

+

•

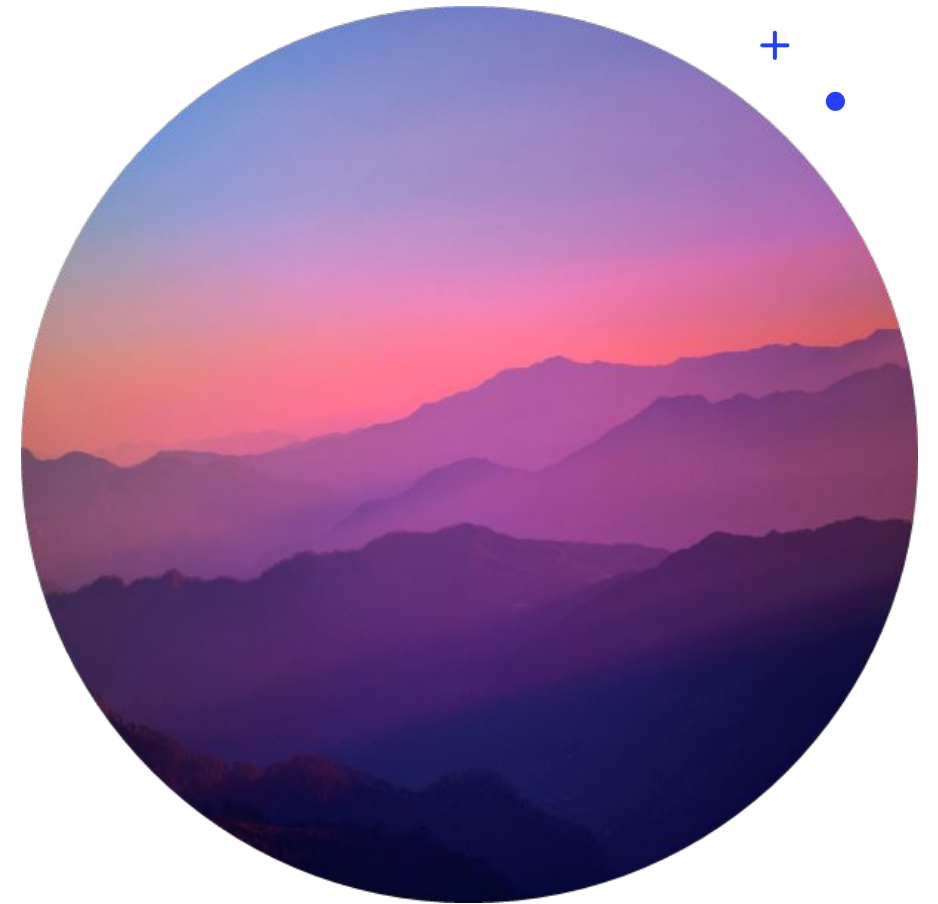
○

“My Skinfolks But Not My Kinfolks”: Searching for Kinship in Libraryland

- Ayanna Gaines
- Woodbury University
- POCinLIS Summit 2023
- July 21, 2023

AGENDA

- Who Am I?
- What Am I Up To?
- Why Me and Why This Topic?
- What I've Written So Far
- Structure of Chapter
- What Remains to Be Written
- Some Resources of Note
- Where Do We Go From Here?
- What Have We Learned?



Who Am I?

Ayanna Gaines, Student Success Librarian

Mid-career librarian

50 years old

Identify as African-American/Black

Brown skin, short dark pink hair, brown eyes,
brown eyes, pink glasses



What Am I Up To?

- Writing a chapter for a book entitled *Women of Color Practicing Sisterhood: Reflections from Community Intersections*
 - Title of chapter: “Searching for Sisterhood in Librarianship”

- Name of this presentation is taken from a phrase that I first learned about from a Facebook group – “skinfock ain’t always kinfock”
- Phrase struck a chord – it described my whole life
- Perhaps I am not alone

Why Me and Why This Topic?

- I know one of the coeditors personally
- I had talked with her about some of the issues surrounding being a woman of color (WOC) in librarianship
 - Lack of peers with similar experiences
 - Loneliness
- Also mentioned some of the ways that I found fellow WOC
 - Facebook
 - Twitter
 - Email lists

Snippet from Abstract

- “Women who identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC) are a rare breed in the field of librarianship. According to the 2012 *Diversity Counts* study of race, gender, and age in the profession (the year for which there is the most current information), 83% of credentialed librarians identify as female, and 88% of those identify as White females.”

What I've Written So Far

- A LOT about my youth, my young adulthood, and coming into librarianship
 - Supported by research and footnotes
- Some brief sections on “NEXGENLIB-L,” “we here” on Facebook, and friends made online
 - Need to be bulked up

Structure of Chapter

- Introduction
- My Early Childhood
- Navigating Difference
- Defining Sisterhood
- College Years and Cultural Pluralism
- An Introduction to Chicago and Librarianship
- Moving Out West
- The Challenge of Women Librarians of Color

- Young Progressive Librarians List
- Finding Community in Facebook Group
- Something something something
- References

Capital W

- One decision I made: to capitalize the word “White”
 - To quote Kristen Mack and John Palfrey on the MacArthur Foundation’s webpage “Capitalizing Black and White: Grammatical Justice and Equity:” “Choosing to not capitalize White while capitalizing other racial and ethnic identifiers would implicitly affirm Whiteness as the standard and norm. Keeping White lowercase ignores the way Whiteness functions in institutions and communities”
(<https://www.macfound.org/press/perspectives/capitalizing-black-and-white-grammatical-justice-and-equity>).

Introduction

- “I’ve been a librarian since 1999. And I have only three times worked with another librarian of color.”

My Early Childhood

- “The desegregation of Denver schools that occurred after the historic Supreme Court case *Keyes vs. School District No. 1*, in 1973 (Asmar), caused me, in 1982, to switch schools. Stedman was a predominantly Black school, while Park Hill was more racially mixed, and the redistricting was intended to integrate Stedman further.”

Navigating Difference

- “It was during this uncomfortable stage of my life that I learned the meaning of the saying “All my skinfolk ain’t kinfolk,” although I didn’t become familiar with the quote itself until I was in my forties. While the quote is generally attributed to Zora Neale Hurston, what she actually wrote was, in her autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road*, “When somebody else eats fried fish, bananas, and a mess of peanuts and throws all the leavings on the floor, [college-educated Black people] gasp, ‘My skinfolks but not my kinfolks’” (Gates). What Ms. Hurston was alluding to then was how bourgeois Blacks perceived working-class Black folks.”

Defining Sisterhood

- “As an only child, I perhaps define sisterhood differently than many others do. Since I have no blood brothers or sisters, I had no expectations growing up of how I should be treated by someone who saw me as a sister. When I was a child, sisterhood was defined for me by the book *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott.”

College Years and Cultural Pluralism

- “I didn’t mesh with the unit of fellow first-year students that I had been placed in. Irony of ironies, I was on the only women-only floor on campus and found sisterhood with none of them. As a Gen-Xer, I have found that certain names, like Jennifer, were quite popular amongst my peers. There were five Jennifers in my first-year unit. Against all odds, none of them were my friend.”

An Introduction to Chicago and Librarianship

- “In retrospect, there were many things that I was naïve about with regard to my chosen profession, and certainly, the issue of race and gender was never brought up in my classes by my instructors, leaving me and my classmates unaware of what we would be encountering. As I started working in academic libraries, I became more aware of how rare people of color were.”

Moving Out West

- “Blacks, especially middle-class Blacks, have been making their way into White space since the end of the civil rights movement, as they began to integrate settings that were formerly occupied only by White people. Their reception has been decidedly mixed; while some White people welcome integration, others do not. To this day, there are still many “neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, universities, and other public spaces” that remain predominantly White (Anderson, 13).”

The Challenge of Women Librarians of Color

- “Fife comments that his positionality and privilege as a cisgender White male in management allows him to move to rural areas. Due to the increased public hostility towards BIPOC, trans folk, and women, not to mention the hostility towards instruction in critical race theory and African American Studies, all of which have sprouted since the 2020 election, people with marginalized identities are no longer safe to move wherever the job may take them.”

Young Progressive Librarians List

- “While there were some people of color on the NEXGENLIB discussion list, the list was predominantly populated by young White women. I am still friends with a good number of those librarians, even though we can no longer be considered “young,” and we communicate with each other via Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, and other discussion lists. Yet I can count on one hand the number of Black librarians that I met through that discussion list. “

Finding Community in Facebook Group

- “Thanks to the safety, deep sharing, and support of people in [the we here Facebook] group, I have had validated for me that, indeed, in librarianship, as in other spaces, “not all skinfoolk are kinfoolk.” Yet those who are kinfoolk are like sisters (and brothers) to me. They give me a space where I can be my authentic self, a rare gift, as it is so dangerous for people of color to be their authentic selves in White spaces.”

What Remains to Be Written

- Analysis of scholarship on online sisterhood
- More about Facebook
- More about “we here”
- Conclusion

Some Resources of Note

- Anderson, E. (2022). *Black in White space: The enduring impact of color in everyday life*. University of Chicago Press.
- Feagin and Sikes. (1995) *Living with racism: The Black middle-class experience*. Beacon Press.
- Mbunyuza-Memani, L. (2019). Embracing natural hair: Online spaces of self-definition, e-sisterhoods and resistance. *Communicare: Journal for Communication Studies in Africa*, 38(2), 17-35. <https://doi.org/10.10520/EJC-1a19081eb1>
- Pho, A., & Fife, D. (2023). The cost of librarianship: Relocating for work and finding community. *College & Research Libraries News*, 84(6), 191. Doi:<https://doi.org/10.5860/crln.84.6.191>

Where Do We Go From Here?

- Discussion Questions:
 - How many of you have had experiences similar to mine? If you have, what advice do you have for others?
 - How have you sought out kinship in Libraryland?
 - Do you think that having kinship in Libraryland is important for sustaining the wellness and longevity of practitioners in the profession?
 - Why do you think there are so few POC in Libraryland, especially in academia? What can we do about it?

What Have We Learned?



7/21/2023

THANK YOU

- Ayanna Gaines
- Ayanna.Gaines@woodbury.edu
- <http://library.woodbury.edu>