"Are they still anxious?": Students' Experiences of Academic Libraries

Kaeli Nieves-Whitmore[a]

[a] The University of Alabama College of Communication and Information Science, USA
kmnieveswhitmore@crimson.ua.edu

ABSTRACT

Mellon's 1986 theory of library anxiety named a phenomenon many librarians were familiar with, and influenced inquiry related to multiple areas of Library and Information Science (LIS). However, Mellon's study, and the work it inspired, were done in an academic library environment that is drastically different from the academic library of today. Considering the rapid evolution of physical academic libraries alongside shifting societal attitudes towards mental health since the completion of Mellon's study, it is essential to reevaluate the concept of library anxiety. My dissertation research critically reevaluates the concept of library anxiety in the library of today and asks, "are they still anxious?" or, "anxious in the same way?".

To explore these questions, I have designed a two-part qualitative study. Part one is an analysis of the scholarly literature exploring how the concept of library anxiety has been understood and applied in the field of LIS. Part two of the study explores how that older understanding of library anxiety aligns with students' experiences of academic libraries today. Using a combination of surveys, interviews, and interactive mapping activities with student library users on a university campus in the Southeast, I identify possible connections between physical academic libraries and students' emotional experiences as they relate to library anxiety in today's landscape. This study has the potential to inform library design in ways that support students' information needs and shed light on some of the affective experiences of student users that are sometimes overlooked as key parts of user experience.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Academic Libraries; Critical Librarianship; Students; Research Methods.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

Library Anxiety; Library as Place; Affect; Library Design; Topophilia.