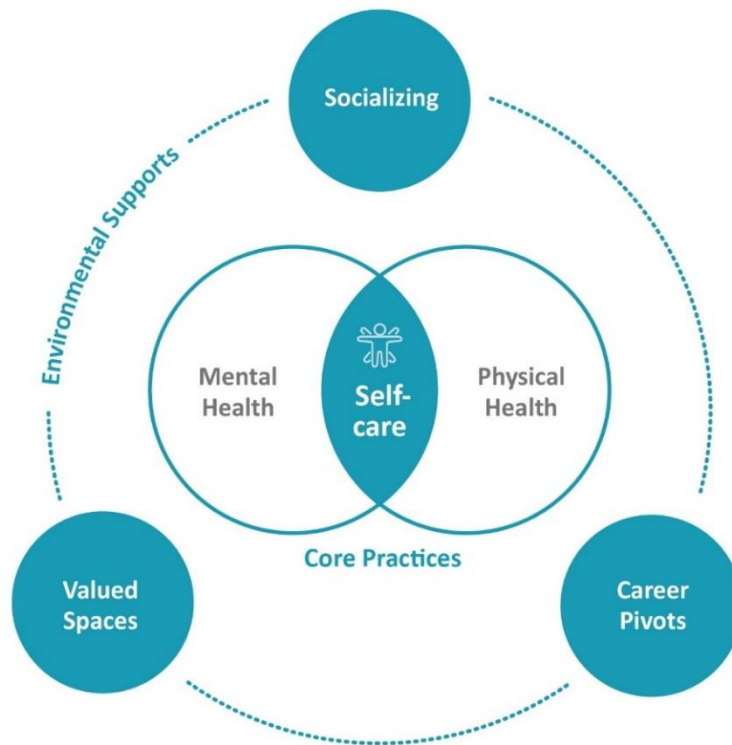
1. During the pandemic, many participants have been **focusing on their mental health** to mitigate the negativity and challenges of the national moment.
2. For some, the pandemic has been a time to **attend in new ways to their physical health**, including through exercise and food.
3. A number of participants regularly **brought themselves into peaceful and healing environments** that could directly support mental, physical, and communal well-being.
4. For many, self-care meant **making meaningful connections** with family, friends, and community members.
5. Some participants took care of themselves by **reflecting on their future and renewing or changing their career plans** – which may lead to significant life pivots for a few.

Introduction

Without much prompting by us, most participants made wellness a central focus during these conversations. Many shared stories of actively exploring, prioritizing, or re-prioritizing their well-being during the past year. The activities that they framed as self-care varied widely, but they were linked by the theme of “being intentional” and “keeping everything balanced” in a challenging time. In the model below, we share key relationships between the findings of this chapter. We heard about activities that represent core self-care practices, which enable both mental and physical health (e.g., getting exercise, going to therapy, creative expression). Many also shared examples of key environmental contexts that

surround and support self-care practices (e.g., valued spaces, socializing, making career pivots); see Figure 4. As explored in the previous section, creative and artistic activities played a major role for almost everyone we spoke with; things like cooking, photography, writing, singing, dancing, playing an instrument, etc. were often described as directly or indirectly related to self-care. In this chapter, we explore how creativity and creative expression fit into a broader sense of personal and social health.

Fig 4. A qualitative model of self-care core practices and environmental supports.



It's important to note that many participants experienced the pandemic as an opportunity as well as a challenge. Despite the emotional and financial stresses, they were grateful for this period because it allowed them to rest and reset their priorities. As one put it, this time has been "a global comma," a pause that allows for "inward sanctity for peace and presence."

Individual Practices

During the pandemic, many participants have been focusing on their mental health to mitigate the negativity and challenges of the national moment.

A number of people noted the importance of mental health during a time of stress in their personal lives and negativity at the national level; they mentioned going to therapy, practicing meditation, and



I'm in therapy. I do that every two weeks. You know the whole things with Black people and therapy being taboo, [my church] did a whole thing on mental health, let's make it normal. Every two weeks I've talked to my therapist I talk about what's going on, and I probably entertain her as well. All of that has helped me maintain where I am."



I lost my job because of the pandemic, and I'm working now. But having those long periods of time where you could just go slower, it allowed for me to rapidly change in a year. I got those quiet moments which you usually don't have. [Before] I was working full time and going to school full time. I didn't have time to think about how I'm navigating the world and how I want to see myself in the future."



Fasting or religious activities, they just give me time to reflect, especially because my schedule is super busy. Those moments when I can be one with myself, or be one with nature, have peace in the moment, is really important to me."



I write poetry. I'll write reflections on my day, and I'll express my frustrations through writing."

spiritual rituals or reflection. Several referred to therapy being taboo in the Black community, yet they and other participants were currently going to therapy or had gone in the past, suggesting that that taboo has eroded somewhat. One participant mentioned traumatic events they had been through earlier in their life and the subsequent pressure they felt to be strong for their children and family. For that person, therapy allowed them space to be vulnerable and cared for. Meditation was another self-care activity mentioned, most commonly by people inclined toward spirituality, and was described as a way to "be aware, acknowledge, and learn about being in the now...especially when so much is happening all at once." For some, meditation was a formalized practice, while for others it was highly informal. One participant had discovered a digital meditation group for women of color during the pandemic, which became a valuable way to connect with others and process emotions together.

People also connected to their religion or spirituality during the pandemic: "getting back on track spiritually" as one put it, or relying more on God to help them get through this time. A number of participants mentioned specific activities that their church had sponsored to help support mental health, such as a discussion

group that met over Zoom during the pandemic in which members developed vision boards for their next steps and life aspirations.

As discussed in the previous chapter, many people engaged in creative or artistic activities like photography, writing, or playing an instrument, and these were often explicitly framed as self-care strategies. "Sometimes I practice art as a form of self-care," said one participant, "whether I'm singing, dancing, or painting my nails." These kinds of activities helped people counter negative feelings, use each day intentionally, and deepen their sense of self. One form of creativity that many people shared

toward this end was in writing, particularly and recording thoughts and emotions during that pandemic. Writing can be a way to express frustrations or hopes, and it can be a creative method of recording experiences during this time (see quote).

For some, the pandemic has been a time to attend in new ways to their physical health, including through exercise and food.

In addition to their mental health, people were also prioritizing their physical well-being during the pandemic. Several mentioned walking and hiking to increase their activity-level during the pandemic, and for some this was an opportunity to begin new routines with new goals: “getting steps in,” “working out,” “getting healthier, losing some weight,” “taking care of my skin,” as we heard from various



It’s very confining. I have three teenagers. It can be very stressful having everyone in the same house. I think it’s just about doing just little things, like going for a walk around the community.”

participants. They also discussed either cooking more during the pandemic or changing their diet, sometimes describing the reprioritization of cooking and diet as a time of experimentation (“I’ve been trying more vegan foods”) and sometimes as a means of working through stress (“I stress-cook and stress-bake a lot of times”).

Environmental supports

A number of participants regularly brought themselves into peaceful and healing environments that could directly support mental, physical, and communal well-being.

Visiting spaces that contribute to a sense of inner peace was an important part of mental and physical well-being for the people we spoke with. A number described spiritual or religious buildings and their grounds in this way, regardless of whether they belonged to that religion; being in these spaces provides a therapeutic opportunity for both beauty and reflection. One person described creating such



There’s a museum that I like, and it [held] a grieving session. It was stressful, but collective grieving was really great... Two artists facilitated it, and it was on Zoom. It was thoughtfully done. There was voice and meditation, there was collective singing and chant. And they would put the name of someone you were thinking of, who’d passed away, or you were holding space for... You have to grieve to get over something, and you have to acknowledge it.”

an environment at home by making an altar to honor a recently deceased loved one. These spaces could also be virtual, such as with online church gatherings or gaming groups. Several also mentioned the unique role that arts and culture organizations and spaces play in bringing people together to connect, process emotions, grieve, and heal – a role that’s especially important during times that require collective processing, and can be either physical or virtual (see quote at left). This finding echoes important conclusions from the 2020 survey data, in which we noted that Black, Latinx, Native American, and multiracial respondents were more likely than

other groups to want arts and culture organizations to help the community “heal, grieve, and process our emotions.”¹⁸

For many, self-care meant making meaningful connections with family, friends, and community members.

We heard many comments about socializing with family and friends and rekindling old connections, sometimes brought about by necessity but also often framed as an opportunity for caring and growth. “I

“We were always just catching each other in passing, at bedtime, or maybe breakfast time. Having a solid three months to come together as a family, and even planning how we’ll handle it if someone catches Covid, it brought my family together.”

appreciate the aspect of being able to bond with my family,” said one participant; “I’m getting to know them in ways that I didn’t know.” For some, technology played a key role in helping them keep those connections active (as we also found in the 2020 survey).

“[At the George Floyd protest] we walked like twenty, thirty blocks... People were really kind, they brought their own signs, shirts that said BLM. Different Black-owned companies were passing out food, pink lemonade... I felt like I was supporting the cause. It was a nice way to be as a community in a peaceful way.”

Some also described moments of engagement with their larger community that contributed to both individual and collective wellness – including participating in protests, which they described as timely, meaningful, and emotional experiences. One interviewee recalled feeling “overwhelmed” after the murder of George Floyd, then attending a protest that helped her feel at least somewhat better, thanks to a sense of solidarity and collective expression (see quote at left).

Some participants took care of themselves by reflecting on their future and renewing or changing their sense of purpose — which may lead to significant life pivots for a few.

During the pandemic, career shifts and new business opportunities were another critical priority for some people we spoke with, often as ways of finding work environments more conducive to their well-being. A few were considering major shifts in their career plans, either because they’d had more time to reflect during the pandemic or due to stresses in their current jobs that had emerged or intensified over

“My parents started to get a business license using the extra money they got from the unemployment, because sadly, the money from unemployment has been more lucrative. Our family was able to come together to finally make some real wealth, to scrape ourselves out of this generational debt.”

the past year (e.g., being one of the only people of color on staff). One participant described how their family was able to use pandemic-era support funds to establish their own family business, something they had desired previously but not had the time or financial resources to plan and launch (see quote).

¹⁸ Benoit-Bryan et al., *Centering the picture*, page 16. <https://sloverlinett.com/insights/centering-the-picture-the-role-of-race-ethnicity-in-cultural-engagement/>

Strategic Extensions

To help readers of this report reflect on how the findings may be applicable in their own contexts, we share some potential extensions and strategic questions here. These draw on the interview findings but also go beyond them, bringing in our own experience and perspectives as researchers in the arts and culture sector (and other fields) as well as our discussions with the community-connected advisors about this study (see Introduction, page 16).

1. Participants in this research spoke of self-care as something essential to their lives, not superficial or an add-on. **What would it look like for more culture-and-community organizations to make self-care a core programmatic or experiential frame?** Self-care practices have a particularly deep importance for Black people, given historical inequities that Black communities have faced – and continue to face – in the U.S. In the words of poet and activist Audre Lorde, “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.” For the people we spoke with, there are already deep links between self-care, creativity, and connection as well as powerful resonances among individual wellness, arts and culture experiences, and self-expression. How might the field build more intentionally and creatively on those connections and use them to support both personal and collective healing and well-being?
2. The pandemic may be spurring public recognition, questioning, and reimagining of pre-pandemic habits and norms around self- and community-level care. **How could culture-and-community practitioners be a bigger part of this reimagining, avoid a return to pre-pandemic norms, and recognize the importance of individual and collective self-care?** Some organizations, practitioners, and funders are already centering the work of healing, balance, and equitable access in various ways, while others could make a stronger commitment to that goal. Findings from this research reveal a range of reasons to consider integrating individual and social processing and other therapeutic approaches into cultural experiences, both digitally and in person. Similar thinking could be applied to supporting artists and other culture-sector workers and creators, for example through safe and accessible facilities and spaces.
3. The participants in this research are already using and experiencing all kinds of cultural programs – institutional and informal, in-person and digital – for self-care and well-being. This suggests that self-care and well-being can easily co-exist with artistic and cultural spaces and missions. **How could culture-and-community organizations meet genuine needs in their communities by embracing a connection between creativity and well-being?** For the people we spoke with, cultural spaces are, in part, refuges: they’re often viewed and used as therapeutic, meditative, spiritual, and/or psychological tools. Indeed, many artists are working with those concepts and bringing new creativity to bear on the outcomes of mental health, social connection, and community well-being. How can the field learn from, and work more closely with, such artists and innovators and with other kinds of social-sector organizations already doing that work? How can they build those intentions and outcomes more overtly into their programs and places?



findings & EXTENSIONS

Trustworthiness

Summary

We wanted to explore trustworthiness and trust not only because Black and African American respondents in the 2020 survey expressed a higher-than-average need for “trusted information during the pandemic,” but also because the racial reckoning has shone a new light on questions of trust throughout the culture-and-community sector – though in different ways for small, community-connected organizations and larger institutions. We wanted to learn about what trust and trustworthiness look and feel like for our participants, and how they’re earned and sensed in the current moment.

1. For many of the people we spoke with, **doing personal research and evaluating the evidence are instrumental** in judging trustworthiness.
2. Most saw trust as **dynamic and provisional**, subject to change as new evidence or contrasting information arrives.
3. When it comes to institutional change, **meaningful, consistent action speaks louder than words** to these participants.
4. Many shared examples of organizations earning trust by **meeting immediate community needs during the recent crises** – but few of these were arts and culture organizations.

Introduction

In conversations and research about Black people and trust – which have lately centered on trust in vaccines, doctors, and medical institutions – the focus is usually on “Black people’s mistrust,” “Black people’s lack of trust” or the “trust gap for Black people.”^{19,20} Such language places the burden of trusting mostly on Black people, as if a lack of trust were Black people’s shortcoming, and it obscures both the role that institutions and systems have played in violating Black people’s trust in the first place

¹⁹ Vegari, M. J. (2021) Financial institutions should repair their trust gap with Black communities. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. <https://www.inquirer.com/opinion/commentary/investment-wealth-stocks-racial-gap-black-americans-philadelphia-20210224.html>

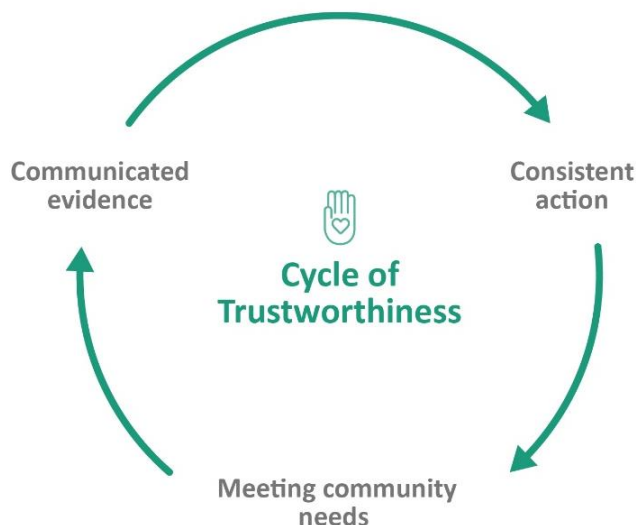
²⁰ Wan, W. (2020) Coronavirus vaccines face trust gap in Black and Latino communities, study finds. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/11/23/covid-vaccine-hesitancy/>

and the question of what they can do to earn it now. In other words, it misses the concept of trustworthiness – and so does much of the literature on trust, in which that word is hardly mentioned.²¹ In a 2020 opinion piece in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, though, Warren et al. argue that trustworthiness must precede trust:

Our country has yet to comprehend adequately that overcoming racism is not primarily the responsibility of Black people; the racist ideas and practices that constitute today’s “structural racism” were created, and have been sustained, primarily by White people. **It would be wrong, as well as ineffective, to ask Black communities to simply be more trusting.** Clinicians, investigators, and pharmaceutical companies must provide convincing evidence—sufficient to overcome the extensive historical evidence to the contrary—that they are, in fact, trustworthy... What can we do to earn and deserve increased trust?²²

That philosophy informed our approach here: we wanted to shift the question from individual and/or collective “trust” to the “trustworthiness” of people, institutions, and systems. We use the word “trustworthiness” in this chapter to refer to factors external to our participants that build and sustain their trust, and the word “trust” to talk about the end result of this process: what is built and sustained through the actions of trustworthiness. The diagram above outlines three key means explored in the findings by which organizations and institutions can project trustworthiness, framed as an ongoing cycle (Figure 5).

Fig 5. The cycle of trustworthiness leads to trust in the community.



²¹ Hardin, R. (2002). *Trust and trustworthiness*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

²² Warren, R. C., Forrow, L., Hodge, D. A., & Truog, R. D. (2020). Trustworthiness before trust – Covid-19 vaccine trials and the Black community. *The New England Journal of Medicine*. <https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMp2030033>

Our interviews broadly highlight the importance of trustworthiness. In some of the interviews, participants brought up the concepts of trust and trustworthiness themselves, which allowed us to follow up with questions about what it entails. We asked all interviewees about trust in general and what makes a person, organization, or institution trustworthy.

Evaluating trustworthiness

For many of the people we spoke with, doing personal research and evaluating the evidence are instrumental in judging trustworthiness.

When it comes to judging the trustworthiness of other people, places, or institutions, participants told us that they do the research and look for evidence. This evidence has to come from trustworthy sources which echoes our Wave 1 survey finding mentioned above, that Black and African American respondents were more likely than other racial and ethnic groups to select “staying informed with trusted sources of information.”²³ For some, that meant one’s immediate circle of family and friends and one’s immediate community, who are perceived as dependable and therefore unlikely to let you down. One participant mentioned that they lived in a historically redlined community and were unable to depend on the city to provide services during emergencies. Their neighborhood suffered from multiple gas leaks and, despite calling the city multiple times, never received assistance until the gas leaks led to explosions – one of which killed a child in the neighborhood. Based on examples like that, residents of the neighborhood learned to get information from and to each other when challenges occur, and to count only on each other to solve problems. Similarly, in more positive circumstances, participants spoke about how helpful it was to be able to rely on their circle’s suggestions and endorsements of things to do, local businesses to support, etc. Others mentioned doing research online and reading reviews for evidence of a good reputation and trustworthiness before making decisions; others sought out expert knowledge, whether in their immediate circles or beyond, or relied on established national institutions like the New York Times or the CDC – both of which were mentioned as trustworthy sources of information based on their history and expertise.

However, even with all these go-to sources, the people we spoke with still cross-reference and get second opinions before deciding whether an organization, place, or information source is trustworthy. That skepticism was particularly evident in the area of news, where participants said they consult

multiple outlets to triangulate a fuller picture (see quote at left), and where sources outside the U.S. were considered more accurate by some: “In Europe they say the truth. If it’s ugly, it’s ugly.”



I’d go to CNN and MSNBC and then Fox to see what they are saying on the other side. To be honest, all three of them lie.”

²³ Benoit-Bryan et al., *Centering the picture*. <https://sloverlinett.com/insights/centering-the-picture-the-role-of-race-ethnicity-in-cultural-engagement/>

Most saw trust as dynamic and provisional, subject to change as new evidence or contrasting information arrives.

As part of doing research and seeking second opinions, a number of participants noted the importance of updating knowledge and attitudes based on new evidence. Trust must be earned and supported through actions; not only is it built over time, it can be decreased or lost based on new or changing actions. "I think trust is an active thing, and it's constant, something that needs to be affirmed," one participant said. "It's not static, a destination on the map. You have to feed it."

Another mentioned having loved H&M as a clothing brand for years but no longer shopping there as a form of protest, since the company featured an image of a Black child-model on their online shop

wearing a shirt with racist verbiage.²⁴ This participant noted that the imagery was able to pass through multiple departments and processes before being posted online, suggesting that either no Black employees were involved in any of those processes or that input from Black employees was not listened to (see quote at left). In this instance and many others we heard about, interviewees mentioned "taking my business elsewhere." And some noted that social-media sharing and prominent news sources are important ways of learning about and helping spread these protests against problematic behavior.²⁵

Fewer participants talked about doing similar research into the trustworthiness of arts and culture organizations, but those who did made it clear that such organizations aren't exempt from accountability. Some spoke of the large cultural institutions as culpable in problematic dynamics, particularly the long-term lack of representation by people of color on their staffs and behind the scenes. Moreover, interviewees assume that what they *do* know about those issues at cultural organizations is just the tip of the iceberg. As one said, "The first time you catch someone do something is not the first time they did it."

It's important to add that, even among participants who mentioned problematic issues

If you just had one person of color in your artist room [at H&M], that wouldn't have happened. Change is not going to happen overnight. But it needs to be a consistent thing. What are you doing consistently?"

I go to the [large art museum], half this stuff is stolen. This is not trusted, this is booty that I'm looking at... Does that make sense? I don't trust you. This ain't yours. I'll remember... Also, how many people in leadership positions represent people like me? You're not paying people correctly. There are layers at these institutions that don't solicit trust."

Traveling internationally...when you go to museums, you see what you are told in the U.S. is not true. The narrative of African race is much more out there than in the U.S. If you go to Sweden to the Nobel Prize Museum, [you'll be] blown away by how many Brown people have won the Nobel prize. There are a whole bunch of us across the globe... I went to Mozart's house, and I saw how he played alongside Black classical composers. Look at all this greatness we don't talk about [in this country]."

²⁴ Stack, L. (2018). H&M apologizes for 'monkey' image featuring Black child. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/08/business/hm-monkey.html>

²⁵ Indeed, the literature on organizational trust shows that widely publicized organizational practices are an important influence on the perceived trustworthiness of organizations; see Kramer, R., & Tyler, T. (1996). *Trust in organizations: Frontiers of theory and research*. SAGE Publications, Inc. <https://www.doi.org/10.4135/9781452243610> (page 8)

at cultural organizations, the lack of trustworthiness wasn't in itself a barrier to attendance (see strategic extensions, below, for further discussion). People had varying rationales as to why they continue attending certain cultural organizations despite not finding them trustworthy. One noted that being present and visible in the audience as a Black person or asking for accountability collectively could help shape the institution's priorities: "If we show up and we're there, then they have an incentive and a prerogative to put on shows that also reflect our realities...If I don't show up as an individual, it doesn't make a difference for the institution. But, if my voice is part of a broader voice, then maybe it's going to be heard more."

Factors of trustworthiness

When it comes to institutional change, meaningful, consistent action speaks louder than words.

For many, the trustworthiness of organizations – including cultural and community organizations – is signaled through consistent actions rather than words. No one we spoke with viewed the Black Lives Matter statements, equity-and-inclusion statements, or posted commitments to racial justice as evidence of trustworthiness or change on their own. Rather, such statements were considered empty promises unless actions were taken to back up the words. Several participants mentioned needing to

know who the board members and other decision-makers were in an organization in order to determine whether those commitments were genuine or performative. Similarly, many spoke about wanting to see increased diversity and Black representation at every organizational level, both as a substantive sign of change and as a means to more equitable and authentic programming (see quotes at left).

Yet several participants also cautioned against tokenism in those internal changes. Too often, one noted, organizations and their leaders rely on tokenized Black people: a Black person is selected for a role, then they become the face of everything diversity-related for that institution (or even that whole field). So for the people we spoke with, seeing one Black person in a visible role in an institution doesn't always mean that the organization is working toward meaningful change; instead, it can convey that they prioritize optics and have a "quota of one" for Black employees.

Gestures can be hollow without actual action. I still want to know that you've made concentrated efforts to diversify your board and staff. Put out a press release, you're doing it. Put it on a billboard. That's fine if you're [actually] doing it."

Some of these organizations, they've posted these Black Lives Matter [statements], but I don't think that's true in some situations. Because you look at their staff, their board... If your mission is serving the general population, then that needs to be represented on the staff. You need that cultural expertise on your staff in order to be effective at cultural presentation. A lot of organizations don't acknowledge that, or they only do in front of funders."

These sentiments were accompanied by realism. Many spoke of valuing progress over perfection; they acknowledged that institutional change is a long process that requires consistent commitment, and that mistakes will be made along the way. The important thing, several told us, is how institutions acknowledge, learn, and grow from these mistakes. They talked about the concept of “grace” and “allowing for grace” when problems do occur, in part because they assume some degree of ignorance

on the part of those who lead institutions and are willing to give them the benefit of the doubt. “To some amount we have to give people grace,” explained one participant. “In the Black community, we have these conversations because it’s our lives. For some people, they never had them.”

The same principles emerged in people’s stories about their visits to, and relationships with, arts and culture organizations. In the case of larger, national-destination cultural institutions like museums and concert halls, one of the most

common trust-reducing elements was their connection to historical injustices. Cultural spaces like these are not considered outside of the larger structures of oppression. As noted above, some participants mentioned that artifacts in museums were sometimes stolen from Africa (and other continents and cultures) for the enjoyment and benefit of predominantly White countries and people. One person characterized this cognitive dissonance as the “double consciousness of Black and brown people”²⁶ in such settings: they really enjoy certain prominent museums, yet they always have at the back of their mind the realities of how these spaces came to be.

As the quote above suggests, participants told us that an organizational acknowledgment of problematic histories might not alleviate that cognitive dissonance and paradoxically might deepen it, if it is not followed by actions. On the one hand, “addressing the past is part of the process of building a better future,” as that same participant noted. But on the other hand, it raises expectations of action and change. And people are less inclined to give that grace to large cultural institutions with large

endowments and ample resources than to organizations with smaller budgets. The former have the time and resources to make their commitments a reality, so any lack of action partly belies the authenticity of those commitments.

We did hear about some cultural organizations that feel trustworthy to our interviewees, particularly those that are viewed as responsive

It’s very difficult to change [large art museum], especially with age and the tradition of that place. They had a 150-year retrospective that started talking about how it’s been exclusive towards certain communities. And it feels weird going to see these paintings knowing that the history behind these paintings and all the stolen pieces... It definitely takes away from the experience in some way.”

I like the more intimate [theater] venue, a smaller size. At some of the regional or local theatres, I feel really connected to the people and theatre in a different way than at the larger ones. I’ve gone to the larger ones, and I do like the social aspect of it, but I don’t get that same kind of personal connection to the people or even the actors. I feel like I’m just observing it versus feeling like I’m in it.”

²⁶ This participant was echoing W.E.B. Du Bois’s influential phrase, “double consciousness,” about the dualism inherent in being Black in a white-supremacist country: “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.” See Du Bois, W. E. B. 1. (1968). *The souls of black folk: essays and sketches*. Chicago, A. G. McClurg, 1903. New York: Johnson Reprint Corp.

and as meeting needs in their communities (see next finding). Some interviewees mentioned small, neighborhood-based cultural organizations and events, and described them as providing a greater intimacy, spontaneity, and sense of dialogue than their larger counterparts, attributes that help create a



Outdoor festivals feel more magical because they're outside. I think that outdoor festivals, even giant ones, feel more like a community has come together, almost like a big block party."



I like all artists. Whether they're Black or not they are telling a story. But I do typically occupy as many Black-owned spaces and [support] Black artists as much as possible."

sense of trustworthiness (see quotes). Mid-sized and larger organizations or experiences were also sometimes viewed in those terms if they, too, felt responsive and representative, or provided a sense of anonymity to blend in and get immersed in the experience.

Among the organizations we heard about were Black-led arts and culture organizations, specifically small organizations working with Black communities. These were acknowledged for doing meaningful work despite significant financial constraints. As one participant put it, "Any Black arts center is probably going to be underfunded, so there's only so much that they can do. I wish they would actually build a system

that actually reaches out to Black people, not just Black people that already know about it". Because participants recognized that funding in the arts is unequally distributed, some felt it was personally important to support these kinds of organizations.

Many shared examples of organizations earning trust by meeting immediate community needs during the recent crises — but few of these were arts and culture organizations.

To further explore one of the Culture + Community survey questions, we asked participants if they'd seen any organizations really show up for the community during times of crisis. They mentioned food shelters, homeless shelters, and other social and community enterprises that serve specific needs, and many brought up organizations of other types that had pivoted to be able to meet emergent needs: a basketball arena in one city turning into a mass voting site; food companies giving away food; a bank offering seminars on how to establish credit or apply for a PPP loan and connecting Black-owned businesses to each other and non-Black owned businesses.



I trust my church because of my pastor. As I got older, and seeing different churches, and seeing for myself which preachers were real and which weren't... The church we're at now, he's real, so I can trust him. I see what he does for the community. Anything. If people's bills need paying, if you're hungry, if you need food. Members of the church and non-members too. They do a lot."

For some, a *failure* to show up in this way during challenging times changed their minds about the trustworthiness of institutions. For example, several participants had become disillusioned about organized religion and churches, noting a lack of action from the churches around them. One person, for example, illustrated this point with the rhetorical question, "A lot of megachurches have gone silent. What have you



I went to the [large arts institution] recently... It was kind of cool to see that they were doing something that was including communities other than older White people... I say 'cool' hesitantly, because why isn't that just the default?"



There was an evening event, with family programming at the beginning, then a dance DJ thing. They're definitely more conscious of... a lot of different kinds of people. If we only see White people in a cultural organization, that's not because only White people are interested, it's because the programming is only really for older White people. They were [now] really proactive in engaging other parts of the community... thinking of people as a whole and the intersections."

all done for the community?" Others trusted some but not all churches, based on evidence of authenticity and action (see quote on previous page).

Arts and culture organizations didn't come up as often as other organizations in this context, but we did hear a few examples of museums and arts venues that had engaged with their communities creatively and productively during the crises (these were primarily larger cultural organizations). Participants were quick to note that those communities hadn't been prioritized until recently (see quotes at left).

It's important to add that several of our advisors from community-connected organizations described how they had to pivot quickly at the beginning of the crisis to adjust for what the community needed. One mentioned switching their organization's services to support parents whose childcare needs had become even more pronounced due to the pandemic. Another

whose organization works with artists mentioned that, although they closed their doors to visitors, they offered space to artists who needed it to continue their creative practices. Another made care bags for artists who were struggling and created a gathering-space where they could pick up the bags and interact with each other, albeit briefly. Yet another organization hosted a drive-through food pick-up service for everyone in the community, again allowing for socially distanced, brief but meaningful exchanges. It's possible that we didn't hear more about these kinds of direct-service activities by culture-and-community organizations in our interviews because our participants were less aware of smaller organizations than of the larger, higher-budget cultural institutions in their communities. That "visibility gap," of course, is part of the problem that smaller culture-and-community organizations face, a result of and contributor to the cycle of underinvestment and marginalization.

Strategic Extensions

To help readers of this report reflect on how the findings may be applicable in their own contexts, we share some potential extensions and strategic questions here. These draw on the interview findings but also go beyond them, bringing in our own experience and perspectives as researchers in the arts and culture sector (and other fields) as well as our discussions with the community-connected advisors about this study (see Introduction, page 16).



1. As participants in this study indicated, becoming trustworthy may take a long time, and consistent action is key. **What does it look like for culture-and-community practitioners to practice trustworthiness as an ongoing process, not as a task with an endpoint?** Trustworthiness precedes trust. It's important for culture-and-community leaders to acknowledge that the burden of trust lies on their organizations, not on the communities and people who may not trust them yet; institutions need to earn trust by behaving in ways that are trustworthy. For our participants, trust is dynamic: it can rise and fall as an organization's new actions send updated (though not always intentional) signals to its constituents. When taking actions and making decisions, it's important to consider who's in the room, who has authority, and who will be affected.
2. A strong theme in this research is that you can't "signal" trustworthiness; you have to live it. **How can culture-and-community practitioners take actions that speak louder than words?** The people we spoke with do their research, and they actively update their perceptions of an organization's trustworthiness over time. Public statements of support or commitment aren't considered evidence on their own; they're only as real as the actions, policies, and investments that follow them. It also helps to acknowledge shortcomings and show how the organization and its leaders have learned and grown from their mistakes.
3. This study indicates that attending an organization or program doesn't mean that the person attending trusts it. The people we spoke with can hold a "double consciousness" about cultural organizations' trustworthiness and experiential value. When they visit or attend some arts spaces (particularly large, well-known cultural destinations and historically significant institutions), they can enjoy the experience even though they don't have a trusting relationship with it. They're used to some amount of cognitive dissonance in these experiences: they can relish the art and overall experience even while knowing it's problematic in important ways. **How can culture-and-community practitioners measure the success of their efforts if attendance is not a good indicator of building a trustworthy relationship?** Practitioners may want to think of measuring attendance as just a starting point – and perhaps a flawed feedback loop. Additional modes of feedback are important, as is acknowledging and processing historical injustices in public ways, as a pathway to enacting and embodying trustworthiness.
4. Meeting real needs in the community and "showing up" to work alongside others is a strong indication of trustworthiness. **What does it look like for culture-and-community practitioners to show up in a consistent way?** The people we heard from in this study are quick to see the difference between organizations that are self-interested or absent during a crisis and those that join in to tackle the collective challenge. Organizations that come out of their own space or programmatic domain to support others in meeting community needs, and those that build alliances with other organizations that are already doing such work, are much more likely to earn trust. This is especially important during times of pain and change, but also in more everyday circumstances.



findings & EXTENSIONS

Welcome & belonging

Summary

Even before the pandemic and the resurgence of interest in racial equity, many culture-and-community practitioners were discussing how to make their programs and spaces more welcoming to all and how to support a sense of belonging. We hoped to contribute to that work by seeing how both welcome and belonging came up organically in these interviews, and what the relationship between them is.

1. Participants clearly **distinguished between the concepts of welcome and belonging**, describing welcome as a function of the actions and attributes of a space or event and belonging as an internal feeling that can be present or absent independent of the space.
2. Many shared stories where **small acts of kindness could be mutually reinforcing**, adding up to making spaces welcoming
3. People **perceive both visible and invisible cues** in a space, and both are important in signaling welcome.
4. For many, the most welcoming spaces were those that **allowed them to express their authentic selves**.
5. When it comes to arts and culture spaces, participants expressed the **critical importance of holistic representations of Black people and Black experiences** in contributing to welcome.

Introduction

Our interviews began with the question “What has been keeping you sane this year?” and many participants spoke of moments of comfort, safety, and connection they had experienced. When we asked about the kinds of spaces and interactions that contribute to those feelings, they shared stories about feeling heard, safe, fully present, and fully themselves. Those stories are related to what we learned about self-care later in the conversations, but they also reveal ways in which spaces and experiences of all kinds, including in arts and culture, can help create a strong sense of welcome – and help set conditions that foster feelings of belonging (Figure 6, next page).

Fig. 6. Supports for belonging include welcoming spaces of culture and community, but also one's own sense of self.



Belonging is a much-studied topic in psychology^{27, 28, 29, 30, 31} and acknowledged as “a fundamental human need that all people are driven to satisfy.”³² There is less consensus on how it should be measured and how is achieved, although support and connection are widely considered important.³³ “Sense of belonging” also comes up often in the growing literature on the experiences of Black people in various contexts and spaces.³⁴ Black students at predominantly White colleges and universities, for example, reported more “stress, isolation and mistrust” than their White peers,³⁵ whereas at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), students reported higher levels of happiness, cultural congruity, and life satisfaction.³⁶ The negative experiences at the predominantly White institutions were

²⁷ Allen, K. A. (2021). *The Psychology of Belonging. (The Psychology of Everything)*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/978042932768>

²⁸ Dortch, D., & Patel, C. (2017). Black undergraduate women and their sense of belonging in STEM at predominantly white institutions. *NASPA Journal About Women in Higher Education*, 10(2), 202-215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19407882.2017.1331854>

²⁹ Hunter, C. D., Case, A. D., Joseph, N., Mekawi, Y., & Bokhari, E. (2017). The Roles of Shared Racial Fate and a Sense of Belonging With African Americans in Black Immigrants' Race-Related Stress and Depression. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 43(2), 135-158. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798415627114>

³⁰ Hunter, C. D., Case, A. D., & Harvey, I. S. (2019). Black college students' sense of belonging and racial identity. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 23(9), 950-966. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1602363>

³¹ Inzlicht, M., & Good, C. (2006). How Environments Can Threaten Academic Performance, Self-Knowledge, and Sense of Belonging. In S. Levin & C. van Laar (Eds.), *Stigma and group inequality: Social psychological perspectives* (pp. 129-150). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

³² Allen, K. A., Kern, M. L., Rozek, C. S., McInerney, D. M., & Slavich, G. M. (2021). Belonging: A review of conceptual issues, an integrative framework, and directions for future research. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 73(1), 87-102. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049530.2021.1883409>

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Booker, K. (2016). Connection and commitment: How sense of belonging and classroom community influence degree persistence for African American undergraduate women. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 28(2), 218-229. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1111140>

³⁵ Sedlacek, W. E. (1999). Black students on White campuses: 20 years of research. *Journal of College Student Development*, 40(5), 538-550.

³⁶ Constantine, M. G. & Watt, S. K. (2002). Cultural congruity, womanist identity attitudes, and life satisfaction among African American college women attending historically Black and predominantly White institutions. *Journal of College Student Development*, 43(2), 184-194.

linked to more frequent incidents of harassment and discrimination³⁷ and less support;³⁸ positive experiences were linked to “likeness” (i.e., perceived similarity between oneself and others in the environment), comfort, and tolerance.³⁹

But, as with trustworthiness and trust, it’s important not to place the burden of feeling belonging on the person interacting with a space, and instead place it on how that space supports or doesn’t support belonging. In this final section of findings, we share what we learned about the dynamics of both welcome and belonging from these fifty participants, focusing mostly on welcoming spaces because (as we learned) that is the dimension most applicable to culture and community organizations.

Welcome vs. belonging

Participants clearly distinguished between the concepts of welcome and belonging, describing welcome as a function of the actions and attributes of a space or event, and belonging as an internal feeling that can be present or absent independent of the space.



I think when you do find belonging, you find people that can hear you. No matter where you go, they’re listening to you. There’s comfort in that...they’re listening and they’re trying to understand you. There’s connection in that. We all want to connect, and we all want to be understood... You can just focus, hear, and leave any worries. It’s like, these are my people.”



At Afropunk, the festival, I feel authentically myself and like I’m safe there, because I can express all pieces of me. I think it’s being surrounded by so beauty and so much uninhibited Blackness. One year I went in a sheer top, but no one is staring at you. This is what it should be like. I feel like my body is respected and I’m still allowed to have autonomy over it even in this very intimate space.”

In the remainder of this chapter, we discuss what makes a space or experience welcoming in the eyes of people we spoke with. What leads to belonging is less straightforward, though, because participants consider it an internal, personal feeling that, in an ideal world, one carries everywhere one goes. There aren’t necessarily “spaces of belonging”; rather, “people belong anywhere and everywhere,” as one participant put it. They described belonging as an internally motivated state, experienced most consciously in moments where one feels heard and can be one’s most authentic, uninhibited, unashamed, undisturbed self (see quotes at left).

Yet they also noted that the feeling of belonging is relevant in contexts that involve being with other people; it’s a relational concept. So it’s not *entirely* internal – and that

³⁷ D’Augelli, A. R., & Hershberger, S. L. (1993). African American Undergraduates on a Predominantly White Campus: Academic Factors, Social Networks, and Campus Climate. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 62(1), 67-81. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2295400>

³⁸ Jay, G. M., & D’Augelli, A. R. (1991). Social support and adjustment to university life: A comparison of African-American and white freshmen. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 19(2), 95-108. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629\(199104\)19:2%3C95::AID-JCOP2290190202%3E3.0.CO;2-2](https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(199104)19:2%3C95::AID-JCOP2290190202%3E3.0.CO;2-2)

³⁹ Booker, K. C. (2007). Likeness, comfort, and tolerance: Examining African American adolescents’ sense of school belonging. *The Urban Review*, 39, 301-317. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-007-0053-y>



makes it vulnerable to external threat. People shared times when their sense of belonging was inhibited in situations where they were “made to feel like I don’t belong.” In those cases, participants said, they tried to “reclaim” the space or experience so they could create their own space of belonging anyway. For most of the people we spoke with, feeling a sense of belonging was simply easier and more likely in environments that were welcoming. Welcoming can affirm and support belonging.

Factors of Welcome

Many shared stories where small acts of kindness could be mutually reinforcing, adding up to make a space highly welcoming.

What makes a space or experience welcoming? Participants shared examples of memorably positive, albeit sometimes brief, interactions of kindness and support, such as a neighbor offering to bring groceries before a snowstorm or people saying “hi” with a smile at the supermarket. Several



[In the northern U.S.], people can walk past you or let doors close on you like it’s perfectly fine. You’re kind of cautious of people, you have your guard up. In the South, their doors are open. I was at a grocery store there, getting a case of water. A guy stopped and asked if he could [help]. I was like, oh my goodness. Southern hospitality definitely originates in the South. I miss it.”



When you ask someone in the Northeast for directions, they say, ‘turn left three blocks from here, then turn right and it’s right there.’ In Barbados, when you ask for directions they say ‘I’m going that way, let me show you where it is.’ It’s the slower pace of life. They take the time to talk to you and form that personal connection.”

interviewees spoke of the positive feeling of being vulnerable and asking for help, which for some was a relief from the ongoing weight of having to be strong. The “strong Black woman” archetype was an extra burden carried by some. Such moments of support and vulnerability were memorable and meaningful for these participants, and were associated with feeling connected, comfortable, and safe.

Several participants associated that everyday kindness with life in the American south or, similarly, the Caribbean (see quotes). Whether they currently lived in southern states or had visited the south at some point, these people spoke of a slower pace of life that allows more time and space for friendly and kindly interactions. They viewed those interactions as the difference between being in a community and being in an individualistic setting, where everyone has to fend for themselves.

People perceive both visible and invisible cues in a space, and both are important in signaling welcome.

Participants described the importance of the explicit (visible) and implicit (invisible) cues they observe and sense in places and institutions, both of which influence their perceptions of comfort, welcome, and safety. Explicit cues were physical signs that stated or conveyed a point publicly, and they could be

powerfully positive or negative. Participants mentioned Black Lives Matter signs, land acknowledgments in Zoom gatherings, and rainbow flags as examples that supported welcome, and thin blue line flags or ‘we support law enforcement’ signs as examples that conveyed the opposite.

One important explicit cue, participants said, is the diversity of the people in the space – including the presence of other Black people, both as employees and as fellow members of the public or audience. And where that presence is concentrated is telling, interviewees said. If Black people are represented



There are little cues to prime a space to be successful. When I walk into a space, I’m absorbing every element about it... You can track how the staff are treating the patrons. Do staff buy into the space? We get recruited and you see the exhaustion. I’m generally a public-facing person, so if I thought I was being taken advantage of, you could tell.”



If I walk around my community and I don’t see [symphony orchestra] hanging on billboards, but I go to a White community and people are talking about the orchestra and how the orchestra is coming to their neighborhood, it makes me feel like they don’t care about my viewership.”



What makes it feel like you don’t belong there is because no one looks like me. If you take that a step deeper, why [doesn’t anyone look like me here]?”

only in the frontline workforce and not at higher levels, this was a cue of unwelcome. And if Black employees are run down, overworked, or paid unfairly, then their resulting emotional states are clear to Black attendees and a determinant of whether that space feels welcoming.

Explicit cueing can begin well before someone enters a space. One participant who travels between neighborhoods observed that an arts organization’s advertising and venue decisions subtly cue welcome and unwelcome for different communities, which for that person revealed inequities (see quote at left).

Implicit cues, on the other hand, are more subtle but just as informative – and in some ways more so. Participants were attuned to signals that a space or organization either did not have any Black people on its staff, or that Black staff were not decision-makers. One observed that, in institutional processes in which Black people or other historically marginalized groups are not represented, “it always ends up tone-deaf.” Another mentioned being able to tell the racial/ethnic background of the person or people who had written a text, for example on a website or in a museum exhibition, especially when it was about issues of concern to Black people.

For many, the most welcoming spaces were those that allowed them to express their authentic selves.

In these conversations, participants distinguished among “Black spaces,” “predominantly White spaces,” “diverse spaces,” and “affinity spaces.” The underlying question across all these spaces was whether one could be one’s authentic self there or not, and the answer varied widely in the stories they shared.

Affinity spaces, in which people come together and connect around shared values or interests, were often cited as fostering a sense of welcome, comfort, and often belonging. Our participants didn't

“ [I want to be where] I can be my whole self in a space. I don't have to be the White-washed version of me or the best Black version of me. I feel that way with my math friends. A bunch of us go to a national math conference together and spend days learning about math and talking about math.

“ It was like a queer party performance, burlesque, poetry. They get people from the LGBTQ community performing, and it was just a bunch of queer, lesbian, and gay people cheering. Everyone was really supportive, and it was incredible.”

“ In a New York church I saw a lot of different faces. There were people who were Muslim, Black, White, everything in between. It was cool to be in a space that was multicultural and supportive of Black Lives Matter.”

“ If you have a program with all types of people, then race doesn't have to come up. The director is Hispanic, I'm Black, and three of our directors are women of color. There's no reason to have any type of racism there, is because everyone is represented.”

always specify the racial or ethnic background of the others in these spaces, just the fact that they shared values and interests – though sometimes those overlapped with background or identity. One person found this during a first-time visit to a Baptist church: “That's definitely a space I can enter and feel comfortable. I can reflect spiritually, religiously, and if I need help, I can reach out, even if I don't know them.” For others, the welcoming affinity space was a math group or a queer party/performance (see quotes).

Diverse spaces were also mentioned as places of welcome, with fewer unspoken norms and assumptions about people's backgrounds and life histories, since with more diversity there was also more room for people to get to know each other. For some, diverse spaces were characterized by solidarity and mutual support around a shared perspective. For others, diverse spaces celebrated or allowed for exposure to different perspectives and viewpoints. “To me it's important to live in a town [with] some ethnic diversity or religious diversity,” said one participant, “where, even if the classrooms aren't full of Black people, there are some Asian kids and some Jewish kids.” Cultural and artistic events that celebrate diversity were also mentioned.

Black spaces were often described by participants as those where they can express their authentic selves, where people can “just be” rather than be “the representation of” or be compared to White people. Several participants recounted experiences of feeling affirmed and in control in various Black spaces (sometimes literal places and sometimes more abstract “families,”

as in the quote on next page). One participant talked about their choice to study at an HBCU, where being Black is the norm and therefore not a factor in discrimination. Another classified our Zoom interview for this research as a Black space, because in that interview the two Black researchers were present for the conversation as the interviewer and the note-taker, which made it feel comfortable. Some also noted that Black spaces could encompass Black-led organizations and events.



Obviously, with my family, my Black family, I can be 100% myself. In some families, I recognize people can't always do that. I feel safe with my Covid family. With my ladies, my crew, my squad, I always feel super comfortable and affirmed... I feel very seen and held with my Black female therapist. In a space in which I have control over – that's important. I look at it as, everything external is out to get me, so I need things I can control, to feel held."



My family is from Saint Kitts, where everyone is Black. At least I know that if I'm getting ignored in a store, it's not because I'm Black. That's one thing I can eliminate from the calculus."



In my life, I find myself in a lot of White spaces. There's not a lot of places where I'm not acutely aware of the racial breakdown. I'm acclimated to it, but there is always a moment when I do a tally: who is in this room, ethnically or racially? I'm literally in the minority in those spaces. Do I feel unsafe in my day-to-day existence? No. But am I aware of who is in the room? Yes."



With the Black Lives Matter thing, my Caucasian friends didn't get it, they were like 'all lives matter.' I was like, you don't understand prejudice. It comes from not living it. You can sit there, read it and be sad. But if you're still living the aftereffects and some things didn't really change, your perspective is highly different."

What a "Black space" is can be very flexible, but in describing them participants emphasized how they elicit feelings of connection, comfort, and control. Even in Black spaces where the connection to others might not be as strong or deep, people still reported feeling more relaxed, since they didn't need to constantly participate in the mental gymnastics of explaining things to non-Black friends or co-workers or wondering about whether an interaction was just rude or racist (see quote about Saint Kitts at left).

In predominantly White spaces, the dynamics were different. Some participants said they still felt comfortable in some of these spaces, but with an extra level of awareness and questioning. Some noted how many Black people or people of color were in the space; for others it was the degree to which Black voices were part of the conversation and not a side-note. In predominantly White spaces, seeing that Black people were valued and cherished contributed to feelings of safety, comfort, and welcome.

One issue mentioned in connection with both Black and predominantly White spaces was colorism – which rewards proximity to Whiteness in both color and adaptability to White cultural norms. Given the history of systemic racism in the U.S. (and elsewhere), not even Black spaces were viewed by our participants as free of anti-Blackness – and the Black women we spoke with were especially attuned to this. One interviewee saw colorism in many of the recent corporate efforts around diversity and inclusion: "Covid did bring us to the Zoom conversation of 'Hey guys, we got to be a little more inclusive at the table.' Then they go and hire the lightest Black guy."

In speaking of diverse, Black, and predominantly White spaces, it's important to note that many people's lives don't exist in such clear-cut categories. We talked to many people who had multi-racial and multicultural families, so, for them, diversity started at home: "My husband is



White, my daughter is mixed,” one person told us. “I can’t really draw those lines.” Others talked about the clashing dynamics between diverse spaces and surrounding predominantly White spaces, and they noted that diverse spaces can serve as safe havens in the face of racism and community change.

When it comes to arts and culture spaces, participants expressed the critical importance of holistic representations of Black people and Black experiences in contributing to welcome.

We heard from many participants about how specific content and narratives, especially in cultural institutions, could foster welcome by including all Black people and Black experiences as part of the picture. Although seeing content made by Black creators and about Black stories was important to

participants, almost everyone we spoke with also highlighted the importance of being exposed to different experiences and perspectives, expanding their horizons, and finding shared humanity in what might seem like difference at first glance.

Relatedly, several participants spoke about the need for more holistic representation of Black people and Black experiences at arts and culture organizations. They complained about the oversaturation of Black trauma on display and wished for more variety – a wider range of authentic Black experiences and perspectives, including joy, connection, laughter, and leisure. For one interviewee, the overemphasis on Black trauma was a sign of Black experiences being filtered through a White lens, one of those implicit cues that Black people were excluded in the decision-making process. Another expressed disappointment in the narrow view of Black

experience shaping even this important social moment, noting that it could create stagnation rather than progress (see quote above).

And finally, some participants noted that when Black people and other people of color blaze new trails in an art-form or other domain, the result is often categorized as “something else,” displaced into a

different or new category rather than welcomed as an innovative contribution to the existing one. Yet innovation by White people is rewarded as “pushing boundaries” and assimilated into the art-form (see quotes at left and next page). These sentiments were mirrored in a comment by one of our advisors from a community-connected organization, who argued that as predominantly



My top operas are the ones with Black sopranos. If it’s a Black soprano I will always go, that’s an essential for me. But that’s not the only thing I’ve tried. I don’t think that, if someone is not like me or doesn’t have a story like mine, it makes it impossible for me to enjoy... If you’re closed off and you say ‘this is not something that Black people do,’ you’re missing out on an entirely different form of expression... You’re going to miss out on so much.”



Black Lives Matter went worldwide. I was like, yay, we’re going to be seen worldwide. But at the same time you’re highlighting only things related to criminal justice. At what point are you going to move past the criminals to our jobs and our maternity leave and our students?”



I think people are more complex, [but] society puts people into boxes and so people don’t even get to do things outside of their box. I have a qualm with that whole concept of Black lives being used primarily for entertainment. We want you to entertain us but not in classical music. That’s for us.”





When White people do cool things that involve other people's things, it's trailblazing, but if Black people do cool things from our culture, it's a Black thing."



You push the margins and now you're not even in it, because they're like, we don't even want to consider that new idea could possibly be part of what we've already established. So, we're going to put you elsewhere, and make you some kind of novelty item."

White cultural organizations make their bids for Black audiences, they place an unfair burden and pressure on Black artists to produce "Black Art." In the process, those predominantly White institutions end up defining what "Black Art" is and what it looks like (again, filtering Blackness through a White lens), which limits the creative expression of Black artists to a specific type of work that is not even defined by them.

Strategic Extensions

To help readers of this report reflect on how the findings may be applicable in their own contexts, we share some potential extensions and strategic questions here. These draw on the interview findings but also go beyond them, bringing in our own experience and perspectives as researchers in the arts and culture sector (and other fields) as well as our discussions with the community-connected advisors about this study (see Introduction, page 16).

1. Small gestures of kindness can have a big positive effect on feeling welcome. **How can culture-and-community practitioners foster welcome more intentionally?** As with trustworthiness leading to trust, welcoming spaces can help affirm and encourage a sense of belonging. Welcoming spaces can be created through acts of kindness and support, which are remembered and appreciated by the people we spoke with. Our participants noted that all kinds of experiences are racialized in this country, which can make rudeness and racism functionally indistinguishable (see page 54). As a result, rudeness invites worries of racism. Culture-and-community practitioners should consider multiple ways to create environments of active, unmistakable welcome, where even the briefest of interactions becomes a positive connection.
2. Real representation means celebrating all kinds of Black experiences and meeting all kinds of needs that Black people have. **What would it look like for this diversity to be expressed and acknowledged in different kinds of arts and culture settings** (e.g., across a wide range of museums, performing arts, and other culture-and-community spaces)? Black people, cultures and experiences are diverse and multifarious. Culture-and-community practitioners and organizations have a responsibility to affirm and celebrate that richness and breadth and avoid promulgating a view of Black stories and themes limited to slavery, trauma, and police brutality. This research reminds us that Black audiences want the full human range of stories and experiences in arts and culture programs. Practitioners and funders should make time to



question and defuse any impulses that tokenize Black people and affirm only one type of Blackness that is “palatable” to White people.

3. Representation is important in all organizational levels and roles, not just on the front lines. **What would it look like to enhance representation in your organization or area of cultural practice?** Spaces and institutions where Black people are represented only in front-line service positions don’t engender trust. The participants in this study want to know that Black people and other people of color are also in positions of authority and creativity behind the scenes – and when that’s not the case, they can recognize it (see page 52 for examples). Addressing this gap requires bringing Black voices into all kinds of messaging and content developed by an organization, especially messaging and content specifically about Black people and Black experiences.
4. It’s important to celebrate, affirm, and support Black innovators and creators as trailblazers *within* an art form or cultural category rather than dubbing them “outsiders” to it. **How might this affirmation be created – or extended – within different parts of the culture-and-community sector?** The people we talked with are sensitive to the kinds of marginalization of Black creativity that keeps Black genius out of some domains and locked into others. Practitioners and funders should find ways of encouraging and rewarding Black artists who work “outside the box” in a given art-form or discipline, rather than othering them by defining their innovations as “something else.” Celebrating Black visionaries and innovators can help generate a sense of both welcome and trustworthiness.





Provocations FOR THE FIELD

Photo: Courtesy of NYC-based photographer Deb Fong (debong.com, IG [@deb_fong_photography](https://www.instagram.com/deb_fong_photography)). Taken in May 2021 at [Broadway United for Racial Justice](#), an action hosted by [Unite NY](#). On the steps of the New York Public Library, organizers and speakers [Rodrick Covington](#) and [Clive Destiny](#), accompanied by musicians including [Russell Hall](#), led this creative community of artists and supporters in taking a firm stand together against racism.



Provocations for the field

In writing this section, the four authors were joined by Peter Linett, a White researcher and Slover Linett's co-founder, for additional context as we considered the implications of these findings and potential opportunities and provocations for the culture-and-community field.

Throughout this report, we've highlighted the stories, priorities, and aspirations of our participants, spotlighting their own words on (almost) every page. Our goal was to listen, honoring and amplifying their voices as they established the frames in which the arts, culture, creativity, and community would be discussed. We felt it would be a mistake to pre-determine a focus on any one form or setting of arts and culture participation, in part because so much previous research in the sector (including our own firm's) has done precisely that, and in part because we wanted this study to inform a very wide range of cultural, artistic, and community spaces, art-forms, genres, and missions. But we also want to offer a few concluding thoughts in our own voice as researchers, in an attempt to synthesize some of the most

important things we learned here. We encourage readers to take these broad insights as opportunities to reflect, rethink, and experiment with new priorities and practices. Leaps will need to be taken by readers to focus on their own contexts of practice, new conversations will need to take place, and new questions will emerge.

In our Introduction we shared a diagram of a conceptual framework that outlines the connective threads between the range of content we explored in this study – which became the organizing principle for this report. But we haven't included chapters on the two thematic areas that make up the right-hand side of that model, *connection* and *well-being*, so we'll start here with some general observations about both.

Connection

Humans are social beings, so it's no surprise that all the forms of culture we talked about with our participants – their own creativity and self-expression, experiences with arts venues, community gatherings, etc. – were valued in part as opportunities or tools for connection with family, friends, and even strangers. We rely on and use culture to connect with each other, or to deepen existing connections, perhaps especially during difficult times like the pandemic and a society-wide racial reckoning. In that sense, despite the "+" sign in our title for this initiative (Culture + Community in a Time of Transformation), culture *is* community.

Well-Being

But as our diagram points out, connection isn't just with others, it's also with ourselves and our heritage and identities. In these interviews, we learned that engaging with culture, creativity, and the arts helps us

A strategic summary of this qualitative research is also forthcoming from our partners at LaPlaca Cohen. Please visit culturetrack.com/research/reports.

discover or develop our sense of self and make meaning from our experiences – again, perhaps most valuably during times of pain, change, and new hope⁴⁰ – and in some circumstances it can provide a powerful feeling of generational continuity and connection that affirms or deepens one’s identity and sense of place in the world. In this sense, connection is an intermediate outcome that can contribute to a more fundamental one: greater well-being at both an individual and collective level. Some participants spoke of direct benefits to their well-being from their creative practices, self-care strategies, and positive experiences at arts and culture programs or places. They spoke of well-being as a kind of comfort, wholeness, safety, peace, and pleasure in the genuine ability to “just be” oneself. And individual well-being has a direct relationship to well-being at higher levels of social aggregation: families, friend groups, neighborhoods, and communities – again, in both the geographic and identity- or interest-based senses of community.

We’re aware that some arts, culture, and creativity organizations, along with some foundations, have long emphasized well-being in their missions and programs. Historically and currently, these have tended to be smaller, community-based organizations, often serving marginalized communities and often working at the intersection of the cultural and the social services sector; they use arts, creativity, and culture as strategies to achieve specific well-being outcomes among their participants and in the communities in which they work. But for some organizations, especially larger, national destination arts and culture institutions with wealthy trustees and purpose-built buildings or campuses, the idea of wellness or well-being as an outcome of artistic or cultural experience has a contested history.⁴¹ Not long ago, it was dismissed by a panel of (White) art museum directors as “the therapeutic trap,”⁴² and similar views have dominated classical music and other “fine arts” domains. Yet in recent years, and perhaps increasingly during the pandemic, some large arts and culture organizations and institutions have begun to embrace individual or community well-being in at least some of their language, programs, and priorities. Our findings in this study directly support the work of arts and culture practitioners and organizations that have long been committed to both connection and well-being, and equally support practitioners and funders who are trying to widen and update the paradigm at larger cultural organizations to embrace those purposes alongside others. Taken together, the insights our fifty participants shared point the way toward a more expansive, humanistic view of creativity and culture and their roles in contemporary life.

Creativity as vital vision

As we discussed on pages 25-31, the near-universality of creativity and its obvious importance in the lives of our participants in this study – as self-care, as connection, and as pathway to well-being – makes it worth deeper consideration by all kinds of arts and culture practitioners and funders. In particular, the

⁴⁰ We don’t have a pre-pandemic and pre-George Floyd comparison, and in any case there’s no such thing as a pre-racism period in American history. So we can’t say whether the last year-plus has shifted perceptions of the role of the arts, culture, and creativity in Black lives. The pre-2020 participation literature in the arts, museums, libraries, etc. that we’re familiar with acknowledges but doesn’t emphasize or analyze connection, although there is a growing body of research on arts engagement and physical and mental health—both important components of well-being. Then again, we’re not aware of a previous study that has been as open-ended about how people frame the value of culture and the arts in their lives, nor one that has focused exclusively on Black and African American perspectives. So it’s hard to know whether we would have learned similar things had we conducted this study before the pandemic.

⁴¹ On the one hand, it goes back to Aristotle, whose notion of “catharsis” in what today we would call a theatergoer involved an emotional-physical purging that was explicitly tied to health and (individual) well-being. On the other hand, later thinkers, especially Kant, emphasized aesthetic experience as “disinterested contemplation” detached from any practical outcome or physical response—a view which came to dominate the training and thinking of most critics, curators, scholars, and “cultured” American arts consumers in the twentieth century.

⁴² Roundtable discussion in Cuno, J. (Ed.). (2005). *Whose muse? Art museums and the public trust*. Princeton University Press.

ties we learned about in these interviews between creativity and social vision – imagining new possibilities, solutions, and futures which we can then work toward together in the real world – are crucial because they suggest that “personal” creativity is too narrow a frame: creativity, broadly defined, can and does contribute to collective or societal as well as individual well-being.

Some culture-and-community organizations, practitioners, and funders have long been working directly with the creativity of their participants, audiences, and communities in their programs (e.g., the community arts and arts education fields, Indigenous and folk cultural-transmission programs, other “informal” and participatory arts, myriad programs in libraries and bookstores, schools, parks and recreation centers, religious organizations, and social services enterprises, etc.). These experiences celebrate, support, and tap into the creativity of community residents – sometimes for the immediate pleasure of it and sometimes to try to solve shared problems in novel ways. That commitment to empowering and leveraging the existing creative assets in a community is also central to the ethos of creative placemaking.⁴³ Our findings here affirm the implied or explicit theory-of-change that underlies that kind of community-responsive work and funding: supporting, validating, and amplifying “everyday creativity” is likely to lead to positive social impacts for both the individuals and the communities involved. The findings may also help some of those organizations and funders fruitfully broaden the definitions of “creativity” that they work with, to more fully embrace the broader range of creative activities and mindsets, and to prioritize funding in areas that channel these priorities.

Other kinds of cultural organizations have exclusively prioritized the creativity of professionals (e.g., artists, performers, choreographers, designers, historians, scientists, etc.) and concentrated on presenting that creativity to the public. In some cases, those organizations say they do their work in part to inspire creativity in their audiences and communities – a kind of ripple effect in which the cultural presenter models creative or artistic excellence in ways that enrich the imagination and creative lives of those it touches, helping them see themselves and the world through changed eyes, come together around issues of shared concern, etc. We heard direct confirmation of such effects in these interviews, and of the value and pleasure that people we spoke with see in those kinds of perspective-shifting encounters with art and culture. But we also heard currents of subtle misalignment when people differentiated between these more formal experiences and their own more humble, messy, and personal creative expressions. Hence our point in the previous section about the need for even national destination cultural institutions to think of new ways of acknowledging and validating the creativity and self-expression of their participants and communities and somehow putting them in dynamic relation with the professional creativity they present.

For the whole arts, culture, and community sector, our findings about creativity suggest that it’s worth considering ways of placing even greater value on artists and creators of all kinds, professional and everyday, as *visionaries*: possibility-seers, divergent thinkers, imaginers, reframers, and do-ers who are integral to social change and healthy communities. This would include valuing Black artists and creatives and embracing their innovations by widening the definitions of existing fields and genres to amplify them. And it would mean involving artists and other creatives people in more roles, domains, and institutions, as practitioners of creative visioning themselves and catalysts of it in others.⁴⁴ This higher

⁴³ Creative placemaking is a process where community members, artists, arts and culture organizations, community developers, and other stakeholders use arts and cultural strategies to implement community-led change

⁴⁴ The trend in the last decade or so of embedding artists in (non-arts) city departments and corporations is a heartening example, as is the role of artists in planning and visioning processes as well as documentation and analysis of community development projects. [Citations! Minneapolis artists residencies?]

and broader valuation of creativity may not be a paradigm shift so much as a paradigm expansion, a natural extension of the “arts &” thinking that has prospered in recent years (as in, arts & public health, arts & climate awareness, arts & racial justice, etc.). But it might require a different way of thinking about the purposes and outcomes of creativity and artistic expression, and for some practitioners it might open new programmatic and experiential avenues to explore and new kinds of partnerships to cultivate. We believe that that way of thinking would be additive to and in harmony with more intrinsic or traditional notions of the uniqueness and self-evident value of the arts and creativity, widening of the spectrum of who and what is considered “creative” and the democratization of notions of value and voice.

Rethinking “relevance”

One of the dynamics we encountered in this research has to do with relevance, and it has two aspects. First, some previous research in the arts, museums, and other areas of culture has suggested that people from “underrepresented” or “underserved”⁴⁵ communities find experiences in some kinds of cultural spaces and institutions too formal: intimidating, stuffy, passive, spatially or behaviorally daunting, and therefore uncomfortable and irrelevant.⁴⁶ Data from the Culture + Community (Culture Track) Wave 2 survey supports that conclusion in some ways, with “fun” emerging as an important motivation for, and outcome of, participation and significant minorities of respondents wanting arts and culture organizations to change to become “less formal” and “friendlier.”⁴⁷ Yet our interviews in this qualitative study reveal that institutional formality or scale is not in itself a barrier to relevance and enjoyment. Many brought up, unprompted, meaningful, and valuable experiences in larger cultural spaces like encyclopedic museums or performing arts centers. Some even contrasted those spaces favorably with more community-based, intimate cultural settings in the sense that they provide anonymity and therefore freedom to be oneself – to experience the aesthetic or cultural content without feeling like your reaction or participation will “get back to [your] mom.” The people we spoke with are comfortable in many different spaces, scales, and modes of participation, and they often find real value and relevance in each.

The problem arises when the space, whatever its size or formality, proves inhospitable: unwelcoming, untrustworthy, uncaring, or even unsafe. We learned that this is less about the conventions of the experience or the scale or design of the space and more about the *people* one encounters – both the staff or volunteers and one’s fellow audience members or participants. Their individual and collective behavior, attitude, even facial expressions, can either support or detract from (or even eliminate) the value and pleasure of the experience. When those encounters do support the experience, the space is welcoming. Are larger, national destination arts and culture institutions – often places that enjoy social prestige, visibility, and the support of financial elites – more likely than larger, community-based cultural

⁴⁵ We put these common terms in quotes because we share the view of many antiracist practitioners in the cultural sector that they place the burden or blame on the oppressed group rather than on the institutions that have failed, historically and often currently, to represent and serve them meaningfully and equitably.

⁴⁶ See, for example, a case study on Steppenwolf Theater described by Parker, S. in *Building arts organizations that build audiences* (Wallace Foundation, 2012), page 5 (<https://www.giarts.org/sites/default/files/Building-Arts-Organizations-That-Build-Audiences.pdf>); the UK study *Not for the likes of you: Phase two final report* (Morton Smyth Ltd., 2004; <https://culturehive.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Not-for-the-Likes-of-You.pdf>); and our own firm’s 2020 research for Signature Theatre Company in New York City, summarized here: <https://sloverlinett.com/services/case-studies/the-building-blocks-of-welcome-in-theatre-spaces-lessons-learned-from-interviews-with-black-and-latinx-theatergoers-for-signature-theatre/>

⁴⁷ Benoit-Bryan, J., Smith, M., Linett, P. (Forthcoming 2022). Rethinking relevance, rebuilding engagement: Findings from the second wave of a national survey about culture, creativity, community and the arts. Slover Linett Audience Research. See <http://sloverlinett.com/cctt/reports-and-tools>.

organizations to be where Black people will encounter behaviors, attitudes, or expressions that make the space *unwelcoming* for them? Our interviewees didn't say so, but they did share important experiential differences between "Black spaces," "diverse spaces," and "predominantly White spaces" (see pages 52-55), and they're well aware that most of the large museums, concert halls, and other arts and culture facilities in this country were founded by, are still led by, and disproportionately highlight stories and perspectives of, White people.

Second, we learned that the framing of "relevance" in the arts and culture sector in relation to Black audiences and communities is sometimes based on assumptions of Black people's needs and interests, and therefore can be a counter-productive disservice to the Black people such organizations hope to engage. That's because relevance is often viewed too narrowly, solely in terms of Black histories and experiences of trauma and injustice. Our participants said they want a broader, fuller view of their humanity when it comes to arts and culture programming and content, one that also highlights Black joy, leisure, connection, innovation, and brilliance, as well as perspectives that highlight shared humanity and meaning across groups, experiences and cultures.

These two lessons come together in that evocation of "double consciousness" made by one participant to describe Black experiences in predominantly White arts and culture settings or art-forms (see page 44). The Black people we interviewed often have richly meaningful experiences in those settings or with those art-forms *even while knowing* that the stories, content, creators, objects, or performances may be problematic and can't be fully trusted, and *even while knowing* that the people around them may not always or fully embrace their presence. In fact, honoring that cognitive dissonance *and benefitting from the experience anyway* is itself a kind of creative act – part of what ties even receptive or spectatorial modes of cultural engagement back to personal creativity, self-care, and connection with others and with one's own identities and heritage. For Black people we spoke with, being an audience member, museum visitor, or cultural participant can sometimes be a reclaiming act.

How can cultural organizations of all kinds and sizes create environments where people do not have to "reclaim" but "just be"? In part by challenging current assumptions about "relevance" in light of those two lessons and by working harder to make the cognitive dissonance less acute – to strive instead to provide cognitive *consonance*: a sense that everything fits; that problematic aspects of the content or creators are acknowledged and made part of the experience; that Black stories and themes are not limited to trauma stories; that welcome is overt and authentic belonging encouraged; that trustworthiness is prioritized over trust and is accepted as a long-term process; that meeting community needs is part of the institution's goals and missions; that the value of self-care and connection is embraced and doesn't need to be "hidden" or suppressed; and that the everyday creativity and self-expressive range of Black participants and communities are acknowledged and affirmed along with, and in dynamic relationship to, Black professional forms of creativity on display. For some kinds of arts and culture enterprises, some or all of these things are already the mission and the program; for others they would represent, and require, a radical reimagining. If the global pandemic and the country's overdue grappling with race don't serve to accelerate that reimagining consistently across the culture-and-community field, the sector will truly have wasted an opportunity to adapt and contribute to an evolving world.

Invitation to explore further

The authors hope this report is useful to everyone working to make culture, creativity, and the arts more equitable and beneficial to Black people and others during these trying times. We welcome questions, comments, critiques, and conversations about further exploration and analysis. Our interpretation here is by no means conclusive, and we look forward to learning from other researchers, scholars, policymakers, and of course practitioners who may draw new or different inspirations and implications from the word of our participants. Please email the authors at CCTT@sloverlinett.com.




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Of course, any errors or shortcomings in this document are entirely the authors' own.

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And finally, thanks to you, our readers! We hope you'll find this document valuable in your work, and we invite your comments, questions, critiques and suggestions; please email us at CCTT@sloverlinett.com.



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In writing the Provocations section of this report, the authors were joined by **Peter Linett**, president of Slover Linett and a White researcher and consultant. » [full bio](#)

About Slover Linett

hello@sloverlinett.com | @sloverlinett on Twitter

Founded in Chicago in 1999, Slover Linett is a social research and evaluation practice for the cultural and community sector, broadly defined to include the performing and participatory arts, museums of all types, libraries, parks and public spaces, public media, science engagement, placemaking, and philanthropy. The firm's mission is to help practitioners and policymakers increase equity and access, deepen engagement, and meet human and community needs. For more information, visit sloverlinett.com. For questions about this study or the broader Culture + Community/Culture Track research collaboration, please email CCTT@sloverlinett.com.



Appendix

For readers interested in the details of our research methodology, we provide three appendices here. Please also email the research team for more information: cctt@sloverlinett.com.

- A. Participant Demographics
- B. Interview Guide
- C. Consent Form

A. Participant Demographics

The interviewees in this qualitative study were 50 Black and African American adults living in the United States. Almost half (21) of these participants were recruited from a list of respondents to the first wave of the Culture + Community/Culture Track national audience and community survey who provided their contact information for future research opportunities. About half (24) of the participants were recruited via a professional qualitative research and recruiting company (Schlesinger Group), and the remaining five were referred to the study via the project advisors – and in one case, a referral from another participant.

Because of these mixed recruitment methods and the fact that demographics questions were not mandatory (especially for people who came in via the first-wave survey or were referred by the advisors), we do not have complete demographic information for all 50 participants. For these reasons, we focus more on averages and minimums in reporting some of the demographics here:

The participants ranged in age from 20 to 76, with an average age of 37.6. A majority were women (35 people). The incomes ranged from the “under \$25,000” category (10 people) to “over 200K” (1 person); the most typical income category was “\$50,000–99,000” (18 people). Education levels ranged from “some high school” (1 person) to professional/doctorate degrees (4 people); participants were most likely to have bachelor’s degrees (14 people), followed by “some college” (11 people), masters degrees (9 people) and associates degrees (5 people).

There were at least 7 participants with disabilities among the fifty, and at least 6 people identified as LGBTQIA+. Most people were from metropolitan areas (urban and suburban), though some were from rural areas (5 people). Additionally, there were at least 2 people with an immigrant background and at least another 2 with biracial backgrounds.

Interview Guide for Conversations with Black and African American Participants

This protocol is designed to help the Slover Linett research team ensure that they are keeping the overall goals of the project in mind when interviewing participants this study. Please note that this protocol is not a script, survey or questionnaire; instead, it serves as a tool to connect high-level project goals with specific activities and questions that help support the research team. At no time will participants in the research read this protocol. The researchers may depart somewhat from this document as additional areas of interest emerge during the fielding period.

1. Introductions and Consent

(5 minutes)

The facilitators will introduce themselves and thank the participant for participating in the study. They will then offer a brief orientation to the session and encourage participants to provide their candid feedback. Facilitators will reference and explain the study consent form. The form will have been emailed to participants who have access to email prior to their interview.

- Thank you
- Interviewer's introduction and goals:
 - Thank you so much for sharing your time with us. I appreciate it! I would like to give you a quick orientation to our session. Hopefully, this will be the only part in our conversations where I am doing most of the talking because what I really would like to hear your thoughts.
 - I am from Slover Linett, an organization based in Chicago that tries to understand how people connect to spaces, each other, and to their communities. We've been doing this as a company for over 20 years, and we are constantly learning something new during each project we have.
 - For this project, we are interested in learning about Black perspectives on finding joy, connection, and purpose—both generally and during this past year, in which a lot has happened...
 - I hope to chat with you about activities that you enjoy, and then we can talk about your experiences in different settings and what makes you feel connected and fulfilled.
 - Is that okay?
- Consent and orientation to the session:
 - To help us remember what you have said, is it ok if we record this conversation? It will only be used for note-taking and only the people who are on our research team will have access to it. A year after the project is done, we'll make sure to delete it.
 - In your email invitation to this conversation, you should have received a consent form. It says... Can you verbally confirm that you agree? [If participant does not agree to record the conversation, facilitator will ask participant to submit consent form electronically before the conversation OR will offer to record the following verbal consent agreement only and then will turn off recording.]

- Great! I invite you to be as honest as you feel comfortable being. There are no right or wrong answers. Your thoughts, feelings, and experiences are all 100% valid. You can be as personal or political as you'd like to be. As we are just now getting to know each other, I want to set up from the beginning (or from the jump is what I'd say), that if any question makes you feel uncomfortable, or I cross a line, or the question is unclear, definitely tell me. None of that is my intent, so please let me know if anything feels off. I'll make no judgment. Not only am I grateful for you agreeing to share your stories and experiences, I respect you and any boundaries that you may want to preserve.
- Feel free to choose not to answer any question if it makes you uncomfortable; again, no judgment. I'll respect your decision. You can also take a break or stop the interview at any time.
- Also, I want to emphasize that your identity will be protected. We'll be writing up a report based on discussions with a number of people. We will not connect your name with anything shared in our report. If you're interested, we are happy to send you an email with a link to the report when it's finished so you can see what others have said also.
- We'll keep our conversation to 90 minutes, and as a token of our gratitude, we'll send you \$150 in respect of your time and expertise.
- Any questions before we begin? Is there anything that I've said that is unclear? Anything that concerns you? Anything you'd like to let me know before we proceed further?
- OKAY, let's begin!

2. Rapport building

(7-10 minutes)

To start, let's introduce ourselves a bit more, and we can each share something about ourselves before getting into the conversation. Here are two questions and you can answer whichever you'd like:

Do you mind telling me about the story behind your name?

What is the greatest thing that comes up for you about where you're from?

[Facilitator will offer both questions and ask participant to choose one. Facilitator and note-taker will also answer their chosen question to develop rapport and reciprocity.]

Thanks for sharing! Can you tell me some more about yourself? 2020 has been an intense year. How you've been doing during this last year, what kept you sane?

Note/probe for:

- Their background and interests
- Impact of major events of previous year, including a global pandemic, BLM protests/uprisings, movements for racial justice, and national elections, etc.
- Listen for any sensitive issues (loss of income, Covid exposure, personal loss, other challenges)
- Listen for general sense of financial situation (if this information is volunteered) and sense of stability, to be empathetic in upcoming questions about leisure time.

- Listen for where they found joy in the midst of it all
- Listen for new learnings
- Listen for new opportunities that emerged

3. Starting exercise: joy, connection, and self-expression

(20 minutes)

I'd like to talk more about activities in your life that you enjoy --and I'd love to do so with a a fun activity! We will make three groups of different kinds of activities, and then we can talk about each of them...

[Facilitator will share one list at a time, using screen sharing to collaboratively fill out three lists with participant, one list at a time and the facilitator will type out responses.]

- **...activities that bring you a sense of joy or purpose personally**
- **...activities you enjoy that give you a sense of connection with other people**
- **...activities you enjoy where you can express yourself authentically, such as being creative or making something**

[If interview is conducted over Zoom, facilitator will share screen with template document with the three lists and will help interviewee to add activities to each list, and prompt interviewee to articulate how these activities support each goal. If interview is conducted over phone or if interviewee has visual limitations, facilitator will verbally discuss each list with participant.]

Note/probe for:

- Specific examples (try to get to vivid detail, concreteness)
- KEY: What makes activities fun, meaningful, relevant, fulfilling, etc.
- KEY: Who they do activities with (e.g., partner, family, friend group, strangers)
- KEY: Location of activities
- Any activities that fall across multiple lists
- Activities against the backdrop of the BLM movement and uprisings, elections, and pandemic (and any other societal events that might act as context)
- Insights on their sense of belonging
- Frequency, duration, and informality/formality of activities (note qualities of this such as the physical place, the “rules”/ constraints on behavior, location, whose space it is, etc.)
- KEY: Level of involvement with organizations
- Listen for any mention of typical “arts and culture” activities (but note, no explicit ask for participants to include arts and culture activities if they do not bring it up by themselves – we'll discuss these activities further in section 6 of the guide)
- Comments on pre-pandemic vs. during pandemic (e.g., online/digital ways to connect)

[Facilitator will keep in mind any activities that participant brings up that are related to arts and culture contexts to reference in later sections.]

4. Main discussion: welcome, belonging, and trust (30 minutes)

Thanks so much! Now I'd like to switch gears a little and talk about some of your experiences and feelings in a different way. Can you tell me about a time where you did something or met with a group and felt welcomed and comfortable? This could relate to the activities you mentioned earlier or be something else...

Note/probe for:

- Connection to place, ideas, other people, organizations, etc.
- What feelings they associate with that moment
- Elements that contribute to sense of welcome
 - Seeing others “like me,” however self-defined
 - Personal involvement and pride
 - Internal/external motivation
 - Storytelling
 - Feeling safe
 - informal moments
 - Ability to use voice
 - Freedom to express self in comfortable way (however self-defined)
 - Decision-making power in outcomes that affect them
- Connection to culture (e.g. Black/African American culture, neighborhood culture, etc.)
- How long it took to feel welcome and comfortable

What about a place or a group where you feel heard and have a say? What do you think makes it feel that way?

Note/probe for:

- If participant chooses “home” or “with family” we will ask them to also think of an example outside of home and family
- What belonging means to them/elements that contribute to sense of belonging
 - Feeling safe
 - Personal involvement and pride
 - Internal/external motivation
 - storytelling
 - informal moments
 - Using/expressing their voice
 - Self-expression
 - Decision-making power in outcomes that affect them
 - Can be themselves fully
- Any mention of trust and what creates a sense of trust
- What kinds of things bring up those feelings?
- Other settings that bring up similar feelings of welcome and belonging

- Relationship to the activities listed earlier
- KEY: Immediate feelings of belonging versus belonging developing over time
- KEY: Any sense of differences between welcome and belonging
- KEY: Places, situations and moments in which they feel they hold power in the decision-making process, and have control over shaping a space or a narrative

Have your feelings of welcome and comfort changed over the past year, in any place or with any group? Tell me more about that...

Note/probe for:

- Impact of the global pandemic, BLM protests/uprisings, movements for racial justice, and national elections, etc.
- Nuances in people's sense of belonging, trust, comfort and safety
- Potential changes in sense of belonging during specific types of crises

Thank you for sharing that with me. Now, I'd also like to walk through a few places and activities with you, some you may have experienced or been to , some maybe not. Let me know what you think of them and how they compare to the places you've already talked about in our conversation.

[Facilitator will suggest at least one art and culture context that the participant has brought up in their lists, and 2-3 arts and culture contexts that they have not referenced.]

Note/probe for:

- Arts/culture contexts and institutional spaces to cover if not brought them up:
 - Museum [for probes: art, science or technology, children's, natural history]
 - performance space of some kind, like a theater or live-music spot [?] [for probes: live theater, dance, opera, etc.]
 - historical landmark
 - botanical garden
 - street festival [for probes: art, music, craft or design, food and drink, film, etc.]
 - library
 - community center
 - park [for probes: neighborhood, regional, etc.]
 - House of worship [for probes: church, mosque, synagogue, temple, etc.]
- Formality/informality with orgs they have interacted with
- Positive/negative impressions
- Reactions to differently sized organizations
- Trust in arts and culture
- Any nuanced ways that arts/culture contexts feel community-centered, inclusive, diverse, safe?? relevant? exciting? fair—or as lacking these qualities
- Perceptions of art/culture contexts as places to make connections within a group or community vs. bringing different groups, communities, or backgrounds together
- Focus on any systemic issues of representation, belonging, etc.
- Any implied desires for change in art organizations

Are there any organizations (or places or groups) in your community that you have a lot of trust in?
[if yes] **What did those groups do to earn your trust?**

What about distrust? Any organizations in your community that you distrust?

[if yes] **Why?**

Note/probe for:

- Level of trust and safety in different kinds of organizations
- Factors in trustworthiness
 - Level of communication
 - Personal relationships
 - Authenticity
 - Historical contexts
 - Length of involvement
- Personal stories
- If not local orgs, what about national?

Have you seen any organizations or groups really show up to support your community over the past year?

[If yes] **Who? What did they do? Was it more than they normally do?**

[If not] **Tell me what you think it would take for an organization to support your community during this time.**

Note/probe for:

- Their definition of “supporting communities” (i.e., what counts as authentic, useful support)
- Thoughts and feelings associated with that organization
- Any connections to activism, racial justice, protests (i.e., thoughts on organizations that opened up their lobbies for Black Lives Matter protestors as a rest stop)
- Thoughts on Black Lives Matter statements/anti-racists efforts by organizations
- Pandemic-related support (e.g., financial, vaccines, etc.)
- Other insights related to trust, relevance, or service/serving/meeting needs
- The fit and relationship between cultural organizations and the communities they are located in
- Additional ideas for roles that organizations could do to connect with and help the (your) community during times of crisis

5. Online/digital activities during the pandemic

(15 minutes)

Let's go back to our joy, connection and self-expression. Looking back at the lists you made earlier, were you able to do any of them this past year online or remotely? If so, can you tell me about an example?

[If not discussed spontaneously, facilitator will bring up a few examples of activities from the participant's lists that would be broadly defined as “arts and culture” activities]

How about something you tried for the first time during the pandemic? What about it appealed to you?

Note/probe for:

- Make sure to surface specific arts and culture activities (e.g., prompt on whether they may have seen a concert, video, show, etc. online)
- Pros and cons of digital activities
- Reasons for participation (i.e. learning something new, escape, relaxation, work, to entertain and occupy kids, connections to culture and to others...)
- Aspects of digital activities that they find appealing
- What about digital activities are more preferable over in-person activities (and vice-versa)
- Any use of digital activities for joy, fulfillment, and sense of connection
- The ways in which they participate in digital activities (i.e. alone, with others...)
- New digital activities discovered during the pandemic
- Digital activities they had not previously done pre-pandemic, reasons why
- Newfound digital activities they will consider continuing post-pandemic
- Anything else?

Does being online or remote change your feelings of welcome or comfort?

[If yes] How so?

[If no] Why do you think that is? How does being online or being remote changes your sense of welcome or comfort?

Note/probe for:

- Opportunities for connection during the pandemic
- Ability to make connections within a group or community vs. bringing different groups or communities together
- BLM movement and other mentioned events' potential impact on feelings of welcome and belonging.
- Feelings of safety in a digital realm

6. Interview Conclusion

(2 minutes)

To complete the session, we will present the interviewees with a chance to ask questions, offer any final insights and feedback, inform them of process for receiving their thank you gift, and thank them for their participation.

Facilitator will also ask participants if they would like to contribute something that reflects their creativity (e.g., craft, art, writing, other forms of expression, etc.) that could be included in our report. This could be a photo, a link to an audio clip, something else, etc. If they are interested, we would make sure to allow them to review the report section where it is included before the report is made public.

Consent Form for Participation

Study Title: Culture + Community: Black & African American Perspectives on Creativity, Connection, and Belonging

Co-Principal Investigators:

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Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this research project is to explore Black and African American perspectives on finding connection, creative expression and purpose, generally and during the Covid-19 pandemic, within and beyond cultural and community-oriented settings. We want to investigate the range of activities you have been participating in; how you have been participating in them (in-person vs. digital); and your feelings and experiences of welcome, belonging and trust in different places. This is a qualitative study that serves as the second phase of a 3-phase national project conducted by Slover Linett. Once the project conversations are completed, we will write a report on the main findings and may present them at various panel and conferences.

Procedures

We will be asking 50 people to participate in a one-time session. The session will be a conversation between you and 1-2 project team members. With your permission, we will videotape and/or audiotape the conversation only for notetaking and transcription purposes. We will delete any recording associated with the conversation one year after the public release of the study report.

Duration and Location

The conversation will take about 90 minutes using videoconferencing (i.e. Zoom) or over the phone. During the conversation, you will be able to take breaks or end the conversation at any time without stating a reason.

Participant Requirements

You must be Black or African American and over the age of 18.

Risks

The risks and discomfort associated with participation in this conversation are no greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. However, as with any research study there is a minimal risk of accidental disclosure of confidentiality. Given the length of the conversation, there is also a potential

risk of fatigue during the conversation. To reduce fatigue, we will encourage taking a break midway through the conversation. You are also free to take breaks any time that you prefer.

Benefits

There is no direct personal benefit to you from your participation in the conversation. The knowledge you provide may contribute to a holistic understanding of cultural engagement; highlight the work of organizations and spaces that foster joy, belonging and community; improve the ways in which joy, connection and belonging can be fostered in different spaces, and inform conversations about equitable practices within the cultural sector.

Compensation & Costs

You will receive a \$150 VISA gift card for your time, issued two weeks after completion of your interview.

There are no costs to you for participating in this study. However, internet access, mobile minutes, and data usage costs may apply.

Confidentiality & Privacy

The information you provide us in this conversation will be kept as confidential as possible. The notes and recordings associated with the conversation will be assigned a participant ID number before it is saved and will not be directly linked with your name. Your contact information, responses and the audio or video recordings we may make will be stored in Slover Linett's password-protected and encrypted files. The information gathered during your conversation may be disclosed to others for report presentation purposes. However, your name, address, contact information and other direct personal identifiers in this consent form will not be disclosed at any time. One year after the completion of the project report, any notes, identifiable information, and recordings made during the conversation will be deleted. The project team members, The Wallace Foundation who is sponsoring the study, and regulatory authorities including the Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review the information for the study.

Rights

Your participation is voluntary. You are free to stop the conversation at any point. Refusal to participate or withdrawal of your consent or discontinued participation in the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits or rights to which you are otherwise entitled. Your alternative is to not participate in the study.

Right to Ask Questions & Contact Information

If you have any questions about this project, please feel free to ask them. If you have questions later, or desire additional information, would like to offer input, feel you may have been harmed by participating in this study or wish to withdraw your participation, please contact one of the project team members by the phone number (773) 348-9200x113 or e-mail listed on the first page of this consent form.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant or wish to talk with someone other than the study team, contact Ethical & Independent Review Services (E&I) IRB at 1-800-472-3241 or email at subject@eandireview.com. Reference study # 21019

Voluntary Consent

By signing below, you are confirming that you have read this consent form, you agree that the above information has been explained to you and all your current questions have been answered. You may ask questions about any aspect of this project during the project and in the future. By signing this form, you agree to participate in this conversation. You will not give up any of your legal rights by signing this form. Keep a copy of this consent form for your own records. If you are unable to or prefer not to sign this document, you will also have the option to verbally consent during your interview.

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

DATE

Questions, comments, collaboration:
CCTT@sloverlinett.com

**CULTURE +
COMMUNITY**

IN A TIME OF
TRANSFORMATION
A SPECIAL EDITION OF
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