Chapter 6
Why Isn't This Being Studied?

ABSTRACT

This chapter poses and attempts to answer a significant question regarding emotions research within academic librarianship – namely, why isn't this topic being researched more? Given how emotionally-laden the work is and how emotionally-laden information-seeking behavior can be, it seems surprising that there is a dearth of research on emotion-related issues. Other people-oriented professions like healthcare and hospitality seem very focused on understanding the qualitative experiences of their professionals; in comparison, academic librarianship seems reluctant to tackle the topic. The chapter examines what does exist in the academic librarianship literature regarding emotions and branches out into other disciplines to see how they examine the issue of emotion and its impact on professional practice. The chapter also posits answers for why this topic isn't studied more within academic librarianship, focusing on issues of objectivity and data-driven decision making.

INTRODUCTION

Given the individual and organizational impacts of stress and burnout – which in other fields, particularly healthcare, have been connected to high rates of job dissatisfaction and turnover which in turn contribute to shortages in the profession (Dall'Ora, Griffiths, & Ball, 2015) – one does not wonder at such phenomena being studied. As antecedents to stress and burnout, studying emotional labor and emotional exhaustion likewise make sense

for understanding those experiences, addressing them when they occur, and developing solutions to prevent or at least mitigate their occurrence or re-occurrence.

However, surprisingly, while there seems to be an adequate amount of research on stress in academic librarianship, with lesser but still respectable amounts of research regarding burnout, overall there appears to be a dearth of research regarding the emotional experiences of academic librarianship. This seems strange: where is the literature examining the emotional aspects of academic librarianship? After all, academic librarianship is clearly a public services profession, involving people work which requires significant emotional labor. The greater the emotional labor, the greater the potential for emotional exhaustion. And we know where emotional exhaustion leads: the literature reflects the inevitable endgame of emotional exhaustion.

This raises a significant question that this chapter will attempt to answer through an examination of what does exist in the literature regarding the emotional dimensions of librarianship, extending the scope of review beyond academic librarianship, and looking at the motivations for such research in emotional research in non-library fields such as healthcare and the hospitality industry, fields which feature significant people work and routinely examine the impact of emotional labor and exhaustion. This chapter will also hypothesize regarding why the field of academic librarianship seems to avoid tackling this critical topic.

EMOTIONS RESEARCH IN LIBRARY FIELDS

Much like the previous chapter in which we examined burnout in the words of public and technical services librarians, this section will likewise look at the very words of librarians to determine why these topics have been studied as a means of understanding why academic librarians are not studying the emotional dimensions of the profession. The main reason for studying any problem is to understand it and identify ways to prevent it – to identify solutions. Obviously, we argue that it is important to study the emotional dimensions of academic librarianship because of the chain reaction that leads to emotional exhaustion and burnout. Surely, we thought, the profession recognizes the problem. Quite apart from the research, our personal experiences as academic librarians in public services and technical services reveals that there are emotional

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