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Seven Auditing Tools to Uncover Soft Censorship

The heart of this session is seven auditing tools you can use in any library, regardless of size or budget, to uncover soft censorship — from a thirty-minute walkthrough of your own building to data-driven benchmarks using the Seattle Public Library's open checkout dataset and free tools built specifically for this kind of collection analysis.

There are titles missing from library shelves right now that were never formally challenged, never voted on, never even discussed, and there is no record of their absence. It's called soft censorship and it's happening in libraries across the country. In most cases, nobody intended it.

We'll look at the three mechanics through which soft censorship operates — Removal, Rejection, and Restriction — using Kayla Martin-Gant's research as our framework. We'll examine what the current climate is doing to library workers and how that stress quietly reshapes collections through a phenomenon researchers call anticipatory anxiety. We'll look back at the 1950s comic book

scare — because the mechanics of soft censorship are not new, and what happened to the profession then has direct lessons for now.

Participants will be able to:

- Identify the three operational mechanics of soft censorship
- Explain how anticipatory anxiety drives fear-based collection development decisions
- Analyze historical patterns of moral panics targeting library collections
- Apply data-driven auditing tools to detect soft censorship in library collections

Intended Audience: This session is for collection managers, selectors, display and programming staff, and library directors who need tools to evaluate how soft censorship may be operating in the library.

BIO

Sonya Schryer Norris is a third-generation Michigan library worker with over 26 years of experience, including 16 years as a Consultant in Library Development for the Library of Michigan. Since founding Plum Librarian LLC in 2020, she has served as a consultant and trainer to 12 state libraries. Sonya has created 35+ courses on Niche Academy adopted in all 50 states and internationally, and her articles have appeared in *Library Journal*, *Computers in Libraries*, and for Cengage. She presents regularly for organizations including Library 2.0 and state library agencies.