

10-19-2024

Cliques or Collaborators: Impressions of Cultural Collaboration in Academic Libraries

Lauren Turner

University of Denver, lauren.s.turner@du.edu

Natalia Umaña

University of Denver, natalia.umana@du.edu

Denisse Solis

University of Denver, denisse.solis@du.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/collaborativelibrarianship>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Turner, Lauren; Umaña, Natalia; and Solis, Denisse (2024) "Cliques or Collaborators: Impressions of Cultural Collaboration in Academic Libraries," *Collaborative Librarianship*: Vol. 14: Iss. 1, Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/collaborativelibrarianship/vol14/iss1/3>

This From the Field is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Collaborative Librarianship by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact jennifer.cox@du.edu, dig-commons@du.edu.

Cliques or Collaborators: Impressions of Cultural Collaboration in Academic Libraries

Abstract

In 2016, Absher and Cardenas-Dow wrote that for people of color, collaboration is often “a complex social and cultural negotiation” that acts as “a coping mechanism, a way to meet every day needs, the way we succeed and thrive in an environment that is not always accepting of our viewpoints^[i].” Approaching collaboration as library faculty members with an understanding of its complex nature, the authors were delighted when the opportunity to collaborate arose. All women of color, the ease at which we were able to share, create, and flow together naturally offered us all the coping that Absher and Cardenas-Dow mentioned. The impression of our newfound safety net by our white library colleagues was one of less than productive value, resulting in the labeling of us as a ‘clique.’ Almost picking up where Absher and Cardenas-Dow left off, we hope to examine the acts of misunderstanding and offer recommendations on how academic libraries—and many white people who work in them—can reflect on their language, intentions, and approaches to culturally exclusive collaboration. This report will touch on aspects of collaboration across departments, shifting toxic legacy practices, countering weaponized traditions of collaboration, and implementing change as new librarians.

[i] Absher and Cardenas-Dow, “Collaborative Librarianship: A Minority Opinion” in *Collaborative Librarianship* Vol. 8: Iss. 4, Article 3. (2016): 162.

Keywords

collaboration, cultural collaboration, minority women librarians, library cooperation

From the Field

Cliques or Collaborators: Impressions of Cultural Collaboration
in Academic Libraries

Lauren Turner (lauren.s.turner@du.edu)

Digital Archivist and Residency Librarian, University of Denver

Natalia Umaña (natalia.umana@du.edu)

Community Outreach & Reference Residency Librarian, University of Denver

Denisse Solis (denisse.solis@du.edu)

Digital Collections Librarian and Associate Professor, University of Denver

Abstract

In 2016, Absher and Cardenas-Dow wrote that for people of color, collaboration is often “a complex social and cultural negotiation” that acts as “a coping mechanism, a way to meet every day needs, the way we succeed and thrive in an environment that is not always accepting of our viewpoints.”¹ Approaching collaboration as library faculty members with an understanding of its complex nature, the authors were delighted when the opportunity to collaborate arose. All women of color, the ease at which we were able to share, create, and flow together naturally offered us all the coping that Absher and Cardenas-Dow mentioned. The impression of our newfound safety net by our white library colleagues was one of less than productive value, resulting in the labeling of us as a ‘clique.’ Almost picking up where Absher and Cardenas-Dow left off, we hope to examine the acts of misunderstanding and offer recommendations on how academic libraries—and many white people who work in them—can reflect on their language, intentions, and approaches to culturally exclusive collaboration. This report will touch on aspects of collaboration across departments, shifting toxic legacy practices, countering weaponized traditions of collaboration, and implementing change as new librarians.

Keywords: collaboration, cultural collaboration, minority women librarians, library cooperation

Introduction

Imagine going to eat with a group of friends at a restaurant you have never been to before. You are all expecting to sit around a table together, touching elbows, sharing food, and laughing for

the evening. So, when you arrive at a restaurant full of solo dining booths¹—individual stools facing the wall with physical partitions between each seat meant to cater to solo diners—it can come as a shock. Mentally, you begin to adjust how you plan to function in that space, seeing

¹ Absher and Cardenas-Dow, “Collaborative Librarianship: A Minority Opinion” in *Collaborative Librarianship* Vol. 8: Iss. 4, Article 3. (2016): 162.



the contrast to the dining experience you are accustomed to with the one you are faced with now. You know that not everyone shares your traditions, and you all agree to give it a try. Your group takes their seats at their solo booths, slightly scooching their stools to the edges of the partitions to feel closer to one another. The dining room is very quiet, and you notice the other guests looking over to see the cause of the noise. No one else is talking and the disruption caused by your group is palpable. You notice how uncomfortable it feels to be there, and despite the hunger growing inside of you, it is hard to focus on the menu. You make eye contact with your friends and can see that they feel the same way. *Should we even be here? Maybe we should just go grab a table at our usual place. We clearly don't belong.*

This is what it felt like as the three authors (all women of color) began to develop the friendship with one another necessary to cope with and thrive as library faculty at our primarily white institution². Within six weeks of building “a level of trust and openness that felt almost radical³,” it became clear that our comfort with one another was a distraction for our white colleagues. Reminders not to let one another’s prior experiences impact our perceptions of the library’s culture felt more like warnings than friendly advice. Other clear acts of discomfort included statements discouraging getting “too close” and questions about the content of our conversations. Despite how our collective was perceived, we continued to build community together, encouraging numerous independent and group research efforts, and branching out to welcome new faculty of color across campus. Together, we could be ourselves; loud, joyful, and visibly in strong connection with one another. So, when the term ‘clique’ was used to describe us, it spurred further examination of the tradition of collaboration in academia. We found ourselves asking why our efforts to collaborate

in both scholarship and professional development were being perceived as problematic. Noting the existence of previous collaborations between women library faculty of the same age left us wondering if the problem was that *we* were women of color.

Speaking from our frank perspectives, the tradition of collaboration as an individualistic practice has been weaponized against us as a culturally specific collective. This *From the Field* report will examine the acts of misunderstanding experienced by the authors while posing intentional questions about how culturally exclusive collaboration is valued and perceived by white librarians. First, we will give some context to the institution and the library. Then, we will recount what drew us to our academic library and share some examples of how the weaponization of traditional collaboration has shown up for us. Finally, we will share some questions for consideration for the field.

Background

Guiding Frames

As we set out to problematize how we come together to do work, we were drawn to the research philosophy of Institutional Ethnography (IE). Established by social theorist Dorothy E. Smith and influenced by Marxism and the feminist movement of the 1970s, IE prioritizes people’s everyday experiences as the mode of understanding an organization; this examination is undergirded by a desire for change (“activist sociology”)⁴ and resonates with our wishes and imaginations of a different way of *being* in the academy. While a true application of this theory further requires a deep examination of institutional texts, one we are not undertaking here, we hope this phenomenological discussion can serve future inquiries on the tradition of collaboration. Additionally oriented by critical theories, we apply these lenses as we broadcast our counternarratives – that is to say, our stories from the

margins that counter the ‘official story’ of a highly collaborative University of Denver Libraries faculty.

The Institution

The University of Denver (DU)⁵, a private doctoral-granting institution in Denver, Colorado, espouses values of diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice under the banner of “the public good.”⁶ We, as women of color and new faculty, were drawn to this narrative and the progressive policies promoted to prospective students, faculty, and staff. The façade started crumbling before us as we informally encountered the Evans Report⁷—a report investigating the role of the University of Denver’s founder⁸ in the Sand Creek Massacre of November 29, 1864—through discussions with other faculty of color and student-led initiatives⁹. We discovered its recommendations were not followed through. This neglect is evident in the administration and Board of Trustees’ refusal to retire the DU moniker¹⁰ despite repeated calls for its removal. As settlers, we strive to resist oppression and seek social justice, working alongside Native students¹¹, faculty, and staff to work with and for the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Ute tribal nations, and all Indigenous Peoples of the land on which the University stands.

The Library

Named the Best Library in 2022 by Princeton Review¹², the Anderson Academic Commons (AAC) is DU’s primary library, noting on its website a mission of “connecting students, faculty, staff, and the broader University community to knowledge in all forms.” An initial review of the library website would suggest it to be a forward-thinking institution, with a commitment to creating lifelong learners within the DU community. The library’s values include a call to “cultivate inclusion and diversity as values that enhance connections to the community and foster cultural competence.” The DU library

has taken several initiatives to foster diversity and inclusivity within its organization. These include the establishment of the Collection Diversification Task Force, Anti-Racist Task Force, and Inclusivity and Diversity Committee. Additionally, the library has released statements in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. In 2018, the library launched its residency program aimed at providing early-career BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) librarians with an opportunity to gain experience as faculty in an academic library.

Accounts

Now, the authors will share the context that led them to apply for DU’s library residency program, their professional and/or library experience before the residency, and a bit about the culture they experienced at DU, particularly relating to collaboration.

The One – Denisse Solis

I was born during hurricane season in the humid climate of Miami, Miami-Dade County. I grew up surrounded by people who looked like me, who spoke like me, and who celebrated like me. As an immigrant child, I experienced many challenges, yet I was able to fully embrace both my American and Nicaraguan identities. It wasn’t until I moved to Denver that I realized how much Miami had enabled me to thrive as a Latina. During my first library job as a cataloger at Florida International University, I spoke Spanish with my colleagues and cataloged Spanish materials, creating original records for Latin-American works and authors. I was not bullied for speaking another language, having an accent, or sometimes struggling to search for the right words. I spoke Spanish frequently and felt like I could bring my whole self to work; that feeling, unfortunately, was short-lived.

As noted by Absher and Cardenas-Dow¹³, collaboration is often “a complex social and cultural negotiation,” and it is in that negotiation

where I found myself while pursuing my MLIS degree. I was constantly being told three things; (1) that the field of librarianship was small, and everyone knew each other; (2) that I must publish as soon as possible; and (3) that publications were the coin of the realm. This context led me to accept an invitation to collaborate with a group of colleagues which included a white woman who was a full professor reference librarian, and a woman of color who was an assistant professor music librarian. At the time I was a staff member at Florida International University. Although I initially needed to shake off the encroaching imposter syndrome, I was excited because I was passionate about the topic they were speaking on and felt I could contribute.

Unfortunately, I found myself struggling to understand some of the decisions being made during the editing process by my colleagues and the collaboration became harmful. Passive-aggressive comments on my writing methods left me bewildered and hurt. When I suggested a different visualization for our data, I was labeled a bully. Later, in a meeting where I attempted to gain some clarity and resolve these tensions with the full professor, I was called a “bitch” for supposedly offending my assistant professor colleague. Devastated, I went and apologized to her, only to learn that she did not find my suggestion offensive. This incident left me confused and deeply hurt. I did not expect that during this “collaborative” process, I would be verbally abused, declared a bully for no real reason, and ultimately removed from a future presentation we had proposed together.

While this may seem like an extreme example, it happened and has impacted my perception of white colleagues, resulting in hesitation and anxiety whenever a white colleague wants to collaborate. The same questions always circulate in my mind; are you going to harm me? How do you handle conflict? Do you *actually* believe in what we are writing? Are you just after the

social capital associated with the topic or benefit from having a woman of color as a co-author?

When I moved to Denver to become the first library resident at DU, I was anxious about the unknown. As the sole resident, I often felt isolated, further complicating my desire to collaborate and build community. I eventually connected with other early-career librarian faculty, who were not residents. While we worked and socialized together, a true sense of understanding was missing. It wasn't until years later when Lauren and Natalia started that I felt whole again, seen and understood in ways my white colleagues could not comprehend. I was able to find joy again. I often wonder if the comments we receive about our collaboration stem from a lack of understanding of this kind of joyful collaboration. My research is me-search, it is about me in ways that may lend itself more to this joyful collaboration, especially when the collaborators are on a similar journey.

The Few - Lauren Turner and Natalia Umaña

Lauren - During the process of applying for library school, I sought perspective from fellow women of color currently working in the field. Because I had already decided to apply to DU's library program, I initially scanned the website looking for any familiarity. When I found two women of color, I reached out to them both about my interest in learning what the reality of librarianship at DU was like. One of them was a Black woman Ph.D. librarian on their way out of the institution, and the other was Denisse Solis. I felt extremely lucky that both welcomed my inquiry and shared openly about their experiences. Their mere presence within the institution was enough to solidify my decision to move forward.

I began working within the University Libraries as a graduate student staff member in 2021 while earning my MLIS at the Morgridge College of Education. I was the first Documenting

Student Activism Archives Assistant, working with the Curator of Special Collections and Archives, and the Digital Collection Services Librarian (Denisse). The role offered the chance to explore the library's current holdings related to BIPOC students, and more specifically, student activism on campus.

Like many student employees, I was juggling the position, my coursework, and my personal life, so building relationships with colleagues was not at the top of my list. I often came into the building to do my job, work with the physical materials, and go home or to class. Luckily, not many colleagues attempted to interact with me other than the usual greeting. This being my first position in an academic library, I thought that to be the norm. With my graduation approaching, I began looking for what was going to be next for me professionally. When I learned about the Digital Archivist Residency Librarian role that would be opening in 2022, I saw the three-year term as a great opportunity to get my feet wet and make a better decision about whether working in an academic library was for me.

Before library school, I had two successful but ultimately unfulfilling careers; the first writing for magazines in New York City, and the second doing marketing for arts nonprofits in Denver. So, although my professional experience was vast, it hadn't touched on the academy yet. With encouragement from colleagues, classmates, and professors, I applied for the Digital Archivist Residency Librarian role. In applying, I learned that if given the role, I would be part of a cohort of two. My counterpart would also be a person of color, which was an exciting possibility. Despite the intensity of the application process, I was confident I could do the job. This was my first experience with a search committee as well, but I noted several familiar faces there including Denisse, a former professor, and another member of the library faculty I encountered during my first year of applying for student jobs.

When I was offered the position before officially graduating, I was excited by the opportunity to work in a library every day; I looked forward to being part of the faculty, and I was eager to build relationships with my colleagues, especially my new colleagues of color. My excitement aside, I could feel a shift in the air, and I noticed a change in how people addressed my previous position working under Denisse. This is when statements about our developing friendship began to surface. At first, I thought this was because I transitioned from a staff position to a faculty role, but my underlying concern was that it was because of the proximity between my Blackness and Denisse's Brownness. When Natalia arrived, the three of us clicked together as if it were meant to be. Despite back-handed comments about our perceived inability to do the jobs we were hired to do and what I thought to be weaponized incompetence from our white colleagues – conflating Denisse and my roles as the same despite adequate knowledge of the differences – the chance to work with two badass women of color made it worth it for me.

Natalia - I am a Colombian American Latina whose experiences of seeking belonging and facing xenophobia as an immigrant shape my perceptions of my first two years as a visiting faculty member at the University Libraries; I am the other librarian in the residency cohort along with Lauren.

My previous experience in academic libraries included progressively growing responsibilities at Lucy Scribner Library at Skidmore College, where I held a series of staff positions within Access Services that ranged from a seasonal part-time interlibrary loan assistant to the head of circulation. I am grateful for my time at Scribner Library, which afforded me the first peek into academic libraries and the complicated dynamics of higher education, especially as a staff member and as one of the two people of color in the library.

For various reasons, including my k-12 specialization in my MLS program and a lack of a second graduate degree—a norm for most of the academic librarians I’d first met—I was told and believed I would never be able to fully wear the label of librarian within academia. The possibility of countering this was born after reading an announcement shared to a REFORMA listserv: The University of Denver was looking for a Community Outreach and Reference Residency Librarian position, and the announcement was posted by the library’s first resident, Denisse Solis. From it, I learned that the University Libraries Residency program:

provides early-career librarians with professional experience and mentoring in academic librarianship. Designed to engage librarians who are members of historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, the residency program will allow the successful candidate to gain the experience and skills necessary to thrive as an academic and research librarian. The University of Denver Libraries is a member of and is committed to the principles of the Association of College & Research Libraries Diversity Alliance: <http://www.ala.org/acrl/issues/diversityalliance>.

I had recently attended the 2021 REFORMA National Conference for the first time and was inspired by Denisse Solis’ scholarship on display in “Telling Our Stories and Voices for Equity: Recruitment and Retention of BIPOC Library Workers: Results from a Mixed Methods Study¹⁴.” REFORMA 2021 was one of the most stimulating and inspiring experiences in my beginning career, a much-needed reminder that people with similar cultural backgrounds and experiences not only exist in libraries but excel and thrive. My eagerness to apply continued to grow with the knowledge that the libraries sought a *cohort* of residency librarians. I hoped sharing this residency experience with another

person of color who was also an early career librarian would mitigate the isolation I’d previously experienced at Scribner Library and grant me space similar to my experience at the REFORMA conference.

In a 2019 review of Beverly Daniel Tatum’s 2017 edition of *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria: And Other Conversations about Race*, Higher Education scholar D-L Stewart notes that “the gathering of Black and other racially minoritized students together amid white spaces continues to be fodder for concern, debate, and evidence of ongoing racism in educational, professional, and social spaces¹⁵.” This nascent community Lauren, Denisse, and I built, one of safety, comradery, collaboration, and support, has received the label of a ‘clique’ and appears to be “fodder for concern [and] debate¹⁶.” What was it about our group that merited this label? Was it our loud and emotionally expressive ways of caring for each other? Our effusive hugs of greeting when we gather? If so, is this all just a matter of cultural misunderstanding? García Peña describes how building community is “antithetical to academia... [as it] is grounded in a model of individual success... [one that] promotes competitiveness, exceptionalism, and ownership of history and knowledge-making¹⁷.” Therein the problem—our collective does not fit the traditions of the academy nor how faculty generally collaborate; our scooching of booth seats to be closer together in this solo dining environment is grating to others; this abnormality must be a clique. In its definition of the term, Merriam-Webster includes the following example, “that *clique* refuses to even talk to outsiders at their lunch table”¹⁸, reminding us that the metaphor of Black folks meeting around a table didn’t begin with Tatum.

King et al. relate the history of Black women gathering around kitchen tables as sites of “restoration and revolution” and for “talking deep—planning, strategizing, and healing each other’s wounds,”¹⁹ urging us to continue to gather

among these metaphorical tables to create change in the academy...to humanize these spaces. When the authors highlighted the “third shift,” the additional, invisible, and highly emotional labor that is required to even begin talking deeply, I recognized *our* third shift. Some past experiences of collaboration, or just the mere act of seeking them, have left me feeling embarrassed and deflated; perhaps I should have paid attention to the extractive nature of antiracism committee work as a clue of what was to come as I continued my journey within academia. While I am grateful to have highly effective collaborative relationships with several white colleagues as related to my essential duties, it is when I have attempted to stray beyond these prescriptions that I encounter territorial boundaries — perplexed colleagues who declare “That’s what I do” — or an obvious interest in materials I created, but not me, my opinions, nor my ideas. For me, these individuals are used to doing what they do, alone and protective of their expertise as they sit in their solo booths to feast unperturbed. Instead, I will keep returning to our table of safety and community despite knowing the meal takes place during the third shift.

Statement on Skinfolk Not Always Being Kinfolk

Acknowledging that not all skinfolk are kinfolk, i.e., that folks do not have to be white to perpetuate white supremacy²⁰ we constantly rejoice in how lucky we are to have found one another, here and now. Considerations of how and why we were able to bond so quickly have made their way into many conversations, leading us to examine how we individually approached academia. Unbeknownst to us at the time, we all entered the institution as our true selves, with authenticity, honesty, and an urge to reject assimilation. This strength was further bolstered by witnessing each other show up courageously in spaces where our collaborative traditions were not the norm.

Approaching academia as our true, authentic selves is a risk and privilege²¹ not all people of color take on. It should be no surprise that at a PWI where facets of white supremacy are the norm (e.g., individualism, territorialism, and perfectionism), people of color may choose to suppress parts of themselves for safety and/or to prioritize the advancement of their careers. Pulling up a chair in this solo dining environment when you’re used to communal tables takes a great deal of conscious effort and energy.

We have experienced collaboration among various groups, working both in interracial groups and BIPOC-only groups, yet our collaboration persists as rare and worthwhile. We have collaborated with our white colleagues for a presentation inspired by García Peña’s *Community as Rebellion: A Syllabus for Surviving Academia as a Woman of Color* for the 2023 Conference on Academic Library Management (CALM) and worked well with each other, pushing forward solutions to systemic harms while reinforcing boundaries and our humanity.

During other experiences of interracial collaboration, we have witnessed the transition from a well-intended effort of collaboration to instead a complex negotiation of values and ideas, some of which were in direct contrast with the ideas and experiences of the majority and leading to discomfort. Over time, that discomfort morphs into defensive, combative, and passive-aggressive interactions, in turn, creating a challenging and possibly harmful situation for all involved.

Alternatively, in working with a group solely of other BIPOCs, we are allowed more intellectual curiosity because we can move past ‘diversity 101’ and build on our shared understanding of the value of our lived experiences. This support gives us the space to co-create knowledge and safely challenge our perceptions while serving as validation of our experiences, thoughts, and research ideas. It is in the validation that we resist being overtaken by the culture.



In acknowledging that there can be both positive and negative collaborative interactions no matter the makeup of the group, we recognize that there is still (and always will be) room for us to grow collectively. This brings front-of-mind questions about how we can continue to build trust conducive to collaboration, especially through moments of tension or disagreement. How this group handles conflict and accepts that we hurt differently is one of the ways that we are countering the weaponized traditions around us. The overlaps of our intersecting identities still leave gaps in understanding when it comes to collaboration, but there is a basis of trust and respect that makes space for our vulnerabilities in a way that is different from working with our white colleagues.

Coming to the Table

In 1972, writer Charlayne Hunter wrote an article for *The New York Times* about a two-day symposium of Black women meeting to converse in Chicago, Illinois. Sponsored by the Black Women's Community Development Foundation, the need for such an event was clear. As the foundation president Mrs. Jean Fairfax was quoted as saying, "We felt there was much need for black women to talk to each other without fear and without being under pressure to be something other than what they are²²." Similarly, and on a much smaller scale, the (table) space that we have established makes room for such free-flowing dialogue that can only happen when the fear of being one's authentic self is gone.

Unlike the status quo in 1972, the glare from the performative DEI efforts has made it difficult to recognize the root cause of the continued shortcomings. The struggle to recruit and retain BIPOC librarians influenced the increase of academic library residency programs over the last 10 years and into the present, often aiming them directly at minority and/or underrepresented communities. In creating new opportunities

geared toward BIPOC librarians, such as the cohort model of the second round at DU, there should be a resulting increase in the gathering of BIPOC librarians. Considering this somewhat logical circumstance, why then did it feel like white librarians were surprised by our gathering? Ringing a little ominously true of the behavior exhibited by men upon women entering the workforce and establishing women-only spaces, BIPOC-only spaces within academic libraries should be expected, respected, and allowed to grow.

Questions for the Field

As we examine our experiences with collaboration, we return to IE²³, seeking to move beyond describing our local conditions to uncover the forces that influence them. We invite readers to reflect on the "relations of ruling"²⁴ in your contexts through the following questions:

1. What is the culture of collaboration at your library? What does it look, sound, and feel like when individuals collaborate successfully? When is it appropriate to collaborate?
2. How are newcomers welcomed into this "culture of collaboration"? In what ways? (E.g., committees, policies, written and unwritten rules, etc.) How might that be different for residents or visiting faculty?
3. How does this culture influence your daily decisions and actions regarding collaboration? Can you identify specific policies or rules that shape this behavior?
4. Do tenured and/or senior-rank white librarians approach meaningful collaboration with librarians who are in early or mid-career? If so, how?
5. Do tenured and/or senior-rank white librarians approach meaningful collaboration with BIPOC librarians who are in early or mid-career? If so, how?

6. What drives your decisions on which collaborations to pursue? Is it driven by tenure and promotion expectations or personal interest in the topic? How often does collaboration take place because of interest in the potential for community building?
7. What does reflection look like for white library faculty? Do they experience a similar taxing consideration or “third shift” of how their behavior, words, and implications impact BIPOC librarians as we do? If so, what does that look like?
8. If collaboration is such a core tenet of librarianship, why would collaboration that is culturally exclusive be seen as such a problem?

Conclusion

I'm breathing deeply as I write this. What I'm writing about is charged. I feel this energy in my body. It's a heat in my throat and a rumbling in my belly. It's an intensity that's frustrating that these words must even be written. It propels me through my fears of backlash and worry about not getting it exactly right. What I say may anger you. You may disagree. You may feel more confused, and this, I would say, is good. It means the work can begin.

Breathing.

- Kelsey Blackwell, “Why People of Color Need Spaces Without White People,” 2018

Collectively, the co-authors have embodied Blackwell’s wise words, as they worked with intention to write their truths while fighting the

urge to dilute them out of fear. Through this process of collaboration and reconciliation, the individual ideas and words have morphed together from start to finish. Unlike any collaborative effort experienced before, from the brainstorming and writing to the revisions that often went line by line, there is no formula to replicate how we got here. The many intricate details that led us to find each other when we needed each other the most (even if we didn’t know it) are far beyond the scope of this report and our understanding. In noting the massive benefit that our collaboration has provided each of us, we are left feeling more confused than ever about why it bothers our colleagues so. Are our expressions of joy in collectivism in such contrast with how academic librarians view collaboration? Or is the root cause much scarier, residing among colonial misconceptions that people of color are threatening savages here to take away from white existence?

As a final note, we want to reiterate that our discussion is not implying that collaboration never happens in our library; quite the contrary. Our discussions and ultimately this Field Report, rooted in deep self-examination and reflection, serve as a collective sense-making for why certain collaborations appeared to be territorial, on terms we didn’t comprehend, transactional, or seemingly inauthentic as early and mid-career librarians of color. We hope that our perspectives spark dialogue on the complex dynamics of intergroup collaboration.

¹ Natalia Umaña experienced the solo dining restaurant, Ichiran, in New York City with family, 2017.

² Absher and Cardenas-Dow, "Collaborative Librarianship: A Minority Opinion," 163.

³ Proudford et al., "Navigating the Circle of Trust: Building and Rebuilding Authentic Relationships among Women," in *Gender, Race, and Ethnicity in the Workplace*, ed. M.F. Karsten (USA: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006), 201-202.

⁴ Peter Grahame and Kamini Grahame, "Institutional Ethnography", in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, ed. G. Ritzer. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosi084.pub2>

⁵ "Institutional Quick Facts Academic Year 2022-2023," University of Denver Office of Institutional Research & Analysis, accessed January 8, 2024, <https://www.du.edu/ir/factbook>

⁶ "University of Denver Mission, Vision & Values," <https://www.du.edu/about/mission-vision-values>.

⁷ John Evans Study Committee, "University of Denver John Evans Study Report" (report shared to University of Denver committee, Denver, CO, November 1, 2014).

⁸ University of Denver Magazine Staff, "University Releases Report on Founder's Role in Sand Creek Massacre," *University of Denver Magazine*, November 3, 2014, <https://magazine-archival.du.edu/campus-community/university-releases-report-founders-role-sand-creek-massacre/>.

⁹ University of Denver, "Indigenous History and DU," YouTube video, 1:28:19, January 25, 2021, <https://youtu.be/wZmguqj2hDs>.

¹⁰ The DU moniker, Pioneer (abbreviated as 'Pios'), has been the subject of largely student-

driven demands for removal. You can learn more about the history of DU's mascots in the exhibit titled, "[No More Pios: The Legacy of Settler Colonialism and the University of Denver](#)."

¹¹ Julia Cardi, "Student-Led Group Decries DU's Response in Asking to Change Nickname, Other Demands," *The Denver Gazette*, October 29, 2020, https://denvergazette.com/news/local/student-led-group-decries-dus-response-in-asking-to-change-nickname-other-demands/article_50b59bcc-1a1c-11eb-976f-e3dae3e44fd1.html.

¹² University of Denver Magazine Staff, "Princeton Review: DU's Library Ranks as the Nation's Best," *University of Denver Magazine*, Fall 2022, <https://magazine.du.edu/students-verdict-dus-library-ranks-as-the-nations-best/>.

¹³ Absher and Cardenas-Dow, "Collaborative Librarianship: A Minority Opinion," 162.

¹⁴ "Telling Our Stories: Recruitment and Retention of BIPOC Librarians," Survey, accessed 12/14/2023, <https://diverselibraries.com/survey/>.

¹⁵ D.L. Stewart review of "*Why Are All The Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?: And Other Conversations About Race*, by Beverly Daniel Tatum. *Journal of College Student Development*, Nov-Dec 2019.

¹⁶ Stewart review of "*Why Are All The Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*" 741.

¹⁷ García Peña, *Community as Rebellion* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2022).

¹⁸ *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, "Definition of CLIQUE," accessed 12/10/2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cliQUE>.

¹⁹ King et al., "Andrea's Third Shift: The Invisible Work of African-American Women in



Higher Education,” in *This Bridge We Call Home* (London: Routledge, 2022), 403-415.

²⁰ Zora Neale Hurston’s famous quote “All skin-folk ain’t kinfolk”; Gloria Ladson-Billings, “Just What Is Critical Race Theory and What’s It Doing in a Nice Field Like Education?” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 11, no. 1 (1998).

²¹ Duran, L. (2022). The Authenticity Trap: A Critical Race Interrogation. *About Campus*, 27(4), 13-17. [https://doi-org.du.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/10864822221123942](https://doi.org.du.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/10864822221123942)

²² Charlayne Hunter, “200 Black Women ‘Have Dialogue’” *The New York Times*, January 10, 1972, <https://www.nytimes.com/1972/01/10/archives/200-black-women-have-dialogue-debate-issues-that-differ-from-white.html>.

²³ Dorothy E. Smith, *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2005).

²⁴ The interconnected system of governance, control, and organization that shapes how one approaches collaboration through institutional structures, discourses, and power dynamics.