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The Special Collections Reading Room: A Study of Culture and Its Impact on the Researcher Experience

This article takes an anthropological approach to the special collections reading room by demonstrating that every reading room has its own culture. Cultural anthropology seeks to study the world and culture through human thought, behavior, and ways of life.[1] By adapting this perspective to the reading room, one can see the forces at play that affect the way patrons and staff navigate the space. The culture of the reading room is shaped by the various systems put in place and can promote, or impede, a productive visit. A disjointed culture comes from the miscommunication between philosophy, policy, physical design, and atmosphere within the reading room. Techniques and policies used in the reading room are influenced by three main factors: access, security, and preservation. Aligning these methodologies with the ethos behind them disseminates important information to patrons; when out of alignment negative culture persists. The author examines the strategies at twelve libraries. The different practices and philosophies are analyzed through participant observation and interviews with librarians and archivists. Librarians can use their cultural authority in the reading room to determine what ethos is emphasized, curate a reading room that will facilitate success, and directly impact user experience by creating a positive cultural environment.

Introduction

The reading room is the beating heart of the library. Without the reading room, a library cannot serve as a center for knowledge, learning, and collaboration. The items in special collections libraries are there because they hold cultural, artistic, literary, intellectual, and/or historical value. They must be preserved, maintained, and protected, and those who wish to study or explore these items must be able to access and use them. This article aims to take an anthropological perspective to the reading rooms of special collections libraries, and proposes that the formal reading room

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1. Serena Nanda and Richard L. Warms. *Cultural Anthropology*. 10th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2011. 80.

inspires its own culture. The reading room is a self-contained and clearly defined area, and it holds special meaning to both staff and visitors.

If cultural anthropologists Serena Nanda and Richard Warms observed that culture "helps us understand" nature and meaning, and "comments on how we should act within the world,"[2] so, too, might one extend this sentiment to a library and its reading room: library culture engrosses staff and patrons, and helps us understand the nature and meaning of the spaces in which materials are used; the library's culture comments on who we are—users and staff—and how we should act within the reading room. The culture that is developed within the reading room is one that helps patrons and staff alike adapt to the circumstances within which they are placed. Culture is a mental template for organizing the world, and the culture of the reading room is, therefore, the template for organizing how to behave within the reading room, and within the library.

It is vital to acknowledge that each reading room has a different and distinct culture. The impact of strategy and policies applied within the reading room has differing effects on the culture, which in turn influences the experience of a researcher. Within the library space, the social logic comes from whoever is creating the guidelines, designing the space, and giving directions to those who wish to move in it. A library and its staff are the architects of their systems of logic and reason.[3] Library staff set the blueprint, thereby holding cultural authority and shaping the experience of readers. Decisions on security, preservation, and access can either aid or hinder the intended result, and thus influence the experience of the patron. Culture needs to be considered when creating policies or designing rooms so that they have the desired intention and effect, as opposed to having unintended consequences that could interfere with patron experience, access to information, safe handling, or staff environment.

For this article, twelve special collections reading rooms were chosen based on location (major cities with a population greater than one hundred thousand, as well as hubs for special collections libraries), prestige of collection, type (museum, university, public, or research), or uniqueness (in policy, collection, or reading room space). While only nine libraries are specifically referenced within, all twelve were influential in this article's analysis. The technique used is participant observation, which entailed gathering detailed observations on the social life of the library and its methods/theories/techniques. This was completed by examining the procedures, environment, and interaction with staff, and how they influence a reading room's unique culture and

2. Nanda, Serena, and Richard L. Warms, *Cultural Anthropology*, 10th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2011), 81.

3. Thomas Augst and Kenneth E. Carpenter, *Institutions of Reading: The Social Life of Libraries in the United States* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 247–8.

affect both patrons and staff. In order to understand the ideas and intended meaning behind the methodology that runs through the reading room and its culture, one-on-one interviews with the librarians or archivists who work in these twelve libraries were also conducted.[4] This article examines the impact of strategy and approach on the culture of the reading room because understanding this culture can lead to more innovative ideas for serving material, and for patron experience.

Culture

"Culture" is an elusive word to define and has evolved through many different stages of definition, understanding, and schools of thought. There are various ways[5] of approaching culture within the field of Anthropology, from seeing culture as a force that is shaped by and shapes the personalities of its members, to seeing it as a way to give life meaning, to believing that culture can never be truly described due to inherent biases.[6]

A textbook definition is that "cultures are made up of learned behaviors,"[7] that is, they all have language and complex symbolic systems. Cultures are shared by groups; they contain information about how to survive in the world. Applied to libraries: the culture of a reading room must then have learned behavior, have a language and symbolic system, be shaped by a group, and contain information on how to "survive" within the room. The learned behavior is how to interact with the material in a safe and respectful way. The language and symbolic systems are words and symbols that are unique to the library or mean something different in a library setting. The information on how to survive is provided through the policies and guidelines of each particular library.

Culture can be regarded as a system of multiple elements that come together to form an interconnected whole.[8] The culture within reading rooms is a system of interrelated parts because the reading room has shared elements that determine how those within it perceive the entirety of the space around them. These interrelated parts develop a pattern of behavior in both staff and researcher that informs, and is informed by, the culture. There are three main components that feed the culture of the reading room: environment, policies and methodology, and the philosophy behind

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4. The libraries and librarians interviewed are kept anonymous. They are referred to as Library A, Library B, Library C, etc.

5. Nanda and Warms outlined six characteristics that define culture, as well as twelve definitions that evolved based on different schools of thought. *Merriam Webster Dictionary* has six definitions, while *Oxford English Dictionary* offers fifteen (three of which are considered obsolete).

6. Nanda and Warms. *Cultural Anthropology*. 74.

7. Nanda and Warms. *Cultural Anthropology*. 74.

8. "Difficulties in Defining Culture." *Inter-culturally speaking*. https://www.conted.ox.ac.uk/courses/samples/inter-culturally-speaking-online/index.html#:~:text=Characteristics%20of%20culture&text=It%20is%20an%20integrated%20whole,provides%20a%20sense%20of%20identity.

the policies. Questions that drove my analysis included: What does a reading room's interior design communicate to the user? Are staff enabled to cultivate positive and collaborative interactions? How do the policies reflect the philosophy, and vice versa? For my research, it was important to observe both the abstract (i.e., atmosphere) and literal procedures (i.e., method of material delivery). These procedures could inform different aspects of the experience and culture. At Library F (research library in a major city), patrons had box access to archival materials, rather than accessing one folder at a time. This provided more patron freedom, which allowed individuals to proceed at their own pace, and created an allied atmosphere. Taken together, Library F produced trust through its literal procedures (box access) and reinforced a culture of collaboration via the abstract (an atmosphere where patrons viewed materials at their own pace). In the following sections, I will provide my assessments of the three main components that influence the culture of a reading room: environment, policies and methodology, and philosophies observed across the twelve reading rooms in my study.

Environment

The environment within a reading room is the combination of atmosphere and physical design. Atmosphere encompasses the feelings, energies, and attitudes of those in the reading room (staff or patron). The atmosphere within a reading room can clue one into how staff and patrons interact. The interactions of staff and patrons and their behaviors indicate how they feel both about—and in—the space. The space a reading room occupies is intellectual, and more than its physical characteristics alone. Aptly put by Augst and Carpenter, "the space books occupy is cognitive as well as physical."[9] If culture is the mental template for organizing the world, the atmosphere colors how individuals view and interpret the world around them, as music would in a film. Imagine watching a film in which two characters are talking. If ominous music were playing, you would interpret that scene as tension-filled or suspenseful. If upbeat and happy music were playing, it would be interpreted as comedic or cheerful. Music has a direct effect on the cognitive processing and emotional state of a viewer.[10] Atmosphere and energies are the incalculable—yet influential—forces in the reading room.

The physical design of the reading room affects how the space is interpreted. It informs visitors about the thinking behind what librarians hope the user experience will be, as well as how organizations decide their policies. The furniture in a reading room may be arranged in a certain way to counteract poor sightlines. This indicates a

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9.   Augst and Carpenter, *Institutions of reading*, 18.
10.   Marilyn G. Boltz, "Musical Soundtracks as a Schematic Influence on the Cognitive Processing of Filmed Events," In *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* vol, 18, no. 4. (University of California, 2001), 427–54.

design responsive to staff needs. The environment of the reading room is a combination of physical and mental curation—what are the physical limitations of the space, and how does that translate cognitively?

Library A (special collections within a university in a major city) has one reading room that sits between two different, unseen staff workspaces. To get from one workspace to the other required staff to maneuver through the reading room, tables, and patrons. The presence of staff was constantly felt, as they were continually walking in and out with carts and boxes, and holding whispered conversation. However, even with this placement, full-time staff were not easily available for questions. Library A was a place where people actively did their job to secure materials behind the scenes. What makes this an interesting example of a reading room's atmosphere is that while physically patrons were in the center of it all, they were not the priority. The placement of patrons was contradictory, creating atmospheric tension within the room.

Adding to this feeling in Library A was the sensation of clear separation between staff and patrons. Staff were seen and heard, but there was little to no interaction or collaboration. This presented an interesting twist on access. Traditionally,[11] patrons feel more barriers between themselves and the material; in Library A, it was the opposite. There were few barriers between patron and material, and more barriers between patron and staff.

In direct contrast was the reading room of Library B (research library in a major city), where staff workstations were located in the reading room and therefore clearly seen and available to patrons. It created an open line of communication. At one point during my visit, a patron walked up to someone working at his desk,[12] along the edge of the reading room, and asked a question. This ease to have questions answered reinforced the accessibility of staff and the openness of the reading room. The setup of a reading room like that at Library B can be a great tool to aid in collaborative processes because it set the atmospheric tone.

Culture is a manifestation of social elements. It does not produce society but is the product of society. Therefore, when negative or positive elements come together they can produce aspects that are then demonstrated by the culture. The reading rooms of Library A and B had elements that positively or negatively affected the patron, which were then mirrored back within its own positive or negative culture. Atmosphere and physical design encapsulated these elements, which combined to create the environ-

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11.   Tara Wenger, "Welcoming Undergraduates to Special Collections," *Kansas Library Association College and University Libraries Section Proceedings*: Vol. 2: No. 1 (New Prairie Press, 2012), https://doi.org/10.4148/culs.v1i0.1617.

12.   Individual desks at Library B were separate from the check-in and reference desks.

ment of the two distinct reading rooms. It is not a question that each reading room is unique and has different strengths and weaknesses. These strengths and weaknesses were illuminated in how the spaces were curated and maintained, both physically and psychologically.

Policies and Methodology

The policies within a reading room are the backbone for the entire operation. Without policies, rules, or guidelines, the reading room would be chaotic, and the risk for damage or loss would increase. The policies within a reading room are the key to deciphering the culture. Reading room policies are understood to represent handling guidelines, user interaction, outside materials not allowed in (food, drink, bags, coats, etc.), and reading room workflows or procedures. Through policies, patrons learn to navigate handling materials, interact with staff, and generally move throughout the space. While there are some policies that are uniform across special collections, others seem to be in opposition. For example, every library I surveyed required the use of lockers for patrons to store their belongings. On the other hand, a contradictory policy was the use of notebooks. Notebooks were only allowed at six of the libraries. The "no-notebook" rule was theoretically for security reasons, but the reasoning is unconvincing when one considers the recent history of large-scale special collections theft.[13] Of the libraries that did not allow notebooks, only Library F examined the individual sheets of paper at the end of my visit, backing up their no-notebook policy. If that was a procedure, and one could also, theoretically, examine the pages of a notebook, then why were notebooks prohibited? The only reading room that inspected my laptop was Library G (university library in a suburban municipality), which also allowed notebooks. This kind of contradiction can be frustrating to patrons. If one's notes are in a notebook, which they are allowed to bring to one reading room—but cannot to another— the sudden shift can yield confusion and a negative perspective. This unease influences patron's reactions to other policies and colors their experience.

The language used to write these policies is important and should not be overlooked by reading room policymakers.[14] Language is itself a social action and cultural resource. As Alessandro Duranti said, "Language [is] a set of practices, which play an essential role in mediating the ideational and material aspects of human existence and,

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13.   Michael Blanding, *The Map Thief: The Gripping Story of an Esteemed Rare-Map Dealer Who Made Millions Stealing Priceless Maps*, (Gotham Books, 2015). Bregman and Tenney warned that "laptop computers also present their own set of hazards ...drives can be used to conceal materials." Alvan Bregman and Margaret Tufts Tenney, "Special Collections Reading Rooms," in Everett C. Wilkie, Jr., ed., *Guide to Security Considerations and Practices for Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collection Libraries*, (Chicago: ACRL, 2011) 13.

14.   "ACRL/RBMS Guidelines Regarding the Security of Special Collections Materials," (Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL), 2009), Revised June 2023, https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/security_theft.

hence, in bringing about particular ways of being-in-the-world."[15] Within the reading room, language is very important to patron understanding, since it acts as a tool with which one can function successfully. By refining the verbiage in the guidelines, one can hope to make policies more understandable; complicated language leads to misunderstanding, confusion, and can ultimately result in intimidation or an uncomfortable experience for both patron and librarian. To encourage strong collaboration between patrons and staff, both of whom can come together to uphold policy, clear and detailed instructions are needed. Intentional policy drafting and considered language allows for staff to have a positive social impact on the culture of the reading room. It ensures that a cultural resource (language) is available, and also positively impacts how special collections are regarded by the public.

Philosophy

Revealing the thought processes and strategies that go into creating the reading room demonstrates whether staff hopes for patron experience successfully translate into the culture. Did archivists' and librarians' intentions come through? Did the intentions translate to the patron/cultural experience, or was there a disconnect between what the librarians hoped a policy would achieve and what that policy actually communicated to the patron? To gather data for this portion, I interviewed various reference librarians and archivists to determine the thought processes that influenced their reading room's guidelines, physical arrangement, and patron interaction.[16] In these discussions, it became clear that the philosophies of the staff and institution heavily influenced reading room culture.

Library A operated under two responsibilities: primarily to protect the material, and secondarily to serve the researcher. This kernel of philosophy radiated into the culture through chosen policies, staff organization, and reading room arrangement. Library A's policies catered to the need that material lasts; policies were based in a particular kind of service, "service to the material itself and secondly, service to the researcher interested in it."[17] Therefore, when communicating with patrons the rule of thumb was, as one librarian described it, to engage with patrons with "polite firmness. We need to think about the fact that the patron is not always right. When push comes to shove, the material is the most important."[18] Thoughts and attitudes such as this were seen in Library A's policies, one of the few in this study that operated with folder-level access.

Library I (university library in a major city) operated with access as its focal point. The key principle to Library I's policies was that any task was secondary to the re-

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15. Alessandro Duranti, *Linguistic anthropology*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 5.
16. See appendix A for interview questions.
17. Librarian at Library A. Interview by author.
18. Librarian at Library A. Interview by author.

searcher, and staff did all they could to maintain a collaborative environment between staff and patrons, and among staff members. In discussions with staff, phrases such as "keep the user in mind" and "the stuff [i.e., library materials] should never precede the person"[19] were used. Library I has one of the most patron-driven reading rooms, which is reflected in such policies as box-level access and biweekly staff meetings to discuss user experience.[20] Another patron driven library was Library L (public library in a major city, with a separate reading room for its special collections), which made sure to imbue "warmth"[21] into every interaction, purposefully, to combat patron anxiety. It had the longest check-in process, where each patron had an extended one-on-one orientation with a librarian. Its philosophies were in alignment and supported its policies, which positively impacted the culture of the reading room.

Library C (museum research library in a major city) welcomed walk-in patrons. Therefore, many patron visits tended to be spur-of-the-moment, by people who had no experience with special collections, or the security procedures and registration involved. The consequences of theft and the worry surrounding security were felt in Library C's procedures and methodology. When working in the reading room, staff reported being "very aware [and to] always have eyes on people." A staff member observed, "you never know what can happen. You have to keep your guard up because people can take advantage."[22] However, in my one-on-one interviews, staff emphasized that they appreciated when someone came in who may have never been to a special collection before, and valued "when people come in and [are] excited."[23] This sense of awe and excitement is what staff hoped the experience was like for all patrons. Library C was a case where the desire of staff did not translate in the way intended. Hoping a patron has a sense of excitement when encountering material versus feeling exhausted by patrons who do not understand the space they are entering—plus feeling anxiety toward security that manifests as a need to constantly watch them—are very different. The hope for patron experience created tension with the strategy behind the policies due to their conflicting goals.

In the reading room, librarians hold cultural authority, but Library C illustrated how patrons themselves contributed to the culture of the reading room. If staff understood why they asked a researcher to change a particular behavior or follow a policy but the researcher did not understand, then the patron felt persecuted. The librarian must balance the negative effects that arise from inconsistency between philosophy,

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19.   Librarian at Library I. Interview by author.
20.   Librarian at Library I. Interview by author.
21.   "Warmth" was a specific goal/word choice. Librarian at Library L wanted patrons to "go away feeling like it was a good experience as a reader dealing with staff socially, as well as dealing with the collections because sometimes it can seem cold." Librarian at Library L. Interview by author.
22.   Librarian at Library C. Interview by author.
23.   Librarian at Library C. Interview by author.

policy, and atmosphere, which created a disjointed culture and affected all those in the reading room. The cultural authority holders (library staff) construct the reality[24] of the reading room and must ensure cohesion between the how and why of their space.

Access versus Security versus Preservation

From what was learned about the methods and strategies of all twelve special collections reading rooms, one thing stands out: the main motivator that shaped policies and staff-patron interaction was whether the institution emphasized access, security, or preservation. Most libraries endeavored to keep a balance, but usually one goal was emphasized. This rendered access, security, or preservation the greatest influence on the culture within the reading room. The competition and lack of balance among these priorities are the framework for the ethos that guides the libraries' decision-making.

Procedures give information on how to "survive" within the reading room. When out of balance, the culture suffers and the blueprint for moving within the space becomes confusing. If a library's procedures emphasized preservation, then the information disseminated to patrons focused on care of the material. Too much emphasis sent a message of "hands off." If a library's procedures emphasized access, the information passed on was that this material was for everyone. However, without effective rules or guidelines, institutions risked damage to the materials and potentially lost future research possibilities. If security was most important at a library, then the subliminal message was that patrons posed a risk and must be surveilled. Patrons felt intimidated, but the material was secured. The messaging within these key influences deeply affects the modus operandi that created, and continually seeped into, the culture. All libraries in the study attempted to find a balance between preservation, access, and security, but it was noticeable when one of those aspects was emphasized over another. Prioritization of one of these aspects, I observed, deeply impacted researcher experience. If a balance was successfully struck between the three, it provided the patron with a clear understanding of the nature and meaning of the special collections library, and how to achieve success within it. Staff and patrons working together ensured the preservation of valuable materials and the success of research, and enabled everyone to navigate the security policies.

Institutional Influence

The parent institution also has an important effect on the reading room's culture. Many of the libraries in this study are independent from their parent institutions with regard to day-to-day decision making and changing or improving policies. However, that does not mean they are not influenced by the institution that surrounds

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24. Tiffany Jenkins, "The Crisis of Cultural Authority," essay in *A Museum Studies Approach to Heritage*, 1st ed., (London: Routledge, 2018) 2.

it. If culture is made up of learned behaviors,[25] one can argue that a reading room contains not only the learned behaviors of its patrons and staff but also the learned behaviors resulting from its parent institution's ideologies, which in turn affects the policies the library enforces.

There are special collections within public libraries, museums, universities, and private libraries. The way these intertwine can be illustrated by a matrix chart (Appendix B). The *x* axis represents museums. At one end reside the traditional preservation- and security-driven museums; you're invited to look but not touch.[26] At the other end are museums that encourage a sensory experience. The *y* axis represents libraries. On one end would sit public libraries: access driven, free and open browsing, a tactile environment. At the other end are subscription libraries, where access is only granted to those who pay a membership fee. Special collections reading rooms are a hybrid between museum galleries and public libraries; they balance patrons and artifacts. This matrix may not be forever, as more special collections libraries become open access. For example, private libraries, which one would think are closer to subscription libraries, fall closer to the middle, as many allow independent research of their collections.

One of the biggest motivators toward where a reading room fell on this matrix was the type of parent institution, which also led to varying degrees of strictness when it came to accessing or using material. The parent institution at Library H was a university. Library H was patron-centric, with an eye toward security. Its policies were firm but educational, and encouraged questions. One of the founding goals was to aid in students' research and learning. The parent institution at Library D was a museum. At Library D, security guards escorted patrons to the reading room. The parent institutions' ideologies greatly influenced policy design and enforcement, which impacted the culture of the room.

Conclusion

Libraries are storage facilities, book processing centers, intellectual banks, and service hubs all wrapped into one. The library is an important body of human knowledge, and the formal reading room is the beating heart of the library. Libraries are special places because they are uniquely important to the preservation and growth of human knowledge and culture. They exist as the gateway for people to access that knowledge and culture. The special collections reading room gives the library a sense of place, where innovation and collaboration come together to inspire new ideas and ways of thinking. Without a properly curated room, the special collections library operates ineffectively because it fails to cultivate a culture that positively impacts research, user experience, and care of materials.

25. Nanda and Warms, *Cultural Anthropology*, 76.
26. Tiffany Jenkins, "The Crisis of Cultural Authority," 24.

Nothing in the special collections reading room is by chance. As demonstrated in this study, everything has a purpose or a message to convey. Choices, behaviors, and philosophies made by staff are important contributions that translate into the overall culture of the reading room, reflected by the environment, policies, and patron experience. Identifying this is key, and as Totleben and Lacher-Feldman said, "recognizing and valuing differences and strengths offer insights into the identity and organizational culture of the library."[27] Each reading room in my study had a distinct feel and nature; no two were the same. A reading room may feel similar and remind you of another, but each is unique. Researchers' ingrained ways of behaving must be altered, and doing so will require a mental reorganization facilitated by staff.

 The role of a special collections librarian is an interesting one because there are two motives seemingly in conflict: the need to protect material, and the desire to connect patrons to that material in the most efficient and helpful way. Most of the time, these two ambitions align. But when they do not, it negatively impacts the culture of the reading room. The conscious decisions made by librarians play a role in implemented procedures and day-to-day interactions. Just as important, however, are the subconscious intentions staff may not realize are communicated to patrons. There are "oppositions in the library's many meanings. While it can be a 'fine, meditative space,' the library can be a site of 'conflict and devastation' too; it 'can be threatening as well as nurturing.'"[28] A reading room becomes intimidating and adversarial when contradictory behaviors, policies, and philosophies interact. Reading room staff can articulate that access is the primary goal, but if staff subliminally treat patrons like potential criminals, then there is a subconscious intention that prevails. The mission of Library C, for example, was to connect researchers with historical material related to the museum's collections. However, in my discussion with the librarian, she mentioned the threat to security multiple times. In that space, there were always four to five people watching the reading room at once. The subliminal messages did not align with the conscious mission, causing tension, which made for confusion on the part of both patron and staff, as well as in the policies enforced. There is nothing wrong with choosing to make security a priority; the problem resides in its conveyance. Similarly, at Library D (also a museum library in a major city), it was clear that preservation was a top concern. The difference was that this edict, and the rationale behind it, were directly communicated to patrons both explicitly through email and implicitly through policies such as washing one's hands and not being allowed to turn the page of a book with a pencil in hand. Successful policies must reflect the ethos.

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27. Totleben and Lacher-Feldman. *Creating a Holistic Fabric of Services and Collections from the Inside Out*. 40.

28. Crawford, Alice. *The Meaning of the Library: a Cultural History*. Princeton University Press, 2015: xxiii.

This exploration into the reading rooms of special collections libraries reveals that the culture was dependent on atmosphere, interior design, policies, and philosophies behind designing those policies. These cultures can be curated to benefit librarians and aid them in creating a safe, positive, and collaborative experience for everyone. Librarians are just as affected by the culture as the researcher. To encourage positive staff interaction, the culture needs to aid them in communication and support what they are trying to achieve.

This study was undertaken during a time of change for special collections, as people within the field pushed for more access and less intimidation. Librarians, to varying degrees, have focused on improving access in many places while also improving security. Some recurring words from the various interviews conducted were "welcoming," "collaboration," "partnership," "transparent," "seamless," and "successful." Librarians and archivists are making strides to emphasize both preservation and access. By marrying philosophy and policies, having an intentional space, and providing support for staff and patron collaboration, special collections can create an optimal culture. The cultural power of the reading room, the center of the library, needs to be taken into account to provide a successful patron experience.

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Below are the guiding questions used. The author also allowed room for conversation to flow or interviewees to discuss anything they felt important to include.

Library:
1. What is your definition of a special collections library?
   a. How does your library subscribe to that definition?
2. How do you define the success of your library?
3. What is the purpose of this library?
4. How long have you worked at this library?
5. What is your interpretation of the physical space in the library? How is it curated?
6. Are there any factors specific to your library that affect how the reading room is run?
7. What is the best part about your reading room? Your least favorite aspect?
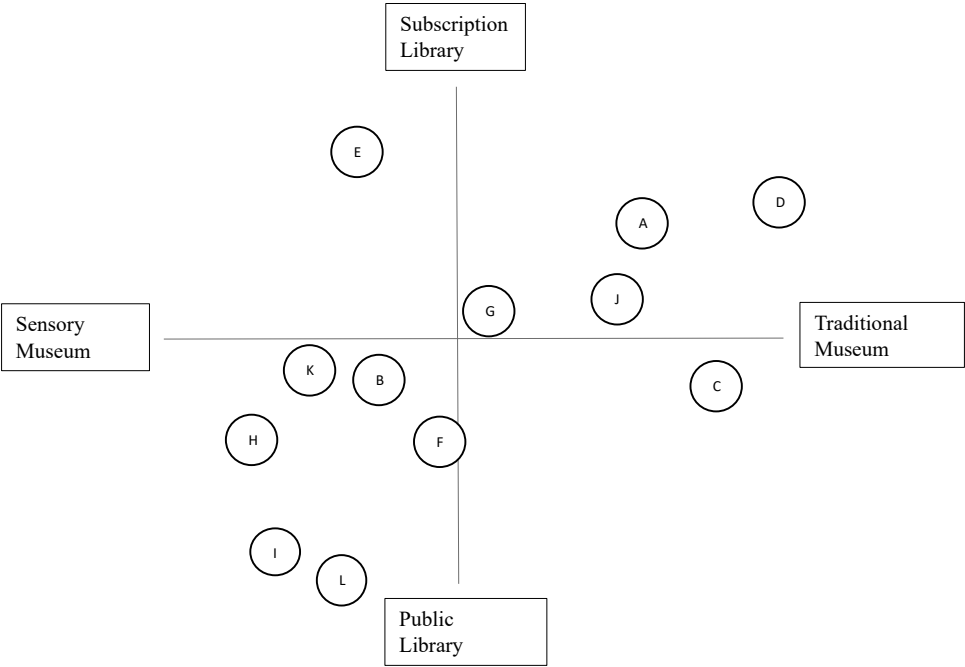
Reading Room:
8. Who developed your reading room policies?
9. What kind of policies do you employ?
10. Have they ever changed over the years?
11. Is there a philosophy/methodology behind the practice that you prescribe to?
12. How do you staff your reading room? Why? (Scheduling vs. actual handling)
    a. What special knowledge, skills, and abilities are needed? What techniques and methods?
    b. What tools are involved? How and when are they used?
13. Do you have a manual for employees?

Researchers:
14. What kind of researchers are the most successful here?
15. How do you communicate with patrons? (Within Reading Room or remotely?)
16. Do you have a strategy when dealing with patrons?
17. What are you hoping the experience is like for researchers?

Appendix B: Institution Matrix

Libraries have been placed based on the following criteria: parent institution, level of access, level of security, or level of preservation*

Key

Sensory Museum: Low security, low preservation

Traditional Museum: High security, high preservation

Public Library: Low security, high access

Subscription Library: High security, low access

* These levels should be taken in context with the fact that there is a baseline level of each for all special collections libraries: i.e., low security does not mean no security.