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Evaluating Equitable Successes In Literary Spaces A Portland Book Festival (PBF) Case Study

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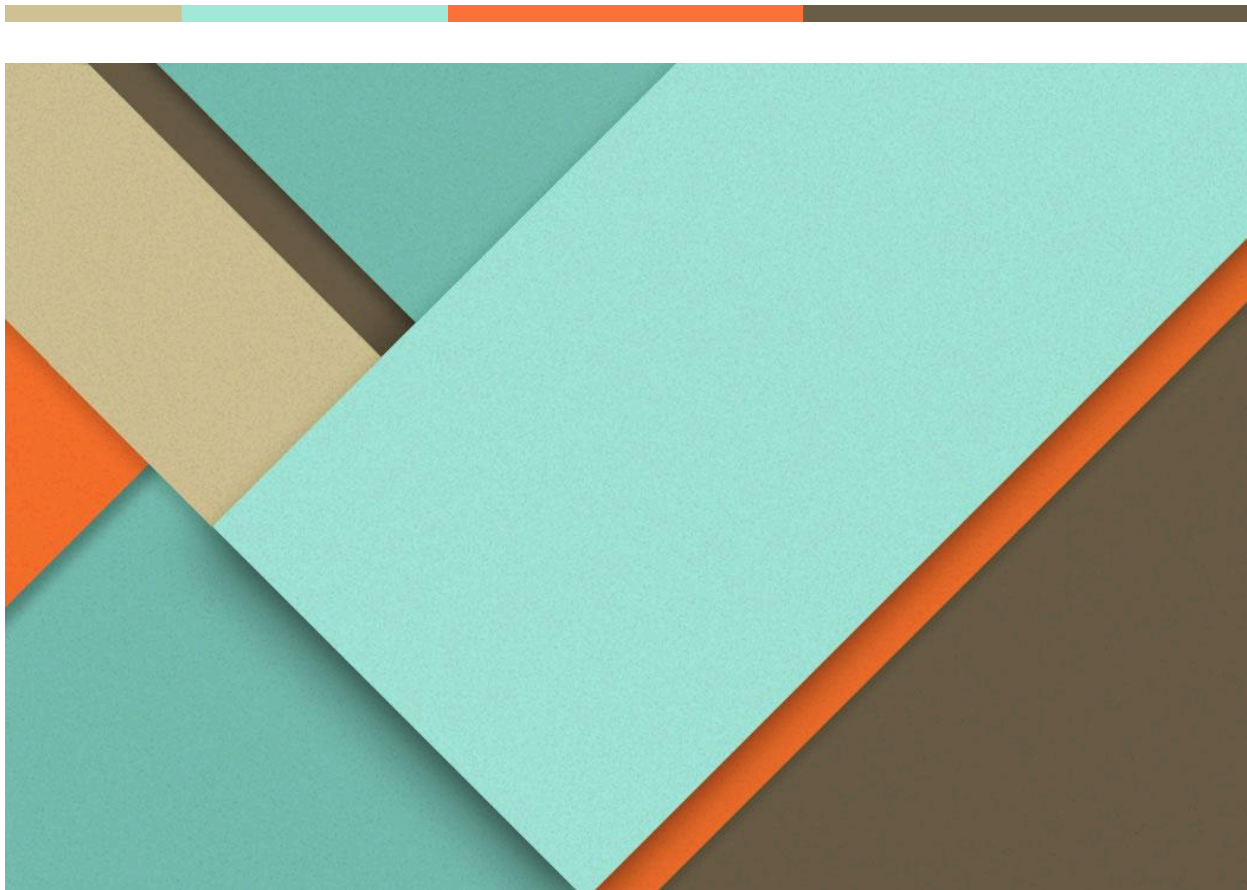
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Evaluating Equitable Successes In Literary Spaces

A Portland Book Festival (PBF) Case Study

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May 2023

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ABSTRACT

How do literary institutions achieve and evaluate successes in equity? Do certain factors expedite this transition?

To understand the impact of Literary Art's Discovery Model on diversity in literary spaces, data concerning all BIPOC Writers & Presenters at the Portland Book Festival 2023 was collected and analyzed by book placement, genre, and age category (among additional subcategories).

Acknowledgement of publishing industry trends and activism within literary communities appear to be significant factors while curating authors with equity in mind.

GOALS FOR LITERARY INCLUSION

#activism

The book publishing industry has been at the center of many social movements such as #weneeddiversebooks (2015) and L.L. McKinney's #publishingpaidme (2020).¹ Such movements advocate for equitable change in an industry that has historically neglected non-white hires, writers, and readers.² After the monumental publication of Lee & Low's "Baseline Diversity Survey" in 2015, data – in combination with adamant social pressures – publishers were pressured to create spaces of inclusion and belonging. At the very least in most cases, literary establishments of all sorts strove to ensure that "populations [were] more representative of society."³

In 2023, Penguin Random House delivered its "first ever Penguin Random House U.S. Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Report featuring DEI initiatives."⁴ This publicly available report on employee population, came a lengthy 8 years after the first

¹ Maher, John and Ed Nawotka. 2020. Authors Push for Transparency with #PublishingPaidMe." Publishers Weekly.


<https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/83535-author-s-push-for-transparency-with-publishingpaidme.html>

² Lee & Low Books. 2015, 2019, 2023. "The Diversity Baseline Survey."

<https://leeandlow.com/about-us/the-diversity-baseline-survey>

³ Penguin Random House. 2023. "Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion U.S. Report: 2022 - 2023."

⁴ Figure 1



“Baseline Diversity Survey” and 4 years after the most recent (at hand) at the date of publication (2019).⁵

In an industry/vocation where the products of production⁶ can take months-to-years to make and sell, quick results are hard to come by. Since the transparency afforded by social media activism circa 2015 and beyond, publishers, booksellers, nonprofit organizations have developed varying missions and strategic plans to implement practices of racial justice. While mission statements are a popular visual representation of progress, data analysis, examples of equitable praxis, and outlines for plans to achieve representative goals can be scattered and harder to find. Unfortunately, public perception is not always relative to verifiable evidence of successful pursuits of equity (even if initiatives are statistically successful).

Challenges at the Point-of-Sale (POS)


Data transparency and goal setting can be foundational tools in asserting that mission promises are being “achieved.” Achievement, too, can be a tricky thing to define within the constraint of equity initiatives. These challenges often compound at the Point-of-Sale (POS). It is systemically easier to employ more diverse employees or acquire more diverse employees than it is to consider all possibilities for shelving and categorization that prompt browsing habits that elevate underrepresented authors to the perceived value status of their overrepresented counterparts.⁷ These titles must transcend token appreciation. Additionally, diverse books must be produced by publishers before booksellers can source and sell them.

Consider a hypothetical generalist bookseller who has worked diligently to provide “x% more diverse books by 2023.” While they may have increased the diversity of their authorship pool, the placement/categorization of these authors is significant. What does it mean if only one or two genres in a single age category see a sales influx of titles by underrepresented authors? What if most of the diverse authors come from a small pool of publishers who specialize in just a few racial identities?

⁵ Lee & Low Books. 2015, 2019, 2023. “The Diversity Baseline Survey.” <https://leeandlow.com/about-us/the-diversity-baseline-survey>

⁶ Books.

⁷ Berkers, Pauwke, Susanne Janssen, and Marc Verboord. 2014. “Assimilation into the Literary Mainstream? The Classification of Ethnic Minority Authors in Newspaper Reviews in the United States, the Netherlands and Germany.” *Cultural Sociology* 8 (1): 25–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1749975513480960>.



Are current trends in activism acknowledged? How? What if the characters are diverse but the authors do not identify as such?

Why Book Festivals?

The latter questions address the “who for” of diversity initiatives within the context of publishing. Publishers, booksellers, and authors do serve themselves and each other, respectively, but all intersect within one common goal: reaching readership.

One place these three – publishers, booksellers, and authors – coexist side-by-side to achieve this shared commercial aim is at book festivals.

WHY THE PORTLAND BOOK FESTIVAL (PBF) 2023?

Emphasis on Discovery

Literary Arts instituted a 3 year initiative in 2019 to increase diversity.⁸ Literary Arts Portland Book Festival follows the “Broad Goals” that emphasize complex systemic change in “Strategies” rather than advancing quotas that may unintentionally restrict the boundaries of justice. “[BROAD GOALS] Increase the diversity of the communities we serve.” Quotas, when offered, are clearly stated and accompanied by a supplemental explanation of reasons and values behind the benchmark(s) illustrated in “Outputs” and “Outcomes”.⁹ This Logic Model is used to transform “Strategies” into actionable tasks that become anticipated outcomes.¹⁰

Discovery Model

Although this model exists separately from the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) incentives, the Logic Model prioritizes outcomes of a Discovery Model – “exposure” and “connection”¹¹ – that connect to the stated diversity initiatives. While an emphasis on “Discovering” may assume that majority attendees are white/white alone, which is true,¹² it can also challenge certain limitations of ethnographic focused labeling such as bias in perceived quality of work¹³ as well as inappropriately drawing comparisons between titles.¹⁴¹⁵

⁸2019-2022_LitArtsStrategicPlan.pdf

⁹ Figure 2, 2019-2022_LitArtsStrategicPlan.pdf (p.11)

¹⁰ Figure 2, 2019-2022_LitArtsStrategicPlan.pdf (p.13)


¹¹ Driscoll, Beth, and Claire Squires. 2018. “Serious Fun: Gaming the Book Festival.” *Mémoires Du Livre / Studies in Book Culture* 9 (2). <https://doi.org/10.7202/1046988ar>.

¹² 79% of 2018 PBF attendees identified as European American or White. Noorda, Rachel, and Kathi Inman Berens. 2020. “Keep Portland Weird?: Carnavalesque Elements in the Rebranding of the Portland Book Festival.” *Mémoires Du Livre* 11 (2). <https://doi.org/10.7202/1070268ar>.

¹³ Berkers, Pauwke, Susanne Janssen, and Marc Verboord. 2014. “Assimilation into the Literary Mainstream? The Classification of Ethnic Minority Authors in Newspaper Reviews in the United States, the Netherlands and Germany.” *Cultural Sociology* 8 (1): 25–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1749975513480960>.

¹⁴ Clayton, Dhonielle. 2023 “We Don't Talk About Harry Potter: The perils of publishing a diverse magic school series in the shadow of a juggernaut.” *Publishers Weekly*. <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-authors/article/93457-we-don-t-talk-about-harry.html>

¹⁵ Berkers, Pauwke, Susanne Janssen, and Marc Verboord. 2014. “Assimilation into the Literary Mainstream? The Classification of Ethnic Minority Authors in Newspaper Reviews in the United States, the Netherlands and Germany.” *Cultural Sociology* 8 (1): 25–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1749975513480960>.



The Discovery Model under investigation, as will be elaborated, prioritizes consumer discovery and relies on a variety of product offered and “disorganized” placement to maximize cross-genre appeal.

Local (Systemic) Barriers

*Oregon’s demographics are changing and the historical inequity among its diverse communities is at the forefront of civic discourse and requires action.*¹⁶

Portland is historically white. The 2019-2022_LitArtsStrategicPlan.pdf calls for a long term change within the organization as well as outreach practices to become as diverse internally as the writers and readers it desires to support.

Must overcome/challenge historically white notions of:

- authorship
- audience
- venue

Transparency

Sustained and visible data tracking. 2023 will be the culmination of the 2019-2022_LitArtsStrategicPlan. Over three years of recorded data.


Transparency was also a big draw. Data and strategic plans were readily available.

Format

This is an age of competitive trade and digital book markets. Specialist bookshops are in decline, but book festivals are prosperous.¹⁷ In the making and selling of books, there is a capitalistic gain in providing titles and authors that are appealing to/representative of many individuals of many backgrounds. This includes identity as it pertains to age, sexual orientation, race, gender orientation, and cultural practices.

¹⁶ Figure 3, 2019-2022_LitArtsStrategicPlan.pdf (p.13)

¹⁷ Wood, Felicity and Tivan Tom. “Festival Season: Specialist Bookshops Might Be in Decline, but Literature and Arts Festivals Are on the Rise, and Publishers and Authors Are Busier than Ever Promoting Themselves and Selling Books. Felicity Wood and Tom Tivnan Investigate the Rise of Festival Fever - Document - Gale Business: Insights.” n.d. Accessed October 24, 2023. https://go-gale-com.proxy.lib.pdx.edu/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=BIGTrade&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&retrievalId=fa07cade-4ec3-48a5-9d1d-7c66b714aed5&hitCount=1&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm¤tPosition=1&docId=GALE%7CA294507872&docType=Article&sort=Pub+Date+Reverse+Chron&contentSegment=GBIB&prodId=GBIB&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CA294507872&searchId=R1&userGroupName=s1185784&inPS=true.



Literary Arts underwent a few branding changes in 2017¹⁸ in order to make PBF more attractive across age demographics. The 2019-2022 Strategic Plan takes this accessibility a step further by prioritizing the needs of BIPOC members in the literary community as well as introducing more incentives for youth populations¹⁹ during a surge of challenged children’s literature.²⁰

In this light, book festivals aren’t always about the marketing of literary products. In many ways book festivals remind all of us the communities we are a part of.²¹ Readers and attendees are active members of the communities they associate with and are frequently activists, fans, and future members of literary vocations.²²

Book festivals tend to dissolve lines between publisher and bookseller as many presses (generally independent) table alongside representative bookshops/booksellers to generate direct sales. As in the case of the PBF, most of the tables/vending spaces are equal in allotted space. Some publishers/booksellers reserved more vending space, but this practice was a rare exception. Differences in press size, profit margins, acclaim, etc. is not always perceivable; especially to festival attendees who are not loyal to any particular “brand” of publisher. In many ways, this layout acts as a “control.” Brand appeal is effectively reduced by making all publishers appear – at least physically – “equal” in size and thus quality; consequently, challenging issues regarding comparative quality. This perceived “leveling,” although intrinsic to most book festivals, is essential in understanding the success of the Discovery elements in the “Literary Arts Strategic Plan.”²³

An exception: established large-size independent bookstores (Powell’s Books and Broadway Books) received larger, tailored vending space to supply titles by “Authors and Presenters” in specific locations depending on author programming.²⁴

¹⁸ Noorda, Rachel, and Kathi Inman Berens. 2020. “‘Keep Portland Weird’?: Carnavalesque Elements in the Rebranding of the Portland Book Festival.” *Mémoires Du Livre* 11 (2). <https://doi.org/10.7202/1070268ar>.

¹⁹ Figure 4

²⁰ American Library Association. 2023. “Book Ban Data.” *Banned & Challenged Books*. <https://www.ala.org/bbooks/book-ban-data>

²¹ Gump, Steven E. 2021. “Contemporary Publishing and the Culture of Books by Alison Baverstock, Richard Bradford, and Madelena Gonzalez.” *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 52 (3): 192–97. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jsp.52.3.06>.

²² Brough, Melissa M., and Sangita Shresthova. 2012. “Fandom Meets Activism: Rethinking Civic and Political Participation.” *Transformative Works and Cultures* 10 (June). <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2012.0303>.

²³ 2019-2022_LitArtsStrategicPlan_Assement_FINAL.pdf (p. 13)

²⁴ Figure 8



At a time when “Literary Arts has no publicly available organizational commitment to DE&I. Though Literary Arts has created an equity lens and framework, awareness of these tools within the organization and their usage varies.”²⁵

²⁵ 2019-2022_LitArtsStratigicPlan_Assement_FINAL.pdf



METHODS

The Portland Book Festival advertises that they bring in approximately 100 authors each year as Authors and Presenters. In reality, this number is closer to 130 - 150 individuals.²⁶ In 2023, Portland Book Festival featured 148 “Authors and Presenters.” Although asynchronous opportunities for author programming had been available in previous years, all events were in person in 2023.

Some of these individuals are categorized as “Presenters,” but a firm majority of these “Presenters” are authors themselves. A Presenter, when not featured as an author (even if they do have publication), may appear in Book Festival Programming as a panel facilitator or as someone facilitating academic discourse on writing. Only featured authors with programming associated with books they had written were included in the data set. There are three distinct subcategories within this category – excluding presenters/facilitators who were not self-promoting books.

Author and Presenter Categories

Panelists

Authors and Presenters who appear alongside other authors within a panel of varying size (generally between 2 - 4 panelists and one or more facilitators). Panels are carefully curated, either by authors themselves or by Literary Arts, in order to provide literary content that fits a specific interest, genre, or niche.

Example: 10:15 a.m. Culture & Politics: Santi Elijah Holley, *An Amerikan Family* mod. Prakruti Bhatt. Mitchell S. Jackson, *Fly* mod. Paul Marshall.²⁷

Panelist’s books are sold by one of the three designated bookstore vendors and/or a tabling publisher.


“Pop-up” authors

Since 2021 Literary Arts has featured Pop-ups described as “short events that feature authors reading in the galleries of the Museum. Each author is thematically paired with a specific work of art on view. These thematic pairings highlight the intersections between visual art and the written word.”²⁸

²⁶2019-2022_LitArtsStratigicPlan_Assement_FINAL.pdf (p. 32)

²⁷2019-2022_LitArtsStratigicPlan_Assement_FINAL.pdf (p.7)

²⁸ <https://literary-arts.org/2021/11/pop-up-readings-at-pdxbookfest-2021/>



These are 15-minute slots for reading. 78% of Pop-up authors (14 of 18) presented individually, 3 presented jointly with an external group (BIPOC Reading Series, National Book Foundation, or Incite), and one Pop-up featured 5 authors promoting one book.²⁹

Pop-up author's books may or may not be sold by one of the three designated bookstore vendors and/or a tabling publisher.

Keynote/Featured

Authors and Presenters who are in conversation with a single moderator in the largest venues.

Keynote/featured author's books are sold by one of the three designated bookstore vendors and/or a tabling publisher. All keynote/featured authors receive stations for book signing.

Identity Data Collection

The public-facing identities of the authors were considered. To prevent introducing bias/errors in a data set concerning BIPOC authors, Authors and Presenters had to publicly disclose their identities as such to be included within the data set. **Race is a construct and cannot be accurately discerned in visual guessing.** Similarly, intersectional identities (such as gender and sexuality) were examined within the same constraints. The vetting process included auditing interviews, group/club association, bios, and/or social media.

In all but two instances,³⁰ racial identity was openly and intrinsically tied to the content promoted by Authors and Presenters at PBF 2023.

64 of 68 BIPOC "Authors and Presenters" are included within this analysis. 4 BIPOC authors were "Presenters" only and did not provide programming pertaining to their own publication(s).³¹

Publications


Genre and Age Categories

²⁹ *Cascadia Field Guide*

³⁰ Both examples feature anthropomorphic entities as primary protagonists in children's literature (*Ploof* and *The First Cat in Space and the Soup of Doom*)

³¹ Collected data:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1NOOgP9kuvYgKz9F57xSR6j2bpK_Og2XlbYMs_2k1Rqw/edit?usp=sharing



Genres and Age Categories were tracked and listed in accordance with primary Book Industry Standards and Communications (BISAC) codes retrieved from BookScan. There are 3 distinct super categories for genre: Fiction, Non-fiction, and Poetry. For age categories, there are 3 as well: Juvenile, Young Adult, and Adult. The Adult category can be divided into 3 subcategories: Adult Fiction, Adult Poetry, and Adult Non-fiction. The first secondary BISAC code of every featured publication of the Authors and Presenters was tracked as well. Secondary BISAC codes are specialized and yield patterns in some instances (Autobiography/Memoir and Adult Non-fiction, Cooking and Adult Non-fiction), but not in others (isolated secondary codes for Sports, Ghost Stories, and Family across all age categories).

Quantity

The number of previous and forthcoming publications per qualifying Author and Presenter, as well as the title promoted at PBF, was collected.

Publication date(s) for promoted titles were collected as well.

Characteristics of the Publisher

The characteristics of each promoted title respective publisher was observed as follows:

- Name of the publisher
- Status as an independent or “Big 5” publisher³²
- If the publisher is an imprint
- If an imprint, the name of the main publisher and its status as an independent or “Big 5” publisher


Locality

The current state and/or country in which each qualifying Author and Presenter lives was tracked when publicly available (all but two instances). To appeal to local populations, Literary Arts adds a teal Oregon State-shaped icon to Oregonian authors.³³

The exact conditions garnering an “Oregonian Icon” proved to be inconclusive as a variety of Authors and Presenters qualified for what appeared to be an extensive list of reasons:

³² An independent publisher is any publisher who is not part of, though may distribute via, the “Big 5”: Penguin/RandomHouse, HarperCollins, Macmillan, Hachette, or Simon & Schuster.

³³ Figure 5

- 
- Living in Oregon
 - Lived in Oregon
 - Possibly working/worked in Oregon

For the purposes of this research, the current state of author residency was collected with disregard to any past affiliation to Oregon which may have earned an “Oregonian Icon” as they are not current residents of Oregon (despite a history granting them the icon).



FINDINGS

Venue-based Book Finding and Signing

At the PBF 2023, unique titles per author could be sold in multiple places to support a consumer discovery model. A single title had the potential to be found:

- At one of the three book retailers present within the festival.
- With the Press the author had published with (if present/tabling).
- At a book signing station specifically for Keynote/Featured authors and a few selected panelists.

More Opportunities to Purchase

This method for selling books proved to have equitable advantages. For one, seeing a BIPOC author/Independent title sold in more than one place, particularly at respected retailers such as Powell's, Green Bean Books, Broadway Books,³⁴ may elevate public perception of both BIPOC authorship as well as independent publications. Opportunities to buy books included purchase options that generated direct sales. Many Pop-up authors, as well as authors who were not invited to be Authors or Presenters at PBF 2023, utilized the tabling space of their publisher to host book unofficial scheduled signings. Authors working with their publisher were also able to draw attention to available backlist titles they had written that were not being advertised specifically for the festival. For authors selling books in designated signing venues, the ability to purchase a book was convenient as most festival goers bought their books near the space the author was speaking/presenting.³⁵

Organization of Titles

Browsing was prioritized. There were no boundaries or markers between genre or age category with the exception of the Children's and Young Adult titles sold at a newly introduced "Kids Stage".³⁶

Live Author Entertainment

Although opportunities for streamed events were utilized in previous years, all events at PBF 2023 took place live/in-person.

³⁴ The booksellers present. Figure 7.

³⁵ Example: Figure 8

³⁶ Figure 4



Identity

Racial/Ethnic Statistics

Percentages of BIPOC within the population (regardless of authorship) fluctuates depending on geographic area/region³⁷:

- US = 24.5%
- Oregon = 38.4%
- Portland, Oregon = 26.2%

In a sample size of 148 (the number of “Authors and Presenters”), distribution of BIPOC authors should be within the range of 36-57 individuals to reflect, at the very least, the racial distribution of the U.S.: consequently, achieving a state of parity. The inclusion of 57 BIPOC individuals would realistically represent the racial/ethnic composition of Oregon.³⁸

Of the 148 Authors and Presenters listed, 68 identify as BIPOC. 45.9% identify as BIPOC and 54.1% as white alone. This far exceeds the total racial mean – when comparing all non-white identities to white alone identities – of national, statewide, and citywide population averages.

Gender

57% of BIPOC Authors and Presenters publicly identified as female, 38% as male, and 5% as trans/nonbinary/other. The increasingly normative practice of providing pronouns made collecting this data straightforward.

Intersectional Identities within BIPOC Authorship

Data concerning sexual orientation and dis/ability within the pool of BIPOC Author and Presenters proved inconclusive. 9 participants (14%) in this pool did publicly self-identify within either/both additional identities.³⁹ Although the work of some authors did feature characters of varying sexual orientation and/or ability (as is necessary in inclusive storytelling), but many of the authors themselves did not publicly identify as such and could not ethically be assumed to identify as such without direct confirmation.

Publishers

³⁷ 2023 Census Data, retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045222>

³⁸ 2023 Census Data, retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/OR,US/PST045222>

³⁹ Confirmed via author bio, public interviews, or as a response to direct messaging.



Independent Press Popularity

45% of BIPOC Authors and Presenters published independently⁴⁰ despite Big 5 Publishers⁴¹ publishing 62% of all trade paperback books in 2023⁴²; a 7% difference compared to the national average for independent trade publications. While it is difficult to make presumptions concerning the significance of this statistic due to the sample size, it is worth noting that all publishers present at PBF 2023 were Independent.

Publication Types

Imprints

65% of BIPOC Authors and Presenters, independent or not, published via an imprint.⁴³

Popular Genres & Age Categories

1 in 3 BIPOC Authors and Presenters shared writing in Juvenile and/or Young Adult categories.⁴⁴

4.6 books: the average number of books a BIPOC author had at PBF 2023. 6 Juvenile and Young Adult authors had more than 10 publications.⁴⁵

Adult Fiction was the most populated category with 28 (53%) BIPOC authors presenting books within the genre and age.⁴⁶ Adult Fiction BIPOC authors averaged between 2-3 publications.

⁴⁰ Collected data:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1NOOgP9kuvYgKz9F57xSR6j2bpK_Og2XlbYMs_2k1Rqw/edit?usp=sharing

⁴¹ Penguin Random House, Hachette Book Group, Harper Collins, Simon and Schuster, and Macmillan.

⁴² Milliot, Jim. 2024. "Big Five Domination of Adult Bestseller Lists Slipped in 2023." *Publishers Weekly*. <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/94145-big-five-dominance-of-adult-bestseller-lists-slipped-in-2023.html>

⁴³ An imprint may be defined as an individual brand within a publisher. An imprint may operate out of the main publisher under a different name, mission, genre, age category, and/or specific needs (this list is non-exhaustive).

⁴⁴ Collected data:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1NOOgP9kuvYgKz9F57xSR6j2bpK_Og2XlbYMs_2k1Rqw/edit?usp=sharing

⁴⁵ Collected data:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1NOOgP9kuvYgKz9F57xSR6j2bpK_Og2XlbYMs_2k1Rqw/edit?usp=sharing

⁴⁶ Collected data:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1NOOgP9kuvYgKz9F57xSR6j2bpK_Og2XlbYMs_2k1Rqw/edit?usp=sharing

ANALYSIS

Pros and Cons to Chaos

Point-of-Sale

While certainly not outweighing the pros, one con to this Discovery Model - specifically the selling books in multiple places - is a lack of redirection to an original press present at PBF which may inhibit:

- backlist sales by a featured author
- loss of direct sales to an original press

One significant pro of selling through a major retailer is that Point-of-Sale (POS) may be tracked/reported. Record of POS is significant in determining the public “success” of a title.⁴⁷ Additionally, seeing a title sold at a trusted independent bookstore may elevate the credibility of a lesser-known publisher or author. This elevation is especially valuable to BIPOC authors.⁴⁸

However, prices were not always displayed on the Indie books when sold through a bookstore retailer⁴⁹ despite the original publisher tabling a few booths away. A title by Tommy Orange required attendee redirection as it was being sold at all present bookstore retailers with the exception of one.

Considerate placement of all retailers is crucial in this model. At PBF 2022, there existed no Kid’s Stage and the Broadway Books retailer was separated from major venues and located in a windowless room. In this case:

- Children’s Books were confined to specialty publishers/retailers with booths. There were fewer opportunities to purchase such books as well as a limited sense of consumer discovery.

⁴⁷ Determining a “Bestseller” for example.

⁴⁸ Berkers, Pauwke, Susanne Janssen, and Marc Verboord. 2014. “Assimilation into the Literary Mainstream? The Classification of Ethnic Minority Authors in Newspaper Reviews in the United States, the Netherlands and Germany.” *Cultural Sociology* 8 (1): 25–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1749975513480960>.

⁴⁹ *Cross-Stitch*

- Broadway Books location suggests bias against and/or deficit in comparative quality to other bookstore retailers with better placement.

Suggestion

Providing visual awareness that a title is being sold in multiple places, most advantageous to independent publishers present at the festival, may redirect festival goers from bookstore retailer to publisher and thus author. Essentially, whittling down the facelessness of consumer practices until the exchange occurs individual-to-individual; directly adhering to the Strategic Plan.⁵⁰

Allowing books for purchase at bookstore locations and publisher tables is highly advisable as:

- It elevates the perceived quality of independent publication and BIPOC authorship.
- More opportunities for purchase equate to more books sold.

Genre Limitations

In an effort to appeal to a broad audience, highly stylized genres were largely omitted from PFB 2023. Adult Age category genres like Science Fiction, High Fantasy, and Romance were largely absent. Although the most profitable⁵¹ of genres, it may be supposed that titles in this category may not spark as much Discovery or cross-genre appeal as other titles which may contain conventional genre elements within realms of speculative and historical fiction (of which there were substantial publications).


Alternatively, these specific genres are sometimes viewed as lesser forms of literature⁵² that may disrupt the quality of the stock for those seeking mainly literary publications or the literary atmosphere (avoiding comic convention-style audience interactions). The latter may explain a notable dearth in graphic novels available. However, neglecting these genres may impact attendee participation.

⁵⁰ Figure 2

⁵¹ Kirch, Claire. 2023. "Booksellers Stock Up on Genre Fiction." Publishers Weekly. <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/bookselling/article/93251-booksellers-stock-up-on-genre-fiction.html>

⁵² "'I am the literary equivalent of a Big Mac and fries.' —Stephen King"

Maleeny, Tim. 2024. "Literary Fiction or Genre Fiction: A Case for Both: Bestselling author Tim Maleeny investigates the interaction of literary fiction and genre fiction and makes a case for which stories will stand the test of time." *Writer's Digest*. <https://www.writersdigest.com/be-inspired/literary-fiction-or-genre-fiction-a-case-for-both>



Additionally, Middle Grade, Young Adult Sci-Fi, Young Adult Fantasy, and Young Adult Romance are the most diverse categories in the industry.⁵³

Age Category Limitations

Attendees under 17 and/or with a valid High School ID receive free admission.⁵⁴

For minors, a diverse “Kids Stage” has numerous benefits:

- Provides a positive platform for BIPOC authors who are inherently at risk of having their titles challenged/banned.⁵⁵
- Increases diverse authorship in a fair and organic way by creating space for the most diverse age category: Young Adult.⁵⁶
- Generates “Discovery” within appropriate reading levels.

However, the popularity of middle grade and Young Adult titles among adult and teen readers⁵⁷ presented a challenge within the Discovery Model. “51% of YA books are purchased by people between the ages of 30 and 44, and 78% of those buyers...[intend] to read the books themselves.⁵⁸” Youth title “leakage” presented vexatious bookstore retail placement of certain titles such as *Juniper’s Christmas* (Juvenile, Fiction) beside *Working it: Sex Workers on the Work of Sex* (Adult, Non-fiction) and Lydia Kiesling’s *Mobility* (Adult, Literary Fiction).⁵⁹

Suggestion

A Young Adult extension of a “Kids Stage.” 17 and underrepresents a broad readership. A Young Adult space that caters specifically towards individuals between the ages of 12-17, as well as adults, may spark a sustained interest in reading.

⁵³ Werner, Rachel. 2020. “How These 3 Genres Are Becoming Diverse Book Hubs.” *We Need Diverse Books*. <https://diversebooks.org/how-these-3-genres-are-becoming-diverse-book-hubs/>

⁵⁴ Figure 4

⁵⁵ American Library Association. 2023. “Book Ban Data.” *Banned & Challenged Books*. <https://www.ala.org/bbooks/book-ban-data>

⁵⁶ Werner, Rachel. 2020. “How These 3 Genres Are Becoming Diverse Book Hubs.” *We Need Diverse Books*. <https://diversebooks.org/how-these-3-genres-are-becoming-diverse-book-hubs/>

⁵⁷ American Library Association. 2023. “Book Ban Data.” *Banned & Challenged Books*. <https://www.ala.org/bbooks/book-ban-data>

⁵⁸ O’Sullivan, Joanne. 2023. Who is YA For: Editors discuss the category’s shifting boundaries.” *Publishers Weekly*.

<https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-industry-news/article/93417-who-is-ya-for.html>

⁵⁹ Covers depicted in Figure 6



If desired, a Young Adult space may also prompt balance in titles for the 17 and under crowd. 11% of BIPOC authors wrote in the Young Adult Category. 23% wrote in the Juvenile Category.

A caveat of this: these individuals likely require the permission of their parent, guardian, or other source of regulated or unregulated income to purchase books. Individuals between the ages of 12-17 are entering a time in their lives where reading preferences appear as independence and personal identity is explored. It is easier to buy a juvenile book for someone who is a juvenile, as a guardian or gift, because reading comprehension may matter more than personal interest and investment in content. However, juvenile readers must rely purely on a guardian's finances. Personal income may vary for any individual 14 and older.⁶⁰

As for genre, the Discovery Model may support extensions into any genre - rigid or flexible. For example, inviting a BIPOC author of a YA Romance, along with their specialized press, will still ensure visibility and discovery of new voices and titles.

Because browsing is encouraged and BIPOC authorship is well maintained, BIPOC representation occurs organically and with minimal opportunities for booksellers or consumers to discern hierarchy between writers and publishers.

“You Had to Have Been There!”

Some venues are more profitable, visible, and accessible than others. Digital spaces excel in accessibility and cost to create but are not as visible or profitable as in person PBF events. Digital venues can be financially viable, but require existing interest and popularity in talent for the public to invest.⁶¹ This model doesn't necessarily serve 1/3 of the BIPOC writers who are presenting their debut.⁶²


Suggestion

Holding asynchronous PBF events may increase accessibility. However, there are a few conditions to consider:

⁶⁰ Legal working age in Oregon.

⁶¹ Craig, Ailsa, and Sébastien Dubois. 2010. “Between Art and Money: The Social Space of Public Readings in Contemporary Poetry Economies and Careers.” *Poetics* 38 (5): 441–60.
<https://doi-org.proxy.lib.pdx.edu/10.1016/j.poetic.2010.07.003>.

⁶² Collected data:
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1NOOgP9kuvYgKz9F57xSR6j2bpK_Og2XlbYMs_2k1Rqw/edit?usp=sharing

- 
- Festival goers' interest may peak if digital content occurs before or after the day of the festival⁶³; consequently, extending the event beyond the constraint of a single day.
 - Digital content may increase the reach and credibility of authors if in conversation with an established peer that generates interest in a digital format.⁶⁴ This is similar to the function of panels and pop-up events.
 - Books by featured digital authors may be obtainable, required, or given prior to or with confirmation of registration.

Response to Calls for Progress

By setting broad goals with flexible actions to achieve proposed outcomes, Literary Arts responded appropriately to specific events in the literary sphere.

⁶³ Weber, Millicent. 2015. "Conceptualizing Audience Experience at the Literary Festival." *Continuum (Mount Lawley, W.A.)* 29 (1): 84–96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2014.986058>.

⁶⁴ Murray, Simone, and Millicent Weber. 2017. "'Live and Local?': The Significance of Digital Media for Writers' Festivals." *Convergence (London, England)* 23 (1): 61–78. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856516677531>.



Publishing/Literary Event	Influence on BIPOC Authors in the PBF Literary Space
<p>Consistent calls to action from the public for equitable changes to literary spaces to make them racially inclusive.</p> <p>The book publishing industry became the center of a social movement in 2015 after the publication of Lee & Low's first Baseline Diversity Survey revealed that 79% of the book publishing industry overall is white.⁶⁵ #weneeddiversebooks hashtag goes viral.</p> <p>Literary establishments strive to ensure that "populations [were] more representative of society."⁶⁶</p>	<p>45% of all Writers and Presenters at PBF 2023 identified as BIPOC. This population exceeds national, statewide, and local racial parity.</p>
<p>58.7% of US Publishers operate in the Northeast.</p>	<p>PBF is a West Coast Event. Regional Publishers skew independent at the festival. 100% of Publishers tabling at the event were Independent.</p> <p>44% of BIPOC Authors at PBF reside within the Pacific Northwest.</p>

⁶⁵ Lee & Low Books. 2015, 2019, 2023. "The Diversity Baseline Survey." <https://leeandlow.com/about-us/the-diversity-baseline-survey>

⁶⁶ Penguin Random House. 2023. "Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion U.S. Report: 2022 - 2023."

<p>Despite advocacy since 2015, the 5 largest corporate publishers responsible for approximately 77% of all U.S. publications across Trade Paperback, Hardcover, and Mass Market Publications in 2023),⁶⁷ did not publicly release data on employee & author diversity until around 2020. Slow transitions in corporate publishing result in idealistic missions/incentives backed by minimal changes and minimal data transparency. As such, controversy proliferates; i.e. #publishingpaidme in 2020.⁶⁸</p>	<p>45% of most recent publications by BIPOC Writers and Presenters were published independently.</p>
<p>In 2023, inclusive Children’s Literature is challenged/banned in unprecedented quantities.⁶⁹</p>	<p>BIPOC Authorship of Children’s Literature increases proportionally to the adoption of a “Kids Stage” at PBF 2023.</p>

Geographic elements, inclusivity, as well as time sensitive trends (such as challenged children’s literature) were all significant factors in the success of equitable vetting of authors and publishers at PBF.

Equity, in this case, is solidified by a willingness to make changes that reflect the needs of marginalized individuals with urgency by supporting and uplifting voices and publishers who have produced content that is truly representative of the diversity of society in addition to publicly adhering to anti-racist protocols as a way to achieve accountability.

⁶⁷ Milliot, Jim. 2024. “Big Five Domination of Adult Bestseller Lists Slipped in 2023.” *Publishers Weekly*. <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/94145-big-five-domination-of-adult-bestseller-lists-slipped-in-2023.html>

⁶⁸ Maher, John and Ed Nawotka. 2020. Authors Push for Transparency with #PublishingPaidMe.” *Publishers Weekly*. <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/83535-author-s-push-for-transparency-with-publishingpaidme.html>

⁶⁹ American Library Association. 2023. “Book Ban Data.” *Banned & Challenged Books*. <https://www.ala.org/bbooks/book-ban-data>



FURTHER RESEARCH

Limitations of this Study

Comparative Data

There is no comparative data to authors within the “White Alone” category. This study focused exclusively on trends within the BIPOC “Authors and Presenters” featured at Portland Book Festival.

While some comparative data exists regarding publishers present as well as attendees, data concerning BIPOC authorship at PBFs in previous years was not considered. However, to reiterate, 2023 marked the end of the 2019-2022 Strategic Framework which anticipated the end of a significant transition. This 2023 data is valuable because it evaluates the actualization of a literary space that is inclusive.

Financial Success

The Point-of-Sale (POS) for books is notoriously difficult to track at book festivals and other similar venues. Not all bookstore retailers and publishers report festival sales, direct or not, to Circana™ Bookscan to provide public data on the financial success of a title. Determining if Author or Presenter type had an impact on financial success of a title could be a way to further evaluate the effect of hierarchy within author pools; specifically, measuring the financial performance of BIPOC authors.


Definition of Equity

Equitability recognizes that some individuals have more privilege than others. When barriers of privilege are removed for a certain group, equity may be achieved.

This research utilized publicly available data, with a few exceptions,⁷⁰ to calculate equity within the minimum of achieving parity with national racial averages.⁷¹ As a sum of all BIPOC individuals, Literary Arts has achieved, and exceeded, this. This is an equitable change because BIPOC authors are being sought out and supported with intentionality. Such intentionality recognizes that barriers to festival entry as well as a history of exclusion must be eliminated in order to let BIPOC individuals succeed.

⁷⁰ Direct correspondence with a few authors personally who did not publicly disclose certain aspects of their identity, but were willing to disclose anonymously for the purposes of this research.

⁷¹ 2023 Census Data, retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045222>



However, “BIPOC” is an umbrella term that encompasses all non-white individuals. Specific racial identities, and their comparison to census data, were not tracked due to the scope of this study.

CONCLUSION

Findings suggest that literary spaces striving towards equity, specifically in racial parity, show inclination towards the inclusion of independent publications and placement by age categories in effort to meet - or in this case - exceed the goals of self-set diversity initiatives set by an organization.

Frequently, it isn’t enough to bring in diverse employees or writers. How and where books by BIPOC writers are positioned significantly impacts how they are discovered as well as how valuable their community and readership views them.

Discovering Discovery

The Discovery Model, as its namesake suggests, uses “discovery” as a way to achieve equity within the activities of an urban literary nonprofit.

To summarize, the Discovery Model at PBF 2023 looked like:


- Books sold in multiple places.
- Three types of Author-to-Audience interaction.
- Books for one author are sold in many places. There are more opportunities to purchase individual venues depending on venue and Author-to-Audience interaction.
- No genre categories. Books are sorted by age category.

Discovery Model can promote equity and adequately support BIPOC authors so long as certain criteria are met:

Quantity

The pool of authors must be so diverse that the marginalized identity of one individual is not considered an obvious anomaly or in any way an influencing factor pertaining to the perceived quality of their work. Rather, their identity should be viewed as a singularly complex component of the whole of society.

Mode of Presentation



This model may work best in-person as browsing can readily occur beyond horizontal and vertical panning and offers a preferable tactile experience with print titles.⁷²

Promise of Exchange

Only 4 BIPOC Authors and Presenters were not included in this analysis as they were not passively or actively promoting a new publication at the festival. Capital gains are a significant driving force in this model. Literary Arts provides festival goers with \$5 vouchers to spend on books; seemingly, to ignite the drive to discover and spend.

In Conclusion

Because browsing is encouraged - with minimal opportunities for booksellers or consumers to discern hierarchy between writers and publishers - and BIPOC authorship is well maintained, BIPOC representation at PBF occurs organically and equitably.

⁷² Most readers still prefer print books to digital formats. Colless, Laurel. 2022. "Which do you prefer: an e-book or physical book?" *Stora Enso*. <https://www.storaenso.com/en/newsroom/news/2022/6/which-do-you-prefer-an-e-book-or-physical-book>

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