



welcome & thank you for coming! if you feel so inclined, as an ice breaker, share the origin of your given or chosen name in the chat.



good gossip:  
spreading the word  
to protect each other

NIMISHA BHAT, SHE/HER/THEY

[bit.ly/goodgossip2021](https://bit.ly/goodgossip2021)

hi, i'm  
nimisha!

visual arts librarian  
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# OUR MAP



storytelling

hearsay

anecdote



gossip

bitching

whisper  
network

rumors

# where did gossip come from?

- psychologists & anthropologists suggest that gossip is our modern-day mechanism for bonding social groups together
- “...gossip can be a way of learning the unwritten rules of social groups & cultures by resolving ambiguity about group norms” (mcandrew et. al)
- gossip affirms a person’s point of view, allows a cathartic release, and provides workers with more insight on what to expect
- workers of color have an especially difficult time trying to learn these rules & norms created by majority-white leadership and gossip is a way we can be better informed of the often absurd expectations put upon us

# informational infrastructure in libraries + academia

- libraries & academia are rife with contradictions, myths, guesswork, and rumors, and thus always warrant a critical gaze
- for a profession that prides itself on “providing information access to all,” those with the least amount of power in libraries are usually left out of conversations & decision-making that affects everyone
- gossip allows us to overshare in an attempt to make ourselves part of the informational infrastructure of our workplaces (yousefi)

# good gossip in libraries

- gossip or “disruptive storytelling” as a political act to expose the concealed operations of inequitable power relations
- whether we call it storytelling, rumor, or telling tales, gossip is an old strategy that is dangerous for those in power (yousefi)
- a common tool for decentering power & creating alternative narratives (easterling)
- gossiping & telling tales is a way for black librarians, indigenous librarians, and librarians of color to reaffirm & validate one another’s experiences





by distributing information equally, we begin to dismantle the secrecy inherent in the bureaucratic structure, along with the white hegemonic standards of professionalism, in order to envision a more equitable future for ourselves.”

- **lalitha nataraj, holly hampton, talitha r. matlin, yvonne nalini meulemans**

# let's talk

- have you used gossip to help yourself or your colleagues of color?
- who do you turn to when you're looking for someone to validate your experiences?
- do you just need a good gossip sesh right this minute? share an experience here with us, if you need it
- take five minutes to share in the chat or submit to the session mentimeter: **[bit.ly/goodgossip21](https://bit.ly/goodgossip21)**
- we'll come back together to share — feel free to unmute!

# works cited

- Baumeister, Roy F., Liqing Zhang, and Kathleen D. Vohs. 2004. "Gossip as Cultural Learning." *Review of General Psychology* 8 (2): 111–21. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.8.2.111>.
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# works cited, continued

- Ribarsky, Elizabeth, and Joshua Hammonds. 2019. "Gossiping for the Good of It? Examining the Link between Gossip and Organizational Socialization." *Kentucky Journal of Communication* 38 (1): 28–42.
- Smith, Malinda S. "Gender, whiteness, and 'other Others' in the academy." in *States of Race: Critical Race Feminism for the 21st Century*, edited by S. Razack and S. Thobani, 37-51. Minnesota: Between the Lines, 2010.
- Yousefi, Baharak. 2017. "On the Disparity Between What We Say and What We Do in Libraries." In *Feminists Among Us: Resistance and Advocacy in Library Leadership*, edited by Shirley Lew and Baharak Yousefi, 91–105. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press.

# THANKS



Do you have any  
questions?

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## **Good Gossip: Spreading the Word to Protect Each Other**

Nimisha Bhat (she/her/they) — Visual Arts Librarian, Smith College

Librarians from traditionally underrepresented populations are subjected to a litany of toxic behaviors in our workplaces and often find ourselves using strategies that help us survive in the job. One of those strategies is gossip. We have a default societal understanding of gossip as an inherently negative way of communicating, and associate it as a bad behavioral trait in people. This presentation will address the concept of “good gossip,” a way that librarians of color spread news and information amongst ourselves in the workplace in order to keep each other informed of knowledge that is often kept secret or privileged to those with the most administrative power because of bureaucracy. Many of us have colleagues or communities of color in our workplaces who we turn to in order to privately share information and knowledge as a “head’s up,” a way to warn or inform each other so that we may be better prepared to deal with whatever may be coming our way. Drawing on different definitions and analyses of gossip as well as scholarship about informational infrastructure in library workplaces, attendees will hear about and share their own experiences with how information/LIS workers can use gossip as a way to protect ourselves and each other in a field that does not prioritize our wellbeing.

Outcomes:

1. Attendees will learn about “good gossip” and how it can be utilized in library workplaces as a strategy for self-preservation
2. Attendees will have a space to share their own experiences with using “good gossip” in their own workplaces

[Wampanoag Trading Post](#)

[Presentation Slides](#)

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Works Cited:

Baumeister, Roy F., Liqing Zhang, and Kathleen D. Vohs. 2004. “Gossip as Cultural Learning.” *Review of General Psychology* 8 (2): 111–21.

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