

Brilliance of the Black Unicorn: Poetic Expression of One Black Female School Librarian's Lived Experiences

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ABSTRACT

As a Black woman scholar and former school librarian, Cynthia Johnson's work is deeply rooted in promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion within school librarianship. Her research focuses on the lived experiences of Black women school librarians, a group that remains largely underrepresented in both scholarship and professional conversation. By amplifying their voices, Johnson aims to challenge systemic inequities and advocate for culturally responsive practices that affirm Blackness in school library spaces. Moreover, her scholarship and service work to remove barriers to recruitment and retention for Black librarians, fostering a more inclusive and fair profession.

Using Black feminist-womanist storytelling, she shows how these librarians navigate challenges, build resilience, and create affirming spaces for themselves and their communities (Baker-Bell, 2017; Toliver, 2022). The inclusion of poetry provides an intimate, creative way to express their lived realities, capturing both struggle and triumph in ways traditional academic approaches often cannot. By highlighting these stories, her research broadens the discussion on Black women's knowledge production in the field and underscores the importance of addressing racial and gender barriers within librarianship.

This presentation shares key findings from her dissertation, especially focusing on the poetic expressions created from one participant's stories. These poems serve as powerful symbols of resilience, resistance, and a strong commitment to fostering inclusive school library environments. Through her words, a deeper understanding of how the cultural wealth, expertise, and leadership that Black women librarians contribute to the profession, despite systemic obstacles meant to marginalize their roles.

Through this work, Johnson aims to challenge dominant narratives within the field, advocate for systemic change, and amplify the voices of Black women whose contributions have been historically overlooked. By embracing both scholarship and creative expression, her research underscores the necessity of integrating multiple ways of knowing into academic

discourse, ensuring that school libraries become spaces where Blackness is not only acknowledged but celebrated. This presentation invites educators, scholars, and library professionals to engage in meaningful conversations about equity, justice, and the transformative potential of school librarianship when all voices are valued and heard.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

School libraries; Social justice; Research methods.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

Black school librarians; Black librarians; Storytelling; Poetic expression; Black feminism.

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