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# Small Brown Faces in Large White Spaces

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## *Chapter 9*

### **SMALL BROWN FACES IN LARGE WHITE SPACES**

**Rosalinda Hernandez Linares and Sojourna J. Cunningham**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter we will explore how multiculturalism in the field of academic librarianship is mobilized and what the shape of that mobilization can tell us about issues of identity and the body. As former resident librarians of color, we the authors felt unmoored by the expectations put upon us as diversity resident librarians for a multitude of reasons. We had to learn quickly, but not ask too many questions or else we would seem unprofessional; we had to be ambitious, but not be intimidating to our coworkers. Above all, we had to be successful, which allowed little room for error or discord. This is our attempt to pull back that narrative and use our voices to represent our full identity.

Diversity residency librarians are a product of pipeline initiatives that aim to increase the number of librarians from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups within the field of librarianship. Other pipeline initiatives include specific scholarships for librarians from underrepresented groups who are matriculating into library school, travel funds to library conferences, and residency, fellowship, and internship programs, which are pre- or post-degree professional work designed specifically for entry-level librarians.

Typically, participants in these programs represent intersections of race, ethnicity, and gender. They have struggled historically for recognition in terms of bodily presence in physical spaces and culturally distinct but overlapping identities within academia as a whole. Programs in academic librarianship that are specifically created to provide entry points into librarianship have often placed the onus of responsibility for representation of a specific racial or ethnic community upon their bodies and identities as they move through white-centered expectations of “what a librarian should be” within the academy.

In the mid 2000’s, vocabularies that had been endemic in women’s studies, gender and ethnic studies, and law began to enter the lexicon of library literature. As a result, terms like white supremacy, intersectionality, and microaggressions are now interrogated in relation to librarianship.<sup>1</sup> Throughout this work, we will apply the sociological term “person of color,” which refers to racial and ethnic minority groups, to librarians who self-identify as non-white, by using the specific designation “librarians of color.”<sup>2</sup> The usage of “librarian of color” has spread throughout the profession and is in use by the Ethnic Caucuses of the American Library Association (ALA) and affiliate groups: Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association (APALA), Black Caucus of the American Library Association (BCALA), Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA), National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking (REFORMA), and Progressive Librarians Guild. The usage of “librarian of color” was codified by the creation of the Joint Council of Librarians of Color (JCLC).<sup>3</sup>

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1. David James Hudson, “On ‘Diversity’ as Anti-Racism in Library and Information Studies: A Critique,” *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* no. 1 (2017); Jaena Alabi, “Racial Microaggressions in Academic Libraries: Results of a Survey of Minority and Non-Minority Librarians,” *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 41, no. 1 (2015): 47-53; Michelle Caswell, “Teaching to Dismantle White Supremacy in Archives,” *Library Quarterly* 87, no. 3 (2017): 222-235.

2. Richard T. Schaefer, *Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Society* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2008).

3. American Library Association Executive Board, “ALA EXECUTIVE BOARD 2015 Fall Meeting Agenda,” *Ebd* 9, no. 1 (2015).

In “Unpacking Identity: Racial, Ethnic and Professional Identity and Academic Librarians of Color,” Gonzalez-Smith, Swanson, and Tanaka ask, “How do academic librarians of color perceive themselves in a predominantly white profession, and how can we interpret those perceptions to better understand their experiences?”<sup>4</sup> We intend to extend this critical and essential work with a specific, race-gendered lens on perception and identity formation that have been influenced by systemic barriers, specifically the problematic legacies of both early-career programs for librarians of color and issues of retention stemming from historic racism, sexism, and homophobia in the academy.

In this chapter, based on our exploratory research, we consider the legacy of the language and rhetoric of multiculturalism in higher education and in doing so, we interrogate the relationship between multiculturalism and pipeline programs in academic librarianship. Through this rhetoric, librarians of color act as symbolic mechanisms charged with contributing to a hegemonic institutional culture. Our goal is to provide critical insight into the lives of women of color in librarianship by narrating the collective stories we tell about our identity. As such, we approached our data collection and analysis from a grounded theory approach that allowed us to identify themes in the stories we collected and connect them to known feminist theories in an attempt to “utilize our lived relations as a basis of knowledge.”<sup>5</sup>

Our hope is to change what is and is not allowed to be said within public and academic discourses.<sup>6</sup> We believe that by giving ourselves the space to tell these stories, we can begin to theorize our experiences in

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4. Isabel Gonzalez-Smith, Juleah Swanson, and Azusa Tanaka, “Unpacking Identity: Racial, Ethnic, and Professional Identity and Academic Librarians of Color,” *The Librarian Stereotype: Deconstructing Perceptions and Presentations of Information Work*, ed. Nicole Pagowsky and Miriam Rigby (Chicago: ACRL, 2014): 149-174.

5. Barney G. Glaser, Anselm L. Strauss, and Elizabeth Strutzel, “The Discovery of Grounded Theory; Strategies for Qualitative Research,” *Nursing Research* 17, no. 4 (1968): 364; Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 338.

6. Dian Million, “Felt Theory: An Indigenous Feminist Approach to Affect and History,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 24, no. 2 (2009): 53-76.

“radical and innovative ways” and contribute to new veins of scholarship within our field.<sup>7</sup> We consider this work a preliminary step in utilizing our own tools to address issues of power and influence within the academy, and we hope to ultimately facilitate environments where the traditionally disempowered are able to claim their multitudinous identities.<sup>8</sup>

## Multiculturalism in the Twentieth-Century Academy

In the twentieth century, the term “multiculturalism” within the sphere of education had many uses. The rhetoric of multiculturalism served as a project of “reconstruction,” aimed at addressing institutional factors surrounding educational theories of cultural pluralism.<sup>9</sup> The academy subsumed the term multiculturalism in the 1970s and 1980s, and administrative bodies wielded the surrounding rhetoric to attack, de-radicalize, and institutionalize ethnic studies and women’s studies programs whose roots go back to the second-wave feminism of the 1960s and the post-civil rights influx of racial and ethnic minority students who were entering higher education en masse.<sup>10</sup>

With the growth of ethnic studies programs that focused on African American, Latino, Asian American, and American Indian/Native American Studies, and as Gender and Women’s Studies entered mainstream curricula, there was a tangible corrective path that contended with racial and gender inequalities on an institutional level by bolstering student retention and engaging academic discourse on minority topics.

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7. Judith Roof and Robyn Wiegman, *Who Can Speak? Authority and Critical Identity* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 251.

8. Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2003): 27.

9. Christopher Newfield and Avery F. Gordon, “Multiculturalism’s Unfinished Business,” in *Mapping Multiculturalism*, ed. Avery F. Gordon and Christopher Newfield (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 76.

10. Ramon A. Gutierrez, “Ethnic Studies: Its Evolution in American Colleges and Universities,” in *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Theo Goldberg (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1995), 158.

In the 1980s, multiculturalism was seen as a project of the humanities, with a focus on language and literature programs in a handful of elite universities.<sup>11</sup> Academics surveying the landscape of multiculturalism in the mid-1990s point to its many compounding contradictions in interpretation and use, both inside and outside of the academy.<sup>12</sup>

## Multiculturalism and Pipeline Programs

In the early 1990s, pipeline programs such as residencies began functioning as a mechanism to integrate multicultural bodies and identities in an attempt to add racial and ethnic representation to academic librarianship. By doing so, these pipeline programs have been used to create a homogeneous identity, which can be simply defined as “the other” for librarians of color who inherently hold multiple identities.

There are significant disparities between the racial makeup of librarians and that of the current U.S. population. As of the 2012 update of Library Counts, “a comprehensive study of gender, race, age and disability statuses in the library profession,” non-white librarians made up 13.6% of credentialed librarians. That percentage is consistent among academic libraries. If libraries were reflective of the actual population of the United States, the percentage of non-white librarians should be 40.9%.<sup>13</sup> The major organizations of academic librarianship (i.e., the American Library Association and the Association of College and Research Libraries) prioritize “diversification” of the field through top down “inclusion and diversity” efforts and initiatives in an attempt to correct the critical imbalance between the whiteness of librarianship and the communities they serve. Significant portions of these “inclusion and diversity” efforts are embodied in the creation of diversity resident librarianship programs. These temporary one- to three-year programs,

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11. Newfield and Gordon, “Unfinished Business,” 77.

12. *Ibid.*, 83.

13. Chris Bourg, “The Unbearable Whiteness of Librarianship,” *Feral Librarian* (blog), March 3, 2014.

aimed at early-career librarians of color, are put in place with the goal of increasing the percentage of librarians of color within academia.

In effect, however, all of these initiatives place the burden of representation on the shoulders of librarians of color, who are often new in their career and still finding their place within the profession. Additionally, there have been no significant increases in the percentage of non-white librarians over the past two decades.<sup>14</sup> As a result, large public research universities, where a majority of these programs are housed, have struggled in their approach to increasing the numbers of librarians of color.<sup>15</sup> The legacy of these pipeline programs is that librarians of color are often subject to systems that disembody their personhood, voice, and individuality.

## Methodology

In February of 2016, we sent out a call for self-identified women of color who had participated in an MLS-related internship, fellowship, or residency. We also intentionally sought out those with some kind of professional librarianship experience in both a public research institution and a small liberal arts college as a way of holding some institutional variables as constant as possible. We conducted sixty-minute interviews with our four subjects. Our interview subjects were split between those who were still in early-career programs and those who were already in

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14. Lisa K. Hussey, "Why Librarianship? An Exploration of the Motivations of Ethnic Minorities to Choose Library and Information Science as a Career," in *Advances in Library Administration and Organization* 28 (2009), 153-217; Linda R. Musser, "Effective Retention Strategies for Diverse Employees," *Journal of Library Administration* 33, no. 1-2 (2001): 63-72; Joyce K. Thornton, "African American Female Librarians: A Study of Job Satisfaction," *Journal of Library Administration* 33, no. 1-2 (2001): 141-164; Laura Bayard and Linda Fisher, "Project to Recruit the Next Generation of Librarians: The First Year," *Indiana Libraries* 25, no. 2 (2006); Musser, *Effective Retention Strategies for Diverse Employees*, 63-72.

15. Kelly McElroy and Chris Diaz, "Residency Programs and Demonstrating Commitment to Diversity," *Faculty Publications* 46 (2015), [https://digitalcommons.nl.edu/faculty\\_publications/46](https://digitalcommons.nl.edu/faculty_publications/46).

permanent professional positions. Some had come to librarianship as a second career or also had additional master's degrees in other disciplines.

We state unequivocally that the thoughts, feelings, and experiences narrated by the individual librarians of color that we interviewed cannot, and should not, be taken as the general experience of all librarians of color. The creation of these narratives is a form of resistance against the institutional language and rhetoric surrounding pipeline programs, which do not allow a space for women of color librarians to reflect on their own experiences. In this work we explore the effect that the legacy of pipeline programs and other systemic pressures have on how we perceive the world.

The interview questions covered topics such as identity formation, performance of identity at work, mentorship, and career drive. Organizing the narratives of these interviews through the grounded-theory model,<sup>16</sup> women of color can begin to tell our own stories of how our preconceived notions inform who we believe librarians are or should be, how we feel others perceive us, what our expectations are of pipeline programs, how or when we feel empowered or supported, and where we find community. Ultimately, this exploratory research is an attempt to build community knowledge we wish to share with future women of color librarians.

### **Librarianship as Written on the Body**

*"I knew during undergraduate that I wanted to become a librarian"*

*"I don't think I saw a librarian of color until I was in college, I'm pretty sure."*

*"You know I was very scared to get into the library field because first of all, I'm a librarian of color, and all the librarians I grew up with were white women, so I wasn't sure."*

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16. Glaser, Strauss, and Strutzel, "Grounded Theory," 364.



*"I didn't see a librarian of color until college, and it was important for me to be present and visible."*

Gonzalez-Smith, Swanson, and Tanaka describe the factors contributing to the dynamic nature of identity as time and context dependent. They also present identity formation as spanning local and global registers, in that the identity-creation process occurs at the individual corporeal level, the level of claimed communities, and the societal level. This reveals a complicated relationship for librarians of color between their professional, racial, and ethnic experiences and raises questions about how we might describe exactly who a librarian can and should be.<sup>17</sup>

On the individual level, just as pre-conceived notions of the identity of "librarian" are often reduced to a singular "white woman," the opposite, singular identity of "librarian of color" emerges as a counterpoint. Women of color claim this singular identity as indicative of commonality, distinctiveness, and community within the profession. In terms of visibility, the body of the "librarian of color" is comprised of an "amalgamation of all our identities, mixed into one self."<sup>18</sup> Women of color can also feel a responsibility to be present as a singular representation of their claimed communities in a professional capacity:

*"So, I had decided to become a librarian, but I was alone until I met any non-white librarians. I thought that would be a pretty cool way of a) helping me become a professional librarian, b) aid in the visibility of, you know, "we are here," which I think is an important part of the profession, and helped me expand my network of other librarians who look like me."*

*"The reason why I went for it, is because I was coming from a totally different area, like I worked in television, so I wanted to know, this was a big risk, becoming a librarian for me, because I had spent ten years trying to get into television, getting*

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17. Gonzalez-Smith, Swanson, and Tanaka, "Unpacking Identity," 149-173.

18. *Ibid.*, 165.

*to the position I was in, and I definitely wanted to try it out and see how it was, you know to be a librarian, especially a librarian of color.”*

In the first quote above, the interviewee stating that she was “alone,” makes it clear that, for her, the identity of “librarian of color” is essential and separate from “librarian.” She refers to her community as a kind of physical presence where she can identify with other bodies that “look like me.” The second quote above points to the overlapping aspects of community and identity, as the interviewee has a strong professional identification and affiliation with her first career, and also points to a similar distinction between “librarian” and “librarian of color.” By using the phrase “especially a librarian of color,” she indicates her professional identification with “librarian of color,” not as an innate marker of non-white librarians, but rather as an identity to be pursued.

### **Bodies at Work**

Gender, as well as identity, is a powerful determinant of experience in the professional, racial, and ethnic contexts of the individual.<sup>19</sup> Beyond any societal categorizations based solely on physiology of the body, gender affects how we interact with, and are perceived by, the communities we inhabit on a contextual basis.<sup>20</sup> The notion of perception, more specifically how one sees and is seen, is defined in philosophical theories of the self and of how we understand our individual identity in part as an identity with the potential to be recognized by others.<sup>21</sup> The absence of such recognition, or even misrecognition, is harmful to multidimensional identities and affects how women of color form

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19. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 1990).

20. Mary Hawkesworth, *Feminist Inquiry* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006).

21. Charles Taylor and Amy Gutmann, *Multiculturalism and “The Politics of Recognition”*: *An Essay* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 112.

identities in a professional environment, as social constructs of gender are ever present at work.<sup>22</sup> The hegemonic nature of higher education spaces that our black and brown bodies must negotiate compounds these issues of identity.<sup>23</sup>

Ford's work on bodily misrecognition enriches this feminist reading of multidimensional identities. "Bodily misrecognition," as defined by Ford, refers to the perceptions of others about the ways in which women of color faculty in the academy interact in the classroom.<sup>24</sup> Bodily misrecognition occurs when women of color enter hegemonic academic spaces where inaccurate perceptions about them based on racial and gendered stereotypes are prevailing and inescapable. This leads women of color faculty to manage their bodies, both physically and behaviorally, in order to come to some kind of mutual acceptance of their authority in a classroom with their students. The phenomenon of body management appears and is interrogated ubiquitously in feminist scholarship as a negotiation with the male-oriented approaches to the body that have left out the experiences of women of color in the past.<sup>25</sup>

As women of color librarians in academic spaces, we can feel the pressure to negotiate academic institutions as physical spaces where our non-white bodies are present amidst colleagues, faculty, and students:

*"One, you know, you don't want to be viewed... especially, I mean, this is just me personally, but I don't want to be viewed as unprofessional. A lot of people think that – because, you know, I look young, so a lot of people are like, oh I thought that you were really young, and things like that, so I would try to stay serious, so that*

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22. Barbara J. Risman, "Gender as a Social Structure: Theory Wrestling with Activism," *Gender and Society* 18, no. 4 (2004): 429-450.

23. Roof and Wiegman, "*Who Can Speak?*", xi.

24. Kristie A. Ford, "Race, Gender, and Bodily (Mis)Recognitions: Women of Color Faculty Experiences with White Students in the College Classroom," *Journal of Higher Education* 82, no. 4 (July, 2011): 444-478.

25. Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).

*people think I'm, you know, a little older. Including wearing makeup, wearing... trying to make yourself look a little older, to play the role, you know of a librarian."*

The interviewee worries that she will be misrecognized as "not a librarian" due to her youthful appearance, where notions of youth confer lack of "seriousness" or authority to do the work required in the workplace. In order to overcome these notions placed on her gendered body, the interviewee equates professionalism with application of makeup as a marker of femininity that legitimizes her authority as a librarian. If she is "playing the role" of librarian by upholding Western, white stereotypes around beauty standards and femininity, she is both accepting librarianship as a feminized form of labor and also one that her non-white body has to physically alter in order to be seen as worthy of that labor and the authority it confers.

Similarly, another interviewee states:

*"It's hard for me because, so I'm half Japanese and I feel like I look...some people think I'm white and some people think I'm Hispanic and I don't know how faculty and students see me, if they see me as just another white librarian, and I know my supervisor she has made comments to me like you know, do you eat this type of food or like, about, does your mom speak Japanese, things like that. I think...she expects me to be a certain way that I'm not."*

She is misrecognized by her physical appearance as either white or Hispanic, the former implying that her body exists as "just another" contribution to hegemony. Simultaneously, her supervisor places cultural stereotypes upon her by asking about her cultural history and gastronomic preferences once her presumed identity is "known" and expects the interviewee to manage her behavior to meet those cultural stereotypes. In this case the interviewee is compelled to collapse her intersectional identity to fit the expectations of her white supervisor.

One interviewee, who came to the library profession after a career in the military, sees both the advantages and disadvantages of the intersectionality of her professional identity as time and context dependent,

and strategically reveals and manages them to gain power and retain her sense of worth in the workplace:

*“I have been able to leverage my military identity in some ways because people might give me more respect than they otherwise would. But then I do also have my studious librarian identity because, you know, being a black woman I definitely, I can’t always be happy and smiling because people sometimes read that as a lack of intellect or professionalism. My professional librarian self, while I might have a sense of humor, I tend to have to talk sharper and drop all my big words, despite my goofy demeanor, [to show] I actually do know what I’m talking about.”*

The physical and behavioral implications of bodily misrecognition in these narratives show a myriad of interactions that women of color experience on a daily basis. The identities and bodies of women of color are complicated by their historic exclusion from academic spaces.

## Expectations and Belonging

Our own formations of identity, taken as time and context dependent, inform our expectations of the transparency of identity-based recruitment into pipeline programs.<sup>26</sup> At their best, early career programs deliver on their promise to expose librarians of color to the rigors of academic professions. As one interviewee describes her program where residents are considered non-tenure track faculty:

*“We were encouraged to do the same things that would be expected of us as tenure track faculty. We were expected to teach, do service, publish, all of those things. It was sort of a slightly less stressful way of acclimating us to that environment.”*

But the intention behind pipeline programs is not always so transparent, nor are the objectives realized as advertised. As one interviewee relates:

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26. Gonzalez-Smith, Swanson, and Tanaka, “Unpacking Identity,” 149-173.

*"I have a residency that is not billed as a diversity residency or anything like that. I know that a bunch of colleges and academic libraries have those kinds of residencies, and I wouldn't have applied had that been in the job description. I wouldn't want other staff and faculty to see me as an entry-level librarian who was there just because I wasn't white.*

*There were two people of color on my hiring committee which was awesome, and I met a few more people here and there, but then I got to the job and I realized, 'Oh, I met every single not-white person while I was interviewing.' I then realized that two of the three people of color who work at [my institution] had my position before me, then transitioned into permanent roles, which I thought was weird. It is not a "diversity" residency, but there seems to not be any other avenue for diverse people to enter the staff."*

Creating pipeline programs marked with the term "diversity" initiates a pool of librarians of color in a hierarchical fashion, because residents' status are fixed as early-career and temporary. These programs breed an atmosphere that feels separate and unequal, especially when the institutions that hire these residents simply draw from the same pool to keep residents in order to fulfill staffing objectives. The interviewee above thought she had avoided such "marked" programs, but in fact chose a program whose transparency was suspect.

Once librarians of color attempt to transition from pipeline programs into a permanent position, expectations of hiring practices and how they will be perceived change yet again. Many times, this is based on who they see on prospective employers' current staff:

*"And I think my library director was deliberate to try to hire people that were of color 'cause there was no one of color here. That was nerve-wracking because the position was open before and I saw it and I said, I'm interested in this position, but when I looked through the people that were in the library, I saw that no one looked like me. I was like, I don't know, I don't know if I'll get hired, you know? And I said, I'm just not going to go out for it, so they ended up hiring someone else, a white male, and they, he didn't do well, and they let him go or he left — I don't know what the circumstances were."*

In this case, the interviewee passed on an opportunity to apply for a job, because she could not see herself reflected as a part of the library's personnel.

## Mentoring and Community

The benefits of formal and informal mentoring in support of librarians of color are directly linked to issues of recruitment and retention.<sup>27</sup> Opportunities for librarians of color to be supported and mentored by fellow librarians of color can counteract the “aleness” of perceived whiteness as noted earlier. As one interviewee relates about her experience:

*“She was a big—she was of course a woman of color, and she was a big influence on me. I said, you know, I really want to do what she’s doing for the library. I just felt like she had influence, people listened to her. So I was like, this was something -- she showed me something I didn’t even think existed. I just didn’t even think a person of color can be in that top position in the library system. I was like, wow, I want to go out for an outreach position, and she started telling me what she did, and we maintained our friendship. I’m still friends with her to this day.”*

The interviewee, in her first role as librarian, met a librarian of the same ethnic background and began an informal mentoring relationship that encouraged her to see herself as capable of “something I didn’t even think existed.” Bonnette’s large-scale, U.S. Census-based statistical research shows that professional skills and competencies developed in mentoring relationships that lead to self-confidence and self-motivation in the workplace are early indicators of success and retention for librarians of color. Feelings of isolation felt by early-career librarians of color were found in Johnson’s research to be mitigated by group mentoring;

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27. Ashley E Bonnette, “Mentoring Minority Librarians Up the Career Ladder,” *Library Administration & Management* 18, no. 3 (Jul 1, 2004): 134; Peggy Johnson, “Retaining and Advancing Librarians of Color,” *College & Research Libraries* 68, no. 5 (Sep 1, 2007): 405-417.

similarly, Olivas and Ma found that mentoring led to increased job satisfaction.<sup>28</sup> Expectations of formal, structured mentoring do not always align between the mentee and the institution.<sup>29</sup> This interviewee describes a mentorship in their program as:

*“There was an attempt at mentorship. It was a thing that I feel like they were trying to mentor, but I feel like a lot of the mentorship ended up being me mentoring people. It was a type of mentorship very focused on how to navigate their institution.”*

That mentoring, however, was very narrowly based and focused on navigating the ins and outs of their institution rather than mentoring aimed at crafting a larger career. The same interviewee describes her definition of formal mentorship, which was at odds with her experience:

*“When I think of a mentor, I’m thinking of someone who is really helping you craft your career potentially even beyond wherever it is you currently are, they’re giving you words of wisdom and advice and definitely it’s back and forth.”*

Support outside of formal mentoring programs many times comes directly from supervisors:

*“I think that most of the people I interact with, like my supervisors, are invested in my growth as a professional on a more personal level, because they’re genuinely nice people and they would encourage me, they have encouraged me to apply for other positions, despite the fact that I’ve only been at [my institution] a year.”*

This interviewee feels that her colleagues are personally invested in her success on an individual basis. Identifying with communities

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28. Johnson, “Retaining and Advancing Librarians of Color”; Antonia Olivas and Richard Ma, “Increasing Retention Rates in Minority Librarians through Mentoring,” *Electronic Journal of Academic and Special Librarianship* 10, no. 3 (Winter 2009).

29. Angela Boyd, Yolanda Blue, and Suzanne Im, “Evaluation of Academic Library Residency Programs in the United States for Librarians of Color,” *College & Research Libraries* 78, no. 4 (2017): 472.



outside of professional relationships with fellow colleagues, faculty, or librarians is also common. As one interviewee still in an early career residency reflects:

*“I feel much more kinship with the students, who are very diverse. I look like them, I’m closer to them in age, and also there’s more diversity in the student body than is found among my colleagues.”*

In addition to kinship with students, librarians of color have the opportunity to mentor student workers and affect how other students see their peers. Positive interactions with students can lead to the elevation of status for students of color library assistants. One interviewee describes the implications of such interactions:

*“I’ve had students who say, this is awesome, I can’t believe I didn’t come sooner. And they’re so grateful for my help that I was like, see I’ve changed somebody’s perspective on a librarian of color. They’ll never think that again. Matter of fact, sometimes people come up and ask some of the student workers, are you a librarian? And they’re Black or they’re Hispanic and they say, no, but I’ll go get one of the librarians.”*

When pointedly asked about whether interviewees felt that they had found a community of peers, many replied that they had not:

*“I don’t know, maybe it’s kind of gloomy, but I feel community-less.”*

*“No. I do have people at my job that I can talk to about things that I’m going through, but it’s not the same because they don’t have the same background. It’s hard. They sympathize, but they don’t know, they can’t empathize with you. There’s no one.”*

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this exploratory work, we have attempted to interrogate links between the legacies of multiculturalism as put into practice in the

1990s and residency programs instituted within academic librarianship during the same time period to recruit and retain librarians of color. Over the intervening years and up to the present, these programs have failed to increase the number of professional academic librarians of color. If we consider our current bodily presence in the field in light of these failed projects, turning towards the lived, intersectional experiences of women of color librarians can help us work through the ways in which our present is informed by our past. By deeply interrogating previous narratives and creating new descriptions of record that accurately reflect the lived experience of women of color, we hope to use these new narratives, not only to shift attitudes and open up broader conversations on identity and the body in our profession, but also to validate, empower, and ultimately support women of color within the profession.

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