

## Letters

## To the Editor:

The recent article on the client-librarian relationship by Joan C. Durrance (C&RL, January 1986), raised a number of questions in my mind, some specific and/or methodological, others more theoretical. First, on the level of detail, I had difficulty linking figures in the text to the accompanying tables. For instance, are the "168 responses" citing appearance (p.61) the same as the 136 in table 2? Where are the "35 users [who] based their rationale on what appears to be . . ." (p.61)? I don't find them in table 2, either. Second, on a somewhat broader scale, what are the characteristics of the client-professional relationship? They seem to be defined *a posteriori*, and applied to a subset of the interviewees based on their behaviors, rather than enunciated beforehand. The author states that "certain conditions must be present before a client engages a practitioner in a professional relationship," but never enumerates these conditions.

My third concern is no doubt the most important. Why do we librarians wish to isolate ourselves in "private or semiprivate offices," or distance ourselves in other ways from nonprofessionals on our staffs? People visit dentists, attorneys, and other "professionals" in situations which are not usually pleasant; certainly we wish to project a more congenial context in which we provide our services. Visiting "professionals" is often a daunting, even frightening, experience; we should seek rather to be more approachable and non-threatening, so that patrons will feel at ease when they seek us out. The primary goal of librarianship should be excellence of service to library users. If efforts to attain some kind of "professionalism" interfere with the smooth functioning of all members of the library staff, by creating counterproductive status distinctions within that staff, then professionalism should not be an overriding concern. Our energies would be better directed toward the patron him/herself.

MARK SCHUMACHER

University of North Carolina, Greensboro

## A Response:

I have reexamined my article and have these comments regarding the numbers cited by Mark Schumacher:

168 for 136 is the result of a typographical error. It probably occurred because the number below is 68. The fact that users cited appearance twice as often as expertise is still valid ( $68 \times 2 = 136$ ). To obtain the numbers for users who based their rationale on bibliographic instruction and other practices that may result in identification, add "ID Practice" and "Bib. Inst."

Regarding Schumacher's third concern, now is the time to raise questions about the proper practice of reference. We have much evidence that the present practice, which is not based on a reference theory (we don't really have one), doesn't work well. We need to be engaging in more dialogue aimed at making it work better.

JOAN C. DURRANCE

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

To the Editor:

Libraries and museums are our *social memory*. Joan Bechtel's (May 1986) settling for *conversation* as a paradigm for librarianship leaves out the greater social responsibilities of our institutions and our profession to protect and to make judgments about our graphic heritage on what we select and preserve for recall. Because travel and information technology are able to all but remove time and location from our senses to make us all part of a single global civilization, I agree with Michael Gorman, "There is no longer such a thing as a library, there is only 'The Library'—the fusion of all libraries" (*American Libraries* 17:325-28, May 1986). The question of mission and goals for libraries become moot if we view libraries as part of the total social body. Libraries have no more of a need for a goal than we need to define a goal for our arms, our heart, or our memory. To carry the biological analogy further goal and mission statements are needed only when we refer to the exercise (i.e., access) of our memory.

VERN M. PINGS  
Wayne State University,  
Detroit, Michigan

### LIBRARY ANXIETY: SOME ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

To the Editor:

In a recently published article in *College and Research Libraries* (47:160-65, March, 1986), Constance A. Mellon proposed a theory of "library anxiety." This theory was developed as a result of a qualitative research project involving students enrolled in composition classes at a relatively small university. In response to Mellon's article, I have two intentions: to applaud her research approach and to expand on her conclusions.

Without taking either side in the passionately debated issue of librarians and faculty status, I feel safe in saying that the quest for professional recognition and/or promotion and tenure has led librarianship to place an enormous, and perhaps unjustified, emphasis on quantitative research. Mellon's well-defined and articulately presented qualitative approach offers a challenge: will quantitative research alone ever satisfactorily provide the information librarians need to determine the practices of "a profession whose major aim is service to people?" (p. 160).

Her particular qualitative research project attempted, through an analysis of students' "diarylike (journal) entries" describing their research processes, to "shed light on . . . how library instruction should be accomplished" (p. 163). Seeking common "themes, topics, or situations" (p. 161) in the journals, this analysis revealed that a significant proportion of college students find library use frightening, overpowering, and terrifyingly confusing.

These revelations won't come as much of a surprise to public service academic librarians, and the development of hypotheses from the recognition of common themes in subjective compositions may not seem nearly as satisfying as an annual comparison of the number of books circulated, reference questions answered, or online searches performed. Such hypotheses, however, tell a great deal of truth about information gathering, a complex and often unsystematic process.

The satisfying logic of search strategies has, for too long, deflected librarians away from the fact that users find information using serendipitous, illogical processes. Search strategies make sense only as descriptions of the organization of information; they do not describe the actual information-gathering process. These strategies delineate what librarians need to know not how library users want or need to behave. By concentrating on quantitatively measuring library users' encounters with the way information has been organized rather than establishing a qualitative understanding of how users feel about the

information-gathering process, librarians have been discovering little about users and more about themselves.

The power in Mellon's research lies with the fact that it was the students themselves who used the words, *scared*, *fear*, *overpowering*, etc. What Mellon has here is a theory of library anxiety grounded (a qualitative research term) in students' own feelings about their library experiences. This is data that librarians simply cannot afford to ignore. Satisfying as they seem, numbers and the statistics they generate can be meaningless as descriptions of a service performed or needed. Slippery as they seem, people's feelings about library research constitute essential evidence.

Mellon set out to discover how what she learned from her qualitative research would improve library instruction. Comparing library anxiety to math or test anxiety, she makes some suggestions for incorporating the recognition of a fear of library use into instruction sessions. Mellon's predetermined expectations, however, obscure the full implications of her results. Insistent on the fact that the common themes she discovered in the students' journals would validate the need for and improve library instruction, Mellon ignores the implications of library anxiety, which suggest that instruction programs may be part of the problem.

The fear of the library that Mellon's research uncovers, stems from feelings of inadequacy and shame. Students believe that finding their own information is something they are supposed to be able to do, something other students (and certainly all faculty members) can do. Confronted with a composition term paper assignment, they come face-to-face with the realities of how much information exists and how complex locating even a relatively small amount of it can be.

The feeling of anxiety students experience toward finding information using libraries is justified. Teaching them search strategies or information organization, even if this teaching acknowledges their fear, runs the risk of aggravating rather than alleviating this feeling. Librarians, after all, have earned advanced degrees studying the organization of information. The best reference librarians and online searchers have years of experience developing and utilizing search strategies. Faculty who encounter a problem requiring them to vary from what we know to be their usual behaviors of consulting colleagues or following up on footnotes or bibliographies, will, we hope and advocate, turn to librarians for information they cannot conveniently and independently find.

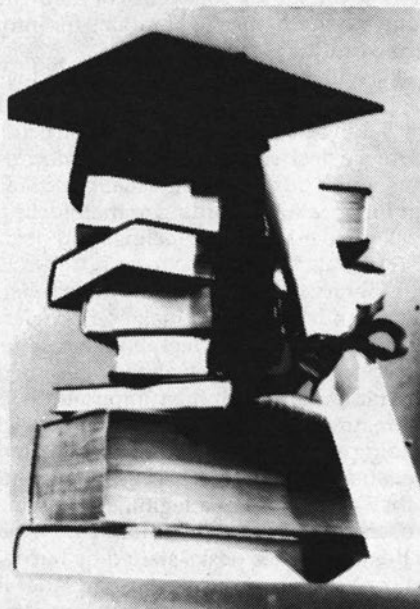
Behavior on the part of librarians that implies using a library can be easily mastered will contribute to already well-developed feelings of inadequacy, shame, and fear. This is something instruction advocates need to consider. Behind many bibliographic instruction sessions and programs, and behind traditional reference desk service lurks the democratic ideal of the independent user, an ideal that places an unfair burden on information seekers and denies librarians' expertise. Users will look for information according to their feelings and their needs. It is librarians' task to understand how to match these feelings and needs with the way information has been organized for retrieval.

Mellon deserves to be applauded. Her theory of library anxiety provides an excellent demonstration of how important it is for librarians to understand and make service decisions on the basis, not only of what library users do, but also how they feel about what they do. By using her qualitative discoveries to justify a service librarians had already designed, however, she limits their usefulness and fails to go far enough with their implications. A review of the literature indicates that the effective treatment of anxiety involves acknowledging and recognizing its legitimacy, and providing successful, counteracting experiences (p. 163). People needing information feel anxious about libraries because they don't know if they will be able to get the information they need. This is a legitimate fear in a service environment, which implies that if library users don't know how to locate information for themselves they don't deserve to find it. Busy reference desks staffed by harried librarians and one-shot term-paper presentations convey the confusing message that library users need help, but not very much help. Anxious users require the reassurance that

librarians are experts who can and will locate, and deliver when necessary, needed information. Responding to library anxiety simply by altering bibliographic instruction sessions to accommodate its existence represents a woefully inadequate service response to a valuable qualitative discovery.

CONNIE MILLER  
University of Illinois, Chicago

## Midwest Library Service



**You won't find  
a wider selection  
... anywhere**

College and university librarians: Midwest Library Service has what you're looking for. With 24 years of experience in the field, Midwest can supply you with virtually any book you want—even one from the smallest, most obscure publisher. This includes nearly all U.S. and Canadian publishers, U.S. distributors of foreign published works, university presses, non-profit organizations, private associations, and societies, in addition to many reprint publishers and paperbacks. You won't find a wider selection of books your library wants, whether you're a small college or a large university. Midwest Library Service has what you're looking for!

For additional information, call the  
TOLL-FREE WATS NUMBER: (800) 325-8833.  
Missouri librarians call toll-free (800) 392-5024  
Canadian librarians call collect (314) 739-3100



**Midwest Library Service**

11443 St. Charles Rock Road  
Bridgeton, MO 63044

# Light years ahead.

A dramatic advance in serials check-in has arrived. MicroLinX is here.

Until now, you've only dreamed of such speed and accuracy. A bar code scanner attached to your personal computer enables MicroLinX to read SISAC and UPC codes, and automatically check in the specific issue you've received. With a growing number of publishers committed to printing these codes, libraries of all sizes can save time with this reliable feature.

MicroLinX also offers easy downloading, predictive check-in and electronic claims transmission through Faxon's global network of libraries and publishers. Additional software modules will soon be available, making this a comprehensive serials management system.

Let MicroLinX check in your journals with the speed of light. Call 800 225-6055 toll free, or 617 329-3350 collect.

**faxon**

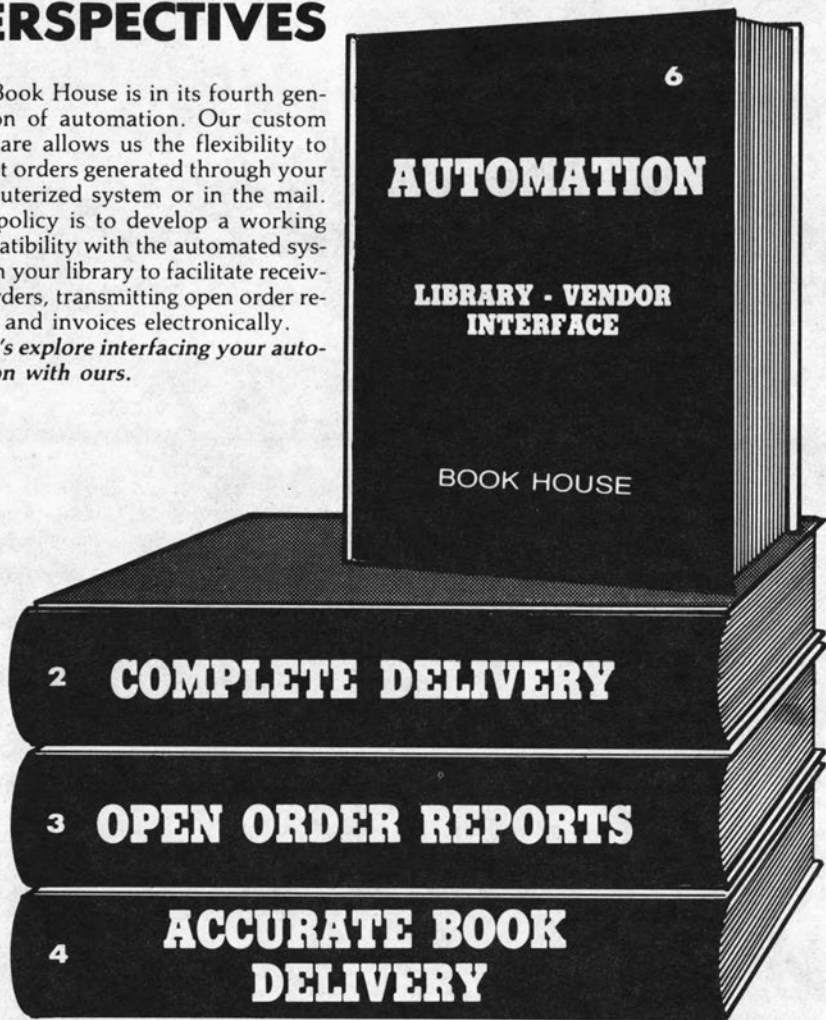
*A Future You Can Look Forward To*



## ACQUISITION PERSPECTIVES

**6.** Book House is in its fourth generation of automation. Our custom software allows us the flexibility to accept orders generated through your computerized system or in the mail. Our policy is to develop a working compatibility with the automated system in your library to facilitate receiving orders, transmitting open order reports and invoices electronically.

*Let's explore interfacing your automation with ours.*



**CALL TOLL-FREE  
TODAY**

1-800-248-1146

In Canada & Michigan

CALL COLLECT (517) 849-2117

OCLC Vendor No. 17397

SAN 169-3859

**the  
BOOK  
HOUSE**

**JOBBERS SERVING LIBRARIES WITH  
ANY BOOK IN PRINT SINCE 1962**  
208 WEST CHICAGO STREET  
JONESVILLE, MICHIGAN 49250