Getting from Summer Reading Programs to Library School:
Thinking about the Professional Pipeline through the Library Experiences of Black/African-American Students

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Purpose of our study

- Research points to a persistent racial achievement gap in American higher education, particularly in terms of degree completion.
- Research also indicates that Black/African-American students engage differently with their institutions than their white peers, and campus racial culture and climate are important factors.
- Our profession has a stated commitment to EDI + SJ.
- The voices of Black/African-American students are surprisingly absent from our professional literature.
- How do we know if we are meeting the needs and expectations of this population if we haven’t asked?
Research questions

• How do Black/African-American students attending a predominantly white institution (PWI) in the Midwest describe their experiences with libraries and library staff, both before and during college?

• What role or purpose do Black/African-American students at this PWI assign to the libraries and library staff on their campus?

• Do prior experiences with libraries seem to inform college library usage for Black/African-American students at one PWI?
Research study

Method

• 60-minute, semi-structured interviews
• with 15 Black/African-American undergraduates
• at The Ohio State University.

The interview covered…

• Perceptions of libraries and librarians
• Experiences with public, school, and academic libraries and librarians
• Role of race in library experiences and interactions with library staff
PRELIMINARY FINDINGS
The Ohio State University

UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
Perceptions of Librarians
LIBRARIANS = WHITE WOMEN
FUN
CARING ENGAGING
ACKNOWLEDGING
INTERACTIVE TALK
UPDATES
Students’ Library Histories
Experiences with Libraries before College

• Most students reported using their public libraries
  • Family members were critical
  • Often described themselves as “big readers”

• Experiences with school libraries were varied
  • Experiences varied even with an individual students’ narrative
    (i.e. really engaged with elementary or middle school library with little to no engagement with high school library)
Experiences with Libraries in College

- All students used libraries at Ohio State
- Libraries are primarily for studying and doing homework
- Librarians were mostly invisible
- Most students seemed disengaged with library services, even those who worked for OSUL
Experiences with White Librarians

One time when we went to the library to like collect our rewards...librarian behind the desk was like abrupt and like short with us. There was [White] kids ahead of us in line, that she's was like, ‘Oh yeah. Good job for reading. Here's your [prize].’ But when me and my sister got to the front of the line, there was none of that. She kinda just was like, ‘Uh, okay. You did what needs to be done. Here's your prize.’ I was just kind of put off like, ‘What is this?’ I loved reading. I always did that. I did the club every summer. I know one summer in particular, I wasn't like a big fan of it, so I didn't go back to that...

-Imani
Race Matters

“It's not like I don't want to be around them [White librarians], but I feel like they don't really have an interest in helping me, so I don't really have an interest in seeking them out.”

-Jaylen
Race Matters

“I would say as an African-American male, it is hard to approach a white woman. Just the way our society is. Because libraries are predominantly more white woman led...I just ask them a question, get what I need and kind of go. Versus a black male or female librarian, I can kind of sit with them and talk with them.”

-Tahuti
Role/Purpose of Librarians

“I was just thinking maybe like logistical things, like figuring out barcodes for books, or the order of the books, or like where a book goes in a shelf. And all the data entry. That could be my supervisor's job. So, yeah, I don't know.”

-Destiny
(student employee)
THE PATHWAY LIKELY BEGINS FROM A YOUNG AGE, AND IT NEEDS TO BE NURTURED.
Want a little more detail?


[https://go.osu.edu/acrl2019paper](https://go.osu.edu/acrl2019paper)
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Thank you! 😊

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