

Life of the Library: An Exploration of Public Space Use and Meaning

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Abstract

Libraries have a long history of adapting to environmental factors for the benefit of their users. Recent technological advances and pedagogical shifts are creating fundamental changes in the way academic libraries are perceived and utilized. As a result, librarians are increasingly concerned with ensuring that the physical library remains relevant and meaningful to its users. To that end, this paper explores the academic library as a dialectical place of enlightenment and engagement through the words and actions of library users at York University. Library behaviour was documented and interpreted to better understand user needs. Reflections about memorable library experiences were analyzed to gain greater insight about the role of the library as place in the broader context of students' lived experiences. It was recognized that the creation and support of flexible yet differentiated library spaces allows for the development of multiple and convergent places of meaning. The students' library is a place of belonging, one in which librarians and library staff are increasingly marginalized. This empowering shift of control from professional to student marks a transition from a highly controlled venue for book storage and solitary study to a student space that supports social learning and other types of engagement. In order to remain relevant and meaningful the academic library must be a successful, and public, place for students to learn and engage.

Foreword

This major research paper (MRP), *Life of the Library: An Exploration of Public Space Use and Meaning*, was completed as part of the degree requirements for a Master's in Environmental Studies at York University. This self-directed program was organized by a plan of study that focused on public space planning and design, environment-behaviour research, and theoretical underpinnings that inform these areas. The evolving environments within academic libraries contextualized this work and also served as its inspiration. Analyzing the information gathered for this MRP contributed to many of the learning objectives in all areas of concentration in my plan of study. First, it allowed me to develop a better understanding of how public space in academic libraries is perceived and interpreted by library users. Second, it provided an excellent opportunity to explore how library users interact with and respond to related physical and social environments. Finally, it informed my reflection upon and recommendations about the future of academic library design.

This project would not have been possible without the generous participation of library users and I am deeply grateful for the time, candour, and enthusiasm they chose to share with me. I am hopeful that their thoughts and actions will be conveyed through this work in a manner that allows them to indirectly assist academic librarians concerned with the repositioning of physical library spaces.

**Life of the Library:
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Abstract.....	i
Foreword.....	ii
Library as Place: An Introduction to Concepts and Methods	1
Environment-Behaviour Research: The Library and Information Studies Approach to Understanding Place	6
Place Theory: Informing Understandings of the Library as Place.....	12
Methods.....	26
Dialectical Library Space: Exploring Use	32
Differentiated Library Space	35
Temporal Nature of Library Space.....	39
Noting the Gaps	41
Placemaking in the Library: An Interpretive Investigation	44
Spatial Literacy and Identity	45
The Role of the Library	56
Noting the Gaps: The Role of the Librarian	64
Conclusion	66
References	69

Library as Place: An Introduction to Concepts and Methods

“The places of libraries in the lives of people are places we evolve together; otherwise the library is a site of domination or a hopeless utopian dream, literally ‘no place’.” (Templeton, 2008, p. 195)

Libraries are cultural institutions responsible for both the preservation of and provision of access to manifestations of knowledge. Over the past century and a half, the stewardship role of libraries in academia has evolved from a place to keep books to a clearinghouse and creator of digitally published material. As physical public spaces, academic libraries have evolved from highly segregated and controlled bastions of book shelves and solitary study to energetic and dynamic arenas that support both communal and social learning. In successful libraries, this transition from primarily paper-based repository to primarily active learning space has often been ushered in by library users, leaving librarians to grapple with the implications for buildings designed around what they held instead of what happened within their walls.

The current transitional state of libraries, in various sub-sectors, is well documented both within and outside professional discourse. Dawson (2008) predicted that public libraries would be extinct by 2019 and members of the Taiga Forum¹ suggested that “library buildings will no longer house collections and will become campus community centers that function as part of the student services sector” by 2014 (2009). Library administrators at Stanford University justified the closure of an entire

¹ The Taiga Forum is a group of North American Associate University Librarians concerned with the future of academic libraries: <http://www.taigaforum.org/>

library and the elimination of 58 positions (as well as the downgrading of nine others) based on both budget cutbacks and reduced reliance on print collections (Stanford University, 2009). It is clear that academic libraries are organizations that are in direct competition with other information providers on campus and losing the unique features of their public spaces (Ross & Sennyey, 2008). The past decade has witnessed steep declines in circulation and reference transactions; however, this is seemingly offset by increases in gate counts (Martell, 2008), forcing an exploration of changing patterns of use and *meaning*. Clearly libraries are still being used, but not for the purpose they were built: to access paper-based materials.

These shifts in usage are tied to environmental factors.

Technological advances in the late twentieth century predicated fundamental shifts in post-secondary curriculum and libraries adapted to remain relevant. Widespread use of computers, online materials, and an even more pronounced focus on group work in the social sciences began to drain traditional academic libraries of their users. Progressive library directors responded by transforming these spaces into Information Commons, which were essentially computer labs situated in libraries. With the academic needs of students no longer tied to physical books, “the information commons has in many ways come to substitute for the card catalog as a principal means of defining space as library space” (Bennett, 2008, p. 183). Information Commons quickly evolved into Learning

Commons, open public areas that provide users with a “one stop shop” for learning supports traditionally based in units outside the library (e.g., writing labs, tutoring assistance, etc.)². Some institutions have taken extreme measures to draw students into these spaces. For example, Georgia Tech offers video gaming, hosts parties, and coordinates speed dating nights in its Learning Commons. While these spaces are popular with students, some feel it undermines the traditionally more studious role of the library within the academic experience. This raises the question: what *is* the emergent role of the library?

Rybczynski described the public library’s future as a place for meeting and gathering, and as a place whose purpose has “less to do with the digital world – or the digital word - than with the age-old need for human contact” (2008, slide 8). The success of such social spaces in libraries is dependent on their success as public spaces. According to Carr, Francis, Rivlin, and Stone (1992), successful public spaces are interpreted by their users as being democratic, responsive, and meaningful. It is my assertion, then, that public spaces are considered unsuccessful when they are devoid of human interaction. Thus, human experience provides the purpose *and life* of public spaces. In physical libraries, human interactions – both with other humans and other environmental constituents – help create the cultural institution and give it life. The relationship between user and academic library, informed by both

² Although peripheral to the aims of this paper, it should be noted that there is a considerable amount of library literature dedicated to the emergence and functioning of Learning Commons in libraries.

individual experience and the broader university environment, defines the life of the library itself. Investigating the success of library spaces, then, requires an approach focused on the library user experience.

If academic libraries are to remain or become active and successful public spaces, a renewed focus on the needs and expectations of library users must be taken seriously. To that end, librarians and administrators need to develop a better understanding of how and why people use physical libraries if they are going to attempt to ensure that these spaces remain relevant and meaningful to students, faculty, and other community members. Put another way, and to echo the opening quote, they must ensure that libraries are places that evolve with input from both librarian and library user. This paper partially addresses this need by exploring how and why people use the Scott Library, the busiest and largest library at Canada's third largest university, York University. That is, it explores the phenomenon of the library as place (and its meaning in the lives of its users) as communicated through the cultural practice of using the library.

As both a professional academic librarian and a graduate student, I enjoyed a privileged role that straddled the understandings of both information service provider and consumer in the Scott Library. This perspective provided me with greater access to and credibility with students and other library users. Having worked in the Scott Library as a librarian for the past seven years, I am committed to better understanding its function as a social space and doing my part to ensure its enduring

value. To this end, fieldwork for this paper was largely productive and rewarding, as was engaging with colleagues through professional conferences, workshops, and informal discourse. Care was taken to broach sensitive issues with tact; however, explorations about changing environments, no matter how carefully delivered, can and did cause stress for those who feel strongly about the book as a primary signifier for both librarianship and the public spaces fostered by professional activity. In a few cases, individuals who initially responded defensively to my preliminary findings have since acknowledged the need to explore alternatives for ensuring that library public spaces remain relevant to library users. Thus, another goal of my work is to help inform the librarian's role in a changing environment.

An exploration of how and why people use academic libraries must first be contextualized by previous work in environment-behaviour studies completed in academic library settings. The next section provides this review and also serves to underscore the long history within library and information studies of drawing on various disciplines to inform theory and practice. This is followed by a selective introduction to place theory as understood in relevant sub-disciplines of the social sciences. This theory informs the ethnographic methods used in the case study that comprises the remainder of this paper.

Environment-Behaviour Research: The Library and Information Studies Approach to Understanding Place

“Understanding places begins with feelings... Yet feelings about places differ, depending on whether one is visiting, working, or living in them.” (Hough, 1990, p. 6)

Environment-behaviour research is concerned with the interplay and exchange between humans and their surroundings. The dearth of knowledge and research around environment-behaviour relationships and socio-psychological experiences in a library context have been noted by Sommer (1966), Campbell and Schlecter (1979), and Thomas (1996). More recently, Shill and Tonner (2003) stated that, “there are no systematic, empirical studies documenting the impact of enhanced library buildings on student usage of the physical library” (p. 435). Perhaps in response to earlier authors, Veatch (1987) produced an accessible overview of environmental design and psychology as it applied to libraries in the late 1980s. However, indications that this summary was read or acted upon are minimal, especially when considering the lack of cited references to this work³. Veatch rightly noted that issues related to regulating privacy, personal space, and territoriality can alter the function of library spaces as well as the way these spaces are interpreted by users. Related explorations around conceptions of place would have helped prepare librarians for the changes ahead.

³ The Social Science Citation Index documents three references to the Veatch article in academic literature and Google Scholar eight.

Why didn't library planners use, or librarians engage in, environment-behaviour research more heavily? There are at least two answers. First, the perceived success of library spaces prevented any sense of urgency. For many years, success was defined by the number of paper-based volumes in a library's collection and the number of people who entered the library, used its services, and borrowed its books. Thus, if the lines of library users waiting for service remained long, the seats remained filled to capacity, and books continued to circulate, how could library spaces be considered unsuccessful? Why fix what wasn't broken? As noted earlier, this is no longer the reality (in addition to Martell, 2008, see also Carlson, 2001). Second, experimental and single-method approaches to investigating library user behaviour failed to provide meaningful guidance for practitioners. That is, attempts to identify relationships between specific physical elements and socially mediated behaviour were problematic at best and often misleading, with findings that were equivocal and difficult to transfer to other environments (i.e., there was no way to control for all possible factors in a natural setting so that generalizations about relationships could be made with confidence).

Single method approaches that attempted to document the way students interpreted space were especially problematic. For example, findings about the relationship between noise and library use appear to be contradictory. Specifically, both Luyben, Cohen, Conger, and Gratton (1981) and Bird and Puglisi (1984) documented the impact of sound

reduction strategies on students' perceptions of noise in an undergraduate library. While both identified a positive correlation between a decrease in perceptions of noise and the implementation of abatement strategies, Luyben et al. (1981) suggest that the change in perception was linked to changes in the *type* of noise (i.e., *not* objective sound measurements, which remained consistent) and Bird and Puglisi (1984) linked actual sound reduction to a reduction in subjective interpretations of noise.

Other studies are inconclusive or employ variables that are place and time specific, rendering the results difficult to extrapolate to other scenarios. For example, psychologists Gal, Benedict, and Supinski (1986) asked library users to gauge seat selection intentions based on intended library use (i.e., study or research) and the availability of other types of seating arrangements. While they found that intended use does determine seat selection, the activities they focused on are now recognized as only two of many possible library activities and the plethora of furniture and arrangement options surpass the (necessarily) narrow focus on their research. In addition, Fishman and Walitt (1972) attempted to link architectural design and human behavior by observing seating preferences in a reading room. They determined that privacy regulation was extremely important to library users but their "objective" methods prevented them from being able to make any statements about *why* the seating choices were made.

Recognizing the limitations of a positivist stance, researchers began to explore the library as place as a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon. Thomas's (1996) PhD work on discursive practices in library architecture and environmental design was initially based on direct observation but later incorporated librarians' opinions and perceptions. Her investigation of the role of the physical environment in the creation of social spaces and personal identity led her to conclude, in part, that:

until libraries attend to the experience of users in making library design decisions, library practice will have failed to make the shift of paradigm which so many scholars and practitioners believe is necessary to ensure that the goals of contemporary library service are realized (p. 482).

Librarians have begun to recognize the value of investigating and exploring the user's understanding of the library as place. In the process, they have started to think seriously about how and why people choose to use physical libraries. Historically, this work was more likely to be undertaken by environmental psychologists that accepted the limitations of controlled single method approaches and opted to incorporate data from a range of methods. For example, Campbell and Schlechter (1979) employed mixed methods to investigate the "behavioural impact of the total library milieu of a university library on its users" (p. 27). Sommer (1966) explored how students regulated privacy in an academic library

and ultimately recommended that public spaces should include coffee shops and dedicated areas for group discussion. More importantly, his work recognized the complex nature of library user experiences.

More recently, Kracker and Pollio (2003), a librarian/psychologist team, used a phenomenological approach to better understand library user perceptions. Specifically, written responses were categorized and analyzed using a thematic structure that allowed them to link the complexity of experience with the level of library in which it occurred (e.g., library experiences at the college/university level covered more themes than library experiences at elementary/middle school libraries). They also noted that respondents writing about post-secondary library experiences were much more likely to document environmental elements that contributed to both perception and sensation (e.g., the “aura of intelligence”, visual escapes, noise levels, etc.) than respondents who were writing about middle or high school library experiences. Again, the complex and individual nature of the library experience was noted.

At about the same time, library professor Leckie teamed with geographer Hopkins to investigate the state of large urban public libraries. Leckie and Hopkins (2002) used surveys, interviews, and observational walks they called “seating sweeps” to determine the extent to which these institutions were necessary and successful public spaces. They concluded that the central library in question held a “deep sense of place attachment for its user” (p. 353) but did not expand on the psychological concepts of

sense of place and place attachment. Unlike other researchers (e.g., Young, 2003), Leckie and Hopkins (2002) found observational data sufficient to identify specific user activities and, based on this data, to claim that “the central library acts primarily as a public work space and not a recreational space” (p. 354). Drawing from the same data, Given and Leckie (2003) examined the observational seating sweeps method itself, noting the under-use of ethnographic approaches in library and information studies research more broadly. They claimed that the sweeps method produced findings that could not be documented in any other way (e.g., estimated gender and age breakdowns by area of the library). Not surprisingly, they also stressed the importance of using a triangulated methodology in order to “investigate the full range of patrons’ attitudes and motivations” (p. 383).

Encouragingly, the results of a number of user-centred research projects have been published over the past few years. This marks a strong departure from previous and often top-down approaches to library space studies. This new era of research can be organized into two categories: site-specific case studies (e.g., Bryant, Matthews & Walton, 2009; Fried Foster & Gibbons, 2007; Silver, 2007; Walton, 2006; Webb, Schaller & Hunley, 2008; Waxman, Clemons, Banning & McKelfresh, 2007) and futurist musings about the role of the physical library (e.g., Bennett, 2009; CLIR, 2005; Duderstadt, 2009; Sennyey, Ross & Mills, 2009). Generally speaking, case studies are motivated by practical needs and conclude

with a set of recommendations intended to improve library spaces in specific institutional contexts. While ethnographic methods are often employed, none consider the library itself as a venue for an ethnographic case study. In addition, theoretical discussions about the library as place fail to explore the psychological constructs of sense of place and its related concepts.

This is, indeed, a timely opportunity to explore understandings of the library as place and the cultural meaning of the library through an interdisciplinary lens. To do this, contemporary reflection on the conception and construction of place are explored in the next section.

Place Theory: Informing Understandings of the Library as Place

“Place: stabilizes and gives durability to social structural categories, differences and hierarchies; arranges patterns of face-to-face interaction that constitute network-formation and collective action; embodies and secures otherwise intangible cultural norms, identities, memories and values.”
(Gieryn, 2000, p. 473)

Situating place conceptually helps ground the emergent, contextual, and co-constituted phenomenon of library as place. In this discussion, place is socially constructed and draws meaning from both individual and group interactions and expectations. Most importantly, it must be recognized that place is space endowed with meaning⁴. Thus, theories of place are generally inductive and exploratory, helping us make

⁴ This definition of place is consistent with its predominant use in anthropology, psychology (e.g., Low, 1992), and human geography (e.g., Tuan, 1977).

sense of this complex event that shapes our understandings of self and society.

The idea of place has been explored through multiple lenses within the social sciences. In this section, the work of sociologists Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre are drawn upon to help unpack the layers of social relations that inform the creation of place. Theories focused on the individual experience of place are briefly explored through the work of Edward S. Casey, Michel de Certeau (philosophy) and David Seamon (human geography). In addition, the contributions of environmental psychology to the conceptual mapping of place understandings are noted. And finally, the treatment of place within anthropology provides an exploration that allows for analysis at both the individual and societal level.

Place and Power

Foucault's work is characterized by a recurring examination of societal deviations that illustrate the link between power and knowledge and the resulting creation of epistemes (e.g., Rabinow, 1984; Strathern, 2000). That is, societal shifts in knowledge create dialectical shifts in power. Foucault recognized that social relations are a central aspect of power and that power was a factor in the production and use (including dissemination) of knowledge (e.g., Strathern, 2000). According to Foucault, understanding relations of power requires analyzing how people are made into subjects, or objectified. To this end, he described three

modes of objectification, through which humans are made into subjects: dividing practices, scientific classification, subjectification. Obviously, all three modes of subjectification are influenced by the control exercised in a space. That is, the control of space is one way that a “docile body may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (Rabinow, 1984, p. 17), reproducing power relations.

Foucault also dealt with the idea of space more directly in his widely cited musings about heterotopias, a topic he explored as part of a lecture drafted for architecture students in 1967 (Foucault, 1986). He defined heterotopias as sites that “suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect” (Foucault, 1986, p. 24). Strictly a theoretical tool, its common linkage to physical libraries is problematic. Specifically, Foucault described libraries as indefinitely accumulating time (1986), which only appears to “work” if one accepts that libraries are defined solely through their physical collections and the nineteenth century collection policies of a few elite national libraries. In contrast, Lees (1997) provided a more robust interpretation of this construct by characterizing the heterotopic library as one that offers a social space in which to access knowledge that allows people to “contest, dissent, and resist sociospatial order” (p. 341) and “is ideological in that it can act as a space of illusion, but it is defined by the order of material space for it functions in relations to all other forms of space” (p. 342). Interpreting the library through Foucault’s work highlights it as a cultural

institution that both reflects society's current episteme (i.e., through collections and the nature of access) and provides a space through which societal organization might be contested.

Place and Social Relations

While Foucault's work can be used to explore ideas of public space and the social relations that help form those spaces, Lefebvre dealt more directly with these issues and their relationship to the construction of place. In his widely cited *Production of Space* (1991), he identified three fields of space (physical, mental, and social, p. 404) and offered his readers the infamous spatial triad, later described as the "weight-bearing epistemological pillar... a dialectical simplification... with three specific moments that blur into each other" (Merrifield, 2006, p. 109). According to Lefebvre, space is actively produced in the following ways, which together form the triad: through representations of space (conceptualized space or definitions of space that emerge from professional discourse), through spaces of representation (lived space, providing a symbolic dimension of space), and through spatial practices (the networks, routes, interactions that connect people (Merrifield, 2006, p. 110)). The triadic elements are not mutually exclusive; rather, they represent a dialectical process upon which social relations can be examined. In addition, Schmid (2008) described the components of the phenomenological dialectical trinity (i.e., the perceived, conceived, and lived) as intellectual points of access to the

triadic elements. This trinity is “not only constitutive for the self-production of man but for the self-production of society” and leads to the conclusion that a social space includes the nonmaterial “thought concept and a feeling – an ‘experience’ ” (pp. 39-41) which is further contextualized by the “three moments of production” – i.e., material, knowledge, and meaning (p. 41).

Lefebvre’s work is useful because it provides a malleable framework for understanding place and space within the context of dynamic social relations. Lefebvre’s work offers librarians an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the public spaces they physically create and manage. Each library user realizes a unique experience of these library spaces, one that is shaped and formed by their past interactions, their unfolding activities, and the physical environment (bound inextricably with the social environment) that we conceive, produce, and attempt to manage. Schmid’s use of the dialectical trinity underscores the importance of understanding how place is experienced by the individual.

The Experience of Place

The way an individual interprets space (and thus creates place) is central to understanding the experience of place and its physical manifestations through behaviour and behavioural patterns. The process of unconscious interpretation is explored as a navigational activity by de

Certeau, who questioned the fixity of place and the power of governing bodies to control it; i.e., the walker creates place through decisions tied to navigating everyday life, decisions that cannot be completely controlled by those that design the paths they walk on. Thus, the walkers' "bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it" (de Certeau, 1984, p. 93). His often cited (and variously interpreted) phrase, "to walk is to lack a place" (p. 103) and that place "implies an indication of stability" (p. 117) further empower the walker's role in creating new, and ever evolving, social spaces. For de Certeau, "space is a practiced place" (p. 117), a phrase that recognizes the power of everyday actions to create place by necessarily disturbing both pedigreed and vernacular processes; i.e., there is a dialectical tension embedded in spatial practices.

David Seamon (1980) is also concerned with everyday spatial movement and used phenomenology as a theoretical precept to explore understandings of place. Phenomenology prioritizes the subjective view of experience and offers a holistic approach to the relation between objectivity and consciousness (Moran, 2000, p. 13). In this approach, interpretive appropriateness and relativity are strived for in order to realize intersubjective corroboration (i.e., reliability) (Seamon, 2000). Researchers who employ phenomenological methods take a holistic stance, accepting that people are not separate from the world but immersed in it through a multi-faceted net of intentionalities, including those of body and emotions.

In this context, intentionality is the idea that all human actions are directed towards an object which, reciprocally, provides context for the meaning of experience (Seamon, 2000). Thus, behaviour cannot be separated from experience and fact cannot be separated from meaning; one has no meaning without the other. Seamon (1982) described this precognitive intelligence of body-subject as an active, intentional holistic capacity which intimately “knows” through everyday actions; i.e., not a chain of discrete passive responses to external stimuli. This parallels Merleau-Ponty’s work on the body-as-learned, which provides an exploration of this pre-reflective but learned intentionality. Seamon also characterized the synergistic synching of time and space routines (manifested through the body-as-learned) in a supportive physical environment as a “place ballet.” Seamon claimed that this type of phenomenon generates a “strong sense of place because of its continual and regular human activity” (1980, p. 159).

The goal of Seamon’s work in this context was to identify “underlying experiential patterns [that] transcend particular social and temporal contexts and can be found in all human situations” (1980, p. 160). Obviously, understanding individual perception is fundamental to this process. Writing from a phenomenological perspective, Edward Casey described perception as the “crux of place”, evolving into a synesthetic phenomenon based on past understandings of configuration and complication that assist with the construction of meaning (1996, pp. 17-

18). These place meanings are relational, with similar places linked into regions, which Casey defined as “a collocation of internally related places” (Casey, 1996, p. 41). While this emergent process of sense-making is time and place specific (and thus not universal), this particularity does not preclude the identification of patterns in behaviour.

Making Sense of Place

A range of concepts have been used to map the idea of place within environment behaviour studies. These include sense of place, place attachment, place identity, and place dependence. Many researchers accept that the development and degree of these emotional (affective) bonds is a prerequisite of psychological balance and good adjustment, which helps individuals to overcome identity crises and provides them with a sense of stability (Lewicka, 2008). There is much less agreement about how these concepts are interpreted and applied.

Sense of place is generally viewed as a summative phenomenon; i.e., “sense of place is the sum total of meanings and attachments, constructed through human experiences” (Stedman, 2001, p. 31). For environmental psychologists, it has both descriptive elements (e.g., symbolic meanings, beliefs about what kind of place this is) and evaluative elements (e.g., feelings that express importance or preference).

While place attachment is sometimes used as a synonym for sense of place (Bell, Greene, Fisher & Baum, 2001, p. 50), it is more often used

to describe the fulfillment of a functional need or goal by the environment (Prohansky, Fabian & Kaminoff as cited in Bott, Cantrill & Myers, 2003).

Thus, place attachment can be interpreted as a function of social relationships that occur in places (Jones & Kyle as cited in Farnum, Hall & Kruger, 2005).

Like sense of place, place dependence can be both positive and negative (e.g., Stedman, 2001) and is often described in a way that appears to devalue the role of non-human elements. Even though humans are seen as the primary agents of place dependence, the multi-faceted nature of the phenomenon is largely ignored; i.e., it is often defined by a motivation to perform a specific task or activity in a specific place. Stokols and Shumaker describe place dependence as a:

form of attachment associated with the potential of a particular place to satisfy the needs and goals of an individual and the assessment of how the current place compares with other currently available settings that may satisfy the same set of needs (as cited in Williams, Patterson & Roggenbuck, 1992, p. 31).

Place identity, conversely, is often defined in a way that prioritizes non-human elements. That is, it is described as a relationship in which, through personal attachment to a geographically locatable place, a person acquires a sense of belonging and purpose in that place, which gives meaning to life. (Prohansky, Fabian & Kaminoff as cited in Bott, Cantrill &

Myers, 2003). Thus, the physical place could be interpreted as more influential in the construction of place than the social networks that inform its interpretation and creation.

Understanding how place might influence individuals requires an approach that is sensitive to the complex, dynamic, individual, and emergent nature of the phenomenon. Meaning is understood through the structures, patterns, and essences mined from lived experiences that can be conceptualized, in part, by using the labels of sense of place, place attachment, place identify, and place dependence. While there is value in employing these constructs, their interpretations must include a socially constructed reality that is formed in a specific context and informed by a larger socio-political milieu. This culturally grounded analysis is the domain of anthropology.

Towards an Understanding of Place

Socio-cultural anthropologists have become increasingly concerned with theorizing space and place as part of their work by rethinking and reconceptualizing their understandings of culture in spatialized ways (e.g., Low & Lawrence-Zuniga, 2003). These explorations often draw upon the ideas of social theorists (e.g., Lefebvre, de Certeau) and phenomenologists (e.g., Casey) and incorporate concepts co-developed in disciplines that study environment-behaviour relationships. For example, Rodman (2003) compares place as both an anthropological and a social

construction and Hirsch (1995) accepts the duality of landscape framed by anthropologists and made meaningful by individuals. Recognizing that the subject and object are not mutually exclusive is also a long-standing premise of phenomenological inquiry, a method Ward (2003) acknowledges as valuable to ethnographic explorations. This recognition also forms an important premise in Latour's (2005) work to develop actor network theory, an approach that also accepts the co-constitutive nature of social relations.

Low and Lawrence-Zuniga use the phrase "embodied space" to describe "a model for understanding the creation of place through spatial orientation, movement, and language", a model that is defined through perceptual experience and engagement (2003, p. 2). This bears a striking resemblance to Merleau-Ponty's ideas about the "body-as-learned" within a phenomenological tradition (described earlier). Embodied space is also described as a dialectical process that involves "appropriation and transformation of space and nature that is inseparable from the reproduction and transformation of society in time and space" (Pred as cited, p. 5), echoing the importance of social and structural relationships to the experience of place, as explored by social theorists like Lefebvre and de Certeau.

The phrase "inscribed spaces" is used to define and focus the relationships between humans and the environments they occupy. Specifically, there is an interest around "how people form meaningful

relationships with the locales they occupy, how they attach meaning to space, and transform space into place“ (Low & Lawrence-Zuniga, 2003, p. 13). To do this, anthropologists employ techniques similar to those used in environment behaviour studies informed by a phenomenological approach; i.e., narratives of place experience are documented and the reciprocal and co-constitutive nature of the relationship between people and their environments is accepted.

Actor-centric concepts like place attachment and self-forming place identity are explored as part of a broader anthropological assessment. Meaningful places shape an individual's identity through their own actions and understandings, which have the potential to link them to broader regional identities (Gray, 2003). Reading spaces (i.e., developing spatial literacy) can be understood as an identity-creating process where “spatial practices are identity practices that work through and on power relations as they are organized in the real spaces in which people live” (Erdreich & Rapoport, 2006, p. 122). That is, their spatial practices reflect their understanding of self, a processual production that is “a matter of becoming as well as of being” (Ward, 2003, pp. 86-87). Place attachment is a natural output of this process and while the phenomenon is often communicated via anthropological narratives, it is rarely labelled. Low (1992) provided an exception when she tackled cultural place attachment directly. She provided a typology that integrated material, social, and ideological components understood as both categories and processes that

are a “series of dimensions in multidimensional space” (Low, 1992, p. 167).

The clarity of analyzing individual experience is a function of contextualizing that experience within social relations. It is with anthropological insights about cultural processes that understandings of place experience can prove valuable to emerging theories of place. Erdreich and Rapoport (2006) claim that it is through observing cultural processes that embody place meaning that we “can study how social relations are re-organized as place” and describe the navigational act of spatial literacy as “putting to use an understanding of the spatial organization of social relations” (pp. 117-118). Creating place through the process of spatial literacy, or interpreting the space in that moment to produce knowledge, has the potential to mitigate potential feelings of alienation embedded in foreign spaces. These novel spaces also provide opportunities to inscribe new behaviours on a space, creating a place that has the potential to support empowerment, a status that can become transferable through the process of identity formation. That is, “freedom is a concept that cannot be separated from space” (Erdreich & Rapoport, 2006, p. 131).

While placemaking is an active process that connects an individual to the location and the regional identity, it is not removed from the “disciplinary aims of institutions” (Gray, 2003), sowing the seeds for the creation of contested spaces that “concretize the fundamental and

recurring, but otherwise unexamined, ideological and social frameworks that structure practice” (Low & Lawrence-Zuniga, 2003, p. 18). Clearly, anthropologists’ contributions to knowledge production include taking up the charge to “elucidate the language of social relations through which people create the world as they know it” (Rodman, 2003, p. 209). This balanced understanding of individual and social influences has created a flexible framework that allows for the integration of evolving and emergent phenomenon. One example is the increasingly normative practice of mobility that reinforces contextualized identities and mutual sites of belonging. Interestingly, sociologist Urry linked the creation of places to networks of movements (which overlaps with his New Mobilities Paradigm), claiming that the practices of mobility (i.e., flows of people) directly shape specific places, as do the social activities that occur in a place, forcing an evolution of place via the demands of global competition, a phenomenon he described as “place reflexivity” (2007, p. 266).

Anthropologists’ recognition of phenomena predicated by increased mobility (both physical and virtual) has informed new theoretical frameworks that embrace the actor-centered approach and understand place to be negotiated and constructed (Ward, 2003, p. 81). The emergence of place theory requires an intellectual environment that is sensitive to the complex, dynamic, individual, social, and emergent nature of the phenomenon. Phenomenology contains a flexibility that supports the constituted, experienced, and relational nature of place. Linking this

approach with Foucault's understanding of the embedded power structures of current epistemes, powers that inform the elements of Lefebvre's dialectical spatial triad, provides a frame for understanding the balance between actor as active participant and product of systemic forces.

The nuanced narrative of anthropology, realized through sensitive ethnographic methods, offers a structure through which librarians can interpret the public spaces that define their roles and better understand the needs of their users. Allowing library users to describe routine and exceptional experiences situated in physical libraries *in their own words* helps the researcher to better understand the processes and relations that ultimately make the place. Directly and systematically observing how library spaces are used corroborates and reinforces themes drawn from personal narratives and also provides a greater appreciation of context including the role of environmental factors not necessarily recognized in self-reports of experience.

Methods

"We construct spaces rather than sense them." (Ellard, 2009, p. 123).

As noted earlier, successful public spaces are democratic, responsive, and meaningful (Carr, et al., 1992). The level of democratic access to and responsiveness of a space can, to some extent, be determined through policy assessment and unmediated self-reporting

tools like questionnaires. Understanding how and why a library user ascribes meaning to a physical place requires a phenomenological approach. That is, it requires an investigation of the phenomenon as experienced.

The role of the library in the life of the user is socially constructed and informed by prior and anticipated interactions. The library as place is co-constituted by the individual and the space around them (Kracker & Pollio, 2003). Thus, an attempt to identify definitive causal or even strongly correlative relationships would have been impossible as each experience, and its effects, are specific and unique to the individual and the material-socio-psycho space they inhabit and create at that moment in time. Rather, ethnographic methods embracing a phenomenological approach allowed for a more sensitive exploration of context and individual experience. To this end, data collection included both reactive self-report and non-reactive behavioural measures in an attempt to create as holistic an interpretation of library use and perception as possible, paying careful attention to the interconnectedness of environmental factors and opportunities for triangulation. Specifically, both interviews and observational techniques were used, the latter primarily to provide context and corroboration for ideas expressed in the interviews.

The question of *why* people use the library was explored primarily through semi-structured interviews and written work about the interviewee/informant's personal library experiences. Participants were

recruited using a sample of convenience; i.e., they were approached directly in public places on campus including open common areas, food courts, and library entrances. The bulk of recruitment activities were completed during September and October 2008, immediately before the commencement of a campus-wide 85 day CUPE strike. While course-based activities were suspended during the strike, research activities were allowed to continue and ten interviews were completed during this period. In order to recruit more participants, flyers explaining the parameters of the project were distributed inside the Scott and Osgoode Libraries⁵ in January 2009. Both in-person and paper-based recruitment techniques informed potential participants about the project and asked them to submit a written summary of three memorable experiences that took place in a physical York University library. They were also asked to expand on one of these experiences and participate in an interview. Each interviewee received a \$25 York University Bookstore gift card as compensation for their contributions.

All interviews started with an exploration of one of the stories submitted by informants and was followed by a series of open-ended questions used to guide the conversation without leading the interviewee to pre-selected answers. This type of phenomenological approach, where informants both write and speak about their experiences, is described by

⁵ The Osgoode Library serves the Law Faculty, which resumed classes nearly a month after the CUPE strike started. See media release dated November 26, 2008:

<http://www.yorku.ca/mediar/archive/Release.php?Release=1562>

Flyers were only distributed in the Scott Library during evenings and weekends, when picket lines were closed.

Kracker and Pollio as the only way to “learn about the human meaning of the library experience as it is lived and described by ordinary users of the library” (2003, p. 1104). In addition, informants were asked to provide basic demographic information and answer questions about academic libraries. A concentrated effort was made to keep the recorded interviews as informal as possible; e.g., I did not have a sheet of questions in front of me to guide the conversation and each interview began with a few minutes of casual talk about the informant’s school or work. In addition, I was careful to “bracket” my own assumptions and judgments so as not to discourage or limit the informant from exploring their personal interpretations of library experiences; e.g., inaccurate or incorrect statements about library policies and procedures were never corrected or discussed. Interviewees were not discouraged from going off-topic unless they had stated time constraints prior to beginning the interview (which was rare). In retrospect, these tangential discussions often provided richer data than could have been collected with a more structured approach. In total, sixteen interviews were completed, a number well beyond the average sample size for phenomenological research (e.g., Langdrige, 2007, pp. 84, 109). Interview lengths ranged from nineteen to seventy-three minutes and averaged thirty-four minutes in length.

Talking to individuals about their experiences is the most direct way to learn about how they interpret the world around them. Learning the language they use and how symbolic representations of the world around

them are interpreted and valued is critical to understanding how and why they use the library. However, this self-report method assumes that the respondent is aware of their perceptions (i.e., processing, integrating, and interpreting environmental factors) and actions and both able and willing to honestly articulate them. Herein lies part of the value of the observational component of data collection, which helped contextualize the users' experience and informed the analysis of interview transcripts. This behavioural measure allowed for the comparison of interview explanations and insights about library use and the actual physical use of the Scott Library. While observation allows for greater control over data accuracy and consistency, it has been recognized in the literature as limiting when used on its own (e.g., Fishman & Walitt, 1972; Thomas, 1996; Young, 2003). Observational sweeps were used in this project to both complement and contextualize the narratives obtained through interviewing.

Data collected via direct observation was used to address and contextualize the question of how people use the library. Nineteen observational sweeps were conducted in the Scott Library following the resumption of classes after the CUPE strike. An observational sweep is a procedure where data collectors "sweep" all areas of the library during a specific time period. Nineteen sweeps were conducted between March 15 – 28, 2009 in the morning, afternoon, and evening of two consecutive Sundays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays. The days of the week

were selected to allow for future analysis related to commuting patterns (the vast majority of York University students do not live on campus). Behavioural maps were used to record the data collected, which included basic observable demographic information, the presence of visible possessions, and the activity of every stationary non-staff person in the Scott Library. Each map documented up to fourteen library users and 828 maps were completed overall. This data was entered into an SPSS file, which was later analyzed for behavioural patterns by producing basic frequencies and cross-tabulations. While the CUPE strike likely influenced post-strike student library behaviour (and lack thereof during the strike), this does not diminish the value of observational data for corroborating and contextualizing informants' narratives. As indicated through the interviews, patterns of library behaviour were established prior to the strike.

Participant observation has become an important topic in the area of ethical review for projects involving non-reactive measures. That is, observing people without them realizing they are participating in a research project raises questions about informed consent. Currently, the participants' right to "opt-out" of the research takes priority over the researcher's attempt to utilize a truly non-reactive behavioural measure. As per the approved ethics protocol for this project⁶, signs with large, bold font were created to inform library users that people were observing library

⁶ An ethics protocol for this MRP work was approved by the university-wide Human Participants Review Committee (HPRC) on August 28, 2008 for the period August 28, 2008 – August 28, 2009.

user behaviour as part of a research project and that no personal information was being collected. These signs also provided my personal contact information and were posted at the main entry and also on every floor of the Scott Library on days when observational sweeps were conducted⁷. In addition, consent forms were discussed with and signed by all interviewees.

The benefits of using multiple methods to collect data are undeniable and compelling. First and foremost, the data collected are complementary and provide a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon being studied. In addition, use of both reactive and non-reactive measures allows for triangulation, which informs insights that are hopefully relevant and of interest to a greater number of people. This increases the likelihood that shared meanings might be recognized and explored, strengthening the possibility for empathetic and meaningful placemaking activities by future library designers.

Dialectical Library Space: Exploring Use

The small table has been cleared of course kits and laptops.

They have been replaced by containers of food that are neatly lined up along the edge of the table where it meets the wall. A student

⁷ Even with these precautions, one student who had not noticed the signs raised concerns about his ability to opt-out of the research project and also whether or not data collectors were monitoring his previous and ongoing use of library workstations (we were not).

sits backwards on the study carrel's attached bench, purposefully distributing napkins and plateware to her peers gathered around her on the floor. One of them is juggling a fork and a travel mug while organizing scholastic paraphernalia in his backpack. He looks up, takes in my clipboard, and catches my eye. "You want some?" he beams, gesturing towards the food. I return his smile and attempt to make supportive eye contact with the rest of the group, some of whom are now nervously fidgeting. "Don't worry, I'm just documenting how people use the library, I'm not here to confiscate your supper." A visible sigh of relief passes over the group, broken by one of the women, who inquires about my motives for recording what they are doing.

The life of the library is defined by its users. Their interpretation of library space informs their decisions about acceptable behaviour and spatial practices. It is telling that the historical understanding of the library as a place for quiet, solitary reflection (where food is verboten) is far enough removed from these users' current lived experiences to allow for activities like social dining in one of its most public of spaces. In this situation, the library diners were sitting in an open balcony bordering a four-story atrium and repurposing carrels designed for individual study. That is, they (re)interpreted the space to meet their needs, producing inscribed space. This act of reformation is not without tension, as indicated

through the exchange with a representative of the library's authority (i.e., the researcher). The students' recognition that the library's official representative might expect behaviour different from the behaviour they were engaged in illustrates the dialectical nature of library space. Put another way, a new space emerged out of existing tensions between vernacular use and pedigreed expectations.

The production of a social space to satisfy a basic need (to eat) played a supportive role in these users' broader need for the library on that particular visit: to study. It is no secret that students come to academic libraries to study. Traditionally, this was a solitary behaviour strongly reinforced by librarians and users alike. A shift in pedagogy has resulted in more active social learning practices that have found a home in library group study rooms as well as areas historically designated for solitary study. While this change has been noted anecdotally, it is rarely documented in a systematic way.

Aggregate observation data gathered for this project indicates that social activities (e.g., talking, using a cell phone or social networking web site) made up 20% of all activity at study carrels, 24% of all activity at study tables, and 22% of all activity at computer workstations. While this is lower than the percentage of social activities in group study rooms (64%), it is important to note that at least one in five people were engaged in social activities in areas that were originally designed for quiet and/or solitary study. This does not mean, however, that social activity occurs

with the same intensity, duration, or volume across all types of study areas. In fact, such variations in use were noted repeatedly. Furthermore, the types of behaviour observed in specific areas often seemed to be differentiated more student regulation than physical visual cues like furniture. For example, talking at communal study tables in one area of the library was generally quieter and of shorter duration than talking at communal study tables in other areas. While physical environmental factors like furniture and structural forms might influence behaviour, the spatial practices negotiated and created by library users determined how the space was used and defined.

Differentiated Library Space

The importance of choice in selecting a library space was stressed by informants. Each section of the library communicates specific cultural norms, which are largely self-regulated by library users. Obviously, people select a space that best suits their immediate and perceived needs, an embodied practice that can be interpreted as a form of spatial literacy and privacy regulation:

It's nice to have that option if you want to go study and have the quiet space you go inside the second and third floors... That and also there's a second floor lounge there [Current Periodical Reading Room] and then after that, the balcony, if you want more of that whole thing. If I want to sit and talk, I just kind of go there. If I want to do some more studying and kind of talk, I go upstairs.

I know some people come here to socialize and I've taken it as the second floor is ok – it's social... You can't do your work and

concentrate – don't even expect that. [And] if you go into the lounge, that's another story.

I find that if you're in a big room full of people and most of them are studying, it makes you study too. Sort of like keeps you focused. And like I don't want to be seen like... I don't know... I'm not going to sit there and scroll through Facebook or whatever if I'm in a big room full of people that are studying because, like, I don't know why it just helps me. So that's also why I go there – because it really helps me focus and that's why I come to the library in the first place.

I don't like those [communal areas] 'cause it's so easy like, there's not even like a wall or something between the desks so everyone's looking at one another and I'm the type that catches the eye really easily, right, so if someone's looking.... like I look at him immediately... That's why I don't study there.

As noted earlier, traditional environmental cues (like furniture) are a factor in space use decisions but their influence is far from deterministic. In fact, library users often reinterpret library spaces in ways that contradict existing design elements. Group study rooms are used for solitary study, communal study areas are used for social learning activities, areas designed for social learning are used for quiet study, etc. This tension between use and design becomes an integral part of the academic library experience and the exercise of user control over the space creates a personalized and more meaningful learning environment. This is obvious in student descriptions about how group study rooms are used:

I personally like the individual, enclosed rooms, it's a bit more... it feels like I have my own space even though it's within the bigger space of the library. You feel like this is somewhere you can drop all your guard down and just be yourself. It's kind of private so I really like the closed rooms with the windows and the chalk board.

[In the library carrels] you have some privacy but again it's just sitting down and doing work whereas I need to be able to engage with the work on different levels, I have to stand and walk around to do that kind of thing. I guess I need a study room whereas a study area is just sort of if you're doing readings or taking notes or something but I need to be able to engage with the work I'm doing on different levels.

Personalized space use is also communicated through the way in which solitary study carrels support the overlapping and sometimes amorphous activities related to solitary and social learning:

I like [the balconies]. It's like you can still study and you can still socialize at the same time. I find that you get a lot of work done but it doesn't feel like you're doing a lot of work... I was comfortable up there, you're open, I guess you can't really describe it though, it just kind of felt good.

[It's different from other study sessions] cause we were more open and able to talk whereas most times I study with a friend we just sit there and study and that's it... I like the balcony because it's just quiet enough... I don't like it when it's dead silent. Cause that makes me nervous.

Of course, personalized space created in dynamic social environments has the potential to be contested, as described in the following incident which took place in the Current Periodical Reading Room:

...they come in and they're talking so loud and I'm trying to do an essay that was due the week that the strike happened so we just – and my prof's mean, you know, he's really strict about it, he still says it's due next week. And I didn't even start on it so I'm trying to do the readings for it and these guys come in and start talking and yelling and partying in the library... Everybody's looking at them. And still, like, what are they going to do, you know? They realize it's a library. And they're just going on louder and louder and louder. And like I hear 'shhs!' coming from every single angle but it was... it was pretty bad. You know, we didn't end up moving because we're too lazy for that. I just put in my music – you know – I can study really well with music.

Current Periodical Reading Room

The Current Periodical Reading Room (CPRR), which was the setting of the quote above, provides an important illustration of student space use that strongly rejects the area's original purpose. Library designers created the CPRR as a space to house and read paper-based, unbound periodicals. Over the years the physical footprint of these materials shrank as they migrated to digital formats. The room was renovated in 2004 but a sign informing users of its status as a CPRR was not installed. Today, the current periodical shelving occupies roughly 10% of this large room's floor space. The remaining bulk of the room houses a mix of study tables, carrels, and casual, soft seating.

While many of the informants spoke at length about the CPRR, none could identify it as a place that provides access to current periodicals. Instead, it was often identified by its use and spatial location; e.g., the "the lounge by the computers." The fact that many people identified the CPRR by the spatial practices that occur within it and its connection to other areas of the library tell us that this is, in de Certeau's meaning of the phrase, "a practiced place" (1984, p. 117). In addition, many informants described this mixed use room in a way that communicates a strong sense of place attachment:

Well people chill out in that room, as far as I have seen... that's the only place where I see people strewn across the floor or undergrads are flirting or chilling out or reading... that's where the

people always are. That's where I notice people. And they're not usually so much in the middle of the atrium or straight ahead, that's the computer room and to the left I can't really think about what's there... maybe a window and people working. But yeah, to the right is where those people are – I didn't realize it's a whole separate room.

I absolutely love that room, there, the lounge, whatever it is... I don't know what they're called but they have those low walls... where the seats are... That gives you the feel of having cubicles to yourself and I love that... you have a lot of large space where you can sit and kind of stay by the windows... they're still open enough where you don't feel suffocated but there's a nice table beside you, the wall behind you, so the sound is kind of like blocked out and they're comfortable chairs.

I wouldn't even know it's for periodicals – it's a reading room. I didn't even know that it has current periodicals... I didn't even know that! And you know what, actually, from sitting in there and reading myself, it's annoying when people go in there to find [periodicals]... and people are looking for their periodicals or books or whatever it is... and there's newspapers in there, too? And so I want to say, 'Stop rattling your newspapers!' Cause I'm reading and why are they in there with a newspaper, you know?

The CPRR is also an example of dramatic temporal shifts in space use and sense of place by time of day (i.e., morning, afternoon, and evening). For example, socializing increased at night along with number of people clustered in social groups. These time-based changes underscore the unfixed, complex, and emergent nature of place.

Temporal Nature of Library Space

Among other things, the creation of place is a function of time. The diners in the opening narrative of this section were gathered around 6:00pm on a Wednesday evening and the carrel they selected as their

dinner table was positioned less than twenty feet from the University Librarian's office, an area that no doubt supported a different type of placemaking activity earlier in the day. Once administrative activity subsided, students filled the vacuum and redefined the space based on their own temporal rhythms.

Observational data indicates a 7% increase in the level of talking from morning to evening hours across all areas of the library. That is, more library users were engaged in talking in the library at night than in the morning. However, this figure only tells part of the story as it was repeatedly observed that library space use became more differentiated, and strongly regulated, at night. In addition, some library activities associated with specific areas seemed to invert at night. Spaces that were used for silent study and sleeping during the day became highly active social areas at night. For example, the incidence of sleeping at study carrels and tables drops by half in the evening when compared to the afternoon. Open study spaces that supported a measure of social learning during the day became places of serious, quiet study at night. These observations are consistent with many comments made by informants, including the following remark about a communal study area on the entry level of the library:

It's a lot less busy [at night], so less conversation. Everyone's there just to study. During the day I find people come in to have a break or talk with their friends for some reason. It's a place to sit down I guess. I find that the people who stay in the library past about 8pm, they're there for a reason.

While such changes in use were likely due to changing populations (i.e., a “day” group of users and a “night” group of users), it was obvious that some people spend twelve hours or more in the library on any given day, often staying in the same location and only taking breaks for biological and social needs. In fact, it was not uncommon to see the same person at a study carrel during a morning, afternoon, and evening sweep of the library on the same day over a period of fourteen hours. These marathon library sessions no doubt lead to a strong sense of place attachment or even dependence. In one case, a student was overheard flirting with another, “You know where I’ll be – I’m always at the same spot in the library – it’s *my* spot. Come and see me sometime.”

Noting the Gaps

The discussion up to this point has focused on library use that illustrates a clear point of departure from traditional conceptions of library space and its original purposes. This evolution of library as place is also communicated through the absence of behaviour that once defined library space use. It became apparent very early in the interviews that when library users spoke about paper-based library books, it was always in the context of home or commuting. None of the informants spoke about reading physical library materials in the actual library. As a result, the behavioural map was modified and considerable time and effort was spent to accurately document what types of materials library users had in their

possession during library sweeps. Tabulations from the observational sweeps strongly indicate that library materials are not used in the library as frequently as course kits and other texts brought to the library by users. Specifically, only 7.4% of library users had a library book or periodical in their possession during the sweeps and it is likely that a number of these impersonal possessions were left behind by earlier users. When this figure is compared to the 42% of users that had a laptop in their possession and the 59% that had course kits, notebooks, or other texts it becomes clear that physical supports for learning in the library do not always include physical library resources. Rather, students are bringing their own supports to the library in order to make it a place conducive to studying.

It is important to note, however, that not using library books in the library does not mean that they are not used at all. Rather, students are opting to use books outside of the library, even when spaces for quiet, solitary study are available. This raises important questions about the relevance of the book as a signifier for academic libraries. The relationship between library book use and library space use is described by informants:

It never really crossed my mind that I could sit down at the library and do the readings... I never felt like that it was an option for me. I don't know... I never thought about it. To actually just sit down and do it... I was just like, here are the books, let's go.

We just kind of go and use our notes from the classroom. Like if one of my friends has to write a paper or something, we'll pick up library materials and go.

If it looked like it was really, really related and worth it I would come here and check it out and photocopy it or whatever and then I would take it home and read it.

... I've really just gone in, grabbed stuff and left.

Even those who claim an emotional attachment to physical books recognize the inefficiency of this paper-based format, prioritizing task utility over procedural nostalgia:

And just because of the feeling, the lighting, everything... you just get that aura for studying and so you just feel ready to write that essay. You get your books... and they're heavy. [laughter] But that's what I mean, it's that feeling, you can feel the weight on your shoulders... And once you do that, you start flipping through the book and say, 'I want that – I want that.' And that really changes your focus or changes the trajectory of your writing and I couldn't imagine not having that. Yeah. But also thought, 'Imagine if it was like a vending machine. It would be so much easier.'

Library buildings were designed primarily to store books. As the link between physical books and the physical library loosens, the disconnect between intended and actual building use widens. This section has served to illustrate this disconnect in numerous ways. It is aptly summarized in the story of a fourth year student who claimed to be a frequent user of the Scott Library throughout his undergraduate degree. It was not until his final year of study, however, that he ventured up to the second and third floors of the library where the book stacks, Information/Computer Commons, and various public service points are located. He explained that since he brought his own materials to study with (i.e., not library resources) he had never felt the need to venture beyond the study area on

the entry level of the library. It is not only *how* the academic library is used that is important – it is *why* it is used that must be explored in order to understand the future of these cultural institutions. Motivations and intentions can only be explored through individual perceptions, which form the basis of placemaking and are explored in the next section of this paper.

Placemaking in the Library: An Interpretive Investigation

“For the meaning of life differs from man to man, from day to day and from hour to hour. What matters, therefore, is not the meaning of life in general but rather the specific meaning of a person’s life at a given moment.” (Frankl, 2000, p. 113).

It is the numerous and unmarked interactions of everyday life that inform our understandings of self and environment. These activities, repeated over time as part of daily life, become cultural practices that organize and structure society (e.g., Ward, 2000). This section examines library user interpretations of library practices, providing insight about the creation of the library as place and what it means to the informant. This is explored through the idea of spatial literacy and its potential influences on identity creation and placemaking. Specific phenomena, including wayfinding, the establishment of social spaces, and the practice of floor-sitting are highlighted as manifestations of place attachment and belonging.

Spatial Literacy and Identity

Cultural identity is tightly bound to place and what one understands to be their location within that place. By interpreting, reacting to, and creating spatial practices, one forms and reaffirms identity. Put another way, spatial literacy is, “a process of reading and putting to use an understanding of the spatial organization of social relations” and “can be a tool for analysis of how space directs the social construction of identities” (Erdreich & Rapoport, 2006, p. 117). For example, even though it is widely known that eating in the library is unacceptable and, in fact, many library users were observed attempting to hide both their food and the act of eating, 7% of library users had food in their possession during the observational sweeps⁸. Others, like the group in the opening narrative of the last section, openly exercised their power to make decisions about where and how they study, socialize, and eat. This placemaking practice tested and altered the social order, which manifested in the reversal of power roles between librarian and student; i.e., the students controlled activity in the space, not the librarian.

The interplay between the development of identity and spatial literacy skills can be illustrated through this same narrative. The library carrel selected by our diners was most likely chosen with care. Whether that effort was conscious or not is uncertain but there were likely multiple

⁸ This is only slightly lower than the percentage of people that had paper-based library materials in their possession (7.4%). It is likely that the number of people with food would exceed those with library books if we could count people who were hiding food they planned to eat in the library.

aspects of the surrounding environment that made it an ideal place for a social meal; e.g., the established nature of the area as a social space, enough room to congregate, a table to set food on, high ceilings with natural light and plants, etc. The activities that occurred in that space, especially the interaction with the researcher, established the students' role as contestants and defenders of activities they knew could be challenged by library authorities. The fact that they continued to be successful in their radical use of space reaffirmed their positions both physically and psychologically. No longer trespassers by activity, they became rightful owners of the space they chose to use in a non-traditional way. This no doubt changes the way they interpret their relationship with library space and the way they navigate, or find their way (aka wayfind), through that space in future visits. In this way, place and identity are constructed, in part, through the spatial literacy practice of wayfinding.

Wayfinding

The process of reading and interpreting a place is tightly bound to navigating or wayfinding through the environment. While the challenge of wayfinding in the Scott Library has the potential to produce a tension that facilitates placemaking, it can also act as a barrier to positive manifestations of sense of place and place attachment. For example, the Scott Library's current entry level has been modified from its original incarnation as a retail space and retains visual cues that create a sense of expediency and assembly line flow. It is not obvious, from this main entry,

how to access the general book collection held on the upper floors or the professional assistance located on the second floor. Interestingly, many people don't associate the entry level with the "real" library, which opens the space up for broader interpretation but also serves to confuse and even marginalize previous conceptions of the library as a place:

I remember my first impressions were that this place is *horrible*... the spatial structure is awful... like taking the escalator that only fits one person – there's no stairs even. And then the stairs are on the side – it's a completely awkward area – you have to walk all the way around... it's hard to get into. Like, when you walk in the library, you're not even actually *in* the library. You have to go up another escalator and then, you know, all the other escalators up the stairs. [sighs] It's always full, there's not enough room, there are people everywhere.... I thought it was terrible. I didn't want to study here. Especially when I didn't know there was the grad room.

I actually did not know... I didn't even know this was a library.... cause it said Scott Library and I just thought it was something else because the Scott Library for me is the library after... I don't know it's so stupid... when I went in there, like at the bottom ground it didn't look like a library because it's so you know, there are tables and desks... but even the second floor the books are not readily there... it's still really when you go to the third, fourth, fifth, then you see the books... And they're eating there!

These design elements act as physical barriers that can lead to feelings of stress and even alienation, which can leave the library user feeling as though they don't belong in the space. These feelings can in turn lead to the erection of intellectual barriers:

I have a hard time coordinating the floor plan to the actual physical space. I don't know... I'm usually pretty good with maps... It's just annoying. It just makes me not want to use the library and just use what's familiar and navigable... I shouldn't need to have someone hold my hand.

Navigating the stacks in search of a library book is another wayfinding activity that was repeatedly characterized as frustrating and negative⁹. In this context, the book stacks represent a highly controlled space that can be interpreted as one of Foucault's dividing practices; i.e., it is a mode of manipulation that "combine(s) the mediation of a science and the practice of exclusion" (Rabinow, 1984, p.8). The classification of books, which are physical manifestations of knowledge, compartmentalizes that knowledge into disciplines, producing structures that control access. Academic library classification schemes reflect the organization of academia and its inherent structure, not the way students might interpret the space in relation to their own needs¹⁰. For example, physical book placement is dictated by an order that might not represent the library user's current needs; e.g., does a book about women and domestic violence "belong" alongside books on women's studies or alongside books about domestic violence? A student studying either women's studies or domestic violence would likely opt for the position that relates most closely to their own area of current interest.

This highly controlled classification of paper-based library resources provides a structure that communicates priorities (both directly and indirectly) to the library user, thus reproducing the structure. Those who do not learn how to navigate the library intellectually, by traditional

⁹ This is a common phenomenon often included as part of the broader concept of library anxiety in library and information studies.

¹⁰ The Library of Congress Classification was created, in large part, by early twentieth century North American academics and is still used in the majority of academic libraries.

methods, often feel dislocated from library spaces that serve its book repository function. This problem is compounded by peers who feel they are missing a part of the library experience:

I actually am afraid of looking for any article or journal article in library. Rather, I find it easier to find it [via] ejournals.

I mean eventually I got [the computer account] setup and I used it to look up the books I needed and getting the books for the first time was kind of annoying because the call numbers were kind of... I wasn't used to them so it took me awhile to locate the books that I needed, I had to walk around... and it's really kind of stuffy up there. And it's quiet but it's not... I guess 'library' has it's own kind of quietness... it's quiet but it's not like a comforting quietness... it feels like people are just being quiet because they have to be so for me, when I'm up there it feels like there's this suppression of noise and I try not to make my shoes squeak too much or if I have a cough I try to cover it up so I feel extra self-conscious of making any sounds up there and it's kind of weird.

I remember some of my friends in third and fourth year still didn't know how to use the library. And I don't know why some people get it and others don't. [laughs] But I remember she would make me go every single time... the place would mean more to the person who knew their ins and outs, knew their way around compared to the ones, 'Thank God I'm out of here. I still don't know what I'm doing'... if you need to find someone every time or you're so annoyed and you know, nervous to go into a place because you don't know what you're doing or how to get the books you need.

Social Spaces

Peer learning and engagement are integral components of the academic experience and the library provides a relatively neutral place to create the social spaces conducive to these activities. Areas commonly identified as "third places" can inform users about their role in both social

and institutional networks¹¹. These spaces are not strictly work or private environments. Instead, they bridge elements of both, creating a strong sense of place and place attachment. The absence of barriers to access associated with both classroom (place of work) and dorm room (place of privacy) helps create a place amenable to feelings of acceptance and belonging:

In first year I didn't really know anybody and so when I had a three hour break... I was like, 'I'll just go sit in the library.' And then it just turned into, ok, I can actually get work done and it just flew from that... I remember last year I had a seven hour break at one point so... I would study for a few hours and come and socialize for another like whatever and if I need to go back, I would go back to the library. I find it's a spot where you can always... I guess you're always welcome and there's always spots for you.

I noticed a few days ago... a girl was sitting beside another girl and she looked over and she was just like, 'you're in my whatever class' and she was like, 'yeah' and she was all, 'well, could you help me with something?' And then, so, for like the last hour they just sat there discussing for the next exam that they had together and so they were just feeding information off of one another, total strangers, they had just met that day and completely like learning off one another and giving each other information.

One flexible (and ubiquitous) area of the library that is often used as a social space is the floor. Even when study tables are empty and carrels are available, many students chose to use the floor to work and socialize. These practices were collectively labelled "floor sitting" after speaking with many informants about the use of the library floor as a space that transcends its designed purpose as a passageway or transitional area.

¹¹ Ray Oldenburg writes about the third place in *The Great Good Place*, New York: Paragon, 1991.

Floor Sitting

For Foucault, the active process of self-formation enables the phenomenon of subjectification (e.g., Rabinow, 1984). This can be hypothetically observed in the spatial practice of using the library floor for seating when other seating options are available. Specifically, choice is rationalized by individuals in ways that reflect self-concept and self-formation. For example, informants described their decision to sit on the floor as an expression of their culture, (e.g., “The thing is, my culture, my family, because we’re Afghan, we sit on the floor”), prioritizing their own physical comfort (e.g., “I will sit on the floor. It’s just more comfortable... I like to sit cross-legged. And in the chairs I can’t sit cross-legged...”), solving practical problems (e.g., many students are observed plugging in laptops to wall outlets that are only accessible if you sit on the floor), and regulating privacy (e.g., “Sometimes at the tables I’m uncomfortable sitting with people I don’t know so I will just sit in a little area by myself [on the floor]. And I think other people do that too”). The floor and their use of it forms and reaffirms their sense of self: culturally aware, pragmatic, high level of self-respect, etc.

Of course, not everyone embraces floor sitting. Some informants felt that the environment created by floor sitting was under-regulated and provided too little control of what was interpreted as private space:

I don’t sit on the floor at all. I do not like the floor. If I have to I will probably leave the library... I don’t want to lie beside someone or like, you know, sit beside someone on the floor that I just don’t want to be too close to or whatever. Where when you’re sitting at a table,

you are like, 'this is my area' and like you can't really come in and like... but on the floor, like, if there's room between those two people against the wall, then someone else can sit there.

One informant interpreted the practice of floor sitting as a failure of the library to provide adequate space for student use, "if they're crashing here that probably means there's nowhere else to crash." Regardless of how or why people decide whether or not to use the library floor, they are creating a co-constituted place that communicates who they are to other library users. This conveyance of self-image through space use is also reflected through seemingly progressive changes in the way graduate and undergraduate students interpret and use library space. In fact, changes in patterns of library space use can be linked to academic and intellectual maturation.

Progressive Use

The progressive nature of identity construction can be interpreted through longitudinal library space use. For example, many younger students and students closer to the beginning of an undergraduate degree place higher value on social and communal learning environments and seek out areas in the library that meet these needs (e.g., 1st and 2nd floor study areas of the Scott Library). Conversely, students near the end of their undergraduate degrees were more likely to place a higher value on quiet areas where they could engage in more contemplative work (e.g., individual carrels on the 3rd, 4th, and 5th floors of the Scott Library). This progressive use is no doubt tied to the changing nature of academic work

from undergraduate to graduate programs. That is, as curriculum and academic focus becomes more specialized, more solitary work is required. Interpreted through this frame, progressive library use becomes a rite of passage; i.e., when someone stops using the library primarily as a social and communal learning space and starts using it primarily as a place for solitary, contemplative study it marks a transition in the maturation of their academic identity.

In the early years of an undergraduate degree, students are learning about the university culture and how to become successful in their academic work. This requires both active and passive engagement with their peers and other members of their self-selected (academic) subculture. This is clearly communicated by one informant who described a time when she was studying at a table in a large, communal study area but was having trouble focusing on her work. She noticed another student employing study techniques different from her own and strove to incorporate these techniques into her work. The experience was a powerful one, inspiring her to work longer and more effectively:

I studied around one or two more hours but I really could study well... that like inspired me, that environment inspired me to study.

Furthermore, there is a recognition that academic libraries are used differently in the later years of an undergraduate degree:

I always knew there were spaces to study... so this year I said, 'ok – I need to get really good grades. I have to really apply myself.' So I figured I would come here. And I have a study friend... so we

come here and we book a room and do readings and studying and things like that.

I am in my fourth year. So up until now I've rarely studied in the library. So this is the first year that I've actually gone to the different rooms and stuff.

And, not surprisingly, some informants never use the library's public spaces for academic work during their undergraduate years at all:

In my undergrad I used to come to meet up with my friends... my friends would just say, 'I'll meet you at the library'... that's where we would meet up. We'd use the couches – I would pull up two couches, take a nap. She'll take a nap – surf the Internet. We did not study. I don't remember studying while I was here.

Informants who were also graduate students either did not use the library at all or developed exceptionally strong place attachment to the library. Low use can be partially attributed to a relatively condensed course schedule (as compared to undergraduate courses) and a strong understanding of the library as an undergraduate space. The Graduate Student Reading Room represents an area of intense place attachment where informants claim a high level of territorial behaviour is common. Even though the focus is on studying, social elements remain important to this group:

I don't really have breaks that often [in my graduate program]... for my undergrad I had some breaks that were like two or three hours in between classes... I can't go home... so I have to go somewhere to do my studying, right, and usually I would come to the Scott Library... Now I come here just to look up books, take them out, and I'll take them home... now I barely use [the library] at all. I think because a lot of the time it's usually just like searching journal articles at home rather than taking out books. Like, I've hardly used

it ever as a grad student for actual books, I think. Maybe for one or two classes.

The grad section - that's the only place I'd go pretty much... someone mentioned it in one of my classes last year, in my first semester and then someone else in class said, 'Shhh! Don't tell them because then everyone will go there.' I was like, "come on - we're all graduate students here, let's be fair." I added that on to the [faculty's graduate student association] web site... It got hacked and I had to redo it and the section is gone now but anyway, long story short I tried to put it in because a lot of people don't know because no one tells you.

It's nice, because I see a lot of people I know, I can catch up with friends, I can talk with people in my class, find out what they're up to, if there's questions about readings, it's sort of like a social area for me and it's quiet... I can just bring a coffee and sort of plough into my work and I get a lot of work done there than I do at home or anywhere else. And I meet friends there, too. It's nice - to have social aspects mixed with academic time.

Well I get shushed if I speak up after a second in the graduate student reading room... It's one of the few places on campus where I - if I'm going to stick around and do some work, that's where I go... it just feels intimate... And there's usually someone in there like a grad student who I can at least wave to so there's that kind of community there and it's... maybe it's just like a club thing but you have your code to get into the room and you feel like this is a space for you specifically and not necessarily kind of a... just like a huge catchall space. Like, this is a space designed for serious work and, I suppose, what the idea of what being a grad student is whether or not people actually do serious work. But there is that feeling - when you're in there people are doing work.

The progressive nature of library use reinforces the idea of place as co-constituted, dynamic, and emergent. The process of placemaking includes innumerable environmental elements as well as individual interpretations of prior and anticipated experiences. It is these interpretations that inform the following exploration of the Scott Library's role in the lives of its users.

The Role of the Library

The academic library is often described as a scholastic third place, a refuge, and a meeting place. It is a place for learning and enlightenment. While these characterizations are true of the Scott Library, the informants in this project clearly described the academic library as a student space outside the direct control of professors and separated from private home life. It is a space that is flexible enough to support student generated places. That is, the Scott Library is a place that supports student maturation and empowerment. In addition, its interpretation as a place of refuge helps create a sense of place and belonging that has the potential to support personal development.

The library as refuge provides protection or recourse from other, less supportive environments. Often, this equates to a motivational and supportive study space:

I definitely get more out of my study sessions in the library... whereas in my room if I wanted to do that I have to limit out the distractions. Typically my room is the space I go to study when I don't feel like being around other people. In the library, it can go either way. Like, if I'm excited about my studying, if I'm really interested in what I want to do or if I feel like I need to do this and it's a do or die kind of thing... something about being in a space where there's at least one other person doing that – it's motivating. Even if it's just like I have to make it some kind of a competition. Like I have to do my best to study harder because all these people are talking and I, like to study, like working against that problem, again, it at least gives you something to bounce off of and that excites me I guess.

The library is also a central gathering spot for planned and chance encounters alike:

When I used to wait for classes to start or end or if there was in-between time, I would just come here and read or to pass the time or whatever. Check my email, if necessary. And also, I use the library to meet people. 'Cause everything knows where it is. And so, if I'm meeting someone for lunch or if I'm selling or buying a book, I just say, 'Meet me at Scott or the Library.'

The experience of place attachment is heightened by these and other activities. Put another way, building a connection to the library as place is a function of using that space and its various resources. Not having this connection can lead to a sense of isolation and even alienation from both the library and the broader university community, diminishing the role of both:

I feel like I don't have the same kind of connection to the library that I did at other, previous institutions that I attended. I used the archives, I used the Circulation Desk, I used inter-library loans, I used everything and the government documents librarians – like *everything*. Simply because my research required that I was accessing materials that the library had. I just felt like I was actually... that I belonged there and was supposed to be there and I was part of the university community whereas here I don't really feel that way at all. Not just because of the library, but it doesn't help.

These practices and related experiences inform how the library as place is understood and developed. True to its dynamic and emergent form, the library as place also teaches the perceiver about campus culture and its ritualized practices, as described here:

There's lots of students studying in this library. Now I had an idea that students here spend a lot of time at university. Like they come here in the morning and go at night. So, they do classes and in

between they come to library and study and then, it's like their home.

Transition

While no place is truly static, the role of the academic library is evolving more quickly than in years past. Historically, libraries were built to protect and provide access to books and other materials. This mandate resulted in a highly controlled environment, one that often incorporated a panoptic design, with the librarian sitting at a central desk where she could see, and conceivably control, all public spaces. The open, active areas of today's academic library lack the elements that informed the perceptions and expectations of past users. Instead, this perceived legacy is communicated to current users by professors and parents even though it is no longer understood through lived experience. Today's book stacks could become yesterday's card catalogue:

I was talking to a professor once and she was telling me about how she's still not used to the fact that... you know how you used to pull out the big drawers to find your book? And you would go through the little tabs? And then you would find the call number that way? [card catalogue] She was saying that her learning experience had changed so much... just because of that. She said it's just not the same feeling without the cards going between your fingers. And I have no idea what that's supposed to even mean.

The predominant understanding of today's library is one of differentiated spaces that support a range of learning needs. However, this is a transitional reality that is not always embraced by all users. Some struggle to reconcile former perceptions with unfolding realities:

The reason [I stopped coming as much] was cause they changed the setting and everything. Like on the first floor there's no more cubicles – it's more like open tables, like the second floor. And I find it's not as private and you can't just sit there and you have all these people talking, doing group projects at the table and so it's always like, 'ok. Well, I can't get my work done so I always find myself heading home now.' And so I find I usually get most of my work done here cause at home you get so many distractions, right, so I find that was a big downfall and as well, like, it added a lot more of those weird round tables on the second floor. There was so many more spots but it just like brings so many more people and like people don't always go to the library always just to study. They sit there and like talk and play and... when they talk, you're just thinking you can hear them and you can't actually work. So I find like this year there's been a great change on the library atmosphere so I haven't really been here that often.

People just come here, I think, for no reason. It's a little annoying having to walk around to look for a seat for awhile and then let's say you find the seat and then there's all these noisy people around you. It's really not what the library is for.

As soon as you step in the library – this is the place to study. This is where people want to study. It's quiet time, not talking time, right? Cause they're... if you... the library is only one little section where you're not allowed to talk. The rest of the university, is open ground for you to talk so I think you should respect that, right, for our students.

It's not even a library; it's more like a social playground for a lot of these students so... you always associate a library with a study area so really that's not how they... well, it's structured it's not like that.

You're just conditioned to associate the library area as a study area and through elementary, secondary, it's always been a study area so when you come to university you're thinking now, ok, this is the most hardest, difficult, like the... you just expect it to be more enforced... it's just a place where you can check your email, surf the Internet.

How, then, can the role of the library be characterized in the life of the student? Nearing the end of her degree, one informant reflects on

what the library has meant to her and how the academic experience might be different for those who never use the library. The library is not only a refuge from the many stressors and distractions of student life; it is a place for exercising personal needs and priorities, a place for growth:

Some people here... have no idea where anything else is but their classes. They've never been to the library... they get off the bus, go to class, get back on the bus, go home. I just don't understand! I mean, how do you not go to the library, like, do you study at home? Like, I can go home and study if there's no one home, like, until like my parents come home from work... or like even when my brother comes home. And then you just keep getting pushed off but if you're in the library it's just you – you're not going to have some random student be like, "oh. Let's go eat in ten minutes" because you can say, "no. Like, I'm going to finish this." Like, you're on your own terms, you don't have other people to consider and like I find that I don't know, I just don't understand how people don't even attempt to go to the library because here there's so many resources you can use... and I don't understand how someone, through their entire course of university haven't been to the library once to even use the space and being out of your house, get away from your roommates to study, like get away from distractions, just to come to the library and just to like lock yourself away on the fifth floor where no one can find you.

Library space that supports student maturation through learning must be flexible and adaptable, allowing students to develop as individuals in a social arena. One informant has a strong sense of the library as a place that supports learning and knowledge creation in an apolitical way and grapples with the emergent quality of place that cannot be reduced or easily defined:

You can't always designate different space for that [open discussion]. Ok, you're going to say let's put this room for that.... You want to eat? Ok – cafeteria. No, it's not like that. It's like having this space of free, unconfined space for people to engage with each other. It's not only about engaging with people who are... like, if you

have a lecture you're going to have certain people going there and certain people not going to be there. So you're not really engaging with a wide, diverse... a diversity of ideas. You're engaging very specific students with specific ideas, right. A library is like an open space, it's letting you engage with everybody, right?... that's one reason why we can't get rid of libraries.. because you can't get that on computers. You can't. How are you going to discuss this article with your friends? I don't know – you just can't... the library itself is neutral. They have books about... controversial books. Just because they have these books is not a reflection of the library's position on these books.

Thus, the library is not only a physical refuge, it is an intellectual refuge as well. In fact, it was described as one of the few public spaces on campus that appears to be student-centred and non-commercial:

We live in that residence with no common space, no social... there's no common space. There's not even a TV room where people can mix... the student centre is just another place I feel could have been a really good common space but it's so commercialized... York Lanes... it's another great common space but again it's just too commercialized.

The perceived lack of student-centered common space on campus provides the library with an opportunity to meet the need for a relatively neutral space for public engagement. This also responds to the warning by Ross and Sennyey (2008) that claims academic libraries are losing the unique features of their public spaces. Their claim was premised on the idea that the main purpose of the academic library is to provide access to information. Conversely, users understand the unique features of the library to be very different: it is a student space that supports learning and engagement but that does not necessarily include accessing information. This assertion was developed through discussions with informants about

how their lives would change if access to library resources was maintained but the physical library itself was closed; i.e., a potentially terminal transition.

No More Physical Library

For many students and librarians alike, a university campus without a library is an unfathomable situation. Still, questions about the necessity of academic libraries have been raised for decades. As noted above, informants were asked about how their lives would change if the physical library was closed and all library resources were available online or via rapid-retrieval storage. The intent behind this question was to draw out the primary purpose or role of the library as perceived by the informant. Emotive responses ranged from ambivalence to horror, with the majority of informants stating a strong preference for retaining a physical library. Their reflections underscore the dramatic shift realized by academic libraries over the past few decades.

For many, the utilitarian nature of the library as a study space is of prime importance. Their study patterns often incorporate various types of social engagement:

Oh – close it? No, that – I would definitely be against that. The library is a good place to study, especially... some people live at home, you know, they got brothers and sisters that are so annoying, like me for example.

I wouldn't have any place to study. I wouldn't get any work done. I come here to study – I come here to do work.... I know tons of commuters who are like, 'I just spent twelve hours in the library.' I mean, they probably talked for six of them but there's still a good

three or four hours of work that you did there. There's also the fact that every now and then you find the environment stimulating... I don't know how they think they're getting work done when they come and talk for like eight hours on end but.... I think it's helping guys pick up [girls] because they can't get phone numbers in class, personally.

The library is more than just holding journal articles. It's where I come to study. So I'd have to go someplace else to study, I guess... I guess that's pretty much it.

I won't have a place to go. Nowhere to study.

That would be awful. I like the library... It's somewhere you can sort of be on your own in a social atmosphere and be working... In the library, there's people around and although you're not maybe speaking with them it's just like, a community atmosphere that I like. And knowing that everyone else is studying too, it helps me concentrate. It's sort of like... a little sanctuary... That's where I get all my work done – the majority of my work is done at libraries. Whether at York or a different one so without the library I mean, that would make a huge impact on my study habits. So, it would be a huge impact.

For others, the library clearly represents a rare physical space on campus that engenders feelings of connection to the university. It provides a reflection of the broader university culture.

[Closing Scott] would negatively impact me because I still use the space if not necessarily for books... it would take away the one space outside of [my home department] that I'm kind of familiar and comfortable with and like to use.

People go to the library even when they don't have essays to write... I don't see the library just as a resource for paper writing or just as a resource for studying or for students... I think that the library - even a university library - offers much more than just a place to get the stuff you need... I think that the community would lose something when it doesn't have a library. It's a place where... you don't have to pay anything, you don't have to have any economic status to be able to get these books and the information and you can come here and do your own studying on a personal

level... not having a library with physical books in them is a big no-no, it's a big loss.

You just assume there's going to be a library when you go to an educational facility or institution. You assume that there will be a library, just like... it's just one of those things that's built... It's part of the character of the institution. So having a library – not having a library, that's like a huge chunk out of that.

It should be noted that library users are, by definition, already finding value in the fact that a physical library is available to them. Missing from this study are the numerous people who do not use the Scott Library. By virtue of their absence, one wonders if they might share the ambivalence of this informant:

How would that affect my life? It's hard because I have a habit of studying at home, maybe I would be ok. But it would affect other students.

There are at least two other major components of the traditional library experience that are missing from informants' responses about removing the physical structure altogether: books (noted in an earlier section) and librarians.

Noting the Gaps: The Role of the Librarian

The relationship between librarians and library users is a difficult one to articulate. A gap between how librarians perceive their role and how their role is perceived by library users has always existed and likely always will. Traditionally, the librarian held specialized knowledge that was required to access a finite range of library resources. While this privileged

and powerful role of gatekeeper remains relevant in specialized and advanced fields of study even today, it is rarely recognized by the average current library user. In fact, none of the informants could accurately distinguish librarians from library staff. For example, many spoke confidently about transactions with “librarians” that were actually completed with library support staff. While most contemporary librarians embrace an emerging role as educator, students often have a different interpretation of their role:

I kind of feel like I only will talk to librarians if it's absolutely necessary. I figure I can usually figure stuff out on my own. Then and only then when I can't figure it out I'll usually ask a librarian but I don't think I have *ever* asked the librarian anything other than – you know – check my book. But that's about it.

They don't really have a role... I guess they just facilitate ours... I guess if you have... their role is very passive... like if you have a problem you go to them... and ask them things... it's very passive... They're just facilitators, really.

Library users are also confused about what librarians can contribute to specific situations, as indicated by excerpts from discussions about elevated noise levels in study areas:

I definitely think somebody should have stepped up and told one of the librarians about them. But honestly, I don't think she would have done anything. She would have come and been like, 'ok guys. Be quiet.' And then like five minutes later they would have done the same thing. You need somebody *serious*. Like somebody like security staff or something.

Like, 'why are librarians here?'... [in] high school if you talk, they would tell you, 'please quiet down, people are studying here' but here no one cares.

It is no surprise that changes in library use and perception are also changing the perception and role of the librarian. Not unlike the spaces in which they work, librarians must adapt to remain relevant to their communities of users. For many librarians, this has meant a shift in public service focus that prioritizes classroom teaching *outside* the library over reference work *inside* the library. This outbound shift further marginalizes the role of the public service librarian in the physical library.

Conclusion

“Life attracts life.” (Jacobs, 1961, p. 348)

Academic libraries are often referred to as the heart of the campus. While this analogy remains valid, it is for vastly different reasons than its original coinage intended. Historically, the academic library offered a place to access information not available elsewhere and librarians served as gatekeepers and stewards of this fixed resource. Today, this same information has become readily available in digital form, a medium that does not require physical classification and control, rendering historical classification schemes less relevant. It follows, then, that librarians and the physical libraries they co-create can no longer claim complete control over manifestations of knowledge and the people who use them. Research completed for this project documented this shift in power by investigating how and why people currently use physical academic libraries.

Data collected for this project clearly showed that users of the Scott Library embraced the library's physical space as their own and created place by interrogating the social and adapting the physical environments to serve a wide range of individual and group needs. Psychological and intellectual needs were met by making choices about behaviour and physical placement; i.e., the ability to read spaces and regulate privacy and establish acceptable behaviour patterns became an empowering experience. Social needs were met through the creation of social spaces that ultimately differentiated library space while remaining flexible enough to overlap with other library uses; i.e., mixed use spaces supported both solitary and group learning activities. Such manifestations of place attachment are successful because the Scott Library offered a flexible, adaptable environment that, for the most part, did not restrict users from finding their place in the library.

It is clear from this exploration that academic libraries serve many overlapping and intersecting functions: a place to study, a place to engage with others, a place to mature and develop a sense of self. The physical layout of libraries, how they are situated, and the extent of their footprint relative to other areas on campus communicate their role within the broader institution. Library users interpret and interrogate these norms through a process of interpretation that informs their lived experience. This process, bound to maturing spatial literacy skills at a sensitive point of the lifecycle, informs the creation of identity, strongly linking the library as

place to student experience. This research suggests that students' strong sense of agency has been decoupled from former iterations of power. For example, the power embedded in the academic library through its control over access to information is no longer valid. The spaces once used to house this information are now used for social dining, spaces of solitary study are now used for group and social activities, and floors are reinterpreted as acceptable places to sleep, congregate socially, and work. These examples all communicate the shift of power from professional to user. Libraries that do not allow this agency to develop will be the ones that flounder. They will become dead spaces devoid of the people and placemaking processes that give life to public spaces. People congregate where they feel a sense of belonging and a sense of place that is nurturing and responsive. They are drawn to places with other people that share a common goal, whether it includes accessing information or not. Put simply: life attracts life.

In order for academic libraries to become and remain vital, librarians and designers must take care not to interfere with the natural rhythms of student life by allowing barriers of a quickly fading era to remain or, worse yet, building new forms of control over access to and engagement in learning spaces. Library users will create the places they need if provided with flexible and supportive spaces. Let the library be that place.

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