Perspectives of Black Female School Librarians on Recruitment and Retention

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Introduction

This study examined the lived experiences of five Black female school librarians. The participants shared perspectives on recruitment and retention in school librarianship. Current research on recruitment and retention of Black female librarians focuses on academic librarians.

Background

Women of Color Librarians' Motivations for LIS Degree
- Importance of community
- Representation
- activism

(Minter & Chamblee, 2018; Ndumu & Rollins, 2020).

5%
Librarians are Black
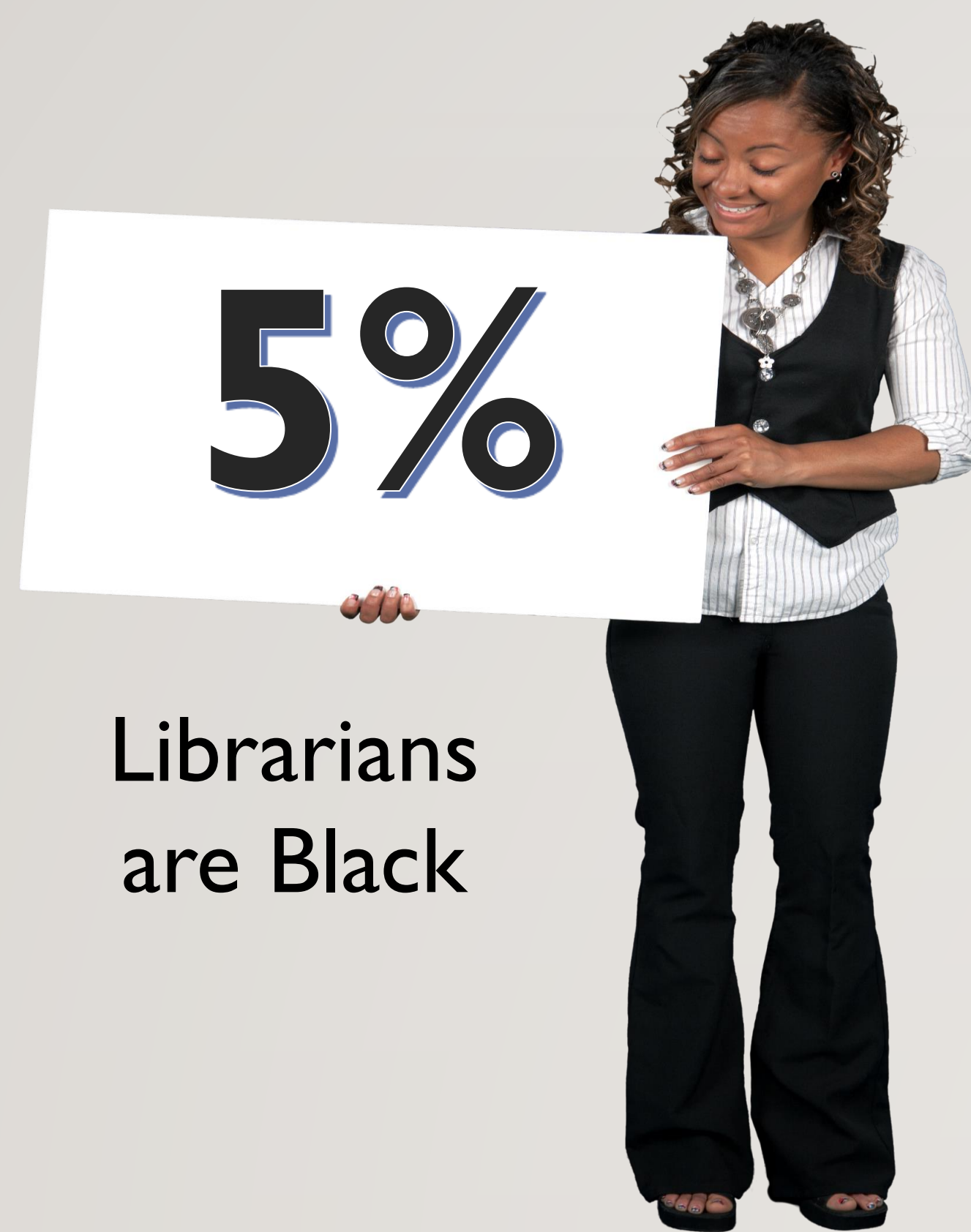
Research Question

(R1) What can we learn from current Black female school librarians' lived experiences to increase recruitment and retention in School Librarianship?

(R1.1) What are Black female school librarians' perceptions of barriers to recruitment into the profession?

(R1.2) What are the factors that affect the retention of Black female school librarians in schools?

Methodology

- The target population for this study was Black female school librarians currently employed in a public school.
- Purposive sampling was used in this study.
- Five semi-structured interviews using a web-based platform with a password-protected link was the qualitative data collection method.
- In Vivo & descriptive coding was conducted to identify emerging themes using thematic analysis.

Discussion

- The data indicates an intentional pathway increases recruitment of Black women into school librarianship.
- Microaggressions and invisibility in K12 school environments are challenges faced by Black female school librarians.
- Representation holds significant value for Black school librarians and their impact on the school community.
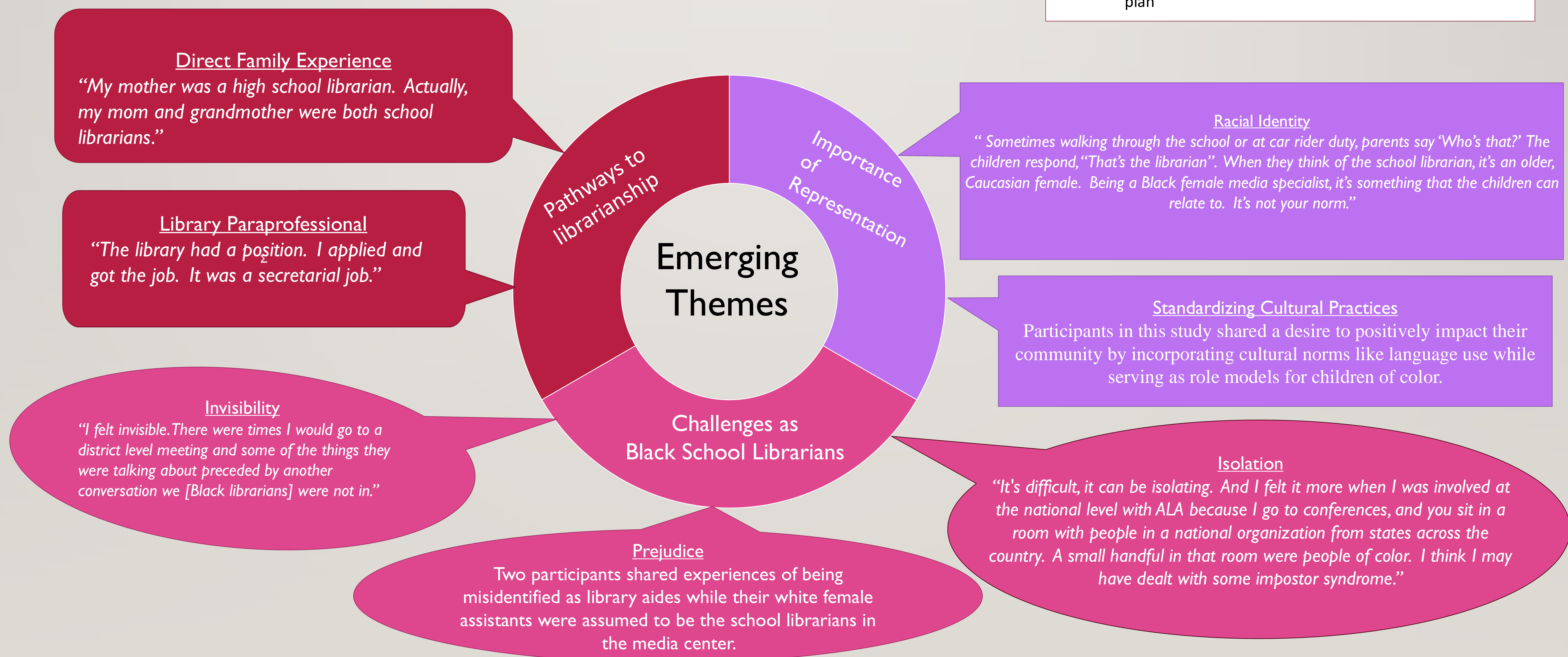
Despite acknowledging the challenges experienced by the participants, they expressed a high satisfaction with their job as school librarians.

Conclusion

- Core library values like literacy development and diversifying the school library collection were important, but representation in school librarianship emerged as a shared reason for staying in the field.

Though this study was limited in participants, it provided insights that should be explored into ways to recruit and retain Black females in the field of school librarianship.
- Black school librarians as recruitment facilitators
- Partnerships with organizations and schools like HBCUs
- Roundtable discussions to create a strategic recruitment plan

Emerging Themes

Pathways to librarianship

Direct Family Experience
"My mother was a high school librarian. Actually, my mom and grandmother were both school librarians."

Library Paraprofessional
"The library had a position. I applied and got the job. It was a secretarial job."

Importance of Representation

Racial Identity
" Sometimes walking through the school or at car rider duty, parents say 'Who's that?' The children respond, "That's the librarian". When they think of the school librarian, it's an older, Caucasian female. Being a Black female media specialist, it's something that the children can relate to. It's not your norm."

Standardizing Cultural Practices
Participants in this study shared a desire to positively impact their community by incorporating cultural norms like language use while serving as role models for children of color.

Challenges as Black School Librarians

Invisibility
"I felt invisible. There were times I would go to a district level meeting and some of the things they were talking about preceded by another conversation we [Black librarians] were not in."

Prejudice
Two participants shared experiences of being misidentified as library aides while their white female assistants were assumed to be the school librarians in the media center.

Isolation
"It's difficult, it can be isolating. And I felt it more when I was involved at the national level with ALA because I go to conferences, and you sit in a room with people in a national organization from states across the country. A small handful in that room were people of color. I think I may have dealt with some impostor syndrome."

Contact

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