

## ABSTRACT

This qualitative research investigated how homeless men use public libraries and reports their understanding of public library as “place”. This study is based on 23 individual semi-structured interviews with homeless men in Vancouver BC, which were conducted during the summers of 2010 and 2012. This research found that public libraries are very important places for homeless men.

Homelessness is a high risk lifestyle and homeless men who purposely avoided street danger felt safer within the Central Library than at the Reading Room in the Carnegie Centre, the designated library for homeless people in Vancouver. Despite not being eligible for a library card at the Central Library and without any private space of their own, having access to a variety of seating, computer and Internet access, large collections of information resources, and decent public washrooms made the Central Library the preferred library among participants.

Some participants who were very frequent library users created a new social identity for themselves as library users, and just like other library users at the Central Library, enjoyed very ordinary social experiences such as reading, playing online games, and searching the Internet. Participants found stability at public libraries and developed routines; the library became a place where they could restore their soul as they found that they were treated with respect at the library.

Some homeless men also used public libraries as transition spaces for self-improvement and self-education; some participants successfully completed their high school equivalency from reading at public libraries. Thus, in addition to information needs, public libraries also serve the social needs of homeless men, including social identity, normalcy, and respite from the stigma and stresses of homelessness.

How library buildings are used as place by homeless men may be of interest to librarians planning library programs and to architects for designing future library buildings. The design of large, urban public libraries should be inclusive of the socio-demographic diversity found in the community that the library serves, including homeless people, who are often more concentrated in downtown locations.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Born: July 23, 1954  
Academic Studies: B.A. SFU, 1981  
M.L.S. UBC, 1993  
Current Position: Ph.D. candidate, UBC

## GRADUATE STUDIES

Field of Study: Library and Information Studies

### Courses

LIBR 600	Advanced Seminar in Research Methods
LIBR 610	Theoretical and Research Foundations
LIBR 620	Advanced Study in Major Area
LIBR 621	Advanced Study in Minor Area
ARCH 504	Architectural History
ARCH 505	Architectural History
GEOG531	Graduate Seminar
LIBR 699	Thesis

### Instructors

Dr. H. MacNeil &  
Dr. R. Kopak  
Dr. E. Rasmussen &  
Dr. A. Curry  
Dr. A. Curry  
Dr. A. Curry  
Dr. S. McKay  
Dr. S. McKay  
Dr. E. Wylie  
Dr. A. Curry &  
Dr. L. Freund

## AWARDS

Graduate Entrance Scholarship, UBC, 2003-2007  
Canadian Library Association, Library Research & Development Grant, 2009

## PUBLICATIONS

McKendry, J.M. (2008). [Review of the book *The new downtown library: Designing with communities*, by S.C. Mattern]. *Library Quarterly* 78(3), 340-343.  
doi:10.1086/588409

## PRESENTATIONS

McKendry, J.M. (2007, January). Making a place for the homeless in public library space. Work in progress poster session presented at the Association for Library and Information Science Education Annual Conference, Seattle, WA.

McKendry, J.M. (2006, January). Work in progress poster session presented at the Association for Library and Information Science Education Annual Conference, San Antonio, TX.

## SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE

Dr. Ann Curry (Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta)  
Dr. Luanne Freund (Library, Archival and Information Studies)  
Dr. Elvin Wyly, (Geography)



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

## PROGRAMME

The Final Oral Examination  
For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
(Library, Archival and Information Studies)

JEAN M. MCKENDRY

B.A., S.F.U., 1981  
M.L.S., U.B.C., 1993

Thursday, April 18, 2013, 4:00 am  
Room 200, Graduate Student Centre  
*Latecomers will not be admitted*

**“Reading the Landscape of Public Libraries as Place: Experiences  
of Homeless Men in Public Libraries in Vancouver, BC”**

## EXAMINING COMMITTEE

Chair:

Dr. Samson Nashon (Curriculum and Pedagogy)

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Ann Curry, Research Supervisor (Library, Archival and  
Information Studies)

Dr. Luanne Freund, Research Supervisor (Library, Archival and  
Information Studies)

Dr. Elvin Wyly (Geography)

University Examiners:

Dr. Rick Kopak (Library, Archival and Information Studies)

Dr. Grant Charles (Social Work)

External Examiner:

Dr. Julie Hersberger  
School of Education  
University of North Carolina  
Greensboro, North Carolina  
United States

Dr. Lynne McKechnie  
Faculty of Information & Media Studies  
University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario  
Canada