

# **At home in the academic library? A study of student feelings of “homeness”**

## **Abstract**

A recent focus in academic library design is as a third place: a home from home. Research has yet to interrogate what it means to be “at home”, and if academic libraries are treated like, and feel like home to students. Seamon’s (1979) model provides a framework for understanding the qualities associated with homeness, across the five dimensions of rootedness, appropriation, regeneration, at-easeness and warmth. Using this framework observations were made in two libraries using categories relating to “homeness”. It was found that students do act and feel at home in the library. Newer library designs did not facilitate homeness more than older designs. It is concluded that new library designs have the opportunity to make students feel at home by offering flexible spaces to make their own, places to retreat from their desk, and basic amenities.

## **Introduction**

Since 2014, a number of universities have introduced designated places for sleeping in the academic library. The University of Michigan’s ‘nap station’ (Chant, 2014), the University of Manchester’s ‘Zzz Zone’, and the University of Edinburgh’s planned nap pods (McCarthy, 2016) all legitimise a practice once discouraged in libraries (“Sleeping in the library”, 2015). This demonstrates the library’s evolution in recent years from a place to retrieve information and engage in “serious studying activity” (Gayton, 2008, p. 60) to one that is welcoming, comfortable, and can “meet student needs as they arise” (Cunningham and Tabur, 2012, para. 8).

A number of developments have caused this change. In the UK, the competition for students has led to universities building better facilities to attract them (Cox, 2017, p. 3). In addition, the increase in digital collections and subsequent reduction in print collections has allowed more room for learning spaces (Bennett, 2015, p. 217). Furthermore, library spaces

have adapted to changes in pedagogy to reflect an emphasis on collaborative learning (Webb, Schaller and Hunley, 2008, p. 407).

The resulting “learning commons” library designs are flexible learning spaces that provide “a hybrid of information resources and collaborative and independent workspace” (Bryant, Matthews and Walton, 2009, p. 8). Despite a decline in print book circulation (Cunningham and Tabur, 2012, para. 1), by redefining itself a place to study, the library has retained its “status as a central location on campus” (Cox, 2017, p. 4).

This shift in focus from the library as a space to hold resources to a “place of collaborative learning and community interaction” (Montgomery and Miller, 2011, p. 229) has led to research into the library as a third place. A third place is neither home nor work, but a public space between the two (Oldenburg, 1989, p. 20) where people feel “belonging, ease and warmth” (Lewis, 2017, p. 170).

Numerous studies have identified that students sleep, eat and relax in the library (DeClerq and Cranz, 2014; Harrop and Turpin, 2013; Sommer, 1966). Students often describe feelings of comfort and safety (Cha and Kim, 2015; DeClerq and Cranz, 2014). This evidence suggests that students act and feel at home in libraries. However, there have not been specific studies devoted to the homeness of academic libraries, or how design impacts this. In this context the aim of this study was to investigate if academic libraries are treated like, and feel like home to students, in particular exploring whether modern learning commons designs are treated like, and feel more like home than older library designs.

### **Literature review**

Many commentators have made the connection between public libraries and Oldenburg’s (1989) concept of the third place - a public place that is neither home nor work (Elmborg, 2011). However, the notion that students like the library but do not necessarily visit it to find resources has led to the suggestion that academic libraries are also third places (Lewis, 2016; Montgomery and Miller, 2011). Lewis (2016) states that the library is a third place,

being neither the dorm room nor the classroom (p. 96). The main features of third places as set out by Oldenburg (1989) have been adapted by Lewis (2016) for academic libraries:

- *Neutral ground* - all disciplines mix in one space
- *Social leveller* - almost anyone can use any of the library spaces
- *Conversation is the main activity* – well-designed libraries accommodate informal conversations during study breaks
- *Accessibility and accommodation* - libraries are accessible, and keep long hours
- *The regulars* - many students use the library at regular times and use the same seats
- *A home away from home* - the library is the home where students can be comfortable doing their academic work (p. 96-98).

The idea that Oldenburg's criteria should be used when building or renovating academic libraries is one shared by a number of commentators (Lewis, 2016; Montgomery and Miller, 2011; Webb, Schaller and Hunley, 2008), however there is little discussion of how this would look in practice. In particular the notion of it being a "home away from home" has not been interrogated in any depth.

"Home" is a "multidimensional concept" (Mallett, 2004, p. 62) that is defined both in terms of a physical place and psychological belonging (Oxford English Dictionary, 2011). Tognoli (1967) defines home in contrast to house, labelling the attributes as centrality, continuity, privacy, self-expression, and social relationships (cited in Smith, 1994, p. 31). The concept of "homeness" is developed by the phenomenologist David Seamon (1979) through five themes rootedness, appropriation, regeneration, at-easeness and warmth. Rootedness refers to the way that the home is the start and finish point for activities, a strong grounding for action. Appropriation refers to the way that an individual has control and power over the homespace; it also implies a notion of privacy. There is a strong link to the feeling of territoriality that we have within the home. Regeneration is about the way that the individual is refreshed in the home, through sleep but also through mental rest. At-easeness implies the individual feeling able to be themselves, rather than seek to sustain a public image. Warmth refers to a sense of friendliness and support. Differentiating these five

themes to homeness strengthens our ability to ask precise questions about the ways in which a library is like a home.

Homeness in academic libraries has not attracted substantial attention in itself. Rather, there are a number of comments sprinkled throughout the literature that indicate the topic is worth further exploration. Due to findings that students most frequently discuss academic work in domestic spaces, Bennett (2005) suggests food and drink can help make libraries more domestic. This is similarly advocated by Hunter and Cox (2014), who recommend drinks making facilities on each floor to “make students feel at home” (p. 48), and Harrop and Turpin (2013), who suggest refreshments and soft seating to replicate a “homely” environment (p. 65). Furniture is considered by DeClerq and Crazz (2014) in their research on student postures, arguing their informal use of formal wooden furniture “as if they were in their own living room” indicates how they would prefer to study (p. 581). Similarly, Webb, Schaller and Hunley (2008) state that behaviours such as putting feet on furniture demonstrate that a student has “moved in” to the space (p. 419).

More generally, in advocating libraries as a third place, Lewis (2017) states that libraries are students’ second home. It is Waxman, Clemons, Banning and McKelfresh (2007) who perhaps come closest to advocating homeness by suggesting a need for restorative and rejuvenating library spaces. Notably missing from the literature, however, is evidence to suggest how students themselves view homeness.

While homeness itself has not been central to studies of libraries to date, some related aspects such as space choice and atmosphere have been the subject of investigation. For example, space choice is a popular strand of research. Cha and Kim (2015) identified the amount of space, noise levels, crowdedness, comfort of furnishing and cleanliness were the most important factors for students. Webb, Schaller and Hunley (2008) identified furniture choice and window views as the most cited reasons for choosing a space. Beatty (2016) found that students’ preferences for space were mainly based on sound, followed by lighting. The importance of control is expressed by a number of writers. DeClerq and Crazz (2014) found students valued the ability to move furniture. Similarly, Bennett (2005) states

that students considered a good study space to be one that allowed them to control “social and academic dimensions of study” (p. 17).

Often interwoven in discussions of space preferences are considerations of the atmosphere in libraries. Mohanty (2002) considers staff attitudes to students, ease of access to resources, lighting, and an attractive environment as part of creating a welcoming atmosphere in academic libraries. Physical features such as wood flooring, comfortable chairs, coffee and food smells, and an outside view characterise a “warm atmosphere” according to Waxman, Clemons, Banning and McKelfresh (2007). However, atmosphere is considered to be more than generated by physical design (Hunter and Cox, 2013). Montgomery and Miller (2011) argue that conversation – both vocal and scholarly communication – adds to a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere. In addition, the role of staff is further explored in terms of library anxiety, where the perception of staff as intimidating and aloof is a barrier to using the library (Bostick, as cited in Jiao and Onwuegbuzie, 1999). A section of the literature focusses on the importance of the presence of other students in the library. A number of commentators suggest the ability to work amongst others creates an ambience and sense of scholarship that is attractive to students (Cha and Kim, 2015; Cunningham and Tabur, 2012; Gayton, 2008).

### **Methodology**

The research was undertaken at the University of Nottingham, with the permission of the Libraries, Research and Learning Resources department. The institution was chosen due to its recent renovation and extension of George Green Library. A short walk away from the new library is Hallward Library. The design differences, age and proximity of the libraries provide an interesting comparison for the study. George Green Library was renovated and extended in 2014-2017. It supports the faculties of science and engineering. It now has a glass facade, moveable furniture, and a variety of seating options throughout the building. Hallward Library supports the arts and humanities faculties. Covering four floors, most of its seats are concentrated on the top two floors, which hold traditional study carrels for silent study. Originally built in 1972, between 2006 and 2008 various part of the library were

refurbished, most notably the lower ground floor which was made into a learning hub (Waller, 2011, p. 76). The learning hub (Level 1) is in contrast to the silent floors with a focus on collaborative learning and moveable furniture.

The analytic framework for the project was based on the work of Seamon (1979) who developed five criteria for what it means to be and feel at home. In the framework (Table 1 below), the criteria were defined and then related to library behaviours, indicating possible differences between the libraries. The *relation to library behaviour* column also indicates which method would be used to measure the criteria (O = Observation, Q = Questionnaire, I = Interview). Some of the criteria would be difficult to observe, and therefore were more suitable for inclusion on the questionnaire, and vice versa.

**Table 1. The Homeness framework**

Criteria	Definition (Seamon, 1979)	Operationalisation in library behaviour
<b>Rootedness</b>	<p>“A physical centre for departure and return”</p> <p>A place where a “person organises his comings and goings”, “departures and returns may be fixed by habit”</p> <p>“Can move fluidly throughout the dwelling because body-subject knows that space intimately” (p. 79).</p>	<p>Students rooting themselves in the library throughout the day - using it as a space to return to in between classes and breaks (Q).</p> <p>Students can navigate the library while engaged in other activities e.g. using the phone, reading, talking (O).</p>
<b>Appropriation</b>	<p>“Possession and control: the person who is at home holds a space over which he is in charge”</p> <p>“Lack of appropriation involves infringement or loss of privacy”</p> <p>“Disruption of appropriation leads to responses of feeling-subject which may include anger, anxiety or</p>	<p>Territorial behaviour - leaving markers to save a space or discourage others from using the same space (O)</p> <p>One person using two or more spaces (O)</p> <p>Creating private spaces using movable furniture or belongings (O, Q, I)</p> <p>Controlling the space by moving furniture</p>

	discomfort” (p. 80-81).	(O, Q, I)
<b>Regeneration</b>	<p>“Restorative powers at home”</p> <p>“Physical rest” and sleep</p> <p>“Psychological regeneration”, “a stable place in which a person can recoup his physical and psychic energies” (p. 82-83)</p>	<p>Eating and drinking (O, Q, I)</p> <p>Sleeping or lying down (O, Q, I)</p>
<b>At-easeness</b>	<p>“Freedom to be: the person who is at home can be what he most comfortably is and do what he most wishes to do”</p> <p>“It contrasts with public environments where people must partake in roles and behaviours required to maintain a public image” (p. 83-84).</p>	<p>Behaviours that break social convention such as taking shoes off, putting feet on the furniture and lying down could indicate that students are at ease (O, I)</p> <p>Measurement of how comfortable students feel (Q)</p>
<b>Warmth</b>	<p>“Atmosphere of friendliness, concern and support”</p> <p>“Presence of people and interpersonal harmony”</p> <p>“The person feels concern for the home and keeps it ordered and in good repair” (p. 84-85).</p>	<p>Taking pride in the space – keeping the space tidy (Q).</p> <p>Measurement of student perceptions of warmth and friendliness (Q, I).</p>

A mixed method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, was employed to gather data about the two libraries (Bryman, 2016, p. 634). The main methods were quantitative, being structured observation and student questionnaires. Questionnaires were chosen because “although observational studies can provide an insightful glimpse of ‘what’ is happening in libraries, they do not indicate ‘why’ patrons do what they do” (Given and Leckie, 2003, p. 383). Similarly, observations are valuable, as in questionnaires, “errors arise

when respondents lack motivation to report truthfully, lack comprehension skills, or deliberately distort their answers” (Paretta and Catalano, 2013, p. 159). To supplement the quantitative methods, a semi structured interview with a staff member involved in the design of George Green Library provided context for the case study. Unstructured observation was also employed to document the whole picture, capture context, and consider the influence of the environment (Mulhall, 2003, p. 307) in a way structured observation does not.

The structured observation approach involved recording the frequency of behaviours within predetermined categories (Bryman, 2016, p. 269). The libraries were coded into zones, and behaviour was recorded by frequency on a five bar gate whilst walking around the zone following a predetermined route. This reduced the likelihood that the same student would be recorded multiple times in error. Preceding and following the observation data collection, occupancy readings were recorded. Additionally, brief field notes were taken regarding environmental factors that may have affected behaviour, such as temperature. Overall, four hours and 35 minutes of observation was undertaken (George Green 2h35m, Hallward 2h), with observations taking place over three days, in the exam period, in the morning (09:40-11:15), afternoon (14:15-16:45), and evening (18:25-19:50).

The questionnaire (Appendix) was designed with two purposes in mind. Firstly, it had to fit into the five criteria of the framework in order to test homeness. Secondly, the questions were designed to run parallel to the observation points, as it was important to compare what students were doing to what they say they do, and how they felt about it (Given and Leckie, 2003, p. 383). Most of the questions were closed ended questions, however, an open comment space was left at the end of the questionnaire so that respondents could voice their opinion or provide details that may have been missed in the closed questions (O’Cathain and Thomas, 2004). At the end of the three week period (in may/June 2017), out of 100 questionnaires left at each site, 26 completed questionnaires were counted from George Green, and 56 from Hallward. The remaining 118 were either handed in blank, or were missing.



A semi-structured interview was undertaken with a member of staff who had been involved in the design of George Green Library. The topics of the interview mirrored some of those in the observations and questionnaires, however focussed more on the designs of the two libraries.

During the structured observation, some unstructured observation was undertaken. This consisted of the researcher noting down any observation that related to the topic or elaborated on a structured observation point. This was conducted in conjunction with the structured observation as it was felt behaviours would arise on an ad hoc basis and should be recorded as soon as they were viewed. It was important to take the notes "as inconspicuously as possible so as not to disturb the normal flow of events" (Parahoo, 2014). When an interesting observation was made, this was noted down, ideally out of sight of the participants, for example between the shelving or at an empty seat.

The ethical aspects of the study were carefully considered to ensure that participants were protected and to ensure the integrity of the research (Cresswell, 2014, p. 92). The approach was approved through University of Sheffield ethics procedures. For the interview informed consent was obtained. The interviewee's identity has been anonymised. Unobtrusive observation has the benefit that no participants are intruded upon. However, observation without knowledge of the participant is a contentious issue due to concerns about lack of informed consent (Takyi, 2015, p. 856). Yet the number of students moving in and out of the observation areas made gaining informed consent unfeasible. Under these circumstances, the University of Sheffield (2016) suggests that "approval is sought from the relevant authorities" (permission was gained), and "specific individuals should not be identified, explicitly or by implication" (p. 30). Furthermore, on the advice of Given and Leckie (2003, p. 376), a sign was displayed at the entrance of both libraries informing students that observations were taking place. This enabled the option to opt out by avoiding the library on the specified days.

The participating institution requested the students were not approached and questionnaires were left on study tables; therefore it was unsuitable to ask students to sign a consent form, due to the possibility of it being left unattended. Rather, implied consent

was gained by virtue of completion, as explained on the participant sheet. Responses to the questionnaire were anonymous, minimising the risk to confidentiality. Completed forms were collected by library staff, kept securely on site and periodically collected by the researcher.

## **Results**

### **Rootedness**

Rootedness is defined by Seamon (1979) as a “physical centre for departure and return” and knowing a place intimately enough to move around the space fluidly (p. 79).

The questionnaires attempted to ascertain if students rooted themselves in the library spaces throughout the day. Students were asked to tick all answers that applied for the following statement “I would leave my belongings on the library desks unattended for” (Figure 1). The question sought to understand how long they used their belongings to root themselves to their chosen space. A surprisingly low proportion of students stated they would leave their belongings in the library for the length of a lecture, seminar, or exam. Whilst this does not necessarily indicate that students do not come and go from the library during the day, it does suggest that they are less inclined to root themselves in a particular spot using their belongings when leaving the library.

**Figure 1**

As shown in Figure 1, there are very few discernible differences between the two libraries.

The data overall indicates low levels of rootedness in both libraries. In hindsight, a question about whether students leave and return to library throughout the day would have given a clearer picture of this element.

In structured observations, rootedness was operationalised in terms of students walking through the buildings fluidly while engaged in other activities. In both libraries, this was only

observed a total of once, when students were walking through the building whilst looking at their mobile phones. The lack of data here is possibly due to the time of year. As it was exam period, students did not have lectures to attend, and therefore were perhaps less likely to move from their study space.

### **Appropriation**

Appropriation involves “possession and control” (Seamon, 1979, p. 80), which can be operationalised in library space behaviour as students becoming territorial about their space, and altering the space to suit their needs.

When asked if they have a favourite spot to study in the library, over 80% of students in both libraries said ‘yes’. This was confirmed by the staff interviewee, who stated “people have their spot, and they like their spot, and they get very attached to it”.

Seamon (1989) states that “disruption of appropriation leads to responses of feeling-subject which may include anger, anxiety or discomfort” (p. 81). Therefore, students were also asked to rate their disappointment from one to ten if their spot was not available. However, the results were less conclusive, with a variety of answers along the spectrum and little difference between the two sites. However, it was notable that female students expressed more disappointment than male students (Figure 2B).

**Figure 2**

Another aspect of appropriation - territoriality - was observed through students using more than their designated desk space, as defined by spacing between chairs. As shown in Figure 3, students in George Green were on average twice as likely to use more than one space than in Hallward, by spreading their belongings across the tables. As George Green has more open tables without partitions, this was to be expected.

**Figure 3**

Unstructured observations found that in George Green it was also common for students using the partitioned carrels to spread their belongings around them on the floor. In comparison, in the Hallward carrels, students were not observed using the floor space, other than under their own carrels. This could be due to George Green having much more room around the desks. This indicates that George Green's design allows students to have a much wider territorial remit than at Hallward, which they take full advantage of.

Conversely, when asked if they felt they had enough room to create their own space in the library (Figure 4), although the majority of George Green students tended to agree (54%), a significant number (19%) disagreed. This is in comparison to Hallward, in which only 9% disagreed, and 27% strongly agreed.

Figure 4

As a newly renovated building that was designed in part to give students more space, this is an interesting result. With exam period meaning the libraries are often at full capacity and George Green becoming popular with other disciplines, the disagreement from George Green students could be due to the high occupancy in the building. With many study spaces not partitioned, the closeness to other students may have been a factor. The staff interviewee noted that 100 more seats had to be purchased for George Green, which inevitably meant that in some areas students had to sit closer together. However, there was an awareness that this could impact the space negatively.

*"I really feel if you actually cram chairs into every nook and cranny, you will ruin it completely, so I do feel there are enough chairs now and I'm not going to buy any more"*  
(A1).

Given the design of the building, it is also interesting to note that while only 50% of students agree/strongly agreed that they could move furniture, 72% did so in Hallward (Figure 5).

Figure 5

This correlates with the observations, in which a slightly higher proportion of Hallward students were observed moving the furniture to suit their needs than in George Green (Figure 6). Part of the aspirational brief for George Green was, as the interviewee stated, “modern, flexible furniture ... that students could within reason, move around themselves to get the configuration they wanted”. It is interesting to note then, that more students were not observed altering the furniture in George Green. While students at George Green were observed being more territorial than in Hallward, the questionnaires suggested Hallward’s students valued the ability to control the configuration of the space more strongly. This is despite the specific aim of George Green to encourage this control.

Figure 6

### **Regeneration**

Regeneration refers to the “restorative powers” of home, which includes physical and psychological restoration (Seamon, 1979, p. 82-3). This was operationalised in terms of activities around eating, resting and sleeping in the libraries.

Overall, slightly more students were observed eating in George Green than in Hallward. This could be in part due to the café, which blends study spaces into a café space and is located on the lower ground level. Hallward’s café is close to the entrance and reception desk, making it less secluded than George Green's. The staff interviewee described feedback from students about wanting a space that felt like they were having a break from the library.

*“When we did George Green ... it was ‘yeah we do want to drink a cup of coffee anywhere’ but they also said ‘yeah but do you know what I actually want to be able to have a break, I want to get away from where I’m studying and I want to go to the café and I want the café to feel different from the rest of the library because I want to feel like I’m having a break”*

(A1).

The results for sleeping (or resting your head) in the library were strikingly similar in both libraries. Both libraries reported a 60/40 ratio with the majority of the students stating they had fallen asleep or rested their head in the library (Figure 7).

Figure 7

However, when asked if they like to rest and recuperate in the library, the majority of students from both libraries tended to disagree. Majorities from both libraries stated that there were not places they felt they could rest and recuperate in the library (Figure 8).

Figure 8

Answers from the questionnaires are supported by the observation data, which found only three students asleep (or with their eyes shut) in each library.

Thus students in both libraries used the space to regenerate, but mostly through eating. Although most disagreed that they liked to use the library to rest, there is evidence to suggest that they do anyway, perhaps out of necessity, rather than comfort. Despite this, the following free text comments from the questionnaire show that some students showed an awareness and desire for the library to provide facilities for regeneration.

*“Needs a nap space and more bean bags and a microwave”*

*“Please get nap pods”*

*“Cushions. More booths. A kettle/microwave”*

*“Please get napping pods”*

*“Need nap space please”*

### **At-easeness**

The freedom to be yourself was what Seamon (1979) identified as being at ease (p. 83). This includes the dispelling of social conventions. In the questionnaire, students were asked if they felt able to be themselves in the library (Figure 9). Most students tended to agree or strongly agree.

**Figure 9**

In observations, at-easeness was measured by how many students had their shoes off as this was what Seamon described as a behaviour inconsistent with “environments where people must partake in roles and behaviours required to maintain a public image” (p. 83-84). The results were similar for both libraries (Figure 10). Unstructured observation found that students walked around both libraries with no shoes, suggesting a high level of ease and intimacy with the environment.

**Figure 10**

Structured observation also looked for students with their feet up (Figure 11 and 12), and found that this was slightly more prevalent in Hallward. Once again, this was fairly unexpected due to the ease of moving George Green’s furniture. However, this can be explained by the fact that the majority of students with their feet on other furniture were in the basement of Hallward. On this level there is a variety of furniture including ottomans and it is largely unstaffed, perhaps explaining this result.

**Figure 11**

**Figure 12**

Students were also asked if they felt safe in the library, to which half of the respondents strongly agreed (Figure 13).

**Figure 13**

Structured observation was also used to look for the number of valuables left unattended (meaning electronic devices and wallets). In both libraries, more than 60 separate incidents were recorded (Figure 14), suggesting that students certainly feel that their belongings are safe in the library. It was particularly notable that this was most common at George Green in the evening when the library is only staffed by a small number security staff.

**Figure 14**

### **Warmth**

Warmth relates to an “atmosphere of friendliness, concern and support” (Seamon, 1979, p. 84). Therefore students were asked to rate their agreement to the statement about the library being a friendly place. While the majority tended to agree (approximately 50% at both libraries), a higher proportion strongly agreed at George Green (Figure 15).

**Figure 15**

Seamon (1979) suggests that “the person feels concern for the home and keeps it ordered and in good repair” (p. 84) is an indicator of warmth. A higher proportion strongly agreed that they took pride in the library space at George Green (Figure 16). This could perhaps be the result of the newness of the building and the desire to keep it in good condition.

**Figure 16**

This was also reflected in the answers to a question where students were asked if they feel physically comfortable in the library. Slightly more students tended to agree that they do in George Green than in Hallward (Figure 17).



**Figure 17**

The interviewee pointed out that with George Green, the service had the opportunity to create a community, highlighting that students can feel lost at the university. Therefore they have started to open the library up for other uses, for example an artist in residence who showed students how to do Chinese brush painting proved very successful during revision period. This focus on community, as well as the problems with amenities at Hallward could account for the higher numbers of students who, overall, felt George Green was a warm place.

### **Home or library?**

Students were also directly asked if they felt at home at the library. As demonstrated in Figure 18, George Green agreed more strongly with the statement, but also tended to disagree more. In comparison, Hallward's answers were more concentrated in 'tend to agree' (55%) and 'neither agree or disagree' (21%).

**Figure 18**

In a female to male comparison (Figure 19), more females (19%) were found to strongly agree to the statement than males (3%). This correlates with Figure 2B which showed that female students had more of an attachment to their spot than male students.

**Figure 19**

Students were asked where they prefer to study between the library and home, with the vast majority of students stating they prefer to study in the library. This was expected as students filling in the questionnaire were those using the library. Students were then asked to identify the reasons for their preferred location. Those who chose 'library' are displayed

in Figure 20. Unsurprisingly, the most popular answer for both libraries was that they can concentrate better in the library (GGL 26%, HAL 24%).

**Figure 20**

For the respondents who chose 'other', a separation of home and work was a common theme, especially in terms of distractions.

*"It is a good physical reminder that the library is for work whereas home is a place I can relax"*

*"Feel more motivated to study here (lib) than at home and good to get out of the house for mental health reasons"*

*"Can differentiate between study and rest"*

*"Fewer distractions (except surveys)"*

*"There isn't a fridge to distract me"*

Students were asked to add any further comments about homeness in the library. A common opinion was that students did not want the library to be homely, as they felt there should be distinction from home.

*"I don't like the library to be too "homey" as I'll start treating it like my own home (messy/less productive). I need the clear distinction to reinforce the idea that the library is for work and home is for relaxing."*

*"Not homely but that's good"*

*"I like having separate work and have home spaces, I don't particularly want the library to feel "homely"."*

*“People don’t go [to] the library to rest, they go to work.”*

*“I think the places in the library that tend to be the most homely are always the busiest so there’s never really the opportunity to work there. I prefer working in the less homely bits during exam/coursework time because I find it easier to concentrate in quiet places.”*

### **Summary**

The results show that students do exhibit most of the homely behaviours as set out by the framework, and suggested by Seamon (1979). Appropriation, regeneration and at-easeness were all observed a significant number of times over the three observation days. The results of the questionnaires and the interview confirmed these results. Warmth was not an observation point, but the questionnaires demonstrated that the libraries were viewed as friendly and warm places. Interestingly, rootedness, however, was not a common element. In their study, Harrop and Turpin (2013) found that students used the library throughout the day for different purposes, for example “to use a PC to quickly check email or timetables before a lecture” (p. 69). However this study found that this did not extend to using belongings to root themselves to a particular spot.

The results did not conclude that newer library designs facilitated homeness more than older ones. Rather, they showed that the designs impacted on different elements of homeness. The learning commons building was better equipped for basic amenities, taking breaks, territorial behaviour and was considered to have a better atmosphere overall. However, in the older design, students felt they had more control, resting was more important, and agreed more strongly that they felt at home in the library. This suggests that familiarity with the building is an important aspect of homeness.

### **Discussion**

### **Individual retreat**

Much of the current literature around library design has focussed on the need for collaborative space (Montgomery and Miller, 2011; Webb, Schaller and Hunley, 2008). Echoing Gayton's (2008) comparison between communal and social spaces, the results of this study indicated that students liked to work individually, but amongst each other because "looking at others working hard" makes them feel "encouraged" (free text comment).

However, the results indicated that a space for individual retreat was an important factor for students. In line with Regalado and Smale (2015) and Applegate (2009), individual spaces were highly valued. This is further supported by the interview: "what they're telling us about Hallward is not enough silent study spaces". This echoes the work of Bailin (2011) whose interview respondents stated there were too many collaborative spaces. The observations also demonstrated that when given the opportunity with larger individual spaces at George Green, students spread their belongings on tables and the floor to mark their own space.

Conversely, the open tables in George Green appeared to result in some dissatisfaction with 19% of students tending to disagree that they have enough room to create their own space. It could be inferred that the lack of partitions (which are used in all of Hallward's silent spaces) mean that in busy periods, students in George Green are required to sit closer to one other than they are comfortable with. This supports the work of İmamoğlu and Gürel (2015) who found that student satisfaction increased when partitions were added to library study tables, and Beatty (2017) who found students "preferred spaces where 'their space' was defined, either by dividers, low barriers or single seating tables" (p. [4]).

As Harrop and Turpin (2013) point out, territoriality and desire for privacy is not necessarily connected to silence, but is more to do with being "relaxed, cozy" and "comfortable" (p. 69). When students used spaces that were partitioned by the library, they expressed more of the behaviours associated with appropriation. For example, unstructured observation found that students using study rooms exhibited many of the homely behaviours such as no shoes, feet on tables and eating. This was supported by free text comments in which one

student described their individual study room as having a “comfortable, homely atmosphere”.

It can be argued, therefore, that Retreat is an important part of homeness. While George Green’s design allowed much more physical space, the results indicate that the traditional carrels in Hallward afford more privacy and control.

### **Innovation versus the basics**

The study highlighted the balance between creating innovative, modern spaces, whilst maintaining the basics. The interviewee suggested that the “basics” are constant available spaces, power sockets, the ability to eat and drink, and PCs. The results certainly supported this with students at Hallward more concentrated in the areas that have plug sockets at the desks, and comments complaining about the lack of plug sockets and water.

In this respect, George Green was more successful at providing the basics, which contributes to feelings of comfort. However, the study showed that students were also aware of innovation with multiple comments regarding nap pods.

Nevertheless, the “basics” continue to change. The comments from students requesting places to sleep, microwaves and kettles suggest that more home comforts are desired. Hunter and Cox (2014) made the recommendation of drinks machines on each floor to make students feel at home (p. 48). Just as plug sockets on every desk were once not essential, the results indicate that food and drink making facilities may become a basic necessity in the future.

Innovation and modernity does not necessarily equate to comfort and homeness. In a discussion about third places, Montgomery and Miller (2011) state that the “allure of third places is not the beauty of the location, but rather other people in that place”. This is supported by results of the questionnaire in which agreement to feeling safe and at home in the library were equal between the two libraries.

A challenge to Montgomery and Miller's (2001) suggestion that fondness and attachment create a sense of loyalty, however, is the fact that many Hallward students are moving to George Green to study. The results show that more students consider George Green a friendly place than in Hallward. In addition, when asked why they prefer George Green over their home, higher proportions of students chose the library's atmosphere than at Hallward.

These results show that students value basics, but do have some awareness and desire for innovation that could make their experience more homely. The basics, however, also extend to the atmosphere of the library, suggesting that a mixture of both at George Green has contributed to its success.

### **Restoration and rejuvenation**

Waxman, Clemons, Banning and McKelfresh (2007) advocate the library as a place to find restoration and rejuvenation (p. 430); however the results for regeneration in this study were mixed. While eating was found to be very important to students, resting garnered less conclusive results.

The results found that the café in George Green was used to rejuvenate, and was more used than the Hallward café. This suggests that the specific design of the café as a space that is notably separate from the study spaces and staff areas did encourage homeness in terms of finding a space to rejuvenate.

As previously mentioned, student comments on including more spaces for sleep also suggest that some students would like to use the library for restoration. However, the observations and questionnaire results indicate that although the majority of students had fallen asleep in the library, it was not a factor that they considered to be desirable.

This relates to Harrop and Turner's (2013) idea of retreat. The café in George Green shows that students value a space where they can retreat from their desk. As sleeping and resting

is less possible at the study tables, the results imply that, just as the café is a retreat for eating, a space for resting away from the study areas could also be valued.

### **Replicating home**

De Clerq and Crazz (2014) argued that students' informal use of wooden furniture indicates that they want to study as if they were at home (p. 581). However the questionnaire results showed that when given more flexible furniture, students were more impartial towards it. The interview respondent described that when choosing furniture for George Green, student preferences were surprising.

*"They didn't choose necessarily what I thought they might, they were more concerned with lumber support and such things. Quite a lot of students said if 'I were going to be in George Green for any amount of time, I need it to be comfortable when I'm sat with my laptop, I want support, I want arm rests'" (A1).*

However, the bridges in George Green hold the type of sofas and soft seating that Harrop and Turpin (2013) believe should be used to create a homely environment (p. 65). The interviewee stated that the bridges were designed to be a more relaxed area. However observations showed that the bridges were used as a study space, rather than a break out space. This could be in part to the high occupancy in the traditional study spaces during exam period, however the interviewee confirmed that students do "just set up for the day there".

Comfort also extends to being at ease physiologically. Smith (1994) describes the "essential characteristics of home" as a "positive atmosphere which engenders feelings of warmth, care and cosiness" (p. 43). Measurements of "at-easeness" was equal between the two libraries overall, with majorities in both agreeing that they feel at ease. This is in line with Cunningham and Tabur (2012), Cha and Kim (2015) and DeClerq and Crazz (2014) who found students described feelings of psychological comfort in the library. George Green was viewed as a friendlier place than Hallward, supporting the work of Shill and Tonner (2003),

who found that ratings for “overall ambience” increased when libraries were renovated (p. 460).

Despite suggestions that measures such as food and drink and furniture would make libraries more homely (Bennett, 2005; Hunter and Cox, 2014; Harrop and Turpin, 2013), this study has demonstrated that students value the separation of home and work. Students from both libraries commented that they did not want the library to be homely and majorities stated they did not like to rest there. Students did, however exhibit most of the elements of homeness as set out by the framework and agreed that they felt at home. Bodaghi and Zainab (2013) state that the phrase “I feel at home” means that a person is expressing “comfort, security, and sense of belonging to a place” (p. 45). The results support this, demonstrating that while students value the library as a place to concentrate on study, factors such as privacy, food and drink, safety and physical and psychological comfort enable them to do so effectively.

The results point to a nuance between “domesticity” and “homeness”. Where domesticity pertains to “home or family life” (OED, 2011), homeness is the “quality or condition of being homelike” (OED, 2011). In contrast to the terminology Bennett (2005) chose in discussing how a space could be “domesticated”, this suggests that students do not necessarily want a replication of a “domestic” space, but rather want the qualities of home, namely retreat and privacy, rejuvenation and the “basic” amenities.

### **Conclusion**

The study found that students do treat the library home, as well as feel like it is home. The “basics” are essential in making a library feel homely. This includes the ability to eat and drink, and access study spaces, PCs, and power sockets. The study has shown that the basics could also extend to a friendly and warm atmosphere to make students feel at ease. While students are aware of innovations, like sleep areas, they were more concerned with having the basics. Students value their personal space and the ability to retreat from others as they would at home. However, they also valued the ability to leave their chosen space to take a



food or rest break in the café. The design of George Green's café proved that these breaks could be facilitated. Certain features such as warmth and atmosphere do not come out of design, but with familiarity. Therefore, older designs could facilitate more comfort than newer ones. In addition, constant innovation could cause the space to lose the sense of stability that libraries often provide. The library as a place to concentrate was important to students, and some indicated that they did not want the library to be homely as they valued the separation of home and work. Despite this, students still exhibited signs of being at home, suggesting that while they want the space to be different from home, they still appreciate having home comforts in the library, and the sense of comfort, ease and safety that home gives them.

The study was a small scale one conducted in one institution in a short time period; further work is needed to explore the issues it raises. The main contribution of this research in the context of the study of library space is to identify the need to define homeness more precisely, and to begin to suggest how to operationalise the concept based on Seamon's (1979) themes of rootedness, appropriation, regeneration, at-easeness and warmth. The multi-dimensional character of homeness that this reveals enriches our understanding of a key aspect of library experience. More work may be needed to fully operationalise Seamon's themes, but the paper has demonstrated the value of recognising the complex nature of homeness.

This study can offer some recommendations to academic libraries considering making their libraries more homely.

- ❖ Collaborative and social spaces are an important part of learning commons buildings, and contribute to making informal spaces. However, as demonstrated in the results of this study, individual retreat and privacy is still highly valued by students, and these spaces should not be sacrificed as they too are a part of making students feel at home.
- ❖ The results indicated that students do not necessarily want libraries to be homely. Students value a separation of home and work, and as this study has demonstrated, home does not necessarily equate to domesticity. Rather, spaces that make them

feel comfortable, safe and at ease can offer a homely atmosphere without taking away the academic atmosphere.

- ❖ As demonstrated in the café at George Green, spaces for rest and rejuvenation should be made noticeably separate to the study spaces in the library to provide a physical and psychological break from study.

More generally using Seamon's (1979) five themes of homeness gives more precision to the evaluation of library design. The finding that rootedness was rare in the examples asks the question whether this element is needed or practical in the library context.

The study highlights that future research that would be valuable for studies into homeness in libraries, and libraries as a third space. An aspect of homeness not covered in this study is the impact of staff and other students. A study into attitudes of staff in relation to friendliness and warmth could determine how this impacts feelings of comfort and familiarity. In addition, a study into the expectations of student behaviour could determine what students consider to be a 'friendly' library. More research is also needed into study habits of students who prefer to study in their own home. This would help inform libraries of any potential changes to make the buildings more accessible and appealing to those students. Interview or observation based studies in these areas would also be able to engage more deeply with Seamon's (1979) five themes.

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